

Tuwei:

a stigma caused by class habitus

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Abstract

Since 2017, *tuwei* (土味) culture has emerged in Chinese online space and the manifestation of it varies. On the basis of a case study on two Chinese social media platforms and gathered data from interviews, online videos and relating comments, the aim of thesis was to explore this culture with the main focus on *tuwei* videos and their producers, including the definition and classification of it, and to examine whether the videos and producers are stigmatized since the videos are called *tuwei* and they have received unfriendly comments on social medias. The data was analyzed under a qualitative data analysis method. This thesis was mainly guided by the stigma theory and the habitus theory, on the basis of Link and Phelan's framework of the four components of stigma, and Bourdieu's theory of the interaction between habitus and class taste. The thesis found that the unfriendly comments indeed indicate a stigmatization against *tuwei* videos and the producers, and that stigmatization relates to different habitus.

Keywords: *tuwei* culture; stigmatization; rude comments; class habitus; taste; Weibo; Kuaishou.

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1. Introduction

Tuwei (土味, earthy flavored) culture, especially tuwei video as a newly emerged sort of short-videos, has attracted attention from not only Chinese society, but also the international society. There are several forms of manifestations in tuwei culture and scholars classify different genres of it, among them, video is the main form. The definition and classification of tuwei culture and Tuwei video are discussed in following chapters. There are quite a few bloggers on Weibo, which is a Chinese twitter-like platform, are focusing on posting tuwei videos, and the videos are often originally posted on Kuaishou, which is another Chinese shot-video platform, and re-posted by these bloggers with the title of tuwei videos. A typical tuwei video is usually set in a rural or less-developed town scenery, and in the video, people could be talking of life, dancing, performing a short drama or just showing their outfits. Such videos seem to be the product of people for documenting life or for self-expression, although the videos are recognized as tuwei videos and receive aggressive comments.

1.1 Research questions

The main research question of this thesis is whether or not the *tuwei* videos are stigmatized. It consists two sub questions:

1. Are the *tuwei* videos stigmatized?
2. Are the producers of *tuwei* stigmatized?

If the answer of the main research question is yes, then the second research question is: why are they stigmatized? In this thesis, Link and Phelan's approach (2001) of four components of stigma would be applied, and they had stated that the initial step of stigmatization is to distinguish and to label the difference. Thus, the second research question consists another sub question: what are the differences between *tuwei* videos and the others? Based on the answer of this sub question, I will analyze the cause of the stigmatization against *tuwei* videos and the producers.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In this chapter I stated the research question. Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter, that focuses on research papers regarding the definition, transmission and the cause of *tuwei* culture. Chapter 3 presents the method and data collection as well as analytical approach. Chapter 4 introduces the two main theories used in this thesis, which are stigma theory and habitus theory. Based on official reports, chapter 5 offers an analysis of the two platforms, Weibo and Kuaishou, as a contextualization of the study. Chapter 6, the analysis, consists of two parts with each part relating to one research question. Chapter 7 is the conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1 The meaning of *tuwei*

“Tu (土)” is both a noun and an adjective in Mandarin, and “*tuwei* (土味)” means the flavour of “tu”. As a noun, “Tu” refers to “land” / “ground” and “soil” / “earth”. As an adjective, “tu” has a richer meaning. First, it refers to “local” and “native”; second, it refers to “homemade” or “indigenous”; last, it means “outdated”, “unrefined” and sometimes “unenlightened” (Dai, 2019). “*Tuwei*” originates the adjective notion of “tu” (Dai, 2019), and it is usually combined with nouns and then the phrase works as the subject or attribute in a sentence (Luo, 2019).

“Tu” is a word that has been used in China since thousands of years ago, and the meaning of it has changed and developed with the times (Luo, 2019). In ancient China, “tu” is one of the five basic elements — “金木水火土 (metal, wood, water, fire and earth”, and defined the flavour of “tu” as “甘 (sweet, honeyed or pleasant)” because that people lived mostly on agriculture and crop growing from “tu” brings people nutrition and happiness ((Luo, 2019).

Although the meaning of “tu” changed in modern times, when the small-scale peasant economy was challenged in the Qing dynasty, that “tu” and “*tuwei*” became antonyms of “*yang* (洋, foreign, modern)” and suggested a derogatory sense(Luo, 2019; Zhu, 2016). During the late Qing dynasty, China began to open the door to western industrial products such as guns, matches and fabrics that are recognized as modern, new and advanced, and people usually called such products as “洋物 (foreign products)”, such as “洋枪 (foreign guns)” and “洋火(foreign matches)” (Luo, 2019). With the influence of western civilization and modernization, traditional Chinese society was experiencing reforms as well as many of traditional and local culture and customs were assaulted (Zhu, 2016). Before, “yang” and “tu” simply stand for the division of “foreign” and “local”, then with the consensus that “yang” products are better than “tu” products, “Tu” became a derogatory adjective and relevant words like *tuwei*, “tu qi (土气)” and “tu bao zi (土包子)” were generated and endowed with negative meanings of “unrefined”, “unenlightened” and “tasteless” (Luo, 2019; Zhu, 2016).

“Tu” is often related to “rural”. The transformation of “tu” and its derivative terms towards a derogatory meaning initially occurred in places that were first exposed to modernization and that were seen in relation with the collapses of small-scale peasant economy (Zhu, 2016). In such places, urbanization and modernization brought people new and “yang” product and life-style, as well as impacted on people’s view of rural. Urban people have developed new social norms, which based on the spirit of contract and fit better in near-modern society, and have become richer, while rural people still follow the traditional norms which rely on the “guanxi (关系)”, advantageous networks and personal connections that based on favour exchange (Barbalet, 2020); thus, rural people who still live on soil and agriculture were called as “乡巴佬/土包子(hick or bumpkin)” by urbans, and “tu” became a negative characteristic of rural (Zhu, 2016).

In contemporary time, the meaning of “tu” has returned to its connotation of “local” that makes “tu” more of a neutral adjective. Luo (2019) argued that such change is the natural result of Chinese industrialization that provides people with accessible and high quality industrial products, which were expensive “洋物 (foreign products)”, and the “tu” products are no longer inferior to “yang” products. People instead pursue “tu” products such as “土鸡蛋 (tu eggs)” and “土特产 (tu specialty)” which are usually homemade by farmers, because people believe that such non-industrial products are healthier (Luo, 2019).

“*Tuwei*” is recognized as a neutral adjective by some researcher. Dai (2019) suggested that “tu” and “*tuwei*” had become more neutral and sometimes they are used for jesting. Luo (2019) suggested that in online space, *tuwei* is to describe something that cheesy, vulgar, disgusting but also delightful with no reason. Although Gu (2019) still recognized *tuwei* as “non-urban”, “outdated” and as the opposite to “elegant” and “fancy”, he further stated that it is the cultural standards of higher class determines what is “tu” and what is “yang”.

Therefore, “*tuwei*” as an adjective still contains more derogatory implications than neutral ones, which has also repercussions on the term *tuwei* in this thesis.

2.2 *Tuwei* culture as a subculture

As a newly emerged phenomena, there exists not yet much literature about *tuwei* culture. Chinese scholars have started to study *tuwei* culture since 2018 and have published a small amount of articles mostly about the definition and the cause of it. Since English speaking scholars have not started to study *tuwei* culture and there are just few online reports about it, I set a separate section for those English-language reports.

English literature

Fang (2018) introduces three of the most famous Kuaishou influencers and their low-budget videos, and represented them as three different styles, namely northeastern style, southern style and Chinese rural rap style. In Fang's article, such videos were named as "earthy video", which is the direct translation of the Chinese word "*tuwei*". Schaefer (2019) defines *tuwei* as a style that takes up the opposite stance to urban internet celebrities which characterized of delicateness and fashion. To elaborate the definition, she quotes a string of essence of *tuwei* from Zheng (2018): "coarse realism, use of rural dialects, personal catchphrases and cliches, and the lack of self-awareness."

Fang (2018) roughly reviewed *tuwei* culture as a homemade content showing the rural side of China and urban users often get attracted by *tuwei* culture's unconventional fashion styles. Schaefer (2019) further cited four more detailed elements of *tuwei* culture as mentioned in earlier section. And she presented several video creators as Chinese *tuwei* influencers to illustrate the elements she addressed, even though not all her illustrations were accepted by the readers. She called Liziqi (李子柒) and Meishi Zuojia Wang Gang (美食作家王刚) as *tuwei* vloggers, while a comment below says: " why is Wang Gang *tuwei* ?" Wang Gang posts cooking tutorial videos on a short-video platform called Xigua, which is famous of its agricultural contents. Unlike exquisite cooking videos we usually see on Instagram, Wang Gang's tutorial videos are fairly simple and straightforward. Without all the unnecessary greetings, stories, music, and filters, He just says hi to the audience then starts cooking directly. He keeps the cooking processes in the manner that every step is quick and clear, and he concludes all crucial tips in one still frame by the end of the video every time. Clearly Wang Gang's videos are rough and against delicateness, and himself also talks with an obvious rural dialect accent.

Such characteristic makes him *tuwei* according to Schaefer's definition, but not all the netizens agreed with this, and some of them commented to against Schaefer's judgement.

Chinese literature

Tuwei culture refers to a whole set of cultural products that are labelled as *tuwei*, and it contains multiple manifestations including graphic forms like videos, emojis and memes, textual form like lovers' chatter and "Social quotes (社会语录)", as well as songs (Mei, 2019). Among the diverse *tuwei* culture products, *tuwei* video accounts for a major part, and in fact, most products of *tuwei* culture are in the form of video especially short-videos (Chen 2019). Although all these manifestations are not distinctly divided, some of them often occur at the same time. For example, a *tuwei* short drama in the term of video may also involve *tuwei* lovers' chatter as script lines. Therefore, in this section, major manifestations are introduced except *tuwei* video, and *tuwei* video will be introduced as a complex of manifestations in the next section.

Tuwei chatter are based on text while they are also applied as actors' lines in *tuwei* videos. *Tuwei* chatter is sentences used for expressing admiration, while in the way differing from normal lovers' chatter. Guo (2019) pointed out that the key features of *tuwei* chatter is "not classical", "funny" and "earthy", and similar to cold jokes, such lovers' chatter is also featured of unexpected and irrelevant answers. Guo also concluded three common performances of *tuwei* chatter: application of homonyms, metaphors and rhyme. Similar to *tuwei* chatter, that is used for showing love in an awkward way, social quotes are quotes that teaching people how to socialize properly in Chinese environment, and "social quotes" are also applied in awkward settings (Yi, 2019).

Most songs, that are recognized as *tuwei*, often occur as background music of *tuwei* videos. Such songs are easily disseminated in the virtue of their simple melody, catchy lyrics and plainly emotional expression (Liu, 2019). A video¹ in 2019 on Weibo summarized top 10 *tuwei* songs of 2019, most of which are popular on the trendy short-video platforms like Kuaishou and Tiktok.

