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The Construction of Nostalgia in Screen Media in the Context of Postsocialist China

Zhun Gu

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Abstract

This thesis explores how different forms of nostalgia have been constructed by various forms of screen media in China since the 1990s. Textual analysis of media languages and structures and discourse analysis of the Chinese government's economic-politics are used to examine the relationship between screen nostalgia, the influence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China's neoliberalist capitalism, and China's media internationalisation.

In order to examine the complex relationship between socio-economic and political contexts and nostalgic screen cultures produced by various generations of producers and presented in different formats of screen media, this thesis will investigate diverse forms of screen media texts in film, Internet drama and TV documentary. The following screen media texts are chosen: five feature films, *A Mongolian Tale* (Xie Fei, 1995), *Nuan* (Huo Jianqi, 2003), *Shower* (Zhang Yang, 1999), *24 City* (Jia Zhangke, 2008), and *So Young* (Zhao Wei, 2013); one Internet drama, *With You* (Liu Chang, 2016); and two television documentaries *A Bite of China* (Chen Xiaoqing, 2012) and *Maritime Silk Road* (Zhang Wei, 2016).

This thesis identifies that a culture of nostalgia has emerged in China in the past three decades, and this is strongly manifested in different media forms and genres and across different generations. The nostalgic culture speaks to, or engages with, China's postsocialist condition and social changes, including the urban-rural divide, urbanisation, commercialisation, and youth experience, as well as China's domestic and international policies. Overall, through examining various forms of nostalgia constructed by different forms of screen media, this thesis argues that nostalgia culture has changed, from filmmakers' intellectual and critical engagements with China's postsocialist condition to its co-option by the Chinese government and screen media industry for political and commercial gains over the past few decades.

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Introduction

I was born in the late 1980s in the People's Republic of China (PRC). My early childhood was spent in the countryside until my parents sent my brother and me to the city to receive a better education. Subsequently, my family moved several more times in order to support our education. After graduating from senior high school, I moved to large cities for my bachelor and master's degrees. Fond memories of my family and the countryside in the 1990s generates a nostalgia for the place where I spent my childhood. For example, the happy memory of when my brother and I went fishing after school is still with me. At the same time, the peripatetic nature of this earlier life experience meant that I spent less time with my grandparents, which further evokes a sense of regret. This personal yearning for my childhood home and the regret over spending so little time with my grandparents is something I have noticed I share with many friends in my age-group who moved from rural areas in their early years.

To some extent, my nostalgia for the transition from countryside to city for a better education during the 1990s and early 2000s may be viewed as a generational experience, situated in the context of China's intense market economic reform of the early 1990s onwards. Specifically, the Chinese market economy had developed quickly after the implementation of a policy of "reform and opening up" in 1978.[1] After experiencing intense debates about how to

[1] Reform and opening up refers to the programme of economic reform in the People's Republic of China (PRC) which started in December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China, led by Deng Xiaoping. Economic reforms introducing market principles began in 1978 and were carried out in two stages. The first stage, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, involved the decollectivisation of agriculture, the opening up of the country to foreign investment, and permission for entrepreneurs to start businesses. However, most industry remained state-owned. The second stage of reform, in the late 1980s and 1990s, involved the privatisation and contracting-out of much state-owned industry and the lifting of price controls, protectionist policies and regulations, although state monopolies in sectors such as banking and petroleum remained. The private sector grew remarkably, accounting for as much as 70% of China's gross domestic product by 2005. From 1978 until 2013, unprecedented growth occurred, with the economy increasing by 9.5% a year. Fang Cai, "Perceiving Truth and Ceasing Doubts: What Can We Learn from 40 Years of China's Reform and Opening up?" *China & World Economy*, 2018: 26(2), 1-22.

develop the country throughout the 1980s, China quickened the pace of its modernity by urbanisation, reform of state-owned enterprises and joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). This acceleration motivated many rural residents to find jobs and relocate their home in cities. In this sense, Chinese society gradually transformed itself from that of Mao's totalitarianism to a capitalist and ideologically-controlled society, specifically, postsocialist, as will be discussed in the next section.

Economic and cultural changes after the Mao era have been represented in various Chinese screen media. Basically, three kinds of nostalgic culture have been portrayed on the Chinese screen since the 1990s, attempting to transport viewers back to different types of 'home' within various social contexts. The first kind of screen nostalgic culture was produced by "educated youth" filmmakers in the 1990s, a generation who were forced to move to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and return later to the city.[2] These filmmakers produced a sense of nostalgia for the idyllic countryside that engaged with their memories in the context of the aforementioned early market economic reform. The second kind of nostalgic screen culture emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s and was produced by the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. These were people who typically grew up in cities and studied in professional film academies and were less influenced by the Cultural Revolution. Their films focused on the demolition of old buildings and community in the city, and the nostalgia relates to the feeling of a loss of communal lifestyle. The third, focusing on university and school days in the late 1990s and early 2000s, has been drawn upon by new generational

[2] The Cultural Revolution, formally the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976, launched by Mao Zedong. Its stated goal was to preserve 'true' Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Mao Zedong Thought as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Revolution marked Mao's return to a position of power after the failures of his Great Leap Forward. The movement paralyzed China politically and negatively affected both the economy and society of the country to a highly significant degree. Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 51-72.

filmmakers and directors since 2010 and this screen nostalgia remains popular on the Chinese screen. To a large extent, the third screen nostalgic culture is related to the experience of my own generation, which represents my personal motivation for investigating the nostalgias of my and other generations on the Chinese screen. Each of these screen media evokes different longings for the past: some for enthusiasm and passion, some for innocence, and some for simple everyday life. Such diverse nostalgias also carry different functions, as some tend to engage with social issues and have political motivations, while others lean more towards being seen as commodities to attract the screen market. Furthermore, from a linguistic perspective, the connotation of nostalgia has changed from emotional homesickness (乡愁, *xiangchou*), yearning for home, to aesthetic reminiscence (怀旧, *huaijiu*), keeping a forward-looking aspiration. In this process, regardless of how the three forms of nostalgia are presented, the past appears to have been portrayed as a warm and safe place, with the present often depicted as depressing and anxiety-inducing. Therefore, the question this thesis seeks to explore is how the different forms of nostalgia have been constructed by generational filmmakers and directors within Chinese screen media since the 1990s.

Two sub-questions will underpin this core research question: 1) what institutional and cultural factors have given rise to the production of screen nostalgia; and 2) How do specific nostalgic constructions negotiate identity at the levels of gender, region and nation? In this regard, different cultural memories revitalised by screen producers are shown to make and perform social meanings in the context of post-Mao market reforms. This research highlights, on one hand, that nostalgic screen media document social transformations; and, on the other, they constitute a cultural sphere where different discourses confront and contest each other. In these nostalgic cultures, different screen producers present articulated screen nostalgias, which have been influenced by, and engaged with, the transformation of Chinese cultural and economic life since the 1990s.

This thesis seeks to examine nostalgic cultures in Chinese screen media, such as film, Internet drama and TV documentary, to discuss the complex relationships between cultural memories and social contexts. Based on the core research question, this thesis will approach the topic from three angles. First, it will categorise screen producers, by generation and the diverse range of screen formats—film, television, and the Internet. Second, it will address different articulations of nostalgia, such as traumatic memories and repressed memories.[3] Finally, it will engage with multiple expressions and formations of political and cultural discourse in the context of China's market economic reform. Therefore, some films, eulogising the Cultural Revolution in the 1980s and showing youth nostalgia produced by the Fifth Generational filmmakers, have not been chosen by this research. Shortly, based on the selection criteria for the choice of screen media texts, the following screen media texts which include various generational producers, screen media formats, and forms of nostalgic contexts in China since the 1990s will been chosen: five feature films, *A Mongolian Tale* (Xie Fei, 1995), *Nuan* (Huo Jianqi, 2003), *Shower* (Zhang Yang, 1999), *24 City* (Jia Zhangke, 2008), and *So Young* (Zhao Wei, 2013); one Internet drama, *With You* (Liu Chang, 2016); and two television documentaries, *A Bite of China* (Chen Xiaoqing, 2012) and *Maritime Silk Road* (Zhang Wei, 2016). What emerges from this study is an opportunity to re-examine and re-evaluate the boundaries between the individual and collective, politics and commercialisation, as well as Chinese

[3] Stuart Hall's term "articulation", means a connection or link which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not "eternal" but has to be constantly renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections – rearticulations – being forged. An articulation between different practices does not mean that they become identical or that one is dissolved into the other. Each retains its distinct determinations and conditions of existence. However, once an articulation is made, the two practices can function together, not as an "immediate identity" but as distinctions within a "unity". Rather their internal organisation (involving potential disjunctures, contradictions, antagonisms and tensions) and their external conditions of existence created the possibility of "disarticulation and rearticulating". Stuart Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-structuralist Debate", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1985: 2(2), 91-114.

postsocialism and modernity. This thesis identifies that a culture of nostalgia has emerged in China over the past three decades in different media forms and genres and across different generations. The nostalgic culture speaks to, or engages with, China's postsocialist condition and social changes, including the urban-rural divide, urbanisation, commercialisation, and youth experience, as well as China's domestic and international policies. Overall, this thesis argues that nostalgia culture has not only manifested in filmmakers' intellectual and critical engagements with China's postsocialist condition, but has been increasingly co-opted by the Chinese government and screen media industries for the purpose of political and commercial gains in the past few decades.

1. Postsocialist China in the Context of Neoliberal Reform

In order to fully explore these multifaceted relationships between various nostalgias and their social context, it is important to first understand the Chinese context by looking at postsocialism and the neoliberal market economy reforms. Since the 1980s, market economy reform has increasingly influenced the hegemony of the CCP. In this sense, the Chinese government has "selectively adopted democratic elements and neoliberal logic as a strategic calculation to strengthen its dominance without changing the character of the state apparatus."[4] This negotiated relationship between a democratically appealing and market-orientated economy are the main characteristics of the post-Mao period.

Postsocialist China

It has been 40 years (1978-2018) since China transformed from 'Maoist socialism' to a capitalist market economy. The whole of the 1980s is generally seen, therefore, as a period of implementing the policy of "reform and opening up" and

[4] Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From Propaganda to Hegemony* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2011), 23.

creating order out of chaos after the Cultural Revolution. Then, the student movement in 1989 can be seen as marking the end of the debate about how China chose its political-economic system.[5] Since the 1990s, the discourse on economic reform has regularly referred to Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Talk" (1992), which officially showed the Chinese government's determination to propel the development of the market economy.[6] In this context, China's economic system has shifted to a capitalist mode of production. However, its political-legal system remains largely dominated by the CCP. Wang Hui argues that this "free" and "unregulated" market expansion is a highly manipulative and coercive intervention by the state.[7] Under the influence of a series of economic policies, the planned economy in China was gradually replaced by a market economy. Moreover, after 2001, China joined the WTO, when large amounts of international capital were invested in the Chinese market, significantly accelerating China's integration with global capitalism through its bureaucratically-controlled and market-driven industries. As a consequence of such economic stimulation, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached the second highest in the world in 2010.[8] To some extent, the past three decades (1990-2018) have been a period during which China has developed its market economy through capitalism.

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[5] The Tiananmen Square protest or the June Four Movement was student-led popular demonstrations in Beijing, which took place in the spring of 1989 and received broad support from city residents. University students marched and gathered in Tiananmen Square to demand that democracy, freedom, and liberal justice replace authoritarian rule in the reform process while other citizens sought an end to official corruption, inflation, and limited career prospects. The protesters called for Government reform, freedom of the press and speech. The Government initially took a conciliatory stance toward the protesters. Ultimately, the Chinese Supreme leader Deng Xiaoping and other party elders resolved to use force to solve this event.

[6] Robert Weatherley, *Politics in China since 1949: Legitimising Authoritarian Rule* (London: Routledge, 2012), 137.

[7] Hui Wang, *China's New Order: Society, Politics and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 116.

[8] David Barboza, "China Overtakes Japan to Become No. 2 Global Economic Power," New York Times, August 16, 2010, B1.

Furthermore, its economic-political system has transformed from a totalitarian-planned economy to state-controlled capitalism.

