Universiteit Leiden

DRY FOREIGN FISH 干外国鱼

Normalizing nationalistic discourse in the Chinese Dota 2 community

Milan Ismangil | Thesis supervisor: Florian Schneider

Thesis for the Research Master Asian studies, University of Leiden. 28 June 2017

Preface

A note of thanks

I would firstly like to thank professor Schneider for his awesome speed in providing feedback and answering emails. His enthusiasm regarding this thesis gave me more confidence when starting the writing process. I secondly thank my family (especially my mother, brother, and girlfriend), who have helped me greatly in giving feedback and proofreading my often times messy drafts! Finally I would like to thank my second reader professor Limin Teh who gave feedback on my defence and introduced me to a lot of theoretical concepts with regards to nation building. I was introduced by professor Teh to the amazing book *National Past-Times by Ann Anagnost* whose insights into how society can be analysed have greatly inspired my thinking.

Milan Ismangil June 20th, 2017

A note on conventions

This thesis uses online forums as its primary source material. To avoid unnecessary website cluttering I have created a shorthand to directly reference websites and webpages. A forum post is referenced by the first letter of the hosting website coupled with the number I have added them in. The first post referenced on Baidu thus becomes B1, and the fifth post referenced on SG gamer become S5. The detailed references are located below the academic literature references at the end of this thesis. For quotations longer than two sentence I have chosen to separate them from the body of the main text for clarity.

I use simplified Chinese characters as I have in all cases simply copied transcripts from interviews or cited straight from the source material. I follow the Chinese naming convention of surname-first name. In most cases I have copied the Romanization of Chines names used by the authors themselves. When this was unavailable I followed the Pinyin Romanization system.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

The internet today is everywhere and people are constantly exposed to bits of information, from small blogs to long-form news articles. In this thesis, I will argue that these (often) bite-sized information bits have had and are having a profound effect on the way certain discourses are normalized. With the recent elections in the United States and its subsequent rise of a post fact discourse, this normalization has suddenly become more politicized and perhaps more relevant than it was before. To explore this issue, I will analyse a subsection of an internet community surrounding the online videogame Defense of the Ancients 2 (Dota 2) in particular the usage of nationalistic frameworks and language.

The concept of normalization lets me focus on the process of a discourse. It allows me to show that this discourse within the Dota 2 community is part of a larger web of connections that make up Chinese society at a specific time. I especially focus on 'normal' language and discourse within this community. An example of this normalizing of language is found in the negotiation of a team's nationality in chapter four. These nationalities are often contested (a team can be European and North American at the same time) and allow for the creation of clash of nations type narratives. The Chinese community is especially productive when it comes to creating narratives in which the home country must be 'protected' from foreign teams. The Chinese community is largely closed in comparison to the English and Russian speaking one which raises the question to whom they were speaking when they were cheering for Chinese teams and lambasting foreign teams

This thesis research grew from my own interest in the Dota 2 competitive scene. While watching tournaments, and reading posts, I often noticed an interplay between North American and European viewers, mocking each other and using 'national' and regional stereotypes. This led to my interest in what the Chinese Dota 2 scene looked like: did they also use national archetypes to discuss Dota? In February 2016, I was watching the Shanghai major, a tournament in which teams compete in Dota 2 for prize money. As I was watching the games, I opened several Chinese forums to see the Chinese perspective on the games being played. What I found was that amidst many expected discussions about specific games, tactics, and players, there were also many nationalistic posts. Each forum I visited had several topics discussing Chinese teams and how they were performing. These discussions were filled with nationalistic rhetoric in which teams gain honour for the nation or were deemed unworthy of representing the home country China. This piqued my curiosity. Researching this topic through fieldwork in China greatly influenced my thinking and assisted me in (re)formulating the research question which has guided this thesis. In short, how is the nation re-imagined through Dota 2?

In this thesis, I will analyse how discussions on the Chinese Dota forums are channelled through a nationalistic 'lens', framing this competitive videogame in terms of clashing nations. I will use the Chinese (or Mandarin-speaking) Dota 2 community as an example and show how this has implications

outside this narrow field. To do this I will use offline and online primary sources based on the fieldwork I did in China, from September 2016 to January 2017.

With the rise of Trump and the mainstreaming of alternative facts and media I believe the framework and argumentation proposed in this thesis can also be applied outside its relatively narrow case-study. The normalization of a (text-based) discourse (which is my focus here) is a process which is constantly ongoing. An interesting example of this is the pickup of the word "Cuck" by the North American alt-right (McDermott, 2016) to insult people perceived to be lacking in masculinity. Cuck, short for cuckold, refers to someone whose wife has sex with another man. This word has been transformed by its frequent usage by the alt right community, turning it into a swear word and even normalizing its usage outside of these communities. It shows the power of the internet and its echo chambers in regulating discursive flows and what constitutes normal word usage. As I will show, our increasingly digital world has accelerated our 'cultural evolution' in a way that makes what is normal today abnormal tomorrow and vice versa.

To understand these multiple processes at work I have created the following Research question: *How do Chinese web users utilize the online game community of Dota 2 as a platform of discussion, and what do these activities suggest about national representations and discourses in Digital China?*

This main research question is supported by the following two sub-questions:

- How do large narratives such as nationalism fit in a world where people feel empowered by having the potential to be both producer and consumer of content at the same time, and where everyone can create their own reality or their own facts?
- How is nationalistic representation and discourse normalized in the Chinese Dota community?

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In chapter two and three I will lay down my theoretical background and discuss fieldwork methodology. After this follows my case study on the Chinese Dota 2 community in the fourth chapter. In the fifth chapter I will answer my research questions. It will be a synthesis of the thesis so far in which I critically engage with the theory and apply it to the case study at hand. After answering these questions in chapter five I explore some wider implications of this study in chapter six to finally conclude in chapter seven.

For the sake of clarity, I will refer to a team's nationality as they are commonly viewed by the community or the teams themselves. Invictus gaming in this case is considered Chinese as the team itself markets itself as Chinese and is accepted by the community as Chinese. Sometimes a team's supposed nationality is conflicted, in this case I have given multiple interpretations.

Chapter Two: Laying the groundwork

"So used are we already to the rudeness, the unconstitutionality, the uncut racism, hate, and mudslinging that we only take note after a foreign journalist makes note about the shifting boundaries in the Dutch debate."[1]

The quote above from Sheila Sitalsing in the newspaper de Volkskrant is from a column on 2017 Dutch elections and the widened range of acceptable language politicians use in public debate. I believe this perfectly exemplifies what I call the normalization of discourse. In Dutch, it is called the 'hardening of the debate', in which opinions that would have resulted in a shocked response before might now be commonplace. Normalization is a neutral concept describing a process that happens constantly in our lives. It helps us frame the world around us. While my focus is on normalization through language (e.g. nationalistic discourse through digital text), the influence extends beyond this textual expanding of vocabulary as the internet reaches many and has a profound effect on how our daily world is created.

Throughout this thesis, I will argue that the digital messages left on social media (forum posts, blogs etc.) of this subsection in the Dota 2 community can be considered a new example of banal flagging and the recitation of stories. Posts are never made in a vacuum but are part of a larger narrative from which they are created and through which they are reinforced. The internet today plays a major role in how narratives large and small get created, recreated, and reinforced.

This chapter will lay down the theoretical framework on media, representation and the nation. I start the chapter with some clarification on E-sports and Dota 2: what are they and why do they matter? After this I will discuss digital (new) media and their effects, normalization and representation, and finally nationalism.

I take a social-constructivist view of technology: while technology has certain inherent properties, in the end it is the human who constructs and creates its meaning in society. However, after a certain cut-off point it is no longer viable for the individual to ignore a certain technology as society has dictated its use as normal (try living without a mobile phone, for example). Social media has already reached this tipping point in most countries (Van Dijck 2013), as its use is considered normal and non-users are regarded as non-functional in modern society.

My initial thinking process when analysing society stems from cultural studies. I use the idea of a conjuncture, which describes how various forces in society (technological, political, economic, social, etc.) interact with each other to form (or 'articulate') a 'settlement' around existing power

[1] Zo gewend zijn wij al aan de onbeschoftheid, de ongrondwettelijkheid, het onversneden racisme, de haat, de vuilspuiterij, dat we pas weer opveren als een buitenlandse verslaggever zich verwondert over de verlegde grenzen in het Nederlandse debat. (Sheila Sitalsing, Volkskrant. 10 maart 2017)

relations; these power relations formulate and make up a society at a specific time and place. John Clarke, one of the founding cultural studies scholars conceptualizes conjuncture as follows:

> *"The concept of conjuncture highlights the ways in which moments of transformation, break, and the possibility of new 'settlements' come into being. Conjunctures have no necessary duration (…) their time is determined by the capacity of political forces the leading bloc to shape new alignments or to overcome (or at least stabilize) existing antagonisms and contradictions" (Clarke 2014).*

The concept of a conjuncture allows me to discuss society and how its many aspects relate to each other and articulate each other. It allows me to use the case study of the China Dota 2 community as a stepping stone to analyse how the whole (e.g. political, technological and social forces) articulates the local and how the local in turn articulates and transforms the whole. In chapter six I will showcase how different facets of the Chinese Dota community are reflections of patterns and changes in current society.

To supplement and fill in this broad conception of society I will use a variety of theories ranging from areas such as sociology and psychology to media studies and political studies to construct a framework that delineates processes of normalization of a discourse within a community. While most of the sources I discuss in this chapter have a focus on Anglo-Saxon, English speaking 'western' society, I believe the inherent properties of the internet makes them perfectly applicable to China; we are all humans after all. I use the term 'western' to refer to a specific set of countries that to a high degree share the same media-scape (Appadurai 1996) and use the same digital media. This includes Europe, North America, and Oceania. While technologies such as Twitter and Facebook are also used outside these areas, the cultural flows within these areas make them distinct from each other. I acknowledge and agree that these geographical categorizations are problematical (for a discussion, see Dirlik 2005; Miyoshi & Harootunian 2002) and only highlight them here to point out the lack of attention in these digital media sources given to the Chinese internet. This disclaimer is important since China does not use many of the social media services discussed in this literature due to the closed-off status of the Chinese internet.

2.1 Digital (new) media and its effects

In 2016, China had more than 710 million internet users, a majority of who also used social media (CNNIC report 2016). The proliferation of the digital has led to profound but silent changes in society (See Yang 2009 and Marolt and Herold 2015 for examples). The increasing digitalization has had wide ranging effects from increasing digital communications and relations to shopping and consuming online (CNNIC report 2016).

While many have hailed the internet as a tool for democratization and increasing freedom, the past years have seen a more critical examination of the digital realm (Ying 2012). This thesis does not concern itself with this debate but can be placed into an ongoing trend that looks more critically at the consumption of digital or new media. An extreme example of this is the 2012 book *Digital Demenz* (Digital dementia) by Manfred Spitzer, who argues that our cognitive functions are being damaged by overreliance on digital technologies. Another example is the polemical article 'is Google making us stupid?' (Carr 2008) which I will discuss later. In this subchapter, I will highlight several features of digital media (by which I mean internet media such as forums, blog posts, comments) and their effect on our way of viewing and framing the world. I will focus on the effects such media have on reading and perceiving, but I will not dwell on well-established aspects such as increased connectivity, internationalization, and the like (see Briggs and Burke 2005 for an overview).

One of the buzzwords at the advent of the internet was convergence. Convergence in this case refers to the merging of inherent properties of the medium. A book[2] can be read but not much more. A tablet on the other hand has many more functions such as playing games, browsing the internet, watching videos, and a multitude of other things (Van der Weel 2011). Compared to a book, distraction is seemingly built into the device, as there are almost endless possibilities at our fingertips. Important here is to acknowledge that we are both subject and object, we both create content and are the goal of the content we create (Chadwick 2013), meaning that passively viewing sports or other forms of modern entertainment is rarity.[3]

Through the digital, we are more engaged than before in the consumption of media, by posting online during or after events. This short and constant consumption of media has influenced our reading habits, as well as other things which we are only now becoming aware of (see Van der Weel 2011 for an overview). Marshall Mcluhan's famous phrase 'the medium is the message' becomes relevant once more as reading is rapidly becoming fully digital. The concept of meaning and truths are constantly negotiated and constructed in society through communicative action (Castells 2009).

Rather than falling into a postmodern stance of absolute relativity, I take the view offered by Highmore, who discusses Certeau's work. He gives the example of climate change and the dangers of businesses creating their own reality to counteract any climate change legislation. Rather than an absolute relativity there is a *relative* relativity "which finds a method for making value judgements by relating one account to another" (Highmore 2006: 11). Castells calls this the creative audience which leads to the 'interactive production of meaning'. He states that we have moved from mass

[2] Taken for its intended meaning, while a book can also be used to start a fire or hammer nails I refer to the intended usage-properties of the substrate.

[3] The notion of active engagement with media has been theorized before the advent of the internet. Stuart Hall (1980), for example, has theorized how televisions viewers engage and process (encode and decode) messages from television.

communication directed at a certain audience to mass communication directed at the same audience, that now can actively engage with this information, using one-directional informational flows (e.g. the individual social media stream) and talking back to this medium as well as reinterpret and remix the meaning (Castells 2009:55-60).

Due to the drastic reduction of the time between receiving and sending a message, digital communication changes the way audiences perceive time and space. By posting a message in a tournament live-thread, for example, it can be seen by people all over the world instantly and the audience in turn can respond instantly. This despatialized simultaneity has helped re-articulate the private and public space, the political and the unpolitical. Digital communication has invaded the private sphere of the house transforming it into a public forum as one is always online no matter where one finds oneself. It further has turned virtual realms into semi-spaces in which communities can gather in *real time* (Couldry and McCarthy 2004: 64-65). The speed with which these meanings are (re)negotiated has increased due to the rapid communication technologies available to us (Van der Weel 2009).

As Van Dijck (2013: 134) argues, consensus has become a socio-technological construct. Using the example of Wikipedia, in which meaning and truth of an article are created through consensus, Van Dijck on page 142 cites the comedian Stephen Colbert: "if you claim something to be true and enough people agree with you, it becomes true". In psychology, this phenomenon is called the illusory truth effect, which stipulates that we are more likely to believe repeated instances of a fact we are not entirely sure about rather than considering the source of knowledge. It has been theorized that this is the way urban myths propagate (Fazio et al. 2015). Expertise as a concept is renegotiated on the internet from the authority of book knowledge to networked expertise. As the lines blur between producers and consumers of knowledge (anyone can post anything) there is a dwindling trust in the opinion of experts (Pariser 2014).

Chadwick, in his book *The Hybrid Media System*, analyses the changing journalistic landscape in Britain. The rise of the internet has led to a renegotiating of journalistic norms and what it means to be a journalist. News has taken on a new meaning as it has turned from a daily flow (e.g. newspapers, the evening news) to a constant barrage of new information. As a journalist in the book puts it: "You click real-time results. The first things you're getting are going to be the last things put out there. and it's all in real time. That looks like news*. It looks like news."* (Chadwick 2013: 186)

Social media often has no context or nuance, as digital platforms allow anyone to quickly, perhaps thoughtlessly, throw a comment out there and subsequently never bother with it again. For example, a short, seemingly patriotic message posted by an anonymous user without tone of voice or context is at face value believable. In popular discussions, this is referred to as Poe's law, which originally states that it is impossible in some cases to differentiate between someone being ironically

or sarcastically patriotic/racist/ and being a real racist, nationalist or what have you. The original meaning applied to internet users mocking creationists: “Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humour, it is utterly impossible to parody a Creationist in such a way that someone won’t mistake (it) for the genuine article” (Aikin 2009: 2).

Another aspect of this new digital reading is the prevalence of shorter texts. Perhaps coinciding with this is a shorter attention span as the substrate from which we read is also home to videogames, music, and other distractions. An obvious feature is the massive increase in information (texts) available, which leads to a heavier responsibility of the reader to read critically while being in an environment laden with distractions (Van der Veen 2011). There are even arguments that the substrate of digital reading leads to less critical engagement with text and a decrease in the retention of information (Naomi Baron 2016). The antagonizing article ‘Is Google making us stupid’, published in 2008 in the Atlantic, drew attention to these issues, arguing that we are losing the ability to concentrate on long texts (Carr 2008). While this thesis does not wish to delve too deeply into psychology, it is interesting to keep in mind that the internet might potentially impact our (critical) thinking patterns and making us more susceptible to, for example, influencing by third parties. These and other inherent properties and consequences of the internet are the source of ongoing heated debates in the past years, with topics ranging from the death of expertise, filter bubbles (Pariser 2011), or the cognitive impact of the internet (Dean Burnett 2013) to the idea that we are now post truth or fact (Pomerantsev 2016).