¹ <https://www.weibo.com/tv/v/Inbe4lQBx?fid=1034:4455246924283912>

Among the 10 songs, five are love songs, three are expressing self-pity and ambitions including one plagiarism, and two are remix versions of well-known songs.

Video as a complex manifestation of tuwei culture

As stated in the earlier section, *tuwei* videos are complex manifestations of *tuwei* culture and involve other manifestations such as *tuwei* chatter and *tuwei* quotes. Many of the *tuwei* videos are related to romantic entanglements between young lovers, as well as social melodramas. The duration of such videos is usually less than five minutes, while producers of these videos frequently edit the whole video into several episodes if the video is longer than five minutes. Mei (2019) stated that *tuwei* videos are frequently filmed in small towns or villages, and the quality is relatively low. Mei (2019) also stated that actor's lines in *tuwei* video are often dialect or at least with rural accent, and the acting is stiff for the reason that most actors are amateur.

Liu (2018) divides *tuwei* videos into two main parts: short dramas (情景剧) and “Social dance (社会摇)”. And Hu (2019) further categorise *tuwei* short dramas into three styles. The first style he defined is “emotional”, in which the plots are related to romantic entanglements between couples and to disputes of interests among good friends. The second style is “positive energy (正能量)”, in which actors try to promote virtues through scheduled plays. The last one is “performance art”, in which actors' performances are distinctive and shocking, for example in a *tuwei* video², some actors pour liquid like water and beer on their heads.

In “Social dance” videos, actors usually dance with background music that are rhythmic and sometimes noisy. Gu (2019) clarified that, although such dance performances borrowed from early break dance, the dance steps are never fixed and mostly the dancers just wave their bodies with the beat. She mentioned few representative dancers such as Pai Pai Qi (牌牌琦), Jiji King (吉吉国王) and flour guy (面粉哥) and commented that “Social dance” is the beginning and the most typical form of *tuwei* videos. Among them, Pai Pai Qi is the most famous dancer and he once had more than

² <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av48817624/>

thirty million fans (Hai, 2018; Liu, 2018). According to an announcement of the National Radio and Television Administration in April of 2018, Pai Pai Qi had been prohibited. The announcement commanded two online media platforms, including the one Pai Pai Qi was based on, to launch corrective measurements on “immoral” shows in line with Chinese internet legislations.

Through the existing videos of his performances that I found on the Bilibili website³, his typical dances mainly associate with the upper limbs and head with very limited shifting of feet. Gu (2019) also noticed the unique dressing style of “Social dance” dancers and identified tight clothes and shoes that look like Tod’s shoes are the key dressing items. Mei (2019) featured their dressing style differently. She indicated that those young dancers try to catch urban fashion while their imitations are poorly failed, and such dressing style is mainly popular in small towns.

“Social dance” videos are sometimes combined with a textual form of *tuwei* culture, which is “Social quotes (社会语录)”, and such videos usually start with few talking of ambitions through vulgar language, following with meaningless body movements in the background of exciting electronic music. “Social quotes” actually occupy a prominent part of *tuwei* for the reason that it has various topics and it had been used in different *tuwei* videos, while very few researchers had studied it specifically. Chen (2019) mentioned that such quotes are popular among youths from lower class. He further explained that, such quotes are full of desire for money, power and sex, and he believes that such desires are deeply rooted in lower-class youths. The quotes precisely reflect how the lower-class youths imagine the upper-class life, the quotes also reflect their desire to flow upwards (Chen, 2019). But desire is only one branch of “social quotes”, it is also popular to express emotions and to preach about life.

Apart from *tuwei* short dramas and “Social dance”, the *tuwei* eating show is another important form and it has been demonstrated as proof of the indecent feature of *tuwei* in the literature. Unlike usual eating show, hosts in *tuwei* eating shows often eat as fast as possible. At the early stage of Kuaishou, some eating show hosts ate strange things such as alive octopus, even light bulb to get more attention (Hu, 2019). In general, *tuwei* eating shows deliberately show people eating in a boorish way and

³ <https://search.bilibili.com/all?keyword=牌家军>

eating strange food. A host called Old Eight (老八) who recently got popular on Chinese Tiktok is famous of eating feces, although he is mainly having more normal food now due to the stricter platform rules, he constantly have strangely mixed food such as orange with fermented bean curd and minced garlic.

This section has reviewed the definition and common forms of *tuwei* culture and has focused on the *tuwei* video as a complex manifestation of *tuwei* culture. Thus far, the definitions and classification of *tuwei* as well as *tuwei* videos vary in the literature and there is a terminological argument. Some videos or influencers that are defined as *tuwei* are actually not being accepted as *tuwei* by Chinese netizens and viewers. Chen (2019) suggests a more general standard of *tuwei*. He defines that all videos and other products that are beyond mainstream aesthetic view and/or embarrassing the watchers are *tuwei*. Although the consensus of *tuwei* has not emerged, embarrassment and awkwardness have been targeted as some of the most significant feature of *tuwei* culture in the literature.

2.3 The *tuwei* producers: small-town youths and Kuaishou

The literature identifies the producers of *tuwei* culture as “small-town youths (小镇青年)” (Bao, 2018; Liu, 2018; Gu, 2019; Hu, 2019; Yi, 2019; Liu, 2019). The term “small-town youths” originates from research of movie theory which spotted small-town youths as an important group of film consumer, and the term then has been adopted in other fields (Jia and Huang, 2019). The researchers hold different opinions about the definition of the term, yet, most of them agree that the term refers to youths who are aged from 18 to 35 and are born in county level cities and below (Sun and Ma, 2019). Although some researchers have a wider or narrower range of the age and the birthplace, or have other standards relating to income and aesthetics, I accepted the definition proposed by Sheng and Tu (2020) that small-town youths are people living in the third-tier cities and below and who are in the age group between 15 and 30.

Tuwei culture is created by small-town youths and is seen by them as a tool for self-expression and for fulfilling emotional needs (Bao, 2018; Wang and He, 2018; Yi, 2019; Liu, 2019; Qin and Zhou, 2019;

Mei 2019; Yang, 2019). Bao (2018) and Yi (2019) argues that thusly the *tuwei* culture should not be wholly denied, and Yi further argued that the denial against it reflects the hegemony of mainstream urban aesthetics and of power of discourse. Some researchers define *tuwei* culture as a self-expression of “bottom layer (底层)” (Chen, 2019; Gu, 2019), which means the bottom class in the society.

Kuaishou has been considered as a crucial social media platform concerning small-town youths and *tuwei* culture. Kuaishou targeted small-town youths as its main user group and offered them a convenient platform for self-expression, thus, Kuaishou has become an online habitat for small-town youths and the cradle of *tuwei* culture (Liu, 2018; Hu, 2019). Liu (2019) refers to a business report stating that the percentage of Kuaishou users, who are from township level and below, was up to 63.2% in 2018; and Liu argues that small-town youths film their daily life then post them on Kuaishou out of the need for self-expression and such videos are often undecorated, while, to a certain extent, such behaviour is exposing their back stage life on the front stage and the videos consequently are recognized as *tuwei*.

For small-town youths, the behaviour of filming and posting video reflects not only the need for self-expression, but also their understanding of class and the attempt to catch up with aesthetic standards made by urban elite; yet, such standards constantly change and update, and small-town youths' effort often seems ridiculous to urban elite (Gu, 2019; Yi,2019). Yi (2019) points out that the standards serve for the need of urban elite to socially keep distant from other groups, and with the help of higher power efficiency, urban elite youths update the standards once they expire so as to remain the distance; Yi (2019) presents a comment form the Zhihu website, which Yi defines as an urban elite social platform, saying that watching *tuwei* videos is “like watching monkeys in the zoo”. Yi thus argue that urban elite contributes the most contempt and criticism against the self-expression of small-town youths.

Hu (2019) suggests that another reason for small-town youths creating *tuwei* videos is that after a few people have benefited from making *tuwei* videos, such as *tuwei* eating show, more people are attracted and become *tuwei* producers.

2.4 From Kuaishou to Weibo: the transmission of *tuwei* culture

The literature notices the prominent role of Weibo and key Weibo bloggers in the transmission process of *tuwei* videos and it considers Weibo as an elite platform in contrast to Kuaishou which is considered as a more *grassroots* (草根, meaning the lower class of the society, contrasting to elite) platform (Chen, 2019; Hu, 2019; Liu, 2018; Mei, 2019).

Tuwei culture originates from Kuaishou but it is Weibo users who firstly applied the term *tuwei* to certain videos in 2017 and helped to spread *tuwei* culture, despite of Weibo users merely intended to ridicule by labelling Kuaishou videos as *tuwei* (Liu, 2018). Before the videos were re-posted on Weibo, the audience of *tuwei* culture was limited to mainly small-town youths themselves. By re-posting Kuaishou videos and re-naming them as *tuwei*, Weibo users have enlarged the audience; and by the re-annotation and re-creation of *tuwei* videos, as well as by the interaction regarding the videos between Weibo bloggers and their followers, Weibo has helped to enrich the *tuwei* culture (Liu, 2018; Hu, 2019; Chen, 2019; Yang, 2019).

Literature has analyzed causes of the transmission of *tuwei* culture outside Kuaishou from several aspects. Apart from small-town youths, a large number of urban elite netizens have also participated in consuming and disseminating *tuwei* culture, and the literature has recognized two main reasons, namely curiosity and seeking for weirdness and grotesqueness. Many researchers notice that people watch *tuwei* videos because of curiosity and because people always look for fresh things (Liu, 2019; Gu, 2019; Mei, 2019; Wang and He, 2019). Liu (2019) considers the regional differences as the source of freshness that many *tuwei* videos are set in different towns and villages across China, thus they present local customs which attract urban netizens to watch. Wang and He (2018) propose that in addition to curiosity and freshness, the appreciation of weirdness and grotesqueness also contributes in consuming *tuwei* culture, and they used examples of freak show and of ugly Chinese celebrities to support the statement.

Some researchers applied carnivalesque theory to analyze the spreading, consuming and re-creating activities of Weibo users. First, Mei (2019) argues that *tuwei* culture and its audience have showed carnivalesque features: first, Mei cited data of a *tuwei* short drama which indicated a massive number of audience so as to illustrate the feature of massive carnival; second, Mei used the case of a Kuaishou

grassroots blogger who now has become a real celebrity by his eccentric behaviour to state the eccentric feature of *tuwei* culture; third, Mei presented a few examples showing that elites have started to use *tuwei* chatter to show the carnivalistic misalliance in *tuwei* culture. Chen (2019) further analyzed that Weibo has provided a virtual carnivalistic space regarding *tuwei* videos, in which Weibo users freely interact with others regardless of real identity and conduct eccentric and sacrilegious activities and re-creation. An example Chen used is that Weibo users deconstruct and replace common terms with misalliances, such as they address Weibo bloggers who re-post *tuwei* videos as “teacher” and the videos as “handouts”, and they ask real celebrities to learn acting skills from *tuwei* short dramas. But Chen (2019) also emphasizes that the problems and dilemmas shoed in the videos are never the concern of Weibo users, instead, looking happiness and killing time are the prime intents for them.

