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## **On the Dynamic Interplay of Macro and Micro Contexts in Translation:**

### **A Case Study of Cardi B's Subtitled Chinese Bullet-Screen Videos on Bilibili during the China-United States Tensions of Trump's Presidency**

#### **Abstract**

This study explores the dynamic interplay between macro and micro contexts in Chinese fans' translations of Cardi B-related videos on Bilibili. Referring to the concept of translation as a cluster concept, Cardi B is considered as a dynamic source cluster for interlingual and intersemiotic translations, leading to the evolving formulation of the micro context surrounding the subtitled bullet-screen videos. Given the frequent changes in the micro context, two relatively stable components of the macro context are initially identified for the navigation of the corresponding micro contextual elements. The macro context includes the socio-political component of tensions in the China-United States relationship during the COVID-19 period of Trump's presidency, and the subcultural component of Bilibili as a carnival. By analysing the interaction between macro and micro contexts within the target culture, as exemplified in the translator's additions and target audiences' on-screen *danmu* comments, this study concludes that the macro and micro contexts are in dynamic interplay when the source cluster and the translation workflow have an evolving nature. Moreover, the two contexts are no longer set at opposing ends of a spectrum. Instead, an intermediate zone is bridged by *danmu* comments, blurring the boundaries between macro and micro contexts in cyberspace.

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Keywords: macro context, micro context, *danmu*, bullet-screen video, translation as a cluster concept

## 1. Introduction

The context holds “paramount importance” (von Flotow 2005, 39) in the creation and reception of translation. In Translation Studies (TS hereinafter), the emphasis on context was relatively low before the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Baker 2006). Consequently, scholars such as Eugene A. Nida (2001), Juliane House (2006), Anita Fetzer (2007) and Yves Gambier (2021), alongside numerous others, have contributed extensively to the theoretical (re)evaluation of the concept of context and its integration into discussions surrounding translatorship, texts and readers in TS. Context is defined as “all the conditions affecting the production, the publication, the dissemination, the reception, the lack of reception, and the revival of a text” (von Flotow 2005, 44). For TS scholars, the interplay between text and context is mutually constitutive in the process of meaning-making, both within the source and target cultures (e.g., Baños-Piñero and Díaz-Cintas 2015; Zemni, Awwad and Bounaas 2020).

In TS, when considering context as an integrated entity that varies across cultures, a dichotomy emerges: the source context, within which the source text is produced and interpreted, and the target context, wherein translations can give rise to novel expressions and expanded interpretations of the text (Pause 1983; Gambier and Gottlieb 2001). When conceiving context as an assemblage of diverse contextual parameters within a culture or society, whether in the source or target context, Douglas K. Hartman (1992), in the field of educational studies, introduced both the linguistic and sociolinguistic/sociocultural

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perspectives for approaching context. From the linguistic perspective, context encompasses both the surrounding textual elements of a written linguistic unit within the text under consideration and those that can be traced back to other texts previously encountered by the reader (ibid., 301). From the sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspective, context encapsulates “the historically evolved and socially determined governing ideas, relations, and practices – for appropriating, articulating, and transposing texts” (ibid., 302).

In alignment with Hartman’s typology, Valeria Franzelli (2008) and Hannah Silvester (2018a) in TS have employed the concepts of micro context and macro context to investigate translation processes and translators’ decision-making within transcultural subtitling scenarios. The inspiration behind their use of these concepts in TS can be traced back to Gambier’s discussions (2008; 2010) of translation strategies and tactics operating at both the micro and macro levels. According to Gambier (2010, 416), “global strategy (macro-level or cultural and sociological levels) affects what is done at the micro-level (local strategy or textual and cognitive levels) at different phases of the translation process.” These global strategies are influenced by “economic, cultural, political, ideological, linguistic factors and technical constraints,” while local strategies encompass changes in language register, textual structure and the form of signs (ibid., 416). Inspired by Gambier’s discussions, both Franzelli (2008) and Silvester (2018a) perceive micro context as diverse forms of signs (verbal, visual, or auditory) present in the source text (ST) and target text (TT) that collectively contribute to meaning-making. They consider macro context to be the socio-cultural-techno-political milieu that constrains translation processes, products and their micro context.

This micro-macro contextual lens is relatively holistic in terms of describing and

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analysing the dynamic and multifaceted context-text relationship involved in translation, providing a relatively comprehensive overview of how different constraints or norms affect meaning-making in translation processes (Silvester 2018a; Silvester 2018b; Gambier 2021). However, these discussions of micro and macro contexts mainly originate in cases of film translation, where the boundary between micro context (signs of a film as a multimodal text) and macro context (the socio-cultural-techno-political milieu) is relatively distinguishable, in contrast to their blurred boundary in the context of participatory social media translation, which will be further elaborated on in this study.