I mentioned the illusory truth effect to highlight a human phenomenon of being susceptible to repeated false information. Filter bubbles, a buzzword of the past years, have gained more and more attention after the Trump election (Van der Velden 2016). Filter bubbles stem from a combination of technological and personal causes that turn a user’s internet into a personalized echo chamber, allowing little room for dissenting voices or ideas (Pariser 2011). This corroborates earlier research that stipulates that people look for information to confirm their own biases and beliefs (Castells 2009:149-150). In an extreme example, a flat earth believer can now share his or her convictions and ‘facts’ with hundreds if not thousands of other round-world critics. This ‘democratization’ of reality has led to claims that we are now living in a post-fact world. I disagree with this assessment and would argue that all meaning is socially constructed. Reality has always been to a certain extent democratized; Foucault for example discusses how truth is constructed by society. He coined the term regimes of truth[4] which is a premonition of discussions taking place with regards to the internet and our truth-concept today.

[4] “that which determines the obligations of individuals with regard to procedures of manifestation of truth." (Lorenzini 2013: 1)

To conclude, new media forms have had a profound effect on our societies. They allow us to find communities discussing anything and anyone. Through these communities and social media engagements, meaning constantly gets constructed and deconstructed. Mainstream narratives are appropriated and subverted or adopted and renegotiated. The rise of the screen as a reading substrate has led to multiple effects on the way we read. We read shorter texts and are prone to less critical engagement when reading digitally, as distraction is built into the system itself (Van Der Weel 2010). As everyone has the potential to be both a consumer and producer this has led a democratization of knowledge through the usage of the internet both top down and bottom up: the line between expert and amateur has blurred as both can have their say in the digital realm. The advent of the digital has also led to the blurring of private and public space, as we are now constantly engaged with information that streams through our devices.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Lyotard (Storey 2009: 185) pronounced the death of the grand meta-narrative. Digital media have led to an ever-increasing fragmentation of narratives as every individual can construct their own. Paradoxically however, as I will argue later, some older narratives, in particular that of nationalism, thrive even better in this diffused environment. In today's digital world, in which media (information) streams have become increasingly accelerated, these stories disseminate and dissipate faster and through a wider population and variety of cultures than ever before. The potential of digital acceleration allows the average media user (who is both consumer and producer) to participate and create alternative narratives to the mainstream ones (McGillivray 2014: 100).

2.2 Nationalism and narratives

When reading literature about the internet and nationalism in early scholarship, there is a decisive slant (at least in western literature) to regard the internet as being a liberating tool which will enhance democracy and weaken nation-states (see Ferdinand (2000) for an overview). Contrary to this are findings that internet use strengthens national ties, especially in diasporas, as it is easier to maintain close cultural ties through instant communication technology (Eriksen 2007). Recently there has even been something of a counter-movement, especially in the light of Brexit and the Trump election, arguing that the internet might be harmful to democracy (for example Persily 2017). As mentioned in, I take a social-constructivist view of technology. From this viewpoint, the internet can function as a tool suited to its users. It can therefore, somewhat contradictorily, be both used in creating cosmopolitan identities while also at the same time emphasize locality and nation-states, thus reinforcing pre-existing narratives and supplementing these with (cosmopolitan or global) digital ones.

The nation is, as Anderson famously called it, an imagined community that is constructed daily by its inhabitants. There is no primordial nation from which one stems, but rather the nation is

something that is constantly imagined and reimagined through daily life and its encounters (Anderson 1983). The constant (re)imagination of the nation happens through national 'flagging', by which people are constantly reminded of 'banal' utterances of living in a nation (Billig 1995). Flags, sports, language, etc., anything can become an artefact that carries with it some inherent distilled discourse of the nation. I define nationalism as "the yearning, and acceptance of, the norm of the nation" (D. Anthony 1998: 28). Nationalism, to Gellner, "preaches and defends continuity" (Gellner 1983:125) while in fact the nation owes its existence to a break with history after which the nation came into being. For this thesis, I regard the nation as a territorial political construction created by both the elite and its citizens.

As Billig (1995: 37-43) puts it, there is both hot and cold nationalism, the former is emphasized nationalism while the latter is duly neglected (forgotten, as he calls it). Hot nationalism is the nationalism which gains the most attention. Things such as nationalistic rallies (often Xenophobic and far right), and independence movements are examples of this. Cold nationalism on the other hand consists of daily rituals, patterns of life, ingrained thought, and behaviour patterns (like standing up during national anthems) that are engrained through social routines. It is through this banal flagging that we form our national identity, situating ourselves within this framework of 'us' and the nation.

To channel the French schools of thought, nationalism is a social fact. A *social fact* is external to the consciousness of individuals and has (potential) coercive influence over them. It is a collective way of functioning and way of being (Durkheim 1982:50). To rephrase the same idea: today we live in what De Certeu calls a *recited society*, a society defined by stories, by citations of stories, and by the ever-ongoing recitation of stories (De Certeu 1984: 185-190). These stories can take any shape or form, from national myths to sporting narratives. These narratives often refer back to a country's history or shared cultural past and background. To quote Wang Hui, who discussed the formation of Chinese identity and nation around the turn of the 20th century:

> "Feelings of historical continuity and community are all products of imagining, but they are not merely fictional stories, for they contain the conditions by which this imagining may be produced. They are found, for example, in the continuity between modes of daily life that persist through the change from one dynasty to another" *(Wang 2014: 104).*

Narratives are continuously reworked and reshaped in order to fit the present society at that time. A modern-day example of reshaping is the Chinese government's 'the century of humiliation' narrative, which starts with the defeat of the Qing dynasty by the English in the opium wars in the middle of the nineteenth century. This is a narrative in Chinese society which Gries (2004: 43-53) argues has shaped Chinese identities by being continuously reshaped, first as heroic resistance against imperialism under Mao and today by blaming 'the west' and Japan for its suffering.

Today, these narratives are channelled through a variety of ways. Sports for example can play an important role in representing regional and national identities (Crawford 2004). The 2008 Beijing Olympics serve as an example of the interplay of multiple stories. The event drew from the grand narrative of China's first ever Olympics, through which the government could prove China's capabilities to the world. Beside these larger state-led narratives (Lau, Lam and Leung 2011), there were also localized expressions of nationalism as web-users attacked CNN for its depiction of Tibet in its Olympic coverage (Ying 2012: 11-12). As discussed in the media subchapter above, the internet allows communities to grasp larger narratives and appropriate them, resisting stories imposed on them by those in power. The CNN case shows how social media has shifted our values of public and private, as many users probably posted public messages of their own volition from the privacy of their home. Our constant engagement with social media has led, even more so than before, to the constant proliferation of these narratives and stories in our daily lives.

2.3 E-Sports

This thesis deals with Dota 2 and a specific subsection of its community. In this subchapter, I provide some context to these and other terms that might be unfamiliar to the reader.

Defense of the Ancients two, or Dota 2, is an online videogame published and distributed by the American videogame company Valve. It is a multiplayer videogame in which two teams of five players compete against each other. Since the acquisition of the Dota 2 property by Valve, the company has focused heavily on marketing it as an electronic sport or E-sport. E-sports refers to the competitive aspect, but also to discussions on user forums and media. Dal Yong Jin, in *Korea's gaming empire*, describes electronic-sports (E-sports) as a convergence of electronic games, sports, and media (Jin 2010: 59). In the popular tongue, E-sports refers to any videogame played competitively. In 2016, the most popular games were League of Legends, Counter Strike, and Dota 2 (Erzberger 2016). Jin further states that E-sports is a gaming, computing, media, and sports event all at once. For Dota 2, Valve organizes an annual tournament called the International, which has been held annually since 2011. The most recent International at the time of writing holds the record for highest prize pool in a videogame tournament, with a total prize pool of over 20 million USD (Dota2.com).

When I discuss a tournament, it entails the game itself, the broadcast (and the chatroom of the broadcast), media representation and online debate in the form of live threads discussing the games, and post-match discussions. A Dota 2 tournament might have an offline component if there is an offline tournament site with spectators and commentators. This is then broadcasted to various streaming sites such as Douyu (斗鱼) or Huomao (火猫) for Chinese audiences and Twitch.tv for foreign audiences. These streaming sites also have a chat room, which I consider to be a digital audience or crowd in the same way as a live audience adds to the atmosphere in a stadium. Aside from

this, a game in a (major) tournament is usually accompanied by various live-threads[5] that enable users to discuss or react to events happening live.

Sporting events provide a "space for representation to take place (…) between sender and receiver" (McGillivray 2014: 99-100). While E-Sports is not dominated by media narratives to the same degree as the Olympics (as discussed by McGillivray), he does outline the potential of this digital acceleration and the current media environment. They allow the average user to participate and create alternative narratives to the mainstream ones. As E-sports is still in its infancy, much of the 'story' around a tournament is created by the audience. There are only a few tournaments which explicitly create a narrative such as the clash of nations in the Olympics. The most common narrative created by the media and professional casters is that of the underdog, e.g. a lower, lesser known team suddenly beating the stronger teams and perhaps even winning the tournament entirely.

The increasing popularity and profit from the Dota scene has led to increasing 'mainstream' attention. Examples of this include the city of Washington DC sponsoring a Dota 2 team (Zorine 2017) and several German football teams exploring Dota 2 sponsorship options (Wood 2016). E-sports is a rapidly growing industry that has seen increasing attention and sponsorships from companies normally considered outside of the tech-sphere. A growing number of mostly young adult males spend their time watching and discussing E-sports (Casselman 2015), which makes it an interesting case study in how a discourse in a small subsection of a certain community can affect larger narratives such as nationalism.

As discussed in the previous subchapter, sporting events can make an excellent vehicle for nationalism. In E-sports, however, there is no 'inherent' nationalism present in teams, since most E-sport teams do not have a team-house and certainly no home stadium to play in. Team names and player names in Dota 2 always use roman characters. A comparison between an article from two English-language websites *polygon.com* and *ubergizmo* about the winner of the 2016 International tournament provides an interesting example. Polygon classifies teams based on regions as the following headline shows: "Chinese team Wings beat North American team DC three games to one." (Gies 2016). Ubergizmo does not mention Wings' nationality at all, and only mentions that DC is 'North American' (Lee 2016). DC, at the time had three players from Europe and two from North America which led to discussions on whether to consider it a European or North American team (Reagan 2016).

Tournaments of every size occur weekly, accompanied by vibrant discussions on various social media sites. Due to the cost and size, smaller tournaments take place exclusively online, which means the audience only ever sees the teams inside the game itself. A typical match between teams consists

[5] For example, on forums such as Liquiddota.com, Somethingawful.com, Joindota.com for Western scenes or Baidu and SGgamer for the Chinese ones.

of bests-of-three, in which the breaks between games are filled up by a studio space in which viewers can see the casters commentating on the game and providing an analysis of the previous match.

A typical offline tournament is usually held in a conference space or stadium and is arranged like a musical performance. There is a stage with two soundproofs booths standing next to each other in which the teams sit and play the game inside. In front of this stage are spectator seats for the audience. The game is always commentated on by professional commentators. In large tournaments, such as the International, each community has their own commentators and analysts, so that Chinese, Russian, and English speaking fans have professional commentary and analysis during and after the game (these three languages cover the majority of the player base). During a game, spectators might post online through social media such as Twitter or QQ. 'Live-threads' are also popular: these are organized forum threads posted before a match, in which fans can discuss the game as it is happening.

The Dota 2 community is broadly organized into four regions that in general share or use a common language. These are Europe and North America, South America, China, the 'CIS' regions which refers to mainly Russian-speaking countries in Eastern Europa and Russia, and finally Southeast Asia which includes South Korea and the Oceanic region. This thesis focusses on the Chinese community and its subsequent discourse.

The internet allows users to create 'local' communities surrounding teams, tournaments, topics, etc. Communities are formed by (re)creating the local through threads and discussions. These neo-tribes as Crawford (2004: 40-41) calls them, refer to the grouping of individuals who participate in a community on a daily, on-and-off basis. One can drop into a forum and post a message and leave it for the rest of the day. These communities can thrive through the sharing of a pastime and the despatialized simultaneity concept discussed earlier. N*eo-tribes* are usually based around the consumption of consumer goods (ibid). A group is delineated through a shared set of symbols and rituals. This can have a gatekeeping function for non-users.

A staple in identity theory is that the identity of an individual or group is defined by what one is not (Stets and Burke 2000). The Chinese Dota community, for example, demarcates itself using language and its ties to a Chinese identity. To use Crawford's (2004: 120-125) rephrasing of the imagined community concept, this is "not an imagined community but a community of imagination". Such restating puts the emphasis on active participation of the community members in creating a shared set of meanings that constitute a community, as well as the linking ability of the internet that allows for specific groups to form for specific interests.

2.4 Normalization and representation

In this subchapter I will build upon the previous three subchapters and construct a framework of normalization and the everyday. What do we consider normal? How is the idea of normal created and changed? As discussed, social media form a platform where meaning is constantly reworked. Normative language and rules are also objects that are constantly contested in the digital. Van Dijck, who discusses Foucault, focuses on the power of norms in society in regards to private information and monetization:

> *"Norms, as Michel Foucault (1980) has theorized, constitute the social and cultural cement for grounding laws (…). The power of norms, in the area of sociality, is much more influential than the power of law and order. Contemporary methods of power are methods whose 'operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control" (Van Dijck 2013: 19 quoting Foucault 1980:89).*

This quotation illustrates the power norms and normativity have as an important piece in the fabric of society. An example of changing norms discussed earlier is the always-online and always-available mentality present today; someone who is not available through cell phone or other (digital) means will probably be considered as strange in today's 'modern' society. The pressure of societal norms has meant that the private space is no longer private as one is deemed (by friends, family or work and such) to be always connected. Being unavailable is considered as not being social (Van Dijk 2013). As this thesis deals with media I have focussed on how media creates narratives and how these in turn are internalized and reworked by the receiver. How is the normal created by the media and received and negotiated by its audience?

Practice creates the everyday through which society is developed. In relation to practices, De Certeau (1984) notes that we should look for practices that have a 'double characteristic' (he builds on Foucault here) to organize both spaces (such as cities) and languages. Society, according to De Certeu is "composed of certain foregrounded practices organizing its normative institutions *and* of innumerable other practices that remain minor" (Ibid:47-50). De Certeu analyses consumer usage of products within the context of power struggles, and how consumers appropriate and subvert them. He theorizes these actions as strategies and tactics. Strategies, on one hand, constitute the manipulation of power relationships by a subject (e.g. a nation, city, a laboratory), which delineates a place (e.g. what constitutes the nation, the borders of the city, proper conduct in a laboratory?) and demarcates this place by using 'targets and threats' (national threats, research targets, etc.); these targets and threats define boundaries and knowledge, through which the world (or a specific place) is constituted. De Certeau conceptualizes the creation of meaning as an act of co-production (termed silent production), which, while favouring those in power (e.g. the producers), gives room for the consumer - the individual - to take in products/narratives/symbols, etc. and create new, possibly

subversive meanings within the framework (discursive, cultural, etc.) created by elites. This is similar to Stuart Hall's coding and encoding of messages briefly mentioned on page seven. Tactics, on the other hand, are the allowed actions of the individual within the operating field of strategy (Ibid). Bringing this theory back to the topic at hand, I consider strategy to be the representation of the larger national stories told by a state; it is acting out power and (re)creating a framework of knowledge through (the media), from which the citizen regards society. Tactics are the local, individual internet users that reshape this narrative in their own way. And in the case of this study re-articulate it in the space of a Dota 2 community. While De Certeau proposes that tactics are by and large subversive, I posit them as also potentially reinforcing the 'strategy' in which they operate.

I took the idea of looking at media as a practice from Couldry's *Media, Society, World*, which analyses media's role in how we perceive the world (its "social organization"). He lists four advantages of looking at media as a practice. Firstly, practice is regular, secondly it is social, thirdly practice relates to things that we do and fulfils human needs (as defined by society), and lastly practice relates to action, which allows us to actively engage with media not as a passive but active object (Couldry 2012: 40-54). Orientating media as practice allows us to ask questions about who and why people are using media and how this affects individuals and the world around them. It shifts the focus of media from an object that does something to people, to something that people do. Shove et al. (2012) argue that practices "emerge, shift and disappear" when disconnected from three elements from which practices are combined. These elements are materials (things, technologies, etc.), competences (skills, techniques, know-how) and meanings.

Castells argues that "the framing of the public mind is largely performed through processes that take place in the media" (pp. 154). He discusses framing, through which media outlets link certain issues to certain articles to prime the audience towards a certain reaction and promote a certain view. According to Robert Entman, one of framing theory's creators, framing involves selection and salience. To quote: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (Entman 1993: 52). Frames select pieces of information and make them more visible (salient) to the reader/viewer, thus guiding the audience towards a certain manner of thinking about an issue. Frames work upon pre-existing knowledge in the consumer to allow them to, as it were, to 'fill in the blanks' themselves (Castells 2009: 150-165). It is through media that we form our understanding of the world. Through media we create a representation of the world which is already manipulated by framing devices and (pre)-disposed narratives. Couldry states in his analysis of media society that our sense of 'what there is', is a result of the contention between various power struggles (social, political) in society. The difficulty with analysing these struggles is that our sense of 'what there is' stems from our (normalized) conception and representation of the world, which in turn was created by the media we consume (Couldry 2012:89-91).

