Reclaiming and Remediating Space: The Dynamics of Queer Presence in Audio Drama Platform

Abstract

The censorship of Boys' Love (BL) content in mainland China is marked by inconsistencies in both its intensity and scope. Amid these shifting regulatory boundaries, this study analyzes the systematic removal and occasional reappearance of visual BL content from the public sphere. We found that as visual channels are most susceptible to suppression, audio—though still monitored—emerges as a crucial medium, leveraging the agentive power of sound and media remediation to sustain fan engagement with BL narratives. Focusing on Miss Evan, a Chinese audio streaming platform, we explore how it navigates state censorship and market marginalization while restoring the BL subculture through innovative design features, sexually appealing voice performances, and provocative sound effects. Additionally, we investigate the agency of Chinese BL fans in reclaiming BL's presence through polymedia engagement. We argue that the dynamic negotiation between the platform, state censorship, and fandom reveals an ongoing contest between queer marginalization and restoration. While the platform seeks mainstream acceptance by conforming to censorship through the minimization of queer visual representation, the BL fandom employs counterstrategies to sustain the subculture in audio form. This tension highlights the cultural resilience and technological adaptability of queer subcultures as they navigate and resist the censorship imposed by state and societal norms.

Dr. **Tingting Hu** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Media and Communication, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University.

Dr. **Tingting Liu** is a Chancellor's Research Fellow in the Faculty of Design and Society, at University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia.

Introduction

Diverse representations of queer themes are observed across global media, with the genre of Boys' Love (BL), which focuses on male-male romantic relationships and primarily caters to women and sexual minorities, standing out prominently for its significant visibility. Originating from Japanese comics in the 1970s, the BL subculture entered mainland China in the late 1990s via Taiwan, influenced by Japanese manga and fiction. Over the past two decades, BL has not only enjoyed considerable growth and commercial success within the Chinese media landscape but has also evolved into a robust transnational meta-fan culture with a distinct identity (Yang and Xu, 2016), spurred by shifts in gender and sexuality norms, increased purchasing power among women, and media industry adaptations to the needs of female audiences (Song, 2022a). However, the once 'excessively' popular BL-adapted web dramas faced a sharp decline in 2021 as the Chinese authorities initiated a crackdown during the 'Internet Clean-up Campaign (hereafter as the 2021 Campaign).' State media published a series of articles criticizing BL productions as a form of 'vulgar culture.' This marked a significant shift at the state level, signaling a move against LGBTQ+ content that led to the systematic exclusion of the BL subculture and media depicting male homoeroticism and effeminate masculinities from mainstream visual media platforms (Song, 2022b). The state's strategy evolved from rendering certain themes invisible to actively censoring and prohibiting them, while simultaneously promoting a heterosexist, hegemonic view of masculinity (Hu et al., 2023a).

Amid tightened censorship that restricts explicit homosexual intimacy in visual mediums like manga and anime, BL audio dramas stand out as a unique digital medium that can audibly portray such intimacy. By leveraging sexually appealing voice performances and arousing sound effects, BL audio dramas skillfully bypasses textual and visual restrictions, enriching narrative elements and fostering community among its audience (Hu et al., 2023b; Hu et al., 2024). This paper examines how BL audio dramas and the platforms that produce and curate them—although still subject to monitoring—serve as crucial counterpublics within the BL subculture, navigating the ambivalence of China's inconsistent censorship of BL content (Ge, 2022). The study explores the diverse strategies employed by both the platforms and their users to leverage the agentive power of sound, along with self-organized strategies, to sustain fan

engagement with BL narratives (Mizoguchi, 2008; Ge, 2022), despite the systematic removal and occasional reappearance of visual BL content from the public sphere.

Our case study focuses on Miss Evan, a Chinese streaming audio platform that produces and distributes audio dramas. While this special issue emphasizes visibility, our goal is not to shift away from it but to explore the intertwined dynamics between visual and audio elements and the ways in which the BL fandom engages with these dynamics. When the visual representation of queer presence is suppressed, the audio medium emerges to sustain its dissemination. This is not merely a matter of one medium replacing another, but rather a co-presence of multiple media within an increasingly convergent communicative ecology, comprising various digital media whose prominence fluctuates in horizontal dimensions—the concept of *remediation* is particularly useful in deepening our understanding of this interplay (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). Bolter and Grusin (2000) understand remediation as a process where new media derive cultural significance by refashioning earlier forms. They trace the term 'remediation' back to the Latin *remederi*, meaning 'to heal' or 'to restore to health' (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 59). Within the context of the Chinese BL subculture, remediation suggests that the new medium of audio drama navigates the cultural dispossession enforced by Chinese authorities, which deprives the rights to visual BL tropes. This process allows the platform and fans to repossess and enhance the production, consumption, and enjoyment of BL subculture, potentially maximizing the consumptive experiences provided by their predecessors.

The interplay and remediation between visual and audio media is further complicated by the inconsistencies in the intensity and scope of China's censorship regime (Song, 2022b; Hu et al., 2024), which has cultivated BL fans' ambivalent engagement in the ongoing popular feminist project, perpetually marked by self-censorship that embodies heteronormativity and internalized misogyny (Ge, 2022; Zhou et al., 2018). Typically, periods deemed politically sensitive, such as significant milestones like anniversaries of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), witness heightened scrutiny, during which fans have learned to exercise extra caution. Additionally, when certain content—such as fiction, manga, animation, and web dramas—gains substantial popularity and circulation, it tends to attract the attention of censorship authorities. Consequently, fans have also learned to protect such content by keeping it from becoming too popular.

Furthermore, Chinese media censorship is subject to a tiered management system where different censorship bodies may oversee various aspects, leading to discrepancies in enforcement (Song, 2022a; Zhao, 2019).

