

Conflicts Between Pure fans and Double-pickers

Runlin Li

Department of Psychology, Oberlin College

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Dr. Frantz

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Part I: Overview of the Conflict

In June 2018, two Chinese actors, Zhu Yilong and Bai Yu, participated in a web drama named *The Guardian* (also known as *Zhen Hun*) and played the roles of two best friends. They were also known to be good friends in real life. Although the show was made with a low budget, it became a surprising hit due to the two leading actors' excellent acting skills, receiving more than 2 billion views in only 35 days. The two actors also became much more well-known than before. For instance, during the streaming period of the show, the number of Zhu Yilong's followers on Sina Weibo increased from 4 million to more than 8 million. After the show was over, each of the two actors mainly had two groups of fans: They call themselves pure fans (who only like one of the two actors) and Double-pickers (who like both actors). Soon, a series of conflicts started between the pure fans of the two actors versus the double-pickers. To keep things simple, the following paragraphs will mainly examine the conflict between Zhu Yilong's pure fans and double-pickers, a typical conflict between fans groups on the Chinese social media (mainly on the Sina Weibo platform, alongside other websites such as Zhihu and Douban). From this conflict, we can see how two groups who share

similar interests somehow become enemies.

When we look at Zhu's pure fans and double-pickers, we can see that the two groups of fans have very similar background: they were mostly young heterosexual women who have received higher education and lived in cities (Weibo, 2021). It seems that the major difference between the two groups would be their attitude towards Bai and his relationship with Zhu, which led to fights on social media platforms like Weibo. For many double-pickers, they not only like both actors but also view them as CP. In China, "CP" is a popular Internet slang that stands for the imaginary lovers or couples in novel, drama or comic. The CP fans would produce fan fictions and fan-made videos based on the actual persons or the characters they played, in which they have romantic relationships.

At first, when *the Guardian* was airing, the coupling only happened between Wei x Lan, the two characters they played in the drama. After the end of airing in late July 2018, another trend came to couple the characters they played in other dramas, known as Wei x Lan Derivatives. In the end, more double pickers started to be interested in the Real-Person Slash, which is coupling between the two actors themselves. The Wei x Lan fan productions did not receive much criticism. Instead, they were prevalent on the Internet and enjoyed by both parties. At Bilibili.com, China's popular youth-oriented video streaming and sharing giant, the most popular Wei x Lan fan-made video received more than 3 million views.

However, the Real-Person Slash had much more opposition, especially from the side of the pure fans. The Real-Person Slash is a type of fan fictions that write about imaginary romantic/erotic relationships between two real persons, usually celebrities. Although not all double-pickers were into Real-Person Slash contents, most of such contents were created by the double-pickers. A few of them even started to believe that the two actors were couple in real-life; such comments were mostly in the “Zhu x Bai” subtopic on the media platform called Lofter.

From the stance of pure fans, Real-Person Slash is disrespectful of the actors and their friendship. Their comments on Weibo stated that the contents are misleading to the general public regarding the actor’s images, including his sexual orientation and relationship status. “A straight man is fantasized by you all day long as gay. Do you truly respect him?” (Weibo, 2019) They also pointed out that the act of binding the two actors together would negatively affect their careers. Besides the detest for Real-Person Slash, the pure fans’ dislike for Bai also increased in a loop of the ABC paradigm (Gallo, 2013): The pure fans disliked Bai and his CP with Zhu (Attitude), so they protested against the double-pickers’ coupling the two (Behavior), then the following contradictions with double-pickers make them hate the coupling even more (Contradiction enhances Attitude).

Another point of contention is about the status of *the Guardian*. For the double-

pickers, *the Guardian* is special to them; even if they were unsatisfied with its plot and special effects, it was where they met the two actors they love, and probably the only show they would be taking leading roles together. For the pure fans, they tend to view all of Zhu's works more equally, so *the Guardian* is not much more important than his other dramas. When his next show is on, their attention tends to shift to the new character he plays. A few pure fans even hope people will no longer associate him with *the Guardian* since it is a drama adapted from a BL (meaning "boys' love") novel. Although the drama depicted the two main characters as best friends, the original novel's association with gay relationships can make the drama controversial to the general public. Due to the existence of homophobia in China, some pure fans are worried that Zhu's experience of acting in such drama could negatively affect the general public's opinions towards him: The web drama version of *the Guardian* was taken down for several months in 2018 for further censorship and revision. Even if it was a great hit, the public medias deliberately chose not to mention *the Guardian* when talking about Zhu's representative work. The original novel is even now locked by Jin Jiang Literature City, the website on which it was originally published, for having "pornographic or harmful contents."