To entangle ourselves from this web, I will use the idea of the daily, the everyday, as considered in media practice theory. As discussed, meaning is constantly contested. Large scale narratives such as nationalism are created through the media by way of framing and normalizing narratives. It is through the everyday that these normalizing discourses get (re)articulated through the individual. The individual takes in messages and articulates them in their own way, negotiating meaning and truths. It is a two-way stream in which the narrative influences and strengthens the individual, who in turn internalizes this narrative and recreates it through active (posting on social media for example) or passive engagement (being witness to media streams).

Chapter Three: Methodology and Fieldwork

From September 2016 to January 2017, I conducted fieldwork for my thesis in Xiamen, China. The main objective was to find out if the online discourse surrounding Dota 2 (and nationalism) differed from the offline one and if so, in which way? When reading (Chinese) forum posts I often gained the impression that there is very much a 'China vs the rest' sentiment, but was the same apparent when observing and engaging with fans face to face? The fieldwork in China has had a great effect on the thesis. I found that online discourse led to a one-sided view of a certain type of (nationalistic) fan from which it is very easy to fall into generalizations and reproduce stereotypes of nationalistic Chinese (Johnston 2017).

This chapter discusses my fieldwork in China both offline and online. It provides an overview of my methodology, fieldwork in and outside China, and the insights I gained, and it discusses how all of this has affected my thesis. I start this chapter with a short reflection on my fieldwork in which I argue for the importance of supplementing the digital with the non-digital. After this I discuss the key findings of my six months' period in China. I conclude with an outline of my methodology and source selection for the online component of this study.

3.1 The relevance of fieldwork: Why doing offline fieldwork matters

Why do fieldwork in China on a topic that almost entirely takes place online? Even tournaments that have an offline presence are easily followed through streaming sites. Why then leave home at all? As I noted in the first chapter, media and digital reading provide us with a certain (slanted) view of the world. I argue that it is very easy to fall into generalizations and stereotypes when one only deals with the online. Purely for this reason alone fieldwork in China has been greatly beneficial to the overall thesis. It has greatly altered how I look at my research, provided me with context, experience and many different perspectives. It has also made me realize that at least for the humanities, fieldwork can mean many things. Chance encounters with people or locations can spark a line of thought which one would never have had from the comfort of one's own home or office.

3.2. Offline and online methodology

In this subchapter, I will discuss the methods I used in my thesis. I have used a combination of online and offline methods, which is why this subchapter is divided into those two respective categories. Offline methods include participant observation and interviews, while by online I mean internet 'fieldwork': browsing forums, social media, etc.

By digital fieldwork I refer to anything that is done online (e.g. through digital media). This includes browsing web-forums, following online discussions and keeping up to do date with social media, but also online conversations with (Chinese) people. There is some intersection between the

offline and online as I talked to the contacts I made while in China and they, in turn, referred me to other people who might be of help. A contact made offline can be followed up online and vice versa. One important factor in doing digital fieldwork is the fact that it can be done anywhere in the world and is not restricted to a physical locality. This means that even in the Netherlands I can still discuss Dota 2 (and other topics) with the people I met while in China.

3.2.1 Offline: Interviews and observations

During my fieldwork in China I visited one Dota 2 tournament as well as sites such as internet cafes where Dota 2 was being played. This allowed me to observe the offline circumstance surrounding Dota 2 and compare offline and online discourse and representations. My source of interviews consisted of tournament attendees, encounters with people in China on the university grounds, in cafés, bars, etc., and a weekly gathering I went to where foreigners and Chinese could meet. Most of my interviews were with young men, mainly students.[6] Apart from Dota 2 tournaments the easiest way to find Dota enthusiasts is online. Aside from this there is no easy way of meeting Dota players. Thus, when I had the chance, I would always ask if people played videogames to break the ice, and if they did, I would follow up by asking which ones. Through this I have met several Dota players on the university campus I was staying.

When major tournaments were ongoing I wanted to know how these were being watched by the community, i.e. as a group or as individuals? Who do the viewers cheer for and why? Is the environment of watching and posting conducive to creating nationalist discourse? When observing the environment from which posts are made, as well as attending a Dota 2 tournament, I paid attention to any banal flagging both in the environment (posters, flags etc.) as well as by the people I spoke with (nation losing honour, winning games).

I conducted Interviews in and outside of tournaments. Outside of the tournament, these interviews reflected on the normal circumstances around playing the game and community participation. In the tournament, the interview was more strictly about the game being played at hand, and how this was perceived by the interviewee. I used a semi-structured interview format, leaving the discussion as open as possible, with certain questions prepared to frame that discussion. By letting people speak naturally about their passions, I believe that interesting perspectives and narratives can be gained as opposed to using a more controlled method of interviewing.

As noted in my theory chapter, I take a constructivist approach regarding the processing of the interviews, as multiple contradictory statements made in interviews can live alongside each other

[6] Mainly students from Xiamen University (厦门大学) but also from Shanghai Jiaotong University (交通大学) and others in China.

(Frels and Onwegbuzie 2013). There is no single 'truth' but rather the recreation of a narrative through various individuals. A large part of the offline experience was that of gaining an experience of China; being in China and being provided with some context from which posts are made has been invaluable in writing this thesis. While my impressions in China were fleeting, they served to create a structure of context for the research.

3.2.2 Online: Selecting digital materials

One major issue any researcher is bound to face when discussing the internet is the endlessly generating streams of data. As long as Dota is played (competitively) there will be people discussing it, which means that in effect there is no easy way to create a cut-off point to stop gathering information.

One way of coping with the large amount of data is to look at social media on dates of tournaments. This has several advantages:

- Tournaments provide a comparison, since during each single tournament all commentators are engaged in discussing the same events at the same time;
- Tournaments create a storyline, e.g. which teams do better than others, or how the tournament was mismanaged;
- Tournaments are moments in which discussion is much more active than normal: the bigger the tournament the more reaction threads and live threads it will have.

I monitored several tournaments in the time-period from May 2016 to April 2017. Below is an overview of the tournaments, including location and dates on which they were held. A final note of clarification: almost all tournaments include both an offline and an online component. Many tournaments operate by inviting teams directly and leaving 2-4 tournament slots for qualifying matches, which are almost exclusively played online.

Table 1 Tournaments researched for this thesis

Tournament Name	**Date of (offline) play-offs**	**Location of tournament**
Epicenter	May 9-15, 2016	Moscow, Russia
Manila Major 2016	June 3-12 2016	Manila, Philippines
The International 2016	August 2-13 2016	Seattle, United States
Mars Dota 2 League	September 28 – October 3	Xiamen, China
Boston Major 2016	December 3-10 2016	Boston, United States
Dota Asia Championship 2017	March 27 - April 4 2017	Shanghai, China

From May 2016 to April 2017 I have monitored several Chinese Dota 2 forums. This period starts with the Epicenter tournament, held in Moscow, and ends with the Dota 2 Asian championships in Shanghai. During my period of fieldwork several major tournaments were held, during which I monitored Chinese (and western) forums. My online coverage consisted of several forums and social media sites SGgamer, the Baidu Dota 2 forum, NGacn and uuu9. I chose these forums as they include some of the largest Dota 2 forums used by Chinese (Mandarin speaking) users. All these forums have live report threads on tournaments and competitive games. For western forums, I mainly used Reddit and TeamLiquid, two of the major Dota 2 communities for the English-speaking world. Aside from forums I also used other forms of social media such as Weibo, Weixin and QQ. I believe a wider choice of forums would not add anything to my thesis as the current selection already included (tens of) thousands of users generating numerous posts, comments, blogs, etc.

When selecting forum threads, I always first searched for tournament live threads, aside from these I selected further topics based on the title. I chose the topic: "feelings: NB (a Chinese Dota team), makes me think of post-TI 2(second international which IG won) IG"[7] (B1[8]), for example because it because it compared two strong Chinese teams specifically and talked about the feelings that they might have about this.

Live-threads are focussed topics especially made for certain tournaments[9] or even matches in tournaments between opponents in which users can post while the game is being played. They function as a means for people to come together and discuss or even 'yell' support or derision at their team and also allow for post-game discussion. Live-threads are an excellent source of information as there is an immediacy of emotions to the posts since they are written 'in the moment'. I especially paid attention to the way web-users frame the loss or victory of 'their' team as being a win/loss for China as a whole or as representing the Chinese nation. To give an example: the 'Chinese'[10] team NewBee in a tournament held in Russia in May 2016 won a match against a team considered American (Complexity) after which a user posted a cheer on a live-thread forum "keep it up NB (newbee) and clean up those fucking foreign fish."[11][12](S8). The title of this thesis is inspired from this post.

[7] 心情 NB 让窝想起了 TI2 之后的 IG[7]

[8] Letter + Number is a shorthand for the detailed references given in the reference section of this thesis. I used it avoid clutter when reading

[9] Often created by moderators of the site to filter discussion into one topic and prevent spam.

[10] At the time of the tournament NewBee consisted of 5 'Chinese' players. One is Malaysian-Chinese while the other four are from the mainland (a Dota team consists of 5 players and possible substitutes). While ethnicity is a complicated issue, there are only a few cases where non-Chinese citizen Chinese players play in Chinese teams which is why I have decided to focus on mainland players.

[11] TMD stands for 他妈的 which can be translated to 'fucking'. 外国鱼 literally means foreign fish and is considered a derogatory term for foreigners.

[12] NB 继续加油 干 TMD 的外国鱼

To understand the community's many inside jokes and references I used the Baidu search engine to search for explanations behind specific terms. For example, as the meaning behind memes (defined in chapter four) is not always clear I would simply search in Baidu or forums the meme name + meaning (e. g 什么意思) which would often lead me to other confused mandarin speakers asking the same question which were then answered by those better situated within the community's discourse.

Lastly, I searched forums and Weibo through hashtags and key terms based on tournaments (for example Mars Dota 2 league is also knows as MDL, Dota Asia Championship as DAC, and so forth), but also other terms such as 'China'（中国）， and 'foreigner' (外国人). However, searching the forums makes up only a small part in the overall data gathering process. I found that it is too easy to find topics with only one or two replies; I was more interested in threads that garnered at least two pages of discussion, as I believe this to be more representative of an overall discourse than singular outlier topics which garnered little to none discussion.

Using WeChat（微信）and QQ I, asked people I met online and offline if they knew anyone who played or watched Dota 2. This led to eight interviews in which I used a more structured format than offline interviews by asking the following questions:

1. Which team do you support – why do you like/support this team? (你支持那个战队 --为甚么喜欢/支持这个战队？)

2.Does a country's team have any bearing on whether you support them or not -- why? (个战队属于哪个国家会否影响你支持那个战队 --为甚么？)

3. Do you visit/participate in Dota 2 forums / online discussions?
(你有玩关于 dota2 的论坛吗？)

4.Do you read English forums such as reddit or teamliquid? (你看英语论坛吗比如说 reddit 还是 teamliquid？)

5. How did you feel when wings won the International? At that time, there were a lot of people writing online (on SGgamer and Bbs) that Chinese keep it up. What do you think of the slogan 'wings wins, China wins?) (翅膀（wings）TI[13]冠军的时候你有什么感觉？ 当时有很多人在网上里（SGgamer，Bbs）写中国队加油，你对"翅膀赢了中国赢了"这个口号有什么看法？)

These questions were then used as a stepping stone for further discussion. The reason I used a different format for online interviews is because initial contact online can be considerably more awkward than offline ones. As it was the first time I talked to most of the interviewees online these

[13] TI stands for the international, the biggest Dota 2 tournament, which Wings (a 'Chinese' team) won in 2016.

questions served as a way to lead us into the conversation. I will come back to these questions in the next chapter as I analyse my case study.

Fieldwork has been an essential part of this thesis. As I discussed earlier: even when doing research online (about communities or people), offline engagements are crucial as they add nuance and depth to the story being told. It is easy to fall prey to cherry picking on the internet. There are voices that argue that the internet should be seen as an independent entity which requires another perspective than that of the offline world, studying it in its own context e.g. Herold and Marold (2011). I partly agree with this assessment as there is much merit in researching communities on their own terms, but in the context of this thesis I argue that we should look at both sides of the mirror as both influence each other.

Lastly, a quick note on ethics: all my interviews have been anonymized. The interviews held at the tournament for example were asked only minor personal details (profession, where did they come from, age. All the posts I will discuss in the analysis chapter were publicly available at the time of writing. The nature of the internet is that things are both instantly retrievable as well as easily deleted, which means that posts might be unavailable for viewing in the future. I saved backups of the forum posts I use in the thesis, but this did not always work, as I had to find out when some posts I saved were met by an error message when I tried to use them at a later stage. At the time of writing however all forum posts are still accessible.

Chapter Four: The Dota 2 Community in China: A Case Study

This chapter is divided into five subchapters. The first contextualizes China, discussing the Chinese internet and the context in and from which people post. I try to construct the conjuncture of present China, a term introduced in the first chapter that serves to delineate the specific power relations at a time and place in (a) society. I especially focus on (internet) youth culture and modern nationalism in China. While no official surveys have taken place, various polls run by the community itself consistently show a vast majority of Dota 2 viewers and players to be (young) males. After this subchapter, I move to the nation as an object, arguing that the nation has almost become a tangible object one can interact with. I cover various Dota 2 tournaments and how they are emblematic of a certain discourse. Next, I discuss how the nationalist narrative is handled by the community in various ways. After this, I discuss the oft circulated idea of China vs the world and how China's supposed position culturally and historically makes it unique and incomparable to the rest of the world. In the fourth subchapter, I discuss jokes and how political/nationally-focused parodies and jokes can serve to make light of larger narratives (recall the strategies and tactics discussed in chapter 2.4).

4.1 China in context

In what context are the internet posts made in the Chinese Dota community written? Comments are never posted in a vacuum. In this subchapter, I formulate the background in which posts are produced and consumed. I further provide an overview of the recent economic and social developments in China.

The China Internet Network Information Centre report found that China, in July 2016, held around 710 million internet users; 67.2% were urban and 50.5% between the age of 10 and 35. Of these, 55.1% of users played online games, 15.2% used forums, and 45.8% watched online streams (CNNIC report 2016). In an analysis of the Chinese blogging community, Jiang (2012: 8-10) states that 'consumerist behaviour' dominates the Chinese internet. 'Uneven liberalization' since the 90s has led to a larger degree of freedom for Chinese people to express themselves while still being subject to varying degrees of state control (Jiang 2012; cf. Herold 2011). To quote Ying:

> *"The consequent personal freedom has enabled Chinese bloggers to become self-managing consumers who experience a degree of independence which, at the same time, legitimates and stabilizes the existing political framework." (Ibid: 22).*

The state encourages consumerism as an individual choice and uses it to foster nationalist sentiment. Whether this encouragement of nationalism is effective, however, is a topic of debate, as some scholars argue the opposite. Johnston (2017), in an analysis of several surveys held in Beijing, argues that nationalist sentiments have been on the decline for many years despite (Chinese) media proclaiming otherwise.

With regards to the internet as a potential catalyst for nationalist sentiment, Herold (2015: 20-24) further states that, for the Chinese youth, the internet is, more than anything a playground in which entertainment is cheap and one can feel freer to discuss any topics if it is allowed within the (often invisible) discursive space curated by both state control as well as self-censorship. In this regard, discussion about Tibet is allowed so long as it is framed within a nationalistic discourse. The government in turn stimulates this by praising consumers for patriotically embracing consumerism and helping the Chinese economy (a kind of 'buy local' idea; Jiang 2012). However, scholars also argue that the integration of the internet into daily life has allowed people to create new meanings and stories pushing back against generalizations about the 'authoritarian' state versus its oppressed citizens (Yu 2007).

An example relevant to this is (online) gaming in China, which has been framed by the government as being harmful to the development of youths and a danger to a 'harmonious Chinese society' (Lindtner and Szablewics 2011). For the newer generations, however, gaming has become a form of collective identity, a shared connection between members of society. Videogames, whether played at home or elsewhere, provide a new way of creating an identity (ibid). This is something that came up frequently when I talked to people at the MDL. Fans often framed themselves as 'gamers', and all people who like Dota 2 were described as belonging to the same group, no matter country or borders. This mismatch between the government's view of games and the players themselves has resulted in protests. However, these protests align more with the intention of protecting a gamer (consuming) identity than with a wish to upend the social /political order (Ibid.). Social protests in China are in general focussed on single issues surrounding public incidents or construction plans and are not necessarily concerned with large scale political change (Wong 2014:14-19).

Interestingly, many internet users consider online media to be more 'real', more factual than offline media, while also distrusting many sources of information. Cockain, in China Online (2015: 49-67), presents alternatives to discourses of liberation and citizen activism in China. He discusses how the explosion of information available to Chinese people has made people more aware of news and how it is mediated, leading to insecurity and uncertainty. Confronted with the 'harsh' reality through various internet videos, Cockain argues that people turn inward, and that the internet "might be, in fact a catalyst for control" as people long for the safety and certainty of mediated narratives.

Chu and Cheng discuss the Chinese internet in relation to civil society. They argue that Chinese culture strives for an equilibrium, a social harmony in which "the individual sacrifices self-interest for the 'common good' which legitimizes the government's role in maintaining a 'harmonious society'" (Herold and Marolt 2011: 36). The internet provides citizens with a way to express things which could not be said before. It provides a space for the creation of new stories within or outside the framework imposed by the state.