2.5 Conclusion: *tuwei* culture as a subculture

Most literature recognizes *tuwei* culture as a subculture which reflects the self-expression of a grassroots class. The grassroots (草根) class in the Chinese-language literature refers to the small-town youths, who belong to a lower class in contrast to urban elite youths, who belong to an upper class. Researchers have discussed its future pathway in the view of subculture theory, suggesting that the mainstream culture would eventually undermine *tuwei* culture by commodification and by media scrutiny.

Literature analyses the cause of the emergence of *tuwei* culture from both the producers’ side and the viewers’ side. The producers and one part of viewers were identified as small-town youths and another part of viewers were identified as urban elite youths who play a crucial role in spreading *tuwei* culture through contempt and re-creation. Researchers agree that small-town youths create and enjoy *tuwei* because of their needs for self-expression and of the attempts to live an urban life, and some of them are also driven by profits. Regarding urban elite viewers, researchers recognized curiosity and the appreciation of grotesqueness as the two main intents of them.

Besides, departing from the changing meaning of *tuwei*, and from the identity of the producers and viewers, researchers have discussed the influence of Chinese urban-rural structure and the class hierarchy in *tuwei* culture, that it is the urban elite who decide the aesthetic standards and discriminate

tuwei culture, which is actually the self-expression of grassroots, thus *tuwei* culture should not be wholly denied. In the literature, Kuaishou is commonly recognized as a platform of rural and Weibo is recognized as for urban, but there is a lack of data in this regard.

The literature makes the assumption of discrimination and labelling against *tuwei* culture and the producers but without efficient proofs, such as the data and the in-depth analyses of urban viewers' attitude to *tuwei* culture. The literature discussed how *tuwei* videos are watched, labelled and consumed by urban elite, but it neglects the fact that these videos are not necessarily *tuwei* to the producers and to grassroots viewers. This perhaps indicates that “*tuwei*” is a stigma against *tuwei* culture and the producers.

3. Method and material

3.1 Method

I conducted a cased study based on two Chinese media platforms, Weibo and Kuaishou, to study *tuwei* videos and the producers of *tuwei* videos. The literature recognizes that the prominent part of *tuwei* culture is *tuwei* videos. The literature also identifies Kuaishou as the key platform of generating *tuwei* videos, and it identifies that Weibo plays a key role in distinguishing and naming certain videos as *tuwei* videos and in spreading *tuwei* videos. Therefore, I took *tuwei* videos and the producers as the representatives of *tuwei* culture and conducted the case study on Weibo and Kuaishou.

The thesis relies mainly on qualitative data analysis of the data I gathered from both interviews and online comments. First, the interviews and the comments were documented for open coding (Bryman, 2012: 576-577). Second, this thesis adopts specifically the content analysis approach to analyze the meanings underlying the words of the interviewees and the comments (ibid: 290).

3.2 Data collection

The thesis employs three types of data. The first one is primary data from four interviews I have conducted. The second one is the data I gathered from Weibo and Kuaishou. The last type of data consists of all secondary data which are meaningful to the analyses, such as national statistics and business reports.

3.2.1 Data collection

Interview data

I interviewed four urban watchers of *tuwei* videos and all interviewees were found online. Initially I sought for interviewees directly on Weibo platform by asking people who had posted with hashtags in relation to *tuwei*, but most people refused. I finally found interviewees in some Wechat groups. The groups are established by people who enjoys watching *tuwei* videos, and the organizers sometimes post QR codes on Weibo to attract more people. I searched for such groups on Weibo and joined in

three of them. In the groups I asked if anyone is willing to take a short interview. Six people responded me and five eventually agreed to take the interview, but one of the five terminated the interview by stopping me asking questions, thus only four interviews are used in the thesis. I interviewed one of them in person and talked to others through Wechat voice calls. After the initial analysis of the data, I did follow-up interviews with the same people through Wechat. With the consent from informants, I recorded the conversations and took notes during the interviews. Each session of interview time was around 45 minutes.

The aim of the interviews was to gather more in-depth and first-hand information of urban viewers' understanding of *tuwei* culture for the reason that there is a lack of it in the literature. The literature in this field is mainly based on few secondary data such as business reports from media platforms, so that the opinions of *tuwei* videos' watchers became meaningful to this thesis. The interviews were semi-structured and the conversations revolved around few predetermined questions as following:

Part 1 General questions:

1. Personal data: age, gender and education background.
2. Personal experience social media: Do you use any? What kind of social apps do you use?

Part 2 Questions regarding *tuwei* culture:

1. Do you know *tuwei* culture? Do you watch *tuwei* videos? and what kind of it do you watch the most?
2. Do you know spirit boys/girls(精神小伙/小妹)? What is your first impression of them? How about their dressing style?
3. Do you use the word spirit boys/girls(精神小伙/小妹) in your daily life? If yes, in what circumstances? More directly, what exactly do you mean when you use this word.

Part 2 Follow-up interview questions:

1. Personal experience on *tuwei* videos: How did you feel when you watch *tuwei* videos for the first time? And how was your first impression of *tuwei* videos?

2. Have you ever searched for *tuwei* videos after watched them for the first time? If yes, why?
3. What kind of videos do you think are *tuwei* videos? And why?
4. What do you think about people who produce *tuwei* videos?

Data from social platforms

Since *tuwei* videos are the major part of *tuwei* culture, I chose *tuwei* videos as the representative of *tuwei* culture in the thesis and selected comments of three *tuwei* videos as samples.

Firstly, I chose one famous Weibo blogger, “*Tuwei* Excavator (土味挖掘机)”, who was identified as one of the key influencer in many literature, in terms of turning *tuwei* videos widely popular. “*Tuwei* Excavator (土味挖掘机)”, with more than 7 million fans on Weibo, finds short videos on other platforms then labels and re-posts them on Weibo as *tuwei* videos. I chronologically backtracked its original posts regarding *tuwei* video and I selected two videos as samples according to the following requirements:

1. Videos are posted originally on Kuaishou and then re-posted on Weibo;
2. Videos that are typical *tuwei* video, such as “Social dance (社会摇, societal dance)”, “Social quotes (社会语录)” and *tuwei* short drama;
3. Videos must be originally produced by real Kuaishou users in case of that some people deliberately imitate *tuwei* video for mocking them. In that case, the attitude of such imitating videos would be less authentic, such videos and their producers are usually recognized and commented as “alliance” by other Weibo viewers so it is easy to distinguish and exclude imitating videos by checking the comments of the video.

Secondly, in order to examine viewers’ attitude when the factor of location involves, I selected one more video and its comments from another Weibo blogger “Happy Daddy (欢乐老爹)”, which has six million followers and also focuses on *tuwei* video. The video is also originally posted on Kuaishou

then re-posted by “Happy Daddy” on Weibo, and in this video the regional background of the producers was indicated.

Secondary data

Apart from the data mentioned above, secondary data are also used in the thesis. This group of data includes national statistic regarding Chinese internet and netizen development, user reports of involved media platforms, as well as other relevant business reports.

3.2.2 Reliability

All interviewees are from urban areas and are aged between 20 and 30, which means they can be seen as typical urban youths. Three of them are male and one is female. Three of them are still students at different educational levels: one professional college student, one bachelor student and one PhD student, and the other one is employed with a high school diploma. All the informants have rich experiences on using social medias, such as Weibo, and on *tuwei* videos.

Regarding the *tuwei* video and the comments I chose, first, the chosen Weibo bloggers are famous bloggers with millions followers and they have been mentioned in the literature; second, for each video on each platform, I set that all comments are sorted by “hot (热度)” then select 20 of the hot comments for further comparison. In this thesis, I refer to “hot” in order to explain choices of selection of the comments. On the two platforms, “hot” refers to the degree of how many thumbs-up the comment get. The more thumbs-up a comment gets, the hotter the comment is. “Hot comment (热门评论)” then refers to the comments that have more thumbs-up. Thus, the hot comments are agreed and accepted by a large number of users.

3.3 Limitations and ethical considerations

The limitation of data is obvious that I only have very limited number of interviews and video samples, although I selected the sample very carefully and tried the best to ensure the interviewees representative. As the corona virus was spreading in China, it was inappropriate to conduct interviews

in person, so most conversations were taken place on Wechat. Due to the same reason, I could not to interview a *tuwei* icon as he refused to talk about this online. The interviews did not involve sensitive information such as name and ID number, and the record will be destroyed after this thesis is finished. All the videos and comments I used in this thesis are in public. As a master student living in a city, I am aware of my own limitations when dealing with low educated rural Kuaishou users. But because I lost the chance to interview a *tuwei* producers, I had only to work with online comment, thus avoided possible unintentional harm to them.

4. Theoretical framework

Through the literature about *tuwei* culture and a primary investigation on *tuwei* videos, I found that “*tuwei* videos” is a given name, and this name along with the aggressive comments against the videos suggests a possibility that the denomination “*tuwei* videos” is a stigma. Therefore, the thesis examines the stigmatization against *tuwei* videos on the basis of class habitus, using Goffman’s, Link and Phelan’s, and Bourdieu’s theories as a framework.

4.1 Stigma

Stigma theory has been applied in multiple researching fields, not only in its traditional domain of mental illness, but also in other health-related fields, as well as some more general areas such as finance, family issues, crime, and even “place” (Pescosolido and Martin, 2015). Recently researches have noticed stigma in cyber space and the role of social media in stigmatization. For example, Wanniarachchi et al. (2020) review seventeen articles regarding to weight stigma, and of twelve articles analysed the stigma by incorporating data, regardless textual or graphic, from popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

4.1.1 The conception of stigma

Goffman (1963) notes that the term “stigma”, which was used by ancient Greeks to refer to marks on bodies in order to signify unusual and morally harmful persons from the community, now has been applied more to the disgraceful or harmful connotations than the bodily mark itself. Goffman (1963) defines “stigma” as an attribute that makes its possessor different from others as the possessor is discredited, undesirable and dangerous to an extreme extend, and such attributes constitute discrepancies between *virtual social identity* and *actual social identity*. According to Goffman (1963), one’s *social identity* includes both structural attributes like occupations and personal attributes like honesty. Goffman (1963) states that the attributes and character of the individual made by others constitute the individual’s virtual social identity, and what this individual truly possesses thus is called actual social identity.

Goffman (1963) stressed that not all the undesirable attributes are discrediting and stigmas, but only

the attributes, which are incoherent with the assumptions of virtual social identity, have the potential to be a stigma. In other words, the same attribute that can be problematic for one party does not have to be an issue for another party. Goffman (1963) therefore recounted that stigma refers to a discrediting attribute but it should be seen as a mismatch of ones' virtual and actual social identities rather than an attribute itself.