This specific economic-political transformation is referred to by Arif Dirlik as a period of postsocialism, which depicts new economic and political conditions after the Cultural Revolution. Dirlik suggests:

> Postsocialism is of necessity also postcapitalist［…］but in the sense of socialism that represents a response to the experience of capitalism and an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development. ［…］ For this reason, and also to legitimise the structure of "actually existing socialism," it strives to keep alive a vague vision of future socialism as the common goal of humankind while denying to it any immanent role in the determination of present social policy.[9]

In Dirlik's opinion, postsocialism seeks to improve existing socialism by drawing on capitalist ideas. Thus, postsocialism refers to the point at which the Chinese government reconceptualised meanings of Chinese socialism in the context of global capitalist modernity. Lisa Rofel also argues that postsocialism is a period when socialism integrates with capitalism.[10] Simply put, postsocialism is a fusion of socialism and capitalism, which has some common characteristics of both systems. Zhang Xudong further claims that postsocialism is a historical and contemporary condition, in which the socialist state form and the economic system of capitalism overlaps.[11] Therefore, postsocialism not only means an articulated period of post-Mao, but, more importantly, indicates the start of implementation of a policy of "reform and opening up", when the Chinese government decided to carry out market economic reforms and integrate the

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[9] Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1989), 364.

[10] Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 7-8.

[11] Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 16.

country into the global capitalist economy after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Postsocialism shows how the world understands contemporary China, and how China situates itself in the context of the new order of global capitalism. Based on its specific economic-political system, China has begun to reshape its modernity by communicating with the West. As Ralph Litzinger suggests, postsocialism shows an endeavour from the Chinese government to "seek to construct new notions of Chinese cultural identity and national subjectivity in ways that move beyond the teleology of modernisation that has dominated Chinese thinking for much of the twentieth century."[12] Indeed, the Chinese government is defining a new understanding of modernity that is different from the Western teleology of modernisation. Jason McGrath points out that China's modernity since the early 1990s has integrated with marketisation, differentiation, individualisation, and pluralisation.[13] This modernity contains elements of socialism, capitalism, and even postmodernity. Moreover, with increasing economic development, the Chinese government has been trying to exert its influence on international affairs and to project a positive image of itself to the world.

Since the new millennium, the Chinese government has actively communicated its soft power to the world. Hundreds of Confucius Institutes have been established globally; many films and documentaries about China's history and contemporary achievements have been produced. President Xi Jinping (current President since 2012) has coined the slogan 'Chinese dream' to present a positive future for China. Moreover, on 28th March 2015, the Chinese government officially published the strategy of "The Vision and Actions on Jointly

[12] Ralph Litzinger, "Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2002:101(1), 39.

[13] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 9.

Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road" (often known as "the Belt and Road Initiative").[14] Through this initiative, the Chinese government attempts to link China's seaports with those in the South China Sea, the South Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean and Europe, and build the longest economic corridor to expand its economic and political influence. Sheldon Lu suggests that postsocialism is not only "a cultural logic" with which "the residual socialist past and the emergent capitalist present" are negotiated, but also "a place for the emergence of a new life-world" and the creation of "new socioeconomic practices."[15] Indeed, the Chinese government has exerted its economic influence and state-controlled media to construct its own national image and its own version of modernity. From this perspective, China's postsocialist modernity is close to and stimulated by global capitalism. While, at the same time, it may become a new impetus to redefine the meaning of modernity around the world. Therefore, as China reforms itself and emerges as a new superpower, it is defining a new approach to domestic politics and international relations.

Compared to its rapid economic development, China's democratisation and political reform, as components of postsocialism, has faced some challenges. It has not been easy for Chinese society to integrate with global capitalism after Mao's thirty years of autocracy. As Dirlik argues, the Chinese government needs to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development and the intrinsic drawbacks of the socialist structure.[16] In this sense, postsocialism is seen as a controversial ideology positioned between developing capitalism and the maintenance of Mao's socialist regime. At the same time, nominal socialism is

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[14] Issued by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, with State Council authorization, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," 28 March 2015, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html.

[15] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "What Is Chinese Postsocialism?" in *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 204–210.

[16] Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1989), 364.

crucial for the CCP's legitimacy. For this reason, the CCP chooses to maintain the facade of a socialist political state while concurrently implementing capitalist economic policies. Both strategies are aimed at maintaining the CCP's legitimacy, though their 'coexistence' may prove irreconcilable. As Wang Hui argues, one of the crucial reasons for political and social movements, such as the 'June Fourth Movement', is the discord between the promotion of market reform and old political ideologies, which has created a crisis of status legitimacy for the CCP. Furthermore, Wendy Su suggests that this crisis is linked to the tangible-material dimension (economic, institutional, and industrial structure and facilities) and intangible-nonmaterial dimension (ideas, principles, and ideals of humanity).[17] Su's description indicates that the current state of postsocialism is a form of unbalanced modernity. In this sense, the state struggles to navigate through capitalist surroundings by absorbing capitalist economic elements and integrating these with the global economic system. Meanwhile, it tries to uphold national interests, and reassert its national identity, during which the CCP reinforces its suppressive nature. Wang suggests that this structural inequality has quickly resulted in income disparities among different social strata and regions, rapidly leading to social polarisation.[18] This unbalanced system has caused social problems, such as increased inequality and official corruption. Thus, the mechanism of China's one-party system, with the CCP as the only ruling party, is not matched with that of democratic and legal supervision in the context of rapid market economic growth.

The Chinese government is using its increasing economic development to conceal the contradiction between a market economy and a one-party political regime. However, the public is increasingly prompted to question this economic

[17] Wendy Su, *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 9.

[18] Hui Wang, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57-8.

performance-based legitimacy.[19] Thus, the CCP's authoritarian regime may be undermined by China's economic achievements. From this perspective, the tension between economic growth and political oppression is dynamic. Furthermore, Chinese society is moving beyond totalitarianism towards a market-orientated economy, which drives China's economic development at high speed; in turn, this market economy system controlled by the Party-State may be challenged as it has become an obstacle for the development of China's political reform and further economic development.

"Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" and Neoliberalism

China's specific postsocialist system is often described as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" by the Chinese government.[20] Rofel suggests this description is actually how the Chinese government deal with tethering economic reform to neoliberal capitalism, which normalises new forms of inequality, new ways to value human activity, and new ways of 'worlding' China, of placing China in a reimagined world of 'cosmopolitanism'.[21] Rofel's investigation shows that the discourse of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a reflection of China's heterogeneous globalisation, which results in social inequalities and shows a cosmopolitan China from the perspective of capitalist development.

Lisa Rofel uses the concept of 'neoliberal capitalism' to depict 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. 'Neoliberal capitalism' or 'neoliberalism' is another specific term to depict China's economic-political structure. Defined by David Harvey, neoliberalism "proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and

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[19] Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From Propaganda to Hegemony* (Hackensack, N.J., 2011), 11.

[20] Gang Qian, "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," New York Times, 28 September 2012, https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20120928/cc28qiangang10/.

[21] Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 112-3.

free trade in political, economic practices. Meanwhile, the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices".[22] Indeed, China's market economic reform has been significantly influenced by Western economic theories since the implementation of 'reform and opening up', especially after joining the WTO in 2001. Moreover, Harvey pinpoints that China's neoliberalism has its own characteristics. For example, the common principle that the state ventures into markets should be avoided or kept to a bare minimum is not applicable to China's economic-political system. China's reform has its cultural-political specificity, that is, "the party has also acceded to the massive proletarianisation of China's workforce, the breaking of the 'iron rice bowl', the evisceration of China's social protections, the imposition of user fees, the creation of a flexible labour market regime, and the privatisation of assets formerly held in common."[23] The macro-adjustment by the Chinese government has a crucial impact on the Chinese economy. In particular, China's state-owned enterprises hold a dominant position and status in the capitalist market. By taking its particular path towards neoliberalism, China has constructed a system, whereby the state-manipulated market economy promotes its own spectacular economic growth. Within this context, China's neoliberalism may be understood as a form of governmentality reliant on the postsocialist market economy and the CCP's hegemonic political agenda.

Postsocialism and neoliberalism have become specific terms to depict China's political-economic society. Both terms are also used to present a negotiated condition in which the Chinese government attempted to address the crises of state socialism and search for new ways to develop the country while ensuring the CCP's own grip on power. Chinese screen media have developed quickly in this negotiated context and have been further impacted by this mixed political-economic system.

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[22] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press 2005), 2.

[23] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 250.

2. Chinese Screen Media Since the 1990s

China's screen industries have been influenced by China's postsocialist economic-political reforms. Chinese media after the Cultural Revolution were not merely working as the 'mouthpiece of the CCP' to serve their interest or maintain its hegemonic status but have further strengthened themselves through privatisation and commercialisation. As Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and Michael Keane suggest, Chinese media has shifted into new financial and policy structures and engaged with international partners and trading alliances, while it continues to work as fundamental props for government policy and state ideology.[24] Furthermore, in the context of postsocialism and neoliberalism, broadcasting market-orientated reform to the Chinese population has also become a core political agenda for China's media and their regulator, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT).[25] Jason McGrath argues that the autonomy of culture and the arts in postsocialist China "must both respond to the dominant trend of marketisation and cope with the remnants of state heteronomy".[26] In this sense, China's screen industries are expected to continue to play their role in supporting the state's broad purposes of maintaining the CCP's political hegemony, while at the same time making a profit. The development of Chinese screen media is situated in this context. In this section, film, television and digital media since the 1990s will be introduced to present a picture of the screen media environment and the various forms of nostalgic culture.

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[24] Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and Michael Keane, "Media in China: New Convergences, New Approaches," in *Media in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis*, edited by Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Michael Keane and Yin Hong (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 3

[25] SARFT, Some Suggestions on the Reform of Film Industry, January 1993. SARFT merged with the State Administration of Press and Publication in 2013 and is now called the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT).

[26] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 12.

Film Industry

The Chinese film industry developed rapidly with the help of many film policies. For instance, the SARFT issued a directive entitled "Some Suggestions on Reform of the Film Industry" in 1993, which abolished the centralised distribution system that had existed for decades and provided film studios with the market mechanism in film production and distribution. In August 1994, the SARFT issued another decree to start importing ten films (the current quota of imported films is 34 per year since 2012), namely blockbusters (大片, *dapian*), per year, distributed by the China Film Company.[27] These policies changed the government-dominated film market. Furthermore, cooperating with foreign companies to make films and attracting investment from overseas became a common scenario for many Chinese filmmakers in the early 1990s.[28] The Chinese film market was gradually getting closer to the global film market. In particular, the event of China joining the WTO in 2001 stimulated closer global cooperation and integration between the Chinese and Hollywood film industries. Subsequently, the SARFT issued a series of updated film policies in December 2001, which reduced barriers for non-state-owned organisations and individuals to produce films. For example, private companies with a minimum of one million RMB in assets were eligible for filmmaking and distribution.[29] This round of film industry reform was aimed at attracting more investment to boost the Chinese film market. Private investment became an important impetus to promote the decentralisation, privatisation, and globalisation of the Chinese film market.

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[27] Rong Tang. "A Review of the Course of 30-Years' Chinese Film System Reform: The Industry of Chinese Film in the Period of Adjustment and Reform," *Modern Communication-Journal of Communication University of China*, 2009:02, 5-9.

[28] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 70.

[29] Film Regulation Act was issued on 25 December 2001. The Act went into force in 1 February 2002. In 2003, more regulations were issued by SARFT regarding foreign investment in Chinese industry, signifying the opening up of the Chinese film market. Foreign investment could have joint ventures with state-owned film institutions, as long as the foreign share remained under 49%.

"Document no. 21" promulgated in 2003 sought to innovate the cultural sector into a cultural institution that benefits the public and a commercialised cultural enterprise at the same time.[30] Based on the "Regulations of Film Script Approval and Film Censorship" issued in 2003,[31] licensed film enterprises were allowed to submit a 1,000-word synopsis of their proposed films (except for revolutionary and historical films) before shooting, thus reducing the chance of the final product being banned. These film policies showed that the CCP sought to control the core part of media, such as film and television, rather than the whole of the cultural sector, which illustrates the idea that the Chinese government was giving greater flexibility to the commercial sector to pursue economic interests. In this way, the Chinese film industry has gradually transformed from a state-controlled political broadcasting system to a market-orientated media industry. Although this transformation is not entirely complete, both functions can be found in China's film industry today.

