

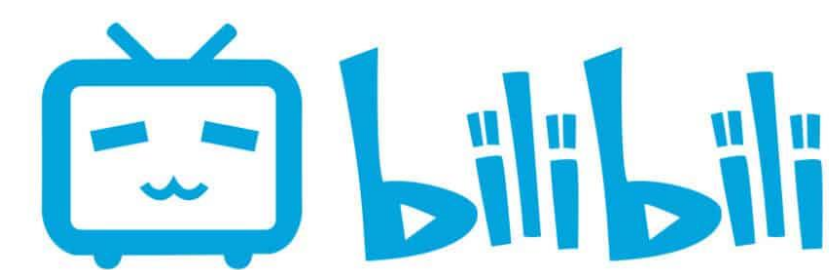
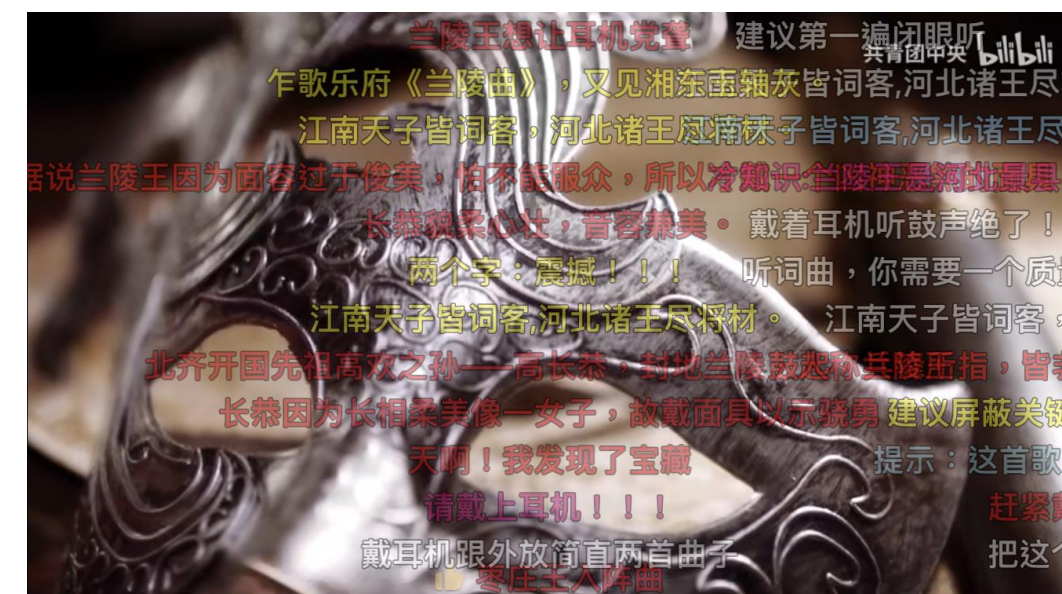
Playful patriotism on Bilibili: an observation on how state propaganda apparatus adapts to and interacts with teenagers' culture in China

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Why Bilibili?

Bilibili is one of the most popular video creation and sharing platforms in China, especially among the youth community. According to the annual report of Bilibili in 2020, the user base of Bilibili has increased by 55% from 2019 to 2020, among which Gen Z+ constituted the majority of its active users.

Due to its increasing popularity and influence among Chinese teenagers, the Chinese government has accordingly reinforced its regulations and collaboration with Bilibili, while Bilibili has also actively involved itself in the state propaganda machine (Diao, 2020).



Danmaku is the anonymous comments floating on the screen while the videos are played, which could be seen by other users instantly (Yin & Fung, 2017). Moreover, different from traditional video, the Danmaku includes views to the content producers of online videos and represents the viewers' contribution to the video content.

Hard Propaganda vs. Soft Propaganda

Hard propaganda, as Huang (2015) points out, despite knowing that citizens would doubt the authenticity of state propaganda, the authoritarian regimes propagandize as a signal and demonstration of its capacity of repression, which further deters political dissents domestically.

Compared with the hard propaganda which deters citizens with the state's capacity, the **soft propaganda** is much more entertaining and emotionally resonant (Mattingly & Yao, 2021).

As Perry (2017) has argued, rather than merely showing the state's power which forces the citizens to comply, the state also aims to establish their “right to rule” among the citizens.