In August 2018, the two actors had their last public interaction on Weibo, some friendly greetings and joking just as before. However, though they still remain mutual followers, they've never mentioned each other in their Weibo or other public speeches since then. There are many theories on their reason for doing so, probably because of

the fear of unstoppable contentions and over-interpretations of their interactions. The strategy also has a downside: Since then, the pure fans of Zhu, Bai, and the double-pickers have developed three entirely different theories regarding their genuine relationship. Both the pure fans and double-pickers sought to use their referent and expert power, trying to find supporting evidence for their assumptions to prove them right and to persuade the other side. The two groups of pure fans believe that the two actors are now opponents, even enemies and that the other actor is responsible for destroying the friendship and obstructing the career of the actor supported by their group. While the double-pickers believe they are still good friends, many even believe that they are romantic partners. A typical conflict brought by the different interpretations is the Backstage incident in May 2019. Someone caught the two actors going to the restroom together. The short video caused an uproar. While the double-pickers were excited to see this as evidence of their enduring relationship, the two groups of pure fans were each trying to prove that this incident was a scheme of their opponent, who intended to advertise them as a couple, using the actor they support as a tool to gain public attention.

Among the Six Bases of Social Power (Raven, 1993), both the pure fans and the double-pickers have used the reward, coercive, expert, and referent power. For an example of reward power, when they give away gifts or hold lotteries on social media platforms, both groups might note that “only the pure fans / double-pickers forwarding this post can get my gift.” Both groups also sought to use their referent and expert power

when looking for supporting evidence for their assumptions about the two actors' relationships, as they would both like to prove themselves right and persuade the other side. For the example of coercive power, it is mainly used by pure fans when they find "inappropriate content," including but not limited to Real-Person Slash, in Zhu's Weibo Super-topic. Since pure fans are entirely in charge of the super-topic and official fan club, they can expel people who post such content. Another example is when there's a fight on Weibo, both the pure fans and double-pickers might report people from the other side to Weibo's management team. Those who got reported might have their Weibo accounts muted or canceled by the platform.

A typical example of a conflict between pure fans and double-pickers is the voting for "Most Popular Drama of the Year" at the end of 2018. The double pickers wanted to vote for *the Guardian* since it was acted by both Zhu and Bai, while the majority of Zhu's pure fans wanted to vote for the drama acted that only included Zhu as the male lead. The competition was fierce, with both sides trying to get everyone they know to vote for the drama they supported. As a result, *the Guardians won*, with the two dramas having a very close number of votes. We will have a closer look at events surrounding this particular conflict in the second section of this paper.

In the following years, as some double-pickers became fan of other people or transformed into pure fans, the pure fans became more predominant in the fan community, while the double-pickers became more marginalized. The main Weibo

super-topic for pure fans has more than 6 million followers, while the main super-topic for double-pickers has 0.7 million followers. Even today, when there are nearly no confrontations between them, pure fans who follow the double pickers' social media would be unaccepted by the majority of fan organizations held by pure fans. On the other hand, the double pickers would mock such behaviors of pure fans with their ingroup members. Some say that the pure fans are too sensitive when dealing with issues related to Zhu and Bai's double-pickers, suggesting that they also think these two people have a special relationship (Weibo, 2021).

For each of the two groups, the image of the other group is primarily represented by extremists, and they both view the other group as an enemy whose behavior is harmful to the actor they like, as we can see later. They wanted to see themselves in as positive as possible, as a more superior group than the other: They are more intelligent, morally superior, and are the ones that genuinely do good to the actor. The other group, however, is always the opposite. We will see more detailed examples of such attitudes in the next paragraphs, as I will summary the quotes from both sides.

