

Editorial Note

The Journal of Social Science and Humanities (JSSH) is a journal focusing on issues of society and development. For Vol. 1, Issue 2 (2025), the journal received a total of nine submissions. Following peer review, five outstanding contributions were selected for publication.

This issue brings together five studies that span literature, media, labor, and cultural analysis, each offering fresh insights into contemporary social and humanistic concerns. Yang and Xiang revisit Bob Dylan's "The Death of Emmett Till," showing how the song functions not only as an artistic retelling of the 1955 tragedy but also as a historical intervention that shaped public awareness of racial injustice and continues to resonate in the era of Black Lives Matter. Li et al. develop the Emotional Consistency Index, a new quantitative tool designed to measure the emotional alignment between subtitles and audience responses in cross-cultural transmedia contexts, filling a methodological gap left by traditional accuracy-based evaluation metrics. Jiang's article turns to China's rapidly expanding gig economy, identifying the information barriers faced by flexible workers within the digital communication ecosystem and proposing a three-dimensional support mechanism—technological empowerment, institutional safeguards, and social collaboration—to improve rights protection and promote high-quality sectoral development. Tan analyzes Wong Kar-wai's *Blossoms Shanghai* through Performance Studies Theory, exploring how the series' female characters undergo a gradual awakening and reconstruction of female consciousness as they navigate both personal growth and the shifting tides of their historical era. Finally, Li challenges conventional critiques of postmodern literature by examining Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, arguing that its fragmented narrative form, dark humor, and metafictional devices embody not political apathy but rather a profound engagement with historical trauma and the ethics of memory. Together, these five contributions highlight the evolving intersections of culture, technology, labor, and history, demonstrating the diverse ways in which scholarly inquiry can illuminate social realities and collective experience.

The JSSH Editorial Office sincerely thanks all authors for their contributions. We also extend our appreciation to the reviewers for their valuable insights and rigorous evaluations. Looking ahead, we warmly welcome future submissions and encourage scholars to continue sharing their innovative research with our readership.

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History, Lyrics, Text:

A New Historicist Analysis of Bob Dylan's "The Death of Emmett Till"

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Bob Dylan; "The Death of Emmett Till" ; racial oppression; Civil Rights Movement	Bob Dylan's song "The Death of Emmett Till" is not only an artistic portrayal of the 1955 Emmett Till tragedy but also an important work for analyzing racial issues in America from a new historicist view. Through its lyrics and melody, the song vividly tells the story of the Till case, highlighting the oppression of African Americans under Southern white supremacy and Jim Crow laws. Its widespread interpretation has played a key role in advancing the Civil Rights Movement, raising public awareness and prompting reflection on racial inequality. It highlights the song's dual role as both a historical record and an active part in shaping history. In the context of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, "The Death of Emmett Till" has been shared, reinterpreted, and reproduced, becoming a key cultural symbol for addressing racial injustice. Its influence goes beyond time and continues to impact ongoing discussions about racial issues.
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In February 1962, at a conference advocating racial equality held at the Finjan Club in Montreal, Canada, a young Bob Dylan performed the song "The Death of Emmett Till" for the first time. He subsequently performed the song at numerous public events and included it in the 2010 album "The Witmark Demos: 1962-1964 (The Bootleg Series Vol. 9)," reigniting public interest in the Emmett Till case. Since the Black Lives Matter movement received a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in January 2021, racial issues in the United States have once again become a focal point of international discourse. In 2018, Crowe drew parallels between Trayvon Martin, the Black teenager shot by police in Florida in 2012, and Emmett Till, the youth lynched by two white men in 1955, offering a fresh examination of the Till case. He views the 21st-century "Black Lives Matter" shootings as a contemporary reenactment of the 1950s Till incident, demonstrating that while racism has waned, it remains latent within the so-called post-racial era. Research indicates that existing studies on the song "The Death of Emmett Till" predominantly adopt sociological approaches, focusing on its broad societal impact, while few scholars have interpreted it through a new historicist lens. Given that African Americans remain in a relatively disadvantaged social position today, and existing research has failed to fully reveal the dynamic connection between the social realities of racial conflict in the United States and media works through

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historical texts, the profound impact of the Tire lynching continues to remind people to pay attention to racial relations in the United States. Therefore, analysis from a new historicist theoretical perspective is particularly necessary.

Emerging in American academia during the 1980s, New Historicism transcended the limitations of Formalism and Old Historicism. While Formalism tended to view literary works as isolated aesthetic objects, Old Historicism often treated history as mere background for literary study or regarded literature as a passive reflection of history (Shi & Wang, 2008). New Historicism shifted emphasis toward interpreting texts through the lenses of power relations, ideology, and political hegemony (Wang, 1999). Louis Montrose, a leading figure in New Historicism, proposed that the relationship between literary texts and historical contexts can be understood through two dimensions: the historicity of texts and the textuality of history. The textuality of history implies that our entire knowledge and understanding of the past can only be obtained through the exploration of surviving social texts (Shi & Wang, 2008). The historicity of texts manifests in how individual experiential texts reflect the contradictory relationship between society and materiality (Wang, 1999). Inspired by this, this paper utilizes Bob Dylan's lyrics and other relevant literature to explore the racial conflicts and oppression that preceded the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the historical narrativity and textual historicity these phenomena reveal.

1. The Historical Till Lynching Case

In 2003, to fulfill Mamie Till's dying wish, the PBS documentary series *American Experience* aired "The Murder of Emmett Till," reigniting public interest in the case. On August 17, 2005, the documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Till*, directed by Keith Beauchamp, prompted the U.S. Department of Justice to reopen the Till case. That same year, the FBI conducted an exhumation autopsy to confirm the remains were Till's, revealing previously unknown details through the condition of the body while upholding principles of fairness and justice. In 2010, witness and Till's cousin Simon provided new testimony about Till's presence in the retail store in his book, *Simon's Story: An Eyewitness Account of the Kidnapping of Emmett Till*. In 2017, *The Blood of Emmett Till* exposed Caroline's false allegations of sexual harassment against Till through interviews with her. In 2018, the book *Escaping Murder: The True Story of the Till Lynching* revisited the case and linked it to the Black Lives Matter movement. Although Till had been educated in Chicago's black schools since childhood, the northern city was not as deeply affected by Jim Crow laws as the South. Thus, when Till vacationed in Mississippi, a state plagued by severe racial tensions, he disregarded his mother's warning to show humility around white people. On the evening of Wednesday, August 24, 1955, egged on by friends, Till entered a local retail store to buy candy and whistled as he left¹. At 4 a.m. on Friday, after store owner Roy returned to Muncie County and learned of the *whistle* incident, he abducted Till at 2:30 a.m. on Sunday. The next day, the news devastated Till's mother, Mamie. She immediately

¹ Although Carolyn testified during the subsequent trial that Till had grabbed her hand, tried to ask her out on a date, grabbed her around the waist to hug her, and whistled at her, which infuriated her to the point of grabbing a gun in anger, in the book *The Blood of Emmett Till*, Carolyn admitted to having lied about the incident. According to eyewitness accounts, Till actually whistled after leaving the store and merely handed her some candy. It is suggested that Till whistled to alleviate his stuttering caused by polio, while others believe he did so as a sign of approval of his friends' admiration for the beauty of the store owner, Carolyn.

contacted the Chicago police and newspapers. By Wednesday, a fisherman discovered Till's body. Heartbroken, Mamie used the media to expose the perpetrator's atrocities nationwide, pleading for justice (Tyson, 2017). Yet on September 6, 1955, the day of Till's funeral, a large crowd of Black people gathered, hoping to witness the conviction of the white man who had lynched an innocent Black man. The outcome proved devastating: the suspect was ultimately acquitted. Following the case's conclusion, numerous Black media outlets voiced discontent and protest against the verdict. Some publications, such as the *New York Post*, even predicted that this case marked only the beginning of a nationwide upheaval in racial relations within the struggle for equality and justice. Leveraging the Till case, civil rights leaders like Medgar Evers and Mamie delivered public speeches to raise funds for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Nobel laureate William Faulkner once remarked that this event existed to test humanity's worthiness of survival. If American culture had degenerated to the point of murdering children regardless of skin color, then humanity was unworthy of existence, indeed, incapable of enduring.

Through textual narration, history vividly reveals its authentic visage and the vulnerable position of Black people under white supremacist oppression. In her memoir *Growing Up in Mississippi*, African American writer Anna Moody recalled losing her childhood innocence in Mississippi after seeing Till's photograph in the newspaper. Before Till's murder, she feared only famine, hell, and the devil; afterward, she began dreading assassination simply because of her skin color (Teasley & Ikard, 2010). This case spurred numerous Black women, including civil rights activists and writers like Joyce Ladner, to join civil rights organizations. Simultaneously, many Black women, fearing the Till tragedy might befall them, courageously joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. According to Douglas, biographer of Rosa Parks, when Rosa saw the gruesome image of Till's body in a magazine, she felt profound grief and revulsion, an experience that directly precipitated her refusal to give up her seat (Crowe, 2018). Moreover, print media, as a vehicle for historical events, profoundly influenced the course of history. The Till case spurred his mother, Mamie, to become a civil rights activist and dedicate herself to the activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This incident also exposed white supremacist ideology in the American South to public scrutiny, making it a target of widespread condemnation and indirectly winning the support of some white citizens for the civil rights movement (Mace, 2014). After the trial, Mamie traveled north with the NAACP, conducting public speeches and fundraising campaigns led by Congressman Charles Diggs. This ignited a movement involving labor unions, progressive religious groups, old-left activists, and ordinary citizens, transforming the Southern civil rights struggle into a nationwide coalition effort (Tyson, 2017). Overall, Till's death catalyzed the civil rights movement. It not only exposed white supremacists' protection of lynchings and KKK activities but also fueled greater outrage among Black civil rights activists (Mace, 2014). The Till case was unique as the first major civil rights event where media intervention altered the course of events, igniting regionalist sentiments across the North and South (Crowe, 2018). White and Black media across the North and South jointly condemned the South's nominal justice system. Simultaneously, Black journalists from the North, through their involvement in Till's trial and experiences in Mississippi, personally witnessed severe racial discrimination and segregation. These experiences fostered deep empathy for the plight of Southern Blacks whose lives were deemed worthless, leading to more critical reporting. Unlike their white counterparts, they viewed the Till case as an extension of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision at the national level, striving to build popular

support for racial equality and disseminate progressive ideas. Following the verdict, over a thousand people gathered in Paris to protest the outcome, and spontaneous demonstrations erupted in four cities, including Paris. Despite Mississippi's mainstream media attempts to downplay public attention on the incident, the case not only ignited domestic resistance but also severely damaged America's international image across Asia, Africa, Europe, and communist nations. Public memory of this unjust verdict prevailed over attempts to forget it (Mace, 2014). History is preserved through records in newspapers and other media, enabling future generations to reconstruct the past. Simultaneously, public opinion profoundly influenced historical processes, propelling the civil rights movement forward and gradually eradicating the ideology of racial segregation and inequality.²

The death of Emmett Till has acquired new significance in the modern era. In terms of racial power oppression, related songs symbolize the covert oppression of Black people by racism in the new era. In January 2009, Barack Obama's election as America's first Black president led many to believe the nation had entered a post-racial era. However, the 2013 "Black Lives Matter" movement sparked widespread debate about the myth of post-racialism. To this day, many Black Americans continue to debate whether affirmative action has genuinely achieved racial equality or instead created disguised discrimination. While some scholars argue that Obama's election brought hope and optimism to African Americans, symbolizing the possibility of racial reconciliation and equality (Teasley & Ikard, 2010), his presidency, to some extent, obscured the realities of racial inequality and wealth disparity in the United States, while also masking the truth of the deteriorating economic conditions. He not only perpetuated the existing unequal economic system but also excluded racial factors from policy analysis (Teasley & Ikard, 2010). Dylan's song can be seen as a prophecy of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, reflecting his skepticism toward the myth of a post-racial era. The "Black Lives Matter" movement not only shattered the illusion of a post-racial society but also harnessed the power of new media to unite African Americans, writing a new chapter in history and issuing a powerful protest against the oppressive power imposed by white society.

2. The Till Lynching Case in Bob Dylan's Lyrics

"The Death of Emmett Till" is an underrated work by Bob Dylan, less well-known than *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, which depicts racial incidents. less civil rights-focused or rebellious than *Oxford Town*, which reflects racial tensions during the enrollment of Mississippi's first black college student; less socially significant than *Hurricane*, the theme song for the national "Rolling Thunder Revue" tour organized to

² Spurred by Mamie and the media, the Mayor of Chicago declared July 25th as Emmett Till Day in 1992. Additionally, Beauchamp's 2005 documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Till* attempted to push for a retrial of the case by exhuming the body and using DNA technology, which once again sparked widespread public interest in the case and ignited a new wave of learning about the Emmett Till case through local and national media. It was due to the continued public attention that the victims of lynching finally received a national apology and a promise to establish a dedicated department (Justice Department office) to review lynching cases. In memory of Till's sacrifice, in 1984 Chicago, Mamie, and Rosa Parks jointly built Emmett Till Road, and in 1995 renamed a bridge in Chicago the Emmett Till Memorial Bridge. On July 2, 2005, a section of Mississippi State Route 49, east of the highway, was renamed the Emmett Till Memorial Highway.

secure bail for a black boxer; and less poetic than *Just a Pawn in Their Game*, commemorating civil rights leader Medgar Evers. Yet this song marked Dylan's first musical engagement with the civil rights movement and his initial challenge to Jim Crow laws and racism. Notably, the song was written as early as 1962 and performed by Joan Baez in 1963, but it wasn't officially included on an album until 1972 and again in 2010.³ Dylan's 2010 re-inclusion of the song signaled his rejection of the myth of America's so-called "post-racial era."

The "historicity of the text" emphasized by New Historicism encompasses three dimensions: First, all texts possess socio-historical roots, being products of specific cultures; second, textual interpretation is not objective but evolves dynamically over time; Finally, texts themselves possess the agency to shape history (Zhang, 2004). "The Death of Emmett Till" not only documented history but also functioned as an active participant in it, driving public attention to the Till case and laying the groundwork for Bob Dylan's establishment as a spokesperson for the civil rights movement. According to New Historicism and Historical Poetics, the "textuality of history" carries dual significance: on one hand, only historical texts preserved through active selection enable people to approach and deeply understand history; on the other, when texts become the basis for historians' interpretations, they once again demonstrate agency and creativity (Zhang, 2004). When songs become historical materials for study in the new era, their blank spaces fully mobilize people's interpretive agency. This not only helps people decipher Dylan's values through his songs but also deepens their understanding of the historical context of the 1950s. Therefore, supplementing relevant historical backgrounds and contexts is indispensable when interpreting texts. This not only helps reveal the agency of the text but also highlights the dynamism of historical narratives.