Cyber Nationalism & Playful patriotism

In previous research, nationalism was largely regarded as a result of the state's unilateral propaganda program, such as the national patriotic program (Zhao, 2004). However, as Chen et al. 's (2021) has pointed out in their research, Chinese cyber nationalism is a “bottom-up spontaneous nationalistic sentiment.”.

“state-endorsed but not necessarily orchestrated, light-hearted, or amusing” way to promoting patriotism.

---- Chen et al. (2021, p.111)

Bilibili's interaction with state propaganda apparatus

2009 forbade online video websites from broadcasting foreign animations, penalized 29 online video websites 2015 shut down 8 websites permanently, accusing them of broadcasting violent and horrifying animation content. 2018 online websites are not allowed to publish the clips, scenes, and full videos of foreign animations with possible problems on its content (Diao, 2020).

In May of 2018, the Office of the National Work Group for Combating Pornography and Illegal Publications have penalized Bilibili for publishing contents that harm social ethics.

Later in July of the same year, Bilibili was criticized publicly by CCTV for its vulgar content and a bad influence on teenagers.

The Cyberspace Administration of China also summoned senior executives of Bilibili for a face-to-face meeting and ordered the company to rectify problems with its video contents.

Bilibili then issued a comprehensive rectification stating that they "will actively cooperate with related government departments to strengthen correct guidance and standardized management of users, and to produce and disseminate content that promotes the main theme and positive energy."

Under tremendous pressure, Bilibili not only censored the contents of videos published more actively, but it also sought to join the mainstream political expression.

Represented by Chinese Choir (中國唱詩班) and Year Hare Affair(那年那兔那些事), Bilibili invested and produced several animations promoting nationalism and patriotism.



In January of 2017, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (CCCYL) started its account in Bilibili in the name of "making friends with the younger generation."

When this article is written, the account of CCCYL has become the sixth most popular account in Bilibili, with 8.33 million followers.

Research Questions

	Official - original content	Official - reupload
Mass - only Danmaku & comments (less commitment)	Official only	Bottom up
Mass - Danmaku, comments, and video adaption (more commitment)	Top down	bidirectional

- 1) What is the general mode of interaction between the official account and the public in different types of nationalistic videos?
- 2) What is the relationship between playful patriotism and different categories of video content? Do the videos with playful patriotism have more interactive modes?
- 3) What is the relationship between the number of Danmaku and the categories of video content? Do the videos with playful patriotism gain more Danmaku?

Methods

Types of official accounts	Name of the accounts
State-owned media	央视新闻, 小央视频, 央视网快看, 观察者网, 央视网, 环球时报, 中国日报 (CCTV News, Xiao CCTV, CCTV Quick Watch, Observer, CCTV, Global Times, China Daily)
CCYL of different provinces	共青团中央, 广东共青团, 浙江共青团, 河南共青团, 安徽共青团, 湖南共青团, 福建共青团, 四川共青团, 贵州共青团, 重庆共青团 (CCCYL, Guangdong CCYL, Zhejiang CCYL, Henan CCYL, Anhui CCYL, Hunan CCYL, Fujian CCYL, Sichuan CCYL, Guizhou CCYL, and Chongqing CCYL)