For Dota 2 the Chinese community is largely isolated from the other regions. It has its own forums, its own streaming websites, social media etc. Due to the language barrier on both sides, there is not much interaction between the Chinese and other communities. While I was not able to find statistics specific to the Chinese community, earlier consumer surveys put the average age of Dota users at below 25 as well as attesting to these consumers being overwhelmingly male (Walker 2015). As we can see from this short literature review there are many, often contradicting stances with regards to the Chinese internet. This falls is line with the earlier reading of the internet as tool which is shaped by its users. Now that I have sketched an overview of internet users in China today, I will turn to my case study of the Dota 2 community which, naturally, also operates within this larger backdrop.

4.2 The nation as a thing: Divine Wings protecting the country

Figure 1: Wings hold up Chinese flags and Wings flag after winning the sixth International (Screen capture from Dota.2.com)

In our current episteme, the nation seems to be the easiest categorization to make when meeting new people, and when watching sports or other events in which we need some pre-existing knowledge to contextualize things happening around us. In modern sports, this is nothing new, as national identification through sports has been happening since its advent (Crown and Mayall 1998). Even though E-sports was created in the age of the internet, globalization, and 'the weakening of the nation-state', national identification is still going strong in E-Sports. How do E-sports differ from earlier constructions of nationalism and sports? If we compare Dota 2 and football teams, for example, we can argue that, in either case, there is no 'nation'. The football team Ajax or the Dota teams Natus Vincere (Na'vi), and Invictus Gaming (IG) all have Greek or roman names betraying no hint of location.

There are, however, a few fundamental differences between a 'regular' sports team and an E-sports team. The first difference is how we view the players: in traditional sports, it is the physical body of the player that people cheer for, while in E-sports the athlete is embodied within a videogame. It is perfectly possible for someone to be a big fan of a professional Dota team or player without ever knowing what they look like, instead only seeing them through the videogame itself which makes them look like any other player in the game. This confusion is something which came up in my interviews in which one interviewee states: "actually when I first started (watching), I didn't know Wings, after I watched a game they played amazingly; only after the commentator said they were a Chinese team did I find this out".[14]

The perception of teams is also affected by this digital – physical dichotomy. Teams are organized by nationality by the community which can seem very random. Na'vi, for example, was for a long time considered a team from the CIS region. After they changed its roster however adding several non-Russian speaking players, people in the community questioned if Na'vi should still be considered a CIS team instead of a more general European team (R7). Other examples include Digital Chaos which, although three players were from Europe was labelled as a North American team. Its organization, however, was American, which was enough for most fans. I mention these examples to show how a team's nationality is not a given but is constantly renegotiated between different fans and organizations. To come back to my earlier comparison with Ajax, its home stadium is in Amsterdam so it is considered a team from Amsterdam when playing in the national competition and in broader terms a Dutch team when playing in international tournaments. On 12 April 2017, only 12 of the 24 players in Ajax had the Dutch nationality (and even fewer were from Amsterdam), with team members hailing from countries ranging from Cameroon to Brazil; this, however, seems to have had no bearing on the perceived identity of the club.

China, however, is an exception to this confusing nation-branding of E-sports teams. Chinese teams, with the rare exception of the occasional Malaysian or Singaporean player, have so far always had five mainland Chinese players and a mainland organization. As explained by a fan:

> *"I do not know to which nation this team belongs, just as you say, a team's players can come from many countries, I usually just understand a team's competitive region. However, if all five players of a team come from the same country then you can say that they are that countries team."*[15]

[14] 其实我刚开始并不知道 wings，看了一场他们打的非常棒，然后解说员说他们是中国队的，因为这样我才知道.

[15] 我不知道这个队伍属于什么国家，正如你所说，一个队伍的队员很可能来自多个国家我一般只了解这个队伍来自什么赛区不过如果这个队伍的全体成员均来自一个国家，那么就可以说这个队伍是这个国家的.

The simplest explanation of why this is the case for China is that of language and location. Most Chinese players barely speak English, which precludes any cooperation with players from other language regions.

A consistent theme I found throughout all forums and interviews was that the nation (be it China or any other nation) is an entity which can lose and gain honour and face, and that needs to be in some sense defended against hostilities. During tournaments that feature Chinese teams, this translates to China itself being at stake. If a Chinese team does well, it is all of China that 'gains honour', and if it loses (and especially if it loses in a big way) this reflects poorly on the nation. As one of my interviewees pointed out when discussing the victory of a Chinese team: "This team not only gives itself honour but also brings honour to its country".[16] Fighting for the country is a popular theme as topics such as "strengthen Wings and let Chinese dota improve!"[17] or "I am Chinese, I support LGD"[18] (B8; S6) are a common sight on all mandarin language forums used in this research.

Companies (and undoubtedly the state) also play a role in reinforcing teams and nationalities as they help induce narratives into and through tournaments, media coverage, and other manners. The 2016 International win by the Chinese Wings exemplifies this. At the time, Wings Gaming was one of the few Chinese teams that could compete with the non-Chinese teams. It was therefore given the title of "the divine wings protecting the country" (护国神翼) (B5, B11**)**. An explanation post explaining their name on the Baidu forums described the title poetically, with phrases such as Wings "ushering in a new daybreak for Chinese Dota", [19] and praising their working spirit: "after becoming champions, they did not rest but rather first attended competitions. Afterwards they only ate some bountiful Chinese food, that's all."[20] Chinese Companies also used the title of divine wings to promote their products. The picture on the next page shows a promotional topic for a (phone) application with which you can bet on tournaments, teams to win prizes and is filled with nationalistic discourse. When discussing Chinese teams battling others, the common discourse is exceedingly nationalistic. This commercial is promoting the application with sentences such as "(Wings) has become China's rongest force to withstand the strength of the world's Dota".[21] When showing the app in action, it is accompanied by the slogan "the strength of the east helps divine wings protect the country!"[22]

[16] 这个队伍不仅给自己赢得了荣耀，更给国家带来了荣耀.
[17] 壮哉 wings，给中国 Dota 争气！
[18] 我是一个中国人，我支持 LGD.
[19] 为中国 DOTA 带来了黎明时的曙光.
[20] 拿到冠军，没有立马欢腾，而是先复盘比赛。之后就仅仅是吃了顿丰盛的中国菜而已.
[21] 成为中国对抗世界 DOTA 最强劲的一股力量
[22] 东方力量助力护国神翼!

Figure 2: Advert for Divine wings protecting the country Application (Tieba.com)

Other community members responded by copying the phrases (a common way to support or cheer that is used on these forums) and by posting their own screenshots of the app. In the Chinese community support for the Chinese nation is a given, support for Chinese teams is not, as bad results can result in derision. Even Wings can fall in prestige, after winning the international in august 2016 they had a string of bad results which earned the team nicknames such as 'trashteam' or 'vegetable team' (S2, 垃圾队，菜队).

When asked how Chinese teams represented the Chinese nation and their thoughts on the slogan "Wings wins, China wins"[23] I received the following answer which I believe is worth quoting in full:

> *"Even though today there are a lot of teams that do not have national boundaries, Wings definitely represents China no? There is a certain rationality behind this. If we regard E-sports as (regular/physical) sports, I think that regionalism is not a topic that is inevitable, therefore I think using Wings to represent China is a rational thing, isn't it?"*[24]

[23] 翅膀赢了中国赢了.

[24] 虽然现在有很多战队都没有国籍限制，但是 wings 一定程度也是代表了中国吧，有一定的合理性。如果把电竞算作竞技体育，我觉得地域性是竞技体育绕不开的一个话题，所以我觉得用 wings 代表中国也算是合理吧.

What this answer says is that when discussing sports and sport teams, it is inevitable that nations and nationality are discussed as well. Continuing this train of thought, the underlying assumption is also that when nations are 'identified' in sports, one naturally supports one's own nation.

Compared to earlier Internationals, the 2016 International victory by Wings gained a comparatively large amount of mainstream attention as media outlets such as Xinhua and CCTV (picture below) reported on the event. As we can see from the CCTV caption the team name is not even mentioned, rather it is a 'Chinese team' (中国战队） that has become champion (Liu 2016).

Figure 3: CCTV screen capture of news report covering Wings Gaming's International 2016 Victory, the title card does not mention the name of the team, only that a Chinese team has won the competition.

When I asked face to face why the forums seemed very nationalistic, I received various answers. Three students from the Guangdong region told me that, while China is not that patriotic, in fact because the nation itself is very large and has a large population, a lot of people post things online. Many seemed almost apologetic when asked why they supported their favourite team. While in the initial conversation I was often told that nationality had little or no influence on their support of a team, they would later say that it does have a bearing. Pride is mentioned most often; fans were proud that China had won three Internationals, and they were proud that the most recent one was won by Wings. The contradiction of not wanting to support Chinese teams just because they are Chinese, but also wanting to supporting Chinese teams precisely because they are Chinese, is well encapsulated by the following response on QQ: "(video)games are really without borders, but I still support Wings and Newbee. They just happen to be Chinese teams. I surely do not support them just because they are

Chinese teams."[25] I argue that it is the insular character of the Chinese community which creates this duality of feeling with regards to supporting Chinese teams because they are Chinese on one hand but also believing in a global borderless gamer community on the other**.** Chinese teams rarely interact with media outside of China and, vice versa, non-Chinese teams rarely interact with Chinese media. The only real contact zones between the two are post-match tournament interviews in major tournaments. This means that Chinese people simply do not know other teams well enough to form any connection to them outside of seeing their games. Other reasons for this also include the new-ness of E-sports, and lack of place and history of teams, which has led to people finding different reasons to support teams**.** One constant in my interviews, for example, is that people most of all want to see good games being played at a high competitive level regardless of where the team hails from.

Another oft cited way to find common ground with teams is by supporting specific players instead of the teams themselves. I believe this is due to the malleability of Dota teams, as most teams change several of their players several times a year. This means that they follow one or several players' careers and support whichever team they find themselves in. A popular player in the Chinese community is the American 'old man' Fear, a member of the team Evil Geniuses who many fans like due to his personal story. In a mini-documentary made by Valve for the International, we are shown that he sacrificed a stable home and job to become a Dota professional, culminating in him winning the International in 2015. This story of overcoming hardship to achieve glory is something many people I interviewed identified with. However, nationality is still the easiest link to make when considering which team to support, and it still functions as the common denominator that binds the Chinese community together.

4.3 A Closer Look at the Dota Asian Championships: Symbolism during the finale ceremony

When China plays, it is the nation itself that is at stake. The Dota Asian Championships (DAC), a tournament held at the end of march 2017 in Shanghai, shows the power of this idea. This was the second iteration of the DAC, the first one, held in 2015, was won by Evil Geniuses, an 'American' team. The finales of the DAC were a best-of-five between OG (European) and Invictus Gaming (IG, Chinese). For most posters in the Chinese community, this was less about the teams themselves but rather about the chance to reclaim China's 'face' and once again win a major international tournament on 'home ground'. IG trumped OG in a 3-0 victory, to the delights of the community. This victory prompted many posters to congratulate IG (and China) online. A congratulatory chat on the Baidu forums is titled

[25] 游戏确实无界，但是我支持的却是 wings 和 newbee。他们恰恰刚好是中国队伍。我并不是因为他们是中国队伍才支持他们的.

"congratulations IG 3-0'd OG and obtained the first DAC championship"[26] (B2). In this thread the opening poster congratulated IG on winning in front of the eyes of the world and stated that we were witnessing another rise of Chinese Dota, ending with the slogan "CN Dota Best Dota"[27]

The prize ceremony had IG holding up a Chinese flag (picture below), even though waving flags is not usually part of a Dota ceremony. There have been instances of non-Chinese teams doing this, but due to the conflicting nationalities discussed earlier this almost never happens. The only other instance of flag usage I could find was of the team Alliance, which at the time had five Swedish players winning the third International; the team then also had a Swedish flag present. I have looked at all grand final ceremonies of major tournaments of the past two years and found few flags overall. While Chinese teams overall hold up more flags, this can be explained due to China being the only region with a large number of single-nationality teams. In the tournaments in which flags were present they were in most cases handed out by someone from the crowd, probably a manager of the team. In some cases, flags were present in the player booths themselves, functioning as a banner for the team. While teams do have their own logos and the more professional teams do have merchandizing in the form of team flags, national flags do take preference. Once again this is especially true for the Chinese fans and teams as the Chinese flag can be spotted regularly during the larger tournament's audience shots.

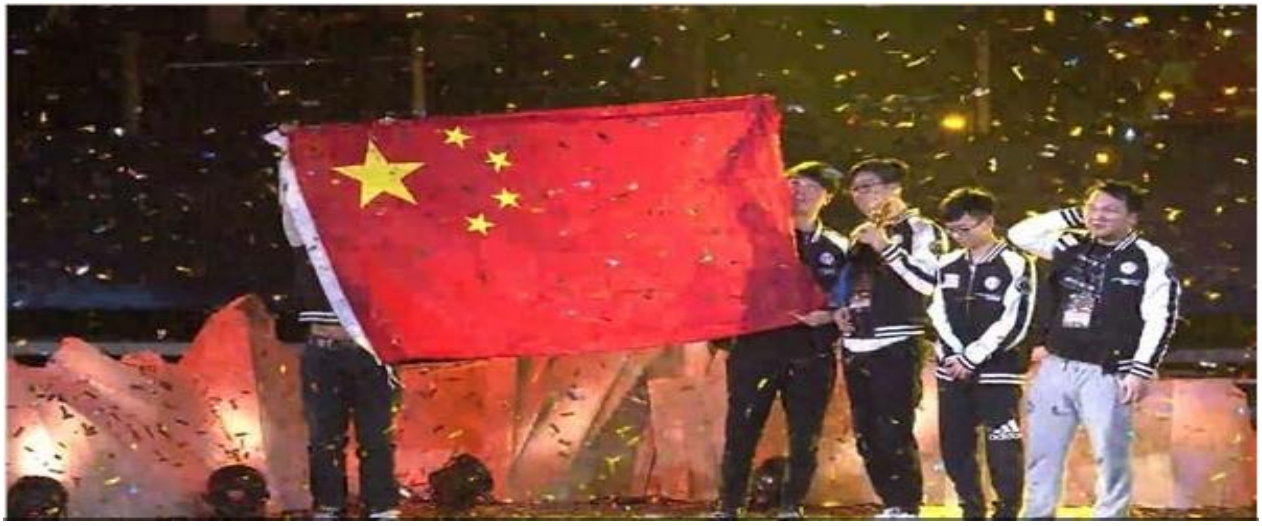

Figure 4: IG wings the Dota Asian Championship 2017 in Shanghai (photo from QQ.com)

This was also the case in the picture above. Aside from the flag, the DAC ceremony also had the host asking the team to hold hands to form a heart which he then referred to as China's heart (中国心) to the joy of the crowd. This is a reference to a 1980s-nationalistic song by Zhang Minming 张敏明 called 'My Chinese Heart' (我的中国心). This phrase was originally used jokingly in reference to the

[26] 恭喜 IG 3 比 0 OG 夺得本次 DAC 冠军.
[27] (恭喜 IG 在这全球瞩目的盛大赛事中，赢得了本次 DAC 冠军！让我们在一起看整了中国 DOTA 战队走上世界之巅！CN dota，best dota！

Chinese Canadian player Eternal Envy[28] as he would (or so the story goes) 'intentionally' lose games against Chinese teams because of his 'Chinese heart', but it has over time transformed into a catch-all phrase to either express patriotic sentiment or mock it. A forum thread supporting Wings Gaming during the International 2016 exemplifies this. Someone posted a topic in which they stated that they betted all their gambling funds (using a similar application discussed earlier) on Wings because of his Chinese heart (S4). [29] This topic shows how the meaning of Chinese heart has shifted to become common parlance for patriotic sentiment. Even though the number of Chinese teams is higher than that of any other nation (or rather: the number of teams labelled as Chinese), when we situate this expression of patriotic sentiment into the greater context of the Chinese community's nationalist rhetoric (e.g. the usage of flags and symbols) it does corroborate the greater pattern of nationalistic rhetoric within the community. The adoption (appropriation?) of 'my Chinese heart' by the DAC organization shows how these symbols can be taken and transformed to create unabashed nationalistic symbolism within the community.

In the previous subchapter, I discussed Ying Jiang's cyber nationalism in China and how Jiang described the state's role in creating a 'self-managing consumer' through which nationalistic sentiment can be channelled. To be a Dota 2 fan in China is to on the one hand love Dota, engaging in a transnational community in which 'we are all gamers' who all belong to the same tribe, and on the other hand cheering for one's country. Identity is never singular (Burke and Stets 2000); most of the people I interviewed were both students, citizens of a global gaming community, proud Xiamen residents, and proud Chinese.

Due to the insular character of the Chinese internet, it very quickly becomes an echo chamber. While censorship and hired commentators might possibly have an influence on the forum discussions, it does not make much difference, instead, it is the culture in which things are being posted that matters. The current Chinese government emphasizes national rhetoric (Johnston 2017). Even sitting in the bus in Xiamen I was subject to patriotic songs played on the televisions screens, not to mention the newspapers and commercials which continuously flag the nation and make up the greater echo-chamber of society in which one lives. This trickles down to the forums where things are discussed within a framework of national encounters, as this is how the ideological framework operates when viewing the engagements of Dota tournaments.