From the view of pure fans, the double pickers are “indulged in the imagination that actor Zhu and Bai are a couple when they are both straight men” (Zhihu, 2018). They do not truly appreciate this person but only “use him as a tool to fulfill their fantasy of a romantic relationship.” (Zhihu, 2018). Once they heard that he might have a girlfriend, they would go mad and hate him. They could not accept other characters

he played and wanted to stop him from moving forward. The most typical and well-known extremist is a double-picker (potentially) who harassed and insulted Zhu because she “could no longer see Wei on him”, meaning he didn’t look like the character he used to play anymore, while he was preparing for his next drama. The pure fans generally view themselves as the ones that truly love and care about Zhu. They sacrifice their time, money, and efforts to support his career by promoting his new shows, buying his endorsement products, and so on. They would also accuse the double-pickers of not making any genuine efforts but only know to write fan-fictions that tie Zhu with Bai, plus criticizing the efforts made by pure fans (Zhihu, 2018-2021).

From the view of double pickers, the pure fans are paranoid, childish, and foolish. They always say they do not want to mention the other actor, but still could not stop comparing the two while attacking each other: “You (pure fans of two actors) really care too much about each other.” (Weibo, 2021) They are such fools that view their beloved actor’s best friend as an opponent or enemy, for these young women are so obsessed with the imagination that Zhu is their boyfriend that they view Bai as their romantic rival. The double pickers also like to mock the pure fans’ posts on social media as they are too childish and melodramatic: “Even a 12-year-old girl would not write such embarrassing posts” (Weibo, 2021). The double pickers believe that these pure fans’ behaviors have made Zhu lose his face and have caused other people to hate him or have a negative view of his fan groups. The double-pickers generally view themselves as the ones that can see the whole picture. They are the only group of people

who can notice the subtle signs of Zhu and Bai's good relationship, which is chosen to be ignored by pure fans. Their group is less suffocated by the toxic regulations of fan groups but is built as a freer, wiser, and more creative community (Weibo, Lofter, 2021).

To conclude, the conflicts of fans, along with the sensitiveness of gay-related contents to the Chinese public, possibly led to the stop of Zhu and Bai's public interactions. However, different speculations on their relationships then emerged, which in turn reinforced the separation of fan groups, making it even harder for them to appear together. Each group of fans is motivated to defend their group identity, trying to prove that they are the ones that speak for the truths or are the ones that indeed do good for the actor they support.

Part II: Important Forces

In this second section, we will analyze important forces in this conflict using the model of vicarious retribution as proposed by Lickel et al. (2006). We will mainly focus on a series of events that happened at the end of 2018, primarily related to the disagreements regarding the vote for "Most Popular Drama of the Year," as it was a major turning point that marked the ultimate rupture of the relationship between pure fans and double-pickers. Besides, it was a very typical conflict among those between the pure fans and double-pickers, and is helpful in revealing the two parties' psychological forces.

We will also take a closer examination at the pure fans' psychological forces for two main reasons: (1) they tend to be more organized than the double-pickers, thus easier to analyze. (e.g.; there are influential opinion leaders and organized pure fan groups) The leaders set rules to define who are pure fans and what are the appropriate behaviors. Only those who follow the rules can enter group chats and participate in activities, so the position held by most pure fans are generally the same. In contrast, the double-pickers are generally not organized and have many complex components (e.g. Real-Person Slash v.s Real-Person Brotherhood), so it is much harder to find a position that can represent the majority of double-pickers. (2) The pure fans' role is more active and aggressive than double-pickers in this conflict. For instance, when an alleged double-picker verbally assaulted Zhu, the pure fans' behaviors fit perfectly with the model of vicarious reattribution, which is defined as "an act of aggression [by ingroup member] toward members of an outgroup for an assault that had no personal consequences, but did harm a fellow ingroup member." (Lickel et al, 2006)