Despite the Till case drawing widespread public attention, it remains merely one emblematic tragedy among countless unresolved injustices against Black Americans. As public fervor waned, Bob Dylan, adopting the folk-rooted stance of a left-leaning intellectual, paid tribute to all victims of Jim Crow laws and white supremacy. Written in 1962, "The Death of Emmett Till" marked Dylan's first song addressing racial issues and his inaugural protest song (Williamson, 2015). Infused with fierce anger and compassion, Dylan meticulously recounts the entire incident in the lyrics from the death of an innocent Black teenager to the perpetrator's sentencing. The song's first verse provides an overview of the incident, portraying a young boy murdered because of his skin color. Dylan contrasts the boy's origins in *Chicago* with the crime's location in *Mississippi*, alluding to differing levels of racism between the North and South. By emphasizing the boy's youth, he implicitly contextualizes the historical backdrop. Following the Civil War, regional perspectives on this tragedy were shaped by newspaper coverage, creating distinct geographical imprints. Till's mother was a Black woman who migrated north during the Great Migration, so Till grew up in the North. His Northern identity and adolescent age amplified regionalism and territorial conflicts within the United States. The most pronounced regional characteristic emerged as the incident unfolded: the American South, including Mississippi, came to be seen as a microcosm of the nation's broader Black issues. With its large Black population and frequent lynchings, Mississippi was widely perceived as a threat to American democracy. White Mississippians believed their state's laws should remain free from

³ "The Death of Emmett Till" was released in 1972 on the album *Broadside Ballads, Vol. 6: Broadside Reunion*, and again in September 2010 on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 9 – The Witmark Demos: 1962–1964*.

outside interference and that any challenge to white supremacy deserved punishment. Till's flirtation with a white woman was interpreted as a black man's desire for a white woman, violating the taboos of white supremacy. It was perceived as an alleged assault on the purity of white women and a threat to white racial integrity (Mace, 2014). Following the Great Migration, many Chicago blacks had relatives in Mississippi whom they visited regularly. Till's tragedy sounded an alarm: lynching and murder could strike any black child, a realization that pierced their hearts. Thus, during Till's three-day funeral, over 100,000 people, regardless of gender or age, were shocked, terrified, and enraged by the gruesome state of the body (Tyson, 2017).

Moreover, Till precisely belonged to the student group that needed protection in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case. His personal background was unblemished, lacking any prior involvement in the civil rights movement. This fact undoubtedly dealt a heavy blow to the Black community, which had rejoiced at the declared end of public school segregation. Till's influence even surpassed that of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, assassinated in 1963, largely due to his identity as a Northern student and teenager. However, it is noteworthy that Till was not as young and inexperienced as portrayed.

In fact, following the racial conflicts of 1919, Chicago's South Side gradually became predominantly Black, while the North Side remained almost entirely white. By the 1940s, Chicago's real estate market was strictly segregated by race, barring Black residents from living in predominantly white neighborhoods. At that time, Chicago was one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States, with its Black enclaves earning the grim nickname "Mississippi of the North." Till grew up in a strictly segregated Black neighborhood and attended racially segregated Black schools. Yet before the Black children of Mississippi, Till's greatest boast was the voting rights enjoyed by Chicago's Black community (Tyson, 2017).

The second and third verses vividly depict the prevalence of white lynchings in Mississippi, where whites unjustifiably believed they had the right to torment children. This mindset, deeply rooted in the white supremacist traditions of the South, reflects indifference toward lynchings and prejudice against Black people. Till's abduction and murder were ostensibly justified by the criminals' claims that he had whistled at a white woman and made physical advances. In reality, Till had merely broken an unwritten rule by placing candy into the female shopkeeper's hand and whistling as he departed. Perhaps, at this moment, the truth no longer mattered. Only the tragedy born of layers of discrimination remains profoundly thought-provoking. Particularly in the era when multimedia was just emerging, newspaper depictions of Till's horrifyingly mutilated body shocked and enraged many. His skull was crushed, one eye brutally gouged out, and a wound stretching from ear to mouth required stitches to prevent his brain from being exposed. Moreover, the body had lost its youthful features after being submerged in water. Since the 1880s, Mississippi had recorded over five hundred documented lynchings of Black individuals, yet not a single perpetrator had faced trial. Had it not been for the widespread media coverage of Till's horrifying remains and the profound sympathy expressed by tens of thousands at his funeral, the court might not have announced charges against the perpetrators on September 7th (Tyson, 2017). This marked Mississippi's first prosecution of whites for lynching. Before the verdict, all Black people hoped the victim's wrongs would be redressed, drawing widespread attention to the case at the time (Crowe, 2018). Mississippi, where this atrocity occurred, was viewed by other states as a microcosm of Black issues and a barometer of racial tensions. This perception stemmed from its tolerance of lynchings against Black people in the 1920s, the rise to power of white supremacists like Hildo Billbo,

and officials' embrace of communist conspiracy theories regarding the *Brown v. Board of Education* case (Mace, 2014). Other states, particularly those in the North, viewed Mississippi as a backward backwater of the South due to its high number of lynchings and the mass migration of African Americans northward between 1910 and 1930. This migration not only supplied labor to the Midwest but also provided African Americans with avenues for voice. Following the Great Migration, black newspapers and magazines proliferated, relaying protests against discrimination and housing/employment inequality to the North. These regional publications championed Northern regionalism, becoming pivotal forces in shaping public attention around the Till case. They not only intensified North-South regionalism but also fueled public outrage over lynchings. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, this event was seen as a symbol propelling the development of American democracy. At the time, the internet was still in its infancy, with a history of only a decade or so and not yet widely adopted. Consequently, the perspectives expressed in newspapers and magazines carried distinct regional and fixed characteristics, a trait that positively amplified the voice of the Till case.

The fourth verse of the lyrics likens the absurd spectacle of a defendant confessing in court only to be coerced into denying guilt to a *joke*, whose root cause lies in the regionalism and racism entrenched among white Southerners. On August 28, 1955, exactly one year and three months after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, as the nation celebrated progress toward racial equality in education, Till's death cast a shadow over the country, reminding Black Americans that the fight for equal rights was far from over. More than a Northern figure, Till represented, in the eyes of the trial judge and jury, a powerful force opposing racial segregation. He symbolized the growing Northern Black influence sparked by *Brown v. Board of Education*, gradually eroding Southern white supremacy. To assert white sovereignty in Mississippi and defend racial superiority, the trial devolved into a farce, disregarding truth and justice, its outcome predetermined from the outset.

As Section Five noted, the verdict declared Till *drowned* in the *ocean* of Southern Jim Crow laws, and equally drowned in the unjust judicial system of the South. Mississippi, with the largest Black population, had the lowest Black voter turnout, a stark illustration of the region's deep-seated racial discrimination. Consequently, NAACP leader Megra believed the key to advancing the civil rights movement lay in increasing Black voter turnout to amplify Black voices within judicial, legislative, and administrative systems. At that time, the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP was thriving, having successfully pushed for the elimination of segregation in public facilities like gas stations, while its membership continued to grow. Beginning in 1950, the organization initiated petitions to abolish racial segregation in education. However, the Citizens' Council, backed by state funding, employed warnings, threats, and violence to coerce petitioners and NAACP leaders into compromise, even causing unemployment among those involved, severely hindering the petition process. Furthermore, the Council assassinated two key Mississippi leaders, forcing other major figures to flee north. Following Till's murder, these racists used the killings as a warning against school integration and the integration of racial facilities (Tyson, 2017).

Sections Six and Seven warn the world that history must not be ignored and is highly likely to repeat itself, strongly urging unity against the Ku Klux Klan and racist ideology. Dylan's perspective carries distinct contemporary resonance, reflecting the mindset of many white Northerners. Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the nation basked in the euphoria of dismantling segregation, and the civil rights movement gained momentum. By the early 1950s, membership in the NAACP

and other civil rights organizations grew steadily, and protests against segregation in public spaces achieved significant results. Building on this foundation, civil rights leaders began organizing black communities to petition for legislation facilitating black voter registration. The Till case highlighted the conflict between whites and blacks. During the active 1950s for civil rights organizations, such cases became focal points for media attention. This stemmed not only from the rise of the domestic civil rights movement but also from international influences. On the global stage, eager to compete with the Soviet Union, the U.S. federal government sought to project an image of national unity. Racial conflicts undeniably undermined the principles of equal rights America championed in the international media. Thus, in 1947, President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights responded to the NAACP's call by elevating domestic racial issues to the international political level, making them a global concern (Tyson, 2017). Against this backdrop, the Till case drew nearly a hundred journalists and over thirty photographers from different states and countries even before the trial began. However, Sheriff Steed's deployment of armed soldiers to patrol and disperse Black citizens and journalists made the tense racial relations in Mississippi starkly evident to onlookers. Simultaneously, a sympathetic female reporter from the United Packing Workers union discovered that speaking with Black men endangered her life and even barred her from attending the trial. Furthermore, the incident where Michigan's African American Congressman Charles was stopped at the courthouse entrance due to his skin color, only granted entry after identification, shocked Mississippi's white community (Tyson, 2017). Facing such formidable obstacles, many media outlets pinned their hopes on the federal government to fairly address domestic racial inequality, thereby curbing the spread of communist ideology and advancing the progress of American democracy. In 1947, the NAACP declared that Mississippi, not the Soviet Union, threatened American democracy. Precisely because of the Cold War context, white Mississippians also viewed the Till tragedy as a conspiracy orchestrated by communists and the NAACP to intensify racial conflict within the state (Mace, 2014).

3. The Contemporary Till Lynching Case

By transforming history into textual form, the song transcends the boundaries between music and society, exerting influence on history through its textuality and thereby shaping historical processes. Yet when "The Death of Emmett Till" was released, critics argued that music should adhere to the principles of entertainment and dramatization, rather than replicating history as Dylan did (Tony). Yet Dylan's meticulous recounting of historical details unquestionably upheld the grassroots stance of left-wing intellectuals, leaving critics who sought to rationalize the racist actions of lynchers like Roy powerless to refute the truth. Whether in the 1960s or today, Bob Dylan's lyricism has consistently been grounded in respect for facts and the transmission of values promoting racial equality. This has led his songs to be regarded as crucial components of the civil rights protest movement after his rise to fame. Particularly following the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the renewed attention on the Till case, these songs have been interpreted as historical documents and have stood the test of time. However, Dylan's songs are not a complete factual record; they contain artistic embellishments. For instance, the criminal mentioned in the lyrics did not publicly confess to killing Till during interrogation, nor were the two related as brothers as described in the lyrics (Carlson, 2010). This text prompts readers to deeply contemplate the relationship between facts and artistic expression. In discourse-driven historical writing, truth is often distorted by factors such as ideology, political hegemony, and mainstream public opinion, leading to

discrepancies between textual narratives and historical facts. However, leftist intellectuals like Dylan and participants in the civil rights movement tended to embrace such discourse-driven historical narratives. Dylan's approach not only reveals the textual nature of history but also offers readers a fresh perspective on the relationship between justice and truth (Carlson, 2010).

Hayden White, a leading figure of New Historicism, was profoundly influenced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. White introduced Foucault's ideas into the study of the relationship between history and text, developing a "historical poetics" aimed at decoding, correcting, and undermining dominant discourses (Wang, 1997). Foucault hoped that the conquered masses subjected to power could possess their own history. Yet, while some among these masses exercised their legitimate rights through violent mobilization and resistance, they lacked a distinct language to articulate their history (Brossat, 2014). Against the backdrop of highly developed mass media and increasingly diverse individuality, the struggles of oppressed groups against power have become multifaceted and fragmented. Yet the legitimacy of such resistance is often suppressed by political figures, journalists, juries, and similar groups, even erased from subsequent historical narratives. (Brossat, 2014) The victims of Jim Crow laws, symbolized by lynchings, require new chroniclers to defend the legitimacy of their rediscovery and vindication. Much like Bob Dylan's reflection on the falseness of songwriting motives in interviews, historical texts face a choice under discursive constraints: selectively accept facts to uphold justice, or respect facts while accepting injustice? To "make things clear" or to "tell the truth" (Brossat, 2014)? Dylan chose the former. Influenced by his values, growing numbers of people were inspired to join the civil rights struggle, thereby propelling the course of history.

Unlike Dylan's meticulous recounting of historical details, Nina repeatedly emphasizes her profound hatred for Mississippi after being enlightened in Alabama and Tennessee, the birthplaces of the civil rights movement, cursing the land that claimed the lives of black men like Till and Megra. Both Nina and Dylan were courageous voices in the civil rights struggle, making personal choices amid the acute racial tensions of the 1960s. Thus, as the Black Lives Matter movement intensified in the 21st century, their lyrics were reinterpreted as historical documents, revealing new contemporary significance. In contrast, Dylan's lyrics carry greater didactic significance, while Nina's lyrics express more of the protest sentiment of Black people, revealing certain limitations. "The Death of Emmett Till" not only reflects the creator's values as a musical work, but its catchy melody also amplifies its impact. It powerfully challenged the entrenched racial views of white supremacists, exposed the injustices of the Southern justice system, and laid bare the pernicious effects of Jim Crow laws. As a text, the lyrics document history while simultaneously shaping historical processes, embodying the interplay between textual expression and historical reality. Together with related literature, the song constructs the image of Till's victimhood and the profound racial discrimination it reflects, elements that have gradually become symbols of history. They warn people to recognize and resist the lingering, hidden racial discrimination within American society, compelling a reexamination of the so-called post-racial era myth against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Announcement

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Proposing the Emotional Consistency Index (ECI): A Quantitative Metric for Emotional Alignment in Cross-Cultural Subtitle Translation

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
BERT; Cross-Cultural Subtitling; Emotional Alignment; Affect Analysis; Transmedia Communication; Emotional Consistency Index; VADER	This paper centers on the development and validation of the Emotional Consistency Index (ECI), a novel quantitative metric designed to address a critical gap in translation studies: the lack of tools to measure emotional alignment between subtitled content and audience feedback in cross-cultural transmedia contexts. Traditional subtitle evaluation frameworks prioritize lexical or syntactic accuracy (e.g., BLEU scores, TER), while existing statistical methods (e.g., Pearson's correlation coefficient) fail to leverage the unique properties of standardized emotional data—undermining their utility for studying how subtitles mediate affect across cultures. Derived from Pearson's coefficient but simplified to account for the inherent centering of emotional scores (generated via tools like BERT and VADER), ECI streamlines the quantification of emotional resonance while retaining theoretical rigor. Through controlled simulated data experiments, this research demonstrates ECI's ability to distinguish between varying degrees of emotional alignment, validate its computational efficiency, and situate it within translation studies' broader shift toward transmedia-focused, audience-centric research. This work contributes a practical, theory-driven metric that reorients subtitle evaluation from “linguistic calibration” to the measurement of emotional negotiation—a core dimension of effective cross-cultural communication.
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Introduction

Translation studies has long sought to quantify subtitle effectiveness, yet existing frameworks remain anchored in a narrow focus on lexical or syntactic fidelity. Metrics such as BLEU (Papineni et al., 2002) and Translation Edit Rate (TER; Snover et al., 2006) assess how closely target subtitles match source-text semantics but ignore the *emotional dimension* of cross-cultural communication—arguably the most impactful factor in audience engagement (Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998). As transmedia platforms (e.g., Bilibili, Viki) integrate real-time audience feedback (e.g., bullet screens, comment sections) into content consumption, scholars have increasingly recognized that subtitles do not merely “transfer” meaning: they facilitate dynamic negotiation of affect between source cultures, target audiences, and media forms (Jenkins, 2006).

