

otherness

Feixue Mei – June 8, 2026

• digital humanities • identity • translation • transmedia • East Asian pop culture • cultural otherness • language adaptation

As a visual researcher focused on cultural studies, I bridge academic writing with creative practice in my design work. My research explores the intersection of textual and visual elements on digital platforms, as shown in my article “Bullet Chats in China: Bilibili, Language, and Interaction” (2021), published in *Transformative Works and Cultures*. This study examines how language and visual culture intertwine in Bilibili’s “bullet chatting” feature, influenced by East Asian pop culture.

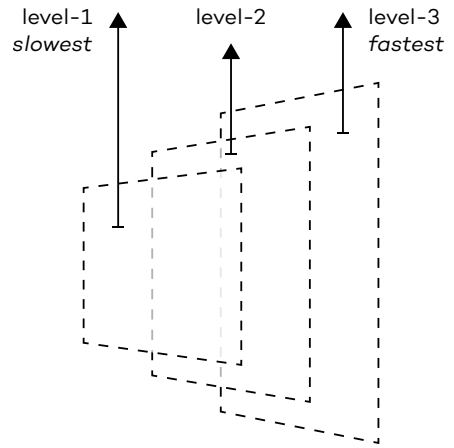
Bilibili, a platform attracting predominantly Generation Z in China (Bilibili, n.d.), features the danmu bullet chat function, borrowed from the Japanese website Niconico. This function overlays user comments on videos, merging linguistic playfulness with visual expression (Liu, Suh, and Wagner 2016, 284). Users blend Chinese with foreign languages, creating a “cyberpidgin” vocabulary that reflects cultural norms rooted in East Asian fan communities, positioning Bilibili as a hub for cultural exchange.

The study examines how Bilibili’s bullet chat culture serves as a space for cultural adaptation, linguistic creativity, and social belonging among urban Chinese youth. The central question is: How do “insiders” use bullet chats for self-expression while excluding “outsiders” through linguistic and visual practices? This investigation reveals how digital communication serves as a dynamic interaction shaped by globalization, cultural manipulation, and technological innovation.

Bilibili’s bullet chats exemplify prosumption, where users act as both consumers and producers of cultural content (Humphreys and Grayson 2008). Terms from the ACGN (Anime, Comics, Games, Novels) fandom and idol industries are adapted, forming a cyberpidgin reflecting Japanese and South Korean pop culture. This aligns with the concept of homophily, where people form social ties with others sharing similar traits (Humphreys 2016, 156). Users innovate linguistically, creating exclusive vocabularies that foster belonging while alienating outsiders.

Bullet chats function as “graffiti” layered over video content, reshaping meaning and challenging authorship and copyright. Their intentionally “anti-designed” nature disrupts ownership claims, transforming Bilibili into a dynamic space for creativity and cultural exchange. This study explores cyberpidgin as both linguistic innovation and visual art, showing how globalization and technology shape language, identity, and cultural consumption.

The visual essay *Otherness*, inspired by this research, explores inclusion and exclusion in online communities through animation, cyberpidgin, and pop culture. It captures the perspective of a cultural outsider in a hegemonic communication space, engaging viewers in a dialogue on assimilation, identity, and community. The work bridges academic rigor and creative exploration, offering insights into Bilibili’s cultural ecosystem and the broader implications of digital communication in a globalized world.



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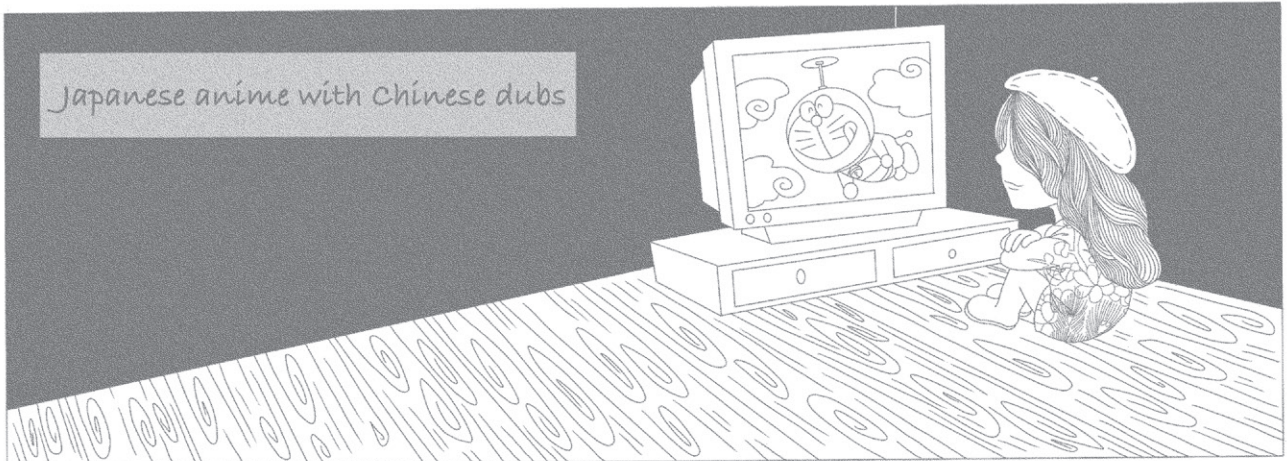
support and acknowledgements: I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Roy McKelvey, Nicole Killian, and Orla Mc Hardy for their invaluable feedback and guidance throughout the completion of this work. Their insightful comments significantly contributed to the refinement and quality of this project.

note: Given the subject matter of the article and the central place occupied by questions of language and expression, the editorial team, in consultation with the author, chose to preserve the text in its original form as much as possible and therefore decided not to proofread or copy edit it, in order to remain faithful to its initial intention and authenticity.