4.1.2 The components of stigma

Goffman's definition of stigma is in relation to the stereotype or established assumptions of certain types of people, as well as the discrepancies between virtual and actual social identities. The definition implied a condition of stigma that an attribute should be a stigma of the individual only if the attribute creates the discrepancy between an individual's virtual and actual social identities. Following such observation, an influential definition thus was developed that stigma is a mark that links a person to undesirable characteristics or attributes (Link and Phelan, 2001).

Link and Phelan (2001) acknowledge that the nature of stigma has been salient for psychological research and evaluated several definitions of stigma from social psychological literature. They criticize that psychological literature draws more attention to the cognitive process in order to explain how a label is linked to an undesirable attribute, while it pays less attention to other aspects of stigma. Therefore, they conceptualized stigma as the convergence of four components, namely:

1. Distinguishing and labeling differences;
2. Linking labeled differences to negative attributes;
3. Separating "us" from the labeled ("them");
4. Status loss and discrimination.

Link and Phelan (2001) frame the first component as the social selection of human differences and the first step of stigmatization, and they argued two features of the component. The first feature they identified is that, substantial oversimplification is required in the selection. When there is no clear boundary for one to categorize, one tends to use oversimplified classification to create groups. Inheriting from Goffman, they spot the second feature, that the standard of this social selection of

difference differs according to time and place. The same attribute could be perceived as normal or as stigmatized in different contexts. They furthermore argue that the word “label” is more appropriate than “mark” or “attribute”, since “label” connotes that the designation of an object is affixed and culturally and socially constructed while “mark” and “attribute” seem to validate the designation.

Link and Phelan (2001) highlight the second component of stigma as the connection between labeled differences and stereotypes, and they point out that this aspect of stigma has been research as a salient part in social psychological study of stigma in a cognitive approach. In the view of social psychology, labels and stereotypes are employed to make judgements even preconsciously for the reason that culturally given categories are embedded in people’s consciousness and provide people with a quicker and simpler decision-making process that free people to other matters (Link and Phelan, 2001). They also criticize that literature solely focusing on this component often neglect another important condition of stigma, which is the third component.

The third component, regarding to separation of “us” as normal from “them” as negatively labeled, is justified by other components of stigma, for the reason that labeled people are linked to negative attributes thus they are fundamentally different from the people who are not labeled (Link and Phelan, 2001). Such separation thus rationalized the hostility and the discrimination against labeled people, because they are different from “us” so putting negative attributes to “them” will only cause limited harm to “us”. The hostility and discrimination here consist of the fourth component. Link and Phelan (2001) further explain, the fourth component as the disadvantage of stigmatized groups regarding life chances, such as housing, income, educational and medical opportunities. Then they finally state that, people are stigmatized when all four components exist simultaneously.

In addition, Link and Phelan (2001) stress that, “stigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power—it takes power to stigmatize” and the power differences or power efficiency are constantly taken for granted. They also note that people’s view plays a key role in reducing stigma. They argue that there are multiple mechanisms for the dominant group to discriminate, devalue the stigmatized group and limit their live chances, as long as the dominant group sustain the same view of stigmatized group, decreasing the use of one mechanism will just result in the increasing use of the others. Thereby, this definition indicates that stigma is processual and created by structural power

(Yang et al., 2007), and this approach to stigma embodied the concern for the operation of power and enabled stigma to be researched along with other fundamental sociological questions, such as social inequalities and social structure of power (Clair, 2008; Bos et al., 2013).

Kinnear et al. (2016) apply the approach by Link and Phelan (2001) in their study of the lives of families with autism spectrum disorder and discuss the role of stigma in predicting how difficult life is overall for parents. Mohamed, Saad and Magdy (2019) also creatively adopt the approach in developing the measurement system of the social stigma of hepatitis C virus in the workplace.

4.2 Habitus

4.2.1 The conception of habitus

Habitus is a philosophical notion and re-conceptualized by Bourdieu as a mediating notion to study human action from the aspect of disposition (Wacquant, 2011). As Wacquant (2011) explains, this concept captures the “internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality (Wacquant, 2011: 318)”, which refers to “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu (ibid)”, thus helps us to revoke the duality between the individual and social.

Bourdieu (2000) uses the word “disposition” to give a more understandable conceptualization of habitus, he then defines habitus as “a system of dispositions” which means habitus is a system of “long-lasting” manners or schemes or structures of being, seeing, acting and thinking, by such definition Bourdieu indicates a dispositional philosophy of action, or *practice*. Bourdieu (1984) argues that habitus is the unifying and generative principle of human practices and thus a systematicity, or objectively harmony, is generates not only in all practices and products of one agent in different fields, but also in all practices and products of all members of the same class, such systematicity can even be seen at the unconscious level.

Wacquant (2011: 318-319) concludes five key features of habitus.

1. Habitus contains a social aptitude thus it changes according to time, place and distributions of power.
2. Habitus is transferable to different domains of practice. As Bourdieu (1984) stated, the existence of habitus explains the systematicity or coherence of practice within and among agents of the same class
3. Habitus is enduring but not eternal. It is socially constructed thus it can be also eroded or disassembled by external forces. For example, an agent moving to a new place could naturally alter the habitus to fit in the new environment.
4. Habitus contains a characteristic of inertia, since it “tends to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them, and because each of its layers operates as a prism through which later experiences are filtered and subsequent strata of dispositions overlaid (Wacquant 2011)”.
5. Habitus “introduces a lag, and sometimes a hiatus, between the past determinations that produced it and the current determinations that interpellate it (Wacquant 2011)”. Habitus thus is neither a result of one’s autonomy, nor of external determinations, it is produced through the interplay between the two.

To conclude, habitus refers to guiding dispositional systems that obtained by individuals from the same class, and that applied to variable domains of practice. Such systems are socially constructed while they are also influenced by holders’ wills and they sometimes can be changed according to the present circumstance.

4.2.2 Class habitus, taste and distinction

Habitus is defined by two capacities of it (Bourdieu, 1984). First, habitus has the capacity to produce classifiable practices and products; second, habitus has the capacity to distinguish practices and products and to make classificatory judgement of them. He argues that an internalized habitus actually provides “a sense of place” for all class members sharing the same class habitus, such “sense of place” enables people to have the awareness or intuition of their certain positions within the social space or field thus the class habitus works as a guideline and leads members to a certain way of living or a certain life-style, which shows the class identity or the social place of the members and sets the distance

between them and other classes. Therefore, life-style became a symbol for agents to present their positions in the social world through the certain way of living and of consuming.

Class habitus appears as taste in the field of life-style, and the class distinction is reinforced through the practice of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (1984: 169) describes taste as “the generative formula of life-style” and as a set of distinctive preferences regarding all aspects of life, such as dressing, consuming and working. For example, a cabinetmaker’s preferences of budget or time management are also present in his or her ethic and aesthetic of work. Bourdieu (1984: 170) identifies taste as a practical operator to transform “objectively classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position, by perceiving them in their mutual relations and in terms of social classificatory schemes”. Hence, taste is a source of generation of social distinction, and taste, as well as aesthetic, follow a general logic of life-style, which is greatly determined by habitus.

Taste has a symbolic meaning. Bourdieu (1984) suggests that the current taste which is recognized as elegant and luxury could become common and banal because of the appearance of a rarer, more luxury taste that is able to provide class distinction, and such relegation happens without any conscious pursuit of distinctiveness or rarity. According to Bourdieu (1984), taste is pursued when it is rare and standing for a higher place in the society, and taste is abandoned when a rarer taste emerges, or when the taste loses its distinctive values. For the lower class of the society, the taste that possessed by higher class is elegant and distinctive thus the taste is worth to pursue because it stands for a higher status, and by possessing the taste, lower class is seeking for a better social image. For the higher class, a taste is no longer appropriate when it loses the symbolic meaning of distinction, thus when a taste becomes too affordable or too popular among lower class, the distinctive value is gone, thus they turn to another rarer, more expensive and distinctive taste. Therefore, judgement and classification of taste are socially determined and constructed, and such judgement of taste or life-style reflects the class habitus and the hidden power structure.

Moreover, researchers have applied habitus theory in studying online space. North, Snyder and Bulfin (2008) argue that there is a link between technology use and the social class, and habitus plays an important role in teenagers’ tastes in digital technologies.

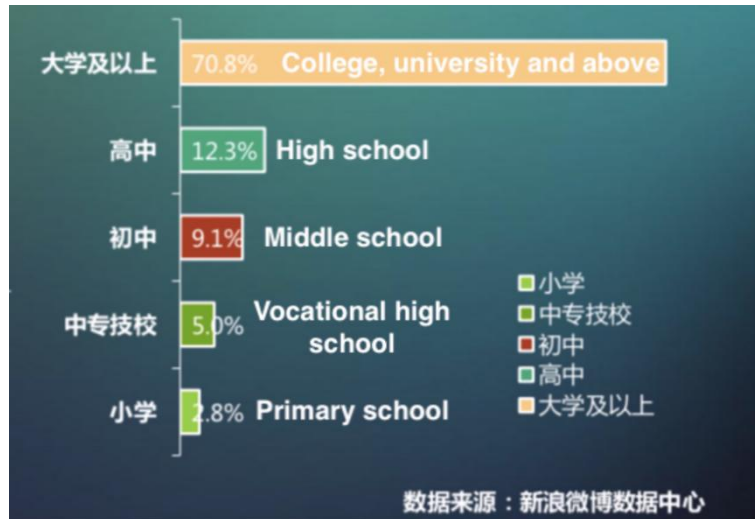
5. Weibo and Kuaishou: from elites to grassroots

In this section, I examine two characteristics, which are education and region of origin of the users of Weibo and of Kuaishou, so as to reveal the differences between the two group of users. The examination is mainly based on recent official reports of the two platforms.

5.1 Weibo: urban elites

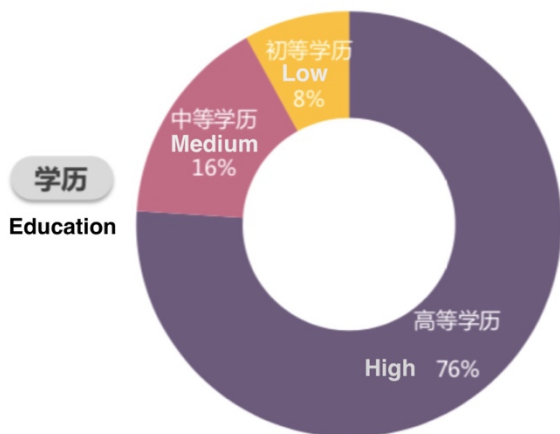
Weibo is a Chinese blogging website launched in 2009, and it is the biggest social media platform in China with 516 million MAU (monthly active users) as of the fourth quarter of 2019 (Weibo Corporation, 2019). Marina (2014) argues that Weibo indeed has provided a space for Chinese masses to express themselves and to discuss social issues, although it has not contributed in mending the information gap among Chinese netizens due to many facts, such as the authoritarian regime in China, and the dominance of elite users on Weibo while ordinary users do not have much less power and impact. Lin, Hamm and Reinhard (2018) interpret Weibo as a social field and also recognize the power difference between elite users and grassroots users. Weibo has also been used as a web source by many researchers, for example, Weibo comments were used to analyse the public perception of haze weather (Zhang, Chen and Liu, 2019).