The participatory culture found on the internet and social media platforms democratises non-profitable cultural production by allowing users, whether professional or amateur, to engage in online projects (Jenkins 2006; Fuchs 2021). This participatory culture promotes the emergence and development of transformative subtitling practices conducted by the collaboration between producers and users, making subtitling a carnival that embraces popular and folkloric culture (Pérez-González 2013; Díaz-Cintas 2018). For instance, the *danmu* (*danmaku*, or bullet-screen comment) interface on some video-streaming platforms in China and Japan allows their audiences to post and read real-time comments on a playing video (see Figures 1–3). *Danmu* are “seemingly simultaneous in relation to the particular moment of viewing the time-shiftable, replayable video” (Steinberg 2017, 104). Through *danmu*, audiences can interact with both the video content and each other in a synchronised manner, creating a participatory co-viewing experience shared by nearly all the audiences (Fang et al. 2018). Each piece of *danmu* appears synchronously with the timeline of the video, allowing amateur subtitlers in the audience to collaboratively add subtitles while interacting

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with each other on the video screen in an entertaining manner (see Pérez-González 2020a; Yang Y. 2021). Added by audiences-as-subtitlers, *danmu* function as a paratext to the video, and their content sometimes reflects audiences' awareness of the source or target macro contexts, such as explaining the source cultural background to help other audiences appreciate foreign content. Therefore, *danmu* can be perceived as a form of textualized macro context for translation. Moreover, the "intersection of *danmu* and online videos creates a new, integrated text: the bullet-screen video," with *danmu* becoming the "organic textual components of the bullet-screen video" (Deng and Zhan 2022, 257). In this scenario, *danmu* serve as the micro context of the bullet-screen video, and the verbal signs provided by *danmu* work harmoniously with other signs within the video for meaning-making. *Danmu* thus transform bullet-screen videos into polyphonic cultural products that integrate the voices of the different contributors (e.g., the original producer, the translator and audiences) due to this "newer form of online collaborative translation" (Yang Y. 2020, 264). Consequently, the source video is recontextualised not only through translation but also through target audiences' online comments (also see Teng and Chan 2022).

Building upon Yuhong Yang's (2020) discovery of the dual textual identity of *danmu* (both paratextual and textual components of online subtitled bullet-screen videos), this study attempts to explore the dynamic interplay between micro and macro contexts in online translation, especially online fan audiovisual translation (AVT), involving amateur subtitlers and fan audiences, facilitated by *danmu*. The focus of this exploration rests on selected subtitled bullet-screen videos featuring fan-generated content related to the American rapper Cardi B. These videos are released through the CardiBArchive channel on Bilibili

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(YouTube's Chinese counterpart). Particular attention is given to examples with explicit ties to China-related themes from the channel. The primary objective of this paper is to examine how the macro social-political context and the macro cultural context undergo dynamic transformation into *danmu* that encapsulate a sense of carnivalesque laughter, thus becoming a component of the micro context within the subtitled videos.

Amidst the backdrop of COVID-19 and the China–United States trade war, events that transpired around 2020 during Trump's presidency, Cardi B expressed criticism of the American government while commending China for its governance and accomplishments. These pieces of content, among others, were subtitled and released by the CardiBArchive on Bilibili, catering to her Chinese fans for viewing and commentary. Through these subtitled bullet-screen videos on Bilibili, one can observe the dynamic interplay between the micro and macro contexts exhibited on the viewing screen. Notably, Bilibili assigns distinct “BV numbers” to each video for indexing purposes, allowing its users to conveniently search for specific videos. For the sake of facilitating the retrieval of data by other researchers, the case studies in this paper will provide the BV numbers of selected short videos.

This study begins by conceptualising the CardiBArchive translation as a form of fan AVT, characterised by a dynamic source cluster, which constitutes the ST to be translated. Given the dynamic nature of the ST, the composition of the macro and micro contexts is then portrayed as continually evolving, thereby fostering a dynamic interplay between these two contexts. The subsequent case studies aim to illustrate this dynamism between the two contexts by navigating two major macro contextual factors associated with the subtitled bullet-screen videos: the tensions within the China-United States relationship during Trump's

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presidency and the impact of COVID-19 (primarily from 2020 to 2021) forming the macro political context; and the readerly carnivalesque commenting environment of *danmu* on Bilibili constituting the macro subcultural context. This study then demonstrates how these two major macro-contextual factors influence the micro context of these subtitled videos. This micro context encompasses video titles, the translator's online posts and *danmu* left by the target audiences. Finally, this study investigates how *danmu* textualize these two macro-contextual factors into verbal signs that become integral components of the micro context. These *danmu* collaborate with other signs within the subtitled videos to facilitate meaning-making. This study concludes that reader reception, as embodied in *danmu*, engages in the construction of both the macro and micro contexts of the subtitled bullet-screen videos. Importantly, these two contexts are no longer set at the opposite ends of a spectrum. Instead, an intermediate zone is forged by *danmu* that blurs the boundaries between the macro and micro contexts.

## **2. Contributors to the dynamism of macro and micro contexts: the CardiBArchive translation as fan AVT, and Cardi B as a changing source cluster**

The rapper Belcalis Almanzar, also known as Cardi B, is labelled as a feminist social figure. As a pop culture icon, Cardi B uses her music and social media content to interact with and impact on her global fan base. Sherri Williams (2017, 1115) commended her active involvement in social activities, attributing her actions to her hip-pop feminist core believe in “bringing wreck,” which is “resisting traditional ways and seeing things and reclaiming and recreating spaces.” Beyond her feminist advocacy, this “bringing wreck” spirit is also evident



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in her compassionate support for marginalised groups, the broader public and individuals of colour. For example, she has drawn attention to the victims of the Russian-Ukraine conflict and criticised racial discrimination targeting Chinese people during COVID-19. In terms of her own personal style in media content, her Afro-Latina heritage and experience as a rapper are reflected in her “thick accent,” vulgar language and emotional behaviour online. These features of being “real,” coupled with her music, attitude and other online content, have contributed to her popularity as a global superstar.