Since the new millennium, the Chinese film industry has been further promoted by the policies of the Chinese government and the WTO. In particular, the media "going out" policy, issued in 2001, aims to increase and extend China's global influence beyond the economic sphere to cultural and creative industries. (The "going out" policy will be discussed in Chapter 4.) Film cooperation and competition with international film enterprises may function as a form of public diplomacy to shape and enhance China's image across the world. Chinese media now seek to cultivate relationships with international audiences as they gradually move away from distinct propaganda, while still presenting China's national image abroad. Thus, they perform under the constraints of the party-state system, in addition to following market rules.

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[30] Document No. 21, the Chinese government, 25 November 2003, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2004/content_62745.htm.

[31] This regulation was issued by the SARFT on 6 July 2004, the Chinese government, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2005/content_63251.htm.

The post-WTO film industry reform brought about market mechanisms for the development of the Chinese film industry. Private and foreign investment has become the most important factor in boosting such development. Increasing Hollywood imports not only offers a model from which Chinese films can learn; they have also become an external impetus to promote the decentralisation and privatisation of the Chinese film industry. The film market has become a lucrative vehicle for public and private firms to turn quick profits. As Suzanne Xiao Yang suggests, China's media globalisation does not only strive for competitiveness for ideas in the global marketplace, but also for revenues.[32] Therefore, the Chinese film industry is "closer to a Western-style industrial structure, management model, and market mechanism";[33] while also strongly protecting its interests through continuous media reforms. For the CCP, the slogan "arts are serving for the people",[34] established in the 1940s, was gradually adjusted in the context of film marketisation to strengthen the Chinese film industry.

Television Industry

The television industry, as one component of the screen industry, has also transformed its function from a political broadcasting machine to multifunctional mass media in the context of Chinese screen media reform. Taking television drama as an example, China's television industry has experienced dramatic growth since the early 1990s. Annual drama production has grown significantly both in terms of output and proliferation. China Central Television (CCTV) launched its first drama serial, the nine-episode *Eighteen Years in the Enemy Camp* (*diying shibanian*) in 1980. At the same time, it also imported many serial

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[32] Suzanne Xiao Yang, "Soft Power and the Strategic Context for China's 'Media Going Global' Policy," in *China's Media Go Global*, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi (London: Routledge, 2018), 89.

[33] Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen, "Introduction," in *Art, Politics and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, edited by Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (HongKong: HongKong University Press, 2010), 8.

[34] Zedong Mao, Speech at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, 2 May 1942, https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-194205.htm.

dramas from the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, and South America, such as the Japanese TV drama *Doubtful Blood Type*, American TV series *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, and *Huo Yuanjia* from Hong Kong.[35] From the 1980s, many literary classics were adapted and released through CCTV, including *The Dream of Red Chamber* (红楼梦, *honglou meng*, 1986) and *Journey to the West* (西游记, *xiyouji*, 1987), *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义, *sanguo yanyi*, 1994), and *The Water Margin* (水浒传, *shuihu*, 1998). These dramas also exported well, becoming enormously popular throughout East and Southeast Asia. For example, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was widely screened in Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the mid-1990s.[36] CCTV and some provincial-level stations began to produce their own television dramas at the beginning of the 1990s. China's first long serial drama—*Yearnings* (渴望, *kewang*) produced by the Beijing Television Art Centre was released in 1990. It became the first Chinese TV drama to highlight the domestic lives of ordinary Chinese people. Zhu Ying points out that *Yearnings*' success firmly established the multi-episode serial as a commercially viable format on Chinese primetime television.[37] The 1990s, as a whole, became the pivotal era for the development of the Chinese television drama.

Since the mid-1990s, costume dramas, in particular, those about the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), became popular. The first Qing drama was the Hong Kong comedy *Tales about Qianlong* (戏说乾隆, *xishuo Qianlong*, 1993), largely based on the Qianlong Emperor's flirtations with women. This television drama started a mass fervour for costume drama. From the late 1990s, CCTV and some provincial stations produced many historical dramas, including, *Yongzheng Dynasty* (雍正

[35] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 8.

[36] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 8.

[37] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 8.

王朝, *Yongzheng wangchao*, 1999), *Kangxi Dynasty* (康熙王朝, *Kangxi wangchao* , 2001), *Qianlong Dynasty* (乾隆王朝, *Qianlong wangchao*, 2003), and *The Great Emperor Hanwu* (汉武大帝, *Hanwu dadi*, 2004). They usually feature the lives of emperors, patrons and courtiers in imperial China, in a historical context of government's corruption and people's social sufferings as well as external threats from foreign powers. For example, *Yongzheng Dynasty* portrays an upright emperor, Yongzheng, in the Qing dynasty, who fights against corruption and political nepotism. Zhu suggests that "nostalgic for this mythic era of upright rule, the Chinese viewing public delighted in the contemporary relevance and palace politics of the new dramas. Subjects and themes that would invite censorship if depicted in contemporary settings—government's corruption, political infighting and power struggles, moral cynicism, public unrest, etc.—had a primetime airing in revisionist Qing dramas."[38] Indeed, the historical period of Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors in the Qing dynasty is depicted in television dramas as an egalitarian economic society with exceptional prosperity and national unity. This depiction, to some extent, reflected the Chinese government's anti-corruption during the period of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In this way, Qing dramas become a metaphor for the political situation at the turn of the century and leading up to today.

In the context of media convergence and the "going out" strategy, the development of Chinese television has been transcultural and global. Many television dramas were made by producers originating from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea. Michael Keane points out that there are "many international businesses that are beating a trail to the Mainland with co-productions and formats."[39] The 2000s saw a much greater integration of pan-Asian markets. Chris Berry notes that media products can no longer be counted as the output of

[38] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 8.

[39] Michael Keane, *The Chinese Television Industry* (London: BFI, 2015), 166.

one nation: they may be conceived in Taiwan or Hong Kong but made in Mainland China.[40] In this sense, co-produced TV dramas between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and Taiwan and the Mainland became eligible to be counted as Chinese domestic productions. Seeing the potential of the Mainland, many companies from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea set up their branches in Beijing, Shanghai, Hengdian and Guangzhou, or entered into various models of collaborative agreement with Mainland companies.[41] In the context of integrated pan-Asian TV drama markets, the Chinese television drama (including TV documentary) has entered the global media market and competed with others.

An example of this is when, in 2004, the SARFT stopped authorising the founding of new media groups and instead asked existing media collectives to separate their business assets from television and radio stations in order to maintain television and radio's role as public services.[42] Furthermore, in 2009, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), restructured based on the SARFT, issued "Suggestions on Separation of Production and Broadcasting", which ushered a new round of structural reform within television and radio broadcasting.[43] Based on this document, many Chinese provincial television stations were split into two sectors: radio and television for public service (and propaganda), and business. For instance, in 2010, Hunan television station, founded in 1997 and seen as one of the most successful provincial satellite stations, became China's first provincial-level consolidated media group in 2000.[44] This was divided into two sectors: Hunan

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[40] Chris Berry, "Transnational Culture in East Asia and the Logic of Assemblage," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 2014: 41(5), 453–70.

[41] Michael Keane, *The Chinese Television Industry* (London: BFI, 2015), 72.

[42] National Conference on Radio, Film and Television, the Chinese government, 22 December 2004, http://info.broadcast.hc360.com/list/zxzt-041223.shtml.

[43] "Notice about Some Suggestions on Separation of Production and Broadcasting in the Radio and Television Industries," the Chinese Government, 7 April 2009, http://www.gapp.gov.cn/govpublic/86/566.shtml.

[44] Jianmin Zhang & Dingbin Zhou, "Current Situation, Problems and Future Trend of Local Satellite TV Development," *China Television*, 2011:07, 54-7.

Broadcasting System (radio and television stations) and Hunan Mango International Media Group (the business sector). Through this reform, the SARFT marketised the television industry by expanding market access, with private and foreign investment entering the Chinese television industry (the business sector). In the context of decentralisation, marketisation, and the consequent expansion of China's TV industry, the CCP offered more freedom for the TV industry to develop itself.

Digital and Internet Industry

The Internet, as a new component of the screen industry in China, has achieved exponential growth and gradually became a pillar industry since the new millennium. The development of China's Internet began in the mid-1990s. China first became connected to the Internet in April 1994.[45] Sina (新浪, *xinlang*), Sohu (搜狐, *souhu*) and Netease (网易, *wangyi*) were the first of several Internet enterprises. On 10 March 1999, Alibaba.com, the first Business to Business (B2B) website in China, went online amid much media attention. In less than a year, it made a significant impact on China's emerging ecommerce market. At the same time, the Chinese government carried out a series of important initiatives to embrace the Internet revolution, which stimulated the online industry to grow quickly in the past few years.

Since the new millennium, China has witnessed the rise of Weibo, Wechat, and other new media platforms. The public space created by these social media champions a burgeoning field for discussion and sharing of information, with the solid support of a mobile network infrastructure. This wealth of new media facilitated by Internet technologies has rapidly entered people's daily lives, changed and entirely remoulded social relations. According to statistics from Zhang Xiaoming, from 2004 to 2010, the value of China's internet-related cultural industries grew from US$ 55 billion to US$ 173 billion, representing an increase

[45] Fengshu Liu, *Urban Youth in China: Modernity, the Internet and the Self* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 35.

of US$ 118 billion, an average annual increase rate of 23.6%.[46] In particular, Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and other Internet giants have entered the core fields of the cultural industries: many new Internet 'innovations', such as Internet novels, Internet music, "Internet big film" (网络大电影, *wangluo dadianying*)[47], and other 'we media' (自媒体, *zi meiti*), have been generated by these Internet enterprises. By the end of December 2018, the number of online video users in China was 612 million.[48] Online videos, including Internet big film, Internet drama, and microfilm, show a booming development trend and have become a core pillar of the entertainment industry network.[49]

When the Chinese economic development faced this "new normal" after the financial crisis of 2008,[50] many policies for promoting the development of the cultural industry and Internet enterprises were issued, and these, in turn, facilitated the rise of China's cultural industries as a new economic pillar and support for economic transformation and restructuring. In March 2015, the Chinese government issued a policy of "Internet Plus" which integrated the Internet technology with traditional industries, as part of the national strategic plan to transform China's industrial and economic structure from a labour-intensive to a service economy.[51] The Internet in China has become a more

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[46] Xiaoming Zhang, "The Cultural Industries in China: A Historical Overview," in *Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in China*, edited by Michael Keane (Cheltenham, 2016), 108-9.

[47] The time of the internet big film is more than 60 minutes but is shorter than normal films. It is produced by a professional crew and has an integrated narrative. It is broadcasted through the Internet and the content should comply with relevant policies and regulations.

[48] "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet," *China Internet Network Information Centre*, December 2018, http://www.cac.gov.cn/wxb_pdf/0228043.pdf.

[49] "2018 Research Report on the Development of Audio-visual Network in China," China Netcasting Services Association, November 2018, http://www.cnsa.cn/index.php/industry/industry_week.html.

[50] New Normal is a term in business and economics that refers to financial conditions following the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the aftermath of the 2008–2012 global recession. The term has since been used in a variety of other contexts to imply that something which was previously abnormal has become commonplace. Jing Zhang and Jian Chen, "Introduction to China's New Normal Economy", *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 2017:15 (1). 1-4.

[51] "Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Promoting Internet Plus Action," the Chinese government, 1 July 2015, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-07/04/content_10002.htm.

tangible and politicised technology and platform compared to other media formats such as television and film. It can connect with film and TV industries to create a space in which multiple agents with different interests may exert their influences. As Keane suggests, "the transformation that we are now witnessing, from 'Made in China' to 'Created in China', illustrates the state's focus on 'independent innovation' diffused within regional policy, allowing and encouraging new networks and alliances between government, individuals, small and medium enterprises and international finance."[52] Indeed, the Internet plus policy has become a next-generational social infrastructure, which may change traditional industries profoundly and promote the competitiveness, productivity and creativity of traditional enterprises. The use of social media has become a daily routine for Chinese people, as it has in other parts of the world.[53] China's ongoing Internet revolution has won enthusiastic support from the government, which sees the Internet as a golden opportunity for another Chinese economic take-off.