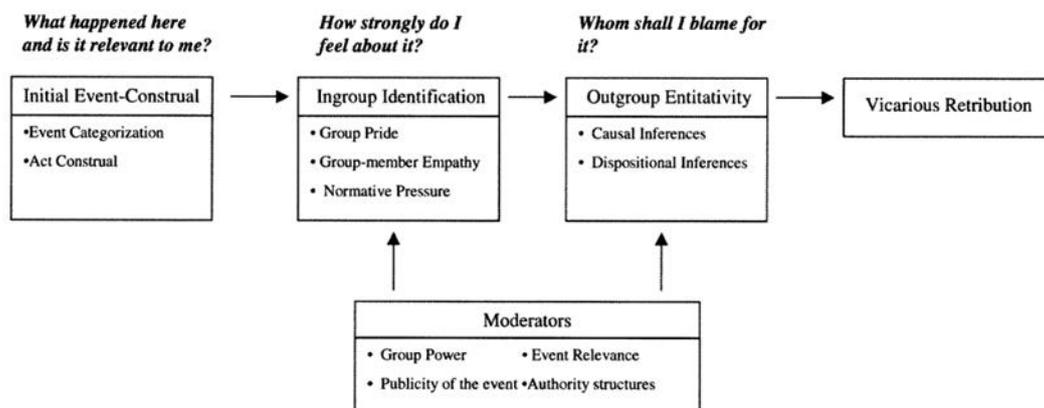


Figure 1. A framework for understanding acts of vicarious retribution.

As shown in the figure above (Lickel et al, 2006), the framework of vicarious retribution mainly consists of three stages: Initial Event-construal, Ingroup Identification, and Outgroup Entitativity. The Event-Construal starts with the Event Categorization, in which people categorize an aggressive act as between-ingroups, between-outgroups, or ingroup-outgroup. When the aggressive act is from an outgroup against ingroup members, the ingroup identity is activated. In the case of pure fans, “the harm of the iconic person of the ingroup identity” contributed the same effect. As mentioned in Part I, Zhu’s pure fans wanted to vote for the drama that only included Zhu as the male lead, while the double-pickers wanted to vote for *the Guardian* since both Zhu and Bai acted in it. The conflict escalated after a video posted by a woman stalking Zhu to his hotel. In the video, she says to him: “Professor Shen (the character he played in *the Guardian*), we are voting for *the Guardian*, will you support us?” When she received no replies, she followed, “Professor Shen is dead now.” (Weibo, 2018) The video quickly invoked anger among the pure fans, for they viewed the stalker’s behavior as violating Zhu’s privacy and dignity.

The next stage of the Initial Event-Construal is the Act Construal, in which the pure fans “attempt to make sense of other aspects of the event, in particular, who is to blame for the event.” As the stalker mentioned “voting for *the Guardian*,” they attributed the stalker to the double-pickers and blamed them for the incident. The double-pickers, however, denied that the stalker was a double-picker. From *the Guardian*’s Weibo Supertopic (similar to a forum), some comments said that the incident was a scheme

designed by haters; some even speculated that it was by the pure fans who intended to obstruct their campaign of voting for *the Guardian*. Several people even said, “We care about nothing but the votes right now, not even Zhu being stalked,” (Weibo, 2018) leading to more intense anger among pure fans. A group of influential pure fans then posted statements that the double-pickers had been excluded from Zhu’s fans. One of them said: “Please let go of Zhu.” “What you (the double-pickers) have done has nothing to do with his fans.” “They call themselves fans, but are doing the things that only haters do.” To encourage reposts of the exclusion statement, the pure fans held a lottery in that everyone reposting the statement had the chance of getting the gifts. As many pure fans joined voluntarily to donate money or gifts, the value of reward for the lottery eventually reached over 30,0000 yuan (around 50,000 dollars). Here, we have seen the other two fundamental elements of vicarious retribution: Ingroup Identification and Outgroup Entitativity.

As hypothesized by Lickel et al., the ingroup identification predicts an individual’s motivation to retaliate against the outgroup as such retaliation can be coded as part of the group norm. Besides the exclusion statement, many influential accounts of the pure fans also stated that they did not welcome the double-pickers to follow, nor to leave comments or repost. Those who fail to retaliate might be viewed as having an insufficient commitment to the group. For example, the owner of one account was criticized because they accepted contribution of a double-picker in a post, and there were “too many double-pickers commenting” as accused of the pure fans. The more

one identifies with an ingroup, the more anger and aggressive intentions one possesses (Yzerbyt and colleagues, 2003). In our case, the degree of recognition with the pure fan identity impacts one's degree of anger.