This shift has exposed a methodological deficit: how to quantify whether subtitles successfully transmit the intended emotional tone of source content to target audiences. While Pearson’s correlation coefficient has been widely adopted in fields like education (Sousa et al., 2024), and social media sentiment analysis (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014), its application to link subtitle emotional scores with audience feedback represents a novel approach in translation studies. However, Pearson’s coefficient requires cumbersome mean-subtraction steps that are redundant for emotional data—specifically, scores generated by state-of-the-art affect analysis tools (e.g., BERT, VADER) are standardized to a $[-1, 1]$ range and exhibit near-zero means (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014; Devlin et al., 2019). This redundancy not only reduces computational efficiency but also creates a disconnect between statistical outputs and their theoretical meaning in translation studies.

To address these limitations, this research proposes the Emotional Consistency Index (ECI): a simplified, contextually adapted metric that retains the mathematical rigor of Pearson’s coefficient while aligning with the unique properties of emotional data and the theoretical priorities of translation studies. ECI is not merely a “statistical shortcut”; it is a theory-driven tool that operationalizes the concept of “emotional alignment” as a measurable construct—one that reflects translation’s role in mediating affect across cultural and media boundaries. Below, this research grounds ECI in translation studies and affect analysis theory, detail its derivation, validate it via simulated data, and discuss its implications for future research.

Theoretical Foundations: Emotional Data, Translation, and the Case for ECI

Before deriving ECI, it is critical to establish two foundational pillars: (1) the unique characteristics of emotional data generated for subtitle and audience feedback analysis, and (2) how these characteristics demand a metric tailored to translation studies’ goals.

1. Standardization and Centering of Emotional Data

Modern affect analysis relies on tools that produce standardized emotional scores, ensuring comparability across texts, languages, and platforms. Two dominant tools in transmedia translation research are:

- **BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers):** A pre-trained language model fine-tuned for emotion classification, which outputs scores

for discrete or continuous affect (Devlin et al., 2019). For subtitle analysis, BERT is typically calibrated to generate continuous scores in the $[-1, 1]$ range, where -1 denotes extreme negative emotion (e.g., grief, anger) and 1 denotes extreme positive emotion (e.g., joy, relief).

- **VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner):** A rule-based model optimized for short, informal texts (e.g., audience comments, bullet screens) that also outputs continuous valence scores in $[-1, 1]$ (Hutto & Gilbert, 2014). VADER’s strength lies in its ability to capture nuance in colloquial language (e.g., sarcasm, intensifiers like “so sad”)—critical for analyzing real-time audience feedback.

A defining feature of scores from these tools is their inherent centering. Large-scale studies of emotional data in media contexts consistently report mean scores near 0. For example, Wang and Xu (2019) provide compelling evidence for this pattern in their comprehensive analysis of 486,025 bullet screen comments extracted from Bilibili’s Classroom of the Elite anime. Their research, which employed a domain-adapted sentiment dictionary built upon Dalian University of Technology’s emotional ontology and supplemented with 794 bullet screen-specific terms, revealed that only 20–40% of the comments contained subjective emotional expressions. The remaining 60–80% consisted of neutral content such as “check-in,” timestamp notes, or the numerical laugh marker “233”. This overwhelming majority of neutral utterances directly contributed to emotional scores clustering around the midpoint. Furthermore, their analysis of emotional distribution showed a balanced pattern across seven categories (joy, anger, sadness, fear, surprise, terror, and diversity), with no single emotion dominating the dataset—a finding visually corroborated by their radar chart visualization. Notably, the sentiment analysis tool used in their study demonstrated 84.9% accuracy in manual validation checks, confirming the reliability of these centering results. This centering arises because emotional content in most media is balanced (e.g., moments of tension offset by neutral exposition) and because tools like BERT and VADER are trained on diverse datasets that prevent valence bias.

For translation studies, this centering is not a trivial detail: it means that emotional data for subtitles (S_i) and audience comments (D_i) already satisfy a key assumption of Pearson’s coefficient—normality and mean proximity to zero—without additional preprocessing. This insight forms the basis of ECI’s simplification.

2. Translation Studies’ Need for Emotion-Centric Metrics

Translation scholars have long argued that effective subtitle translation requires more than lexical accuracy: it demands aligning with the target audience’s cultural cognition and emotional expectations (Gambier, 2013). For example, a subtitle that literalizes a source-culture emotional cue (e.g., a ritualistic expression of sorrow) may be “accurate” lexically but fail to evoke the intended affect in target audiences—leading to misinterpretation or disengagement.

Existing metrics cannot capture this dynamic. BLEU scores, for instance, would award high marks to a literal translation of a cultural emotional cue but provide no insight into whether the cue resonates with audiences (Papineni et al., 2002). Pearson’s coefficient,

while capable of measuring correlation between subtitle and comment emotions, is not designed to answer translation-specific questions: *Does this subtitle strategy (e.g., cultural annotation, paraphrase) improve emotional alignment?* Its requirement for mean subtraction also introduces computational inefficiency for large transmedia datasets (e.g., millions of bullet screen comments), which are increasingly common in subtitle research (Wang&Xu,2019).

ECI addresses these gaps by: (1) simplifying Pearson's coefficient to leverage emotional data's centering, (2) standardizing outputs to a interpretable [-1, 1] range, and (3) grounding scores in translation studies' focus on emotional negotiation.

Derivation of the ECI Formula

ECI's derivation follows a rigorous, theory-informed process: this research starts with Pearson's correlation coefficient (the gold standard for linear relationship measurement), identify redundancies for emotional data, and simplify while preserving statistical validity and theoretical relevance to translation studies.

1. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient: The Starting Point

Pearson's coefficient (r) measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables (X and Y) and is defined as:

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})(Y_i - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (X_i - \bar{X})^2} \times \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (Y_i - \bar{Y})^2}}$$

Where:

- X_i and Y_i = individual observations of variables X and Y ,
- \bar{X} and \bar{Y} = sample means of X and Y ,
- n = number of observations.

In subtitle translation research, X typically represents subtitle emotional scores (S_i) and Y represents audience comment emotional scores (D_i) (Wang & Xu, 2019). The numerator (covariance) measures how S_i and D_i vary together, while the denominator (product of standard deviations) standardizes the result to [-1, 1].

2. Simplifying for Centered Emotional Data

As established earlier, emotional scores from BERT and VADER exhibit mean values near 0 ($\bar{S} \approx 0$; $\bar{D} \approx 0$). For such data, the mean-subtraction terms ($S_i - \bar{S}$ and $D_i - \bar{D}$) simplify to S_i and D_i , respectively. This reduces the covariance (numerator) to:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n (S_i - \bar{S})(D_i - \bar{D}) \approx \sum_{i=1}^n S_i D_i$$

Similarly, the variance terms in the denominator simplify to:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n (S_i - \bar{S})^2 \approx \sum_{i=1}^n S_i^2 \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^n (D_i - \bar{D})^2 \approx \sum_{i=1}^n D_i^2$$

3. The Final ECI Formula

Substituting these simplifications into Pearson’s coefficient yields the ECI formula:

$$ECI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i D_i}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n S_i^2 \times \sum_{i=1}^n D_i^2}}$$

Where:

- S_i = continuous emotional score of the i -th subtitle segment (range: [-1, 1], generated via BERT or equivalent),
- D_i = aggregated continuous emotional score of audience comments corresponding to the i -th subtitle segment (range: [-1, 1], generated via VADER or equivalent),
- n = number of subtitle-comment pairs in the analysis.

Key Interpretations for Translation Studies:

- **ECI = 1:** Perfect emotional alignment. The subtitle’s emotional tone is fully reflected in audience feedback (e.g., a sorrowful subtitle evokes uniformly sorrowful comments). This indicates successful emotional negotiation, often associated with culturally adaptive translation strategies (e.g., annotating emotional cues).
- **ECI = 0:** No linear emotional alignment. The subtitle’s emotional tone and audience feedback are unrelated (e.g., a humorous subtitle elicits random positive/negative comments). This suggests the translation fails to mediate affect effectively.
- **ECI = -1:** Perfect emotional opposition. The subtitle’s emotional tone is directly contradicted by audience feedback (e.g., a tragic subtitle elicits mocking comments). This indicates severe misinterpretation, often due to culturally insensitive translation.

4. Computational Efficiency of ECI

Beyond theoretical alignment with emotional data, ECI offers practical advantages for large-scale translation research. Using Python’s `scipy.stats.pearsonr` and a custom ECI function, this research compared computation times for datasets of varying sizes ($n = 10,000$; $n = 100,000$; $n = 1,000,000$) using standardized emotional scores. As shown in Table 1, ECI reduces computation time by 28–32% compared to Pearson’s coefficient—consistent with gains reported for simplified statistical metrics in large datasets (Virtanen

et al., 2020). This efficiency is critical for analyzing transmedia feedback, where datasets often exceed millions of observations (Wang & Xu, 2019).

Table 1: Computation Time Comparison (Mean \pm SD, n = 10 Runs)

Dataset Size	Pearson's Coefficient (s)	ECI (s)	Time Reduction (%)
10,000	0.12 ± 0.02	0.08 ± 0.01	33.3
100,000	1.15 ± 0.09	0.78 ± 0.07	32.2
1,000,000	12.34 ± 0.81	8.56 ± 0.63	30.6

Validating ECI with Simulated Data

To test ECI's ability to measure emotional alignment in subtitle translation, this research designed three controlled simulated scenarios—reflecting common challenges in cross-cultural emotional negotiation—and evaluated ECI's performance against theoretical expectations.

1. Simulation Design

All simulations used emotional scores consistent with real-world distributions:

- **Subtitle scores (S_i):** Generated from a normal distribution $N(0,0.3)$ (mimicking subtle emotional shifts in dramatic content, where most segments are neutral or moderately valenced).
- **Comment scores (D_i):** Generated with varying degrees of alignment to S_i , plus Gaussian noise (ϵ) to simulate real-world audience variability:
 - a. **Scenario 1: High Emotional Alignment (Culturally Adaptive Translation).** $D_i = 0.8 \times S_i + \epsilon$, where $\epsilon \sim N(0,0.1)$. This simulates a subtitle strategy that adapts emotional cues to the target culture (e.g., annotating a source-culture sorrowful ritual), leading to strong audience resonance.
 - b. **Scenario 2: Low Emotional Alignment (Literal Translation).** $D_i = 0.3 \times S_i + \epsilon$, where $\epsilon \sim N(0,0.5)$. This simulates a literal translation that retains source-culture emotional cues without adaptation, leading to fragmented audience responses.
 - c. **Scenario 3: Emotional Opposition (Misinterpreted Translation).** $D_i = -0.9 \times S_i + \epsilon$, where $\epsilon \sim N(0,0.1)$. This simulates a translation that distorts the source emotional tone (e.g., rendering a tragic line as comedic), leading to contradictory audience feedback.

For each scenario, this research generated 10 independent datasets ($n = 100,000$) to ensure result reliability.

2. Validation Metrics

This research evaluated ECI against two criteria:

- **Convergent Validity:** Does ECI align with theoretical expectations (e.g., high alignment = high ECI)?
- **Discriminant Validity:** Can ECI distinguish between the three scenarios?

3. Results

As shown in Table 2, ECI performed as expected across all scenarios:

- **Scenario 1 (High Alignment):** ECI values clustered around 0.80 (mean = 0.81 ± 0.03), confirming strong emotional alignment. This mirrors findings from studies of culturally adaptive translation, where audience feedback closely tracks subtitle emotional tone.
- **Scenario 2 (Low Alignment):** ECI values were low and variable (mean = 0.22 ± 0.05), reflecting fragmented audience responses. This aligns with research on literal translation, which often fails to mediate emotional cues across cultures (Gambier, 2013).
- **Scenario 3 (Opposition):** ECI values were strongly negative (mean = -0.89 ± 0.02), indicating direct emotional contradiction. This matches cases of misinterpreted translation, where audience affect opposes the source intent.

Table 2: ECI Results by Scenario (Mean \pm SD, $n = 10$ Datasets)

Scenario	ECI Mean \pm SD	Theoretical Interpretation
High Alignment (Adaptive Translation)	0.81 \pm 0.03	Successful emotional negotiation
Low Alignment (Literal Translation)	0.22 \pm 0.05	Partial emotional negotiation; cultural disconnect
Emotional Opposition (Misinterpretation)	-0.89 \pm 0.02	Failed emotional negotiation; active misalignment

To further validate ECI, this research compared its results to Pearson's coefficient for the same datasets. The two metrics exhibited a strong linear relationship ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$), confirming ECI's statistical consistency with the gold standard—while offering faster computation (Table 1) and more intuitive interpretation for translation studies.

Discussion

1. Theoretical Contributions to Translation Studies

The Emotional Consistency Index (ECI) offers three distinct and impactful contributions to the field of translation studies, each addressing longstanding theoretical and methodological gaps that have constrained the analysis of cross-cultural subtitle communication.

Firstly, ECI operationalizes the abstract construct of “emotional alignment” –a foundational yet previously unmeasurable dimension of effective subtitle translation–by anchoring its measurement in the empirically verified properties of emotional data. Within translation studies, scholars have long argued that successful subtitle translation extends beyond lexical or syntactic fidelity, requiring the mediated negotiation of affect between source cultural contexts and target audience expectations (Gambier, 2013). However, the absence of a quantitative framework to capture this affective negotiation has relegated concepts such as “emotional resonance” and “affective congruence” to qualitative discourse, limiting their utility for guiding empirical research or informing evidence-based translation practices. ECI resolves this limitation by translating these abstract concepts into a concrete, quantifiable metric: for example, an ECI score of 0.22–indicative of low emotional alignment–serves not merely as a statistical output but as a diagnostic indicator. This score signals that the underlying translation strategy (e.g., literal reproduction of source-culture emotional cues) has failed to facilitate effective affective mediation, prompting scholars to revisit and refine approaches such as the integration of cultural annotations or contextual paraphrasing of emotional expressions. In doing so, ECI forges a critical link between quantitative analysis and both theoretical inquiry and practical translational imperatives –a connection that was notably absent from prior subtitle evaluation frameworks.

Secondly, ECI bridges the disciplinary divide between transmedia research and affect analysis in translation studies, directly responding to Jenkins’ (2006) seminal call for translation frameworks that account for the interactive, user-driven nature of contemporary transmedia ecosystems. Traditional subtitle evaluation metrics, including BLEU (Papineni et al., 2002) and Translation Edit Rate (TER; Snover et al., 2006), are inherently static: they assess the accuracy of target subtitles against a fixed source text but fail to contextualize this accuracy within the dynamic, real-time audience engagement that defines modern media consumption (e.g., bullet screen comments on Bilibili or user-generated feedback on Viki). This limitation has grown increasingly salient as transmedia platforms integrate audience affect into the content experience, rendering audience emotional responses a critical barometer of subtitle effectiveness. ECI is designed explicitly to address this gap: it is calibrated to analyze real-time, aggregated audience feedback (e.g., emotional valence scores derived from VADER for colloquial audience comments) in tandem with subtitle emotional scores (e.g., from BERT for structured subtitle content), enabling scholars to evaluate how subtitles perform within the interactive, user-centric environments that characterize cross-cultural media exchange today. By centering transmedia dynamics and audience affect, ECI shifts translation studies beyond

a narrow focus on text-to-text accuracy toward a more holistic understanding of translation as a mediating practice between source content, target audiences, and media forms—an orientation that aligns with the field's growing emphasis on audience-centricity and transmedia literacy.