Against this backdrop, our analysis does not concentrate on a single, pivotal event but rather on a sequence of fluctuations over time during which the visual representation of queerness in media—ranging from explicit portrayals of homosexual relationships to the more subtle fantasies of imagined romance in same-sex friendships—faces systematic suppression. Our focus is twofold: First, we examine how Miss Evan strategically positions itself as a leading BL audio drama platform, unleashing the current potential of audio in response to censorship pressures and fan-centered commercial practices by managing queer presence. Second, we explore the perspectives and actions of BL consumers in response to Miss Evan's strategies of de-visualizing queer presence and their pursuit of personal satisfaction. Through this analysis, we aim to uncover the evolving dynamics of queer presence in various media forms, revealing how both the platform and its consumers engage in negotiations that reflect collective resistance against prevailing heteropatriarchal discourse. This examination offers insights into the power dynamics and transformative potential within the BL community and its interactions with the multimedia affordances of the digital platform.

Literature Review: Audio Drama and Boys' Love

Globally, radio drama has been explored through various lenses, including audio adaptation(Huwiler, 2010), audio storytelling(Dann, 2014), industrial practices(Hand and Traynor, 2011), and its impact on human behavior(Smith et al., 2007; Fryer et al., 2013). Often referred to as 'the invisible theatre' (Stanton 2004, 94), radio drama uniquely fills the auditory space with actors' voices, sound effects, and acoustics, engaging listeners in a way that traditional theater. Listening to radio drama offers an experience more akin to dreaming than reading a novel. Here, the actor's voice not only delivers dialogue but also represents the body, leading listeners through a metonymic process to construct physical identities from voices alone. This form establishes a deep connection between spoken words and the imagined presence of the speakers, evocatively bringing to life the narrative context and drawing the audience into a landscape crafted by sound alone. In the American context, Verma (2012)has described radio as 'the theatre of the mind,' noting that the unique interplay between network aims

and broadcaster ideas with political, technical, and cultural developments shapes our understanding of this medium (p.3).

Centering on fandom practices, the relationship between podcasting and queer communities has been a prominent research focus in the field of audio productions. Copeland (2018)argues that podcasting, through sound production and vocal performance, challenges established gender norms and heteronormative practices in Western society by harnessing the emotive power of sound to resonate with queer audiences. In her later work, Copeland (2023)focuses on the LGBTQ+ community's music culture, emphasizing how music podcasting promotes queer joy and becomes crucial in shaping gender and sexual identities, as well as acting as a vehicle for activism. Moreover, Eurritt (2023) understands intimacy as a core feature of the medium of podcast, suggesting that podcasting not only fosters but also defines community connections through crafted intimate experiences. Drushel (2023)adds that podcasts occupy a distinctive niche, providing queer audiences with content that conventional commercial radio has often been reluctant or unable to offer.

Audio erotica, particularly within the genre of radio drama, has been explored through the lens of both heterosexual fantasies (Bellas and McAlister, 2023) and homosexual intimacy(Mowlabocus and Medhurst, 2017), examining how pleasure and sexual agency are entwined with sonic experiences(Pužar, 2023). Stanton's (2004) idea of 'the invisible theatre' aligns well with the notion of 'voice fetishism' (Saito, 2021)in BL audio drama, where homoerotic stories are often viewed as a form of women's erotica(Santos, 2020). Further delving into the theory, Slavoj Žižek (1997) utilizes Lacanian concepts to describe the pleasure derived from the voice as oscillating between lack and excess. The voice serves a dual role: it symbolizes the absence of physical form and disconnection from the source of meaning and life, while also excessively compensating for this absence by failing to convey explicit meaning, thus invoking pleasure(Žižek, 1997). In this sense, the voice becomes a trace of our physical reality and a signifier for the presence of the desired but lost object. Žižek describes the voice as 'an organ without a body' (Žižek, 1997, p. 110), highlighting its role as a fragment indicating the absence of part of the body. More concretely, the separation of the voice from visual elements, coupled with its excessive role in generating meaning or the illusion of a body, significantly contributes to the phenomenon of voice fetishism

and the production of desire(Saito, 2021). These perspectives invite comparison with the Chinese context, where similar tensions may manifest differently. Specifically, audio not only offers alternative storytelling methods or generates additional meaning, but also assists in bypassing censorship, thereby remediating the BL subculture.

Audio drama has a long history in China, originating in 1933 and becoming a significant medium for propaganda, especially after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.[1] Initially, these dramas were used to disseminate ideological messages on topics like labor, women's liberation, and heroism. After a pause during the Cultural Revolution, they resurged in the 1980s with advancements in tape-recording technology and the expanding recording industry. Although the popularity of Chinese audio dramas declined in the 2000s with the rise of multimedia, the 2010s marked a transformation as internet streaming and social media platforms such as Miss Evan, Himalayan FM, Sina Weibo, Tencent QQ, and YY revitalized—or, in the words of Bolter and Grusin (2000), *remediated* audio drama. These streaming platforms utilize streaming technologies, mobile user interface design, and personalized curation to remediate traditional audio drama formats, reflecting the ongoing interdependence and reshaping of multiple media forms. This interplay has contributed to the professionalization and commercialization of Chinese audio dramas, enhancing connectivity and engagement among creators, producers, and audiences(Hu et al., 2023b).

To contextualize our analysis of BL audio drama, it is crucial to understand the factors contributing to its emergence as a significant medium for homoerotic cultural consumption. Two main factors are identifiable: the resurgence of audio dramas in digital media and the stringent censorship of visual forms of BL subculture(Tian, 2020; Hu et al., 2024). Post-2021, BL-adapted web dramas were discontinued, and online novels continued to face rigorous censorship under anti-pornography regulations(Yang and Xu, 2016; Hu et al., 2024). Additionally, other visual mediums like manga and anime are restricted from depicting explicit homosexual acts, including kissing and sexual encounters(Hu et al., 2024). This censorship highlights the unique position of BL audio dramas, which are capable of audibly portraying explicit homosexual intimacy and stimulate 'voice fetishism', thereby circumventing visual censorship(Hu et al., 2024).

The 2021 Campaign has also impacted audio dramas. For instance, the Miss Evan app has altered its user-interface designs and removed or concealed BL content, despite its profitability. This indicates the adoption of 'reticent/*han-xu*' politics by the Chinese party-state within a neoliberal framework, which seeks to marginalize homosexuality and homoeroticism while reinforcing hetero-patriarchal norms (Hu et al., 2023). This is implemented through corporate self-censorship, as businesses adjust their practices to comply with state regulations and censorship mandates while still pursuing their financial goals(Jeffreys and Sigley, 2009; Song, 2022a). These changes not only signify a shift in the BL subcultural and broader queer presence from visible to audible, but also underscore the complex dynamics and challenges that apps face as they navigate market demands, censorship obligations, and their financial interests.