about the author

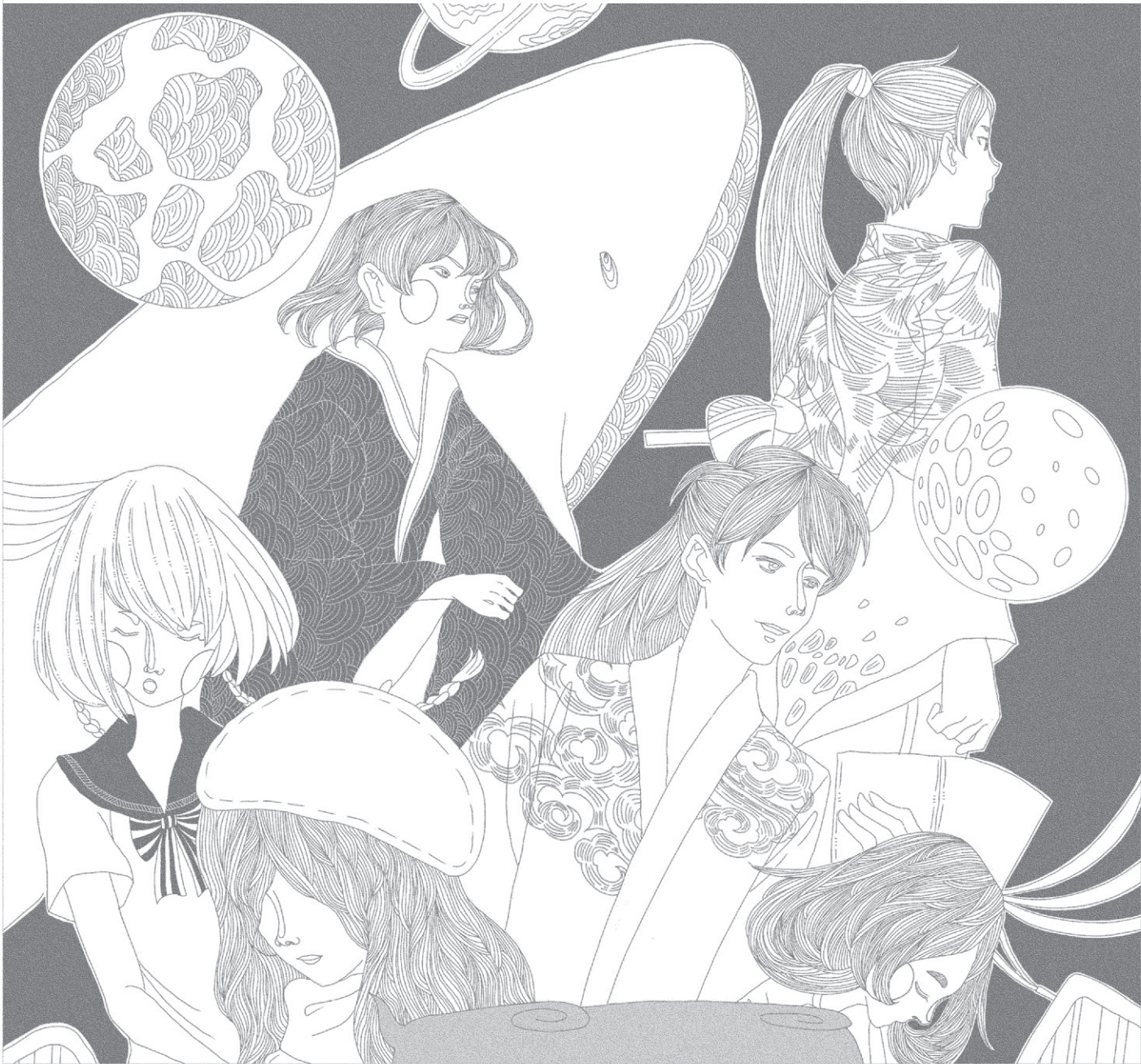
Feixue Mei is a designer, researcher, and Assistant Professor at James Madison University. She holds an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and founded Boundless Bound Publishing, blending digital environments with physical publishing to reframe publication as a collective infrastructure.


<https://feixuemei.info>



Daily News

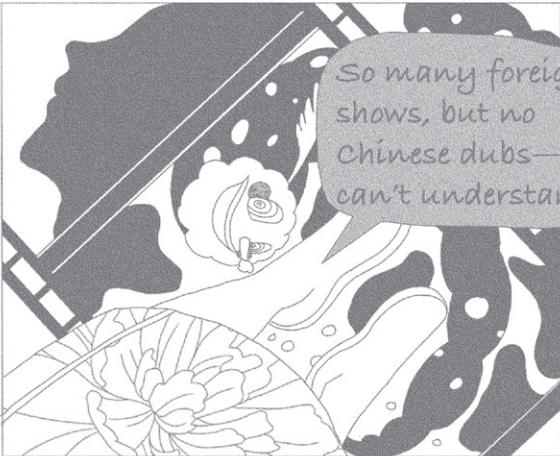
In January 2010, Google announced that, in response to a Chinese-originated hacking attack on them and other US tech companies, they were no longer willing to censor searches in China and would pull out of the country completely if necessary.



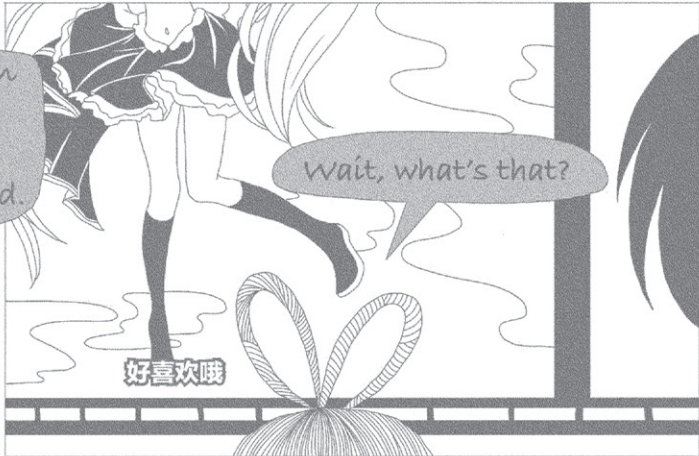


Bilibili targets Chinese Gen Z (born 1990-2009), tech-savvy urban youth who love sharing, discussing, and co-creating Japanese-origin videos now global on the platform.

They are raw subtitles

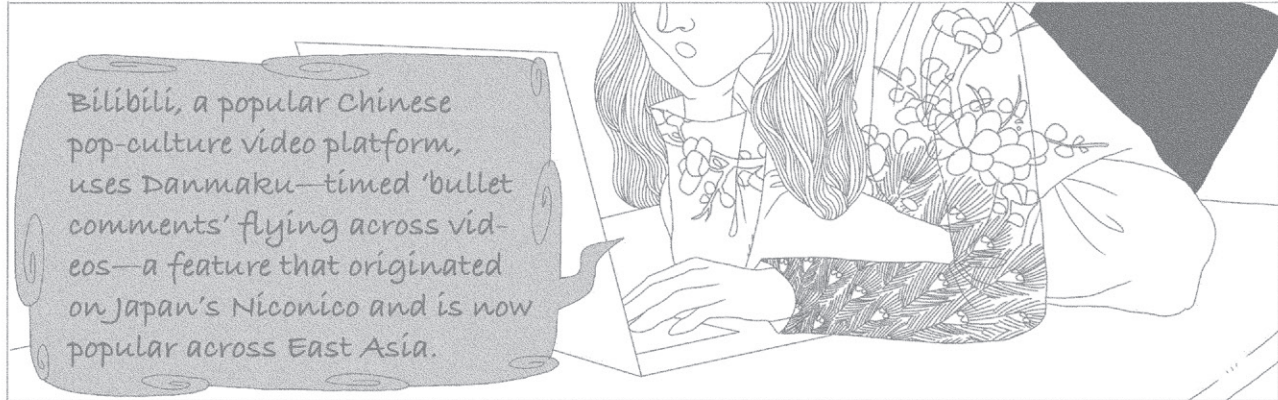


So many foreign shows, but no Chinese dubs—I can't understand.

