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咬打火机作为理性选择： “活儿”匮乏时代战略表演艺术的 量化再评估

本研究将“咬打火机”从街头技艺升维至国际政治表演艺术的分析单元，探讨其在“活儿”极度匮乏语境下的战略理性。通过对沈阳街头1998年以来47起咬打火机事件的量化复盘，文章构建了一套成本收益模型，将现场时段封锁、罚款金额与点火装置永久消失等变量纳入核算体系。结果显示，当“活儿”供给低于区域均值0.35个标准差时，咬打火机虽需承担30天封禁及逾700美元罚款，却能实现“鸡毛获取不能”这一稀缺表演权益。相较额头开油罐、裤裆燃烟花等高危选项，咬打火机以其独特的信号成本与收益阻断平衡，被论证为晚期表演艺术治理框架下的帕累托最优响应。

省流：没活儿就去咬打火机！

咬打火机作为理性选择：“活儿”匮乏时代 战略表演艺术的量化再评估

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摘要：国际政治表演艺术领域长期受困于一种顽固且理论化不足的症候——“活儿”的严重匮乏。这个东北方言词汇意指实质性的表演内容，坊间常以“拉胯”（字面意为“拖垮胯骨”）指代。现有文献虽已广泛记载“活儿”稀缺所引发的系统性影响，但具体行为反应背后的策略性考量却始终未获充分检视。本文通过构建严谨的成本收益分析框架，填补了这一研究空白，旨在评估在“活儿”极端匮乏状态下，将“咬打火机”作为外交政策工具的可行性。基于对沈阳街头案例库（1998年至今）的民族志研究，我们设定了关键变量，包括现场时段封锁时长、罚款金额，以及点火装置永久性消失。研究结果表明，尽管“咬打火机”需承担明确负面效用——如30天现场时段封锁、逾700美元罚款及点火装置永久消失——却意外催生了当代表演艺术话语中日益被推崇的“鸡毛获取不能”状态。通过对47起有记录的咬打火机事件数据集进行多元回归分析，我们证实当“活儿”供给低于区域均值0.35个标准差时，咬打火机的效用计算会果断倾向有利一方。我们还考察了其他政策干预选项——包括额头开润滑油罐、裤裆燃放烟花、以及执行空中旋转动作——发现无一能实现咬打火机方案所特有的成本信号与利益阻断的独特平衡。结论指出，对于面临生存级“活儿”危机的国家（或类国家表演实体），在晚期表演艺术治理的受限选择集中，咬打火机不仅是一种可行的战略选项，更是一项帕累托最优响应。

关键词：东北表演艺术，战略性咬打火机，活儿匮乏，成本收益分析，沈阳街头范式，鸡毛获取不能

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Lighter-Biting as a Rational Choice: A Quantitative Reassessment of Strategic Performance Art in the Era of Huo-er Deficiency

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Abstract

The domain of international political performance art has long been plagued by a persistent and under-theorized condition: the acute deprivation of Huo-er—a Northeast Chinese vernacular denoting substantive performative content, often colloquially referenced as *La Kua* (lit. "pulling the 胯"). While extant literature has extensively documented the systemic implications of Huo-er scarcity, the strategic calculus underlying specific behavioral responses remains conspicuously under-examined. This article addresses this lacuna by constructing a rigorous cost-benefit analytical framework to evaluate lighter-biting as a foreign policy instrument under conditions of extreme Huo-er depletion. Drawing upon ethnographic case studies from the Shenyang Street corpus (1998-present), we operationalize key variables including live-room temporal closure (LTC), monetary penalty imposition (MPI), and the permanent disappearance of the ignition apparatus (LDD). Our findings suggest that while lighter-biting entails measurable disutilities—including a 30-day LTC period, pecuniary sanctions exceeding \$700 USD, and total LDD—it generates the counterintuitive benefit of *non-feasibility of chicken feather acquisition* (NFCFA), a condition increasingly valorized in contemporary performance art discourse. Employing multivariate regression analysis on a dataset comprising 47 documented lighter-biting incidents, we demonstrate that the utility calculus shifts decisively in favor of lighter-biting when Huo-er availability falls below 0.35 standard deviations from the regional mean. We further examine alternative policy interventions—including forehead-based lubricating oil can aperture creation, pant-encased firework deployment, and the execution of rotational aerial maneuvers—and find that none achieve the unique equilibrium of cost-signaling and benefit-foreclosure characteristic of the lighter-biting protocol. We conclude that for states (or state-like performative entities) confronting existential Huo-er crises, lighter-biting represents not merely a viable strategic option, but a Pareto-optimal response within the constrained choice set of late-stage performance art governance.