Apart from what Marina (2014) states that most Weibo users lived in cities in 2012, Chinese researchers discuss also the education background of the users and define Weibo as an elite platform for urban elites in the context of China. Based on the Weibo annual user reports (from 2013 to 2018), Weibo has claimed that most of its users are highly educated since 2013. In the annual report of 2013, it said that 70.8% of users have at least college degrees and less than 30% have degrees that are lower than or equal to high school.

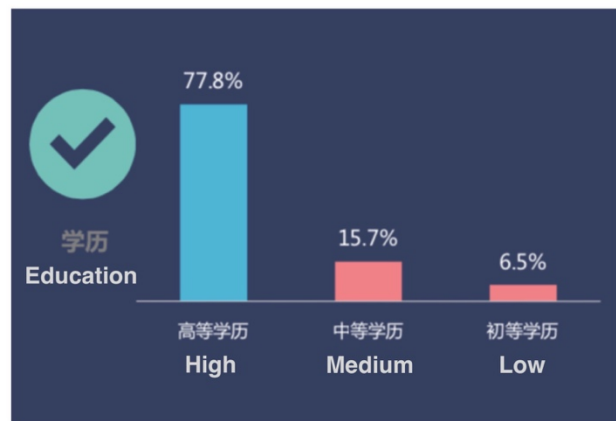


Source: Weibo annual report of user development of 2013

In the annual report of 2015 and of 2016, Weibo stated again that higher educated people consist of the major part of its users:



Source:
Weibo annual report of user development of 2015



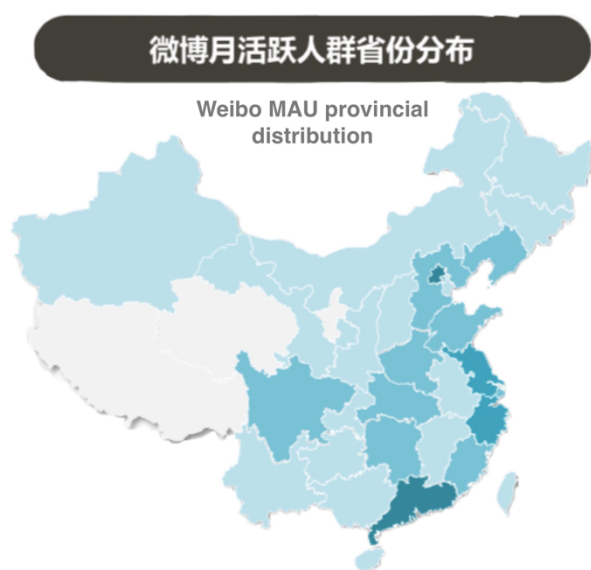
Source:
Weibo annual report of user development of 2016

Ac CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Centre) reported in 2014, the total number of Chinese netizens was 618 million as of December of 2013, and urban netizens constituted the vast proportion up to 71.4% while rural netizens accounted for only 28.6%; among all netizens, only 10.8% have

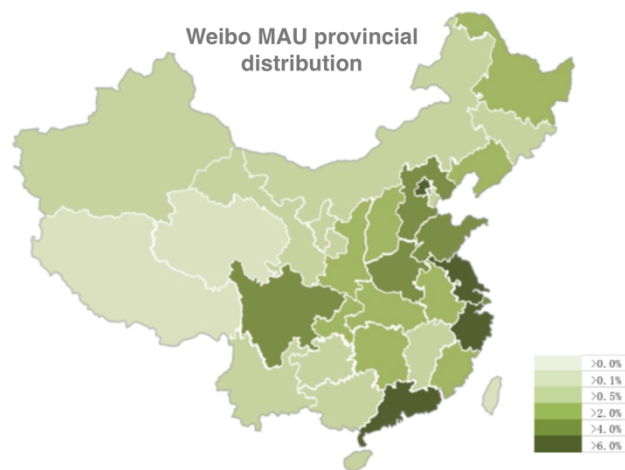
undergraduate degrees or above, and netizens possessing middle school degrees represented the largest proportion of 36%. Meanwhile, Weibo firstly published the user development report and announced that 70.8% of its users have undergraduate degrees or above.

Weibo reported that 76% of its users have higher education in 2015 and 77.8% in 2016, linking to the data reported by CNNIC that the percentage of higher educated netizens in China was 19.6% in 2015 and 20.6% in 2016. The portion of highly educated people among Weibo users is higher than the portion among all Chinese netizens, thus Weibo is a more elite platform in terms of education at least.

Weibo has also indicated that most of its users were located in developed areas, such as the first-tier cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, and Eastern coastal provinces like Zhejiang and Jiangsu. For example, in the annual report of user development of 2014 and of 2015, Weibo provided quantile maps to illustrate the density of Weibo MAU at province level as showed below, and the darker the colour is, the denser the MAU are located.

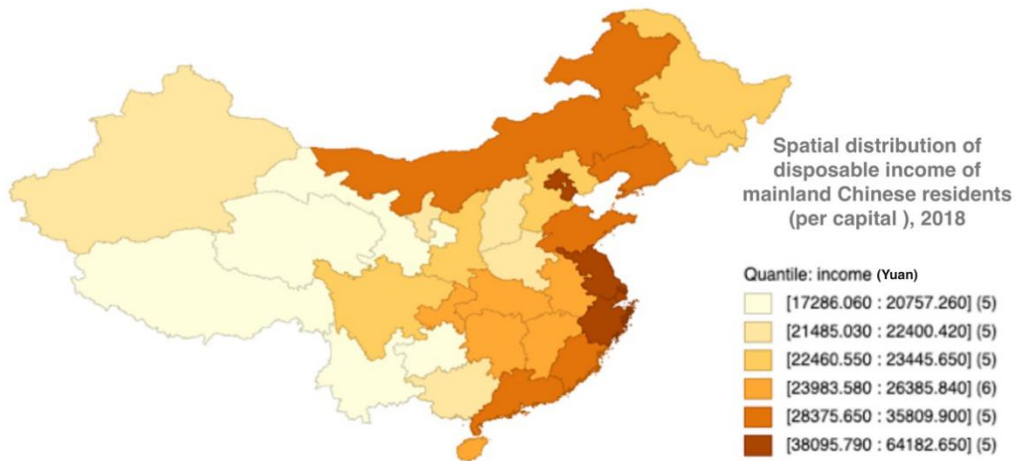


Source: Weibo annual report of user development of 2014



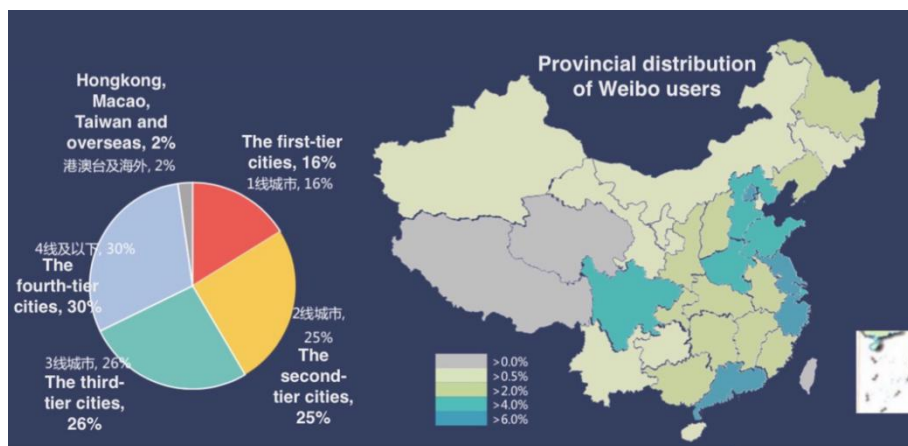
Source: Weibo annual report of user development of 2015

From the map, it is clear that a large portion of Weibo MAU are from Eastern provinces. According to the data of disposable income of mainland Chinese residents (per capital) in 2018, these provinces are relatively richer than others.



Data source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

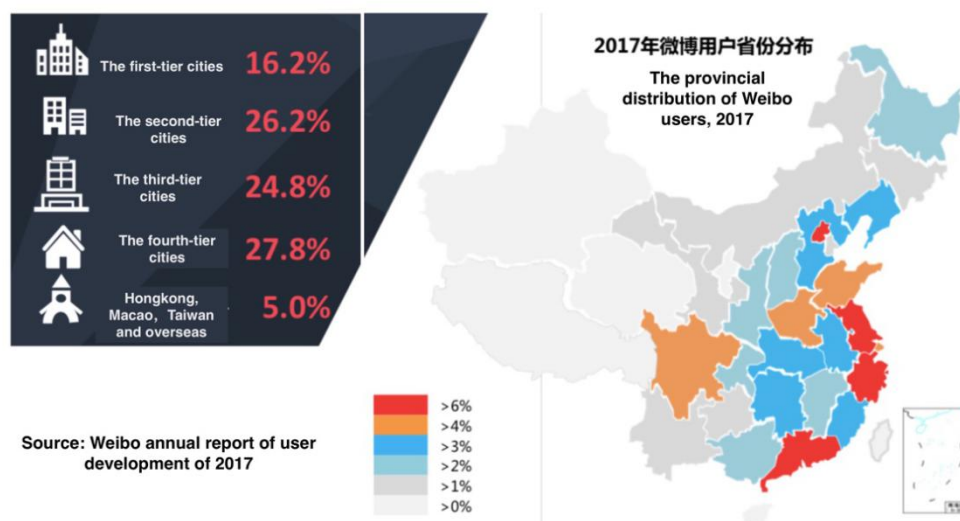
Since 2016, Weibo has started to mention a *sinking*(下沉) trend in the user development, which refers to that newly developed Weibo users are more from less developed areas, such as small cities and villages, instead as from the big cities. For example, in the report of 2016, Weibo stated that users from the second-tier and from the third-tier cities had occupied a bigger portion, seen at the quantile map and pie chart:



Source: Weibo annual report of user development of 2016

In the following annual reports, Weibo continued to remark the sinking trend and it stopped reporting data on the education level of users. A reasonable assumption is that the number of highly educated Weibo users might have dropped with the sinking trend, so the education level is no longer an advantageous index. Meanwhile, the reports have continually indicated that a large portion of users