Cultural Dispossession and Repossession through Remediation

To further unleash and develop the analytical potential of the concept of remediation, we review the framework of cultural dispossession and repossession by Butler and Athanasiou (2013). Originally, remediation is described as a process where newer media both borrow from and redefine older media (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). No medium can function independently as all exist within a network of interdependencies, with each medium claiming cultural significance by delineating its relationships to and rivalries with other media (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). It means that, the relative age of a technology contributes to its cultural meaning, such as how the longevity of film allows it to appropriate and enact visual techniques that newer media like computer games might draw upon. However, in the context of China, as outlined earlier in our paper, the spaces occupied by different media vary—certain media spaces may suffer more severe censorship during specific periods. Thus, in this unique context, remediation also carries deeper implications beyond aesthetics and technology, as it both conditions and facilitates cultural repossession.

Athanasiou (2013) understands dispossession in two interconnected ways: first, as a complex process where individuals conform to norms of intelligibility, navigating the balance between societal subjection and mastery of these norms; second, as the deprivation of agency by normative powers that regulate cultural intelligibility and control vulnerability. While often linked to material losses—such as land or community

under military, imperial, or economic forces—dispossession also encompasses cultural losses, including forced censorship and the dismantling of online communities. This mechanism of power is crucial within colonial and capitalist frameworks (Bhandar and Bhandar, 2016). Harvey (2003) argues that capitalism perpetually generates its 'other' through dispossession, positioning individuals either within or outside the realm of capitalist accumulation, undermining their means of livelihood and social reproduction (Kasmir and Carbonella, 2008). In this context, resistance becomes a central element of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements (Harvey 2003).

In this study, cultural dispossession within the Chinese BL genre manifests as the systematic marginalization and censorship of homoerotic content, rendering BL fans as 'dispossessed subjects'(Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 28), who lose access to cultural resources crucial for their identity and community. This process is governed by dominant cultural and heteropatriarchal norms that dictate the visibility and expression of non-heteronormative narratives, thereby controlling the vulnerability and representation of queer expressions within mainstream media. Although originally theorized within a capitalist framework, the concept of dispossession can be effectively applied to the contemporary mainland Chinese context, which has experienced extensive privatization and marketization over the past four decades of economic reform and opening up. These transformations have been accompanied by measures designed to secure the hegemony of the party-state, both economically and culturally. With recent trends toward power centralization, commercially-oriented digital media platforms often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between generating profit through consumer-favored content and adhering to state-mandated guidelines (Song, 2022a; Song, 2022b; Zhao, 2019). Faced with state censorship, BL fans have emerged as a significant force of resistance, actively navigating the gaps and inconsistencies in state censorship and exploring ways to maintain access to their preferred narratives. This resistance not only highlights their agency but also underscores a broader contestation within the cultural sphere, where fans challenge and negotiate the boundaries imposed by authoritative power. They ensure the persistence and evolution of the BL genre, transitioning from visual to audio forms to circumvent external pressures. This act of maintaining and adapting BL narratives, as well as ensuring enjoyment through various media, can be understood as a form of cultural repossession (Kloppenburg, 2010; Sparke, 2013).

This process of cultural repossession is clearly facilitated by the audio drama platform, which creatively remediates older genres of BL subculture, allowing fans to reclaim and reassert control over their cultural space and identity, transforming constraints into new opportunities for expression and community engagement. On a theoretical level, cultural dispossession and repossession are not dichotomous but integral aspects of how capitalism perpetually generates its own 'other'(Harvey, 2003); This othering process, consistently reinforced through cultural dispossession, involves the systematic marginalization of certain groups, which in turn facilitates the capitalist system's expansion by creating a space for the dispossessed subjects to exist and repossess certain territories within its margins (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). Repossession then emerges as a counter-movement wherein these marginalized groups reclaim and redefine the space or identity imposed upon them. This cycle of dispossession and repossession highlights the dynamic and continuous interaction between capitalist forces and the communities they affect, illustrating how these mechanisms are deeply intertwined in both maintaining and challenging the status quo. On a practical level, this cycle of dispossession and repossession is even more dynamic in the context of China, where the censorship of Boys' Love (BL) content is marked by inconsistencies in both its intensity and scope.

As such, this study contributes to digital studies by offering insights into an emerging form of *cultural repossession through media remediation*. It first highlights the dynamic negotiation between the state, platforms, and consumers, specifically examining how each navigates in response to the dominant heteropatriarchal discourse. Secondly, it reflects a form of non-confrontational resistance that, while challenging state authority, also demonstrates the powerful and resilient agency of media creators and consumers. This agency manifests as continuous technological and sensory expansion, developing and stimulating people's auditory senses when the visual senses are obstructed. Discussing *cultural repossession through media remediation* encourages a critical approach to both media consumption and production, prompting consumers and creators alike to critically engage with media, thereby fostering a more aware and reflective media landscape that acknowledges the power dynamics at play. We argue that the dynamic interplay between the platform, state censorship, and fandom involves not only the dispossession of queer representation but also its continuous repossession, as fans

actively work to restore and sustain queer narratives within the BL subculture, particularly through audio formats.

Methods

To address our research inquiries, we selected Miss Evan (猫耳 FM) as a case study in the Chinese context, where podcasting occupies a small share of the audio production market. Among platforms offering audio content (e.g., Himalayan FM), Miss Evan stands out for its BL audio dramas, targeting young fans. Since the late 2010s, Miss Evan has collaborated with Jinjiang Literature City to adapt popular BL novels into paid audio dramas, achieving notable commercial success.[2] Productions like *Stars of Chaos* and *The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* have garnered over 100 million listens each, using voice performances, sound effects, and music to enhance storytelling.[3] Miss Evan's user base primarily includes readers of original BL fiction and fans of Character Voices (CVs).[4] By 2018, Miss Evan expanded its BL offerings significantly, acquiring the rights to 58 online fictions, nearly double the number from the previous year, solidifying its dominant position in the market.[5]

This study employs a multifaceted research methodology that includes online observation, participation, a walkthrough approach, and in-depth interviews. Both researchers are active members of the BL community and consumers of BL audio dramas across various platforms, such as Miss Evan, Manbo, KilaKila, and Sina Weibo. Our dual roles as participants and researchers shape our understanding and influence the knowledge we generate, impacting our data interpretation and insights from study participants.