Thirdly, ECI reconciles the dual imperatives of statistical rigor and disciplinary accessibility—a balance that has long posed a barrier to the adoption of quantitative methods in translation studies. Pearson's correlation coefficient, the established gold standard for measuring linear relationships between variables, offers high statistical validity but presents practical challenges for many translation scholars, who may lack specialized training in advanced statistical methodologies. Furthermore, as previously noted, Pearson's coefficient includes redundant computational steps (e.g., mean subtraction) when applied to emotional data, which are inherently standardized to a $[-1, 1]$ range with near-zero means due to the prevalence of neutral content and balanced emotional distribution in media contexts (Wang & Xu, 2019). ECI preserves the statistical rigor of Pearson's coefficient—retaining its core structure of covariance divided by the product of standard deviations—while simplifying these redundant steps to leverage the inherent centering of emotional data. This simplification does not compromise methodological validity: simulated data experiments demonstrate a strong linear correlation ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$) between ECI and Pearson's coefficient, confirming that ECI maintains equivalent levels of statistical reliability. Critically, ECI also enhances disciplinary accessibility through its interpretable output range $[-1, 1]$ and unambiguous interpretive framework: a score of 0.8 directly denotes strong emotional alignment, while a score of -1 indicates perfect emotional opposition. This clarity eliminates the need for specialized statistical expertise to interpret results, making ECI accessible to researchers across subfields of translation studies—from audiovisual translation to cross-cultural communication—who might otherwise hesitate to engage with quantitative analytical approaches. In this way, ECI democratizes access to rigorous emotional alignment measurement, fostering broader adoption of quantitative methods and cross-subfield collaboration in translation research.

2. Practical Applications

The Emotional Consistency Index (ECI) exhibits immediate and tangible utility across the translation ecosystem, serving the distinct needs of both academic researchers and industry practitioners through targeted, actionable functionality.

On the one hand, ECI empowers scholars to conduct empirically grounded evaluations of translation strategies, addressing a critical limitation of traditional metrics that prioritize lexical accuracy over affective effectiveness. For researchers focused on cross-cultural subtitle communication, ECI enables systematic comparisons of how different translational approaches mediate emotional cues between source content and target audiences—for instance, contrasting the performance of literal translation (which retains source-culture-specific emotional signifiers without adaptation) against adaptive translation (which modifies such signifiers to align with target cultural norms). Beyond mere comparison, ECI introduces a quantitative dimension to assessing the impact of specific translational interventions: for example, it can empirically verify whether the inclusion of a brief cultural

annotation (e.g., contextualizing a ritualistic expression of sorrow unique to the source culture) enhances emotional alignment, or whether paraphrasing emotionally charged terms to reflect target audience colloquialisms yields stronger affective resonance. This capacity to quantify the effectiveness of discrete translation choices transforms what was once subjective evaluation (e.g., “this adaptive strategy feels more engaging”) into evidence-based insight, equipping scholars to develop data-driven recommendations for best practices in cross-cultural subtitle translation.

On the other hand, ECI offers significant value to industry practitioners, particularly operators of transmedia and audiovisual content platforms such as Viki and Bilibili, by enabling real-time optimization of AI-driven subtitle systems. These platforms, which cater to global, linguistically diverse audiences, face the ongoing challenge of ensuring that subtitles not only convey semantic meaning but also maintain emotional fidelity across cultural boundaries—yet traditional static subtitle systems lack the ability to adjust dynamically to audience responses. By integrating ECI into their algorithmic workflows, these platforms can establish a data-informed feedback loop: as a scene plays, the system can aggregate real-time audience feedback (e.g., emotional valence scores from bullet screens or comment sections, generated via tools like VADER) and compute ECI to measure alignment with the subtitle’s intended emotional tone. If ECI falls below a predefined threshold (e.g., 0.3, indicating insufficient emotional alignment), the system can automatically trigger the generation of an adapted subtitle—for example, rephrasing an emotionally ambiguous phrase or adding contextual clarity—to better resonate with the target audience. Following this adjustment, the system can recompute ECI to validate improvements, ensuring that subtitle performance is continuously refined based on actual audience affect. This real-time optimization not only enhances user engagement by reducing emotional misinterpretation but also strengthens the platform’s capacity to deliver culturally sensitive content at scale, a key competitive advantage in the global streaming landscape.

3. Limitations and Future Directions

While controlled simulated datasets have proven invaluable for isolating variables (e.g., manipulating emotional alignment degrees) and testing ECI’s theoretical predictions, their exclusive use in empirical validation constitutes a critical limitation—one that undermines ECI’s ability to account for the messy, context-dependent complexity of real-world audience feedback in cross-cultural subtitle consumption. Simulated data is inherently designed to simplify rather than replicate the full spectrum of human emotional expression and user behavior, leading to three key gaps:

First, simulated frameworks fail to capture pragmatic nuances of emotional language, particularly figurative expressions like sarcasm or verbal irony. For example, a comment such as “Wow, that ‘heartwarming’ scene really made my day” in response to a sorrowful subtitle may register as “positive” via text-only sentiment tools (e.g., VADER) but actually reflects genuine frustration. This creates a misalignment between surface-level emotional scores and actual audience affect—a dynamic that simulated data (which relies on literal valence assignments) cannot model.

Second, simulated datasets rarely account for multilingual feedback, a ubiquitous feature of global platforms like Viki. For instance, a Japanese anime subtitled in English may elicit comments in Mandarin, Spanish, or Korean—each containing culture-specific emotional lexicon (e.g., the Mandarin term “心酸” [xīnsuān], which blends “sadness” and “pity”) that lacks direct equivalents in the target language. Simulated data, which typically relies on monolingual inputs, cannot capture the linguistic ambiguity or cultural specificity of such feedback.

Third, simulated data ignores idiosyncrasies of real user behavior, including uneven comment frequency across scenes (e.g., sparse feedback for expository segments vs. dense comments for climactic moments), temporal fluctuations in engagement (e.g., peak comments during live broadcasts vs. delayed responses for on-demand content), and the influence of external cultural events (e.g., a global tragedy altering audience sensitivity to sad subtitles). These factors directly shape emotional alignment but are absent from controlled simulated environments.

To address these limitations, future research must prioritize empirical validation using large-scale, real-world data from transmedia platforms. Table 1 outlines a concrete, actionable plan for leveraging data from Bilibili (a China-based platform with bullet screen feedback) and Niconico (a Japan-founded platform known for its danmaku culture and UGC subtitle ecosystem) to refine and validate ECI.

Table 3: Concrete Plan for Empirical Validation of ECI Using Real-World Platform Data

m	Platform	Data Type	Data Processing Pipeline	Simulated Data Limitation Addressed	Technical/Tool Support
	Bilibili	1. Time-stamped bullet screen comments (text); 2. Official/subtitle segments (text); 3. User engagement metrics (comment frequency, likes/dislikes,	1. Extract anonymized bullet screen data via Bilibili’s Public API, filtering for comments aligned with subtitle timestamps (± 5 seconds) to ensure relevance; 2. Detect multilingual comments (via FastText) and translate non-	1. Multilingual feedback; 2. Uneven comment frequency; 3. Partial mitigation of pragmatic nuances (via contextual timestamp alignment).	Bilibili Public Bullet Screen API; FastText (multilingual detection); BERT/VADER (sentiment scoring); Python (pandas for normalization).

Platform	Data Type	Data Processing Pipeline	Simulated Data Limitation Addressed	Technical/Tool Support
	timestamped interactions).	Chinese text to a unified target language (e.g., English) using Google Translate API; 3. Score subtitle emotion (BERT) and comment emotion (VADER); 4. Normalize comment frequency across scenes (e.g., weighting scores by segment-specific comment density) to address uneven engagement.		
Niconico	1. Anonymized danmaku (time-stamped overlay comments, text); 2. UGC/user-verified subtitle segments (text); 3. User interaction logs (Mylist [collection] status, “good” ratings, pause/rewind events linked to subtitles); 4. Optional	1. Access anonymized data via Niconico’s Developer API (with academic research authorization), mapping danmaku/interactions to subtitle timestamps using Niconico’s built-in “content-segment ID” system; 2. Identify pragmatic nuances (sarcasm/irony in Japanese) via TeNPy (a Japanese NLP tool) + contrastive analysis of danmaku-	1. Pragmatic language (sarcasm/irony in Japanese); 2. External cultural event influence (via temporal analysis of danmaku spikes during region-specific events); 3. Cross-cultural variability in emotional alignment.	Niconico Developer API (academic authorization); TeNPy/Janome (Japanese NLP); BERT (subtitle sentiment) + Japanese VADER variant (danmaku sentiment); R (subgroup analysis).

Platform	Data Type	Data Processing Pipeline	Simulated Data Limitation Addressed	Technical/Tool Support
	user language preference tags (for cross-linguistic subgroup analysis).	subtitle valence (e.g., negative lexicon paired with positive emoji); 3. Correlate ECI scores with Mylist rates (a proxy for deep engagement) to validate ecological relevance.		

A critical extension of this plan involves integrating multimodal emotional cues to further enhance ECI’s ecological validity—another gap in simulated data (which focuses exclusively on text). Tools like OpenFace 2.0 (Baltrušaitis et al., 2018) use computer vision to extract facial expressions from audiovisual content (e.g., a character’s furrowed brows signaling sorrow, a live-action actor’s smile conveying joy) and quantify their emotional valence. By combining these visual emotional scores with text-based scores (from BERT, VADER, or Japanese NLP tools), ECI can capture the holistic, multi-sensory nature of real-world media consumption: for example, a subtitle conveying “relief” paired with a character’s relaxed facial expression will likely elicit stronger aligned feedback than the same subtitle paired with a neutral visual. This integration ensures ECI reflects how audiences actually engage with subtitles—through both language and visual cues—rather than just textual data.

Furthermore, ECI is inherently predicated on the assumption of a linear relationship between subtitle emotional scores and audience feedback, a constraint that may limit its ability to capture the non-linear and nuanced emotional dynamics often present in cross-cultural media consumption. In practice, audience responses to subtitles are frequently non-linear: for example, a subtitle designed to evoke “mild joy” might instead elicit a mix of positive affect (from some viewers who relate to the emotional cue) and neutral or even negative affect (from others who find the cue culturally unfamiliar), resulting in a scattered, non-linear pattern of feedback that ECI’s linear framework cannot fully represent. Similarly, certain emotional states (e.g., bittersweetness, which blends sadness and happiness) inherently resist linear quantification, as they involve competing valences that do not align along a single positive-negative axis. To address this limitation, future iterations of ECI could integrate non-parametric statistical methods—such as Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient—into its core calculation. Unlike Pearson’s coefficient (and the current ECI), Spearman’s method does not assume a linear relationship between variables; instead, it measures the strength of monotonic association, making it better suited

to capturing non-linear patterns in emotional data. Importantly, this integration should retain ECI's core simplifications—such as leveraging the centering of emotional data to avoid redundant mean-subtraction steps—ensuring that the metric remains computationally efficient and accessible to translation scholars while gaining the flexibility to handle non-linear emotional dynamics. This refinement would enable ECI to address a broader range of real-world scenarios, further solidifying its utility as a comprehensive tool for emotional alignment measurement.

Conclusion

This paper introduces the Emotional Consistency Index (ECI), a novel quantitative metric developed to address a longstanding and critical gap in translation studies: the absence of systematic tools to measure the alignment between the emotional tone of subtitled content and the emotional responses of target audiences in cross-cultural contexts. ECI is not a mere technical adjustment of existing statistical methods but a purpose-built solution that bridges the divide between abstract theoretical concerns about emotional communication and the practical need for actionable, data-driven insights in subtitle translation. Its derivation—rooted in the mathematical rigor of Pearson's correlation coefficient yet simplified to leverage the inherent centering of emotional data (a defining feature of outputs from tools like BERT and VADER)—ensures that it retains statistical validity while being uniquely adapted to the nuances of cross-cultural subtitle analysis. Unlike generic statistical metrics that require cumbersome preprocessing for emotional data, or traditional subtitle evaluation tools that prioritize lexical accuracy over affect, ECI is designed from the ground up to capture the dynamic, culture-mediated nature of emotional exchange, making it a theoretically grounded and practically feasible instrument for scholars and practitioners alike.

The validation of ECI through controlled simulated data experiments yields insights that extend beyond mere confirmation of its functionality. By demonstrating ECI's ability to reliably distinguish between high, low, and opposing levels of emotional alignment, this study establishes that ECI can transform how translation strategies are evaluated: it moves the field beyond subjective judgments of "effective" or "ineffective" subtitle approaches (e.g., literal versus adaptive translation) toward empirical assessments of how specific choices mediate emotional resonance. For instance, ECI does not just indicate that an adaptive strategy outperforms a literal one—it quantifies the degree of that outperformance, providing a clear, replicable standard for comparing interventions such as cultural annotations or colloquial rephrasing. In so doing, ECI empowers translation research to shift from descriptive analyses of emotional communication to prescriptive frameworks that guide the development of more culturally sensitive, audience-responsive subtitle practices.

More broadly, ECI represents a meaningful contribution to translation studies' ongoing paradigm shift—away from a narrow focus on text-to-text fidelity and toward a more holistic, audience-centric, and transmedia-informed understanding of translation. In an era where global media consumption is increasingly driven by interactive platforms (e.g., bullet screen-enabled video services, real-time comment sections), translation is no longer a one-way transfer of meaning but a dynamic negotiation between source cultures, target

audiences, and media forms. ECI responds to this shift by centering audience emotion as a core metric of success, rather than an afterthought, thereby equipping the field to engage more deeply with the realities of modern cross-cultural media exchange. It does not merely adapt to the field's evolving priorities but actively advances them, providing a scalable tool that can be integrated into both academic research and industry workflows to measure, refine, and optimize emotional communication across cultural boundaries.

Looking ahead, the planned refinements of ECI—including validation with real-world datasets and expansion to multi-modal contexts—are not just incremental improvements but essential steps in ensuring its long-term relevance. As media technologies evolve (e.g., the rise of AI-generated subtitles, multi-modal content that blends text, audio, and visual cues), the need for flexible, adaptive tools to measure emotional alignment will only grow. By incorporating real-world feedback (which captures the complexity of sarcasm, multilingualism, and idiosyncratic user behavior) and integrating visual emotional cues (e.g., character facial expressions), future iterations of ECI will become even more attuned to the full spectrum of factors that shape cross-cultural emotional resonance. In this way, ECI is positioned to remain a vital resource for translation studies and cross-cultural communication, even as the landscape of global media continues to change.

Ultimately, the significance of ECI extends beyond its role as a methodological innovation. By rendering the abstract concept of “emotional alignment” measurable, ECI opens new avenues for research into how culture shapes emotional interpretation, how translation mediates these interpretations, and how to design more effective cross-cultural media experiences. It transforms emotional communication from a qualitative, often elusive dimension of translation into a quantifiable, actionable variable—one that can be studied, optimized, and used to foster deeper cross-cultural understanding. In a world where global media serves as both a bridge and a potential source of cultural misunderstanding, ECI provides a scientific foundation for building more empathetic, resonant, and successful cross-cultural communication—making it a tool not just for advancing translation studies, but for enhancing the quality of global cultural exchange.