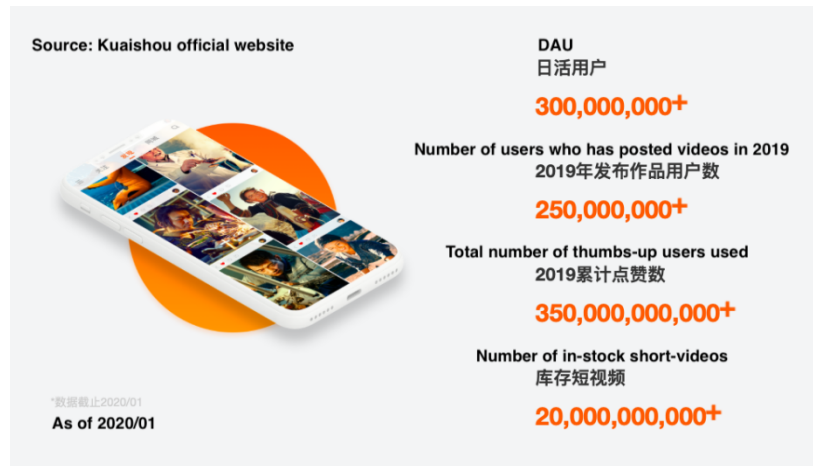
are from more economically developed areas so as to maintain its elite tonality. For example, Weibo presented the rising percentage of users from smaller cities and put a quantile map alongside to indicated that more users are still from richer developed provinces:



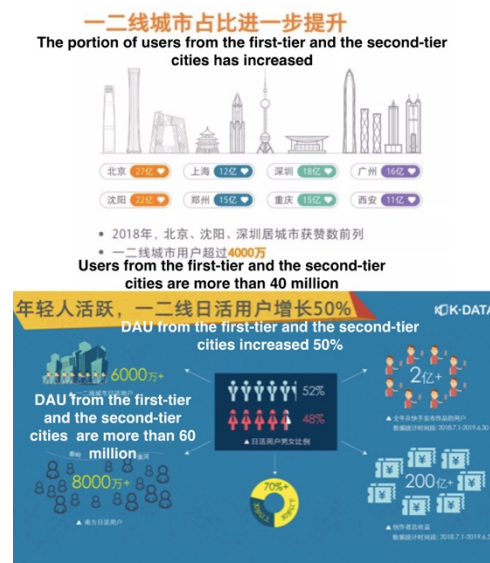
In summary, Weibo gained a large group of highly educated urban users at the early stage and established a tonality of elite since ever since.

5.2 Kuaishou: small-town grassroots

Kuaishou is a GIF-making app launched in 2011 it then transformed to a short-video sharing platform in 2012 and had now developed more than 300 million daily active users (DAU) as stated on its official website. Apart from researchers focusing on solely *tuwei* culture on Kuaishou, few researchers study Kuaishou as a platform of cultural production for grassroots individuals (Lin and Kloet de, 2019), and as a useful digital tool of self-publicity for ordinary people (Tan et al., 2020). Kuaishou started to release official reports only since 2018, thus in this part I used both official reports from Kuaishou and other relating business reports to present the features of Kuaishou users.



In the first content report in 2018, it announced that the percentage of users from the first-tier and the second-tier cities had increased. In the content report in 2019, it stressed again the growth of users from big cities.



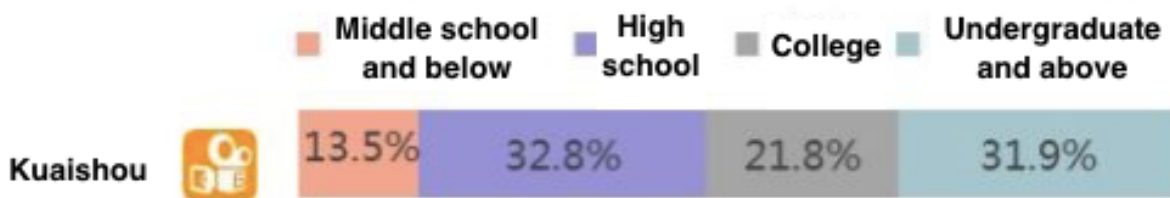
In the two content reports, Kuaishou emphasized that its users are widely distributed among China. In the report of 2018, Kuaishou highlighted several users who are from remote regions such as Yunnan, Xinjiang, and Tibet, and related them to several pinpoints like the westernmost and the easternmost point of China as to illustrate the wide distribution of users. In the report of 2019, it spotted several villages that had become famous on Kuaishou, for example, Gaibao village of Guizhou province had used Kuaishou platform to promote local goods.

While since 2016 Weibo has repeated the sinking trend in the growth of users that more users from small cities and towns were developed; on the contrary, Kuaishou stressed the growth of users in big cities in the reports both in 2018 and in 2019, which indicates that users of Kuaishou are still mainly from small cities and towns, and rural area. Although Kuaishou has never published the details regarding its user structure, a report from Penguin Intelligence in 2018 announced that 61.2% of Kuaishou users are from smaller cities and rural area.



Source:
Researching report on user of Kuaishou&Tiktok

The report also disclosed the educational background of Kuaishou users, that almost half of them have high school degrees and below and only 31.9% of them have undergraduate degrees or above.



Source:
Researching report on users of Kuaishou&Tiktok

Comparing to Weibo, Kuaishou is more of a social platform for the masses not only because of the lower education level, in fact, serving and developing the masses has always been the strategy of Kuaishou.

The brand slogan of Kuaishou is:

记录世界纪录你。

Recording the world, recording you.

In the content report of 2018, Kuaishou presented its brand impression as:

高于日常生活一公分。

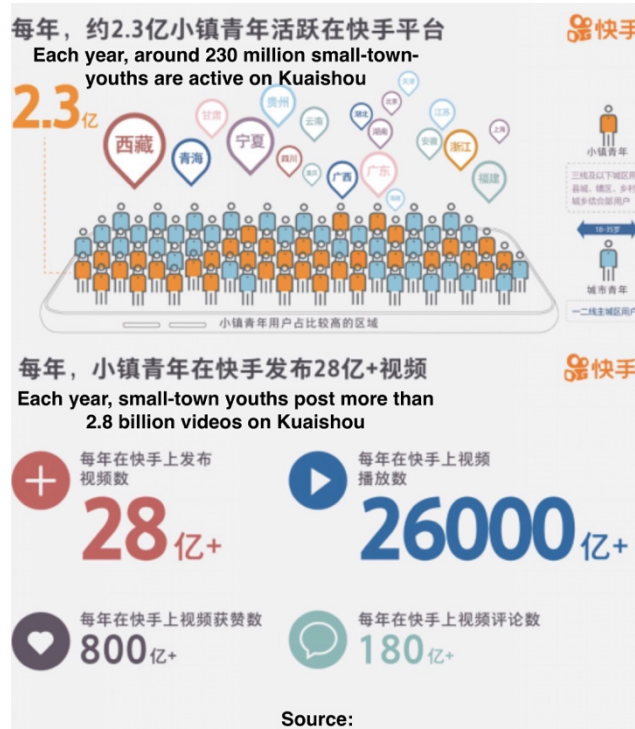
One centimetre above the daily life.

And Kuaishou ends the report by another slogan:

打开快手，发现更多可能。

Opening Kuaishou, discovering more possibilities.

As these slogans indicated, and the content report of 2018 stated, Kuaishou has identified itself as a “civilian community of short videos (国民短视频社区)” and has devoted itself to serve the demands for self-expression of ordinary people. As researchers described Kuaishou users as “small-town youths (小镇青年)”, Kuaishou also affirmed in a report in 2019 that young users from small-towns compose a large part and play an important role in the development of the platform. Roughly 230 million users are small-town youths and they contribute more than 2.8 billion short videos every year for the platform:



Source:
 Kuaishou content report of 2018
 Kuaishou content report of 2019

To summarise, Kuaishou has always focused on small towns and rural areas, and it accordingly became a more grassroots platform, in the Chinese sense, comparing to Weibo.

6. Analysis

6.1 Are *tuwei* videos and the producers stigmatized?

In this section, Link and Phelan's approach (2001) of the four components of stigma is used to find out whether or not the *tuwei* videos and the producers are stigmatized.

After exploring the definition and classification of *tuwei* videos, it is clear that the content of them is rather varied. Although literature suggests that no matter what theme the video belongs to, causing embarrassment and awkwardness is a key indicator of *tuwei* video, and such embarrassment and awkwardness are mainly reported by urban watchers (Bao, 2018; Gu, 2019; Mei, 2019). In fact, *tuwei* video is a label that given by urban viewers while people who produce or create the video do not necessarily think their work as *tuwei*. As mentioned earlier, the term "*tuwei*" is applied by Weibo users to specify certain videos (Liu, 2018). *Tuwei* videos which were posted on Weibo and were called as *tuwei* video were just viewed as normal videos somewhere else, such as on Kuaishou platform.

6.1.1 Distinguishing and labelling differences

Link and Phelan (2001) believe that the initial part of stigma process is to distinguish and label difference and thus to create groups. Such categories and selection of differences build up the first component of stigma. They differ according to time and place, and the same object could be deemed differently in different contexts. In this part, I first present and make a comparison of the comments of two selected videos on Kuaishou and Weibo to demonstrate the first component of stigma, then seek for the answer of what makes a video differ from other videos and turns into a *tuwei* video.

Video 1: a charming bastard 20

Video 1 is a *tuwei* short drama and it has got 371444 likes and 40785 comments on Kuaishou, and 17000 likes and 1981 comments on Weibo up till now, and it is the twentieth video of a series called "a charming bastard". In the video, a father and his daughter who bought discount tickets were stopped at ticket checking point and teller asked them for relevant certificates rudely, then the father explained that he is disabled and his daughter is a student and showed teller his missing arm although the teller

insisted them to show specific certificates; when they were pleading for tolerance, the leading actor showed up and confronted the teller with requesting him a certificate of human since he called himself as a human, and let the father and daughter enter; by the end of the video, the leading actor claimed himself as a charming bastard.

Among the twenty of the hot comments from Kuaishou, six of them are irrelevant to the video but related to other trendy topics, three express negative feelings, and eleven are friendly comments regarding the leading actor and the act. Among the twenty of the hot comments from Weibo, four are irrelevant, fourteen are negative or aggressive, and only two comments are friendly. According to this, the rate of friendly reaction of the video is 55% on Kuaishou and it is 10% on Weibo, and if only take the relevant comments into account, then the rate is 78.57% on Kuaishou and 12.5% on Weibo.

The hot comment with 12.1 thousand likes on Kuaishou said:

“我见过马丁本人，很帅气。”

I saw Ma Ding (the name of the leading actor) in person, and he is handsome.

The hot comment with 2451 likes on Weibo said:

“妈的，这男的你老婆吗？”

Shit, is this guy your wife?