The investigation consists of three stages, each building on the last. First, we immerse ourselves in the BL audio drama landscape by listening to dramas, reading original novels, participating in fan discussions, and analyzing interactive patterns to inform participant recruitment. Second, from January to May 2023, we utilize a walkthrough technique (Light et al., 2016) to systematically explore the Miss Evan app, focusing on dynamic changes in its interface design, technological features, and cultural nuances that guide user interactions. We document our findings through daily use and weekly screenshots, acknowledging that Miss Evan's interface has shifted between more homoerotic and normative designs due to Chinese censorship while also enhancing user

experience. We acknowledge that Miss Evan's interface has oscillated between more homoerotic and more normative designs in response to the inconsistencies of Chinese censorship. Additionally, there have been ongoing changes aimed solely at enhancing user experience and visual appeal. In our report, we focus on the most significant changes, indicative of the app's dispossession and repossession strategies; however, this does not imply that the outcomes of these changes are static or linear.

Finally, we use snowball sampling to recruit twenty interviewees aged 18 to 42, with educational backgrounds ranging from bachelor's to PhD. Most participants are university students, with seven white-collar workers earning between RMB 3,000 and RMB 15,000 (USD 418 to 2,090) monthly. Their experience with BL audio dramas ranges from three months to twenty years, with listening durations from one to over ten hours weekly. The majority are female, reflecting the demographic of the BL community (Wood, 2006). We conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews focusing on three areas: 1) using Miss Evan, 2) enjoying BL audio dramas, and 3) engaging with fellow fans. Interviews were held face-to-face or online, with consent obtained for audio recording, and pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

Invisibilizing Queer Representation and Remediating Audio BL

In response to the 2021 Campaign, Miss Evan strategically modified its visual component by altering its user interface design and the presentation of affordances, yet it retained some BL audio dramas to maintain profitability. The first strategy used by Miss Evan was to make the queer representations invisible by altering its landing page and home page banner, removing depictions of two male characters appearing together. Previously, the landing page would feature a gay couple from a recently updated BL series (Figure 1), accompanied by the voice actor's lines as the user-selected startup sound. After the 2021 Campaign the landing page predominantly features non-sexual and non-gay advertisements and promotional content. For example, Figure 2 illustrates this content by promoting a recent online activity where, instead of a gay couple, only one male leading character appears on the landing page and homepage banner (Figure 3). Although we acknowledge that these changes are only temporary and their results may not be permanent, the elimination of queer representations in the interface settings was specifically enforced by Miss Evan, as demonstrated by the contrast between the homepage banner and the studio's original design featuring the gay couple on their

Weibo account. This strategy is also applied to other BL audio dramas like *Feng Bai*, where the couple only appears on the drama's play page, not the homepage banner; even the Weibo posters for this show feature only a single male character, indicating a broader elimination of queer visual representations.
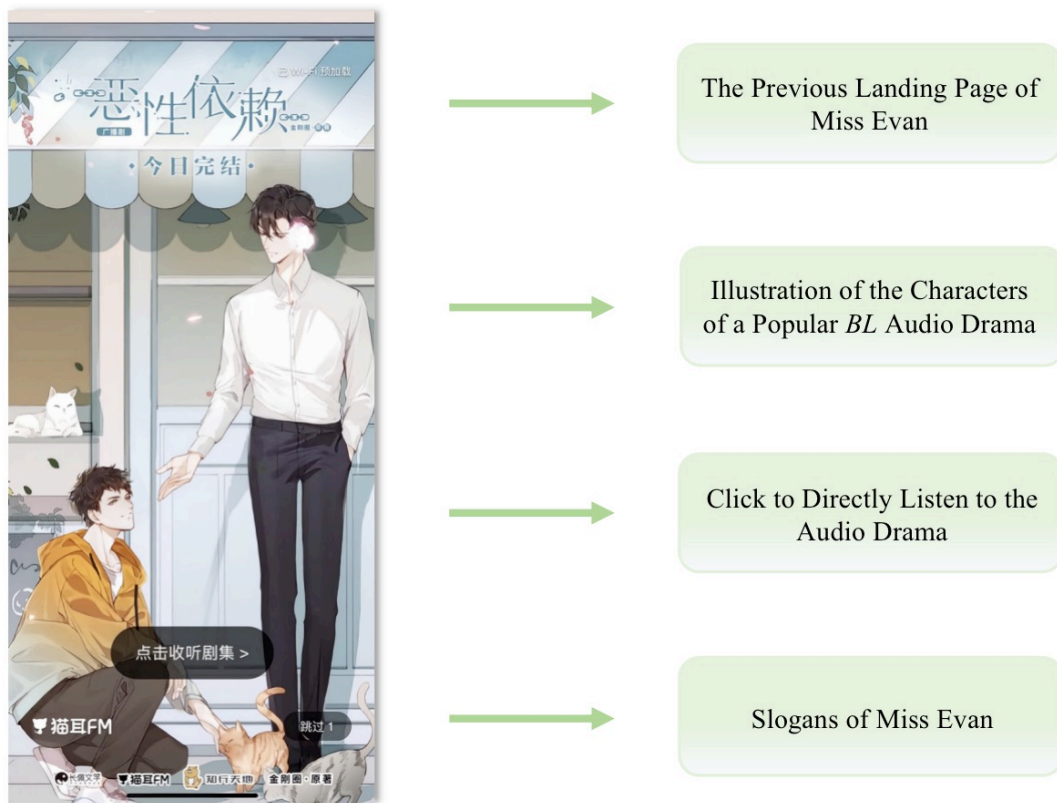