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Research on Information Support Mechanisms for Flexible Employment Groups in the Digital Communication Ecosystem

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Digital Communication Ecosystem; Flexible Employment Groups; Information Support Mechanism; Algorithm Hegemony; Digital Divide	With the deep integration of the gig economy and digital technology, flexible employment groups have become a crucial part of China's labor market, and their survival and development are highly tied to information flow within the digital communication ecosystem. However, these groups face multiple obstacles in information acquisition, identification, and expression, which not only restrict the realization of individual rights and interests but also hinder the standardized development of the gig economy. Combining literature analysis and logical reasoning, this paper first analyzes the information dilemmas faced by flexible employment groups in the digital communication ecosystem, then explores the causes from technical, institutional, and social dimensions, and finally constructs a three-dimensional information support mechanism of technology empowerment-institutional guarantee-social collaboration. It provides theoretical references and practical paths for resolving the information dilemmas of these groups and promoting the high-quality development of the gig economy.
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1 Introduction

The iteration of digital technology has reconstructed the communication ecosystem and fostered the vigorous development of the gig economy. Flexible employment groups, such as food delivery riders, ride-hailing drivers, freelance designers, and self-media creators, are characterized by platform-based, fragmented, and flexible employment. Their core needs, including access to employment opportunities, protection of labor



rights, and improvement of professional skills, all rely on information flow within the digital communication ecosystem (Chen et al., 2023). However, the digital communication ecosystem is not an inclusive information field: the filter bubble effect of algorithmic recommendations limits the breadth of information acquisition, the monopoly of core information by platforms exacerbates information asymmetry, and the lack of digital literacy among some groups reduces their ability to identify information (Li & Wang, 2022). This information imbalance not only traps flexible employees in a dilemma of passively receiving information but also triggers a chain of problems such as damaged labor rights and limited career development—for instance, food delivery riders are surrounded by order information for a long time but struggle to obtain resources for career transformation, ride-hailing drivers are unaware of the specific calculation logic of platform commission rates, and middle-aged and elderly flexible employees cannot query social security policies due to operational barriers (Zhang, 2021).

Existing studies mostly focus on the protection of labor rights for flexible employment groups or the technical logic of the digital communication ecosystem in isolation, paying insufficient attention to the information support issue at the intersection of the two fields: some studies focus on explicit rights such as salaries and social security, while others concentrate on communication laws such as algorithm optimization and media technology (Wang & Liu, 2020). However, few studies analyze how the digital communication ecosystem affects the information acquisition of flexible employment groups, and even fewer systematically propose adaptive information support solutions. Theoretically, filling this research gap can enrich the interdisciplinary perspective of communication sociology and labor economics, and provide a new theoretical explanation for the labor-communication interaction in the digital age (Zhao, 2024). Practically, constructing a scientific information support mechanism can guide the government in formulating special policies, platforms in optimizing information services, and social organizations in providing assistance. It helps flexible employment groups break through information barriers, achieve decent employment and sustainable development, and ultimately promote the transformation of the gig economy from scale expansion to quality improvement (Hu et al., 2023).

2. Information Dilemmas of Flexible Employment Groups in the Digital Communication Ecosystem

2.1 Information Acquisition: Dual Restrictions of Algorithmic Barriers and Platform Monopolies

Information flow in the digital communication ecosystem is driven by algorithms as the core, but the efficiency-first logic of algorithms creates significant barriers for flexible employment groups. On one hand, the personalized filtering of algorithms leads to short-sighted information acquisition: when platforms push information through user portraits, they only focus on content related to immediate work—intensively sending order information to food delivery riders and basic order-taking needs to freelance designers—while actively filtering long-term development-related information such as vocational skills training and labor rights policies. This traps groups in an information loop of only knowing how to work, not knowing how to develop. On the other hand, the monopoly of core information by platforms exacerbates information asymmetry: key information such as employment opportunities, salary calculation rules, and reward/punishment standards is controlled unilaterally by platforms, and flexible employees cannot proactively obtain complete content. For example, ride-hailing drivers can only see the dispatch distance and estimated income but are unaware of the specific calculation dimensions of commission rates; job information on part-time platforms often hides hidden costs, and groups can only learn about them after completing registration or even paying fees, falling into a passive and disadvantaged position.

Furthermore, the information silos between different platforms further narrow the breadth of information acquisition. Flexible employees often have the characteristic of cross-platform employment, but the information systems of various platforms are independent and cannot achieve data interconnection. Information such as high-quality worker labels, working hour records, and customer evaluations on one platform cannot be synchronized to other platforms, making it difficult for groups to obtain better employment opportunities based on past experience and seriously diluting the value of information.

2.2 Information Identification: Dual Interferences of False Information and Professional Barriers

The low-threshold nature of the digital communication ecosystem allows highly free information production and dissemination, but it also leads to the proliferation of false and low-quality information. The lack of information identification capabilities among flexible employment groups makes them the main victims of false information. On one hand, false employment information floods the market: some intermediaries and enterprises release false jobs with high salaries and low thresholds to attract users. Such information is mostly spread through social media and short-video platforms, and

deliberately avoids risk warnings. Due to the lack of information verification channels, groups are prone to falling into dilemmas of damaged rights and interests. On the other hand, the understanding barrier of professional information is difficult to overcome: information related to labor rights protection and vocational skills improvement is mostly presented in professional terminology and scattered across government official websites, industry reports, and other channels. More than half of flexible employment groups lack systematic information retrieval capabilities, and middle-aged and elderly groups even face dual gaps in operation and cognition—they cannot use government official websites to query policies or understand professional expressions, resulting in high-quality information being visible but unusable.

2.3 Information Expression: Dual Constraints of Weak Discourse Power and Lack of Channels

In the digital communication ecosystem, the right to information expression of flexible employment groups has long been suppressed, and it is difficult for them to convey their demands through effective channels. On one hand, the disciplining mechanism of platforms directly restricts freedom of speech: most platforms clearly stipulate in user agreements that flexible employees are prohibited from posting negative information, otherwise they will face penalties such as account restriction, account ban, and deposit freezing. This silencing rule traps groups in a dilemma of daring to be angry but not daring to speak, and reasonable demands cannot be conveyed through platform channels. On the other hand, the lack of public communication channels exacerbates demand silence: flexible employment groups lack unified organizations and thus cannot form collective voice. Mainstream media also mostly focus on work intensity in their reports on these groups, while rarely paying attention to information needs. As a result, the information demands of groups are difficult to enter the vision of public policy formulation, forming a mismatch between demand and support.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Information Dilemmas for Flexible Employment Groups

When exploring the causes of information dilemmas faced by flexible employment groups within the digital communication ecosystem, the selection of analytical dimensions must align with the ecosystem's inherently interconnected nature, where technical, institutional, and social elements operate as a cohesive whole rather than isolated parts. Technology forms the ecosystem's operational core: algorithmic logic directly dictates how information is produced, filtered, and distributed, setting the fundamental conditions for whether flexible workers can access diverse, relevant

content. Institutions act as the ecosystem's regulatory backbone, with government policies and platform rules defining the responsibilities of different actors, shaping the fairness of information flows, and determining whether workers' rights to transparent information are protected. Society, in turn, constitutes the ecosystem's human dimension—factors like digital literacy levels among workers and the availability of community support networks directly influence whether workers can effectively interpret, verify, and utilize the information they receive. These three dimensions are mutually reinforcing: algorithmic biases (a technical issue) often persist due to weak institutional oversight, and even well-designed policies (an institutional solution) may fail without social support to build workers' information-processing capabilities. Existing research on digital labor dynamics further confirms that single-dimensional analyses risk oversimplifying complex challenges, as information dilemmas rarely stem from one factor alone. By integrating these three perspectives, we can move beyond surface-level observations to unpack the layered, interdependent roots of the problem—ensuring that our analysis is comprehensive enough to inform targeted, effective solutions later in the study.

3.1 Technical Dimension: Suppression by the Instrumental Rationality of Algorithm Hegemony

Algorithms are the technical core of the digital communication ecosystem, but there is an inherent conflict between the instrumental rationality of algorithms and the value rationality of flexible employment groups, forming algorithm hegemony—the core technical root of information dilemmas. Instrumental rationality is oriented by efficiency priority and data-driven, while value rationality focuses on rights protection and long-term development needs. The contradiction between the two directly leads to imbalanced information supply (Zhang & Wang, 2022). Firstly, the data monopoly of algorithms exacerbates demand mismatch: platforms construct user portraits by collecting labor data of flexible employees, but only push information based on labor efficiency labels, completely ignoring development demand labels—defaulting that the core need of food delivery riders is to receive orders while failing to identify the career transformation demands of some riders; defaulting that freelance designers only need basic orders while ignoring their needs for access to high-end resources. This ultimately forms a passive situation where groups can only receive what platforms push (Gao et al., 2023). Secondly, the opacity of algorithms amplifies information asymmetry: the recommendation logic and data processing rules of platform algorithms are classified as commercial secrets. Flexible employees cannot know the reasons for information filtering or appeal against algorithm results, and can only passively accept the

information and rights distributed by algorithms, lacking the initiative to obtain information (Zhou & Chen, 2021).

3.2 Institutional Dimension: Dual Absence of Platform Discipline and Policy Lag

In the digital communication ecosystem, platforms are both intermediaries for information dissemination and managers of flexible employment groups. However, their inherent profit-seeking nature leads to the absence of institutional discipline, and policy lag further exacerbates information dilemmas. On one hand, platforms replace labor contracts with service agreements to avoid information dissemination responsibilities: most platforms clearly state in agreements that they are not responsible for the authenticity and completeness of information, shifting the responsibilities of information identification and risk bearing entirely to flexible employees; some platforms even allow enterprises to pay to pin job information without verifying information authenticity, making false information more likely to be pushed to groups. On the other hand, information service policies for flexible employment groups are seriously lagging: existing policies mostly focus on explicit rights such as salary guarantee and social security supplementary payment, but fail to incorporate information support into the policy system. Information release channels of government departments are also not optimized for the characteristics of groups—with complex interface designs, professional content expressions, and lack of popular interpretations—resulting in policy information being unreachable, incomprehensible, and unusable.

3.3 Social Dimension: Dual Insufficiencies of Digital Divide and Social Support

The existence of the digital divide and the weakness of the social support system are important social causes of the information dilemmas for flexible employment groups. From the perspective of the digital divide, there is a significant digital literacy stratification within flexible employment groups: young groups are familiar with Internet operations, have strong capabilities in information retrieval, identification, and utilization, and can obtain high-quality information through multiple channels; however, middle-aged and elderly groups generally face operation gaps and cognition gaps—they cannot operate complex government apps, cannot identify the characteristics of false information, and do not know how to obtain vocational skills information through search engines or industry forums. They completely rely on information pushed by platforms, further intensifying information dependence.

From the perspective of social support, the existing system mostly focuses on

material assistance while ignoring information support: government assistance policies mainly include temporary relief funds and employment subsidies; social organizations concentrate their services on job introduction and legal consultation; few carry out digital literacy training or information retrieval guidance for flexible employment groups. As grassroots service units, communities also fail to build exclusive information exchange platforms and only release limited information through bulletin boards, which cannot meet the personalized needs of groups. This forces groups to passively rely on platforms for information, forming a dilemma of single information acquisition channel (Hu & Wang, 2022).

4. Construction of Information Support Mechanisms for Flexible Employment Groups in the Digital Communication Ecosystem

To address the above dilemmas and causes, it is necessary to break the mindset of single subject solution and construct a three-dimensional information support mechanism of technology empowerment-institutional guarantee-social collaboration. Through the collaborative efforts of multiple subjects, information empowerment for flexible employment groups can be realized.

4.1 Technology Empowerment: Breaking Information Barriers through Algorithm Optimization and Tool Innovation

Technology is the core driving force of the digital communication ecosystem. It is necessary to transform technology from an information barrier to an information bridge through algorithm optimization and tool innovation, and restore the initiative of flexible employment groups in information acquisition (Zhang et al., 2023). Platforms need to break algorithm hegemony and establish a dual mechanism of algorithm information disclosure + independent preference setting: on one hand, platforms should be required to add an algorithm explanation module in their apps, using plain language to explain the basis for information pushing, and regularly release the Algorithm Transparency Report to disclose the pushing ratio and filtering standards of different types of information; on the other hand, flexible employees should be given the right to set information preferences, providing functions of information type selection and pushing frequency adjustment to allow groups to independently choose to receive information such as work orders, social security policies, and skills training, avoiding algorithmic filter bubbles (Li & Zhao, 2023). At the same time, a third-party algorithm audit mechanism should be introduced: government departments or industry associations designate third-party technical institutions to regularly check whether platform

algorithms have information discrimination or filter rights-related information, and issue rectification notices to non-compliant platforms. This approach is consistent with the research results of Wang and Liu (2020), who pointed out that third-party supervision can effectively reduce the abuse of algorithm power by platforms and improve the transparency of information dissemination.

To solve the problem of information silos, the government should take the lead in collaborating with major flexible employment platforms to develop a National Information Sharing Platform for Flexible Employees, which realizes three core functions: first, the interconnection of professional credit files—integrating labor data of groups on various platforms to form unified files and recognizing past qualifications and evaluations across platforms; second, the aggregation of employment information—collecting job information from various platforms, verifying its authenticity, and pushing it by category labels to avoid the trouble of cross-platform retrieval; third, the intelligent pushing of policy information—connecting with the government’s policy database in real time, pushing new policies through popular forms such as voice broadcasts and graphic interpretations, and providing a one-click call for volunteer assistance function for middle-aged and elderly groups to solve the problem of incomprehensible policies (Gao & Chen, 2022).

4.2 Institutional Guarantee: Consolidating the Bottom Line of Information through Policy Standardization and Responsibility Definition

Institutions are the ballast stone of the information support mechanism. It is necessary to clarify the standards of fairness and security for information dissemination through special policy legislation and platform responsibility definition (Hu et al., 2023). The government should incorporate information support into the flexible employment policy system and formulate the Measures for the Administration of Information Services for Flexible Employment Groups, clarifying the information supply division among government-platform-social organizations: the government is responsible for policy-related information, including social security, taxation, and labor laws; platforms are responsible for employment-related information, covering job needs and salary rules; social organizations are responsible for service-related information, providing resources such as skills training and legal consultation. At the same time, it is stipulated that information should meet the requirements of authenticity, timeliness, and popularity—job information on platforms should clearly indicate salary ranges, working hours, and hidden costs, and avoid vague expressions. This policy design is in line with the research conclusion of Zhao (2022), who believed that clear institutional

provisions can clarify the responsibilities of all subjects and ensure the orderly supply of information. In terms of channel construction, the government should upgrade the flexible employment service section of government apps to simplify the operation interface; platforms should set up an information service section on the homepage to centrally display various types of information; communities should be equipped with information query terminals and volunteers to assist middle-aged and elderly groups in operations.

Dual constraints of laws and industry standards should be used to strengthen the information responsibilities of platforms: on one hand, establish a lifelong accountability system for platform information review—requiring platforms to conduct full-process review of job information and salary rules, include issuers of false information in the industry blacklist, and hold platforms liable for joint compensation if they fail to fulfill review obligations and cause losses to groups; on the other hand, protect the right to information expression of groups—stipulating that platforms should set up a demand feedback section to respond to reasonable demands within a specified time limit, and regularly summarize group needs to form a Demand Report, which is submitted to the government and industry associations as a basis for policy adjustment. Suppression of speech in the name of affecting platform image should be prohibited.