In the first comment, the word “handsome” was used to describe the leading actor, while in the second one the word “wife” was used to address him along with a strong emotional expression which is “shit”.

Video 2: the hot head flick of six sisters

Since the “Social dance (社会摇 social shake) was blocked, there is no account post such videos so I chose a similar theme —“head flick (甩头)” video, in which people flick their head in cooperation with the background music and camera movement. Video 2 is a ““head flicking (甩头)” video that has got 7043 likes and 8602 comments on Kuaishou and 16.3k likes and 4k comments on Weibo up till

now. In the video, six girls first stood closely in a line then started to walk forward one by one and the camera focused each of them in order; the first girl walked few steps then flicked her head cooperating with the music beat, and when she flicked, the camera was moving up and down dramatically; then the camera moved to the next girl and the same act repeated till the end.

Among the twenty of the hot comments from Kuaishou, three comments are irrelevant to the video or neutral, four are with negative implications and fourteen are friendly compliments. As for the comments from Weibo, two comments are irrelevant, seventeen are negative or aggressive, and only one is a compliment.

The hot comment with 3.8 thousand likes from Kuaishou said:

“爱妃你们要笑死朕。”

Dear concubines make me laugh.

The hot with 4164 likes from Weibo said:

“一楼娶所有人。”

Whoever make the top comment has to marry them all.

And the most friendly comment from Weibo said:

“你别说，点踩得还挺好的，我毕业了？”

To be honest, they get the beat right, am I getting used to this?

In this case, the meaning of the first two comments are rather unclear and they do not contain any obvious indicating words. Linking to the context, I judged the first one as a friendly comment because the author left a thumb-up for it, and the commenter and the author are following each other. The second one used the phrase “has to” to indicate that marrying these girls is a bad thing, thus the comment is unfriendly. The last one looks friendly yet it contains an obscure implication by using the phrase “getting used to”, that the head flicking was unacceptable to the commenter before.

Distinguishing and labelling differences

Through this comparison of video 1 and 2, first, the comparison reveals a clear difference in the reaction to the same video on Kuaishou and Weibo. First, the reaction on Kuaishou is more friendly and positive than it on Weibo. Second, the same video is normally viewed on Kuaishou while it is labelled as *tuwei* video on Weibo. Therefore, *tuwei* videos are essentially ordinary short videos while they are passively selected then labelled as *tuwei* and get attacked on Weibo platform to a certain extent. And such different attitude to the same videos suggested a difference in judgement between Weibo users and Kuaishou users.

Also, not all the short videos appear on Weibo are labelled as *tuwei* video but only some of them, thus here is a classification process conducted by Weibo users to alienate certain videos. In the process, users of Weibo sense and distinguish differences, accordingly they create groups for short videos, and some of the distinguished short videos thus are labelled as *tuwei*. Therefore, the first component of stigma has occurred, that stigmatized objects are distinguished and labelled as different (Link and Phelan, 2001). In the following sections, I will analyse whether or not the other three components of stigma exist in the case of *tuwei* video, and what the exact differences are between *tuwei* videos and others.

6.1.2 Linking differences to negative attributes

As discussed earlier, the words “tu” and “tuwei” have been used in a more derogatory way since the collapse of traditional small-scale peasant economy in China, although some researchers recognized them as neutral adjectives (Dai, 2019; Luo,2019), at its core those two words still suggest derogatory meanings such as “tasteless”, “unrefined” and “nonfancy”. Therefore, in the case of *tuwei* video, *tuwei* is not only a label but also a negative and undesirable attribute that is linked to the label. Regarding how the categories, or labelled differences are linked to negative attributes, Link and Phelan (2001) have stated that this question is salient for psychological studies in which the thought process that labels and stereotypes become connected is the critical focus. In this part, I only discuss the question that what kind of negative attributes the distinguished videos are linked to through the demonstration of some *tuwei* videos and the comments they received on Weibo and of other relating data.

The first undesirable attribute labelled videos are linked to is “tu”, which also can be seen just from the name of *tuwei* video. “Tu” means a lot, although in this case of *tuwei* video, it is mostly related to derogatory meanings like “nonfancy” and “unfashionable”, and it is often used to criticize dressing style and makeup (Gu, 2019). Although the hot comments from video 1 and 2 did not directly refer to tu or to *tuwei*, some of them actually indicated negative judgement regarding the dressing of actors and actresses in the videos.

From video 1, a hot comment with 52 likes said:

“我出两口卸妆水喷他俩大黑眼圈上，呕。”

I would love to contribute some makeup remover for his big eye circles, ewww.

From video 2, a hot comment with 2 likes thought having similar hair cut with girls in *tuwei* videos is one type of insult:

“我感觉我的短发受到了侮辱。” (all the girls in video 2 were with short hair)

I feel my short hair is getting insulted.

Another hot comment with 29 likes from video 2 questioned about the girls’ shoes:

“镜头晃得太快，都看不清鞋是不是真的”

The camera moved too fast that I could not tell if their shoes are genuine.

Although these hot comments did not mention the word tu or *tuwei* directly, the words “ewww”, “insulted” and the question of shoes presented a negative attitude. Some other non-hot comments used the word “tu” and “*tuwei*” directly. For example, a comment from video 1 said:

“好土味，我受不了了。”

This is too *tuwei* that I could not bare.

And another comment from video 2 said:

“太土了，我吐了。”

This is so “tu”, I am going to throw up.

Another common undesirable attribute that *tuwei* video is linked to is “awkwardness”. There also are some comments from the videos stated that some viewers felt awkward and embarrassed while watching:

“有点尬啊。”(From video 1)

This is a bit awkward.

“有被精神小伙小妹尴尬到” (From video 2)

I do feel awkward by watching these spirit boys and girls (nick names for actors and actresses in *tuwei* video).

I found in some other *tuwei* videos’ comment area that some viewers also commented pictures without words to express their awkward feeling:



The first picture showed a guy was vomiting and with a red Chinese word meaning “ewww”. The second picture showed a person’s hand and feet were curled up strongly in order to indicate a high degree of awkwardness.

When it comes to the interviews with viewers, all my informants confirmed they get negative feeling

such as “awkward”, “embarrassed” and “闹心 (to feel annoyed or queasy about something)”, while they are viewing *tuwei* videos. For example, one interviewee said:

“全方位的尴尬，从他们穿的衣服到台词之类的，都挺尴尬的。”

It is all-round awkwardness, from the clothes they wear to the act lines, those are all pretty awkward.

6.1.3 Separating “us” from “them”

According to Link and Phelan (2001), separating “us” from “them” is the key component to rationalize other components of stigma process. A separation convinces people that negatively labelled people are fundamentally different from “us” who are not labelled, and therefore the stereotyping and other discriminative treatments of “them” become possible. In this section, I examined if such separation exists in the case of *tuwei* producers. I set the examination in a situation that viewers and producers are from the same place. Normally people would recognize others from the same place as “us”, but in this case, *tuwei* producers are still excluded from “us”.

I chose a *tuwei* video posted by “Happy Daddy” on Weibo, which highlights the producers’ location. In the video, eight girls were simply standing in front of the camera and showing themselves with a rhythmic song as background music. The left side of figure 1 shows the first frame of the video and the subtitle which says: “calling for people from Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan (with a flame mark)”, and the subtitle on the bottom said: “whoever comes in is our sister (with a butterfly mark)”. The two subtitles indicate that the girls are from the southwestern region of China, which includes Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan.



After reviewing more than five hundred comments, I found some comments that plainly presented the separation. For example, as showed in figure 1, some comments said:

“我觉得我和她们格格不入。”

I feel I am so incompatible with them.

“我云贵川不认。”

We people who from Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan do not recognize (them) as sisters.

“云南的我拒绝呼叫。”

As a person from Yunnan, I refused your call.

The words “incompatible”, “refused” and “not” suggest that the commenters refused to be the same kind of the girls, even though they are from the same region.

Apart from the video, two of my interviewees also indicated the separation. When I asked what they think about the producers, they said:

“...除了尴尬就是，就是跟看猴儿一样，觉得他们特别搞笑。”

[...] in addition to awkwardness, watching them is like watching monkeys, and I think they

are very funny.

“...我觉得还好，（看土味视频的时候）没有很尴尬，毕竟是他们在做（尴尬的事），又不是我。”

... (when I am watching *tuwei* videos,) I feel it is ok, not so awkward, because after all, it is them doing (awkward stuff), not me.”

The first interviewee frankly referred the producers as “monkeys”, which echoes another comment mentioned the literature by Yi (2019), that a Zhihu user described watching *tuwei* videos as watching monkeys.

6.1.4 Discrimination and status loss

Link and Phelan (2001) included discrimination and status loss as one component of the stigma process. They state that when people are labelled, set apart and linked to undesirable characteristics, a rationale for rejecting and excluding them naturally emerges. They explain this component in relation to inequalities of life chances, such as income and education. They furthermore discuss several forms of discrimination in detail, such as individual discrimination, structural discrimination and status loss a source of discrimination.

On Weibo, video 1 and video 2 have received many unfriendly comments, and some of these hot comments involve element of violence. Two of the twenty hot comments of Video 1 on Weibo said:

“这么装在外面是要被打的小子。”

Boy, you will be beaten if you behave like this in real life.

“可以把牙齿给他打落完不？”

Can I beat all his teeth down?

And three of the twenty hot comment of video 2 on Weibo said:

“今天我看看谁还敢摇。” (comment with a picture of a hammer)

Let me see who dare to flick

“平均身高一米四五????”

Is 1.45 meter their average height????

“你妈给你生脑袋是为了让你来这里甩头的?”

Did you mom give you a head for letting you flick it here?

As showed above, many comments are not only verbally aggressive, but sometimes even threaten with physical violence. In the case of *tuwei* video, not all forms of discrimination and status loss are observed, while individual discrimination against the producers of *tuwei* video indeed exist.

Based on the interviews I conducted, that watchers show their ability to understand the producers' intention of making *tuwei* video and also show empathy to producers. The interviewees presented their understanding of producers' intention, which is to earn money. They also showed that they understand that some videos, and actors and actresses of such videos are recognized as *tuwei* because these people share another aesthetic, which is circumscribed by their economic and educational circumstances.

I asked for the interviewees' personal views on the dressing and makeup styles in *tuwei* videos, one interviewee first told me that:

“(她们的)美瞳都是很大直径的，眼妆眼线什么的，我觉得不好看。... (她们的妆容)挺傻的，但是化完的确显得眼睛很大。... 她们的衣服也挺土的，我觉得。... 口音和穿搭是真的土”

The colourful contact lens (they) used are all in a large diameter, also, their eye makeup and eyeliners, I do not think those are not pretty. [...] (Their) makeup is quite silly to me, but such makeup can really make eyes look bigger. [...] I think their outfits are also quite “tu”. [...] The accent and outfits are really “tu”.