Figure 1. The landing page of Miss Evan in March 2023 (source: screenshot from a participant)

Figure 2. The landing page of Miss Evan in May 2023 featuring a comic cat (source: focus group participants)

Figure 3. Changing the Criminal Path (Zhi huan xiong tu) Season 2:

Left - the landing page of Miss Evan

Miss Evan's strategies reflect a deliberate act of self-dispossession, where queer visual representations are systematically erased from the public interface. In this case, cultural dispossession manifests through the platform's strategic shift toward invisibilizing queer representation—such as depictions of same-sex couples—from its landing page and promotional materials. This act mirrors a broader societal mechanism where normative powers regulating visibility in a way that suppresses queer expressions. The removal of queer imagery from high-visibility areas (e.g., landing pages and homepage banners) exemplifies the process of dispossession, as it strips queer narratives of their visibility and pushes them to less prominent spaces. This shift aligns with the analysis of Liu (2016) and Song (2022), pointing to a transition from overt coercion to a subtler form of self-regulation within digital platforms, whereby applications like Miss Evan modify their content to align with state-imposed norms, yet retain some BL content for profitability. By altering visual representations and limiting queer content to less accessible areas, Miss Evan participates in the cultural marginalization of non-heteronormative narratives, balancing censorship compliance with the need to cater to a financially lucrative BL audience.

From the sides of BL audio drama fans, who are vulnerable to such cruel cultural dispossession, they actively engage in various acts of *cultural repossession through media remediation* by creatively (if not cunningly) storing and sharing BL content, as well as supporting and continuing to consume content from Miss Evan across multiple media platforms. All of our participants were aware of the increasing restrictions on their space for enjoying textual and visual homoerotic content due to intensifying censorship. They also noted a double standard, where BL content is restricted while heterosexual and propagandistic genres are actively promoted and expanded. Faced with these challenges, they seldom engage in public protest and have contemplated ways to reclaim the lost space—an endeavor that, in an authoritarian state, is often unattainable. They have adopted the strategic use of multimedia, remediating a variety of media forms and platforms to adapt to these challenges effectively. It is evident that the multimedia practice lies at the core of the strategies employed by Miss Evan's users for cultural repossession, particularly in the context of government censorship and the

presence of 'fan police' who engage in malicious reporting (Wang and Ge, 2023). This is further compounded by the increasing costs associated with copyrighted media content.

In their own words, our participants reported that they have developed a 'rice bucket' (*fan tong*) approach, remediating various multimedia applications, with a particular focus on the microblogging platform Weibo and the video-sharing site Bilibili. Similar to the global social media platform Twitter, Weibo offers a smart search engine, multiple channels, and interest groups, serving as their primary sources for discovering updates on BL audio dramas. One of our participants, XWY, a 19-year-old university student, enthusiastically shared a screenshot of her 'rice bucket' (Figure 4), illustrating her multimedia approach through engagement with multiple ACGN apps. XWY humorously refers to BL ACGN content as her 'spiritual food' and affectionately calls her collection of apps her 'rice bucket.' 'Without the rice bucket, I would starve in this age!' XWY exclaimed. The screenshot showcases XWY's creative and innovative use of various Chinese and foreign apps, some of which require VPN services for access (such as the Japanese app Pixiv). XWY also modestly remarked, 'I am not that special, every "rotten girl" (*fujoshi*) has her own rice bucket.'

Figure 4. Participant XWY*'s mobile screenshot (17 April 2023).*

The strategies employed by the participants to curate their own 'rice bucket' of BL media content varied depending on their media usage habits and levels of media literacy. In our fieldwork, we encountered two distinct groups of BL fans, each with its own media consumption patterns. The first group, driven by their love for original BL novels, gravitates towards online platforms like Jinjiang and Changpei—dominant hubs for BL literature. These readers often immerse themselves in fanfiction communities, particularly on the niche social media Lofter, where fans share not only textual fiction but also visual artworks inspired by their favorite BL stories. For them, these platforms are more than just digital spaces; they serve as creative ecosystems where narratives continue to evolve through fan contributions. In contrast, the second group is motivated by their affection for voice actors (CVs). These fans are deeply invested in following their favorite CVs and production studios on more mainstream social media platforms like Sina Weibo and Bilibili. Through these platforms, they stay up to date on new audio drama releases, live broadcasts, and behind-the-scenes content. For many in this group, the engagement doesn't end online. Several participants spoke excitedly about attending comic conventions to meet their beloved CVs in person, a ritual that solidifies their connection to the content and the creators behind it. Purchasing IP-related merchandise at these events, they transform their fandom into a tangible experience, extending their multimedia practices from digital screens to physical spaces. This blending of online and offline engagement not only deepens their involvement but also strengthens the bonds within the BL fan community, ensuring that even in the face of censorship, the audio format of BL remains accessible and cherished.

In the face of challenging censorship, participants in this study have demonstrated a remarkable level of media literacy through their efforts to search for and store digital files. This ongoing enhancement of media literacy can be interpreted as an aspect of the subjugation process within cultural dispossession, where norms of intelligibility profoundly shape one's identity and interpersonal relationships (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). However, the fans' agency of resistance, as they find means of survival, cannot be overlooked. Alongside traditional methods like search engines, hard drives, and cloud storage, participants have ingeniously carved out BL spaces within non-BL platforms. For example, XX, a seasoned BL fan, eagerly shared her strategy for navigating the challenges of censorship. 'I use a special plug-in for the Edge browser,' she said, 'which helps me search across multiple music and audio platforms.' With a

few clicks, she demonstrated how the tool magically allowed her to track down deleted and censored BL audio dramas—content that had been quietly removed from mainstream platforms. She explained how these hidden gems were often shared privately by other fans, carefully avoiding public spaces to prevent detection. 'It's like a treasure hunt,' XX laughed, 'You have to know where to look, and sometimes, only a few of us have access to the right files.' Such files can be elusive due to major music and audio applications blocking relevant keywords. Uploaders, seeking to remain anonymous, refrain from leaving comments or following others to avoid detection and removal of their uploaded files. For our participants, instead of merely accessing restricted content, this method was part and parcel of a larger, collective effort to preserve and share the BL audio dramas that censorship threatened to erase.