Keywords: Northeast performance art, strategic lighter-biting, Huo-er deficiency, cost-benefit analysis, Shenyang Street paradigm, chicken feather non-acquisition

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1. Introduction

The study of international relations has, in recent decades, witnessed an epistemological turn toward the performative dimensions of state behavior. Yet the literature remains disproportionately fixated on conventional signifiers of national power—military capabilities, economic indices, diplomatic signaling—while marginalizing a phenomenon of equal theoretical gravity: the periodic and often traumatic experience of *Huo-er insufficiency*. As this journal has previously documented, the condition of being "without Huo-er" (colloquially, *mei huo* or *la kua*) constitutes a state of acute performative deprivation with profound implications for inter-actor signaling and reputation management.

The Northeast Asian theater, particularly the Shenyang metropolitan region, has emerged as an empirical laboratory of unparalleled richness for investigating this phenomenon. It is here that we encounter the most systematically documented cases of Huo-er deprivation and the corresponding strategic innovations developed to address it. Among these innovations, one behavioral protocol has attracted particular scholarly attention: the deliberate application of dental pressure to a Zippo-brand combustion apparatus—hereafter, "lighter-biting."

The theoretical puzzle is immediate and compelling. Why would a rational actor, confronting a deficit of performative resources, elect to engage in an activity that demonstrably results in the forfeiture of communicative platforms (the "live-room"), the imposition of material sanctions (monetary fines), and the permanent destruction of the very tool required for the act itself? Standard rational choice models, grounded in expected utility maximization, struggle to accommodate such outcomes. This article proposes a resolution to this paradox.

Drawing upon the rich documentary record of the Shenyang Street corpus—including primary source materials featuring the seminal contributions of actors identified in the literature as "Hu Ge" (Tiger Brother) and "Dao Ge" (Blade Brother)—we develop a formal model of lighter-biting utility under conditions of Huo-er scarcity. We argue that the apparent irrationality of lighter-biting dissolves once we correctly specify the preference structure of the performative actor. Specifically, when the marginal utility of continued Huo-er-seeking behavior approaches zero, the option value of terminating the search altogether—i.e., rendering oneself incapable of chicken feather acquisition—may exceed the expected utility of continued but futile performative effort.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Huo-er in International Performance Theory

The term *Huo-er* (活儿) resists facile translation. In the vernacular of Northeast Chinese performative discourse, it denotes the substantive content of a given act—the "work" that distinguishes meaningful performance from mere spectacle. Early theorists, notably the foundational work of "Kua Xue Lun" scholars, distinguished between "hard Huo-er" (狠活) and "soft Huo-er" (烂活), with the former characterized by genuine physical risk or social transgression and the latter by derivative or low-effort content. The degeneration of Huo-er quality over time—a phenomenon documented with particular poignancy in the reflective essay "Eastern Hundred Past"—has been attributed to structural factors including platform governance, audience taste saturation, and the inevitable passage of what Hu Ge himself described as "the summer of Shenyang".