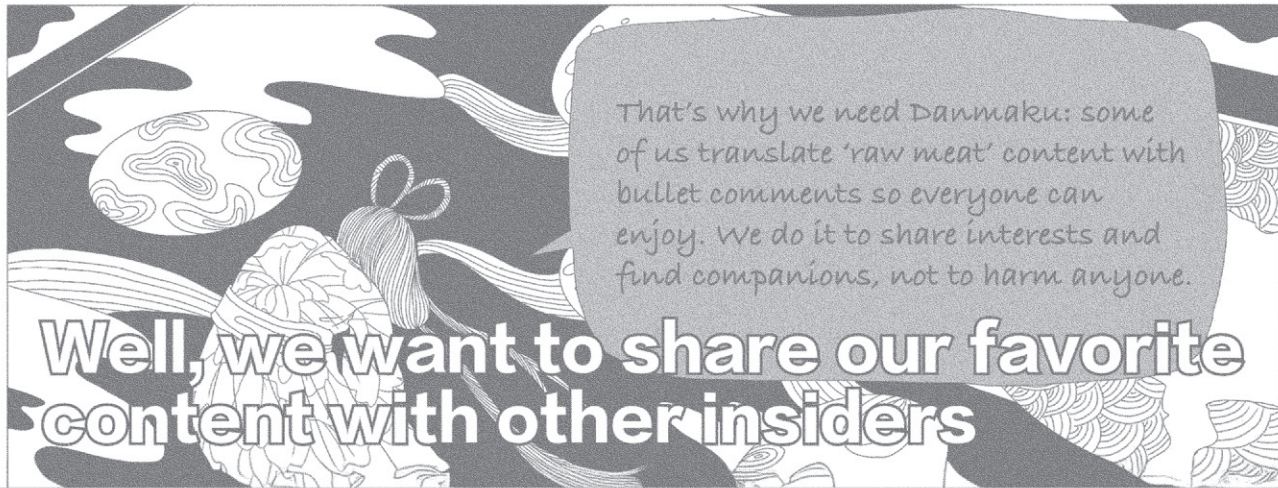


wait, what's that?

好喜欢哦




Bilibili, a popular Chinese pop-culture video platform, uses Danmaku—timed 'bullet comments' flying across videos—a feature that originated on Japan's Niconico and is now popular across East Asia.



That's why we need Danmaku: some of us translate 'raw meat' content with bullet comments so everyone can enjoy. We do it to share interests and find companions, not to harm anyone.

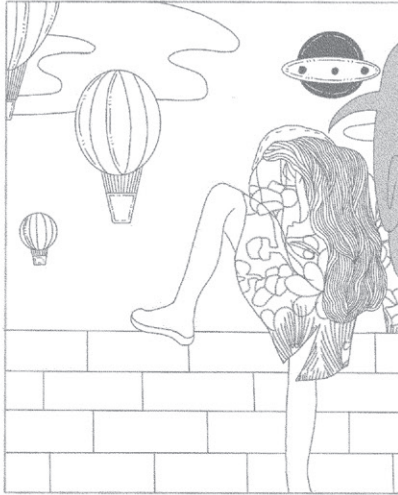
Well, we want to share our favorite content with other insiders

**Don't say bad words to zf
Even you type zf, they still know you
mean the government**




Most Chinese can't access YouTube or other foreign sites due to the Great Firewall, which blocks foreign information and internet tools.


We want to resist the Great Firewall



Many of us use VPNs to bypass the Great Firewall. The door is closed, but not locked.



Wow, more videos now have Chinese subtitles! I can understand them. Many volunteer groups in China translate foreign content and upload it with proper subtitles—not Danmaku—and they don't get paid.



I can watch my favorites, even if I don't understand!

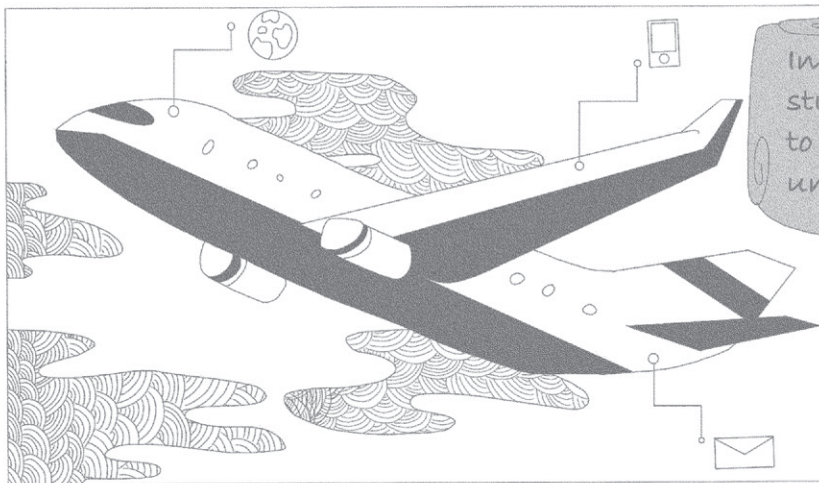


In our world, it's called "Generating electricity via love," where many of us differ from our real selves.



The longer I stay here, the less I need subtitles.

The administrator is gonna lock you in the little black room



In 2016, I went to the US to study, but stayed connected to China online, creating a unique sense of otherness.



We once said, "You can watch anything on Bilibili," but Chinese subtitle groups remain in a copyright grey zone, targeted by the government for translating unlicensed content.





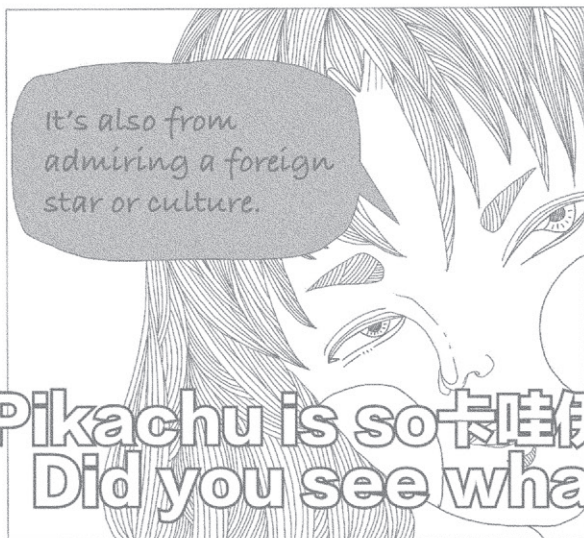
We just need love.
As only children, we
seek friends.