Although we have defined pure fans as those who are only a fan Zhu, there are many more unwritten rules regarding this identity. For example, it is debatable whether one who likes many actors but with only one favorite can be considered a "pure fan." However, a pure fan's list of interested people certainly cannot include Bai; otherwise, one would be seen as a double-picker. Though the original definition of pure fans did not mention coupling, those interested in any Real-Person Slash will be excluded – the Real Person Slash means taking public image of celebrities of the same sex and creating romantic stories with them. (Döring, 2021) Many pure fans even added "those who like RPS (Real-Person Slash) do not follow me" in their Weibo introductions.

Besides, normative pressures also played a part in the pure fans' hatred towards double-pickers. For example, in the voting incident, pure fans who publicly supported voting for *the Guardian* might also be seen as deviants. (Lofter, 2019) It seems from the surface that these things have little impact on the core value of a pure fan; however, for most people, the group's positions are used as heuristics to guide their individual position. They believe that if their group holds this position, then it must support the core value they care about. (Van Bavel, 2018) In this case, that core value is being supportive of their favorite actor. Naturally, being aggressive to double-pickers would

also become part of the group position. One who wasn't would likely become a deviant of the group.

The ingroup identification has explained the pure fans' motivation of aggressive behaviors: but why on the double-pickers? Several elements of the outgroup entitativity could possibly explain why the pure fans blamed the whole group of double-pickers for acts of individuals: Entitativity (Campbell, 1958) is the perception that a group is a unified and coherent whole in which the members are perceived to be bonded together in some way (Lickel et al., 2006). To the pure fans, the double-pickers were to be blamed because of their selfish disposition, omission, and indirect commission of the perpetrator (Lickel et al., 2006): For the omission, as mentioned before, some double-pickers claimed that they only cared about the votes, not how the stalkers verbally assaulted Zhu. They also believed that the double-pickers at least indirectly commissioned the stalker: if they did not insist on competing with pure fans in this voting campaign, the stalker would not have said those words ("We are voting for *the Guardian*...will you support us?"). For the dispositional references, the pure fans concluded that everything done by the double-pickers was to fulfill their fantasy of the coupling, including their insistence on voting for a drama that implies homosexuality, ignoring the fact that the continuation of such coupling could possibly hurt the actor's career. Since their passion for real-person slash was harmful to the actor, the double-pickers deserved to be viewed the same as haters. Most importantly, though not all double-pickers had the behaviors listed above, they tended to stay silent and the voice

of those who did was predominant in the group. As a pure fan said in her exclusive statement: “It is my bottom line not to generalize individuals’ behaviors to the group, but the number of people and comments that harmed the interests of the actor were too large to be ignored” (Weibo, 2018).

The aggressive attribution of the pure fans resulted in a mirroring on the double-pickers, who saw themselves as the actual victims. Contrasting with the pure fans who perceived the harm to certain group members/symbol of the group, the double-pickers perceived their group as the victims. From their perspective, the problems pointed out by the pure fans were only the act of a few extremists, who should not be representative of the whole group. Furthermore, as some double-pickers said, the pure fans’ exclusion statements, which labeled them as “haters,” hurt the feelings of those who were genuinely devoted to the two actors and the drama they love. (Lofter, 2019)

The exclusion from a larger group of identity (fans of Zhu) could be traumatic as it demolishes feelings of social control (North & Fiske), yet it somehow bolstered ingroup identification and group pride of double-pickers: From the posts of some double-pickers, we can see that the meaning of being a double-picker was also enriched just as the definition of the pure fans. Some people not only saw themselves as the fans of the two actors; but they were also the witnesses of the *Guardian’s* glory, and even the only group of people that could give it the appropriate recognition (Lofter, 2019). Many double-pickers gradually gathered together in *the Guardian’s* supertopic on

Weibo and the *Zhu x Bai* CP tag on Lofter and formed their own group against the pure fans, and somehow enjoyed to see the pure fans be mad. For example, when they found a piece of evidence that the two actors are possibly interacting with each other, some would comment: “The pure fans must be so mad to know how good their relationship is” (Lofter, 2019).