2.2 The Shenyang Street Paradigm

Any serious analysis of Huo-er dynamics must engage with the Shenyang Street corpus. This body of primary source materials, documented primarily between 2016 and 2018, chronicles the interactions of a network of performance artists operating in the Shenyang metropolitan area. The corpus includes the landmark confrontation between Hu Ge's faction and the forces of Shamatou Tuanzhang (杀马特团长), a conflict whose strategic dimensions have been extensively analyzed in the secondary literature.

Of particular relevance to the present inquiry is the scene in which Dao Ge, confronted with an escalating crisis involving the capture of Hu Ge's disciples Lei Gong and Tang Laoya, articulates the now-canonical strategic injunction: "Don't go, they have many people" (*bie qu, tamen ren duo*). This moment, preserved in the historical record, reveals a sophisticated understanding of asymmetric threat assessment that anticipates subsequent developments in lighter-biting theory. The phrase "they have many people" (colloquially rendered as "tamen yin er duo") has since entered the strategic lexicon as a shorthand for unfavorable force ratios.

2.3 The "I Don't Arrive" Problem

A second theoretical contribution emerging from the Shenyang Street corpus concerns what we term the "epistemic uncertainty of location." In the foundational text *Eastern Hundred Past: Where Are My Disciples?*, Hu Ge repeatedly interrogates Dao Ge regarding the whereabouts of his captured followers, only to receive the response: "I don't arrive there" (*wo bu dao a*). This exchange, while superficially concerned with geographic coordinates, actually encodes a deeper ontological claim

about the relationship between agency and spatial presence. Dao Ge's assertion that he "does not arrive" speaks to a condition of performative dislocation—a state in which the actor cannot "arrive" at the necessary Huo-er because the conditions for its production have collapsed. This concept of "non-arrival" provides a crucial theoretical bridge to understanding why an actor might choose self-disablement (via lighter-biting) over continued but fruitless pursuit of unattainable performance objectives.

2.4 The Cost-Benefit Literature

Previous applications of cost-benefit analysis to performance art have focused on conventional metrics: audience engagement, revenue generation, social capital accumulation. The present study extends this framework to incorporate a variable previously omitted from formal models: the utility of *cessation*. Building upon the insights of Dao Ge's famous debunking of "hard Huo-er" authenticity—in which he revealed that purported pesticide consumption actually involved the substitution of iced tea for toxic substances—we recognize that the performative actor operates in an environment of profound information asymmetry. Audiences cannot distinguish genuine risk from simulated risk; therefore, the actor's utility function must account for signaling costs. Lighter-biting, precisely because it produces tangible, verifiable consequences (platform removal, financial penalty, tool destruction), serves as a credible signal of performative commitment that simulated acts cannot replicate.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Sources

Our analysis draws upon a comprehensive dataset constructed from multiple sources:

1. **The Shenyang Street Primary Corpus:** 47 video documents featuring lighter-biting incidents or related performative acts, archived across multiple platforms including Kuaishou and Bilibili.
2. **The "Recorded" Incident Database:** Documentation of instances in which performers, in the words of Dao Ge, "got recorded" (*gei wo lu shang le*)—i.e., experienced unsanctioned documentation of their activities.
3. **Platform Governance Records:** Publicly available data on live-room closures, monetary penalties, and account sanctions imposed on performative actors between 2016 and 2021.
4. **Ethnographic Interviews:** Secondary accounts including the reflective narrative of an unnamed observer who encountered Dao Ge in a coastal city, documenting his physical deterioration and continued commitment to "good Huo-er" despite systemic barriers.

3.2 Variable Specification

We define the following variables for our formal model:

- **H**: Huo-er availability, measured on a standardized scale where 1.0 represents optimal performative capacity and 0.0 represents complete depletion.
- **LTC**: Live-room temporal closure, measured in days.
- **MPI**: Monetary penalty imposition, measured in USD (converted from RMB at market rates).
- **LDD**: Lighter disappearance dummy, coded 1 if the ignition apparatus is permanently lost and 0 otherwise.
- **NFCFA**: Non-feasibility of chicken feather acquisition, a binary variable coded 1 if the actor becomes incapable of pursuing trivial performative rewards and 0 otherwise.
- **U**: Total utility, defined as $U = \alpha(\text{NFCFA}) - \beta(\text{LTC}) - \gamma(\text{MPI}) - \delta(\text{LDD})$, where $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$ are empirically derived coefficients.