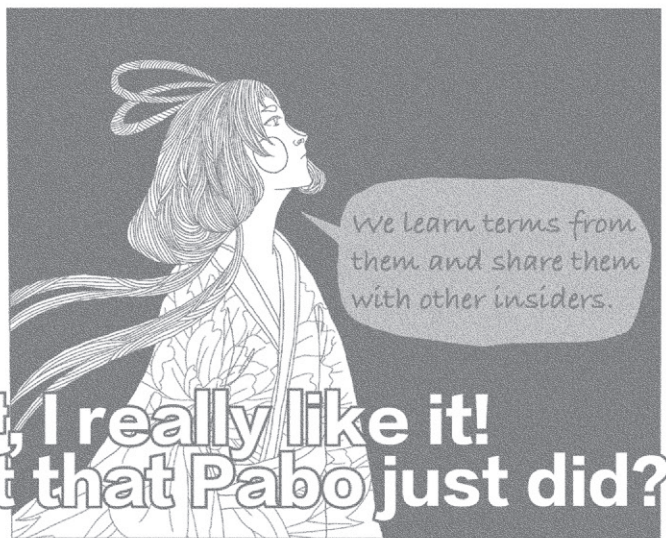
China's "study
abroad, return
freely" and one-
child policies shape
urban Gen Z.



It's hard to find real-world friends with the
same interests; we want people who watch the
same content.



It's also from
admiring a foreign
star or culture.



We learn terms from
them and share them
with other insiders.

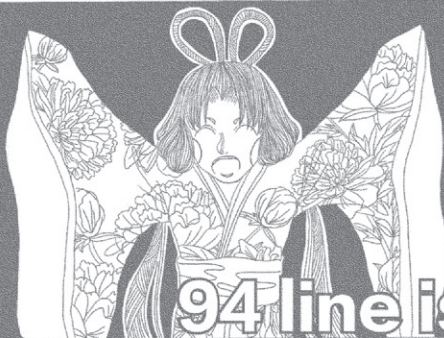
Pikachu is so卡哇伊, I really like it!
Did you see what that Pabo just did?



This song has super high 同歩率 with the scene!

The outsider comments on the use of language. They cannot understand the conversation.

We mix foreign languages with Chinese—our code, our bond, our shared world.



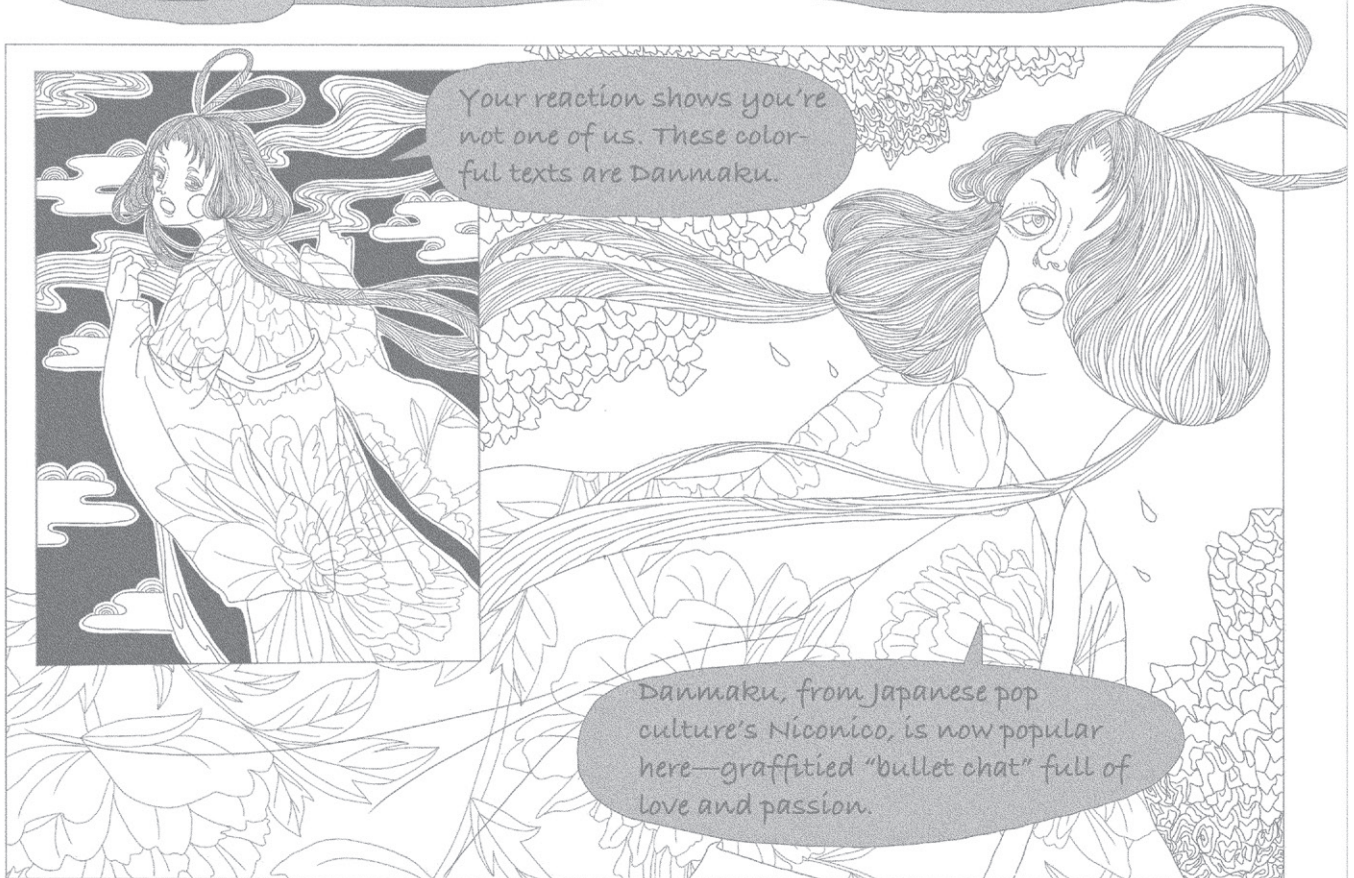
We don't expect you to join. Pass the questions, you're in; fail, you're out.

94 line is so adorable!

Sazae-san is played on which TV Station?

- A. CCTV,
- B. Fuji TV,
- C. Television Kanagawa
- D. Kagoshima Television Station.