Regarding Cardi B’s Chinese fan base, also known as the Chinese Cardigang, the CardiBArchive is one of the influential social media accounts dedicated to spreading Cardi B-related information in Chinese translation, including photos, interviews, textual posts, videos and fan-created multimedia material. The CardiBArchive created its Weibo account, Twitter’s Chinese counterpart, in October 2019 with the support of Cardi B’s photographer Florence Ngala. In its introductory statement, the CardiBArchive (2019) positions itself as the “latest media update page” and a “collaborative account” instead of a personal account. On Weibo, the CardiBArchive’s posts include written texts (news updates, event introductions, etc.), photos and videos. Later in December 2019, the CardiBArchive created its account on Bilibili, which features ACG (Anime, Comics, and Games) culture and the interface of *danmu*. On Bilibili, the majority of the CardiBArchive’s posts are subtitled short videos featuring Cardi B, including live streams, TV show appearances, advertisements, recorded concert excerpts and fan-generated videos. These videos are generally short, ranging from a few seconds to several minutes in duration. Exceptions are translated interviews or full concerts, which might extend to half an hour or even longer.

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The CardiBArchive translation falls into the category of “fan AVT.” According to Tessa Dwyer (2018) and Luis Pérez-González (2020b), fan AVT refers to a form of non-profitable and amateur AVT by fans for fans through online collaboration. The CardiBArchive mainly serves Chinese-speaking fans of Cardi B, so the translations are primarily in Chinese, with occasional incorporation of English terms, such as international fashion and cosmetic brand names, that are left untranslated. So, their translations are more “audience-friendly” for Chinese-speaking individuals who possess a degree of proficiency in English.

To facilitate discussion, this paper employs the concept of “online hyperreal social self-translation practice” to conceptualise the translation activities undertaken by the CardiBArchive. According to Renée Desjardins (2019, 163), hyperreal social self-translation practice emerges when the artist’s background team is “intentionally self-effacing to reinforce...the authenticity of the account owner.” The CardiBArchive has its own distinct collective translator profile perceived as a singular translatorship in cyberspace. The term “the translator” is thus used in the following sections to denote the collaborative entity of the CardiBArchive. This conceptualisation is geared towards acknowledging the intricate and multifaceted nature of the fan group’s efforts, which combine to create a coherent and cohesive presence in the digital sphere.

A notable characteristic of the translation workflow employed by the translator is its semi-autonomy. Unlike conventional translation scenarios, where a fixed text or video is assigned to translators, the fan AVT of their idol’s activities hinges on the dynamism of Cardi B’s public engagements. The availability of source material is contingent upon Cardi B’s active contributions. Consequently, when Cardi B actively produces new work, more sources

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will be available for the Chinese fan translator to process. However, when Cardi B is not active or when the translator desires to offer more than mere translation, this may lead to subtitled short videos from various sources. For instance, the CardiBArchive uploaded seven short videos in August 2022. Five of them were translations of Cardi B's original content, including an interview where she shared her experiences as a stripper and a clip showcasing her life with her daughter. There were also two videos created by the translator: one commemorating the second anniversary of Cardi B's song *WAP*, and the other providing an account of the feud between Cardi B and singer Bella Poarch. This shows that there is a dynamic and evolving source cluster that is continuously engaging with the translator.

Maria Tymoczko (2007) introduces the cluster concept in TS to define translation. Acknowledging the “inconsistent and contradictory practices of translation within and across cultures” (ibid., 84), Tymoczko suggests viewing translation as a cluster concept that is “not based on fixed features but instead on holistically structured activities” (ibid., 88). She posits that translation should be defined from a *posteriori* perspective, based on actual translation practices within a particular culture. With this cluster concept, TS scholars can thus “only describe the similarities or relationships between translation phenomena” (Marais 2014, 87). This concept enables us to conceptualise the CardiBArchive translation as a complex and clustered translation phenomenon, encompassing elements of both interlingual translation (translating Cardi B's interviews) and intersemiotic translation (e.g., narrating and describing Cardi B's feuds in videos). On a superficial level, the “STs” for the CardiBArchive translation are multimodal and polysemiotic, ranging from video sources to physical events like feuds. A closer examination underscores their commonality in disseminating information about Cardi

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B. This insight highlights Cardi B herself as the primary source cluster for the translation. As an active participant in various fields and semiotic realms, Cardi B's constant engagement in meaning-making serves as the ST for the subtitled videos on Bilibili.

The CardiBArchive translation transcends mere literal translation. It involves (re)assembling modes and signs, not only in the form of literally translating the source to the target but also narrating and describing the source as a social entity in the translator's own utterances. Though this cluster conceptualisation reflects the translator's subjectivity in terms of material selection and translation decisions, this subjectivity is intrinsically linked to the meaning-making process of the celebrity who forms the source cluster. This dynamic interplay between source and translator renders the translation workflow semi-autonomous, where Cardi B's ongoing contributions drive the creation of content while allowing the translator to shape their narrative within the bounds of the source material.

The cluster concept also aids in perceiving individual subtitled videos within the same social media channel as integral parts of a larger whole. To illustrate, if we analogise the celebrity (the source cluster) as a book or a serial, then each subtitled video within the CardiBArchive, complete with its titles and introductions contributed by the translator, can be envisioned as a translated chapter – collectively forming a comprehensive translation product. Zooming in on a specific subtitled video within the CardiBArchive translation project on Bilibili, all other subtitled videos are components of the micro context surrounding that particular video. The nature of this micro context is fundamentally dynamic and evolving, shaped by Cardi B's ongoing career activities and the translator's continual translation efforts and video uploads on the platform. Moreover, as more Chinese-speaking Bilibili users engage

with and appreciate the CardiBArchive translation, the growing number of on-screen *danmu*, as textual components of the bullet-screen videos, add an additional layer of complexity to the developing micro context of the CardiBArchive translation. The micro context of the CardiBArchive translation is thus unstable and dynamic.