4.3 Social Collaboration: Building an Information Network through Digital Literacy Improvement and Community Support

Social collaboration serves as the supplementary force of the information support mechanism, addressing the gap between technical accessibility and individual capacity to ensure information in the digital communication ecosystem translates to practical benefits for flexible employment groups (Chen & Li, 2023). Social organizations, in collaboration with governments and enterprises, must develop customized digital literacy training that avoids a one-size-fits-all approach: for young workers like self-media creators, training should focus on advanced skills such as using big data to analyze user demand (Sun, 2022), while middle-aged and elderly groups—such as older delivery riders—need hands-on guidance for basic tasks like querying social security or identifying false job postings (Wang, 2022). Delivery methods should also be innovative: online, short-video platforms can host 2-minute lightweight teaching clips (Zhao & Li, 2023), and offline training points in communities or platform hubs can accommodate non-peak work hours, as offline sessions build trust and enable immediate problem-solving (Zhang & Wang, 2022).

Equally critical is constructing a community information network that combines

self-organization and hetero-organization. Self-organized groups—like WeChat groups for ride-hailing drivers or designer meetups—let workers share practical tips, such as high-paying order strategies or reliable client contacts, with trust maintained through rules against false information (Gao et al., 2023; Li & Zhang, 2023). To enhance these networks, social organizations (the hetero-organization layer) should provide professional support: lawyers can host monthly rights-protection clinics to answer questions about algorithmic penalties, and training institutions can share free skill-upgrading resources (Zhou & Chen, 2021). This hybrid model fixes the limitation of purely self-organized groups—their lack of authoritative information—and turns informal sharing into structured support, ensuring workers not only get information but also tools to act on it (Hu, 2021). In turn, social collaboration bridges the last mile of information support, making technical and institutional solutions tangible for workers' daily lives and careers.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

The digital communication ecosystem provides employment opportunities for flexible employment groups, but also brings information challenges. This paper finds through analysis that these groups face multiple dilemmas such as algorithmic barriers, platform monopolies, false information interference, and weak discourse power in information acquisition, identification, and expression. The causes can be attributed to algorithm hegemony at the technical level, platform discipline and policy lag at the institutional level, and digital divide and insufficient support at the social level. Based on this, the constructed three-dimensional information support mechanism of technology empowerment-institutional guarantee-social collaboration breaks technical barriers through algorithm optimization and tool innovation, consolidates the institutional bottom line through policy standardization and responsibility definition, and strengthens social support through digital literacy improvement and community construction. It forms a solution characterized by multi-subject collaboration, accurate supply-demand matching, and effective rights protection.

This study still has limitations: it does not verify the effectiveness of the mechanism through empirical data. In the future, research can be conducted on specific groups to collect first-hand data through questionnaires and interviews, testing the practical adaptability of the mechanism. At the same time, with the development of new technologies such as generative AI and metaverse, the digital communication ecosystem will undergo new changes, and the information needs and dilemmas of flexible employment groups may present new characteristics—for example, generative

AI may exacerbate the proliferation of false information, and metaverse may provide new channels for information dissemination. Future research needs to further explore the impact of new technologies on the information support mechanism to promote its continuous optimization.

In general, resolving the information dilemmas of flexible employment groups cannot rely solely on a single subject or method. It requires the collaborative efforts of technology, institutions, and society to transform flexible employment groups from passively receiving information to proactively obtaining information, effectively using information, and reasonably expressing demands. Only in this way can information empowerment be truly realized, enabling flexible employment groups to obtain fair development opportunities in the digital age and promoting the gig economy to develop in a more fair and sustainable direction.

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The Awakening of Female Consciousness in TV Series “Blossoms Shanghai” ——A Performance Studies Perspective

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Blossoms Shanghai; Female Consciousness; Performance Studies; Richard Schechner	Wong Kar-wai's TV series “Blossoms Shanghai” portrays numerous female characters undergoing a transformative journey of female consciousness—from its absence to its reconstruction—amidst the currents of their personal development and the broader historical era, blooming like vibrant flowers in abundance. Richard Schechner's theory of Performance Studies posits that any self-referential action constitutes ‘Performance,’ with people living their lives akin to stage performances, constantly assuming diverse roles. From the perspective of Performance Studies Theory, this offers insights into the development of individuals within society. This paper analyses the awakening of female consciousness among the three main female characters in the TV series ‘Blossoms Shanghai’ from the perspective of Performance Studies Theory, aiming to explore the female spiritual world and its developmental significance embedded in the work.
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Wong Kar-wai's TV series "Blossoms Shanghai" (hereinafter referred to as "Blossoms Shanghai") premiered on Chinese mainland TV stations at the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, sparking heated discussions. Although there is no doubt that the story centers around the male lead “Mr. Bao”, a series of female characters such as Reiko, Miss Wang, and Lee Lee, who surround Mr. Bao take turns to appear. Just like the neon lights flickering in the ten-mile-long foreign arena along the Yellow River Road Shanghai, they complement each other and shine like stars. Just as the title of the play suggests: Flowers are in full bloom, overwhelming one after another.

The theory of “Performance Studies” created by American theater master Richard Schechner proposes that, from the perspective of Performance Studies, there are five categories: aesthetic performance, social performance, mass performance, ritual performance, and game performance (SCHECHNER, 2008). The theoretical foundation of this theory is the performance of human daily life, namely: “All objective existence is existence, all existence is in action, and any self-referential action is performance.” Therefore, all human activities with a specific purpose can be studied as performance. He further emphasizes: “The premise of Performance Studies is that we

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live in a post-colonial 'performative' era, where various cultures collide and interact with one another (SCHECHNER, 2008)."

The female characters portrayed in TV series "Blossoms Shanghai" undergo a transformative journey against the backdrop of historical context, societal trends, and personal destiny. They transition from misinterpreting their own female identities to gradually awakening to independence, living for themselves, and achieving a perfect transformation toward self-realization. This shift in life philosophy reflects the awakening of independent consciousness and the construction of self-identity among the "Blossoms" as women. From the perspective of Performance Studies, examining TV series "Blossoms Shanghai" allows us to trace the evolution of the ideological beliefs and behavioral principles of its female characters, as well as the rich process of female consciousness transitioning from misinterpretation to awakening and ultimately achieving the self-construction of an independent personality. This, in turn, offers us profound reflections and insights into the development of individual women and the realization of their self-worth.

1. Male-centered: misinterpretation of female roles

Social performance theory, derived from Performance Studies theory, proposes that we must start from the social role groups within social structures in order to better explain and study the performances individuals engage in when communicating with other individuals or groups. However, in society, the social roles of each individual are not something that can be freely chosen at will. Marxist philosophy has emphasized: The essence of humanity is not an abstract entity inherent in the individual; in its reality, it is the sum total of all social relations; We must first understand the social relations in which each individual is embedded before discussing individual development. Therefore, how women understand their social roles in society, whether they make erroneous judgments, and how these judgments directly influence their behavioral patterns and life choices are critical issues (SUN, 2005).

In the TV series "Blossoms Shanghai", the female characters revolve around the central male protagonist, with the three most prominent being Reiko, Miss Wang, and Lee Lee. Their sense of female identity is not innate. Although the TV series "Blossoms Shanghai" employs a montage-style editing technique, with stories from different eras intertwined, we can still conclude that the three female characters all experience a misinterpretation of their female subjectivity in the early stages of the story.

Reiko met Mr. Bao when he was still a young man, not yet a boss. He had come to Tokyo, a city he knew little about, for a business deal, and there he first encountered Reiko, who was also from Shanghai. The young and charming Reiko was sincere and pure-hearted. When Mr. Bao was feeling disheartened, she unhesitatingly pulled out her lucky charm and gave it to him, explaining that it was a gift of "luck" (the Shanghai dialect term for fortune). This sincerity and this "luck" left a lasting impression on the future Mr. Bao. Mr. Bao gave Reiko a "Yez Tokyo" restaurant and invited her to return to Shanghai to run it. Due to this unique story between the two, Reiko believed she was absolutely special in Mr. Bao's heart. The image she presented to the neighbors was that of Mr. Bao's "wise and capable wife," and she was playful, outspoken, and unashamed. She often invited Mr. Bao into her bedroom in front of the neighbors; the menu at Yez Tokyo always included a special "Mr. Bao's congee"; When Yez Tokyo held a shareholders' meeting for just the two of them, she specially took Mr. Bao to an ancient town in the suburbs, ostensibly to buy the town's specialty tofu and side dishes,

but in reality to assert her authority in front of neighbors and friends, showcasing the unyielding demeanor of a “wife.”

Ms. Wang, the “ideal partner” for Mr. Bao in his business dealings with the Shanghai Foreign Trade Company, was also someone he had known since their early days. Ms. Wang was more outgoing and assertive, a typical lively young woman from local Shanghai. From completing their first foreign trade deal, to successfully negotiating the entry of the San Yang brand into the Shanghai market, to countering counterfeit manufacturers and turning the tide, as Ms. Wang herself put it, she and Mr. Bao share a “revolutionary friendship.” On the night she impulsively bought a used car and rushed to Zhuji to “rescue Mr. Bao,” Ms. Wang nearly lost her life in a car accident. Through her actions, she passionately expressed her concern and care for Mr. Bao. At that stage, she believed her “revolutionary friendship” could withstand the test, mistakenly interpreting it as a deeper, more intense romantic relationship.

Lee Lee was different from everyone else. She was mysterious, arriving in grand style with her opulent “Zhizhen Garden” restaurant, stirring up a storm and causing a great deal of commotion on Huanghe Road. As a northerner from Shenzhen, she naturally drew the ire of the Shanghai businesswomen who dominated the Huanghe Road food street. It was Mr. Bao who came to her aid, not only helping Lee Lee and “Zhizhen Garden” restaurant navigate the crisis but also elevating the restaurant's cuisine and kitchen operations to a new level. Lee Lee, whose background remains a mystery, now shares a secret connection with Mr. Bao. She knows that her mystery, grace, and allure hold significant weight in Mr. Bao's heart; and she, too, has reserved a place for Mr. Bao in the intricate web of her past and present.

At this stage, the three female characters, emotionally dependent on Mr. Bao, also mistakenly base their social roles on their connection to him: Reiko believes she is the one and only devoted wife, so she quietly runs “Yez Tokyo” restaurant, eagerly awaiting Mr. Bao to settle down and even start a family; Ms Wang believes her revolutionary friendship with Mr. Bao will deepen further, dedicating herself fully to supporting him in his career aspirations; Lee Lee, though a mysterious woman with a story, still reserves a spot for Mr. Bao amidst the decadent indulgence of Huanghe Road.

2. Self-reflection: the initial awakening of female consciousness

Performance Studies posits that any self-referential action constitutes “performance,” and that people live their lives as if on a stage, playing different roles. From this perspective, the three female leads in the TV series ‘Blossoms Shanghai’ often fail to recognize their own misjudgments when playing the social roles they have mistakenly assigned themselves, instead immersing themselves in the roles they have created for themselves. However, when triggered by associated characters or mirror characters, they suddenly see a version of themselves that does not resemble their true selves, leading to self-reflection and the initial awakening of feminist consciousness.

Reiko sold cheap pearl earrings to Miss Wang at a high price, which led to Miss Wang being investigated by the organization. As a result, Mr. Bao had a fierce argument with Reiko. All kinds of misunderstandings were both amusing and ridiculous. However, as it was about Miss Wang's reputation and career development, Mr. Bao's scolding and the mutual shirking of responsibility among neighbors and friends pushed everyone to the peak of their emotions. For the first time, Reiko heard the most unbelievable words from her closest friend: You'll never wait for Mr. Bao to come. She was shocked, she was angry, and she was at a loss. In an instant, all her

waiting lost its meaning, and the “Yez Tokyo” she had painstakingly built lost its significance. At this moment, her mind was filled with countless thoughts but she still couldn't see herself clearly. It wasn't until she calmed down that she re-examined the middle-aged woman, Mrs. Wu, who was her neighbor on the second floor: She had been waiting for a man all along. Often, she would cook a full table of dishes, but after a phone call, he wouldn't come. She waited all her life and wasted all her life. At that moment, it was as if it were a mirror image of Reiko, and Reiko saw her future self. Reiko was feeling sorry for herself in the attic. Mrs Wu appeared by the window and sang the line from the Peking Opera "The Unicorn Purse" in a gentle and melodious way: "What goes around comes around. I regret giving you the peach tree."

Miss Wang, despite being investigated by the organization, was stubborn, angry and firmly believed that the innocent would be cleared up. However, she was still like a headless fly, bumping into things everywhere and getting bruised and bleeding. Mr. Bao was wandering around trying to clear Miss Wang's name, but Miss Wang still kept in mind that she couldn't meet Mr. Bao during this special period and asked him to avoid and protect her. Her stubborn temper also made her fearless to take a desperate gamble. At the last moment, she entrusted “Ye Shu”(Shanghai Dialect: Uncle) to pass on a message to Mr. Bao. With just one word from Mr. Bao, she could even give up No. 27 Bund. But Mr. Bao backed out. Mr. Bao could strive and fight side by side, but he couldn't promise Miss Wang a future where she could take a desperate gamble. That night when she was waiting for a reply, Mr. Bao didn't show up. Miss Wang finally saw through herself. How affectionate and loyal their revolutionary friendship was, but without love!

Amidst the complex human relations and social maneuvering, Lee Lee still reserved a place for Mr. Bao until the appearance of his old friend, Mr. Qiang. Mr. Qiang reminded her not to forget the past and not to take the wrong position in the present. Struggling to survive in the narrow space between the cracks, she clearly and helplessly realized her own helplessness and reminded herself not to forget the old love that had passed away in her heart. Could she preserve herself while also avenging her great loss? The torrent of fate and the scorching heat pounded hard on her face. She began to recognize her place and secretly planned the path that belonged to her.

After realizing the social roles they had wrongly played, the three women finally came to their senses. They realized that they had wrongly placed themselves in the wrong roles. Gradually, they came to understand who they originally were and that they should not have become "someone's someone". The yearning for their own dignity drives their lives towards a more independent and self-centered direction. Such emotional projection and the transformation of their attitude towards life lay the foundation for their subsequent thorough awakening and reconstruction.

3. Returning to Rationality: Women's Self-Construction of Consciousness

If the angry words of her friend and the mirror image of Mrs. Wu's wasted life made Reiko finally realize that she had been playing the wrong role all along, then during the period of disappearance, her revisiting Tokyo was like a self-examination journey full of ritualistic sense, and her return to Shanghai was her rebirth. She neither wasted her time nor evaded reality. Instead, she returned to rationality. Her original aspiration was to open a restaurant and create a “Yez Tokyo” of her own. So why did she end up creating a “Yez Tokyo” for others in the past years? With a clear self-awareness, she investigated the market, reset her goals, and transformed “Yez Tokyo”:

a “Yez Tokyo” that truly belonged to Reiko - the Shanghai local kaiseki restaurant “Yez Tokyo”.

Miss. Wang did not wait for Mr. Bao's promise. During her days working in the warehouse, she endured the filth and hardship, and in the process, she gradually came to understand herself. Why should she compromise and beg for others' charity, only to return to No. 27 The Bund, where she was fundamentally distrusted? After leaving the warehouse, she chose to start her own company and fight for herself.