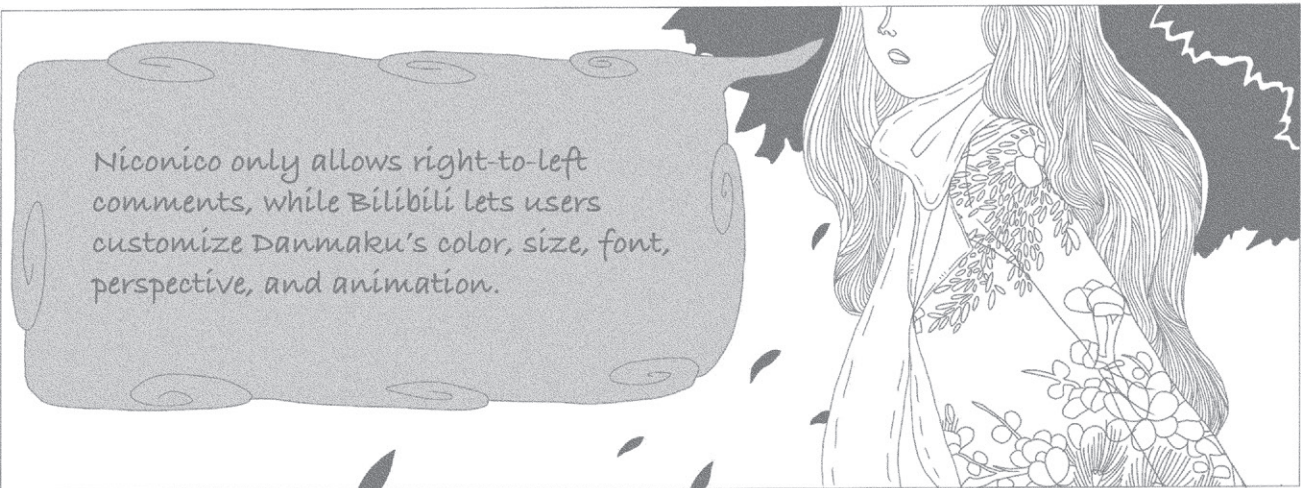
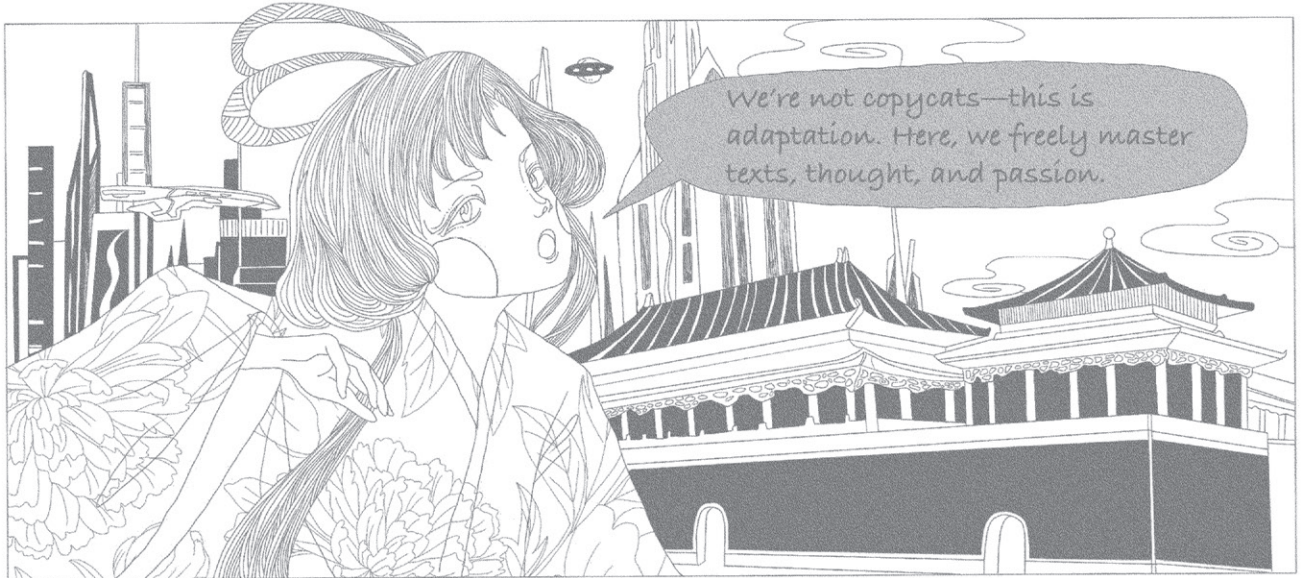
The outsider cycles through 'Sazae-san' CCTV, Fuji TV, Television Kanagawa or Kagoshima Television Station. They struggle to comprehend any of the dialogue because of language barrier.



Danmaku, from Japanese pop culture's Niconico, is now popular here—graffitied "bullet chat" full of love and passion.



Comments usually move right to left, following Japanese custom, though Bilibili differs from Niconico.





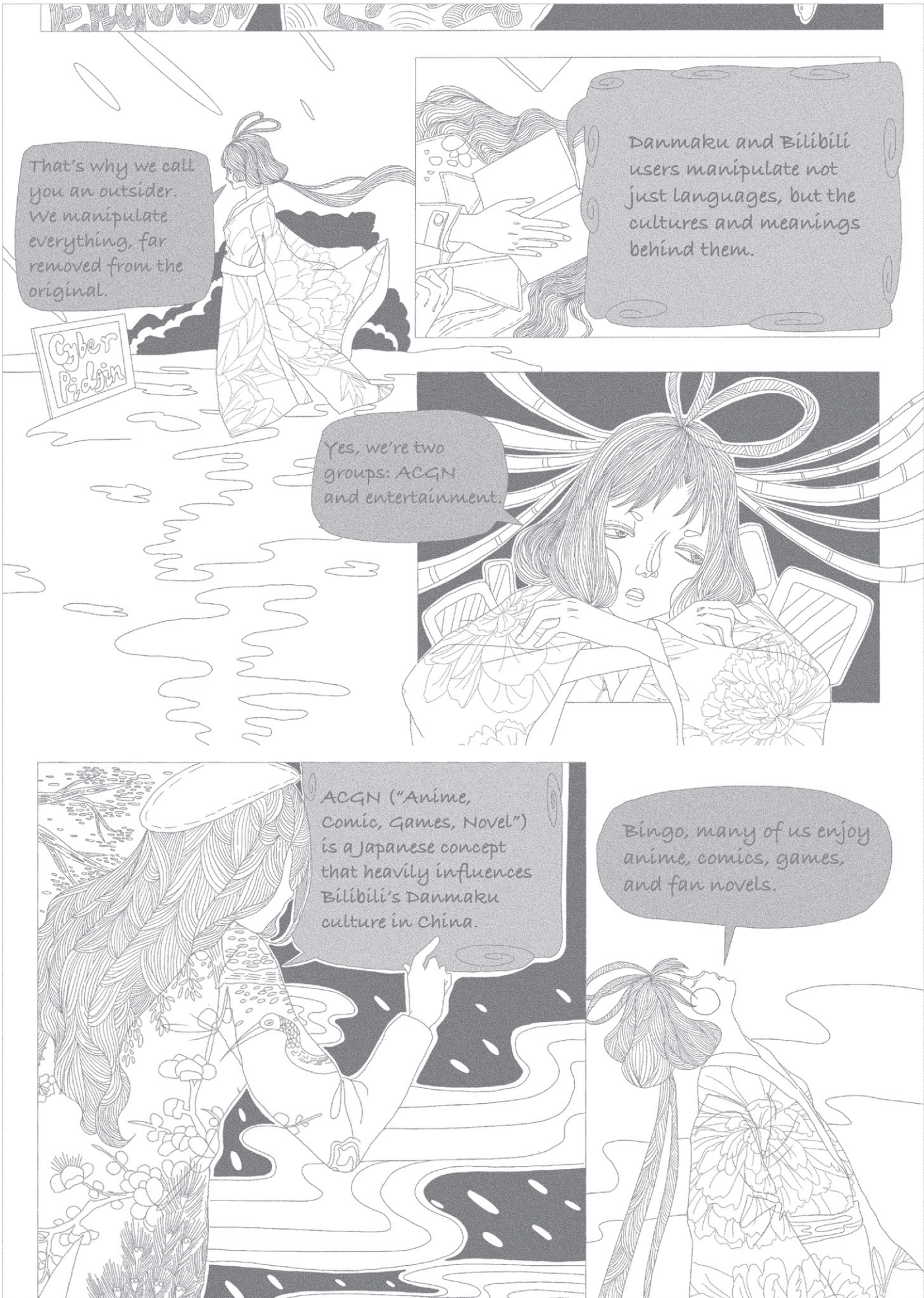
We're not aliens—just blending foreign languages and our mother tongue.