This evolving and dynamic nature of the micro context in the CardiBArchive translation is more apparent when viewed through the lens of time as a parameter. For any specific video from the CardiBArchive translation, changes within its micro context (comprising other videos and *danmu*) can be observed through the translator's regular video updates and the audiences' real-time comments through *danmu*. In other words, changes within the micro context can be identified daily, weekly and monthly. These changes are multidirectional; for instance, a newly translated video might feature a Cardi B concert or introduce her favourite type of milk tea. This could prompt Chinese-speaking viewers to comment on the concert's quality or share their tea and coffee preferences through *danmu*. When focusing on any one of these videos, the others automatically become the micro context of the focused video. Yet a study that centres on the milk tea video as the micro context may not effectively help to analyse the aesthetics of the concert. This underscores the approach proposed by Baker (2006), which suggests a dynamic perspective when studying context in TS and advocates selecting relevant components from each context for analysis. Given the constant changes within the micro context of the CardiBArchive translation, this study initially identifies two relatively stable components of the macro context.<sup>1</sup> These include the socio-political context

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<sup>1</sup> Compared with the rapid changes within the micro context, the macro context indeed appears to exhibit a greater degree of stability. However, it is crucial to recognize that this

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involving the tensions between China and the United States during Trump's presidency and COVID-19, as well as the enduring subcultural context characterized by the carnivalesque nature of Bilibili and *danmu*. These components have developed over years and exert a direct and lasting influence on the CardiBArchive translation on Bilibili. Further elaboration on these components will follow. Based on these two relatively stable macro contextual components, this study selects and analyses relevant counterparts within the micro context of the CardiBArchive translation. This approach allows a focused exploration of the translation's interaction with the broader socio-political and subcultural contexts while acknowledging the ever-changing dynamics of the micro context.

### **3. Macro context of the CardiBArchive translation: Bilibili as an online carnival and the tensions in the China-United States relationship**

#### *3.1 Subcultural component of the macro context: Bilibili as an online carnival in China*

Introduced by the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, the concept of carnival refers to “a second world and a second life outside officialdom” (Bakhtin 1984, 6) where individuals engage and coexist in a “utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (ibid., 9). A carnival is a counter-concept to the established officialdom, which represents laws, rules, hierarchy, seriousness and completeness (Lachmann 1988–1989). People in their everyday official lives may find themselves constrained in expressing their thoughts, leading to

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does not imply the macro context remains perpetually static and unchanging. As the eventual conclusion of this paper underscores, the interplay between the micro and macro contexts is inherently dynamic.

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feelings of depression, fear or sadness. However, “during carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom” (Bakhtin 1984, 7). As a result, a carnival is a celebration by and for the people. Traditional social identities and hierarchies are temporarily suspended, as shown by clowns mocking the king. All participants enjoy the atmosphere of freedom and laughter at the carnival equally, and there is no division between performers and spectators. Individuals both watch and are watched by their peers, and they gaily present their creativity, imagination and thought, regardless of whether or not these ideas and expressions are considered vulgar. Carnival thus represents “collective spirit and utopian public spaces” (Wall and Thomson 1993, 55) and it is “a means for displaying otherness” (Holquist 2002, 86).

According to David Kurt Herold and Peter Marolt (2011), online China is a carnival where the established rules and moral standards that govern individuals’ offline lives are temporarily set aside. Based on this concept, Xianwei Wu (2020) conceptualises Bilibili, a component of the online Chinese landscape, as a carnival without any seriousness in its language use and social interactions, evident in both *danmu* and the content of online videos hosted on the platform. This lack of seriousness does not imply unrestricted freedom of expression since Bilibili asks users for politeness in their videos and comments. Consequently, although Bilibili as a carnival has created a playful and relatively free space for its users, taboo language and explicit expressions are not entirely welcomed on it. As a result, some vulgar terms in Cardi B’s words, like “f\*\*k” and “sh\*t” are often omitted or not fully translated in the subtitles (see Figures 1 and 2). Another contributing factor to the conceptualisation of Bilibili as a carnival is the playful and carnivalesque language used

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within its *danmu* interface. The broad participation of grassroots participants in *danmu* makes Bilibili a carnival, characterized by the incorporation of comic imagery, ironic and humorous expressions, and relatively impolite words into *danmu* (Wang 2021; Deng and Zhan 2022; Zhou 2022).

Within the overarching carnivalesque macro context of Bilibili, average Chinese users can express their ideas through video-making and commenting. Unlike the stringent rules that often govern video production in the Chinese film or television industries, Bilibili offers a platform where users-as-producers are not bound by strict regulations regarding video production and subtitling. One such carnivalesque example that defies the conventional rules of video production is the mixed use of horizontal and vertical formats for short videos in the CardiBArchive translation (see Figures 1 and 2). The subtitled videos are sometimes produced in a vertical layout to accommodate the screens of smartphones. In the case of Figure 1, the original vertical format has been adapted into a horizontal layout with a black background extended to the edges of the screen. While this adjustment may result in a relatively reduced image of Cardi B within the video, it enhances the visibility of the subtitles. This approach demonstrates the flexibility and creativity that users can exercise in reshaping the presentation of translated content. The playful manipulation of video formats in this way contributes to the carnivalesque macro subcultural context of Bilibili, where norms and conventions are challenged to create unique and engaging user-generated content that defies traditional boundaries and expectations. The Chinese-speaking fan audiences of Cardi B, however, are not bothered by the fact that the image of their beloved idol is reduced. Instead, their *danmu* are mostly related to the content of the video. In this case, at least, it seems that



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the target audience of short videos on social media is more tolerant of video layout adaptation and “unconventional subtitles,” which, in turn, confirms the translator’s free and creative manipulation of the source, as can be seen in the following sub-sections.