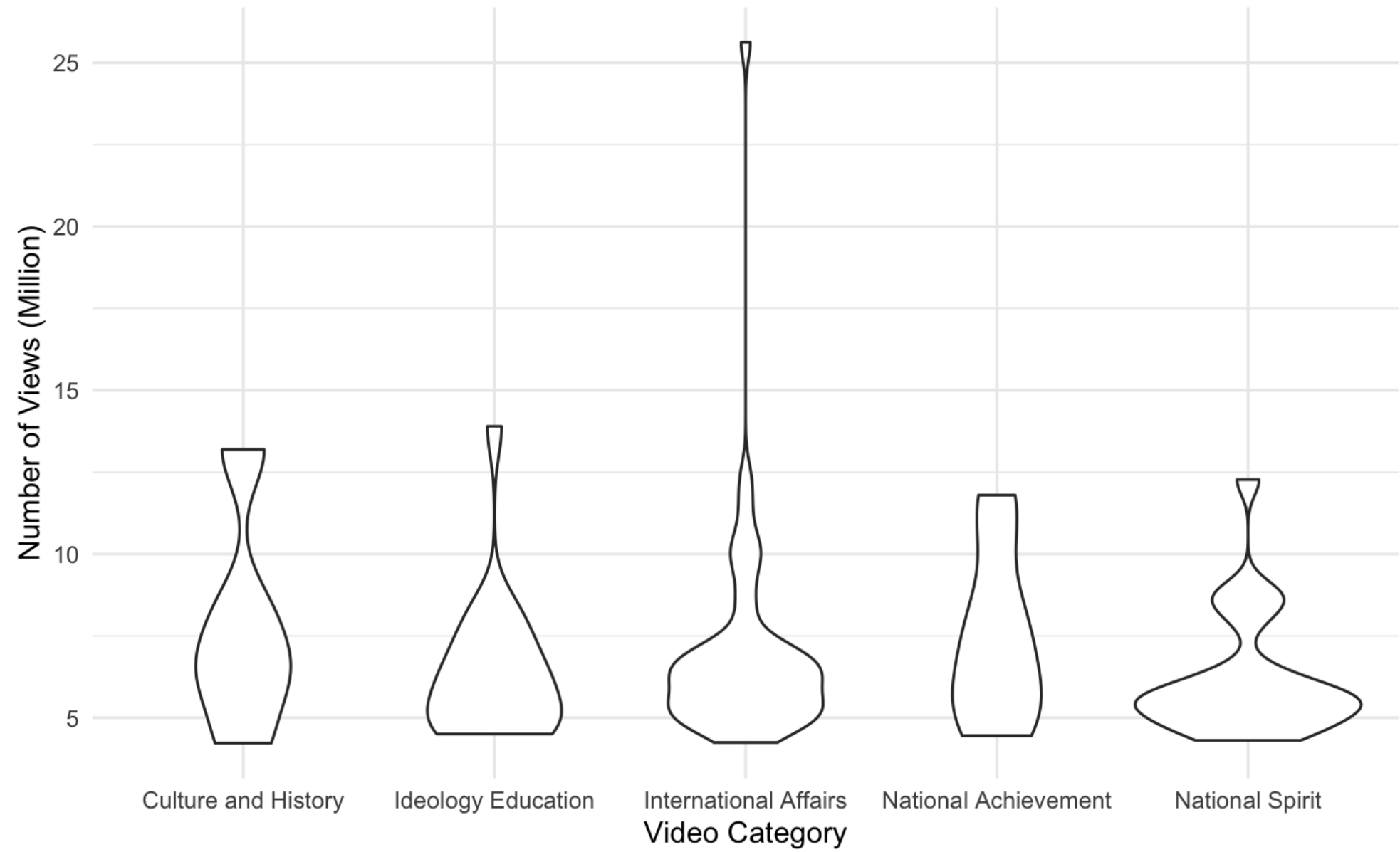
After selecting the top 100 video content, we will first manually categorize them into the five following categories:

- 1) videos showing contribution and devotion to the country
- 2) videos showing achievements of the country
- 3) videos concerning the diplomatic
- 4) videos about Chinese history and traditional cultures
- 5) videos about ideological education
- 6) videos concerning the international image of China.