Then the same interviewee recognized the *tuwei* producers' unawareness of being *tu* regarding the style and taste of clothes:

“他们可能不认为或者不知道自己土吧。... 他们穿的那些名牌衣服, 10% 可能是真的, 他们可能根本不认识那个牌子, 只觉得好看就买了, 也不知道那是假货。”

They probably do not think or do not realise that they are “*tu*”. [...] The brand clothes they wear are 10% likely to be authentic, but they probably did not know the brand in any ways and they bought them just because they thought those clothes were pretty, without knowing them as fake brands.”

Another interviewee offered some reflective thoughts:

“他们土吗? 不同的人对土有不同的理解, 有些人觉得农村的就是土, 城市的就是洋气, 我觉得这(理解)也不对呀。我理解的土就是行为和语言层次不高, 文化水平不太高, 这么说也不太对, 就是他们刻意突破一种我们自诩文明的人不会突破的线。”

Are they “*tu*”? Different people have different understandings of “*tu*”, and some people think rural is “*tu*” and urban is *yang*, but (such understandings) are wrong. I think “*tu*” means a less advanced level of behaviour and language, and education, but this is not quite the proper way to say; these people (producers) deliberately break the line that people who consider themselves as civilized would not break.

All the interviewees believe that some of the producers are driven by profit and they may not be so willing to do such silly things, while they think that some producers truly enjoy doing what they do in *tuwei* videos. One of the typical answers is:

“肯定有些人做这些土味视频是为了点击率, 为了赚钱嘛。但也不排除有些人就是(视频)里这样的, 就喜欢这样”

Some people must do these *tuwei* videos for the click ratio, for making money. But it is possible that some people are just like that (how they are in the videos) and enjoy do things

like that.

To conclude, the first three components of stigma process in regard to *tuwei* videos and their producers have clearly occurred, although the fourth component is in doubt. In this case, neither *tuwei* videos nor their producers have experienced concrete discrimination or status loss regarding life chances, while they have certainly received unfriendly comments. Thus, the fourth component actually occurs in a milder and less harmful manner, and the *tuwei* videos and their producers are stigmatized to a certain extent. Apart from the discrimination, my interviewees showed empathy and awareness of producers' dilemma that limited their aesthetic, that suggested the feasibility of eliminating the stigma. Although, generally, Kuaishou users are more gentle with *tuwei* videos than Weibo users, who have been found to be more rude and make more aggressive comments. People use aggressive language not only on anonymous websites. For example, Rösner and Krämer (2016) argue that people behave aggressively also on less anonymous social websites. Also, Ng and Han (2018) analyse a corpus of more than 200,000 comments from a Japanese celebrity on Weibo and find misogynistic and nationalist slurs on Chinese internet space.

In the next part, the question why *tuwei* videos and their producers have been stigmatized is answered.

6.2 A stigma of class taste

This section focuses on the question of why *tuwei* videos and the producers are stigmatized in the view of Bourdieu's theory of class habitus and taste. To answer the question, it is necessary to firstly find out what exactly the differences are between a normal video and a *tuwei* video, because distinguishing and labelling differences are the first step of stigmatization (Link and Phelan, 2001).

6.2.1 What makes a video different and *tuwei*?

In this section, I explored the question that why some videos are recognized and labelled as *tuwei* videos by Weibo users by using the examples of video 1 and video 2.

Video 1 and video 2 have received thousands of comments on Weibo that focused on several aspects, such as the producers' haircut and dressing style, and the scenario. And as presented in last chapter,

the negative comments also criticised a wide range of concerns. For example, the leading actor from video 1 was criticised for multiple reasons, such as his makeup, his teeth, as well as the story line:

“死亡眼影。”

Fatal eyeshadow.

“牙齿真难看。”

(His) teeth are so ugly.

“进门检查该有的证件，制止插队行为，看门的小伙子哪里有问题？另外，这个明显肾虚的小伙子，不讲秩序还抬杠，迷人在哪里？”

Checking the required certificates, stopping cut-in, what did the teller do wrong? Besides, this weak-looking dude violated the rules and just argued for the sake of arguing, why is he charming?

Such wide range of criticism has made it is difficult to find out the specific attributes that have been distinguished and labelled by Weibo viewers, and have contributed in turning a video *tuwei*. I asked interviewees questions like “what makes a video *tuwei* different from other videos?” and “what do you think is *tuwei*?”, and they answered similarly.

“不好说，我觉得是跟普通人不一样的人去做的一些事情，比如跳社会摇拍情景剧，这种就算是(土味)吧。”

It is hard to say, but I think these things done by people who are different from normal people such as doing “Social dance (社会摇, societal dance)” and shooting short dramas, I think these things can be counted (as *tuwei*).

“为啥叫土味？就想你妈妈让你穿花棉袄出门，你不喜欢，因为你感觉花棉袄很土，我看土味视频就像看花棉袄一样。...(生产者)有这时间不如去听听歌写写字，做一些像

人的活动。”

Why are they recognized *tuwei*? It is like your mom wants you to wear a floral padded jacket for outside, while you dislike this idea because you think the floral padded jacket is “tu”, and the jacket gives me the same feelings with what *tuwei* video give me. [...] (The producers) had better to listen to music or do calligraphy, just do something like a human.

“就是用正常人不会做的事情和言行来吸引眼球吧。”

It is just to attract attention with things and behaviour that normal people would not do.

As mentioned earlier, some bloggers such as Liziqi (李子柒) and Meishi Zuojia Wang Gang (美食作家王刚) were also recognized as *tuwei* video producers by researchers, while netizens disagreed with that. I also discussed Liziqi (李子柒) and another similar blogger — Huanong Brothers (华农兄弟) with interviewees, that whether or not these two bloggers are *tuwei* producers, and one typical answer is:

“我觉得他们这种不算土味，跟我觉得的土味还是差的挺远的。华农兄弟他们做的事还可以让普通人接受。土味那种就很难以理解，如果发生到自己身上就无地自容，想要自杀。”

I think their videos are not *tuwei* videos, their videos are far from the *tuwei* videos in my mind. What they have done is acceptable for normal people. While *tuwei* videos are just so difficult to understand, and you would feel so awkward and would like to commit a suicide if you have to do what they do in *tuwei* videos.

The interviewees all agreed that what *tuwei* videos present behaviour that normal people would not understand and would not do in real life, and by this means *tuwei* videos and their producers became different and deviant from what the interviewees called normal. Relating back to the comparison of the comments of video 1 and video 2 on Weibo and on Kuaishou, it is clear that Weibo viewers and the urban interviewees possess a different understanding of normality and taste from Kuaishou viewers

and *Tuwei* producers, and the former makes judgements on the latter according to the former's understanding and perceive the latter as "abnormal" and "different". In the next section, I will discuss the nature of such divergence and its connection to the stigmatization.

6.2.2 Class habitus and stigmatization

Bourdieu (1984) points out that life-style is derived from habitus and is guided by habitus, and it thus becomes a symbol for people to indicate their class identity and positions in the social world through the certain way of living and consuming. In the field of life-style, class habitus appears as taste and class distinction is generated and reinforced through the practice of taste. *Tuwei* videos and the producers have been attacked because of multiple specific features, such as makeup and outfits. Those features stand for their certain way of living and consuming, and according to Bourdieu (1984), this certain way further imply the taste and life-style of the producers. The fact that the features of *tuwei* videos and producers were recognized as difference and deviation and were attacked by Weibo viewers suggests that, there is a divergence between these two parties of people. Such divergence, as I suggest, is not about any specific features, like outfits, but is rather about taste and life-style; more essentially, it is about habitus and class.

Based on both the literature and earlier analyses, I argue that the root-cause of the stigmatization against *tuwei* videos and the producers is the need of elite class for class distinction. According to Bourdieu (1984), the class habitus drives class members not only to possess and apply unique class tastes, but also to actively produce distinction between them and other classes. The nature of stigmatization of *tuwei* videos is thus the conflict of class habitus, and the distinguished and labelled differences are actually the differences in class taste; and essentially, the assaults on *tuwei* videos are generated by the need for social distinction.

In the previous sections I attempted to identify the key attributes that turn a video *tuwei* on Weibo while the comments criticized a wide range of attributes from the hair style to the scenario and it was difficult to spot the key one. Although the key attribute is clear within the view of class taste, that it is the class taste Weibo users sense and label as different, rather than any specific attributes. The specific attributes attacked on Weibo seem highly variable and random, yet all of them belong to a certain

social domain which is life-style. Weibo users and Kuaishou users represent two different classes and each of them possesses a unique class habitus, and such class habitus appears as taste in life-style field and guides class members' social practices, respectively. These two group of people hold different understanding of normality and of taste, hence, some *tuwei* videos which are viewed as normal on Kuaishou can be viewed as abnormal by Weibo users.

Besides, class taste is deeply embedded and rather elusive that sometimes people feel uncomfortable with something, but they are not able to clearly tell the reason. As presented in last section, one interviewee failed to state his reasons of taking videos as *tuwei* videos, and he had to use a metaphor of floral padded jacket in order to express himself. Weibo users distinguish and label certain attributes when the attributes are easily targeted in the videos, for example, they criticize the dressing style of the actors when the dressing style is obviously different from the style that they are used to; when there is no obvious attributes to target in the video, because of the habitus, Weibo users are still able to distinguish the *tuwei* nature of the videos from some details, for example, from the accent or the body language of the producer. In this case, Weibo users even may not be aware of or to tell what exactly annoyed them, they simply feel that the video is *tu* then label the video as *tuwei* video.

7. Conclusion

This thesis showed how *tuwei* culture is defined and how it has spread and emphasized the important role of two social media platforms, Kuaishou and Weibo, in *tuwei* culture. Through the case study based on the two platforms, I argued that *tuwei* culture and the producers are stigmatized as well as the cause of such stigmatization.

Adopting Link and Phelan's approach (2001), I confirmed that *tuwei* culture and the producers are stigmatized because the four components of stigma have all occurred. Some videos on Kuaishou platform are selected and labelled as *tuwei* videos by Weibo users. By naming the videos as *tuwei* videos, Weibo users link the videos to a series of undesirable attributes such as vulgar and outdated, just as what the term "*tuwei*" indicates. Weibo users consider the producers as another group of people and separate the producers from themselves. Weibo users also show aggressive attitude to *tuwei* culture and to the producer, such as verbal assaulting.

Besides, I discussed the cause of such stigmatization in the view of habitus theory. The labelled differences are very likely caused by divergences of taste and of habitus between urban elites and small-town youths. Out of the need of creating and maintaining class distinction, urban elites belittle, criticize and attack the self-expression and the taste of small-town youths, thus the stigmatization is generated. In the case of *tuwei* culture, it is the young urban elites' view that generates the stigmatization, and according to Link and Phelan (2001), who argue that people's view is crucial in stigmatization and in reducing stigmatization, such view needs to be changed so as to reduce the stigmatization.

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