Another carnivalesque feature of the CardiBArchive translation is the element of “casualness” in subtitling. For instance, Chinese film translations often adhere to one-line subtitles with a maximum of thirteen characters per line; moreover, standard Mandarin Chinese is often used in official subtitling, resulting in the possible loss of language variety in officially subtitled films in China (see Yu 2013). As depicted in Figures 1 and 2, however, the translator challenges established conventions by frequently exceeding word and sentence limits, and even employs subtitles of various colours. Furthermore, the Sichuanese dialect has been used in the translation as opposed to the dominance of standard Mandarin Chinese in official subtitling practice. The inclusion of the Sichuanese word “为啥子 (*wei sha zi* in Chinese *pinyin*, meaning ‘why’)” in the subtitle of Figure 2, rather than the standard Mandarin Chinese “为什么 (*wei shen me* in Chinese *pinyin*),” exemplifies this subversive linguistic strategy. Similarly, the Sichuanese word “摆 (*bai* in Chinese *pinyin*)” is used to translate the verb “tell” in Figure 2, instead of the standard choice “讲 (*jiang* in Chinese *pinyin*).” These examples provide a glimpse into how Bilibili, functioning as an online carnival, challenges and subverts the conventional norms and practices associated with the production and subtitling of films and TV series in China. The playful and subversive approach taken by the translator underscores the platform’s ethos of embracing linguistic variety, experimentation, and creative departure from established conventions.

As demonstrated in the subsequent section dedicated to the analysis of the micro context,

the influence of this subcultural component of the macro context for the CardiBArchive translation is manifested in both the translator's creative and playful means of naming videos and the audiences' humorous comments through *danmu*.



Figure 1. Vertical video in horizontal adaptation in Video 1 (BV17E411j7WB)

(CardiBArchive 2020a)

[English source: If this coronavirus sh\*t is gonna be a couple-of-week type of sh\*t, or a couple-of-month type of sh\*t

Literal translation of Chinese subtitle: If this new coronavirus takes a few weeks or even a few months to settle down]

05:42



开头友好问候 含f量极高herfu\*kr 开局  
 绝对是个四川人 省流男的都不行  
 mo开幕见我be局  
 《该内容仅供娱乐请勿参考》



7.3万



996



1031



7470



5249

但是听卡某人给你摆  
 为啥子我不喜欢



CardiBArchive

✓已关注

51.5万粉丝

卡老师 Cardi B 的星座小讲堂 爱解读星座的卡卡子  
 一枚~ 37.8万播放

⚠ 该内容仅供娱乐，请勿轻信

点我发弹幕



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Figure 2. Vertical video layout kept in translation (BV1Ge4y1a74s) (CardiBArchive 2022)

[English source: Let me tell you why I am f\*\*king don't

Literal translation of Chinese subtitle: But listening to someone like Cardi explaining why I don't like it]

### *3.2 The socio-political context: China-United States tensions during Trump's presidency and COVID-19*

The socio-political component of the macro context plays a significant role in shaping the CardiBArchive translation, particularly in the timeline of video production and releases coinciding with the emergence of COVID-19. This timeframe corresponds with the Trump administration's tendency to attribute blame to China for the pandemic, contributing to the deterioration in attitudes towards China within American society. During this period, Cardi B expressed support for China in her online videos and live streams, voicing criticism of the negative sentiments surrounding China. This content was then subtitled and collected within the CardiBArchive translation, providing Chinese-speaking audiences with a platform for discussion linked to the China-United States relationship. This section provides an overview of this socio-political component of the macro context surrounding the production and reception of the CardiBArchive translation. Its influence on the construction of the micro context will be examined in detail in the next section.

With an "American First" foreign policy agenda, Trump launched a trade war against China in 2018 to protect the domestic market of America and to maintain America's influence

in the global arena (Boylan, McBeath and Wang 2021). In response to the Trump administration's rising tariffs and sanctions on Chinese companies, China also increased its tariffs on American goods, resulting in the continuing deterioration and bilateral tension in their relationship (Lee and Zulkefli 2021; Maya and Urdinez 2022). Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 crisis became a new battleground for this bilateral tension, characterised by mutual recriminations and sharp rhetoric (deLisle 2021). Trump used terms like "the Chinese virus" and "kung flu" to refer to the coronavirus. The direct result is that the China-United States relationship hit new lows during Trump's presidency (Glaser and Flaherty 2020). This heightened conflict influenced public sentiment within American society, leading to increased patriotic prejudice against individuals with Chinese or East Asian backgrounds both within and outside the United States. (Lin 2021; He and Xie 2022). On the Chinese side, the government sought "to enhance its 'discourse power' through 'wolf warrior' diplomacy" (Yang D. 2021, 7), which is a strong and confrontational style of diplomacy. Chinese media framed Trump's administration as irresponsible in handling the pandemic, leading to a sense of digital nationalism among the Chinese population (Zeng and Sparks 2020; Schneider 2021). According to Florian Schneider (2021, 48), Bilibili played a pivotal role in fostering this digital nationalism by "guiding online audiences to rally around the flag" to generate and spread nationalist content during COVID-19. This included content produced by both the Chinese authorities and individual users, as well as nationalist *danmu* on videos. Consequently, Bilibili contributed to the construction of the macro socio-political context in online China during the COVID-19 crisis.