Japanese, Korean, English. All of these are normal languages, people use them in daily lives in other parts of the world.



This is our cyber-pidgin, blurring meaning to confuse outsiders.



That's why we call you an outsider. We manipulate everything, far removed from the original.

Cyber Pictin

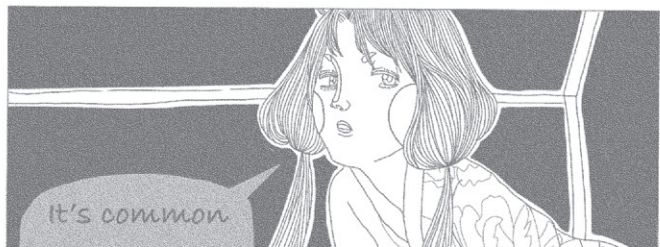
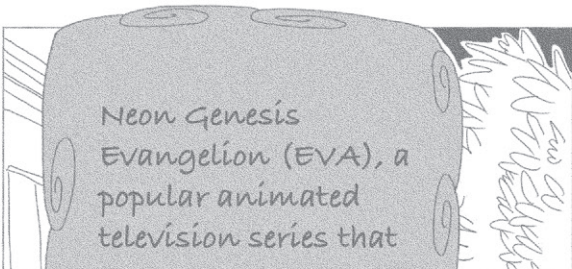
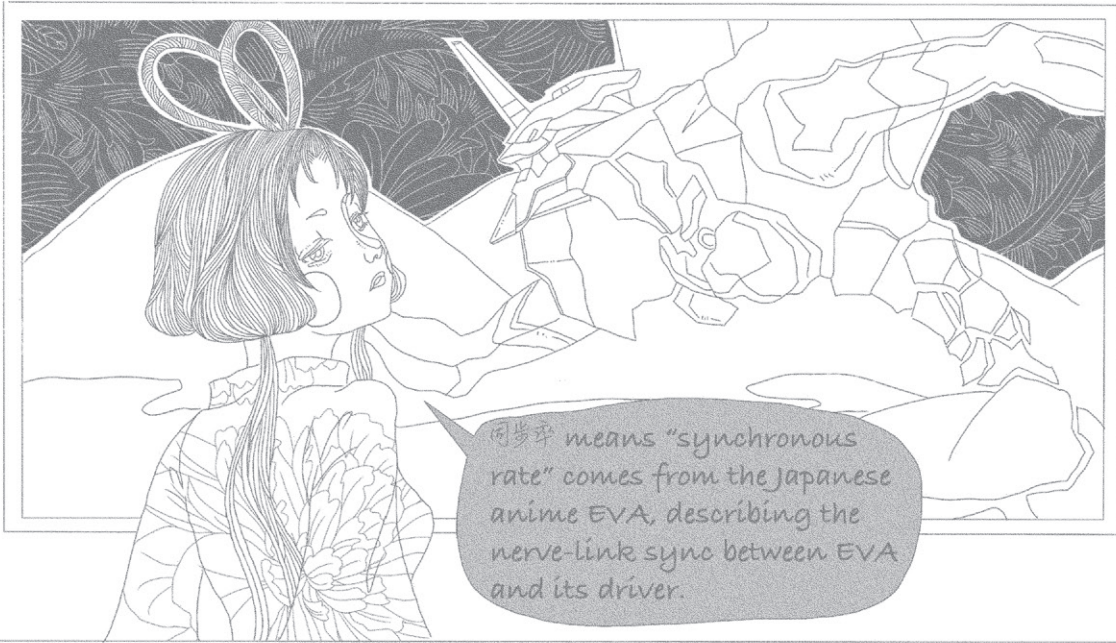
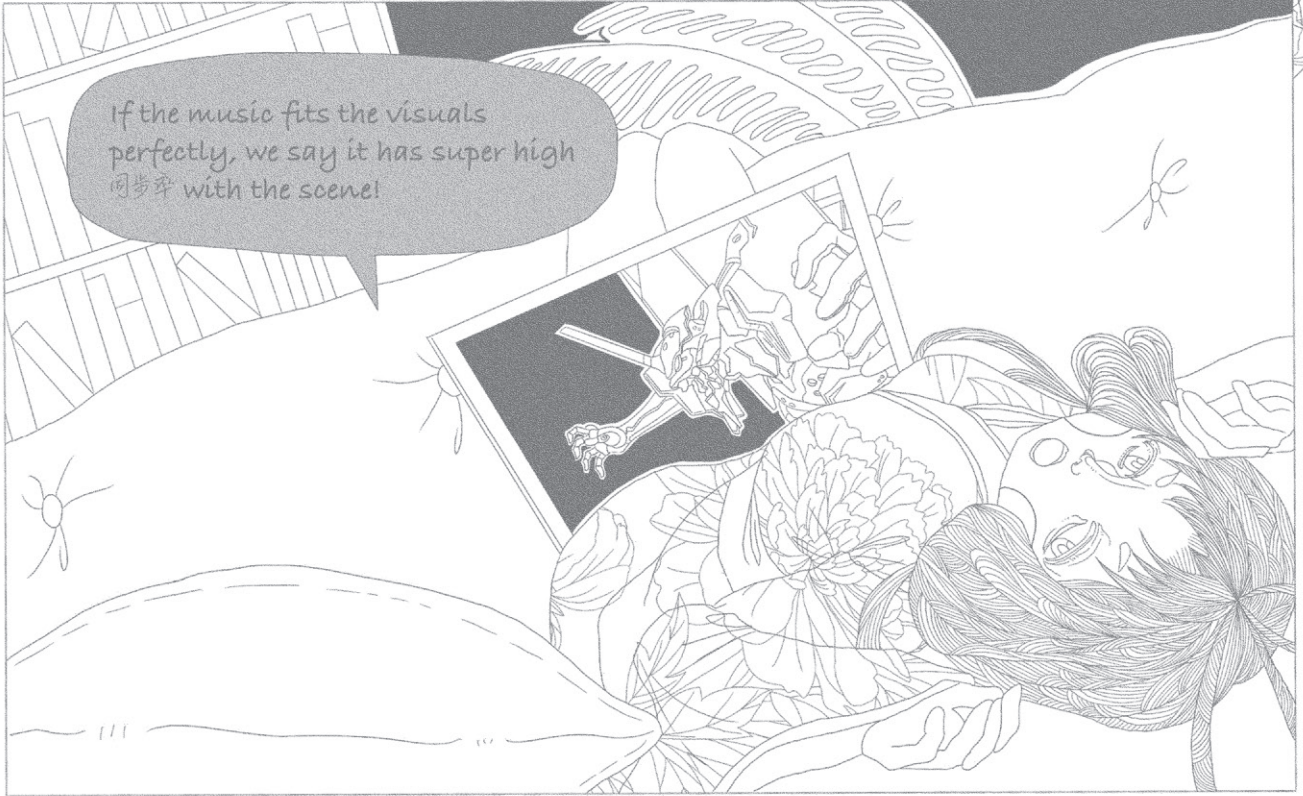
Danmaku and Bilibili users manipulate not just languages, but the cultures and meanings behind them.