In short, a major media policy change, at the state level in the late 1980s, allowed private and non-media entities to produce and distribute films, television dramas and other digital media. The primary functions of screen media also shifted radically, away from propaganda and mass mobilisation and toward information dissemination, cultural enrichment, and entertainment.[54] The rising screen industries reflect technological, economic, and political changes in China and have become a lucrative vehicle for public and private firms to turn quick profits in the context of China's postsocialism.

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[52] Michael Keane, *Created in China: The Great New Leap Forward* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 21.

[53] Anbin Shi, "China's Role in Remapping Global Communication," in *China's Media Go Globa*l, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi (London: Routledge, 2018), 36.

[54] Ying Zhu, *Television in post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10.

Ideological Control

The prosperity of the screen industry does not mean that the CCP's control has become weakened or withdrawn from Chinese media, but rather shows a managed process of institutional adjustment, through which the CCP not only maintains the legitimacy of the regime but further stimulates the growth of the Chinese screen industry. Zhao Yuezhi argues that "based on lessons learned from the outbreak of the pro-democracy movement in 1989 in China and the collapse of Eastern European communism and the Soviet Union, wherein the political liberalization of the media was believed to be a major contributing factor, the party set out to reassert media control and upgrade its ruling technologies in the post-1989 era."[55] Thus, the reform period has not only been characterised as an era of rapid development of the screen industry, but also identified as a time when the state's entire propaganda apparatus has been strengthened.

This tightened media control can be easily found in the works of film, TV drama and the Internet. More specifically, "main-melody film and TV drama" is a genre that performs the CCP's propaganda function, through which the party continues to convey its core values and consolidate its legitimacy.[56] Former Chinese President Jiang Zemin summarised that films should present the "spirits of the time" (Zeitgeist, 时代精神, *shidai jingshen*) of "patriotism, socialism and collectivism".[57] Between 1995 and 2000, 80-100 movies were produced each year. Approximately 80% could be categorised as "main-melody films" that

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[55] Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham, Md.; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 3.

[56] These films normally restore through a number of methods to project CCP's images through adapting Chinese revolution under the Party's leadership from 1920 to 1949, the anti-Japanese war and the anti-imperialist battles against Western invaders since the Opium War, the positive portrayal of Communist Party cadres and their dedication to serving the people after 1949, the "dedication films" (*xian li pian*) that commemorates the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party, and the constructed neo-Confucian ideas, morals, and virtues.

[57] Hua Xiao, "The Discussion of the Unification of Patriotism, Collectivism and Socialism," *Journal of Nanchang University*, 1995:26(01), 30-34.

communicate the party's ideology in postsocialist China.[58] Through these films, the CCP continued to maintain its ideological control. Mary Lynne Calkins claims that the promotional nature of the main-melody film is to "show post-liberation China in a positive light". These films are not restricted to representing "the true contradiction in life" but suggest that the contradiction should be dealt with and could be solved.[59] In other words, these films are allowed to present social darkness. However, there need to be solutions in order to display the superiority of the socialist system. Further, in the context of the media "going out" strategy, films, and TV dramas and documentaries also undertake their political function as the Chinese government's 'mouthpiece' to break the hegemony of the Western media and to project China's national image.

Like the film industry, China's Internet is not a completely free space. Based on Zhao's investigation, between May 2003 and June 2004, 17 online activists were put on trial in China and received prison sentences of up to 14 years, thereby making China the top country for imprisoning Internet activists.[60] The CCP has managed to maintain its control over the Internet by deleting politically sensitive content, blocking websites, monitoring citizens' networking activities, and tracking down and arresting offending individuals. The Chinese government sees Internet security as an important component of national security. Censorship is justified as 'harmonising', by which to present a national image of rapid and sustainable development. In this regard, any speech violating this doctrine is to be deleted by the authorities. Some popular social media sites such as Google, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter cannot be accessed in China due to the difficulty of controlling their web content. In this environment, digital

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[58] Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From Propaganda to Hegemony* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2011), 22.

[59] Mary Lynne Calkins, "Censorship in Chinese Cinema," *Hastings Communications and Entertainment Law Journal*, 1998:21(2), 307.

[60] Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham, Md.; Plymouth, 2008), 20.

technologies and media are still defined as the mouthpieces of the party and seen as agencies to manage communication in China.

By outlining the development of screen industries in postsocialist China since the 1990s, this section illustrates the evolving state-society nexus for screen media production, consumption, and distribution. Notably, it is evident that the CCP has selectively adopted democratic elements and neoliberal logic as strategic calculations to strengthen its dominance without changing the nature of the state apparatus. Furthermore, this principle is reflected in Chinese screen media. In the process of carrying out new media policies, the CCP's political discourses are mediated by media commercialism and globalisation. In short, the development of Chinese screen media presents a dual phenomenon of flourishing prospects and a state-controlled broadcasting machine in the context of accelerated market reforms and global reintegration since the 1990s. The marketised and ideologically-controlled media environment has contextualised nostalgic screen cultures since this era.

3. The Construction of Nostalgia

In this thesis, nostalgia is examined through film, television and digital media representations. It is seen as a particular type of remembering, forgetting, and cultural construction denoting an orientation towards the past based on a sense of longing.[61] When nostalgia is presented by screen media, it can be used to characterise different forms of cultural memory. Nostalgia is understood as a kind of allegorical narrative and social commentary that represents a dialogical relationship between the past and present. As sociologist Fred Davis points out, the ability to feel nostalgia for events in the past has less to do with how recent or distant these events are, than with the way they contrast or, more accurately,

[61] Michael S. Roth, "Remembering Forgetting: Maladies de la Mémoire in Nineteenth-Century France Representations", *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*, 1989:26, 49-68; Janelle Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Bucknell University Press, 2005), 25.

the way we make them contrast with the events, moods, and dispositions of our present circumstances.[62] Based on Davis' theorisation, nostalgia is something one perceives when two different moments, past and present, come together. This moment signifies discontinuity between the past and present. Further, this feeling may draw on the representation of the past to engage with the situation of the present. Hence, nostalgia often carries a considerable emotional weight in order to respond to this discontinuity. Davis's argument of the relationship between past and present offers inspiration for later research and provides a theoretic framework for this research. Later, Stuart Tannock further emphasises the importance of cultural construction, suggesting that "a critical reading of the nostalgic structure of rhetoric should focus, then, on the construction of a prelapsarian world, but also on the continuity asserted, and the discontinuity posited, between a prelapsarian past and a postlapsarian present."[63] Here, Tannock drew on Raymond Williams' "structure of feeling", a cultural hypothesis deriving from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period;[64] to divide nostalgia into a hierarchy of consciousness of said nostalgia. Tannock suggests that nostalgia is also a structure of feeling that can be divided into three stages: prelapsarian past, lapse (a cut, a catastrophe, a separation or sundering, and the Fall), and a postlapsarian present.[65] Subsequently, some questions related to this nostalgic structure of feeling emerge. For example, how is the image of a prelapsarian world constructed by nostalgia? What is placed in the past and brought into the present?

Further, Philip Drake suggests, nostalgia "can be conceptualised as conveying a knowing and reflexive relationship with the past, as a yearning for a better but irretrievable past, or, in more sceptical accounts, as emblematic of an

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[62] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1979), 11-2.

[63] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies*, 1995: 9(3), 457.

[64] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-35.

[65] Stuart Tannock, "Nostalgia Critique," *Cultural Studies*, 1995: 9(3), 458.

engrossing but ultimately fabricated approximation of the past." [66] Indeed, nostalgia in screen media is a selected narrative, which may evoke, erase and create memories of the past by reconfiguring it as a sense of stability, albeit an active, intricate and ambiguous feeling. In this regard, nostalgia is perceived as a continuous process of memorial construction and reconstruction. It establishes cultural values and understands the past from a contemporary perspective. This continuous cultural construction is marked by the process of signification to produce meaning.

The concept of "construction" is identified as a critical perspective from which to investigate how cultural memories are produced within China's social contexts. If socialism and socialist lifestyles are seen as "prelapsarian", for example, then, the market economic reform may be seen as "lapse"; and postsocialism and marketised lifestyle may be understood as "postlapsarian". In other words, nostalgia is constructed by the postsocialist condition (normally seen as a sense of discontinuity) to engage with the influence of capitalism through imagining a past time or place set in the period of socialism. In postsocialist China, constructed nostalgia has become a way in which different factors, such as the CCP's hegemonic discourse, market economic reform, and media internationalisation, are assembled and forged together to present a contested image of postsocialist China. As Marita Sturken suggests, cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for places in history. [67] Nostalgia is negotiated between China's neoliberal governmentality, market-driven capitalism, and the domain of politics. In this sense, the constructed nostalgia in post-1989 China has participated in China's

[66] Philip Drake, "Mortgaged to Music': New Retro Movies in 1990s Hollywood Cinema, " in *Memory and Popular Film*, edited by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 190.

[67] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

accelerated transition from a planned economy to a market economy, from a rural society to an urban society, and from socialism to neoliberalism.

From this perspective, nostalgia is less concerned with the accuracy or authenticity of mnemonic retrieval; rather, it investigates how screen media represent the past in relation to a specific social context. Hence, this thesis focuses not on what happened in the past, but how screen media articulate a structure of feeling that speaks to the present situation. Andreas Huyssen suggests that the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become a memory.[68] This notion highlights that screen media are, in part, an artistic construction of the past. Nostalgia, herein, is less an inquiry into the 'original event'; rather, it pays more attention to how cultural memory is constructed and reconstructed by specific cultural-political discourse. Sturken also suggests that construction is an essential characteristic of cultural memory that is distinct from history.[69] This construction-based concept of nostalgic memory in screen media reads the past in terms of a dialogue with the present. In general, nostalgia is less about what happened in the history / historical events, but more about mobilising a sense of pastness to imagine a past place and time through constructed stories. Every nostalgic narrative is an interpretation of "history"; an objective, unified, and orderly fact may exist, with the memories in screen media portrayed as its shadows.

Having identified "construction" as a characteristic of screen nostalgia, one might now ask what kinds of social context, trajectory or connotation are presented through constructed nostalgia? Joanne Garde-Hansen provides one possible answer to this question. She focuses on Holocaust memories on screen and suggests that its representation of Holocaust memories does not only mean

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[68] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York; London: Routledge 1995), 2-3.

[69] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley; London, 1997), 4.

that this event is "widely thought of as a unique and uniquely terrible form of political violence"; it also offers "a metaphor or analogy for other events and histories".[70] Garde Hansen's view of memory as a metaphor or analogy for other events and histories can be seen through a Chinese film *In the Heat of the Sun* (Jiang Wen, 1995), produced after the Cultural Revolution. The 1980s and early 1990s were seen as a period of correcting mistakes, deconstructing a mythical historiography, and dismantling of the grand narrative about the Mao era, which promoted writers and filmmakers to unearth the suppressed strata of the past. Additionally, this period was also marked by economic reforms and the CCP needed a positive national image to accelerate the process. As Wang Hui points out, a different version of the Cultural Revolution is partially a tactic to legitimise the present economic reform.[71] In this cultural-political context, the film *In the Heat of the Sun* presents a bright version of the Cultural Revolution from the gloomy and suffocating period as depicted in Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993) and Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (1995). Instead, it depicts a passionate, romantic, and carefree summer with a tint of nostalgia experienced by a group of teenagers.

Here, the Cultural Revolution and China's socialist past are reconstructed around a postsocialist discourse of ideological liberation and market economic reform. This nostalgia allows audiences to interpret memories in multiple directions, while at the same time connecting them back to the Cultural Revolution. Hence, the Cultural Revolution in this film loses its quality as an index of specific historical events and traumatic memories. It is constructed as a vehicle for paving the road for economic reform and stabilising the CCP's political regime. Thus, this constructed past has a double mission: it compels people to reflect on what happened, through which nostalgia could have a positive effect of looking backwards to find solace; and it engages with political discourses to challenge

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[70] Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 57.