[28] Eternal Envy would later embrace the meme singing it on his internet streams for example
[29] 为了我的中国心，我把 max 上的库存 all in wings 了

As I have shown, banal nationalist flagging happens in multiple ways. There is the identification by the community of a team's nationalism. If the nationalism of a team is unclear, then a general region is assigned. Only after a country or region has 'claimed' a team can nationalist properties be assigned to it. A team is then not only responsible for its own success but also for its country's 'honour' or 'face'. The earlier discussion focused in large parts on victory, i.e. Chinese teams succeeding in Dota. On the other side, however, support which is so easily given in victory quickly turns into vitriol in defeat. When a team loses and especially when the entirety of 'Chinese' Dota fails to perform, as happened during the infamous Shanghai major, support quickly dwindles. Below is a picture a disappointed fan made and posted on the Chinese forums after all the Chinese teams had been eliminated on the second day of the Shanghai Major. The title of this post is : "Go fuck yourself Chinese Dota, professional players who do not want face" (S3).[30] This opening post consisted of a heartbroken fan who raved about how the Chinese teams disappointed everyone, accusing each team of training too little or being distracted. He ended the post by noting that he saw countless (Chinese Dota fans) with local accents all sighing.

Figure 5: Disappointed Chinese Dota fans at the Shanghai Major 2016. Photo credit Sggamer.

I singled out this post for multiple reasons. First of all, it garnered hundreds of reactions all supporting the initial poster, deriding Chinese Dota for losing face and being garbage (废物); secondly, this post is emblematic of the dual nature of Chinese Dota supporters: in victory teams are praised as gods and in defeat they are scorned as lechers. Support quickly turns into derision. This derision is unlike anything seen in the English communities. Emotions run higher on the Chinese forums due to the close ties teams have with their nationality, lowering the emotional distance between fans and players as the fans channel their support through this national sentiment.

To conclude, I offer the following encounter on Zhihu, a forum where people can ask questions. Someone asked which game was worth playing[31], Dota 2 or CS. The top-rated answer first listed pros and cons of both games and then included a passage on why Dota might be the game to choose:

[30] 去你他妈的 CNDOTA---写给脸都不要的职业选手
[31] 哪个更值得玩呢

"China is Dota 2's greatest team, and it controls the world's Dota. Even more so it is a game that stirs up your patriotic feelings. The (Dota) teams are pulled forward by perfect cooperation, both [patriotism and cooperation] make men's blood burn with passion" (Z1).[32]

This passage also shows the male dominated nature of Dota. In all the major tournaments of the past five years there have been no female competitive team members. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the majority of the audience is male and this fan also seems to imply that patriotism is mostly a male emotion.

Patriotism is the normative discourse on Chinese fan forums. Even when teams do badly, criticism is contextualized in regards to failing the nation and its people (e.g. the Dota fans). This criticism gives people an outlet for venting their frustration. It often stems from the failure of Chinese teams or organizations to represent the nation properly. If a team does badly or a tournament in China is organized poorly it reflects on all Chinese. To use Certeu's phrasings, we can identify the narrative of patriotism as a strategy constructed by the government and elites. The Chinese Dota community operates within this strategical framework and forms tactics (such as criticism and parodies, which I will discuss later) to renegotiate these larger frameworks within their own space. Criticism is embedded in the system and reinforces patriotism; it governs standards that 'China' should set for itself, and if any representative of China fails, then it is not only they who lose face, but the entire nation.

Typically, embedded in the comments to these posts, some people were contradicting the answer, saying that the poster had gone too far in praising China's ability (Z2).[33] While posts criticizing, the prevalent nationalist ethos can be found, they steer clear from criticizing the country. Rather it is the organizers of tournaments and the teams themselves that are subject to heavy criticism when results are poor and tournaments go wrong. Another controlling mechanism is checking other people's nationalism, implicitly agreeing but also saying that maybe they are being a bit too nationalistic. As far as I have seen, there is no counter narrative but rather, as shown in the example above, criticism is phrased as 'I wouldn't go as far'. This statement suggests that while I disagree with you in regards to China being the greatest Dota country (or in regards to any other large claim that is being made), I do of course support the team and the country. These answers further strengthen the strategical position of the narrative of nationalism. They also further solidify the (social) fact that these teams *do* represent countries and that countries *are* important in the context of E-sports and Dota fandom.

[32] 中国世界第一，世界被中国的 DOTA2 统治，更是一个激起你爱国情怀的游戏，团队的拉扯，完美的团战配合，都让男人热血沸腾

[33] 中国统治 dota2。。。不至于不至于

4.4 China versus the world, China as the world

In the previous subchapter, I discussed how the Chinese community uses the concept of the nation to create narratives of losing and gaining honour, face, and representation. This subchapter will analyse one of the most prevalent ideas that is almost always inherently included when China is discussed: China versus the rest of the world. The prevalent framing device for teams (and nationalities) is the Chinese, or the domestic(国内), versus those outside of China (国外). As far as the Chinese Dota 2 community and the people I interviewed are concerned, there are Chinese teams, and then there are teams that are not Chinese.

The Chinese community is aware of its own 'patriotism' and mocks it or makes jokes about it, but on the other hand community members are also proud of it. When asked why they supported a certain team, my interviewees were often very apologetic. They made sure to mention that they did not support a team merely because it was Chinese but also because of other factors. When asked further, the Chineseness of a team was an important factor named by many. There seemed to be a duality in the sense that fans were proud of China's accomplishment, but also aware of the stereotypes revolving around Chinese fandom as overly patriotic. Proudly stating that one supported a Chinese team to a foreigner was thus a negotiation between local and international norms where overt nationalism might be frowned upon, and it shows a growing awareness of international relations. On the Chinese forums, however, there is no foreign observer, which removes any filters one might otherwise have when discussing fandom with a foreigner.

During the Dota Asian Championships in Shanghai, several posters (B3, 4) created threads in which they discussed screenshots of Reddit users discussing (in English) the bias of the Chinese crowd during the DAC and reactions to the DAC itself. These topics led to discussions among Chinese fans. While some tried to argue that it is similar to football teams cheering for their countries, the tone of the thread is jingoistic. Terms such as white pig (白皮猪) for westerners and monkey (猴子) for southeast Asians were casually used. Derogatory terms for non-Chinese are part and parcel on the forums. While in many instances such terms can be used tongue in cheek, there is still a prevalence of terms such as foreign fish (外国鱼) that are taken at face value, and many posters also derided American fans for being hypocritical as they had chanted 'USA' during previous Dota tournaments, which also led to a discussion about the alleged low quality (素质) of American people.

This thread about how different audiences cheer for their teams serves as an example of identity making, an us-versus-them sentiment, reinforcing the narrative of the domestic (国内） versus the foreign (国外). While it is an extreme example, it is emblematic of the underlying discourse of Chinese exceptionalism prevalent on the forums. Furthermore, this thread also serves as a marker for China's growing confidence on the world stage. The concept of raising the quality of people, used

by the Chinese government as population control rhetoric (Anagnost 1997), is here adapted to deride other nations. In fact, this narrative is turned upside down by implying that it is not China's quality that is low, but rather that of other countries, who fail to understand the proper context of why Chinese people are cheering and do not properly cheer for their own team. The following quote exemplifies this: "Us Chinese gamers are very good at being reasonable. I have never seen us using our home advantage to criticise, these white pigs are of low quality."[34] Many reactions in this thread reproduce the 'century of humiliation' and victim narrative discussed earlier in subchapter 2.2: "In the eyes of foreigners, Chinese Dota is simply like the existence of a demon king" (D2).[35] These types of threads showcase how feelings of anger can be channelled at (mainly) the west for being slanted as stereotypical nationalistic Chinese.

As Chinese fans are aggravating themselves against supposed threats, the business side of things is in fact trying to build bridges from China to the rest of the world. The Chinese tournament called the Dota Asian Championship markets itself as being the *Asian* championship, while its entire organization as well as design (tournament logo, waiting screens, etc.) is derived from Chinese idioms. Chinese Dota tournaments supposedly representing the larger Asian region or even World are much more prevalent in China than in any of the other Dota regions. A major tournament held in the beginning of 2017 was the 'World Electronic Sports Games 2016' (WSG), organized by a partnership between companies and the local municipal government in Yinchuan (Leah 2016). It featured a host of different E-sports games and was held in Changzhou, China. While outside of the scope of this thesis, I believe an interesting comparison could be made with American traditional sports tournaments such as the baseball World Series or Super Bowl, the winner of which is declared 'world champion'. These local and growing Chinese events seem to be a l sign of China's growing confidence and assertion on a global level.

There are two contradicting narratives at play here. First, there is China's growing assertion on the world stage, with gaming and tech companies such as Tencent becoming more active outside China.[36] This confidence is seen in events such as the DAC and WSG, where Chinese organizers hold events representing the 'world' or 'Asia' in China, sometimes with local government support (sports.gov.cn). Supporters themselves also play a role as they more often than not reproduce nationalist discourse themselves, framing encounters in tournaments as us vs them, China and the rest. I argue that this is part of a larger notion of China's exceptionalism in which factors such as China's 'long' history, writing system, and 'unique' culture play a role in creating this us vs them mentality.

[34] 讲道理这点我们中国玩家还是很理智的，我从没见过我们 TI 输了拿主场优势来说话，这群白皮猪也是素质低

[35] 西恩 dota 在国外眼中本来就是大魔王般的存在

[36] Tencent for example recently made public plans to create a gaming platform called WeGame (Hall 2017)

The second narrative concerns the idea of a gamer culture propagated by young Chinese. As discussed in the previous subchapter, there is an associated culture of gamers which 'knows no borders'. There is no geography in online gaming, as anyone can play with anyone using the internet. A major difference is the way in which we watch E-sports. As E-Sport's functioning requires the internet, the normal way to watch it is through streaming websites (Pannekeet 2017). While there has been an increase in televised E-sports tournaments, for example through ESPN in the United States, the vast majority of events is still watched through the internet. From small local tournaments to the International, all are available to watch online for free on streaming websites, or through Dota 2 itself (which does require digital 'tickets').

When asked if a team's country affected his support, one of my interviewees noted: "it has no effect, (video)games are without borders"[37]; when asked if this statement did not contradict his earlier statement of supporting Wings for bringing 'honour to China', he stated: "there's no contradiction, just like sports they have no border".[38] An interviewee stated (quite poetically) "all Dota players under heaven are kinsmen."[39] Contrary to this he went on to say that he supported two Chinese teams, since they are Chinese and played well while also stating that a team's country has no bearing on him being a fan or not: "because they are Chinese teams and play absolutely outstanding."[40] This anecdote shows the different considerations fans make. When discussing fan-ship with me directly, people made sure to de-emphasize the effect of nationalism and nations on whether they supported a team. I argue that this is due to the way they placed themselves in a more globalized framework in which they are aware of stereotypical depictions of overly patriotic Chinese and do not wish to reproduce these stereotypes when discussing E-sports with me, a foreigner. Inside the Chinese community, however, these considerations do not apply.

[37] 不影响，游戏无国界
[38] 没矛盾,就像体育无国界
[39] 天下 dotaer 一家亲
[40] 因为是中国的战队而且打得非常出色

4.5 Parody and the Joke: Joining the party (入堂)

Figure 6: Diaosi stereotypes (image from baike.baidu.com)

The Dota community has a long history of using memes. These memes are often used in tournaments, by commentators, players, and even the tournament organizers themselves. In the creation of digital tribes on the internet reference points become important to delineate insider and outsiders and create identities. When one is familiar with a community one is also familiar with its memes, which makes one a member of the community versed in the lingo of that digital tribe (Yang et al. 2014). The Diaosi picture in figure six is an example of a meme. It can be easily reproduced by adding text suited to the meme creator's particular background and circumstance. Furthermore, this meme resonated with a specific subset of a community (jobless/low income young disillusioned males) on the internet which can create a community of sentiment around this feeling. The Diaosi meme on top for example states that Diaosi have no future, money, or credentials. They love Dota and are unable to talk to (beautiful) girls. This meme like all other memes start with a certain template, in this case the Diaosi internet loser stereotype after which endless variations can be produced.

To quote Dawkins, who originated the term: "a hijacking of the original idea (…) internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity" (Wiggins and Bowers 2015: 1889). The same is true for the Diaosi meme. While the meaning might be different in the original picture it has been taken over by the Diaosi meme. Wiggin and Bowers state that memes exist as artefacts of the digital culture, which enjoys low barriers of entry, ease of sharing, and encouragement. They cite three features of memes, these are the virtual physicality of memes. This means that a meme exists online and in the minds of people. Secondly memes highlight the social and cultural makeup of the community in which it appears, they are specific to a time and place. Thirdly and lastly memes are both consumed and produced by the same audience (Ibid). Memes are easily reproducible cultural artefacts and can take many forms, sometimes as simple as a set of numbers, but also video memes which have a higher barrier of entry to (re)produce. Due to the nature of text based forums I will exclusively discuss textual

and visual memes in this subchapter. I will first discuss some common Chinese internet memes and then talk about specific Dota related memes, their usage in the community, and how they relate to the greater discourse of nationalism discussed in this thesis.

The Chinese internet has a long history of using memes, of which the most famous one is probably the 'grass mud horse' (草泥马), a meme which has the same pronunciation as the slur 'fuck your mother' and which was created to pass by censorship on the internet (Li Hongmei in Herold and Marolt 2011). Much has been written on the political potential of memes in China. Chen (2014) and Szablewics (2014) for example write about Baozou manhua (暴走漫画) and Diaosi (屌丝), two memes which serve as a way for the primarily young internet population in China to vent and discuss themes such as the 'backwardness' of Chinese society (Chen 2014) or channel the feelings of a disillusioned youth frustrated by the lack of upwards mobility (Szablewics 2014). On the Chinese internet memes are tolerated to an extent, as the government knows that it is impossible to regulate the internet entirely. This does not mean, however, that there have been no efforts to regulate or remove certain memes if they are deemed too political (Chen 2014). The Diaosi meaning is also relevant to Dota as the image above shows. A Diaosi is a kind of internet loser who only sits in his basement, "loves Dota "and "has no money and no future". It is a self-aware parody that creates a feeling of community. Understanding of certain memes becomes part of a gatekeeping process in which outsiders and insiders are delineated. They create a shared feeling among those who understand them and keep those out who don't.

I have to note that not all memes are political in nature. When a team plays poorly for example, the Chinese character of 'vegetable' (菜) is often typed to indicate the bad quality of play. On the other side of the coin, when a player plays exceptionally well, fans add the appending -god (神) to the name as an honorific for 'great' players or plays made during games. Typing 6 to mean smooth (six (六)and slick/smooth (溜) are both pronounced as liu) indicate good play, is another example of a chatroom meme.

For the analysis of irony, I have adapted a framework used by Yurchak (2005) who, in an analysis of popular uses of irony in the Soviet Union right before its collapse, delineates many similar types of uses of irony and sarcasm to mock or complain about daily existence. Particularly pertinent to this thesis is Yurchak's use of Peter Sloterdijks distinction between 'Kynicism' and 'humour that has ceased to struggle'. The first term, Kynicism[41], holds up a mirror to the daily norms, showing, for

[41] The difference between Cynicism and Kynicism is best explained in two quotes from Žižek (1989: 25-30), first on Cynicism:" The Cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he nonetheless still insists upon the mask". And Kynicism: "Kynicism represents the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm: the classical kynical procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology – its solemn, grave tonality – with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule."

example, their ridiculousness when viewed from another perspective. It makes the ridiculous normal, making the audience reflect on the arbitrary norms and values that make up society. 'Humour that has ceased to struggle' on the other hand is more subservient in nature. While it can still make fun of authority and society, it also holds them in high regard. This 'humour that has ceased to struggle' reinforces existing paradigms as "we identify with them, support them, believe in them (…) or simply recognize them as immutable and therefore not worth struggling with" (Yurchak 2005).

The Chinese Dota community has many memes belonging to either categories. The distinction between these two however is not always clear, and it can also happen that, over time, a meme that was created as a form of 'resisting' the hegemonic discourse gains a reworked meaning and becomes unresisting humour. An example of this is the Chinese heart meme, which as discussed earlier was first mockingly used to refer to a Canadian Chinese player as well people 'lamenting' on forums about the Chinese heart of a Chinese team whenever they lost. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Chinese heart meme has become less ironic and more a serious statement of patriotism. The usage of this meme during the prize ceremony of the DAC exemplifies this. The host of the tournament requested the audience to make a heart shape with their hands which was labelled the 'Chinese heart'. They did this in union with the winning team with the winning team making the victory not only that of Invictus Gaming but rather a victory for all of China. Instances such as this pushes the meaning of the meme more unabashedly in the direction of nationalism.