Yes, we're two groups: ACGN and entertainment.

Bingo, many of us enjoy anime, comics, games, and fan novels.

ACGN ("Anime, Comic, Games, Novel") is a Japanese concept that heavily influences Bilibili's Danmaku culture in China.

Bingo, many of us enjoy anime, comics, games, and fan novels.

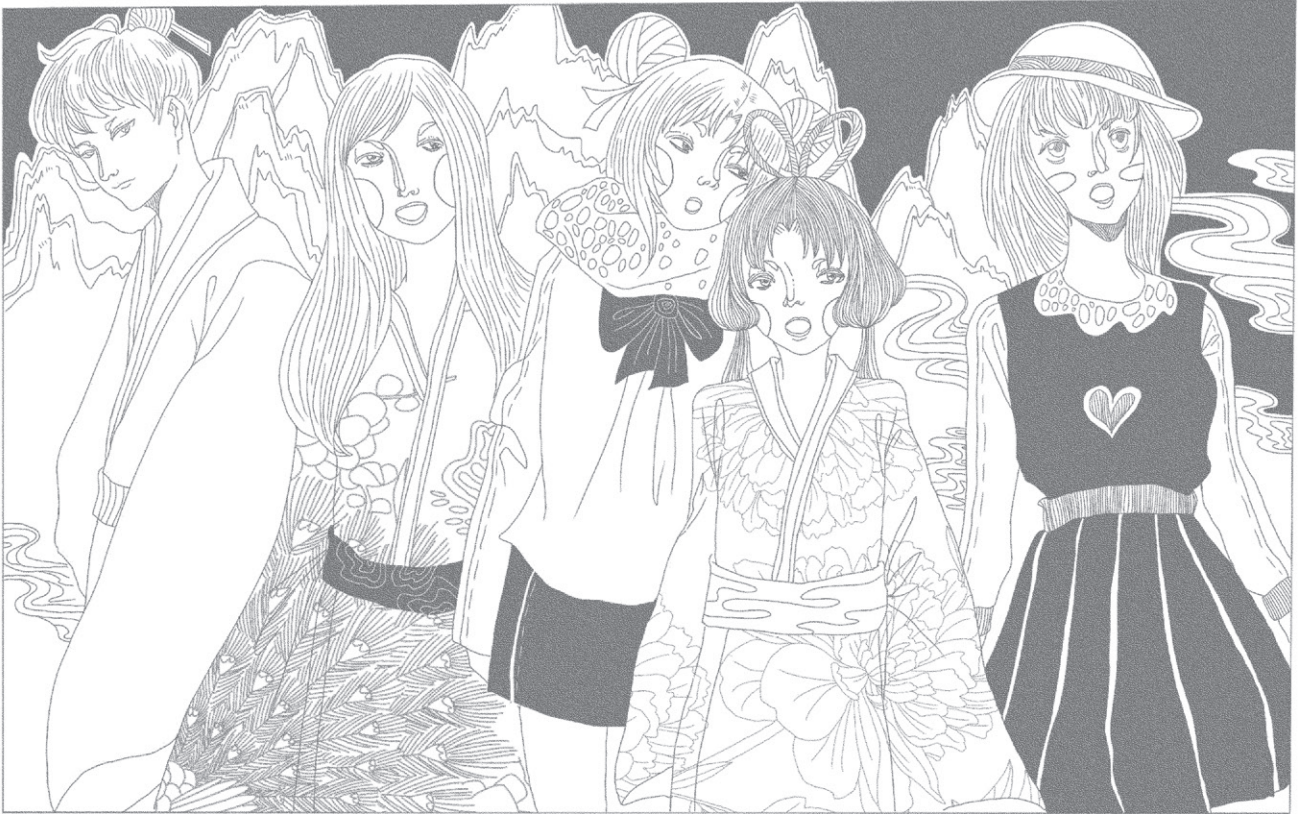


ran on Japanese television in the mid-1990s during the midst of Japan's economic collapse.

The memory of the internet is only 24 hours

knowledge for us.

This is how we express love; we know the content well, care more about its popularity.



Danmaku commodifies users' emotions and sociality.

233333, www—
OK, let me explain.
23333 is "lol" in China; www is "lol" in Japan.



We feel this intimate relationship from sending bullet chats



The amount of bullet chats show its popularity

Entertainment cyber-pidgin divides into smaller circles.

We participate in the conversation



We make friends with other insiders

Haha, yeah—some from J-pop, others from K-pop.

Some English terms exist

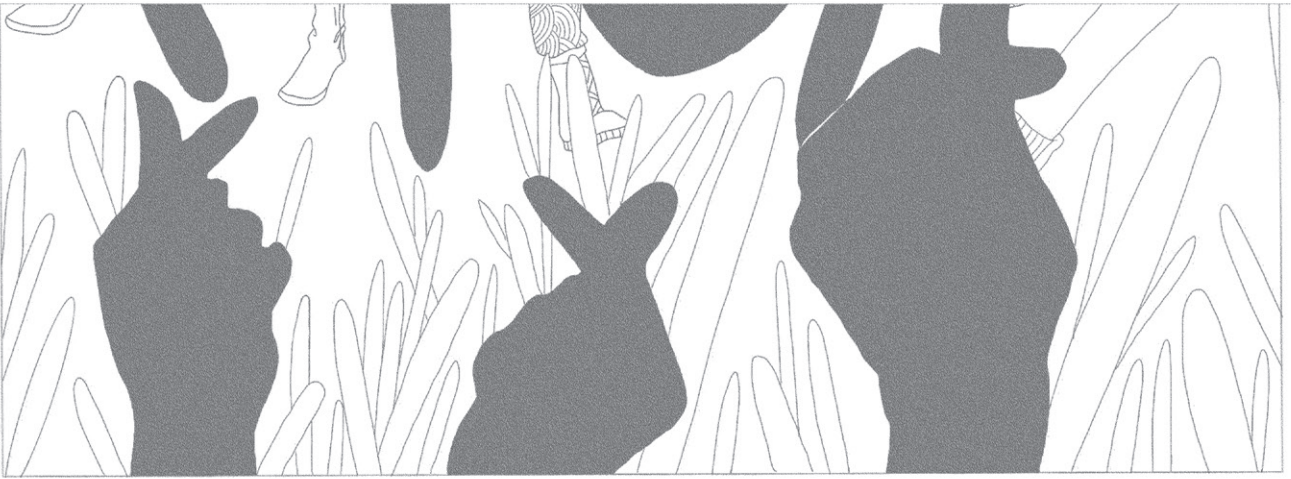
with altered meanings.