Indeed, the dual nature of Bilibili as both a carnivalesque space and a nationalist public

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sphere played a significant role in reflecting the macro context of the CardiBArchive translation. The carnivalesque atmosphere of Bilibili encourages playful and creative interactions, leading to the emergence of humorous content related to serious matters like the bilateral tension between China and the United States. This fusion of seriousness and laughter in the macro context plays a significant role in the shaping of the micro context of the CardiBArchive translation.

#### **4. Interplay between macro and micro contexts in the translator's additions**

Cardi B's first pandemic-related short video was released by the CardiBArchive on Weibo on 11 March 2020. At that time, many in the United States did not fully grasp the seriousness of COVID-19. In response, Cardi B expressed her concern and urged everyone to pay attention to the issue. However, this video implicitly linked China with the origin of the coronavirus, so it aroused criticism from some Chinese internet users. They argued that a cautious and scientific investigation should be pursued instead of assigning blame without any proof. In response to the controversy, the CardiBArchive later posted a Weibo to clear up the misunderstandings on 11 March 2020, affirming Cardi B had always been friendly to Chinese culture. This might be one of the reasons that this particular video was not uploaded on the CardiBArchive's Bilibili channel. This case underscores the intricate interplay between macro-contextual factors and the resulting evolution of the micro context. Considering the growing sensitivities among Chinese audiences while witnessing the tensions between China and the United States, the translator had to post the clarification, leading to subtle yet discernible changes in the micro context's composition.

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Additionally, the translator posted the following subtitled videos, among many others, both on Bilibili and Weibo. It is noteworthy that the original videos, sourced from Cardi B's Instagram, lacked titles. Consequently, the translator provided Chinese titles for these videos, contributing to the contextualization and accessibility of the content for the Chinese-speaking audience.

Video 1 (BV17E411j7WB):

Chinese title: [中字]美国吹哨人卡碟碧 *Cardi B* 新冠卡哲第二弹 婆娘些我们南极见 (CardiBArchive 2020a)

Literal translation: [Chinese subtitle] American whistleblower *Cardi B* / *Cardi B*'s philosophy on COVID episode 2/ Bitches see you in Antarctica

Video 2 (BV1BC4y1s7y3):

Chinese title: [中字]卡老师 *Cardi B* 继续教育美国网友 (CardiBArchive 2020b)

Literal translation: [Chinese subtitle] Teacher Car *Cardi B* continues educating American netizens.

In videos 1 and 2, *Cardi B* criticised the Trump administration's epidemic prevention strategies and the American public's disregard of the seriousness of COVID-19, which is evident from the titles. As a source cluster, *Cardi B* produced these two videos in relation to the source socio-political context (i.e., the macro context) within the United States. These

titles capture the essence of Cardi B's sentiments by using terms like “吹哨人 [whistleblower],” “老师[teacher],” and “教育[educating]” to reflect the influence of the macro socio-political context on the content of the titles, which are a part of the micro context surrounding the videos. The term “whistleblower” bears significant relevance to the COVID-19 narrative, while the latter two terms reveal Cardi B's disappointment with the Trump administration's pandemic response. These added titles resonate with the target socio-political context, portraying Trump's government as irresponsible in its duty towards both its citizens and the global community. Furthermore, a carnival as the macro subcultural context within the target culture plays an influential role in shaping the added titles. For instance, Cardi B is playfully complimented as the “teacher” and her insights are regarded as “Cardi B's philosophy.” It is evident from these cases that both the source and the target macro contexts contribute to the translator's formulation of titles, which are perceived as a component of the micro context surrounding the subtitled videos. It is noteworthy that in comparison to the source macro context, the macro subcultural context of Bilibili distinctly stands out, infusing the added titles with an element of laughter.

Moreover, Bilibili allows video uploaders to assign tags to their videos, functioning as micro contextual elements that serve to categorize content and facilitate users in finding their preferred types of content. In Video 1, the translator chose “搞笑[funny],” “恶搞[spoof],” “娱乐[entertaining]” and “逗比[goofball]” to tag the video, resonating with the macro subcultural context of Bilibili. This tagging strategy essentially complements the platform's inherent carnivalesque environment. Furthermore, the translator introduced an additional layer to the micro context by appending a succinct description below the video:



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Source: 美国小品演员卡迪碧再次在社交媒体平台发布重要讲话，表示“政府你想瞒住我绝顶聪明卡迪碧？老娘一把子跑了债见勒宁”除此之外，卡碟碧还在视频中向广大粉丝群众示范了酒精消毒的正确使用方式 (CardiBArchive 2020a)

Literal translation: American comedian Cardi B once again issued an important speech on social media platforms, saying, “The government, you want to fool the extremely smart Cardi B? I will run away immediately. Bye.” In addition, Cardi B demonstrates the correct use of alcohol disinfection in her video to the fan masses

In this instance, the translator mocked the form of professional news reporting. While the genre retains its formal attributes, the tone interweaves colloquial elements. For instance, the phrase “债见勒宁[zhai jian le ning, bye]” is the internet homonym of the standard farewell “再见了您[zai jian le nin].” On one hand, referring to fans as “the masses” alludes to the Marxist ideology present in the macro socio-political context of China. On the other hand, the mockery of the professional news report genre and the use of colloquial expressions align with the target macro subcultural context.

In summary, there is a discernible boundary in the interplay between the micro and macro contexts in the abovementioned cases: the macro context influences the creation of micro context, and the micro context reflects the theme of the macro context. They are both relevant, with a boundary between them.