It is worth noting that Chinese memes are also of great interest in the western community (R3, R4). This is evident from the many posts after tournaments on sites such as Reddit, for example, in which people translate Chinese memes and comics and discuss them. The consensus is often that Chinese memes are superior to western ones in their complexity and historical depth. This in turn is a source of pride for the Chinese community who see this as an affirmation of China's unique cultural and historical statues (R3). The meme 3154, for example, was so popular that it was also adopted by the western audiences who would spam 3154 in chats when the match timer would reach 31 minutes and 54 seconds. This meme stems from a Chinese player accidently typing 3154 in-chat to everyone instead of in private to his team (R6). The 3154 meme however was decontextualized by the western community. The Chinese community invented a whole backstory to the accidental in-chat typing of 3154. The story is that Jacky Mao (the Chinese Canadian player known for 'my Chinese heart') is a secret undercover agent hired by China and 3154 refers to his activation code (activate at 31 minutes, 5 players in the team, kill 4) after which he will purposely lose the game (S1, R5, R6). This meme links several things together: the ethnicity of Jacky Mao and that Jacky Mao, due to his Chinese ancestry, will always remain Chinese and be loyal to China. It also refers to popular imaginations of secret agents popularized by series, especially in the context of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

The final meme I want to discuss, is 'joining the party' (入堂). This meme is similar to the 3154 meme in the sense that it refers to espionage. It is used when a foreign team loses to a Chinese team (B6). It means that one of the players on the foreign team has been enticed by the communist party to go over to the other side. While it can be argued that it mocks the communist party, it also gives it an aura of power as it is even able to affect the outcome of Dota 2 competitions (B6,7). Joining the party is a popular meme and has become a common expression in the Chinese community. A cursory forum search shows a multitude of teams and players labelled as joining the party. I argue that this meme falls squarely in the second category of 'humour that has ceased to struggle'. It is a parroting of the perceived power of the communist party to influence everything. While it in a sense mocks this process, it is also a reinforcement of the current government and the seemingly immovable and unchangeable political circumstances in which this community operates.

Some of the memes in the Chinese community reflect the concept of hyper normalization mentioned in the first chapter, in which the state in a sense creates a discursive reality. Authors such as Yang et al. (2014) and Szablewicz (2014) argue that memes such as Diaosi are a direct reaction against these forms of discourse-making by the government. The line between mockery and the reinforcement of this discourse is thin, however, as episodes such as the Chinese heart meme have shown. Memes are an integral part of the Dota community. They serve as quick reference points for members of the community to delineate themselves as such. Memes can serve to both challenge and reinforce hegemonic discourses, even within the lifespan of the same meme. To conclude, while memes such as '3154' or 'joining the communist party' could be meant by the initial poster as mocking the establishment, the intent of the author does not guarantee that the meme is read as such parodying power structures but instead fall into a larger pattern of other memes which in fact reinforce rather than criticize existing power structures.

Chapter Five: Synthesis

In the introduction of this thesis I posed two questions. Firstly, how is nationalistic representation and discourse normalized in the Chinese online game community of Dota 2, and how do large narratives such as nationalism fit in a world where people feel empowered by having the potential to be both producer and consumer of content at the same time, and in which everyone can create their own reality, their own facts? I used the second and third chapter to discuss my theoretical and conceptual framework as well as fieldwork in China. The fourth chapter contained a case study of the Chinese Dota community from 2016 to 2017. The present chapter serves as a bridge between the two, picking up any loose threads and explicitly answering the questions posed in the introduction. While the two questions have many overlapping themes, I have, for sake of clarity, divided this chapter into two subchapters dedicated to each respective question.

5.1 Question one: How is nationalistic representation and discourse normalized in the Chinese community of Dota?

In chapter two I discussed digital acceleration and the creative audience. These two terms are best suited when describing the Chinese Dota 2 community. The speed of digital communication and the creative potential of the community allows it to rapidly create, adopt, and renegotiate meaning. Memes and the construction of nationality are examples of this. A team's nationalism is a community-wide agreement which, as this thesis has shown, needs to be reinforced and narrated in order to be kept alive. If nobody mentions a team is Chinese, then nobody will know. After a team is identified as Chinese by the community, and this is accepted as truth, then the team gains a responsibility towards the nation. The team is no longer responsible only for its own success but rather for the success of the entire nation. The same is true for tournaments held in China: a badly organized tournament in Shanghai will, in the eyes of the community, reflect badly on all Chinese everywhere. The nation is constantly 'imagined' through the discourse surrounding team fandom. Furthermore, through memes such as '3154' and 'joining the party', the community also (re)creates narratives of a dominating state power. This 'humour that has ceased to struggle' is especially insidious on the digital platform as its reach is unparalleled in history. The properties of social media also lend themselves to a shorter discussion where nuance is in short supply. I discussed Poe's law, according to which serious and ironic extremist comments are undistinguishable without proper context. This also holds true for this case study; I am sure that many posts I read doing this study were meant ironically, however the cumulative effect is that the normative discourse of the forums turns them into an echo chamber where truth and jokes are indistinguishable from each other.

The party, almost synonymous with all-encompassing power, also holds a remarkable position in the discourse of the community. On the one hand, it is absent, as it is never discussed nor mentioned outright. Rather it is present through memes and phrases that directly or indirectly reference the supposed power of the communist party without ever actually making this supposition explicit.

The meme 3154 is an example of this, jokingly referring to an opposing team's mistake in fact being caused by a Chinese double agent. This meme attributes a great deal of state power to the Chinese nation which is constantly 'made real' by referring to this meme. The supposed power of the state discourse is internalized through these memes. To rephrase Castells: we are witnessing a self-framing of the mind, not by the media, but by the community itself. These memes also work a bit like the illusory truth effect discussed earlier. Why would one critically think of a meme like this if it is also parroted by most of the other media users one is surrounded by? Why doubt what is considered normal by all those who surround us?

It is the parroting of these larger narratives (the earlier mentioned recited society) that gives the meme its power by creating or reinforcing what makes up 'common sense' and common knowledge. Knowledge such as that everyone 'knows' that China is powerful, and influential, but also other common sense perspectives such as the concept of 'the west' being something which can be spoken of as a single entity.

Another way in which the community functions as an echo chamber of normativity is in its restating of China's supposedly unique position, both culturally and historically. The 'regime of truth' created by Chinese society and heavily dominated by state-directed media (Lee Chin Chuan 2003) is constantly reinforced by the community itself by creating Chinese and non-Chinese teams, but also by community members translating English, for example Reddit posts that are in turn discussing Chinese's memes.

To return to De Certeau, I discussed various practices in this subchapter by which the Dota Community both distances itself from non-Chinese and reinforces its own cohesion towards the nation-state. I stated earlier that practices have a double characteristic, organizing space and language. In this case study, I have shown how language is organized through memes and normal discussion. supporting China is the status quo in the Chinese community, which forms an unspoken and unquestioned backdrop for all discussion. I argue that the place that these practices organize is that of the mind. Banal mentions of state power through memes and supportive cheers have a normative effect on those reading them. From the outside, they might appear as factitious, but to those on the inside (e.g. the other fans and supporters who yell the same thing) they constitute a normal rhetoric and practice.

These practices are not resisting the hegemonic, however, but are instead reinforcing it. In the theories discussed there is a prevalent, perhaps romanticized view in which individuals are consciously

or unconsciously resisting strategies (i.e. dominant frames and narratives) imposed on them. This case study has shown that, while individual agents could construe themselves as undermining or pushing back against dominant discourses through posts and memes, they contribute to a slowly increasingly nationalistic discourse as the format does not lend itself to nuanced and critical viewpoints. Thus, the potentially subversive tactics of the individual users become supportive to the larger strategies disseminated by the state (e.g. Chinese dream, consumer nationalism). These tactics are disseminated into the community where they become part of a larger discourse or narrative structure of the community itself, transforming these ironic messages into banal repetitions of state power and state loyalty.

Nationalist sentiment is not unique to China but present in every nation-state, as the creation of a national history, ethos, etc. is necessary to have a functioning nation-state. Every country needs to have it, otherwise it would not be a country. In fact, all the people I spoke with, and the mood of the forums when discussing Chinese Dota, is that of pride: pride in the sense that China is such a strong force on the Dota scene and pride of the community for being a large part of Dota. I would further argue that many Chinese do not even necessarily consider themselves as being patriotic. Many interviewees often implicitly stated that they did not regard themselves as patriotic. There is however a distinct lack of an opposing discourse space in which people can state that they are not being supportive of Chinese teams or China. Another worrying aspect is the invasion of the private space by digital media. In the digital age one is never offline or unreachable. People are surrounded by banal utterings of nationhood and propaganda of the state. It only seems 'natural' that they should reproduce these messages when discussing Dota tournaments as this is the natural course of reasoning when living in a nation.

As discussed, English forums also have people posting e.g. pro-American or pro-Swedish comments, but these practices are much more susceptible to being derided by other commentators due to the use of the English language. For the Chinese community, there is a decisive lack in mocking nationalist sentiment; instead, the representatives of the Chinese nation become lightning rods for criticism and derision. The nation itself, with all its narratives and frames is never questioned as all criticism is directed at players, tournaments and so on sparing the nation from being critically reflected upon. In this fandom, the nation has been internalized and has been granted personhood. It can gain and lose honour and face, be insulted and praised, is everywhere but also nowhere. For this fandom, a citizen is the living embodiment of the nation-state, thus to criticize it would be to criticize oneself. Therefore, when Chinese teams do badly it reflects on them personally as they themselves channel the feelings of the Chinese nation.

5.2 Question two: How do large narratives such as nationalism fit in a world where people feel empowered by having the potential to be both producer and consumer at the same time, and in which everyone can create their own reality, their own facts?

Figure 7: Screencapture 15 May of JoinDota.com

Why is there such a thing as nationalism in Dota 2 at all? The Dota 2 E-sports scene is less than ten years old. The game was made public in 2011 and was officially released in 2013. The professional Dota scene started in a global age of the internet that seemingly knows no borders. Why then does the community constantly place and contest teams' various nationalities? Some teams embrace their nationality, for example the Chinese teams in general take pride in representing the nation. Another example is the team Alliance that I cited earlier, which purposely boasts five Swedish players and identifies as a Swedish team. Comparing two popular Dota English websites Teamliquid and JoinDota shows how nations are placed with each team. Some teams are categorized as 'World' or 'Europe' if players in a team hail from different continents or countries. This is not always logically consistent. Team Secret, for example,[42] is categorized as 'Europe' while only having two European players, and Mineski is classified as Philippines while only having two Philippine players. For the English community, the nationalism of the 'western' teams can be a constant negotiation between fans from different countries. As discussed, a team's nationality is usually dependant on the background of the players and needs constant reinforcing to continue to exist. As it is possible to only watch competitive matches through the in-game client, it is possible for a viewer to never actually see the players or the physical environment within which they are playing. To see all things outside of the game in an offline tournament (interviews, the audience, etc.), one must watch the tournament through a third-party streaming website.

When cheering for a team, many interviewees cited that they support a team because it performed well. This however does lend itself to a dilemma: when a team does not play well, one cannot support it anymore. Another often cited way in which people supported teams was through its

[42] At time of writing (10 may 2017)

players. Like in other sports, fans connect to certain players and will follow their career. These methods however require a large amount of knowledge from the fans. They need to be familiar with the players, their stories, and playstyle, as well as being able to discern what constitutes good play, something not easily apparent in Dota. I argue that for many casual or cursory fans it is much easier to simply use the nation as a category for support. As we live in an age of nation-states they are one of the primary categorizations we share with other people and these categories allow us to make the impersonal personal. Five players hailing from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Australia and Israel become known as European, allowing a whole continent to take their achievements and make them their own.

I discussed the democratization of knowledge that has gained speed on the internet. This diversification of meaning and truth does not mean, however, that everyone can harbour their own realities. Humans are social creatures and truths need to be confirmed and reinforced through communities of likeminded thinkers or, to portray them more negatively, through echo chambers. In the English communities, there is a constant tug and pull between fans from different countries or continents (mostly North American versus Europe), claiming and contesting different teams and thus also contesting the victories that these regions claim through certain teams. These contestations represent different truths (echo chambers) contesting each other, each claiming its reality (e.g. this team is European/American) and trying to supersede the other.

With regards to the question of empowerment of the individual, I would argue that regardless of whether individuals create the stories themselves or dogmatically repeat existing narratives (such as nationalism), they can still feel a sense of empowerment. The popularity of memes revolving around a strong communist party signify this. Feelings of Pride are especially apparent when foreign reactions to Chinese memes are discussed. The emotions can range from pride in the supposed complexity and cultural background needed to understand these memes to anger at being misunderstood. These topics in which non-Chinese discuss Chinese Dota are often discussed as a confirmation of existing Chinese narratives such as its unique cultural identity and history. The ‘consumer nationalism’ framework discussed earlier exemplifies this. People feel empowered as they create their own nationalism through memes and messages posted online. Nationalism is internalized and becomes part of the personal narrative, both imposed from the top by the party as well as being circulated by individuals and their peers. In a truly banal style of nationalism, we do need not need to be reminded of the nation anymore as the truth from which we consider all other things.

Chapter Six: Articulating Society: Macro Perspectives

In the previous chapter I answered my research question and structured my case study within my theoretical apparatus. This chapter is reserved for a broader analysis, taking a step back from the Dota community and conceptualizing how this local field has wider implications. In today's world of short mediated memes and messages it is easier to reproduce and reinforce existing (dominating) narratives than challenge them. This is due to the way our thought processes are already framed from within the hegemony itself. Subtle context is easily lost in the fast world of internet communications which, as discussed, means that statements challenging this hegemony can simultaneously be construed to be supportive towards this very same hegemony.

This thesis asked the question of how nationalism was articulated in the Chinese Dota community, and now I will broaden this question and ask how the Chinese Dota community articulates the rest of society. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first discusses key aspects of the Dota Community and how its members link into Chinese society. The second is titled 'big country syndrome'; it compares the Chinese online discourses I have analyzed with the American social media forum Reddit and its discourse of nationalism. The third discusses the internalization of a nationalistic ideology and historical distancing.

6.1 Internalized nationalism: We know better now: Now is now and then was then

After I visited the Shanghai propaganda poster art museum with my Chinese friend I asked him what he thought about the museum. He was quiet and then said: "Now it is different, we know better now". When I asked him about the propaganda posters still visible everywhere in China he said that while they are there, people are aware of them and they are not as overt as the anti-imperialism posters of the Mao era.

This subchapter discusses ideology and how in the digital age there is a prevalent tendency of thinking oneself above it. I further link to China's growing confidence on the world stage. 'We know better now' refers to the notion that we live in an age of so much available information that we can see 'beyond' the mediated narrative proposed to us. By consciously being aware of operating within an ideology, or being able to see how narratives are mediated, one opens oneself to a different kind of manipulation. A parallel can be drawn with conspiracy theorists who often consider themselves as seeing beyond the narratives proposed by certain parties and seeing things for what they *really are*. The fact that they believe this opens these conspiracy theorists up for other narratives that might even contradict each other (Bessi et al 2015).

Reddit is one of the largest social media sites on the internet (Alexa.com 2017). It is a site that communities can use to create a 'subreddit' and discuss their topic of interest, which functions as a

localized community within Reddit. One such subreddit is called 'ShitAmericansSay' (SAS), which allows users to link to Reddit comments of (supposedly) United States citizens posting 'typically American' comments. I mention this community as it highlights a feature that many non-U.S. users find annoying, namely the proliferation of a supposedly unique American point of view on many issues. While, comparative to China, there might not be a state-organized propaganda machine, mass media and other channels still create an ideological belief world. The difference between the United States and China[43] is in the overtness of the propaganda. I would argue that the Chinese government, as opposed to the United States, is actively developing and creating narratives for its people (the Chinese dream is an example of this although it also builds upon pre-existing narratives). The United States seems to rely more on election cycles from which new narratives are created and attached to a certain government. Obama's message of 'yes we can' and Trump's 'make America great again' are two examples of new ideological messages that build upon pre-existing themes of 'American greatness.' These pre-existing narratives have already been internalized in the United States as they are proliferated constantly through mass media and politics, leading a life of its own.

When two confliction narratives meet, truth loses its meaning. In a conversation about the South China Sea, I was told that I would probably think that Chinese are all brainwashed (my interlocutor used the phrase (洗脑) as they believe the Chinese claim is valid. This was curious to me as I had not made any statements regarding the ownership status of the sea. In fact, it seemed that my interviewee was proud to catch me off-guard by mentioning this apparent brain-washing to show that he could see beyond the propaganda and know how things were. After I expressed doubt about the claim, he accused me of believing too much western propaganda myself. This instance, while anecdotal, shows the power of narratives in creating separate realities and how believing oneself to see beyond nationalism and its ideological power (be it Chinese, American, Dutch etc.) in shaping reality makes us unaware we are operating from within yet another one.

Internalization of national narratives creates new truths from which 'facts' existing outside of these can be refuted. Defending these truths is therefore not seen as nationalistic in any meaningful way but is merely a defence of truth or a defence of the facts as they are. This person did not consider himself nationalistic; for him, it was about fighting against falsehoods and old stereotypes about China.