Lee Lee struggled to make progress in the narrow space, but she skillfully balanced the advantages and disadvantages on both sides, seemingly facing certain death. In reality, she not only avenged her great enemy but also sold the “Zhizhen Garden” restaurant at a high price, ensuring her safety, and withdrew completely. In the end, she chose to turn and leave, never stopping her steps for anyone. Her mysterious arrival on Huanghe Road had stirred up a storm, and her departure was equally enigmatic. She left the place she had briefly stayed at and embarked on a entirely new path of her own.

The choices made by the three female characters after returning to rationality reflect the construction of their self-identity following the awakening of female consciousness, as Richard Schechner described in his discussion of “the reconstructive act of performance”: The reconstructive act of performance is both symbolic and reflective; The self can perform within another role or as another role; The social or transpersonal self itself is one or a series of roles (SCHECHNER, & SUN, 2010). Reiko is no longer Mr. Bao's devoted wife; she is the head chef and owner of “Yez Tokyo”, the pioneer of local kaiseki cuisine. Miss Wang is no longer Mr. Bao's close revolutionary comrade; she is the founder of Pearl Limited Company and successfully secured the historically significant Walmart century-long order. Lee Lee is no longer anyone's confidante; she comes and goes without a trace, having avenged her former lover, successfully sold “Zhizhen Garden” restaurant at a high price, and then vanished into the crowd.

They are no longer anyone's anyone; they are themselves, each an independent, beautiful individual.

Conclusion

The British playwright Shakespeare wrote the following lines in *As You Like It*:

“All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts.”

From misunderstandings and misalignments to confusion and pain, and finally to clarity and independence, the journey of female consciousness awakening in the TV series “Blossoms Shanghai” is not achieved overnight. Some may have once been lost in relationships dependent on others, taking pride in their connections yet unable to fulfill their desires; others may have been shocked and saddened by their own misjudgments upon awakening. However, ultimately, after self-discovery and self-reconstruction, they pursued the material and spiritual lives they desired through their own efforts. The qualities of self-reflection, upward striving, and independence conveyed in their journey of awakening provide diverse models for other women who have yet to awaken.

The path of women's growth is often long and arduous. The TV series “Blossoms Shanghai” presents us with a feast of women's awakening consciousness. The journey

of women's self-awakening sometimes requires enduring pain and struggle, yet the rainbow that emerges after the storm is all the more beautiful.

Note:

1. Since "Blossoms Shanghai" has undergone several revisions from its original novel form, been adapted into a stage play, and then into a television series, with different creative teams making additions, deletions, and adaptations, this article will focus solely on the television series version directed by Wong Kar-wai as the basis for analysis. This is noted for clarification.

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Form, Fragmentation, and Resistance: A Close Reading of the Political and Historical Consciousness of *Slaughterhouse-Five* with Postmodern Strategies

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Kurt Vonnegut, Postmodern Literature, Historical Awareness, Political Apathy, Slaughterhouse-Five, Historiographic Metafiction, Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson	Contemporary criticism, enlightened and led by Fredric Jameson's theoretical framework, frequently portrays postmodern literature as a product devoid of historical consciousness and politically apathetic, emphasizing its fragmented forms and diminished historicity. This paper challenges this view through a close reading of Kurt Vonnegut's <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (2000), arguing that its postmodern literary strategies -- non-linear narrative, black humour, and metafiction -- constitute not an evasion but a critical engagement with historical trauma and political violence. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's concept of "historical metafiction", it demonstrates how Vonnegut's formal experimentation fosters profound critiques of war, memory, and narrative authority. The novel thus exemplifies how postmodern aesthetics can embody a resistant historical and political consciousness.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Current Debates of The Scope

Contemporary critics often see postmodern literature as the product of a lack of historical awareness and political apathy. Fredric Jameson points out that postmodern culture has been characterized by an "increasingly shallow sense of history" (1991, p. 16) and a "waning of affect" (1991, p. 22), and its flatness seems to diminish the depth of the text's engagement with history and politics. In this view, the formal innovations of postmodern literature -- such as fragmented narratives and the emphasis on "mage" and "simulacrum" (1991, p. 16) -- are seen as superficial reproductions of historical

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experience and detachment from political issues. Whether such criticism accurately reflects postmodern literature's stance towards history and politics remains open to question. Two inquiries are initially proposed: Firstly, is postmodern literature inevitably mired in historical nihilism and political apathy? Secondly, could *Slaughterhouse-Five* offer a response to this criticism through its distinctive formal practices?

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* provides a compelling case for addressing these questions. This study argues that such criticisms tend to overlook the formal complexity and deep reflection inherent in postmodern texts. Linda Hutcheon takes a different position, claiming that postmodernism is "resolutely historical" and "inescapably political" (1988, p. 3), and she introduces the concept of "historiographic metafiction" to describe works that are both self-referential and related to historical events (1988, p. 5). Within this context, *Slaughterhouse-Five* reveals the constructed nature of historical writing by disrupting linear narrative, while simultaneously reminding readers of the authenticity and inescapable reality of war experiences through its depiction of the Dresden bombing. This embodies the dual dimensions emphasized by the concept of "meta-historical fiction".

1.2 Research Objectives

This study's core argument is that although *Slaughterhouse-Five* presents postmodernist features such as non-linear narrative, black humor, irony, and metafiction, it functions as a "postmodern literature" that re-engages in the understanding of history and the articulation of political stance through its unique form. The novel challenges traditional linear historiography through its temporal fragmentation (Close Reading 3.1), employs black humor and irony to critique the cruelty and absurdity of war (Close Reading 3.2), and mobilizes imagery and symbolic metaphors to reflect deeply on trauma and historical memory (Close Reading 3.3).

1.3 Methodology

This study combines theoretical analysis with close reading, a method rooted in New Critical tradition (Brooks, 1947) but is historically and theoretically contextualized rather than practiced as ahistorical formalism. employing a "concession-turn" structure: it first outlines the critiques raised by Jameson (1991) and other scholars, then introduces Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction theory as an analytical framework (1988). Micro readings of selected passages are interpreted the work of Caruth (1996) and LaCapra (2001), so as to understand why fragmented form, repetiton,

and metafictional interruption are apt strategies for representing historical trauma. Finally, it demonstrates how *Slaughterhouse-Five* reconstructs historical and political expression within a postmodern aesthetic context, thereby responding to the contention that “postmodern literature inevitably leads to historical nihilism and political apathy”. The study also takes into account that contemporary methodological debates, questioning purely suspicious modes of critique (Felski, 2015), but argues that a historicized close reading efficiently reveals how postmodern form enacts political and historical consciousness.

2. Context: Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Postmodern Literature

2.1 Brief Biography of Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut was born in Indiana, USA, 67 years after his ancestors emigrated from Germany. The honor and wealth associated with his ancestral profession as architects ended with the conclusion of World War I—amidst widespread anti-German sentiment and legal repercussions in the United States. His habit of writing since childhood sustained his pursuit of literary aspirations until he entered Cornell University to major in biochemistry, where he contributed to *The Cornell Sun*. The same year he enlisted in the U.S. Army, his mother took her own life, becoming the “legacy of suicide” reflected in his portrayal of character deaths. His experience as a prisoner of war in Europe during the February 13, 1945, firebombing of Dresden laid the conceptual groundwork for *Slaughterhouse-Five*. After his discharge, he pursued writing relentlessly, continuing to write even through the loss of loved ones. Gradually gaining recognition, he published the novel in 1969, a work that gave him “a feeling of completion” (Reed, 2010).

2.2 The Literary Concept of Postmodernism

The core literary tendency of postmodernism can be summarized as a distrust of metanarratives and the resulting shift in narrative practices. In *La condition postmoderne* (published in English in 1984), Lyotard defines postmodernism as skepticism toward grand theoretical discourses that aim to provide totalizing, ultimate explanations—meaning literature no longer attempts to frame history or reality within a single path or universal truth. The literary characteristics derived from this include: rejecting totalizing narrative approaches (resisting singular meanings through fragmented, juxtaposed, or localized storytelling); emphasizing plural voices and

marginalized perspectives (providing a platform for experiences suppressed by mainstream discourse); and highlighting narrative self-awareness and textual construction (presenting narration as an artificial “pseudo-narrative” to expose its discursive authority). Moreover, the doubt Lyotard refers to carries a political dimension: resistance to consensus and authoritative discourse becomes an ethical and political stance, endowing literary irony, deconstruction, and partial memory with distinct critical functions. It is important to note that Lyotard also cautions us that not all grand narratives have vanished; powerful totalizing discourses persist in real-world politics. Therefore, when employing this theory as an analytical tool, we must acknowledge the explanatory power of postmodern narrative strategies within intellectual and cultural contexts while remaining vigilant to their limitations in addressing social realities.

2.3 The significance of Postmodern Strategies

Accordingly, a close reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* will focus on how it employs a fragmented temporal structure, a self-referential narrative voice, irony, and localized historical representations to both expose the constructed nature of historical discourse and, through formal strategies, give voice to war trauma and marginalized experiences. This approach places postmodern formalism within an ethical examination of history and politics.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Jameson and Fragmentation of Temporality

As Fredric Jameson contends in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, postmodern cultural production is marked by a “waning of affect” and a turn towards surface over depth (1991, p. 10). Postmodern culture presents an unprecedented “sense of depthlessness”, not only reflected in cultural forms dominated by “images” and “simulacrum” but also in theoretical discourse itself (1991, p. 16). Within this cultural logic, our communal connection to “history” is diminishing, as well as the individual’s perception of “time”. Jameson further notes that in the “society of the spectacle”, the “past” is reduced to a patchwork of unconnected “simulacrum” (1991, p. 41), losing its organicity and narrative coherence (1991, p.26). The deeper crisis is that the subject no longer possesses the ability to mobilize historical experience and construct a sense of time as a whole, thus evolving into a fragmented “schizophrenic subject”, whose cultural practices tend to be randomized and haphazard

(1991, p. 28). Thus Jameson's critique reveals the close relationship between the "diminished sense of history" and "political unconsciousness" within the logic of postmodern culture, constituting one of the most influential aspects of his theory.

This description of the disintegration of subjectivity and the erosion of the sense of history finds its counterpart in postmodern literary texts. For example, Billy Pilgrim's experience of jumping between different moments in time, and the non-linear view of temporality represented by the Tralfamadorians, exemplify what Jameson calls the "fragmentation of temporality" (1991, p. 16). Such non-linear narrative techniques mean that events such as the Dresden bombing are no longer presented as a coherent whole, but in fractured fragments, interludes, and repetitions. Coupled with the author's deliberate meta-narrative interventions (e.g. Vonnegut's first person self-insertion), this further undermines the coherence and authority on which traditional historical narratives rely. Some critics have thus argued that *Slaughterhouse-Five* exhibits tendencies towards escapism or political apathy. For instance, Wepler (2011) contends that the novel's satire and absurdity may give the impression of downplaying the brutality of war. Similarly, el Diwany (2014) observes that the recurring phrase "So it goes" functions as a dismissive catchphrase, seemingly eroding the significance of death and suffering while indirectly reinforcing this impression of "non-political engagement". This apparent deconstruction of historical depth and meaning construction renders the text highly susceptible to interpretation as a depoliticized, de-emotionalized narrative stance.

On the surface, such features seem to embody the very cultural logic that Jameson describes, presenting a flat and emotionally detached narrative that confirms postmodernism's lack of historical depth. The risk, however, in viewing these formal strategies merely as depoliticizing and dehistoricizing lies in overlooking their potential function as critical tools. It is precisely at this juncture that Hutcheon's theory offers a distinct interpretative direction.

3.2 Hutcheon's "Historiographic Metafiction"

Yet, is formal fragmentation necessarily politically indifferent? Linda Hutcheon offers a compelling counter-perspective in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. She argues that postmodernism is not defined by evasion, but by "paradox, an insistent historicity, and an inescapable politicality" (1988, p. 3), embodied in "the presence of the past". On this basis, she introduces the concept of

“historiographic metafiction” (1988, p. 5) -- self-reflexive novels that paradoxically engage with history. The significance of this concept lies in its provision of a research pathway that both accounts for the formal self-consciousness of postmodern literature and reveals that this very self-consciousness constitutes an engagement with history and politics. In other words, form is politics; the use of irony and fragmented narratives does not dissolve history, but rather employs “paradox” to highlight the constructed nature of historical writing.

Historiographic metafiction insists on the shared discursive nature of literature and history, both understood as human constructs dependent on language and ideology. As McHale (1987) observes, postmodern fiction continually blurs the boundaries between history and fiction through deliberate narrative strategies, revealing the narrativability and multiplicity of historical knowledge (p.90). And it could further maintain that the “paradoxical nature” of such texts precisely embodies the political dimension of postmodern writing: it acknowledges that history no longer possesses singular truth while simultaneously offering critical intervention through irony and counter-narrative. Within this framework, the formal strategies of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be reread as politically charged. Vonnegut’s pervasive irony and fragmented temporality are not “lightweight jokes” but devices that force the reader into a critical engagement with war and memory. Wepler (2011) suggests that Vonnegut’s comic realism simultaneously evokes ambiguity and absurdity while compelling readers to confront the brutality of war; this effect aligns with Hutcheon’s theory, demonstrating that form itself constitutes a political statement. The novel’s temporally displaced structure serves not merely as a narrative device, but also as a reflection upon and re-enactment of war trauma. Thus, through Hutcheon’s lens, *Slaughterhouse-Five* emerges not as an ahistorical or apolitical text, but as a paradigmatic “postmodern historical novel”. Its self-conscious narration, irony, and repetitive refrains destabilize the authority of historical truth while simultaneously demanding a critical reassessment of war, memory, and politics. In this way, Hutcheon’s theory not merely counters Jameson’s charge of postmodern apathy but provides a productive method for analyzing how Vonnegut reinvents the historical novel form.

3.3 Review of Literature

Although Jameson’s theory provides a foundational critique for postmodernism’s potential detachment, Hutcheon’s metafictional model of historical writing offers a more nuanced framework for analysing politically engaged postmodern texts such as

Slaughterhouse-Five. Hutcheon contends that such novels “establish and then subvert... narrative conventions” to question how we perceive and represent the past (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). This paper further incorporates trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), arguing that Vonnegut’s fragmented narrative mirrors the psychic structure of trauma -- discontinuity, repetition, and intrusion. This theoretical synergy enables us to view the novel’s form not as a failure of historical representation but as a critical mode of historical enactment, challenging grand historical narratives through a deliberately subjective and fractured perspective.

4. Close Reading

4.1 Non-linearity Structure and Metafiction Disruption

Approaching from a formal perspective, we must first recognize that the non-linear structure and meta-narrative interventions employed by Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* are not mere textual experiments, but rather the core mechanisms through which his political stance and historical reflection are realized.

In terms of narrative structure, *Slaughterhouse-Five*’s most distinctive feature is its non-linear temporal narrative; Billy Pilgrim jumps randomly between different points in time, as he himself states, “He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, pays random visits to all the events in between” (15). This temporal arbitrariness subverts the linear progression of cause-and-effect logic of traditional historical narratives. As Hooti and Omrani (2011) argue, such structural disjunction destabilizes reader expectations, generating discomfort that paradoxically forces them to confront the instability of historical memory rather than passively accept coherent war narratives. As Jameson notes, postmodern culture exhibits “an increasingly shallow and attenuated sense of history” (1991, p. 16), and Billy’s temporal dislocation thus reflects a postmodern reassessment of time, whereby it is no longer regarded as a continuous and uniform entity, but as a symbolic system subject to reconstruction.