[71] Hui Wang, *The End of The Revolution* (London & New York: Verso, 2009), 69-105.

and resist some government policies. This structure of feeling extends our vision and enables us to balance an anxious present with a lived past. As Clay Routledge suggests, nostalgia may be a response to distress, not the cause of it.[72] In other words, nostalgia may serve as a coping mechanism or a regulatory resource that people employ to counter negative experiences in the present. The constructions of nostalgia are understood as an engagement with the relationship between the past, present, and future, in the context of postsocialist China. At times, this constructed nostalgia may mediate the contradictions between screen media marketisation and the strengthening of the government's ideological control. Alternatively, it may mobilise individual and collective identities to challenge the Chinese government's hegemonic cultural norms. Nostalgia in Chinese screen media has, therefore, become an integral tool of political control and social mobilisation.

Nostalgia not only anchors one's identity in the present but also nurtures a vision of the future. This future-oriented nostalgia may foster a sense of optimism, inspiration, and creativity. For example, after investigating the ruined cities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Berlin, and Prague and unravelling in a global nostalgia epidemic, Svetlana Boym presents two sub-categories: "reflective nostalgia" and "restorative nostalgia" in order to discuss personal and historical memories.[73] She suggests that the present may feed one's unconscious desires and guide one's conscious actions. In this process, nostalgia embodies a futuristic utopia. Boym further claims that "fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. The future of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking is at the centre of this inquiry."[74] Boym's research broadens the understanding of nostalgia, inferring that it is not always retrospective, but

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[72] Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (Routledge, 2015), 26.

[73] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-50.

[74] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-50

implies what the past could have been like, and pointing to a kind of possibility in the future. This nostalgic longing has exceeded a sense of geographical homesickness and turned into a modern temporal aesthetic concept, an existential experience of exile, and a feeling of rootlessness. To some extent, it is difficult to return to a place that has ceased to exist. Nostalgia keeps the future culturally and psychologically alive even when the past has been lost and one's feelings are tinged with painful mourning. In this sense, tomorrow has become a kind of home, and the past has never been somewhere to which one can return. Imagining an illusory past thus becomes a way to imagine the future through nostalgic longings.

Here, an imagined homeland for people may not be any place where they wish to return. People may develop a sense of diasporic intimacy, which Boym explains as an aesthetic of estrangement and longing.[75] They may cherish their diasporic condition rather than wishing to go back 'home'. Although people may remember their old homes and other outmoded objects and yearn for a community of close friends, 'life is elsewhere' may be a more suitable condition to depict this nostalgia. This mental condition allows them to dream their escape to some imagined place but to live in 'reality'. However, it is in some sense the reading of two sides of the same coin. Nostalgia may be a sentimental illusion when nostalgia is constructed as an aspiration. In other words, when nostalgia is linked to the aspiration for the future, this feeling may redirect to escapism and read as a sense of 'sentimental weakness'. In this way, the search for continuity amid threats of discontinuity may lead to a passive influence and cause people to escape from reality and hide in another 'golden' past.

This future-envisioned nostalgia may also be used in politics. For example, during his time in office, US President Ronald Reagan (1981-9) advocated a conception of his country's past, characterised by the lifestyle of a small town and

[75] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.

its composite institutions, such as family, church, and community, to promote the development of the US economy. Paul Grainge argues that "Reagan's politics of nostalgia invoked a vision of America unaffected by the social ruptures of the 1960s and the political and economic humiliations of the 1970s [...] Reagan played upon a reinvigorated sense of national mission in a climate of acute socio-political discordance."[76] Simply put, Reagan implemented a strategy of economic nationalism (prelapsarian) in an unstable social and cultural condition (postlapsarian present) to stimulate the development of the US economy. Similarly, the Chinese government also reconfigured the Confucian ideology of 'harmony' to promote a nationalist concept of a 'harmonious society' and to publicise a peace-loving image of China for the 21st century. Here, the resort to American analysis is relevant to economic stimulation in the 1980s, rather than to the complex political situations in China in which every generation has operated. In this light, nostalgia navigates the Chinese government's political, cultural and ideological agendas and even endorses the CCP's nationalism through 'traditional' Confucianism. Therefore, nostalgia may become a political rhetoric to implement a government's dominant political or economic ideology.

New nostalgic styles have emerged when contemporary technologies, commercial cultures and marketing strategies exert their influences on screen media.[77] For example, commercial factors often have an important influence on the promotion of nostalgic culture. Grainge investigates the rise of nostalgia-focused broadcasting networks and wider tendencies towards the selling of nostalgia in US media culture in the 1990s and suggests:

> The nostalgia network is not about the past, per se, but about niche marketing and the taste and value differentials of particular demographic segments. [...] In

[76] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 45.

[77] By highlighting the role of technology in representing cultural memories, I am not claiming technological determinism; rather I indicate that new technologies are an important factor in the contexts of the politics and economy.

> commercial terms, it need not depend on a specific idea of the past but can designate anything which has been culturally recycled and/or appeals to a market where pastness is a value. It is not, in other words, symptomatic of cultural or consumer longing but is an index of commodities, media products, and programming orientations, that draw upon notions of tradition, or use an idea of the past to position themselves within particular niche markets.[78]

In Grainge's opinion, this nostalgic culture, seen as a kind of mode, should be examined through different perspectives, in commercial and aesthetic terms, rather than being seen as symptomatic of a sense of longing or loss in contemporary US culture. Elizabeth Outka further argues that this specific culture can be interpreted by the term "nostalgic authenticity",[79] which aims to create a past in new and dynamic ways. Outka suggests that "at the turn of the century (2000), however, there was an explosion of efforts to mass-produce and market this nostalgic vision. Such marketing was reflected both in the rapid rise of town planning efforts such as the Garden City Movement and in new designs of individual domestic homes (in Britain)."[80] In other words, marketing and mass culture influenced British house design. It goes far beyond the simple extraction of profit from individual consumers and becomes a critical perspective to make sense of and engage with the value of the past in the present.

This commodified authenticity is also identified by Chinese scholar Dai Jinhua. After investigating "Mao Zedong fever", the popularity of the cultural and commercial products related to Mao in the 1990s, Dai suggests that nostalgia for the Mao era "signified an ideological trend toward the quotidian and consumerisation, precisely in a form that was not without irreverence and

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[78] Paul Grainge, "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes and Media Recycling," *Journal of American Culture*, 2000:23 (1). 27-34(30).

[79] Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

[80] Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

profanity, as it carried out the final dissolution of the taboo and the sacred."[81] The "Mao Zedong fever" of the 1990s marked a process of ideological production and a very typical process of production and consumption in the context of an early marketised consumer culture. This fever provided people with commercial and cultural products related to Mao, but may not necessarily be understood as anticipation to go back to that period. Therefore, nostalgia, for Outka, Grainge and Dai, functions in an aesthetic mode related to the development of technology and commercialism, and embodying different visions, values, and ideas to construct a sense of pastness. Here, nostalgia may not merely be constructed as a sense of yearning for a lost past, but also as a recycled resource and commercial strategy.

Overall, nostalgia has been analysed as a form of culturally and commercially constructed memory, to link the past, present and future. Nostalgia may construct a past as a 'golden age' to respond to, engage with and even endorse a situation in the present. However, because of its complexity as a structure of feeling, it is difficult to see nostalgia as a singular cultural orientation or experience. It might be more useful to present nostalgia in the forms of various characteristics and styles in different social contexts.

4. Methodology and Chapter Structure

Having briefly introduced the constructed nostalgic culture on the Chinese screen in the context of postsocialism, this section will introduce what methodologies are used in this research and how the five chapters will apply these theoretical perspectives and approaches to the corpus.

Methodology

This thesis uses textual analysis and discourse analysis to investigate how different forms of nostalgia have been constructed in Chinese screen media since

[81] Jinhua Dai, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso, 2002), 130.

the 1990s. Textual analysis is a research method that describes and interprets a recorded or visual message; a method for describing, analysing, interpreting, and evaluating messages embedded within texts. [82] In this thesis, the term 'text' refers not only to screen genres, contents, narratives and structures, but further includes the media languages of camera angles, mise-en-scene, sound, and light, all of which work together to construct a preferred reading of the text. Some questions related to rhetorical and textual features will be asked, for example, where is the nostalgia in the texts of screen media? How do past events shape, and how are they shaped by, screen media narratives and media languages? What is the relationship between a nostalgic text and its social context? What is the relationship between past and present? Who has created these nostalgic screen media? Who is the intended audience? To what extent are individual, collective, and generational issues addressed through the representation of nostalgia? What is the central theme or claim made in these screen media? How do nostalgic texts relate to other texts in the same genre or format? Therefore, analysing texts of media languages and structures will be a suitable method to investigate these questions related to the nostalgia in screen media. Through these questions, textual analysis may yield a deeper understanding of what nostalgia means in a variety of cultural texts, which may, in turn, provide insights into the ideological implications of those texts.

Discourse analysis aims at systematically exploring the causality between discursive practices, wider social and cultural structures, and relations and processes.[83] This method recognises a dynamic relationship between discursive events and social structures. In this thesis, 'discourse' is a specific ideological system and involves a combination of discursive formations. Discourse analysis will be used to interpret how nostalgia engages with the ideological system. For

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[82] Carl Botan & Gary L Kreps & Lawrence R. Frey, and Paul G. Friedman, *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999), 225-6.

[83] James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 94-104.

example, discourse analysis will investigate what have been mobilised in specific conjunctures ranging from the idea of "youth without regret" (Chapter 1) to the policy of "going out" (Chapter 4). Situating in discourse analysis, screen media can be examined as a site to reflect on how multiple types of nostalgia are constructed with ideological influences in their respective social contexts in China. Drawing on discourse analysis, this thesis will explore the following questions, including: how do discourses influence nostalgic screen cultures? How do different forms of nostalgia engage with, enact, confirm, legitimise, reproduce, or challenge the CCP's political and economic discourses? What is the relationship between a socio-cultural context and the representation of nostalgia in that context? How do media producers negotiate multiple discourses, such as the CCP's hegemonic influence and media consumerism? In some respects, critical discourse analysis can be realised when some chapters, such as Chapter 1, 4 and 5, examine the relationship between film language, specific social ideologies, and the representation of nostalgia. Therefore, discourse analysis is therefore useful in examining the relationship between social ideologies and the purpose of screen media making.

Textual analysis and discourse analysis are considered two suitable methods for the examination of screen media texts and their socio-cultural contexts in postsocialist China. However, it is noted that textual analysis and discourse analysis, as two critical approaches, also have their limitations when adopted to investigate the theme of nostalgia. In the process of writing this thesis, a reading of text may echo my personal perspectives and experiences. I position myself as a researcher having left China to study at a British university. I am aware of my own subjectivity (as a sentimental and nostalgic person) and politics of location (feeling disappointed with current China's political and economic situation). My subjectivity may have an impact on the interpretation of screen media texts and contexts. Further, I am using Western theories and perspectives to look at Chinese history and media. For example, I adopt the theories of neoliberalism and

nationalism to discuss China's party-controlled economic system and the CCP's broadcasting system. Lastly, this thesis awares that the relationship between PRC's policies and economic initiatives, and the creative and technical process of media production themselves is not always linear. Recognising this, I will combine different textual analysis approaches, such as semiotics and mise-en-scene analysis to examine screen texts in a multi-dimensional way. Furthermore, media industry analysis will be adopted to enhance the understanding of the dynamic relationship between screen texts and screen industry. Media industry analysis will provide a basic understanding of Chinese and international media industries to anchor down nostalgic culture into specific media environments, which will be beneficial to the recognition of the changing tendency of nostalgic culture in last three decades in China. Concurrently, textual analysis, discourse analysis and media industry analysis, as three intersecting methods, will be drawn upon to interpret media texts, social contexts, and economic-political discourses in order to investigate the rhetoric of nostalgia in postsocialist China.

Chapter Structure

This thesis comprises two parts, which are divided into five chapters. Part I, encompassing Chapters 1, 2, and 3, examines different generational and geographical nostalgias in the context of broad and ongoing Chinese social struggles. This part investigates how the filmmakers of "educated youth", "urban generation", and "new power" engage with social transformations and potentially challenge the CCP's political discourses. Part II, encompassing Chapters 4 and 5, focuses on two TV documentaries produced by China's central and provincial television stations respectively. The CCP's broadcasting apparatus project the Chinese government's "going out" (2000) and "the Belt and Road Initiative" (2015) policies for domestic and international audiences. In this second part, I mobilise culinary and historical nostalgias to articulate the Chinese government's nationalism and to convey its soft power.