Many participants emphasized the crucial role of Weibo, a popular social media platform, in their search for BL-related content. Weibo wasn't just another platform; it became their go-to space for discovering and accessing BL materials that were often restricted or hidden elsewhere. MY, a 21-year-old university student, spoke enthusiastically about how she follows renowned BL novel writers, voice actors (CVs), and post-production staff on the platform. 'Weibo is where I get all the updates,' she explained, 'from new releases to behind-the-scenes content.' LGG, an 18-year-old university student, echoed this sentiment, describing her routine of checking in on studios and CVs to stay informed about upcoming BL audio dramas. For both MY and LGG, following these creators on Weibo was not just a way to stay connected with the fandom but a crucial strategy for navigating censorship, allowing them to access content that might be restricted or harder to find on other platforms. This approach was common among most of the participants we spoke with, as they relied on Weibo's vast network to keep the BL subculture alive in an environment of increasing regulation.

When it comes to storing digital files, BL audio drama fans have developed various strategies to ensure the availability and preservation of BL content. One common practice among Miss Evan users is to secure cache files of complete audio dramas in advance, anticipating the possibility of censorship or removal by Miss Evan. This allows fans to access the full content even if it becomes unavailable in the app. However, this method requires significant storage space on their smartphones. Despite the storage requirement, fans are willing to invest in this to safeguard their access to BL

content. Alternatively, BL fans have acquired the skills to download encrypted audio files from Miss Evan onto their laptops using Chrome. These files can then be easily stored and shared with peers through online drives or small social media groups like WeChat and QQ. Additionally, some individuals seeking to profit from the demand for uncensored BL audio dramas engage in the unauthorized selling of pirated versions through platforms like WeChat, Taobao, and overseas websites. By shifting from visual to audio and from mainstream platforms to more discreet, private spaces, both the platform and fans are engaging in a remediative process that ensures BL content continues to circulate in the face of censorship. This not only reflects media adaptation but also highlights the fans' ability to creatively rework existing media forms to reclaim cultural space, illustrating the interconnection between remediation and cultural repossession.

Reinforced Heteronormativity and Shared Sisterhood

Our walkthrough analysis shows that the second strategy by Miss Evan is, regarding the content on Miss Evan, the platform has reinforced heteronormativity by producing, promoting, and maximizing the visibility of heterosexual dramas (referred to as the 'boy-girl' or BG genre), several BL audio drama series featuring explicit homosexual relationships and erotic storylines have been removed. Despite its reputation for producing BL audio dramas since its establishment, Miss Evan began adapting popular BG romance stories into audio dramas and placed a strong emphasis on promoting these shows, regardless of the potentially lower profitability of the BG genre. Examples of these prominent BG dramas include *Can't Hide Secretly* (2021), *Hard to Make Happy* (2021), *Rebirth: The Drug Queen of the Military Family* (Season 1 in 2022, Season 2 in 2023), and *Black Moonlight Holds a Bad-Ending Script* (Season 1 in 2022). These highly popular BG dramas have been consistently positioned in prominent locations on the app's homepage to attract users' attention, despite the significantly fewer number of BG dramas compared to BL dramas. In Miss Evan's monthly top-ranking list, four out of the top five positions are occupied by BG dramas, leaving only one BL drama (Figure 5). An interesting observation is that while the list is intended to showcase the most popular dramas in the current month, only the BL drama in the list was released in that month (since April 2023), whereas the other BG dramas are dated and were released at least a year ago. This indicates that the inclusion of these BG dramas in the list is a deliberate decision by Miss Evan rather than a fair ranking, which also explains

why the play rate of the BL drama in this list is significantly lower than that of the other BG dramas. Such implementation explicitly reveals Miss Evan's intention to amplify the visibility of BG audio dramas, at least within the app's interface setting, in order to mask its queer-related content.

Examples of the removed BL series include but are not limited to *Obsession* (*E'xing Yilai*, a reality-oriented genre), *Set the Prairie Ablaze* (*Liao Yuan*, a romance between a doctor and tattoo artist), *Breaking Clouds* (*Po Yun*, a detective genre), and *Sunset Avenue* (*Riluo Dadao*, an ABO and male pregnancy genre). Some of these series have been reintroduced after erasing the homo-erotical scenes, while others remain permanently deleted. It is important to highlight that removing a sexually explicit audio drama would result in an empty page within the user's app interface (e.g., *Burned Inexhaustible, Shao Bu* Jin, depicting the romance between a university teacher and his student).