Those who were into the Real Person Slash did not see themselves as problematic either. They believed that they were pointing out the truths, witnessing the true love ignored by the pure fans, yet somehow became the victims of the pure fans’ parochialism, vanity, and irrationality (Lofter, 2019): The pure fans, as an outgroup, were also entitled to the same image of ignorant perpetrator. The mechanism of naive realism could explain their attitude towards the pure fans: It means that people tend to believe that they see the world around them objectively, and those who disagree with them must be biased. (Kennedy & Pronin) In the eyes of the double-pickers, since the pure fans were incapable of seeing things objectively, the double-pickers saw them as not worthy of the cooperative efforts (Kennedy & Pronin), but should be dealt with competitive efforts: Some double-pickers went to report the lottery held by the pure fans to the management team of the Weibo platform, which led to a further escalation of the conflict, with more people fighting on the Internet.

To conclude, the pure fans viewed themselves protecting Zhu’s career and privacy by revenging on stalkers and boycotting Real-person slash. They identified the stalker

as a double-picker and collectively blamed the double-pickers through the system of vicarious retribution. While the double-pickers viewed themselves as victims and witnesses of true love, seeing the pure fans as irrational and not worthy of negotiation, thus retaliated with competitive behaviors, which led to the further escalation of the conflict.

Part III: Solution

This section of the paper will discuss how to resolve the conflicts between pure fans and double-pickers, and conflicts between different groups of fans in general. We will focus less on the specific conflict between pure fans of Zhu and double-pickers of Zhu and Bai.

As mentioned in the previous sections, since 2018, many double-pickers have transformed into pure fans, so the community of double-pickers has shrunk significantly. A de-escalation of their conflicts with the pure fans followed since the number of the double-pickers is no longer competitive with their opponents. Besides, many people have turned into the double-pickers of other CPs (“couples”, “ships”, two people who are imagined to have romantic relationships) after the release of other dramas with implications of homosexuality, such as the *Untamed* (2019) and *Word of Honor* (2021). Within the fan communities of those actors, the conflicts between pure

fans and double-pickers reappear in even more extreme ways: In Feb 2020, the pure fans of Xiao Zhan reported AO3 (Archive of Our Own, a popular international fan-fiction site) to the government because the double-pickers of Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo posted pornographic fan-fictions there. The website was soon blocked in China after their reports, causing great anger among the AO3 users and many other communities, leading to a boycott against Xiao Zhan and his fans (also known as the “227 Incident”). Due to this kind of incident, we have to pay attention to the potential aggression brought by the conflicts of fans. We must seek an effective long-term strategy to prevent such conflicts from happening again.

Considering the extent of the ongoing conflicts and the significant number of people involved, it is unrealistic to completely stop such conflicts. Our goal is to stop any form of aggression brought by the conflicts between fans. We also want to move people toward ripeness so that people from the two opposing groups would realize that the stalemate no longer serves real interests and that they could be better off if the conflicts were framed as a joint problem. (Coleman 1997).

First, let’s still look at the general conflict between pure fans and double-pickers. In the past, there used to be an unwritten agreement that was naturally formed between some people who liked or disliked real-person slash: “圈地自萌,” meaning “self-entertainment in a small community.” This means that the Real-Person Slash

contents can be posted in their specialized Weibo Super-topics or tags for the “couple.” Those contents should not include the legal name of the actor, in case if other people take them seriously when searching for his name, thus misunderstand his sexual orientation and relationship status. It is also seen as inappropriate to post RPS contents under the tag/super-topic for one individual actor, nor should anyone disturb the actor himself. However, in recent years, we can see more double-pickers become unsatisfied to stay underground. Under the Weibo of the actor Gong Jun, many double-pickers leave comments calling him “Dad”, with the other person in the CP being called “Mom” (Weibo, 2021). Clearly, the old rule of “self-entertainment” no longer works, and a new set of norms need to be set to calm down the strife between pure fans and double-pickers.

