We hear a lot about Chinese "netizens" in the media. Whether it is journalists marvelling at the huge size of the internet population, reporting the latest online vox pop, or discussing whether we should actually be using the term "netizen," Chinese internet users are a frequently referenced demographic. For all the popular interest in them, there is little systematic research on how Chinese netizens behave, what their attitudes are, how they come together and what the implications are for Chinese society, both online and IRL ("in real life"). Focusing on netizens and their online communities, this book is a welcome addition to Chinese internet studies. Furthermore, in focusing largely on "fans," it contributes a promising angle to the growing field of Chinese celebrity studies.

The underlying argument is that online fan communities have the potential to evolve into meaningful new "social collectivities" through the "transformation of fans to publics." Drawing on some well-grounded theoretical antecedents (Castells, Bourdieu), the book employs a network approach to understanding how online communities form, expand and mutate. A major finding is that cyberspace does not merely replicate physical world forms of fandom; rather, technological affordances influence how atomistic fans can become collective publics through a combination of online *and* offline networking. A number of case studies are presented, all fascinating.

The most fully developed case study is that of *Rear Window*, which started as an online discussion board for movie fans in 1998. Zhang interviewed contributors in 2003 and spent years as a participant observer before carrying out follow up interviews a decade later. Although this earlier period in the development of the Chinese internet has taken on an innocent and nostalgic hue, the profile of Zhang's sample in 2003 – 99 per cent of her respondents were aged 18–35 and 97 per cent had a college degree – is a reminder of how unequal access was before cheap smartphones and the popularization of the mobile internet.

Rear Window's amateur enthusiasts contributed to innumerable forum discussions on the merits of individual movies, filmmaking and the industry, contributing to a "counter discourse" distinct from state and commercial preoccupations. The film buffs also mobilized their resources to organize "Private Movie Watchings," networking with universities, malls and bars to secure space and equipment for collective viewings of art house, classic and foreign language films on DVD. This was community building in a physical space that cemented the links made online. Growing in scale, *Rear Window* came to the attention of the mass media which publicized the site, repurposed their content, reported on their activities (and wrote op-eds about the legalities of Private Movie Watchings). According to Zhang, it was this networking-led entry into the public consciousness that "turned the movie fans into a subaltern public" (p. 46), an idea she has developed in several prior publications.

When Zhang revisited the *Rear Window* contributors ten years on, many had leveraged their knowledge and enthusiasm for film, and the relationships (should we say *guanxi?*) established in the community, to become critics, playwrights, movie makers and directors. The internet had undergone major changes in this time too, and these changes were also partly responsible. The popularization of blogging – symbolized by

the launch of Sina's blog platform in 2005 – precipitated a shift away from unheralded contributions on discussion boards to seeking substantial audiences, perhaps even becoming a famous blogger. The connection between blogging (and later, microblogging) and fame was explicit from the start: Sina's blog platform was built on the popularity of celebrities like Xu Jinglei, Ai Weiwei and Han Han.

Nearly all the *Rear Window* alumni had their own blogs (as did a third of Chinese internet users at one point in time) and some of them became minor blog stars. Blogs, and then microblogging, spelt the end of the BBS golden age, but they were instrumental in propelling many individuals into the public consciousness. In the case of *Rear Window*, a network that was initiated in cyberspace and concretized through the accumulation of social capital via online and offline connections, Zhang argues that they helped transform a "subaltern public" into a "regular public." One might logically ask what the implications of this transformation might be. The answer to that question awaits further study, but Zhang is convinced that "the politics of fandom publics is not democracy" (p. 134).

One further discussion, though embryonic, looks at how new technological affordances have reduced the distance between audiences and celebrities, making it possible for Chinese fans to experience (the illusion of) personal and reciprocal "relationships" with stars, via services like Weibo, Weixin or Fenda, the "ask-a-celebrity" mobile app that was recently banned. Zhang draws the tentative inference that people are no longer just "onlookers," but members of a network or community drawn to the same "fan object." This requires further investigation, but how fans and celebrities use the internet to interact is a fascinating question that Chinese celebrity studies is just starting to grapple with.

It is unfortunate that the book is pocked by infelicities and errors. We're told that China has 5.64 billion internet users, which is quite a feat even by Chinese standards (p. 16). A troubled narcissistic young woman and one-time internet meme becomes Forong Jiejie (p. 15). Former *Rear Window* contributors reportedly "quitted their jobs and became free-lancers" (p. 56). An understanding of power is described as "Foucaultian" (p. 139). Irrespective of these imperfections, this is an enjoyable study that raises numerous promising lines of inquiry.

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What do we mean by the term "film theory"? Usually, as Victor Fan points out at the beginning of his book, various comprehensive explanatory models of cinema, developed across a carefully defined corpus of texts, all composed by a coterie of Euro-American scholars. Chinese-language scholarship has largely been excluded from this canon. And yet, Chinese intellectuals and filmmakers have written about cinema since the medium's emergence. Though Fan argues that such writing is often more akin to vernacular criticism than grand theory, it has nonetheless conducted a distant and unacknowledged debate with those figures at the core of the