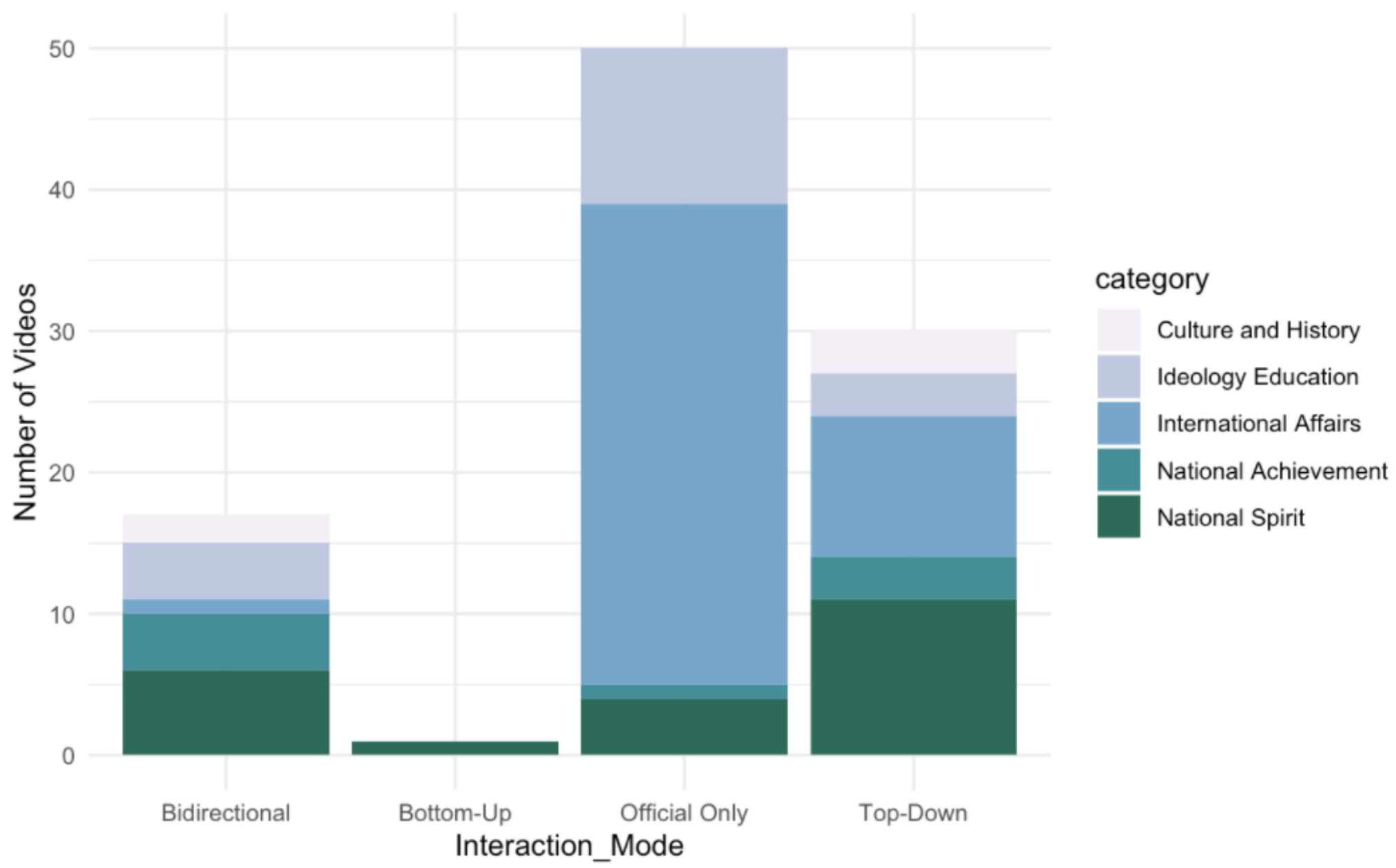
With the dataset of the 100 videos selected, we will further manually categorize them into playful and not playful, two categories.

Finally, we will see whether the number of Danmaku differs from different categories of video, and run an association test to see whether there is a statistically significant difference between videos with and without playful patriotism on the number of Danmaku.