Under the current situation, we can see a few people hoping for the negotiation between leaders of the two groups of fans. The logic behind this proposal is that since the pure fans and double-pickers shared their love for the same actor, it would be relatively easier for the leaders and members of the ingroup to achieve outgroup empathy. Behind their opposed positions, there lie their shared and compatible interests (Fisher & Ury, 1991, page 40): both groups want the best for the actor they like. If this superordinate goal could be identified during the negotiation, it would reduce both sides’ antipathy towards the outgroup (Cohen & Insko, 2008). The initial sign of ripeness might appear if both sides realized that their conflicts not only hurt the fans and might also damage the actor’s public image, just like Xiao Zhan

boycotted after the 227 incidents; and if pure fans and double-pickers could cooperate with each other, it would also be easier for them to arrange supporting activities for the actor.

However, the problem is that in intergroup contexts, the leaders are pressured to do what is best for one's ingroup, which often entails minimizing outgroup outcomes. In this situation, the competitive group morality takes over the individual morality, which generally requires fairness and cooperativeness in interindividual contexts. (Wildschut and Insko, 2006; Cohen & Insko, 2008) If a professional mediator could be provided by the platform to guide their conversations, so that it feels easier for the leaders to follow their individual morality, it is still possible for them to act cooperatively (Cohen & Insko, 2008). In this way, there is hope that the two groups can form new norms: What kind of contents should be considered as "Real-Person Slash" contents? How should the pure fans treat them? Where should the double-pickers discuss them? What kind of the actions of the double-pickers are considered as "disturbing the actors?" What shouldn't the pure fans do when treating double-pickers and the other actor in the CP? All of these questions need detailed answers agreed by leaders of the both groups, ideally in a private conversation.

Unfortunately, the above solution can be hard to implement in reality. For the fan leaders, their independent leadership may be able to bring about peace, but those

leaders who follow their individual morality may not stay leaders for long and may face strong opposition from ingroup members (Cohen & Insko, 2008; Haslam & Platow, 2001). Not to mention that in many cases, there isn't enough motivation for leaders of the two parties to talk together. Therefore, there must be someone from outside the fan groups to call for peace: for instance, the actors themselves. If the conflicts only stayed between the fans and there were no actual conflicts between the two actors, it would be more effective to have their official teams to make a joint claim to call for peace among fans. In this claim, they could state the shared interests of the two actors and the potential harm brought by the conflicts of fans.

However, there are times when the actors themselves also have conflicts of interest, so it is hard for them to create a joint statement. Even if they do, it is possible that the statement might not work as expected, and the conflicts and violence between fans would continue. On Chinese social media, there are slangs to describe certain behaviors of the actors' management company aimed at fans: "Nuefen" and "Gufen," meaning the idol benefits from the fights between fans. When fans are fighting against a common enemy, it could enhance their sense of belonging with the ingroup (Yzerbyt et al., 2003). They get a sense that they are fighting to "protect" their idol whom the enemy has badly hurt; thus, the fans would be willing to stay for longer in the fan group to support their idol.

For example, some people have suggested that Xiao Zhan's team has used the 227 incidents to "Nuefen" and "Gufen." After seeing their idol boycotted by many people, the fans felt an even stronger obligation to stay loyal to protect him. This emotion translated into purchasing power as well: In April 2020, Xiao Zhan released a new digital single called "Light" as the symbol that he was coming back. The single sold more than 30 million copies in 3 days, the sales reaching over 100 million CNY (16 million USD). His fans, including minors, were told by fan leaders that "if you can buy 105 copies, bite the bullet and buy 300 copies." (梦想照进现实-h, 2020)

Such examples reveal that sometimes it is not enough to put all hope on the actors themselves when trying to stop the craziness of fans. We might have to involve more powerful third-party forces like the social media platform or government authorities. However, even the social media platform itself is seen as partial. The Alibaba Group holds a 30% stake in Sina Weibo and in many other entertainment companies as well (Sina Finance, 2020). When fans believe that the platform is biased against them, they are less likely to accept their mediation (Welton & Pruitt, 1987; Rubin et al., 1994, page 201). To common fans, the only third party that is always seen as impartial is the government since it is uninvited and has no automatic benefit from the conflict, at least as it seems (Rubin et al., 1994, page 201). What's more, the government possesses great power, so both sides of the fans and actors would not disagree with the third party's directions.