Chapter 1 analyses the films *A Mongolian Tale* (1993) and *Nuan* (2001) produced by the generation of "educated youth" filmmakers. In this chapter, nostalgic culture is shown through a guilty structure of feeling. Firstly, film languages of light, sound, mise-en-scène, and camera angle are used to analyse how the two films present a sense of guilt as the male protagonists discard their girlfriends. Further, the status of the female in postsocialist China is analysed to emphasise the image of the sacrificing female in the films to present another guilty feeling. Lastly, the desertion of the idyllic countryside and 'traditional lifestyle', in the context of increasing economic influences, is seen as the third type of guilt. By presenting the guilty structure of feeling, this chapter will argue that nostalgia is constructed by "educated youth" filmmakers to decentre the CCP's doctrine "youth without regret" and to criticise the Cultural Revolution itself. Chapter 2 focuses on the "urban films", *Shower* (1999) and *24 City* (2008), shot by Sixth-Generation filmmakers. The two films present the city as a battleground to give a voice to the people, such as small business owners and local residents, who grew up in the cities and are rooted in the margins of society. This chapter asks specific questions: how do Sixth-Generation filmmakers draw on the issue of demolition of the old buildings to present nostalgia? How do these filmmakers, identified as the "forsaken generation", engage with postsocialist issues, for the working class from socialist factories? The third chapter examines the commercial film *So Young* (2013) and the Internet drama *With You* (2016) in the context of the "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" which aims at producing rational, industrial, commercial, and artistic screen media products. Both screen media were produced by younger screen producers titled as "new power". This chapter asks questions such as: how is nostalgia constructed through the scenes of the university and senior high school life? Who is the intended audience? How do commercial factors influence the presentation of nostalgia? Why do screen media after 2010 show a critical historical consciousness with a moderate stance?

In Part II, the fourth chapter analyses CCTV's documentary, *A Bite of China* (2012), by presenting the procedures of making 'traditional homemade food' in the context of the Chinese government's "going out" strategy. This chapter explores the presentation of China's national image through a nostalgic food culture and asks why this image is constructed and what is the relationship between the national image and China's domestic and international environments. The fifth chapter investigates the documentary *Maritime Silk Road* (2016) produced by three Chinese provincial television stations to examine how the ancient Maritime Silk Road is constructed through historical and diasporic nostalgias to engage with the CCP's "Belt and Road Initiative". The "Belt and Road Initiative" is a part of the Chinese government's strategy of "going out". The historical and diasporic nostalgias are further linked to Chinese President Xi's nationalist slogan "Chinese dream". Furthermore, this chapter will unpack how a political rhetoric utilises constructed nostalgia to service the interests and ambition of the Chinese government. Chapters 4 and 5 will show that nostalgia is constructed by the Chinese government to cultivate a benevolent national image via documentaries that are aimed at both domestic and international viewers. This soft-power strategy directs the development of CCTV and provincial TV stations when they actively expand their media products through the marketisation and globalisation of China's screen industries.

This thesis posits and evidences the construction of nostalgia in various forms of Chinese screen media to explore the expressions of on-screen nostalgia in specific social contexts. It thereby provides a detailed exploration of the way in which the Chinese screen industry has deployed specific cultural strategies to respond to and engage with social transformations in postsocialist China. The next chapter will therefore be a starting point to investigate how nostalgia is constructed by screen media, by presenting the process of "educated youth" films challenging the CCP's discourse, "youth without regret".

Chapter 1：Nostalgia and Guilt in "Educated Youth" Films: *A Mongolian Tale* (1995) and *Nuan* (2003)

Around the 1990s and early 2000s, the theme of "educated youth" (知青, *zhiqing*)—Where youths were forced to the countryside to receive education from farmers during the Cultural Revolution—emerged in films. This chapter identifies three kinds of guilty feelings, expressed in Xie Fei's *A Mongolian Tale* (1995) and Huo Jianqi's *Nuan* (2003), to challenge the discourse "youth without regret", constructed by the Chinese mainstream media since the 1980s in order to whitewash the influence of the Cultural Revolution. The first guilty feeling presented through the narrative is that of the male protagonist, who returns to his countryside childhood home to address the guilt resulting from his abandonment of a former girlfriend. In contrast to this guilty male image, the second form of guilt is portrayed from the perspective of a tolerant and self-sacrificing female image. This image is articulated with the socialist female image shaped by the CCP, to deepen the understanding of the guilty feeling of the "educated youth". The third instance of guilt relates to a sense of confusion about cultural identity in China's urban environment in the context of the spiritual crisis of the post-1990s. In this social context, urban residents feel guilty, having renounced their own cultural identity to live in a struggling city in the context of postsocialist modernisation. In this chapter, an idyllic lifestyle in the countryside is seen as cultural roots to which the "educated youth" filmmakers urge the public to return. This chapter argues that the "educated youth" filmmakers use nostalgia for the pastoral countryside to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret" projected by the Chinese mainstream media and, further, to criticise the Cultural Revolution itself in the context of early market economic reform.

1. Social Transformation and the Film Industry in the 1990s and Early 2000s

The intensity of Chinese economic reform began in the countryside in the early 1980s. Rural reform was mainly carried out in two ways. The first was the

dismantling of collectivised agricultural ownership and its replacement with a household responsibility system, which attempted to increase the Chinese farmers' enthusiasm for agricultural production. Second, Chinese farmers were given the freedom to choose how to use their land, such as for raising cash crops, developing workshops, or leaving it behind to go to the city.[1] The rural reform mobilised many villagers to work in the city, thus providing necessary labour forces for the development of rural small business and urbanisation. China's urban reform was implemented from 1985 and ushered in a wave of change, as millions of migrant workers began to move into cities for employment. At the same time, the Chinese household registration (户口, *hukou*) reform, as one component of urban reform, further stimulated social transformation. In 1955, the Chinese government initiated a household registration system, which classified the population into 'rural' and 'urban' residents. Yu Xie and two other scholars point out that the normal methods of obtaining the status of an urban resident are pursuing higher education in cities, joining the military, finding jobs in urban areas, or marrying a person with urban residency.[2] This household registration system widened urban-rural income gaps as it restricted the ability of workers to move from poor rural areas to more progressive urban regions. From the 1990s to early 2000s, corresponding with the rural and urban reforms, rural people's yearning for city life further stimulated active transitions from the countryside to the city. Gradually, the household registration system lost its function and was replaced by a united resident registration system.[3] In short, a combination of China's urbanisation and the Chinese rural people's striving for the urban lifestyle accelerated social transformation in the 1990s.

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[1] David S. G Goodman, *Class in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 41-42.

[2] Xie Yu & Jiang Yang & Emily Greenman, "Did Send-down Experience Benefit Youth: A Re-evaluation of the Social Consequences of Forced Urban–rural Migration during China's Cultural Revolution," *Social Science Research*, 2008:37, 687.

[3] "The Suggestions of Stimulating the Reform of Household Registration," the Chinese Government, 30 July 2014, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-07/30/content_8944.htm.

Alongside the movement of workers from the countryside to the city during this period, China also saw the cultural transition from the city to the countryside. More specifically, during the Cultural Revolution, more than 18 million young people, the so-called "educated youth", moved to the countryside to receive education from farmers.[4] This movement was in accordance with the Maoist imperative, "up to the mountains and down to the villages" (上山下乡, *shangshan xiaxiang*). This large-scale migration from urban to rural spaces was first practised with a limited scope in 1953 and reprised in the early 1960s. Thereafter, it was accelerated during the Cultural Revolution and ended in 1979. Some scholars argue that the movement was in response to economic and social issues, such as over-urbanisation, unemployment, and social turbulence as a result of the "red guards".[5] After the Cultural Revolution, many literatures represent the past times during the Cultural Revolution. For example, many literatures and films that criticise this political movement and express suspicion and resentment about the country turned up, such as Scar literature, Reflective literature, Root-searching literature,[6] and films *To Life* (Zhang Yimou, 1993), *Farewell to My Concubine* (Chen Kaige 1993), and *Blue Kite* (Tian Zhuangzhuang 1994). At the same time, the discourse of "youth without regret" in some literatures, the generation of "educated youth" who felt less regret towards the Cultural Revolution, also appeared. "Youth without regret" had an important influence when the generation of "educated youth" search for meaning for their lost youth during the Cultural Revolution.

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[4] Carl Riskin, "United Nations Development Programme," in *China Human Development Report 1999: Transition and the State*, edited by Carl Riskin (Oxford University Press, 2000), 37.

[5] Yihong Pan, "An Examination of the Goals of the Rustication Program in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Contemporary China,* 2002:11(31), 361-379.

[6] Literature of "educated youth" not only depicts enormous individual and collective sufferings during the Cultural Revolution, but also expresses bittersweet feelings about the countryside, the lost youth, and the Cultural Revolution. The representatives have A-Cheng's novels of *King of Chess* (1984), *King of Trees* (1985), and *King of Child* (1985), Han Shaogong's novel of *Dad Dad* (1985) and *Female Female* (1985) and Zheng Yi's novel of *Old Well* (1985).

The emergence of this discourse had its specific cultural, economic and political environment and had a tremendous influence on social judgement about the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, it may be a real consciousness and experience, as it was felt by many "educated youth" generation. Wang Hansheng and Liu Yaqiu identify three reasons why the "educated youth" may have felt less regret. First, the experience of "up to the mountain and down to the countryside" played to their kind-hearted, pragmatic, and hard-working characters. In other words, these sufferings during the Cultural Revolution brought about a strengthened power and courage for the "educated youth" to overcome difficulties in their later lives. The second reason is that sending 20 million young urban residents to the countryside helped the country to overcome a series of economic and political difficulties in China's cities during the Cultural Revolution. This interpretation integrates the destiny of "educated youth" with national destiny, through which "educated youth" may gain a national identity as a tough but glorious generation. Third, most "educated youth" were forced to go to the countryside rather than chose to go. They had no other choice and did nothing wrong when they got there and,[7] therefore, most of them did not need to feel regret. The discourse of "youth without regret" was further constructed, as Yang Jian suggests, as "glory through suffering", in the literature of "educated youth" after the mid-1990s. This kind of literature suggests that many of the "educated youth" achieved success in China and abroad.[8] Thus, regardless of ideas of "youth without regret" or "glory through suffering", it has an intention to position the discussion of the Cultural Revolution of feeling praise.

The discourse of criticising or supporting the Cultural Revolution is a complex process influenced by historical, literary, and political factors. It may not be fair to assume that the idea of "youth without regret" is constructed by politics

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[7] Hansheng Wang & Yaqiu Liu, "Social Memory and Its Construction: A Study about Collective Memory of 'Educated Youth'," *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2006, 26(3), 7-10.

[8] Jian Yang, *The Chinese History of "Educated Youth" Literature: Chinese Folk Memorandum of "Educated Youth"* (Beijing: China Worker Press, 2002), 2-5.

alone. Rather, as Wang and Liu question, we might ask why it was that only the discourse of "youth without regret" was publicised by the Chinese broadcasting system, rather than other negative viewpoints of the Cultural Revolution,[9] such as "regret about the lost youth". This thesis points out that SAPPRFT, as one of China's propaganda apparatuses, chose "educated youth" literature that expresses the theme of "youth without regret" to whitewash the image of the Chinese government. In this sense, the Chinese government may become a beneficiary of, rather than appear criticised by society. To some extent, "youth without regret" has an intention of transferring the critique about the Cultural Revolution from feeling suffering, suspicion and resentment to feeling praise. This argument does not suggest that all literature, presenting the theme of "youth without regret", attempt to whitewash the image of the Chinese government. Rather it emphasises that some mainstream media have a purpose of controlling the negative discussion about the Cultural Revolution. Zhao Yuezhi argues that "despite the reform era's shift of focus from ideological revolution to economic development, the party continues to derive at least part of its political and ideological legitimacy from the Maoist revolutionary hegemony." [10] The censorship of the party-state has not retreated from ideological control, but has become more proactive in rearticulating the terms of its ideological hegemony in the context of market economic reform. Therefore, "youth without regret" not only constructs the identity of the "educated youth" as an important group in the early period of the People's Republic of China, but further helps the Chinese government get rid of its negative reputation. The discourse "youth without regret", as a technical construction of the Chinese broadcasting system, shows that the bitterness in the Cultural Revolution promotes the "educated youth" as being stronger. This discourse attempts to transfer sufferings into a sense of

[9] Hansheng Wang & Yaqiu Liu, "Social Memory and Its Construction: A Study about Collective Memory of 'Educated Youth'," *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2006, 26(3), 17.