The internalization of national stories/ideology (created by the government) creates new truths and may be regarded as extreme nationalistic signalling to outsiders, however, for the speaker, such statements are a defence of the true (factual) side of the story. Earlier I mentioned Billig's two concepts of hot and cold nationalism. While for Billig cold nationalism mainly refers to physical objects

[43] A comparison can be made with many countries and regions but for clarities sake I have chosen to focus on the United States

(flags) I would like to expand this concept to include the truths that the nation creates. Billig conceptualizes the restating of the nation through banal nationalism; what I wish to confer is that once the nation is accepted as fact, it also brings with it a truth which is in turn internalized. This cold nationalism is unthinking and natural as it involves a person's daily truths and identity. Furthermore, as the example of the age of humiliation discussed earlier in this thesis show, national truths are constantly reshaped to fit the needs of the state.

6.2 Articulating society: Offline and online?

A major point of friction in this thesis is the difference between online and offline depictions of 'reality'. As discussed in the first chapter, online media lends itself to quick, short messages lacking in nuance. This favours the reinforcement of pre-existing structures such as nationalism through for example the memes described earlier. One explanation that was given to me was that these forums are only meant to show to others that you are cheering for your team, and to show to both foreigners and other Chinese that people support China and Chinese teams. This explanation falls in line with China's growing desire to assert itself on a global level.

In the 2017 Davos world economic forum meeting, PRC President Xi Jinping (习近平) gave a speech promoting (economic) globalization. This speech is regarded to be a counterweight against United States President Trump's anti-globalisation rhetoric (Bing 2017). It falls in line with an upwards trend of increasing interest from China towards the world and the world towards China. (Wasserstrom 2014). Films such as the Great Wall (2016), and the popular cartoon franchise Kung Fu Panda, as well as the popularity of games such as World of Warcraft in China (BBC 2016), show increasing cultural flows and interest.

The Chinese Dota community reflects this trend, on the one hand being hyper aware of Dota events outside of China and their implication for the Chinese community, while on the other hand also being extremely insular. Examples of these are the reactions to translated Reddit posts criticizing Chinese audiences only cheering for Chinese fans. These reactions show a need to push back against frameworks put upon Chinese commentators by the English communities. A further example of this is are the multiple instances in which Reddit users identify themselves as (mainland) Chinese and try to set the record straight by talking back to these stereotypical depictions of China, asserting their own identity and narrative on the non-Chinese internet.

While Dota is still very much a niche topic, it still provides many ways in which society is articulated within this sub-culture. One of the most apparent hallmarks of the Dota community is its confidence and assertion on a larger stage. While the language barrier is still apparent, I have shown

various examples in which English posts are translated and discussed. There is a confidence in China's place in the competitive Dota landscape.

Modern China since the founding of the communist party has witnessed the party push ideas with regards to the quality of the people (素质) and the discourse of civilization or a civilized people (文明). An average cityscape in China is rife with posters and slogans perpetuating a state of civilization: drive civilized, go to the toilet civilized, etc. This state-invented vocabulary and narrative (strategies) has been adopted by the general populace (Anagnost 1997). This discourse of civilization and quality has often been centered on China lacking 'human quality' compared to the rest of the world and needing to increase this to become more prosperous (ibid). In this case study, however, I found instances where the community flipped this discourse on its head, instead accusing other countries of having a low quality and being without civilization. I gave the example in the previous subchapter of discussions on the perceived lack of perspective (and quality) of American fans and the bad quality of non-Chinese audiences, who were unable to cheer their team into victory.

Earlier in the thesis I also gave examples of how China's supposedly unique cultural and historical position was reinforced by the community. Translating English posts about the perceived difficulty and historical context of Chinese memes gave rise to patriotic sentiment and pride. It seems that instead of chasing after a certain western type of modernity, the Chinese Dota community has asserted itself on a global level taking pride in their otherness. This is in line with media narratives of China's economic, political and cultural rise as well as the state's promotion of a Chinese state of being in a globalized world. (e.g. the China Dream and the creation of Confucius Institutes). It also shows how even local communities have a gatekeeping function by delineating nationhood. As shown in this thesis China's position as China versus the rest of the world is continuously reinforced through language and discourse. Mediated narratives from outside are brought into the home and proliferated by the user's themselves, creating stories drawn from the society in which they function and operate.

In this chapter I have used a cultural analysis approach to look at some of the societal implications imbedded in this case study. I drew comparisons with the United States and argued that nationalism constitutes the creation of a normal state of being, one that is arranged with its own facts and truths, history and myths and so on. The Chinese government is actively engaged in myth making creating a shared ideological space for its citizens. I further discussed how the Dota's community global aspirations use language and discourse propagated by the communist party. While the Chinese Dota community is very much a skewed sample of contemporary Chinese society (mostly young, male and educated) I have argued that there are greater patterns present which are articulated in society.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Discussion

Nationalism is nothing new. Digital nationalism, is something which has only been possible in the last twenty to thirty years. When discussing nationalism, people in general often only think of the so called 'hot' nationalisms, as Billig calls them. In this thesis my aim was to sketch an overview of the Chinese Dota community which shows how both 'hot' and 'cold' nationalism proliferate. Especially when doing internet research, it is all too easy to cherry pick quotes and phrases which allow one to make one's story. The same is true for this thesis, I came across numerous posts that were phrased in the most jingoistic terms (one, for example, talked about torturing foreigners). Much more interesting to me, and as I have argued in this thesis, is how a normal discourse of nationalism is created in this community.

After my fieldwork in China I realized that I needed to first conceptualize the digital before I could sufficiently answer this question. The internet is all around us, we take it with us on the bus, use it during work and browse it in our free time and at home. The clear majority of the Dota community is always connected through smart-phones and other devices. This has the effect that being a member of the community means that one is constantly subjected to nationalist flagging both through state efforts as well as the way in which the Dota community delineates itself. In the first chapter of this thesis I discussed how digital media are affecting the ways in which we read. We read shorter posts, are prone to quick judgements and opinions, and expertise and knowledge are no longer held in as high a regard as may have been the case before.

This thesis has been written from the perspective of social constructivism, arguing from the standpoint that all meaning is socially constructed. The internet greatly increases the speed at which meanings are produced and contested. This digital acceleration has also affected the way in which narratives such as nationalism are (re)produced in our daily lives, and it has affected how we conceptualize and frame the world around us.

The Chinese Dota community is very much a *Chinese* community. It prides itself on the fact that the Chinese are good at Dota, that they have such a big community, and that they can 'stand up' to 'the rest of the world'. The linkage of nationalism and community is unlike anything seen on the English side of the Dota communities.[44] I discussed this in my thesis, stating that the nature of the Chinese internet as well as the issue of language (both low number of English speakers as well as use of characters) create an extremely isolated community in comparison to, for example, the Russian and English ones.

This means that nationalism is also a natural way of framing things, as it is something a large majority Chinese share when discussing international tournaments. Not everyone supports the same

[44] I cannot speak for the other communities due to language barriers.

team or players but at least the fans can agree that they all support *Chinese* teams and *Chinese* players. These Dota teams did not need to have a nationality. New stories could have been created around them and new ways to identify with teams could have been found. Nonetheless, it is through the nation that the majority of the Dota community (both Chinese and non-Chinese) seems to discuss and identify with teams. The same is true for me, for example. I feel more comfortable in supporting European teams than Chinese or American ones. This (digital) tribalism is something which seems to come all too naturally when making these kinds of judgements.

Like money, the nation is something real, a social fact existing at once inside and outside those who have internalized it. While the truth of money is simple (it has value as a bargaining item), the story of nationalism is more complex and is constantly changing. National truths are also constantly contested by other nationalities. I gave some examples of how the various Chinese forum members relished in the fact that their national truths were corroborated when they saw English speaking posts about the complexity and cultural depth of Chinese memes. On the other hand, we also saw a confrontation of national truths when Chinese fans discussed Reddit commentators' perception of the Chinese audience in Shanghai as being 'too' nationalistic. This challenged the truth from which many Chinese fans operated, which is why it led to such heavy reactions. It was not only a criticism of the Chinese audience but rather a criticism of the very identity of China and the way in which the audience conceptualizes itself as well as others.

Once again, this is nothing unique to China. The same holds true for any nation as they all have their own historical truths and myths. I provided a short comparison with the United States to show how the frequent comments proclaiming American truths were mocked in various sub-communities. While these statements are mocked far more often than those made on Chinese forums (Reddit is a site used by many worldwide), they still serve as a way to think about the future shape of Chinese nationalism in a possible post-authoritarian China. Instead of rejecting these truths, for example, many American Reddit users defend them, showcasing the power of the internet as an Echo Chamber. It is much easier to believe one's own familiar circle of friends and family as well as (anonymous) internet users one aligns with than to rethink the foundations of one's beliefs and truths.

Beyond the connections of individuals, we also must consider society in its entirety and how different aspects (technological, social, governmental, media, etc.) articulate[45] national thinking, national stories etc. The nation, as I have argued, serves as a conceptual framework (a regime of truth) from which meanings are produced. The case study in this thesis exemplifies this. Mundane issues of whom to support and identify with during tournaments are considered through a nationalist filter.

[45] I consider all articulation to be done by humans. Humans firstly produce a certain book/media product etc. articulating it with the societal zeitgeist at that time. This is then interpreted (articulated a second time) by the receiver of this work, another human being.

The nation is a kind of ideological sieve through which ideas and thoughts are filtered. It creates a sense of the normal, a way of being by which the world, in all its complexity, is cut into simpler and more understandable frameworks. A post made on the internet is never made in a vacuum, rather there is a vast range of factors all influencing the words appearing on the screen that are interpreted by the reader. While it is easy to think that singular forum posts might have no effect on the way we think, I have argued throughout this thesis that these posts formulate and constitute a normal (nationalistic and sometimes even a jingoistic) way of being and a way of framing the world around us.

Nationalism is itself necessary for having a nation in the first place. A nation without nationalism is like money without trade. This thesis however has shown some of the more problematic factors of nationalism. The first of these factors is the role of the state and its creation of truth. Truth is power and the manipulation of truths can and has been harnessed to create sentiments that legitimize any number of things. The second factor is the lack of reflection present on the forums. This is in large parts due to the inherent properties of Chinese society in the present conjuncture. As discussed, Chinese internet users have become experts of self-censorship, which means that nationalism is not easily criticized. This, combined with the isolated aspect of the Chinese internet, means that this relatively isolated community is prone to fall into echo-chamber-like behaviour. Finally, building on the second point, there is no 'other' in the Chinese community; no counter voice, no kynicism, to borrow an earlier term, to show the arbitrary nature of nations and the way in which people support them.

One noted problem in this research is that of representability. As stated, the Dota 2 community consists largely of young, middle class males which form only a subset of the general population. Two other improvement points are the length of the case (one year) and the focus on qualitative methods. This study focused on one year's worth of discourse using qualitative methods. Further research could focus on quantitative data sets, plotting usage of different words and phrases within the community over a period of several years and combining this with selective qualitative analyses. Every day (banal) encounters with topics such as nationalism, globalization and other mediated topics are especially interesting. Investigating the influence of these encounters on those outside of the majority discourse (minorities, immigrants etc.), and the effect this has on their daily thought processes might be a good path to take in further research.

In the background of the interviews in this thesis there was an undercurrent of the idea of brotherhood: the notion that we aside from belonging to a nation we are also all gamers and/or Dota players. Nationalism could paradoxically lead to more understanding as it provides a history and cultural makeup which can be more easily grasped by outsiders. The interaction between the English and the Mandarin speaking communities saw a downplaying of negative stereotypes (of overt nationalism for example) combined with an affirmation of positive ones. We also saw the formation of

European and North-American nationalism in the Dota community. These interactions and the effect they have on global community formation should be further developed using ideas from anthropology, sociology and media studies, to name a few.

This thesis might paint a bleak picture of the internet and of Chinese Dota fans. In all my talks and interviews with the community, however, I found that community members were very open and curious about how I thought about things. If anything, this thesis shows the reality we are confronted with today with regards to the digital realm and the non-digital. The mediated world is not a new concept, but on the internet 'everyone' has a voice, or rather everyone thinks that they (should) have a voice. This idea makes truths more relatable as we can select who we listen to and interact with. The digital shows the reality one wants to see, making it easier than ever to corroborate online whatever one has in mind. However, our very conceptual notion of 'what we want to see' is by itself already pre-defined through larger conceptions such as nationalism, which means that these bigger, larger narratives and the stories they tell become truths which are seemingly indestructible and undoubtable. In a land without water, swimming is inconceivable.

Dota teams mentioned in this thesis

EG – Evil geniuses, a prominent American organization and in general regarded as a North American team

Newbee – Chinese team created in 2014 compete in the fourth international which it eventually won.

IG – Invictus gaming, a Chinese team with a long history, winner of the second International.

Na'vi – Natis Vincere – extremely popular in the CIS regions and winner of the first International

Team Liquid – Prominent E-sports organization who hosts on of the largest English discussion forums as well as a popular E-sports Wikipedia (liquipedia.com)

Wings gaming – Chinese team which quickly rose to prominence culminating in its victory at the sixth international, does not exist anymore.

Digital Chaos – North American organization whose nationality during the past year was contested as 3/5 players were European. At time of writing however has 5 North American players.

References

Aikin, Scott F. “Poe’s Law, Group Polarization, and Argumentative Failure in Religious and Political Discourse.” *Social Semiotics* 23, no. 3 (2013): 301–317.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London; New York: Verso, 1991.

Anonymous. “CHINA TOP 电竞中国风强势来袭” *sports.gov.cn*. Nov. 11, 2016. http://www.sport.gov.cn/n323/n11056/c775183/content.html.

Anonymous. “China’s love affair with online game World of Warcraft.” *Bbc.com.* May. 5, 2016. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36209913.

Anonymous. “reddit.com Traffic Statistics.” *Alexa.com.* May. 14, 2016. http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/reddit.com.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Public Worlds, v. 1. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Barabantseva, Elena. *Overseas Chinese, Ethnic Minorities, and Nationalism: De-Centering China*. Routledge Studies in Asia’s Transformations. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon [England]; New York: Routledge, 2011.

Bear, Adam, and Joshua Knobe. “Normality: Part Descriptive, Part Prescriptive.” *Cognition*, November 2016. doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2016.10.024.

Bessi, Alessandro, Mauro Coletto, George Alexandru Davidescu, Antonio Scala, Guido Caldarelli, and Walter Quattrociocchi. “Science vs Conspiracy: Collective Narratives in the Age of Misinformation.” Edited by Frederic Amblard. *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 2 (February 23, 2015): e0118093. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0118093.

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. Trowbridge: SAGE, 1995.

Bing, Qian Zhong (钱中兵).“习近平主席在世界经济论坛 2017 年年会开幕式删的主旨演讲（全文 “ *Xinhua.net.* Jan. 1, 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-01/18/c_1120331545.htm

Burnett, Dean.“The only Susan Greenfield article you’ll ever need.“ the*guardian.co.uk*. Apr. 9, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2013/apr/09/susan-greenfield-article-how-to-guide.

Cabestan, Jean-Pierre. “The Many Facets of Chinese Nationalism.” *China Perspectives*, no. 59 (2005). http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/2793.

Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. London: Norton, 2010.

Castells, Manuel. *Communication Power*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Casselman, Ben. “Resistance is futile: eSports is massive … and growing. “ *Espn.com.* May. 22, 2015. http://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/13059210/esports-massive-industry-growing.

Chadwick, Andrew. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford Studies in Digital Politics. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Chen, Shih-Wen. “Baozou Manhua (Rage Comics), Internet Humour and Everyday Life.” *Continuum* 28, no. 5 (September 3, 2014): 690–708. doi:10.1080/10304312.2014.941334.

Clark, Wilma, Nick Couldry, Richard MacDonald, and Hilde C Stephansen. “Digital Platforms and Narrative Exchange: Hidden Constraints, Emerging Agency.” *New Media & Society* 17, no. 6 (June 2015): 919–38. doi:10.1177/1461444813518579.

Clarke, John. “Conjunctures, Crises, and Cultures: Valuing Stuart Hall.” *Focaal* 2014, no. 70 (January 1, 2014). doi:10.3167/fcl.2014.700109.