## 5. *Danmu* as an intermediate zone for the interplay of macro and micro contexts

Within a specific bullet-screen video, certain *danmu* function as textual representations of the macro context surrounding the focused video, thereby influencing the formulation of the target micro context. Simultaneously, these *danmu*, constituting an integral part of the focused video, also integrate themselves into the micro context as perceived by target audiences, merging the narratives of the macro context into the fabric of bullet-screen videos.

In the 58-second Video 1, the clip starts with Cardi B exclaiming “government, government, government” to remind the Trump administration of its responsibilities. Following this opening remark, Cardi B continued that she became aware of the worsening COVID-19 crisis when the American stock market began to plummet (see Figure 3). In Figure 3, the recurring Chinese character in *danmu* is “哈 [ha],” denoting laughter. In the Bakhtinian carnival, laughter is the key element since it possesses the power to defeat negative elements and serves as the shared feature between participants, facilitating the temporary subversion of established rules (Bakhtin 1984). Thus, the “hahaha” *danmu* not only expresses the emotional sentiment of fan audiences but also forms the basis for the realisation of the carnival. Therefore, the “hahaha” *danmu* acts as a textualized representation of the macro subcultural context surrounding the production and reception of the CardiBArchive translation on Bilibili. Furthermore, the macro socio-political context finds textual representation in *danmu* as well. For instance, the red *danmu* at the top says “防疫小品(doge) [epidemic-prevention sketch comedy],” while another *danmu* situated near the right margin says “入党积极分子 [applicant for Chinese Communist Party membership]” (see

Figure 3). The former *danmu* focuses on the theme of COVID-19, a matter of significant public health concern. Nonetheless, the seriousness inherently embedded in this topic is undermined by the ensuing word “*xiaopin(doge)*” within the *danmu*. *Xiaopin*, or sketch comedy, usually features in the annual CCTV New Year’s Gala to entertain a wide-ranging audience in China. The inclusion of “*doge*” in brackets refers to the ironic *doge* emoji frequently employed to conclude Chinese online utterances, signifying a meaning contrary to the speaker’s apparent intent. Collectively, the use of “*xiaopin*” and “*doge*” within this *danmu*, serving as the micro context of Video 1, conveys a relatively playful narrative style. This narrative style deconstructs the seriousness associated with COVID-19, especially under the backdrop of the heightened China-United States tensions. Given Cardi B’s critique of the Trump administration in Video 1, she is humorously complimented by *danmu* as an “applicant for Chinese Communist Party membership,” a term deeply infused with Communist ideology. Amid the chorus of laughing *danmu*, the designation “applicant for Chinese Communist Party membership” assumes an ironic interpretation, effectively reflecting the underlying political tension in an amusing manner. Through this case, it is evident that *danmu* can occasionally serve as the textualized macro context surrounding the bullet-screen video. Therefore, as a pivotal component of the macro context, *danmu* wield the ability to influence the shaping of subtitled bullet-screen videos, contributing to the macro subcultural context wherein video producer and audiences collaboratively generate content imbued with an essence of playfulness and irony. Simultaneously, *danmu* function as an integral part of the micro context within the video. Consequently, these *danmu* are not only influenced by the macro context but also play an active role in constructing it.



Figure 3. Bullet-screen comments in macro-context from Video 1

(CardiBArchive 2020a)

[English source: Once the stock market start going low, that’s how I know sh\*t getting real

CardiBArchive’s translation: 这个美股市场一跌，姐就知道大事不妙了]

In addition to the abovementioned dynamic interplay between the macro and micro contexts of a specific video, the concept of a “dynamic source cluster” necessitates an examination of contextual factors across multiple videos within the CardiBArchive translation. When an individual engages with Video 1, they immerse themselves not only in

the macro context of general knowledge and the micro context of nuances, but they acquire specific insights about the narrative or character featured in Video 1. These acquired insights subsequently influence their viewing experience of the following Video 2. Therefore, Video 1, along with its accompanying *danmu*, seamlessly integrates into the micro context of Video 2, effectively shaping target audiences' interpretation of Video 2.

For instance, Video 1, along with its accompanying *danmu* such as “epidemic-prevention sketch comedy (doge)” and “applicant for Chinese Communist Party membership,” familiarise the target audience with the subculturally-infused and politically-loaded content related to Cardi B's views on COVID-19. The title of Video 2, “Cardi B continues educating American netizens,” implicitly establishes its sequential connection with Video 1, suggesting a continuity of source and target macro contexts between the two. The connection leads to *danmu* such as “美国版青年大学习 [the American version of Youth Study],” “卡员大学习 [Cardi B's fellows' Youth Study],” and “卡卡人民会议 [Cardi B's People's Congress)” (see Figure 4). Youth Study is a recent initiative by the Chinese government aimed at teaching socialist values to the younger generation through the internet. As well as these terms, there are also *danmu* in the video like “卡爱党同志好 [Hi, Comrade Cardi B-Love-the-Party),” “卡老师申请入党 [Teacher Cardi B applies to join the Party),” maintaining the portrayal of Cardi B as a potential Chinese Communist Party member, a notion cultivated in Video 1. As evidenced by these cases, when the source material for translation is a dynamic cluster, the interplay between its macro and micro contexts takes on a dynamic and intricate nature. Moreover, this interplay is more pronounced in cyberspace due to the active participation of the target audiences through *danmu*, resulting in a blurred boundary between the two contexts

as perceived by the target audiences. *Danmu* function as an intermediate zone – an interstitial context – that bridges the realms of micro and macro contexts. *Danmu* serve both as a textualized macro context and an integral part of the micro context for the bullet-screen videos that are being consumed. The ongoing exchange between video content, reader reception, and context creates a perpetually evolving process of meaning-making in the cases of the CardiBArchive translation. This process is further sustained by the translator’s continuous endeavours to provide subtitled updates to the target audience. In an ideal scenario, this type of fan translation involving a celebrity’s updates would be continuous, although its reality hinges on the celebrity’s social visibility and appeal to fans. Overall, these cases provide TS with an opportunity to observe the dynamic interplay between macro and micro contexts brought by the evolving nature of the source cluster and the translation workflow.