In a marked departure from the broader social media landscape, where accounts and content are often deleted or penalized(Fang and Wu, 2022), Miss Evan has implemented a more considerate approach to safeguarding user rights. This strategy mirrors common practices observed in Chinese online gaming platforms (Lai and Liu, 2023) and digital hook-up apps(Liu, 2016). Users who have previously consumed the BL drama series that have been removed will not face any punitive actions or have their accounts deleted. Moreover, prior to removing an audio drama, Miss Evan typically provides a one-week notice, allowing users ample time to download the audio tracks to their devices. This proactive measure ensures that users can still access the content they enjoy even after it has been removed from the app or platform.
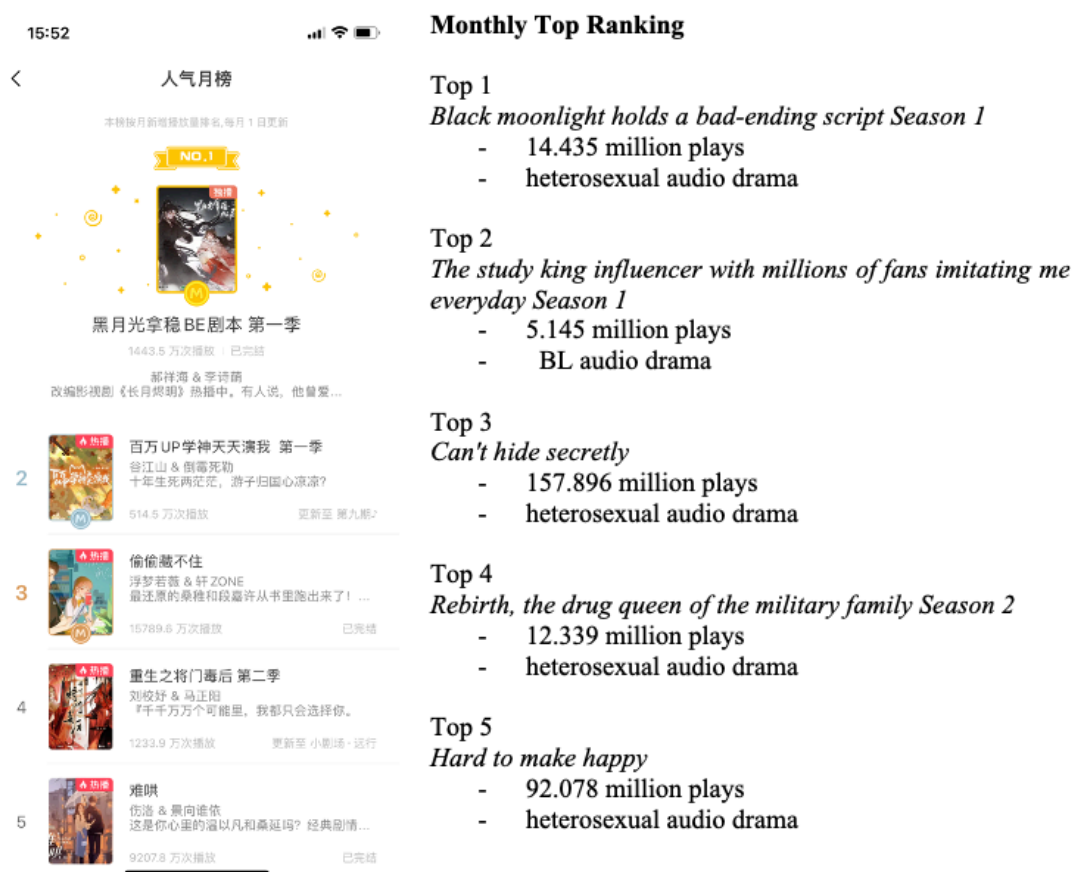
Monthly Top Ranking

Top 1
Black moonlight holds a bad-ending script Season 1
- 14.435 million plays
- heterosexual audio drama

Top 2
The study king influencer with millions of fans imitating me everyday Season 1
- 5.145 million plays
- BL audio drama

Top 3
Can't hide secretly
- 157.896 million plays
- heterosexual audio drama

Top 4
Rebirth, the drug queen of the military family Season 2
- 12.339 million plays
- heterosexual audio drama

Top 5
Hard to make happy
- 92.078 million plays
- heterosexual audio drama

Figure 5. Miss Evan's monthly top-ranking drama list (source: screenshot by the author on 1 June 2023).

Reacting to Miss Evan's reinforcement of heterosexuality, the second strategy from the fandom side is the fostering of a 'shared sisterhood,' a concept that has gained global traction and encapsulates the network of friendships and connections among BL fans (Hu et al., 2024; Lai and Liu, 2023). Participants in this study, like other BL fans, commonly refer to each other as 'sisters' (*jiemei*) and 'family' (*jiaren*), highlighting the strong sense of sisterhood, camaraderie, and friendship within the BL fan community. This reveals an altruistic network where BL fans actively engage in the exchange of 'rice,' referring to BL content, recommendations, and related information. This sense of community enables fans from diverse backgrounds to unite, share their dissatisfaction with imposed dispossession, and collaboratively devise counterstrategies, thereby preserving their space for enjoyment and strengthening their collective identity and resistance. At this point, Ge (2022) illustrates that the fostering of shared sisterhood among BL fans mirrors the counterpublic dynamics observed in *The Untamed* fandom, where women collectively resist state-imposed heteronormativity while navigating censorship, although some female fans may harbor misogynistic attitudes toward the

female actors/characters in the show. Moreover, Zhou et al. (2017) emphasize the persistence of heteronormative gender stereotypes in BL novels through a quantitative analysis. However, our study reveals a different aspect of the BL fandom by showcasing how fans must rationalize and internalize state-imposed heteronormativity and then, in collaboration with the Miss Evan platform, expand their sensory range (in this case, from visual to audio) and diversify media usage to sustain their enjoyment of BL audio dramas, rather than focusing solely on fans' perceptions of BL stories or characters. While the dual focus on counterpublics and persistent heteronormativity illustrates the complex dynamics between fandom resistance and platform compliance under state censorship, the 'shared sisterhood' examined in our study shifts the focus from fan interpretations of BL content and character representations to their strategic media usage practices.

Engaging conversations during interviews and focus group discussions shed light on the dynamics of 'shared vulnerability' and the passionate nature of this community. When asked about their experiences of sharing resources with other BL fans, the majority of participants responded positively. For example, DSY (22, a university student) enthusiastically shared, 'I will definitely share with other people, hahaha! I often ask others to obtain resources and will share them. With my friends, we also collectively buy BL resources and then send them to each other or recommend them to others.' ALD (22, university student) stated, 'Within the BL fan community, it is common for strangers to ask each other for resources. In such instances, if someone requests a resource that I have seen and particularly enjoyed, I am highly enthusiastic about sharing it with them.' Some participants, like TC (18, university student), expressed a willingness not only to share files but also to share the methods and techniques they use to safely share files. TC explained,

> 'To avoid being blocked on open platforms like Weibo, we (BL fans) have developed strategies to share resources indirectly and safely. For example, we would post links to external cloud storage such as Quark, Baidu, or Blue Zao Cloud, but to prevent the links from being blocked, we insert emojis within the URL. This way, those who need to copy the link can easily remove the emojis themselves. These tactics enable the sharing of resources while navigating platform restrictions.'

TC's statement emphasizes the significance of maintaining security and privacy when sharing content within the BL fan community. It reflects a sense of responsibility and concern for the welfare of fellow fans as they prioritize protecting each other's interests while engaging in resource sharing. Moreover, participants like XWY have actively participated in Japanese translation groups, contributing to the volunteer translation and distribution of BL content within the community. Some participants expressed immense gratitude when they stumbled upon rare resources, such as older classics, censored items, and niche works. These valuable findings are cherished within the community, fostering a sense of appreciation and excitement among fans.