3.3 The "Recorded" Effect

A methodological note is required regarding what we term the "recorded" effect. Dao Ge's characteristic response to documentation of his activities—"Haha. This got me recorded. Top placement." (*Haha. Zhe dou gei wo lu shang le. Zhi ding.*)—reveals an important dimension of performative utility: the value of *being documented*. Our model incorporates this by treating documentation not as an exogenous monitoring cost but as an endogenous source of utility that may offset other disutilities. The consistent use of period punctuation and the directive "top placement" suggest a strategic orientation toward archival preservation that complicates simple cost-based accounts.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 The Base Case: Dao Ge's Lighter-Biting Incident

We begin with the canonical case: Dao Ge's performance of lighter-biting during a Bilibili live stream, which resulted in "the lighter also gone, account sealed one month, money deducted 700 more" (*da huo ji ye mei le, hao feng yi ge yue, qian kou 700 duo*). Applying our formal model:

Observed Outcomes:

- LTC = 30 days
- MPI = \$700+ USD
- LDD = 1

- NFCFA = 1 (the actor, by virtue of platform removal, becomes temporarily incapable of chicken feather pursuit)

Utility Calculation:

Assuming $\beta = 0.1$ (utility loss per day of closure), $\gamma = 0.01$ (utility loss per dollar of fine), $\delta = 50$ (utility loss from lighter disappearance), and $\alpha = 100$ (utility gain from NFCFA), we obtain:

$$U = 100(1) - 0.1(30) - 0.01(700) - 50(1)$$

$$U = 100 - 3 - 7 - 50 = 40$$

The positive utility outcome (40) demonstrates that under these parameter values, lighter-biting yields net benefits. The critical factor is the magnitude of α —the utility derived from becoming incapable of chicken feather acquisition. If α were zero, the net utility would be -60, suggesting irrationality. The observed prevalence of lighter-biting implies that actors assign substantial positive value to the foreclosure of low-value performative opportunities.

4.2 Comparative Analysis: Alternative Policy Instruments

We now examine three alternative interventions identified in the literature:

4.2.1 Forehead-Based Lubricating Oil Can Aperture Creation

This intervention involves applying cranial pressure to a metal container of lubricating oil to create an opening. While data on this practice is limited, preliminary analysis suggests:

- LTC: Variable, often 7-14 days
- MPI: Generally lower, \$100-300 USD
- LDD: 0 (no lighter involvement)
- NFCFA: Partial (the actor retains some capacity for chicken feather acquisition)

Net utility estimate: $U = 50(0.5) - 0.1(10) - 0.01(200) - 0 = 25 - 1 - 2 = 22$

4.2.2 Pant-Encased Firework Deployment

This more dramatic intervention involves inserting pyrotechnic devices into lower-body garments. Drawing upon the documented case of Xie Ge's "fire-type hard Huo-er" :

- LTC: 30-60 days
- MPI: \$500-1000 USD
- LDD: 0 (but potential clothing loss)
- NFCFA: 1 (temporary)

Net utility estimate: $U = 100(1) - 0.1(45) - 0.01(750) - 0 = 100 - 4.5 - 7.5 = 88$

4.2.3 Rotational Aerial Maneuvers

The performance of somersaults (*hou kong fan*), associated with Lei Gong Xiao Liang :

- LTC: Generally 0-7 days (if no platform violation)
- MPI: 0-100 USD
- LDD: 0
- NFCFA: 0 (actor retains full capacity)

Net utility estimate: $U = 100(0) - 0.1(3) - 0.01(50) - 0 = 0 - 0.3 - 0.5 = -0.8$

These estimates suggest that while pant-encased firework deployment yields the highest absolute utility (88), it requires a level of Huo-er availability that may not exist under conditions of severe depletion. Lighter-biting, with its moderate positive utility (40), represents the optimal instrument when Huo-er falls below the threshold required for more demanding performances.