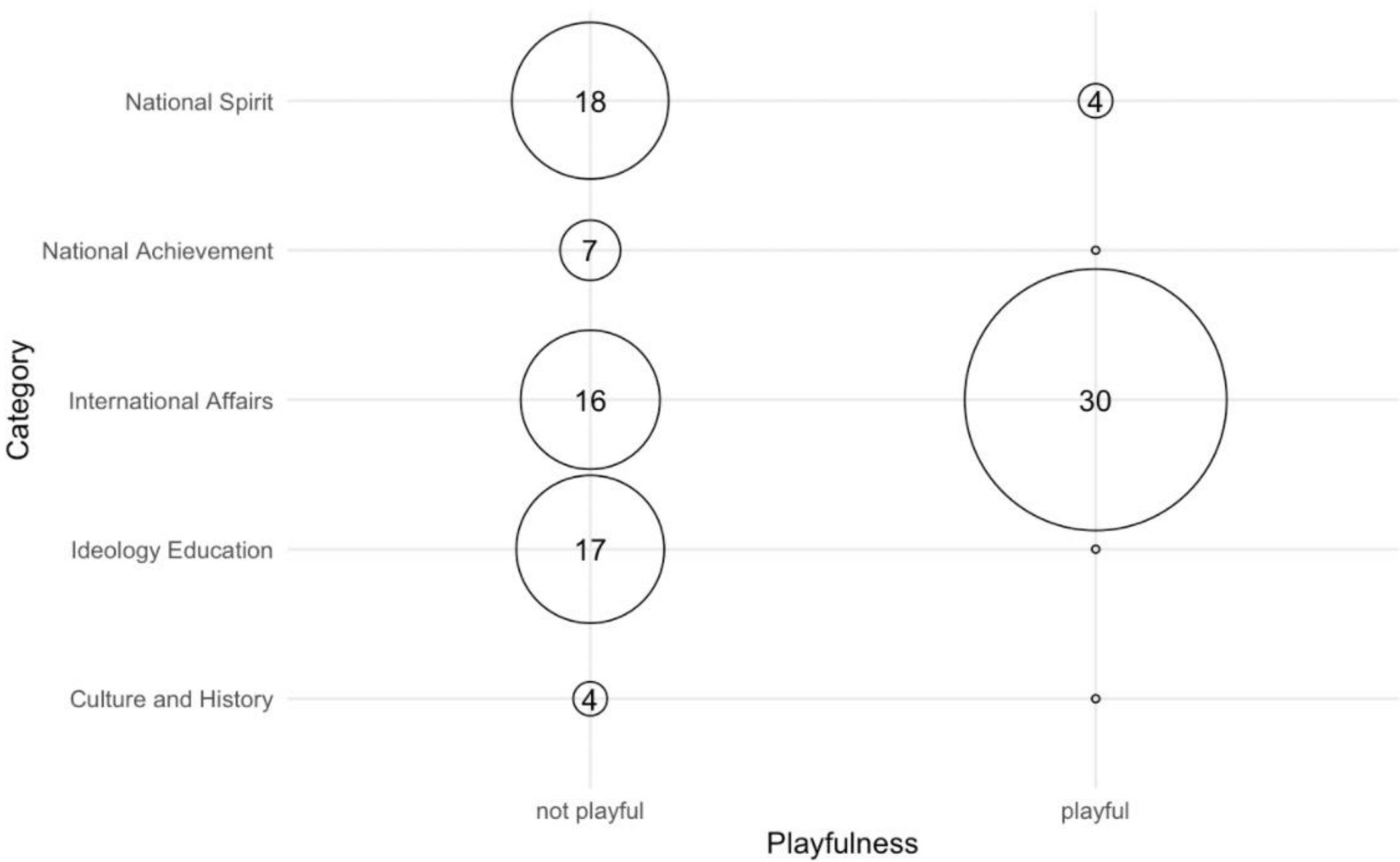
Results



A considerable number of professional users on Bilibili have been actively imitating the videos released from the official accounts. Meanwhile, the figure also shows that there has been some learning and adoption of the official accounts from the common users in Bilibili.