In exploring how BL fans become 'subjugated subjects' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013)—marginalized and deprived of autonomy by systemic censorship on the Miss Evan app—our analysis reveals how these dynamics influence fan behaviors. This influence is evident in fans' continuous rationalization of state-imposed censorship and their strategic enhancement of digital literacy (Wang and Ge, 2023). In interviews with us, fans frequently discussed Miss Evan's strategies: the invisibilization of queer representations [described as 'very normal' (*hen zhengchang*) or 'something I'm used to' (*wo xiguan le*)], the reinforcement of heteronormativity (with respondents noting they are aware of but avoid 'boy-girl' content). Moreover, they strategically navigate the platform's initiatives, such as taking advantage of a one-week notice to download audio tracks before they are possibly removed, which helps them maximize their engagement with the content they prefer. These behaviors not only demonstrate the direct impacts of dispossession on BL audio drama but also resonate with and amplify the broader thematic elements of dispossession within the fan community.

Fandom self-censorship and shared sisterhood are deeply intertwined within the BL fan community as both mechanisms serve as collective strategies to navigate the restrictive environment of state censorship in China. Self-censorship operates as a protective layer, enabling fans to discreetly share, consume, and preserve BL content without risking direct confrontation with censorship authorities. Meanwhile, shared sisterhood fosters a supportive network, through which fans collaborate and teach each other methods of self-censorship, strengthening their resilience against cultural dispossession.

In this context, shared sisterhood serves as the backbone of self-censorship practices. Fans, aware of the potential risks, engage in careful content moderation, using code words, emojis, and other tactics to mask the nature of their exchanges. For example, TC's description of using altered URLs to share BL content illustrates how self-censorship is not an individual endeavor but a collective practice facilitated by this sisterhood. The community educates its members on how to navigate platform restrictions, offering advice on which platforms are safer, how to use VPNs, or where to store and share files through encrypted cloud storage. This creates a system of mutual protection and knowledge-sharing, vital to the preservation of BL culture. Furthermore, this shared sisterhood transcends online spaces. As XY mentioned, fans organize offline meetups to exchange content in person, further reducing the risk of detection. Such acts of collaboration demonstrate how self-censorship, supported by sisterhood, is not just a reactive strategy but an active form of community building, where trust, solidarity, and shared vulnerability empower fans to continue enjoying and circulating BL content under the radar of censorship.

While Miss Evan's and its users' experiences of cultural dispossession share similarities with the industrialization process of the American podcasting industry, a crucial distinction lies in the dominance of state censorship within the Chinese context. Analyzing Apple Podcasts, Morris (2021) argues that podcasters, scammers, marketers, and users employ strategies to enhance the discoverability of audio content through ratings and reviews on platforms, aiming to algorithmically elevate their works. Morris (2021) considers this phenomenon 'a part of the industrialization process and an arena where contested values of the "industrialization" of an emerging format play out' (p. 729). While American podcast productions are primarily market-driven, the Chinese audio production industry, as exemplified by Miss Evan and other digital platforms, must navigate a balance between state censorship and market demand. Miss Evan plays a dual role by superficially obscuring queer presence while relegating demand for BL dramas to less prominent layers of the app's interface. This case provides insights into the dilemmas and survival strategies of the broader cultural production industry within the Chinese context.

Aftermath and Closure

This study explores the complex dynamics of a triangular negotiation involving a Chinese audio streaming platform, authoritative censorship, and an agentic fandom, where the platform's visual content is increasingly subjected to government censorship and a dual process of cultural repossession through remediation is jointly carried out by both the platform and its users. Our fieldwork, conducted primarily in 2023, has continued into 2024, allowing us to track ongoing changes on the platform. Recently, we have observed that posters for some BL dramas featuring two male characters have occasionally reappeared in prominent positions, such as the landing page and banners—positions from which they had been largely absent in 2023. However, most BL dramas still opt for posters with abstract designs, avoiding human characters. When human figures are used, they often appear in cute anime forms that obscure gender-specific traits. In contrast, posters for heterosexual dramas, which remain highly visible in these prominent positions, typically depict couples with clearly distinguishable gender features. These recent shifts may suggest a temporary easing of censorship by higher authorities, though the platform remains largely aligned with mainstream ideological requirements. This ongoing negotiation between the platform, censors, and fans illustrates the fluid dynamics of compliance and resistance that will likely continue to evolve.

In this process, the platform and its users have formed a temporary transgressive alliance—distinct from the oppositional relationships between capital and users seen in previous literature (Kloppenburg, 2010; Sparke, 2013). This temporary alliance illustrates complex negotiations under censorship pressure, where both the platform and the fandom shape the trajectory of the BL subculture. Here, remediation, focused on expanding sensory media experiences, plays a pivotal role. As visual content becomes heavily scrutinized, audio emerges as a new medium for expressing queer narratives. This shift demonstrates how media remediation provides alternative spaces for marginalized identities, with new media forms—whether tactile, virtual reality, or as-yet-unnamed formats—continually offering opportunities for the persistence and adaptation of heteronormativity's 'other' within the broader cultural landscape. However, our study of cultural repossession through media remediation, based solely on the Miss Evan case, leaves the effects, generalizability, and potential revolutionary impact of this approach to be explored in future research.

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[1] The earliest Chinese audio drama titled *Scary Memories* (*Kongbu de huiyi*) told a story with the background of the Second Sino-Japanese War and aired at Shanghai Broadcast Station in 1933, nine years after the emergence of the world's first audio drama *A Comedy of Danger* (1924) produced by BBC.

[2] Jinjiang generally holds the copyrights of the signed writers' fictions and has the authority to decide the ways to cooperate with the third parties.

[3] See the drama pages at Miss Evan: https://www.missevan.com/mdrama/17132; https://www.missevan.com/mdrama/22602.

[4] See more at http://www.chanpin100.com/article/113398.

[5] See more at https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/67323529, https://www.jiemian.com/article/4850771.html.