Cockain, Alex. “Regarding Subjectivities and Social Life on the Screen: The Ambivalences of Spectatorship in the People’s Republic of China.” In *China Online*, 49–67. Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia 41. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015.
Conversi, Daniele. “Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (November 2012): 1357–79. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2012.698204.
Couldry, Nick. *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
Crawford, Garry. *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10093878.
Crawford, Garry, Victoria K. Gosling, and Ben Light, eds. *Online Gaming in Context: The Social and Cultural Significance of Online Games*. Routledge Advances in Sociology 56. London; New York: Routledge, 2011.
Cronin, Mike, and David Mayall. *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration, and Assimilation*. London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1998. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10094246.
De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Steven Randall (translator). Berkeley: University of California Press: 1988.
Deng, Yong, and Thomas G. Moore. “China Views Globalization: Toward a New Great-power Politics?” *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (June 2004): 115–36. doi:10.1162/016366004323090296.
Dijck, José van. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
Ding, Sheng. “Digital Diaspora and National Image Building: A New Perspective on Chinese Diaspora Study in the Age of China’s Rise.” *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 4 (Winter /2008 2007): 627–48.
Durkheim. Emile. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. W.D. Hals (translator) London: The Free Press: 1982.
Entman, Robert M. “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.
Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. “Nationalism and the Internet.” *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 1 (2007): 1–17.
Ferdinand, Peter. “The Internet, Democracy and Democratization.” *Democratization* 7, no. 1 (March 2000): 1–17. doi:10.1080/13510340008403642.
Flesher Fominaya, Cristina. “Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates: Collective Identity in Social Movements.” *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 6 (June 4, 2010): 393–404. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00287. x.
Fromme, Johannes, and Alexander Unger, eds. *Computer Games and New Media Cultures*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-2777-9.
Gellner, Ernest, and John Breuilly. *Nations and Nationalism*. Cornell University Press, 2008.
Giaxoglou, Korina. “Language and Affect in Digital Media: Articulations of Grief in Online Spaces for Mourning,” 2014. http://oro.open.ac.uk/47649/.
Gies, Arthur. “Here are the winner of Valve’s $20+ million 2016 International Dota 2 Championships.” *Polygon.com*. Aug. 13, 2016. https://www.polygon.com/2016/8/13/12469018/here-are-the-winners-of-valve-s-20-million-2016-international-dota-2-championships
Gries, Peter Hays. *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Hall, Charlie. “Steam has a massive new competitor. “ *Polygon.com*. Apr. 17, 2017. https://www.polygon.com/2017/4/17/15326258/steam-competitor-tencent-games-platform-wegame-download.
Hall, Stuart. “Encoding/Decoding.” *Culture, Media, Language*, 1980, 128–38.
Hall, Stuart, and Paul Du Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1996.
Han, Eileen Le. *Micro-Blogging Memories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-59881-3.
Haomin Gong, and Xin Yang. “Digitized Parody: The Politics of Egao in Contemporary China.” *China Information* 24, no. 1 (March 2010): 3–26. doi:10.1177/0920203X09350249.
Herold, David Kurt. “Defining the Nation: creating ’China’ on a Bridge-Blogging Website.” *China Media Research* 8, no. 4 (2012): 39–50.
Herold, David Kurt, and Peter Marolt, eds. *Online Society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival*. Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia 25. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011.
Highmore, Ben. *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture.* London: Continuum, 2006.
Hodgson, Justin. “Scholars| Digital Representation| Publishing.” *Composition Studies* 42, no. 1 (2014): 118.
Hooper, Val, and Channa Herath. “Is Google Making Us Stupid? The Impact of the Internet on Reading Behaviour.” In *2014 Proceedings 27th BLED E-Conference. Http://Aisel. Aisnet. Org/bled2014/1*, 2014. http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=bled2014.
Jabr, Ferris. “The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens. “ *Scientificamerican.com*. Apr. 11, 2013. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/.
Jiang, Qiaolei. “Celebrity Athletes, Soft Power and National Identity: Hong Kong Newspaper Coverage of the Olympic Champions of Beijing 2008 and London 2012.” *Mass Communication and Society* 16, no. 6 (November 2013): 888–909. doi:10.1080/15205436.2013.789528.
Jiang, Ying. *Cyber-Nationalism in China. Challenging Western Media Portrayals of Internet Censorship in China*. University of Adelaide Press, 2015. http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=560092.
Jin, Dal Yong. *Korea’s Online Gaming Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.
———. “The Digital Korean Wave: Local Online Gaming Goes Global.” *Media International Australia* 141, no. 1 (2011): 128–136.
Johnston, Alastair Iain. “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing.” *International Security* 41, no. 3 (January 2017): 7–43. doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00265.
Kelly, William W., and Susan Brownell. *The Olympics in East Asia: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Globalism on the Center Stage of World Sports*. Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University, 2011. http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=ceas_publication_series
King, Garry, Jennifer Pan, Margaret F Roberts, and Forthcoming. “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument.” *American Political Science Review*, 2017.
Lee, Tyler. “Dota 2 The International 2016’s Winner.” *Ubergizmo.net.* Aug. 08, 2016. http://www.ubergizmo.com/2016/08/dota-2-the-international-2016-winner/
Li, Hongmei. “Parody and Resistance on the Chinese Internet.” In *Online Society in China*, 71–89. Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia 25. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011.

Li, Jinquan. *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*. New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=180892.
Lorenzini, Daniele. "What is a "regime of truth"? " *fsw.uzh.ch.* Oct. 28, 2013. http://www.fsw.uzh.ch/foucaultblog/featured/28/what-is-a-regime-of-truth.
Liu, Leah. 'China Rules E-sports.' *Foreignpolicy.com*. Aug. 26, 2016. https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/26/china-rules-E-sports-ti6-dota2-what-that-means-for-future-E-sports-market/.
Marcovitz, Hal. *Online Gaming and Entertainment*, 2013. https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=A393E33B-76E4-4F4C-BAD4-500E476E7BD3.
Marolt, Peter, and David Kurt Herold, eds. *China Online: Locating Society in Online Spaces*. Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia 41. London; New York: Routledge, 2015.
McCarthy, Anna, and Nick Couldry. *MediaSpace Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004. http://ezproxy.uniandes.edu.co:8080/login?url=http://www.tandfebooks.com/isbn/9780203010228.
McGillivray, David. "Digital Cultures, Acceleration and Mega Sporting Event Narratives." *Leisure Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 96–109. doi:10.1080/02614367.2013.841747.
Pannekeet, Jurre. "Esports, A Franchise Perspective: 70% Watch Only One Game And 42% Do Not Play." *Newzoo.com*. May. 11, 2017. https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/esports-franchises-70-watch-only-one-game-and-42-dont-play/
Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What* The *Internet Is Hiding From You.* New York: Penguin Press, 2011.
Persily, Nathaniel. "Can Democracy Survive the Internet?" *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 2 (2017): 63–76. doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0025.
Regan, Cameron. "Implications of Dota's 'European Invasion'. " *Slingshotesports.com*. April. 14, 2016. https://slingshotesports.com/2016/04/14/dota-2-implications-of-european-invasion/.
Rosen, Stanley. "Contemporary Chinese Youth and the State." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 02 (May 2009): 359. doi:10.1017/S0021911809000631.
Rowe, David. *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity*. 2. ed. Issues in Cultural and Media Studies. Buckingham: Open Univ. Press, 2004.
Sarigollu, Basak. "The Possibility of a Transnational Public Sphere." *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies* 1, no. 4 (2011): 150.
Silverstone, Roger, and Eric Hirsch. *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. London: Routledge, 1999.
Sitalsing, Sheila. "We veren pas op al seen buitenlandse verslaggever zich verwondert." Mar.10 2017 *Volkskrant.nl.*
Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London; New York: Routledge, 1998. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10054933.
"Statistical Report on Internet Development in China." China Internet Network Information Center, July 2016.
Stets, Jan E., and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2000): 224. doi:10.2307/2695870.
Stockmann, Daniela. *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*. Communication, Society, and Politics. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
Storey, John. "Cultural Theory Popular." London: Pearson Longman, 2008.
Suleski, Ronald Stanley. *The Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University: A Fifty Year History, 1955-2005*. John K. Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, 2005.

Szablewicz, Marcella. “A Realm of Mere Representation? ‘Live’ E-sports Spectacles and the Crafting of China’s Digital Gaming Image.” *Games and Culture* 11, no. 3 (May 2016): 256–74. doi:10.1177/1555412015595298.
———. “The ‘losers’ of China’s Internet: Memes as ‘structures of Feeling ‘for Disillusioned Young Netizens.” *China Information* 28, no. 2 (2014): 259–275.
Tartoussieh, Karim. “Virtual Citizenship: Islam, Culture, and Politics in the Digital Age.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17, no. 2 (March 2011): 198–208. doi:10.1080/10286632.2010.550683.
Tay, T. L. “Pushing the Borders: Player Participation and Game Culture.” In *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*, 112–32. New York: NY: Social Science Research Council. Accessed March 17, 2017.
Te, Zorine. “Report: Washington, D.C. is sponsoring an esports team.” *Yahoo.com*. Mar. 10, 2017. https://esports.yahoo.com/washington-d-c-has-sponsored-an-esports-team-212548324.html
Tomlinson, Alan, and Christopher Young, eds. *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*. SUNY Series on Sport, Culture, and Social Relations. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
Trace, Megan. “Do students lose depth in digital reading?“ *theconversation.com.* Jul. 20, 2016. https://theconversation.com/do-students-lose-depth-in-digital-reading-61897.
Tseng, Fan-Chen, Han-Chung Huang, and Ching-I Teng. “How Do Online Game Communities Retain Gamers? Social Presence and Social Capital Perspectives.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 20, no. 6 (November 2015): 601–14. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12141.
Van Der Weel, Adriaan. “New Mediums: New Perspectives on Knowledge Production.” In *Text Comparison and Digital Creativity*, 253–268. Brill, 2010. http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/10.1163/ej.9789004188655.i-328.99.
Wade, Lisa. “Banal Nationalism.” *Contexts* 10, no. 3 (2011): 80–81.
Walker, Alex. “Average Age of eSports Players Is Higher Than You’d Think. “ *Kotaku.com*. Nov. 9, 2015. https://www.kotaku.com.au/2015/11/average-age-of-esports-players-is-higher-than-youd-think/ .
Wang, Hui. *China from Empire to Nation-State*. Hill, Gibbs Michael (translator). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.
Wasserstrom, Jeffrey. “China & Globalization.” *Daedalus* 143, no. 2 (April 2014): 157–69. doi:10.1162/DAED_a_00280.
Weinberger, David. *Everything Is Miscellaneous*. New York: Henry Holt, 2007.
———. *Too Big To Know*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.
Weinberger, Matt. Amazon’s $970 million purchase of Twitch makes so much sense now: It’s all about the cloud. *Businessinsider.com.* Mar. 16, 2016. http://www.businessinsider.com/amazons-970-million-purchase-of-twitch-makes-so-much-sense-now-its-all-about-the-cloud-2016-3?international=true&r=US&IR=T
Wessels, Bridgette, Bob Anderson, Abigail Durrant, and Julie Ellis. “Mediating Genocide: Cultural Understanding through Digital and Print Media Stories in Global Communication.” *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 8, no. 2 (September 1, 2012): 193–209. doi:10.1386/macp.8.2-3.193_1.
Wiggins, Bradley E., and G. Bret Bowers. “Memes as Genre: A Structurational Analysis of the Memescape.” *New Media & Society* 17, no. 11 (2015): 1886–1906.
Wong, Wai Man Natalie. *Beyond NIMBY: The Emergence of Environmental Activism and Policy Change in Two Chinese Cities.* Doctoral Dissertation, University of York: 2014.

Wood, Joss. “At Least Eight Top German Soccer Teams Are Seriously Interested in Esports.“ *Esportsbettingrepot.com*. Sep. 30, 2016. http://www.esportsbettingreport.com/german-football-clubs-ponder-esports/
Yang, Guobin. *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*. Contemporary Asia in the World. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
Yang, Peidong, Lijun Tang, and Xuan Wang. “Diaosi as Infrapolitics: Scatological Tropes, Identity-Making and Cultural Intimacy on China’s Internet.” *Media, Culture & Society* 37, no. 2 (2015): 197–214.
Yu, Haiqing. “Blogging Everyday Life in Chinese Internet Culture.” *Asian Studies Review* 31, no. 4 (December 2007): 423–33. doi:10.1080/10357820701710724.
Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology.* London: Verso, 1989.

Forums

All forum sites sourced last accessed on fifteenth of May, 2017. All dates use Chinese formatting on the forums which puts the date year-month-day.

Baidu

B1 2017-04-02 igv 这个队打外国队时候 https://tieba.baidu.com/p/5052764708
B2 2017-04-04 恭喜 iG 3 比 0 OG 夺得本次 DAC 冠军！ https://tieba.baidu.com/p/5055908771
B3 2017-04-04 Reddit 上一群人酸主场优势，笑死爹了。。。 https://tieba.baidu.com/p/5055843108
B4 2017-04-02 Reddit 吹拒绝鱼 https://tieba.baidu.com/p/5053085231
B5 2016-08-24 DOTA2 战队 wings 为什么叫护国神翼 https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/922570481362401179.html
B6 2016-07-23 DOTA2 入党表什么意思，是 3154 吗 https://zhidao.baidu.com/link?url=0ugK0_JzEQeMIk6OHCo9-nuu5A5v8UhUo1HbPYCk0mFfrRKA1O_bod9hcqQtqhSn6m1J00Z91yMOI5-P755j0AvyrWhn8kuRrvh8pJgw9u7
B7 2016-05-25 《DOTA2》3154 是什么意思 3154 到底是什么梗 https://zhidao.baidu.com/link?url=0ugK0_JzEQeMIk6OHCo9-nuu5A5v8UhUo1HbPYCk0mFfrRKA1O_bod9hcqQtqhSn6m1J00Z91yMOI5-P755j0AvyrWhn8kuRrvh8pJgw9u7
B8 2016-04-24 恭喜 wings！ https://tieba.baidu.com/p/4503496203
B9 2016-09-25 打印 上一主题 下一主题 [讨论]（来了来了）EESAMA 唱《我的中国心》恶不恶心？ http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-13163879-1-1.html
B10 2016-11-01 cndota 最大的敌人 http://tieba.baidu.com/p/4845278642?pid=99796463148&cid=0#99796463148
B11 2016-08-12wings，为什么叫做护国神翼？是有理由的！ https://tieba.baidu.com/p/4726259255

Sg gamer

S1 2016-08-15 [讨论] reddit 上讲了 w33 入党的翻译啊。。。 http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-13125792-1-1.html

S2 2017-04-4 [讨论] 翅膀是这次 DAC 唯一被外国队淘汰的中国队 http://bbs.sgamer.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=13323424&highlight=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E9%98%9F

S3 2016-03-04 [讨论] 去你妈的 CNDOTA ——写给脸都不要的职业选手 http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-12870339-1-1.html

S4 2016-12-08 [讨论] 为了我的中国心，我把 max 上的库存 all in wings 了 http://bbs.sgamer.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=13225406&highlight=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%BF%83

S5 2016-06-08 [讨论] 中国队夺冠 roll 个 PA 至宝吧,http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-13025339-1-1.html

S6 2016-06-09 [公告] 我是一个中国人，我支持 LGD！ http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-13028365-1-1.html

S7 2016-08-14 [讨论] 给大家看看美国人的丑态：已经在想靠作弊帮 eg 了赢 wings 了 http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-13121119-1-1.html

S8 2016-05-13 [心情] NB 让窝想起了 TI2 之后的 IG http://bbs.sgamer.com/thread-12974542-1-1.html

Zhihu

Z1 2017-04-04 DOTA2 和 CSGO 哪个更值得玩？https://www.zhihu.com/question/55082060

Z2 2016-06-27 中国 dota/dota2 为什么这么厉害？ https://www.zhihu.com/question/28060448

Z3 2016-12-20 如何评价 DOTA2 重启 2017 亚洲邀请赛？ https://www.zhihu.com/question/53834815

178

D1 2016-08-14 Dota2 TI6 护国翼 Wings 三万敌法 夺得“冠军”！ http://dota2.178.com/201608/265147605349.html

D2 2016-08-14 Wings 夺冠 Reddit 水友堆楼 苏美尔 EEsama 成主角 http://dota2.178.com/201608/265160763516.html

Uu9

U1 2017-03-27 中国队能赢韩国队，凭什么这次西恩不能包揽前三 http://moba.uuu9.com/thread-4687670-1-1.html

U2 2017-04-1[活动] 4 月 1 日 DAC 第二届亚洲邀请赛直播帖——回帖奖达尔优高端外设! http://moba.uuu9.com/thread-4689269-1-1.html

U3 2017-04-04[交流] cctv：在刚刚结束的 dota2 亚洲国际邀请赛上，我国的 ig 战队 3 比 0 战胜了来自欧洲的 og 战. http://moba.uuu9.com/thread-4690623-1-1.html

Reddit

R1 2014-07-22 Why do Chinese teams always wave their country's flag after winning? https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/2bcy48/why_do_chinese_teams_always_wave_their_countrys/

R2 2016-02-26 this Major realy fits into stereotype "MADE IN CHINA"... very sad

https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/47o1qi/this_major_realy_fits_into_stereotype_made_in/

R3 2017-03-27 A Chinese meme a day, keeps the low priorities away (DAC edition): Team IG
https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/61sewd/a_chinese_meme_a_day_keeps_the_low_priorities/

R4 2016-09-14 Chinese reactions and memes regarding TI6 Grand Finals [Spoilers!]
https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/4xncln/chinese_reactions_and_memes_regarding_ti6_grand/

R5 2016-05-11 Insight into the Chinese Memes: 3154
https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/4iss8w/insight_into_the_chinese_memes_3154/

R6 2016-09-15 Another new and spicy Chinese meme
https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/4xrk7b/another_new_and_spicy_chinese_meme/

R7 2016-12-27 Na'vi announce new Dota 2 roster
https://www.reddit.com/r/DotA2/comments/5kj7t6/navi_announce_new_dota_2_roster/