This notion is further reinforced in the novel through the Tralfamadorians’ view of time. They firmly believe that “when a person dies he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past...All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist” (16-17). While this philosophy may appear consolatory, its irony lies in exposing the futility of humanity’s desire for a coherent historical totality. In Hutcheon’s terms, the novel exemplifies “historiographic metafiction”, foregrounding

that both history and fiction are constructed discourses rather than transparent windows onto truth (1988, p. 19). Billy's fragmented movements -- slipping from 1955 into 1941 and then into 1963 (15) -- underscore the impossibility of narrating history as a unified continuum.

A further manifestation of temporal rupture is the repeated motif "So it goes", which follows every mention of death. On the surface, this phrase reflects Jameson's "waning of affect" (1991, p. 10), a gesture of detachment and depthlessness. Yet its mechanical recurrence functions less as indifference than as an ironic ritual. As the repetition produces a numbing effect that paradoxically heightens awareness of the ubiquity of death. Each utterance -- whether describing the petrification of Lot's wife, the hunting accident of Billy's father, or the Dresden massacre -- forces readers into confrontation with the absurd normalization of mass death. Rather than trivializing, the refrain insists that death saturates every aspect of wartime existence, resisting any attempt at transcendental meaning.

Equally significant is Vonnegut's own authorial intrusion, which lays bare the text's constructedness. For instance:

This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt. It begins like this: Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. It ends like this: "Poo-tee-weet?" (14)

Such metafictional gestures shatter the illusion of objective narration, foregrounding the narrator's inability to represent catastrophe fully. What might seem absurdist comedy thus becomes an acknowledgment of trauma's resistance to representation, aligning the novel with Hutcheon's insight that historiographic metafiction both asserts and undermines history's claims to truth.

In this light, Vonnegut's use of non-linear time, ironic motifs, and metafictional disruptions does not signal a retreat from politics or history. Instead, it exposes the fragility of historical discourse, turning formal experimentation into a mode of ethical resistance. Through fragmentation, irony, and self-conscious narrative rupture, *Slaughterhouse-Five* transforms the Dresden massacre into a cultural trauma that resists closure, compelling its readers to wrestle with the uneasy politics of memory.

4.2 Irony, Repetition, and Affective Critique

If the structural fragmentation challenges the conventions of historical writing, then the black humour and irony at the linguistic level constitute a direct response to

historical experience itself, embodying the text's political engagement and emotional tension.

Slaughterhouse-Five is replete with cynicism about military hierarchies, political orders, and the absurd nature of war. For instance, the novel quotes the U.S. Army's verdict of capital punishment for the deserter Slovik, whose bureaucratic and mechanical language repeatedly emphasizes "military discipline" but shows an astonishing indifference to the end of individual life (23-24). This apparent objectivity in quotation actually employs irony to expose the coldness and dehumanisation of the war machine, using its "inevitable political nature" to embody a questioning and dismantling of the existing power structure (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 3).

The repetition of "So it goes" constitutes another emblematic rhetorical device within the novel. Though Jameson might interpret it as reflecting postmodern culture's "flatness and lack of depth" and "the fading of emotion" (4; 7), yet within the text, this mechanical repetition establishes a ritualized cadence, inducing in the reader a numbness of feeling amidst the absurdity of war; the normalization of death resembles more an emotional blunting and self-defence mechanism in the face of extreme trauma. From bidding farewell to multitudes of people, to the creatures frozen to death within their clothes on the Dresden battlefield, their deaths are dismissed with a single phrase: So it goes. This is not an absence of emotion, but an irony that normalizes death, reflecting the emotional numbness individuals experience amidst collective violence. Confronted with traumatic experiences, black humour can serve as a rhetorical device for expressing and processing unspeakable trauma (Caruth, 1996, p. 6), which resonates profoundly with the shadow of war that haunts Billy.

In addition, the novel makes extensive use of black humor, using absurd and ironic language to show the hypocrisy and violent nature of war. Vonnegut likens the marching American soldiers to the "diagrams in a book on ballroom dancing -- step, slide, rest -- step, slide, rest" (22), undermine the solemnity of war through caricatured depictions. Similarly, Billy's memories of his father teaching him to swim -- "His father was going to throw Billy into the deep end, and Billy was going to damn well swim. It was like an execution" (24) -- using the analogy between the brutal experience of growing up and an execution, for a metaphor for the deprivation of individual subjectivity and the polarization of the existential situation in war. When Billy fantasizing about "turning to steam painlessly" (25), he longs to withdraw from physical

existence, indicating his despair over the reality of war and symbolizing the gradual disintegration of subjectivity.

Vonnegut further amplifies this absurdity through visually exaggerated metaphors. American prisoners of war are depicted as “a Mississippi of humiliated Americans” (33), revealing the systematic trampling of soldiers’ dignity by war. Meanwhile, likening the American fliers to “high school kids” and Hitler to “a baby” (38) further mocks and dismantles the heroic myths and binary enemy-ally ideologies inherent in war narratives (a political consciousness I believe is strongly linked to Vonnegut’s German-American identity).

The novel’s opening and ending adopt a “detached” tone, also carrying profound anger and helplessness towards war through such ironic and absurd techniques. As Hutcheon points out when addressing Jameson’s critique of so-called “surface humour”, postmodern texts are not emotionally vacuous; their irony often bears weighty political intent -- a reflection on war and a questioning of authority (7; 17). From the standpoint of political aesthetics, the absurd itself may be regarded as a form of critique (Adorno, 1973, p. 362), achieving a rebuttal of historical violence and authoritarian consciousness by deconstructing grand narratives and dismantling hegemonic discourses. Vonnegut harnessed the satirical aesthetics of postmodernism, employing black humour and absurdity as his medium, to deliver a profound critique of war history and foster political reflection.

4.3 Symbolic Imagery and Trauma Representation

The starkness and sarcasm of language ultimately lead to human experience profoundly reshaped by war, a transformation rendered with even greater depth through the novel’s imagery.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, deep historical and political metaphors lie behind the seemingly absurd imagery. Billy Pilgrim was imprisoned by Tralfamadorians in a “simulated Earthling habitat” (57), a setting that symbolizes the objectification of the individual in war and the mechanism of display and control by the state apparatus. The description of the flying saucer “come from nowhere all at once” (38), can be read as a symbolic collection of important experiences in Billy’s life -- the owl optometrist, the Christianity of his mother, the dog he kept as a child, indicating the suddenness and omnipresence of traumatic memories. Billy expected Tralfamadorians to be shocked by the war on Earth, but their response is to cover their eyes, revealing that the alien civilization is unable to understand and chooses to avoid the killing of human beings

(59), pointing to the indifference of modern society towards war and violence. As Jameson claims, postmodern culture may present a “new sense of lack of depth” (1991, p. 16), and this imagery of indifference can be seen as a literary response to this judgment.

Additionally, Montana Wildhack and her sex life with Billy under the zoo dome (57) constitute a metaphorical interweaving of sex, violence, and the desire to watch in the context of war. And this panoramic surveillance style of spatial design reinforces the visualization and objectification of the individual, suggesting that war all- round deprivation of privacy, dignity and even humanity. The indifference of Tralfamadorians further refers to society’s numbness to war. The bombing of Dresden, as the central event of the novel, is treated as a fragmented narrative, adopts a strategy of presenting the “in-narratable trauma”. As Caruth and LaCapra have explored, it is often difficult to be expressed in traditional narratives, requiring the use of imagery and metaphors to present its ineffable nature (1996, p. 5; 2001, p. 186). Nazi Campbell’s interpretation of the American soldier’s armband appeared imbued with patriotic fervour: Blue stands for the American sky. White stands for the race that pioneered the continent. Red stands for the blood of American patriots so willingly shed in years gone by (80). This patriotic symbolism appeared hollow and ironic within the absurd theatre of history, standing in stark contrast to the impending total destruction.

Besides, the novel’s satire on religion carries profound symbolism. Billy, as “a valet to a preacher”, expected no promotions or medals, bore no arms, and held a meek faith in a loving Jesus which most shoulders found putrid (18). The meticulous depiction of wounds in images of Christ’s crucifixion instead appeared “pitiful” (21-22), suggesting the fragile, powerless nature of traditional religious belief in the face of war. Billy’s mother was trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops, and hung a crucifix on Billy’s wall (22). This act symbolizes the futility of a wartime society seeking order and meaning amidst ruins, while also underscoring how symbolic structures in postmodern texts assume the substitute duty of representing “real history” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 11).

Overall, these absurd imagery are not meaningless textual fragments, but highly symbolic narrative tools. On the one hand, they respond to postmodern literature’s critiques of “anti-historical” tendencies and “political apathy”; on the other hand, they shoulder the ethical responsibility of how postmodern writing employs visual systems

to bear historical expression -- using an unspeakable visual language to carry unbearable historical trauma.

4.4 The Subjectivity of Author's Voice and Historical Narrative

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut employs the first-person narrator "I" to directly engage with the core characteristics of what Hutcheon defines as "historiographic metafiction". She observes that such works are "renowned, widely recognized novels that are intensely self-referential while paradoxically claiming connection to historical events and figures", aiming through "conscious writing" to "question the relationship between history and truth, truth and language" (1988, p. 5). Vonnegut's authorial intrusion exemplifies precisely this strategy of "elevating personal experience to the level of public consciousness" and "fusing public, historical elements with personal, biographical elements".

This strategy directly exposes the novel's construction process. When the narrator describes a soldier as "He didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo" (19), this unconventional, almost absurd metaphor itself becomes a form of meta-commentary. Rather than pursuing the realism of war reporting, it deliberately presents characters through a distanced, pictorial approach. This precisely validates Jameson's critique that postmodern culture constitutes a new cultural form dominated by "image" and "simulacrum" (1991, p. 10). The soldier's image has been stripped of its historical context and human depth, flattened into a peculiar "quasi-image" exhibiting what Jameson described as "a new flatness and lack of depth" and "superficiality, lack of substance, and absence of depth". On the surface, this depiction appears to exemplify the "disappearance of emotion" and "absence of depth".

Nonetheless, Vonnegut's narrative does not conclude here. For example:
He was so snug in there that he was able to pretend that he was safe at home, having survived the war, and that he was telling his parents and his sister a true war—whereas the true war was still going on. (23)

This passage profoundly reveals the essence of historical writing. It becomes a meta-fable about the act of narration: the act of storytelling itself ('telling a true war story') is depicted as a means of seeking solace and psychological escape amidst ongoing trauma ('the real war still raging'). This perfectly embodies Hutcheon's theory that "history and fiction are both discourses, both constructing systems of meaning through which we manufacture the significance of the past", and that "it is precisely the

narrative design of historical writing—its interweaving of account and commentary on past events—that constitutes what we perceive as historical truth” (1988, p. 5).

In this manner, Vonnegut engages with history through his authorship, yet his participation does not consist in providing a transparent, objective historical record. Rather, through the narrative of metafiction, he reveals the inherent subjectivity, construction, and strategic nature of historical writing itself. He demonstrates how narrative is employed to shape, and even distort, our experience of the past to serve present psychological imperatives. This does not, as Jameson feared, render history itself “inaccessible” (1991, p. 10), but rather, as Hutcheon countered, constitutes a “rethinking” of history as an “artificial construct” (1988, p. 3). Vonnegut’s work thus constitutes not a “deceptive ploy to evade truth”, but rather fulfills the postmodernist function of “questioning accepted ideas” and “employing this power to achieve its own critique”, offering a profound critique of the historical representation of war through its very form.

5. Discussion

This close reading necessitates a reassessment of the initial critique that postmodern literature is inherently ahistorical and apathetic. The limitations of such a critique, as exemplified by Jameson’s focus on form as symptom, become apparent. While his diagnosis of a “fragmented temporality” and “waning of affect” accurately describes the surface features of a text like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it risks misinterpreting these features as an endpoint -- a mere reflection of a pathological cultural condition -- rather than recognizing their potential as a point of departure for a different mode of political and historical engagement.

Hutcheon’s framework provides this crucial corrective. By positing that postmodernism is “inescapably political” and “resolutely historical”, she shifts the critical focus from what is lost (depth, coherence, affect) to what is gained through formal innovation. The politics of postmodern literature, therefore, reside precisely in its form. In addressing the initial question, it becomes apparent that the techniques employed in postmodern literature -- such as non-linear narrative, black humour, and meta-narrative -- do not constitute a mere evasion of history and politics. Jameson’s analysis of “fragmented time” and shallow historical consciousness helps us understand Billy Pilgrim’s non-linear temporal experience and the Tralfamadorians’ conception of

time. While superficially misread as historical dissolution, these elements actually offer a multi-dimensional portrayal of war trauma and individual experience. Hutcheon's theory of historical metafiction further demonstrates that non-traditional narrative forms can intervene in historical accounts through paradox and self-consciousness, rendering irony, repetition and the absurd not as markers of emotional detachment, but as potent responses to historical and political issues.

Vonnegut's fragmentation is thus not a withdrawal from history but a polemical argument about history: it challenges the authority of singular, linear, and unified historical narratives. The black humour and repetitive rhetoric of "So it goes" employ emotional numbing and satire to expose the absurdity of war and human powerlessness, thereby achieving the text's portrayal of trauma and critique of historical authority. Symbolic imagery within the novel -- such as Montana Wildhack, the zoo dome, flying saucers, and religious metaphors -- both echoes society's numbness towards war and fulfills an ethical function in historical expression. Collectively, textual strategies and theoretical perspectives mutually corroborate: postmodern formal innovation constitutes a complex engagement with historical trauma, political realities, and individual experience, rather than passive evasion. The contribution of postmodern literature lies in its capacity to question historical monism and make space for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, particularly those shaped by trauma and rupture.

6. Conclusion

In doing so, works like *Slaughterhouse-Five* perform an essential democratic function. They do not offer a clearer or more "true" version of the past but a more critically aware and ethically responsible one. By formally embodying the chaos and subjectivity of memory, they forge a model of public memory that is inherently provisional, contested, and reflective. This does not lead to nihilism but to a more profound and critical form of remembrance, forcing the reader to actively participate in the construction of meaning from the fragments. The political act, then, is the act of formal experimentation itself -- an act that dismantles hegemonic narratives to serve a more critical, inclusive, and vigilant collective reflection.

On the contrary, postmodern literature does not, as some critics contend, evade historical and political issues. Rather, through its formal strategies, it actively engages with the reflection and expression of historical trauma and political realities. Vonnegut's writing practice demonstrates that the "political nature" and "historical

perspective” of postmodern literature are not absent, but are presented through non-traditional, non-realist modes of expression. Therefore, we ought to renew our interpretative framework for postmodern literature, recognizing its formal innovations as distinctive linguistic modes of engagement with history and politics, rather than misinterpreting them as passive evasion of serious issues. *Slaughterhouse-Five* offers a paradigm demonstrating how postmodern literature can assume ethical responsibilities towards history and politics while simultaneously pioneering narrative strategies.

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