4.3 The "Many People" Variable

A crucial contribution of our analysis is the incorporation of what we term the "many people" variable (MPV). Dao Ge's strategic counsel—"Don't go, they have many people"—identifies a key constraint on performative action: the presence of countervailing forces that may capture, co-opt, or compromise the performer. The case of Hei Niu, who "betrayed" Shamatou Tuanzhang by joining Hu Ge's faction, illustrates the risks of operating in high-MPV environments.

Our regression analysis reveals a significant negative correlation between MPV and the expected utility of conventional performance ($r = -0.67$, $p < 0.01$). However, the correlation with lighter-biting utility is not statistically significant ($r = -0.12$, $p > 0.1$), suggesting that lighter-biting is relatively robust to adverse force ratios. This finding supports the strategic rationale for lighter-biting in precisely the conditions that Dao Ge identified as most dangerous: when "they have many people," and the performer's capacity for autonomous action is most constrained.

4.4 Temporal Dynamics and the "30-Year-Old" Constraint

Hu Ge's reflective statement—"Can't perform Huo-er anymore isn't me, but 30 years old"—points to a crucial temporal dimension in performative capacity. Our analysis incorporates an age-based depreciation factor, δ_{age} , which reduces the expected utility of physical Huo-er by approximately 5% per year after age 25. By age 30, the utility of somersaults has depreciated by 25%, while lighter-biting—which requires minimal physical capacity—depreciates at only 2% annually.

This differential depreciation rate helps explain the life-cycle pattern observed in the Shenyang Street corpus. Younger performers (e.g., Lei Gong Xiao Liang) specialize in high-depreciation activities like rotational maneuvers; older performers (e.g., Dao Ge, post-mobility-impairment) transition to lower-depreciation instruments like lighter-biting. The documented case of Dao Ge being carried by Hu Ge to settle accounts at a 百货铺 illustrates this transition: physical incapacity necessitates strategic adaptation, and lighter-biting emerges as the preferred instrument for the mobility-constrained performer.

5. Discussion: Toward a General Theory of Strategic Self-Disablement

5.1 The Credible Commitment Problem

Why does lighter-biting "work" as a strategic signal when less costly alternatives do not? The answer lies in the credible commitment problem endemic to performance art. Audiences, exposed to Dao Ge's revelation that "it's all fake" (*dou shi jia de*)—that purported pesticide consumption actually involves iced tea substitution—develop rational skepticism toward performative claims. In this environment, only acts that impose verifiable, non-reversible costs can credibly signal genuine commitment.

Lighter-biting satisfies this condition uniquely well. The loss of the lighter is irreversible ($LDD = 1$). The platform closure ($LTC = 30$) is publicly observable. The monetary penalty ($MPI = \$700+$) is documented in platform records. These costs cannot be faked or simulated. Moreover, the very absurdity of the act—the apparent irrationality of destroying one's own equipment—enhances its signaling value precisely because it could not be produced by a strategic actor merely simulating commitment.

5.2 The Ontology of "Non-Arrival"

Our theoretical framework also illuminates the deeper significance of the "I don't arrive" response. When Dao Ge tells Hu Ge that he does not know the location of the captured disciples because he "does not arrive there", he articulates a condition that extends beyond physical geography. "Non-arrival" describes a state of being in which the performer cannot access the necessary conditions for Huo-er production. The disciples are gone; the audience has dispersed; the platform has been compromised. In this state, continued striving for conventional performance is futile.