[10] Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham, Md.; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 37.

pride in order to downplay the negative impact of the Cultural Revolution.

Concurrently, a new cultural and commercial tendency, namely, paying a visit to the countryside where the "educated youth" worked during the Cultural Revolution, was also commonplace in the early 1990s.[11] At this time, many people with the experience of the "educated youth" returned to the countryside to recall their memories. Paralleling this tendency, many revolutionary songs and plays produced in the Mao period were commercially repackaged and became popular again. These cultural products became nostalgic artefacts related to the cult of Mao and the Cultural Revolution (a detailed discussion of recycled nostalgic culture will be given in Chapter 3, in the Chinese context of the nostalgia mode). Influenced by this recycled culture, China's revolutionary past was promoted as a commercial and cultural product. Alongside "youth without regret", and nostalgic artefacts related to socialist China, the 1990s reflected a cultural tendency of representing (worshipping) the Cultural Revolution, Mao, and socialist China. The ideology of the Cultural Revolution seems to reappear in the influence of this commercial culture. Cui Shuqin suggests that "for producers and distributors, the obvious reason for repackaging the red classics is to generate profit. However, the question of why these particular political and cultural artefacts, buried in history and neglected by memory were chosen requires explanation."[12] This rebirth culture has been investigated by Dai Jinhua, who suggests that "this［worship of Mao］was undoubtedly one of the social and cultural symptoms of both the mutual opposition between, and the deconstruction of, the employment of the ideological state apparatus and the first appearance of specific public space, the reaffirmation of prohibitions and the consumption of prohibitions, the reiteration of mainstream discourse and a

[11] Shumei Lv, The Tendency of Idealization in New China's Rural Film Creation, PhD Dissertation, Fudan University, 2007, 55-56.

[12] Shuqin Cui, *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 74.

voyeuristic desire to view political secrets."[13] In other words, the representation of socialist culture is a new narrative which retells the classic discourse of Mao and socialist mythology under the influence of the social and political turbulence of the 1990s onwards. In short, China's social transformation since the 1990s, was a bidirectional process between the countryside and the city. On the one hand, it was influenced by China's urbanisation and reform of the household registration system. On the other, it was also a social and cultural movement influenced by the discourse of "youth without regret" and a recycled retro culture of socialist China.

The Chinese film industry reform was accelerated by rising economic development in the context of early postsocialist modernisation. From the 1990s, this reform aimed to open up the Chinese film market and introduce market mechanisms to boost the Chinese film industry. With continuous reforms, more capital came into this market, which stimulated the Chinese film industry to be more active compared to the time of the Cultural Revolution. More specifically, since the beginning of the People's Republic of China (1949-), most filmmakers, working at various state-owned film companies, did not need to worry about the capital and profit of any film. Producing films for them were like assigned works that helped project socialist China, the CCP and Chairman Mao. After the Cultural Revolution, however, the Chinese government gradually loosened the restriction of personal filmmaking. Since the 1990s, cooperating with foreign companies and absorbing capital from overseas became a common scenario,[14] which challenged the stabilised condition of government-dominated filmmaking. Thus, more and more films were produced by foreign organisations; more so after China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, when the Chinese film industry faced a deepening global integration, which, in turn, prompted it to move closer

[13] Jinhua Dai, "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso 2002), 127.

[14] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press 2007), 70

to the global film market and compelled the Chinese government to adjust its censorship. In this situation, 2002 witnessed the success of Zhang Yimou's spectacular film *Hero* (英雄, *Yingxiong*), signalling the rise of the Chinese blockbuster.

The Chinese film industry has developed quickly since the 1990s. Private capital investment gradually replaced state subsidies and became an important impetus for the development of the Chinese film market. Further, the decentralisation and privatisation of the Chinese film industry were partially initiated by the Chinese government to compete with increasing Hollywood blockbusters in the context of increasing globalisation. For example, China went on to import 10 Hollywood blockbusters from 1995. This number increased to 20 in 2001 and further to 34 in 2012.[15] By learning from and competing with foreign companies, in particular, Hollywood studios, the Chinese film industry was becoming "closer to a Western-style industrial structure, management model, and market mechanism."[16] Moreover, Chinese filmmakers and films were gradually entering into the international film market to compete with other nations.

Xie Fei and Huo Jianqi belong to the generation of "educated youth". Xie's *A Mongolian Tale* and Huo's *Nuan* were produced within the above contexts. Following graduation from the Beijing Film Academy in 1965, Xie lost opportunities to produce films at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and became an "educated youth", working on a farm for four years during this time. In the meantime, Huo had no opportunity to go to university and worked in the countryside for nearly two years during the Cultural Revolution. After this setback, Xie finally got the chance to produce films, and Huo got the chance to

[15] Rong Tang, "A Review of the Course of 30-Years' Chinese Film System Reform: The Industry of Chinese Film in the Period of Adjustment and Reform," *Modern Communication-Journal of Communication University of China*, 2009:02, 5-9.

[16] Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen, "Introduction," in *Art, Politics and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, edited by Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 1-13.

study painting at the Beijing Film Academy, graduating in 1982. As a representative of the Fourth-Generation filmmakers,[17] Xie's films, such as *A Girl from Hunan* (1986), *Black Snow* (1990), and *Woman Sesame Oil Maker* (1993), *A Mongolian Tale* (1995), and *Song of Tibet* (2000), are full of idealism and beautiful yearning for pure countryside. His critical stance in his later works is shown more evidently in the context of 'millennial capitalism'. For example, *A Mongolian Tale* and *Song of Tibet* reflect on the chaotic lifestyle of postsocialist modernity, through which both films engage with political trauma and a vision of modernisation in the socialist period.

At the same time, Huo Jianqi, a late-comer among the Fifth-Generation filmmakers,[18] not only inherits former filmmakers' traditions—focusing on rural places in which to explore national and cultural roots—but also, integrates his earlier personal experiences, as a painter prior to becoming a filmmaker, into his films. Huo's films are full of personal aesthetic style. The films *Postmen in the Mountains* (1999) and *Nuan* (2003), for example, are shot in Xiangxi City of Hunan province and Wuyuan City of Jiangxi province respectively. Both places are normally depicted as traditional river towns with small bridges and clear streams. Compared to his predecessors, the presentation of the Chinese rural

[17] The Fourth-Generation filmmakers mainly graduated from Beijing and Shanghai Film Academy before the Cultural Revolution. Main representatives are Wu Yigong, Wu Tianming, Zhang Nuanxin, Huang Jianzhong, Teng Wenji, Zheng Dongtian, and Xie Fei. Although they graduated in the sixties, due to various historical reasons they did not shot films until after 1977. They opened their horizons, absorbed fresh artistic experience, and explored the characteristics of art in order to use new ideas to reform and promote the development of Chinese film. They broke the dramatic structure, promoted the style of documentary, and pursued a simple, natural style and open architecture to reflect society. The aesthetic style of the Fourth-Generation found historical heritage, reality of national culture and modern consciousness. The main works are Xie Fei's *A Girl from Hunan* (1988) and *Woman Sesame Oil Maker* (1993); Wu Yigong's *My Memories of Old Beijing* (1983) and *A Confucius Family* (1993); Wu Tianming's *Old Well* (1986) and so on.

[18] The Fifth-Generation filmmakers refer to the people who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in the early part of the 1980s, their work is characterised as being subjective, symbolic, allegorical, and the representatives are Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang. They have strong desire to explore the history of national culture and national psychology through the film structure. The main works are Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (1986), Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993) and Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993).

areas in his films are depicted as uncivilised wastelands. For example, the images of the countryside in Zhang Yimou's films *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) are depicted as 'uncultured' rural places. Some scholars, such as Wang Yichuan and Stephanie Donald critique that this somewhat exotic image of China may be intended to cater to the tastes of western audiences.[19] However, the countryside in Huo's films is portrayed as an idyllic place, thus, through this image of Chinese rural life, the films move closer to the desires of the international film audiences. The film *Nuan* was produced in 2003, two years after China joined the WTO, and employed more international marketing strategies; specifically, a Japanese target audience, with one of the male protagonists played by a Japanese actor, and post-production completed in Japan. This new Chinese image, and integrated approach led to the successful promotion of *Nuan* in the East Asian film market.[20]

Two reasons underpin the selection of the two films for this comparative study. Firstly, although the Fourth and Fifth Generation filmmakers have different film aesthetics, reflecting on the sacrifices of their youth and questioning socialist discourses became recurring themes in their films of "educated youth", such as *Troubled Laughter* (Yang Yanjin and Deng Yimin 1979), *Sacrificed Youth* (Zhang Nuanxin, 1986), and *Coming Home* (Zhang Yimou 2014). In particular, they denoted the rebirth of the socialist culture which subsequently dominated the discourse of "youth without regret" in the 1990s and early 2000s to further criticise the Cultural Revolution. Both filmmakers adapted two famous "educated youth" literature—Zhang Chengzhi's *Black Beauty* (1982) and Mo Yan's *White Dog and Swing Frame* (1985)—and integrated their own experiences

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[19] Yichuan Wang, *The End of Zhang Yimou's Myth* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1998), 166-67; Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3.

[20] *Nuan* not only achieved success at the box office in Japan but also gained "Best Film" and "Best Male Protagonist" in Tokyo International Film Festival in 2003.

to engage with the discourse of "youth without regret" and the worship of the Cultural Revolution in the context of an increasingly postsocialist modernisation. Second, both films present a similar guilty feeling, as male protagonists abandon their girlfriends and the idyllic countryside and relocate to the city for their future. This guilty feeling is similar to that experienced by the "educated youth" generation, as they returned to the city and considered the city to be their future after the Cultural Revolution. Guilt is an important motivation, which leads the male protagonists and "educated youth" to return to the countryside to regain their dreams, faith and memories. In this sense, analysing guilt offers a way of unpacking the nostalgia of the male protagonists and the generation of "educated youth". Therefore, the guilty images of the "educated youth" and the male protagonists are combined to construct a guilty structure of feeling to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret" in the context of the political and commercial cultures of socialism, popularised since the 1990s. Xie and Huo, as intellectuals, witnesses, and sufferers, use film languages to remind people to stay vigilant about the resurgence of the Cultural Revolution.

2. Guilty Feelings in *A Mongolian Tale* and *Nuan*

The films adapt "educated youth" literature and draw on filmmakers' personal experience of the Cultural Revolution to construct a guilty structure of feeling, through which to engage with a resurging socialist ideology and the discourse of "youth without regret". The guilty feelings, as a critical stance, are constructed from three aspects: guilty male protagonists, feeling guilt about tolerant female protagonists, and feeling guilty as a result of discarding the traditional lifestyle.

Guilty Image of Male Protagonists

The "educated youth" filmmakers Xie and Huo use a similar narrative; they present a guilty male image through the male protagonists Baolige and Jinghe, who, having abandoned their girlfriends 10 years ago, return to the countryside

again to confess their guilt. This guilty image is related to the "educated youth" filmmakers' collective memories of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the male protagonists' guilt becomes a kind of political guilt through which to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret".

More specifically, in *A Mongolian Tale*, Baolige is adopted by an old Mongolian woman on the prairie. He calls the woman grandmother and grows up with her granddaughter, Suomiya. Baolige gradually falls in love with Suomiya and plans to marry her after he graduates from university. However, on his return after university graduation three years later, he sadly discovers that Suomiya has been raped and as a result is pregnant. The grandmother believes that Suomiya's pregnancy is not a disgrace but a positive thing that proves that she has the ability to have children. She tells Baolige that he should undertake his responsibility as a man to look after Suomiya. However, after three years of study in the city, Baolige's ideology of grasslands civilisation has changed significantly. He cannot accept the grandmother's suggestion to marry Suomiya, but chooses to leave them both, and the prairie. Many years later, when Baolige has become a famous singer, he comes back to the prairie to look for the grandmother and Suomiya. When he arrives at Suomiya's home, he realises that his leaving led to the death of the grandmother and a subsequently difficult life for Suomiya, which evokes feelings of guilt in Baolige. Thus, 'guilt' for his actions 10 years ago is a direct reason that propels Baolige to return to the prairie and atone for his mistakes. Finally, he makes a commitment to support the education of Suomiya's daughter Qiqige and leaves the prairie once again.