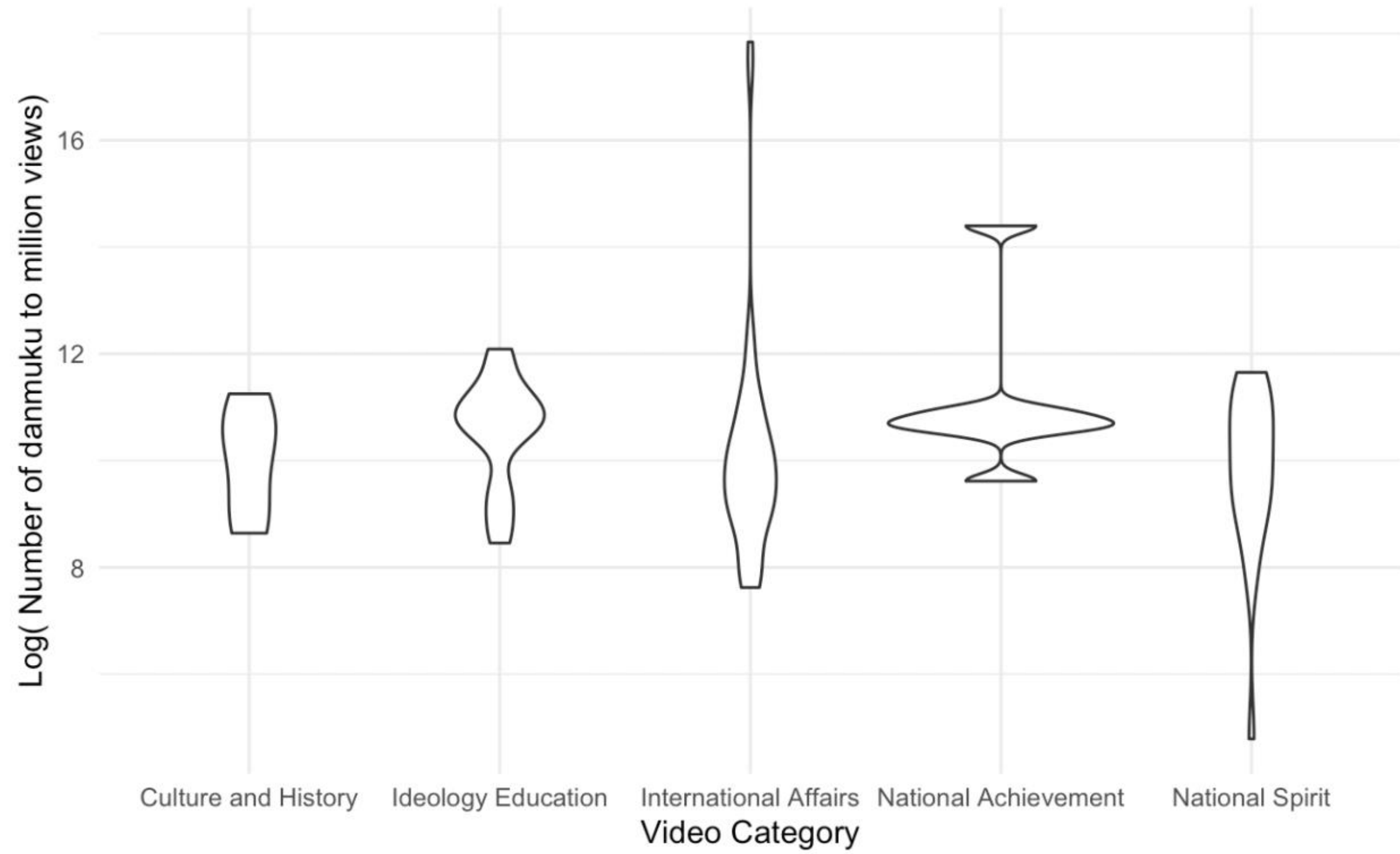


Among the 100 videos collected, the majority of the videos are in a not playful tone. Meanwhile, as shown in the figure below, among the videos with playful patriotism, videos about international affairs compose the absolute majority, which is more than the sum of all other categories.



χ^2 Tests	Value	df	p
χ^2	6.09	2	0.048
Likelihood ratio	6.96	2	0.031
Fisher's exact test			0.044
N	99		

The playful videos are significantly more likely to have originated from and circulated among official accounts (n=99, df=2, p-value = 0.048), instead of attracting users to imitate (Top-Down mode), create (Bottom-Up mode), and interact (Bidirectional mode).



Danmaku_to_view
= Log(Number of Danmaku)/Number of views (Million)
It turns out that the ratio of number of Danmaku of most nationalistic videos are within the range of 8 to 12. Three outliers are noteworthy. Firstly, few of the videos concerning international relations have a particularly heated reaction in Danmaku. Meanwhile, some videos on national achievement also gained massive responses. Finally, some videos about national spirit seem to have an unusually low response in Danmaku, which may relate to the censorship of the platform.

Discussion and Limitations

The common users, apart from their high participation rate in posting Danmaku comments, they actively imitated and re-create the videos of official accounts, which form the self-initiated regeneration of state propaganda.

During the research, we found several personal accounts have specialized in re-uploading and re-creating the videos of official accounts due to the high views gained by the videos released by official accounts.

While emphasizing the democratic potentiality of the discussion procedure in Bilibili, Yin and Fung (2017) overlook that Bilibili and the algorithm of this platform remain profit-oriented.

An essential implication is that, despite the seemingly active popular engagement in playful patriotism, the official accounts have always been the most active promoter of making natioanalistic and patriotic propaganda entertaining.