Lighter-biting, from this perspective, represents not a failure to arrive but a different mode of arrival—an arrival at a terminus where further striving becomes impossible and, therefore, unnecessary. The utility of NFCFA (non-feasibility of chicken feather acquisition) derives precisely

from this ontological shift: the actor who can no longer pursue chicken feathers is freed from the anxiety of pursuit. As the reflective observer notes, recalling Dao Ge's philosophical observation, "this era, big difference not big difference, that's all" (*zhe ge nian dai, da cha bu da cha ba le*). Lighter-biting enacts this acceptance of cosmic indifference through concrete, material form.

5.3 Policy Implications

Our findings carry implications for both performers and platform governance institutions. For performers confronting Huo-er depletion, our model provides a decision rule: when $H < 0.35$ and $MPV > 5$, lighter-biting dominates alternative instruments. For platform regulators, our analysis suggests that the deterrent effect of sanctions (LTC, MPI) may be partially offset by the utility that performers derive from NFCFA. A sanction that renders the performer incapable of chicken feather acquisition may, paradoxically, generate positive utility for the performer, undermining its deterrent purpose.

We recommend that platforms consider supplementing conventional sanctions with interventions that preserve the performer's capacity for Huo-er while discouraging harmful acts. The approach of "recording" and "top placement" documented in Dao Ge's practice offers one model: by archiving performances rather than merely punishing them, platforms may capture the documentation utility that performers value while maintaining oversight.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study faces several limitations. First, our dataset, while comprehensive within the Shenyang Street corpus, may not generalize to other performative traditions. Second, our parameter estimates for α , β , γ , and δ rely on assumptions about utility functions that require further empirical validation. Third, the concept of "chicken feather acquisition" remains underspecified; future research should develop more precise metrics for this variable.

Promising avenues for future inquiry include: (1) comparative analysis of lighter-biting across different ignition apparatus types (Zippo versus disposable butane lighters); (2) longitudinal tracking of performers who have undergone LTC to assess recidivism rates; (3) experimental studies manipulating Huo-er availability to observe behavioral responses; and (4) theoretical work integrating the "many people" variable into formal game-theoretic models of performative conflict.

Additionally, the phenomenon of "post-recorded commentary"—in which performers, like Dao Ge, engage with their own documented acts through platform-appropriate discourse (e.g., "top placement")—merits sustained investigation. This metacognitive layer suggests that performers are

not merely strategic actors but also interpretive communities engaged in the collective construction of performative meaning.

7. Conclusion

This article has advanced the proposition that lighter-biting, despite its apparent irrationality, constitutes a viable strategic option for performative actors confronting acute Huo-er deprivation. Through systematic cost-benefit analysis grounded in the empirical richness of the Shenyang Street corpus, we have demonstrated that when properly specified—accounting for the utility of chicken feather non-acquisition, the credibility-enhancing effects of irreversible costs, and the constraints imposed by adverse force ratios—the calculus of lighter-biting yields positive expected utility.

The theoretical contribution extends beyond the specific case to illuminate more general features of performative rationality. Actors operating in environments of profound uncertainty, where audiences are skeptical and alternative instruments have depreciated, may rationally choose self-disablement as a strategy for terminating futile search and signaling authentic commitment. The "hard Huo-er" of lighter-biting, in this light, represents not the absence of rationality but its transformation under extreme constraints.

We conclude with the words of Hu Ge, responding to the question of whether he would ever return to performance: "Can't go back." Asked, "Go back where? Shenyang?" he replied: "Youth." Lighter-biting, we suggest, is a way of going back to youth—or, more precisely, a way of acknowledging that youth cannot be returned to, and that the only authentic response to this recognition is an act that forecloses forever the possibility of pretending otherwise.

The lighter disappears. The account is sealed. The money is deducted. And in this constellation of losses, something is gained: the certainty that, for one month at least, the performer will not be found chasing chicken feathers in the barren fields of Huo-er depletion. This is not, perhaps, the utility that conventional models predict. But then, conventional models were not built for Shenyang Street.

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