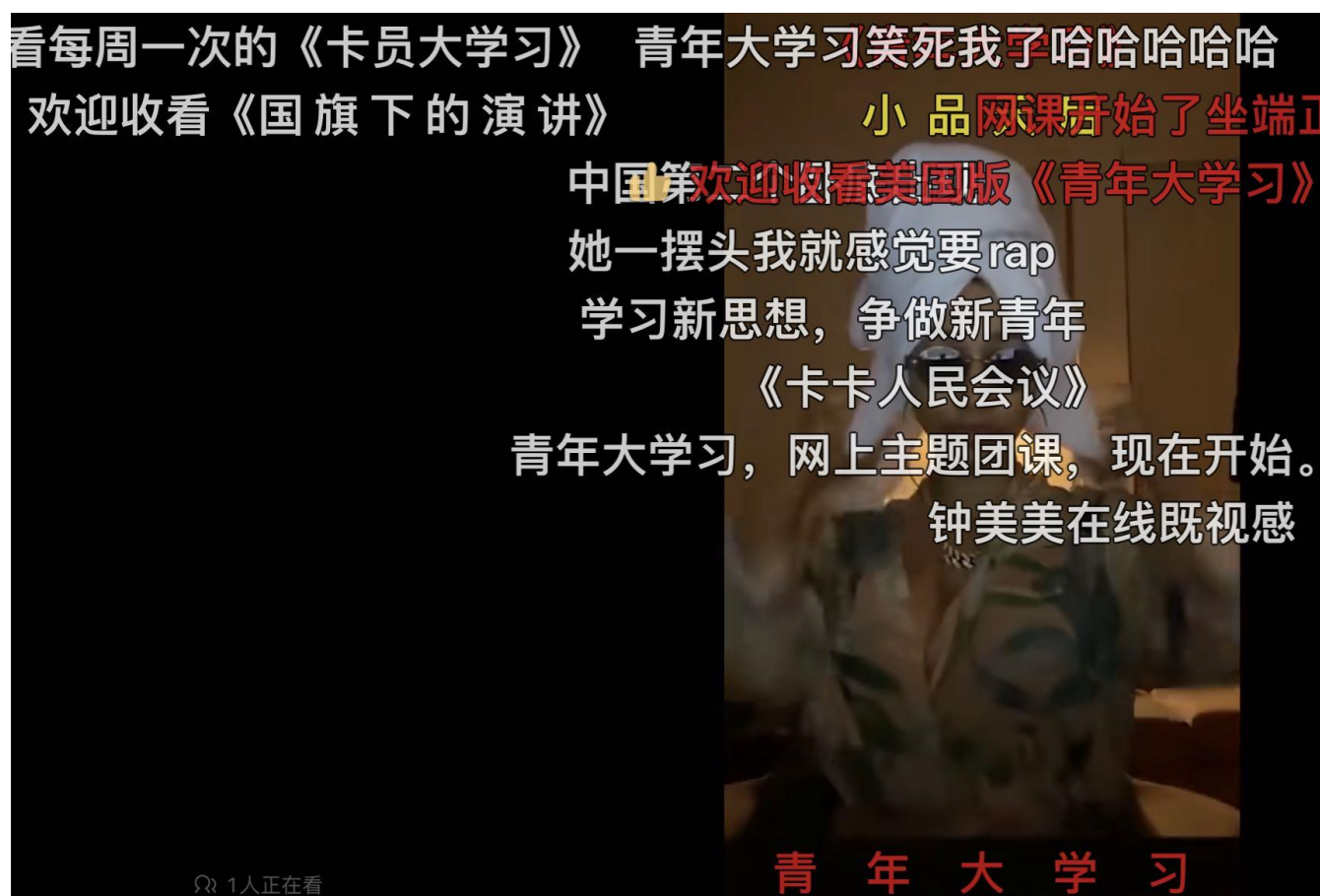


Figure 4. Opening bullet-screen comments from Video 2. (CardiBArchive 2020b)

## 6. Concluding remarks

This paper examines the dynamic relationship between context and translation as well as between macro context and micro context in online short video translations initiated by fan subtitlers of Cardi B. Referring to the cluster concept in TS, this study conceptualises Cardi B as a dynamic source cluster for both interlingual and intersemiotic translations. The evolving nature of the source cluster leads to dynamic shifts in the target context. By primarily focusing on the socio-political and subcultural components of the target macro context of these translations, this study identifies a dynamic interplay between the macro and micro

contexts: the macro context affects the formulation of the micro context, while the micro context reflects the central theme of the macro context. Together, both macro and micro contexts substantially impact the presentation and reception of subtitled online bullet-screen videos. Notably, *danmu* play a pivotal role in this dynamic interplay, contributing to the composition of both macro and micro contexts. Certain *danmu* can be regarded as the textualized form of the macro context, while simultaneously serving as an integral part of the micro context surrounding the bullet-screen videos. The macro and micro contexts in the target culture are thus bridged by an intermediate zone – an interstitial context constructed by *danmu*. Within this intermediate zone, the macro and micro contexts are no longer perceived as opposing ends of a spectrum, and the boundary between them becomes blurred, largely due to the contributions of *danmu*.

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