In reality, Chinese government officials have intervened in some conflicts between fans. In June 2021, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), the central internet regulator, censor, oversight, and control agency for the People's Republic of China, started the "Qinglang · Rectification of Chaos in the Fans Communities" campaign. The campaign is aimed at behaviors such as "tearing and slandering each other, trolling, provoking confrontation, insulting and slandering, making rumors and attacks, and malicious marketing" (CAC, 2021). Those who are found with such behaviors will face punishments such as being muted on social media platforms or even having their accounts canceled. In August 2021, fans of Zhao Liying and Wang Yibo had a fight on the Internet because of the rumor that the two actors would cooperate again after they acted together in the drama "Legend of Fei" in 2020. Zhao's fans were unsatisfied with Wang's acting skills and threatened to boycott the new drama, following the fights between two groups of fans. Several official Weibo accounts from the well-known actress Zhao Liying's fan community were banned, including her "Global Fan Club" with 2.59 million fans, which was the first fan group to be banned on a large scale due to fights on the Internet since the "Qinglang Campaign" in June (Chinanews, 2021). The Weibo platform had an interview with Zhao Liying and Wang Yibo's studios on issues related to fan guidance and management (Zaobao, 2021). The punishment has set an example to other fan communities on the consequences of fighting against each other, which seems successful on the surface to stop the fights in the short term. However, did the

government's involvement genuinely succeed in convincing fans to change their behavior, or did the fans of Zhao and Wang stop fighting simply out of fear of the power? Did they continue to hate each other secretly?

The example above warns us that government involvement should probably be the final method we use when there are no better ways to help the situation. The ideal resolutions are the practical behaviors to increase motivation to reach an agreement, which assures that the parties can make concessions without loss of face (Coleman 1997). However, in the case of Zhao and Wang, we see that the government involvement has definitely made both sides lose face, with the actors' names put together in negative posts, even if they themselves did not start or participate in the fights. This incident would not have happened if the two sides had tried to prevent things from going this far at earlier stages. If they had realized earlier that escalating the conflict is a lose-lose option, and if they started to seek common interests, they could have had the chance to move towards ripeness.

We can continue to take the fight between Zhao and Wang's fans as an example. When the fans heard the rumor of the two actors' cooperation, they could have thought twice about the rumor's source and its reliability. On the Weibo platform, there were plenty of commercial accounts that intentionally provoked fans' fighting so that they could gain public attention and benefit from it. From this perspective,

both the fans of Zhao and Wang were the victims of such accounts that spread unreliable rumors. If we change the way of categorization, the two groups can now be included as one ingroup and have the common outgroup enemy: the commercial accounts that started the rumor, the only perpetrator. Recategorization helps reduce intergroup bias and helps people find more socially shared similarities between the self and the others (Wohl, 2005). For leaders of Zhao's and Wang's fans, instead of accusing each other as the perpetrator, and leading the two groups of fans to fight with each other, they could have told the fans not to believe in the rumors started by commercial accounts. They could even cooperate by reporting the commercial accounts together to the CAC. Even if the rumor proves to be accurate, since both the fans of Zhao and Wang share the same interest (both groups are unwilling to let the two actors cooperate again), they might become allies when boycotting the drama together.

To conclude, several ways could prevent or de-escalate the conflicts between fans. Each resolution has its most-fitted situation but also has disadvantages as well. For prevention, one can try recategorizing two conflicting groups as one in-group with the same interests. For an ongoing conflict, one can try having leaders of two fan groups come together, drafting a Single Negotiation Text (SNT), following their individual morality instead of the group morality. If this is not enough for the conflict, try having the two idols on the table, calling on peace among fans together. If the two

idols also have conflicts with each other, there are still powerful third parties out there, such as the social media platform and the government. I hope that there could be fewer conflicts on the Internet and that everyone can enjoy their journey of being a fan of someone in the future.

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