She wins in the 總選舉!
I can listen to her new songs!

Today, Chinese pop culture is shaped by Japanese, Korean, and indirectly Western influences.

I really like that 忙內, he is so cute!

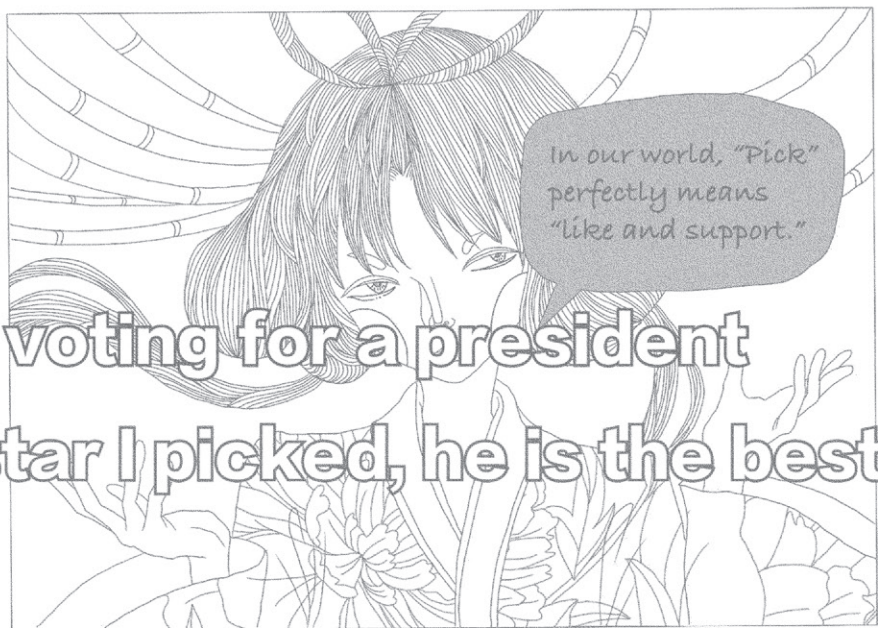
K-pop is a hybrid of pop, rock, hip-hop, R&B, and electronic music with strong visuals. Fans in our Korean-related circle speak their own way.





It relates to AKB48
選抜総選挙, a fan vote
started in 2009 where
top members get to sing
the group's new song.

AKB48, a 2005
Japanese idol group
with 130+ singers,
helped Japan surpass
the U.S. as the world's
largest music market
in the early 2010s.



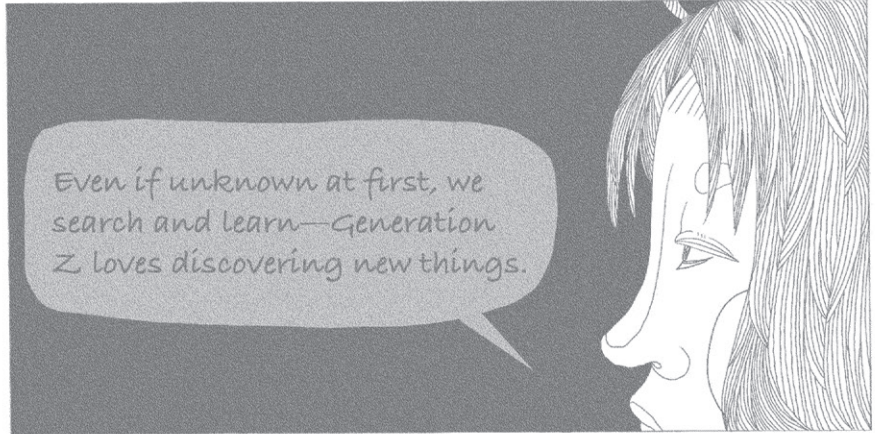
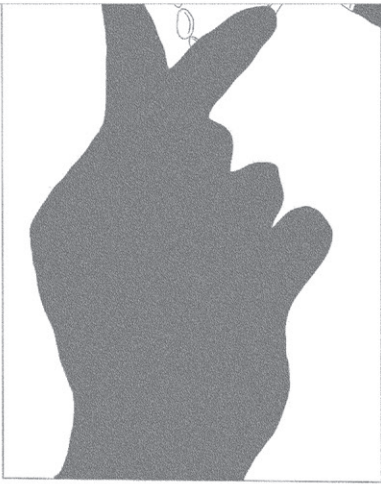
In our world, "Pick"
perfectly means
"like and support."

It almost like voting for a president
This is the star I picked, he is the best!



It comes from Produce
101, a South Korean
reality show where 11
members are selected
from 101 trainees.

Every day, there's someone going
on and off stage — No Sense



Even if unknown at first, we search and learn—Generation Z loves discovering new things.

Love is an momentary feeling

Don't the stage lights just turn on and off



Who am I? I'm Mei Yiyu, a virtual persona built from parts of Mei Feixue, existing for over ten years.

I “宅” in libraries, “嗑” Japanese idols, “开” concerts, read fanfic, “bb” online, play piano, sing, and post fan art.

I exist across many platforms—Bilibili, Weibo, Lofter, Instagram, DeviantArt, Pixiv, Niconico, AO3, and more. My identity keeps changing; I'm an ongoing process with multiple “mes.”

I enjoy “彩虹屁” on my work but dislike “吐槽.” Most of my works are anime and idol illustrations, plus mash-up videos. (23333)

I am also Mei Feixue, born and raised in China—Feixue means flying snowflakes, Mei means plum blossom.

I've toured many countries, gaining a deep appreciation for diverse art and design.

I've long been interested in mass media and internet culture. My work explores adaptation, collective ideas, and shifting identities through design, observing culture online.



I am Mei Yiyu, Mei Feixue—everywhere, in many worlds.

I am ever-changing, adaptable, displaced, and a prototype—an evolving, elastic flame of technology and social change.

I know what I love is a persona, not real. Behind it is helplessness and grief—silence, reflection, otherness, an alternate reality.

(Error sound)

We are very sorry

This video may not play properly for the following reasons

Video link failed
Video content is
not appropriate
Uploader deleted
the video
Copyright issue

--Bilibili

copyrights and references

copyright and image references

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