The film *Nuan* has a similar narrative to *A Mongolian Tale*. It narrates the nostalgia (guilt) through a love story between protagonists Nuan and Jinghe who are classmates and studying at a senior high school in the countryside. At that time, a troupe comes to the countryside to perform for several months. Nuan and an actor of this troupe befriend each other, and the actor makes a promise that he will take Nuan to the city, after finishing his tour performances. However,

Nuan does not see the actor again after he leaves the countryside. Later, Jinghe expresses his love for Nuan, though she has become crippled by an accident. Jinghe tells her that he will come back to marry her after he graduates from the university in Beijing. However, Nuan does not see him either in 10 years. Ten years later, Jinghe returns to the village to help his teacher, Mr Cao, to resolve a dispute. At this time, Nuan and a farmer have been married for seven years. Jinghe confesses his mistake to Nuan and promises to support her daughter's education. Eventually, Jinghe leaves the countryside with conflicted feelings.

In both films, what leads the male protagonists to return is their guilt, resulting from their broken promises. The filmmakers use poetic film languages

Figure 1.1: Baolige's departures in *A Mongolian Tale*

to depict romantic scenes that show the consolation of the male protagonists after they return to the countryside. For instance, in the film *A Mongolian Tale*, a distinct difference may be seen in the two departures of Baolige (Figure 1.1). In the first departure 10 years ago, heavy snow and strong wind create a cold and miserable atmosphere. The film languages of long shots and deep focus are repeatedly used to give a sense of desolation of the prairie covered by heavy snow and the loneliness and hopelessness of the protagonists. Baolige says goodbye to the Mongolian prairie in despair. On the second occasion, ten years later, Xie integrates wide shots of the vast prairie in the warm flow of sunset with

Mongolian music to show Baolige's departure after he confesses his guilt to Suomiya. This presents a beautiful, peaceful and utopian prairie, through which the audience may see that Baolige has consoled his guilty feeling and obtained a kind of spiritual solace after a nostalgic homecoming. By comparing the two departures, we can see the difference between the protagonist's feelings about the prairie.

The male protagonists' 'leave-return-leave' experience is naturally connected to another similar experience that the "educated youth" suffered during the Cultural Revolution. The generation of the "educated youth" was sent to the countryside to receive an education from farmers during the Cultural Revolution and returned to the city and situated the city as their (China's) future after this political movement. In the 1990s, some of the "educated youth" returned to countryside again to recall their memories and lost 10 years in the Cultural Revolution. In both films, the protagonists' guilt is an analogy of the "educated youth". In the context of the prevalent discourse of "youth without regret", the male protagonists' guilty feelings present a distinct resistant culture, in that the generation of the "educated youth" feel guilt about their betrayal of the countryside and the 10 years lost during the Cultural Revolution. This guilty male image directly presents a critical stance against the idea of "youth without regret" and the Cultural Revolution.

Although the Cultural Revolution has been over for decades, the ghost of it still haunts some people, especially various "leftists" and vulnerable groups of the lower societal classes.[21] The document "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China",[22] issued by The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in 1981, has

[21] "Why do Some People still Miss the Cultural Revolution Today?" Boxun.com, 24 October 2013, https://www.boxun.com/news/gb/pubvp/2013/10/201310242308.shtml.

[22] David S. G. Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?" *The China Quarterly*, 1981: 87, 518.

defined the Cultural Revolution as a disaster. However, any discussion of and reflection on the Cultural Revolution is still forbidden, which causes a serious issue, in that this political mistake has never been fully recognised by the Chinese public. In this respect, the prevalence of the rhetoric of "youth without regret" and the resurgence of socialist ideologies in China may be viewed as a romanticised beautification of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, Xie and Huo, as "educated youth", construct a guilty male image to challenge Mao's movement of "up to the mountains and down to the countryside", and further, to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret", to criticise the Cultural Revolution, and to remind the public to be vigilant of any resurgence of the Cultural Revolution. In this way, some "educated youth" films function as a demand for the nation to appear guilty, and to speak of that guilt on behalf of the Chinese government.

The cultural phenomenon of beautifying the Cultural Revolution triggers the filmmakers to resist the discourse of "youth without regret" and to correct possible misconceptions of the Cultural Revolution. As Christopher Daase suggests, "if we understand collective guilt as the perceived moral co-responsibility of members of a group for the deeds—current or historical—of their fellow members and their group as such, the notion loses its enormity and apology becomes possible."[23] From this perspective, the "educated youth" filmmakers construct collective and political guilt to potentially accuse the Cultural Revolution. This collective guilt is seen as a sense of nostalgia, which prompts the Chinese government to apologise for the sufferings that people experienced during the Cultural Revolution. Jeffrey K Olick further suggests:

> The discourse of universal human rights is tied directly to a politics of regret because its advocates believe that only gestures of reparation, apology, and acknowledgement can restore the dignity of history's victims and can deter new

[23] Christopher Daase, "Addressing Painful Memories: Apologies as a New Practice in International Relations," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, edited by Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 23-4.

> outbreaks of inhumanity. The retrospective gaze of this discourse is thus part of an anticipation of the future.[24]

The purpose of "gestures of reparation, apology, and acknowledgement" becomes an impetus to create the guilty male image, through which the filmmakers Xie and Huo testify to the crimes of the Chinese government, deter "new outbreaks of inhumanity", and embrace anticipation of the future for the next generation. Therefore, at the end of both films, the filmmakers set a similar narrative that the male protagonists support the next generation's studies to console their guilt further and then leave the countryside and return to the city. Both films provide an assumption that the daughters of Suomiya and Nuan, as the next generation, are the future of China. These beliefs are undoubtedly the mental support that sustains victims through calling forth the next generation.

This section suggests that both filmmakers narrate a guilty male image to reveal the nature of the "youth without regret" rhetoric projected by the CCP's broadcasting system. The image of redemptive male protagonists in both films creates a new moral identity, through which Xie and Huo admonish the Chinese government acknowledge its moral and political responsibility and face up to the mistake it made during the Cultural Revolution.

Guilty Feeling for Tolerant Female Image

Guilty images of Baolige and Jinghe are constructed to emphasise guilty politics. Compared to this male image, the female image in both films is equally distinctive. They have the characteristics of beauty, kindness, human sympathy, and intrinsic goodness of human nature. In both films, the females are passive objects, waiting for men to return and bearing the sufferings of life in silence. This male-centric female image deepens the understandings of guilt of the male image and hegemonic politics, in order to further challenge the discourse of the "youth

[24] Jeffrey K Olick, *The Politics of Regret: on Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York; London: Routledge, 2007), 126.

without regret".

Firstly, the women in both films are constructed as an image waiting to be rescued, showing tolerance. Baolige and Jinghe want to be forgiven by their girlfriends and the countryside, but both films also present the countryside and the female as waiting to be rescued. More specifically, in the film *Nuan*, only the actor character that befriends Nuan, in the beginning, is considered to be an urbanite. In the eyes of the rural people, the handsome, educated, and courteous actor is a symbol of the city. His performance reflects a new, idiosyncratic, and superior culture coming from the city. The actor opens a window, through which Nuan and other rural people begin to imagine and discover the outside world. Nuan likes the actor and maintains an intimate relationship with him, which motivates Jinghe to study harder to escape from his peasant status. Jinghe envies the actor's urban status and wants to become an urban resident through studying at a university in the city. Therefore, aspiration for a place in the city, popularised since the 1980s, is the main goal that encourages Baolige and Jinghe to leave their countryside homes. Ten years later, Jinghe has also become an urban resident. The voiceover explains that the reason Jinghe comes back home is to help his teacher, Mr Cao, solve a problem. Further, when he meets Nuan again, he attempts to help her and her family to resolve a difficult situation. What he is doing, like the actor 10 years ago, is to present his abilities as an urban resident. Here, Jinghe is actually the person being rescued, despite being presented as an urban resident who uses his urban status to rescue the uncultured countryside and the former girlfriend he previously discarded. This structure is also found in the film *A Mongolian Tale*. In the end, Jinghe and Baolige both pledge to support the education of the next generation. Through these promises, they not only address their guilt, but also rescue their countryside and former girlfriends. Thus, the woman in both films is the image of forgiveness for male guilt, while also waiting to be rescued by a man and the city.

This two-faced image shows the unbalanced economic development and

social welfare between the city and the countryside in the early era of postsocialist reform. As Yu claims, "the main reason that many people try their best to go to cities is that city residents enjoy many more advantages compared to the residents of rural areas."[25] For example, city residents have more opportunities to receive a better education, a job, healthcare benefits, and access to state-owned housing. In 1955, the Chinese government issued the household registration system, which classified the Chinese population into 'rural' and 'urban'. In the films discussed here, Baolige and Jinghe are representatives of those who try to change their rural status through working or studying in the city.

The female characters are caught in a cycle of suffering as a result of the men leaving. At the same time, the process of consoling male guilt is also a form of rescuing the women from their sufferings. Mostly, the female image is one of tolerance in waiting to be rescued, and the male image that of guilt and as the rescuer. Thus, the women in both films become objects who are sanctified. In *A Mongolian Tale*, the grandmother is an image of philanthropy, who adopts many children, loves all beings and tolerates suffering silently. Her image is like that of the Mongolian prairie which bears all love and hate. Suomiya inherits this characteristic, and she asks Baolige to send his children back to the prairie. She wants to bring up his children as the grandmother did many years ago. In *Nuan*, Nuan is abandoned by Jinghe, but she ultimately forgives his betrayal and wishes him happiness. To some extent, the descriptions of the pure and peaceful prairie and countryside represent the image of tolerant females. It is the great tenacity of nature that supports the homecoming of Baolige and Jinghe and consoles their guilt. The presentation of the rural place is depicted as "nature" by Rey Chow. She suggests that "the filmic fascination with nature, which is a legacy of the rural imperative of the Cultural Revolution [...] is inseparable from a deep sense of

[25] Xie Yu & Jiang Yang & Greenman Emily, "Did Send-down Experience Benefit Youth: A Re-evaluation of the Social Consequences of Forced Urban–rural Migration during China's Cultural Revolution," *Social Science Research*, 2008:37, 687.

nature's energy and destructiveness, and, with it, the futility of human endeavour."[26] Here, images of the land, village, countryside, and prairie are captured in such a way as to depict the image of the women as a kind of "nature", which has the power to absorb all happiness and evil and become a spiritual 'home' for the male protagonists to console the guilt of the urban residents in the context of postsocialist modernity. Thus, the frame-by-frame shots of the Mongolian prairie and mountains and beautiful village life in south China in both films indicate the filmmakers' intentions that the woman is seen as the eternal earth and a silent being to support people's homecoming. At the same time, it is this characteristic that propels the female to be a tolerant and sacrificial image. Thus, the films construct this sacrificial image connected to the earth to present the sufferings of the woman.

It should be noted that the pure and utopian countryside and prairie and tolerant female image are portrayed through very male-centric perspectives. The woman is a symbol of the countryside and prairie, suggesting that the female image is somewhat indigenous, primitive and uncivilised. The male protagonists are able to go out in search of their dreams, however, the women must stay at home to wait for their return. Therefore, the homecoming of Baolige and Jinghe is exchanged with the sacrifices and sufferings of Suomiya and Nuan. At the same time, this tolerant image becomes a kind of source and solution for the men's guilt. As Chow suggests, "women occupy the traditional spaces of frustrated, dissatisfied, or tortured young wife, widow, mother, adulteress, and concubine, who despite their strength of character remain always trapped in a hopeless situation."[27] In this respect, Suomiya and Nuan have become symbols of the Chinese female, endowed with a tolerant 'quintessence' from the man's fantasy.

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[26] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995), 39.

[27] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995), 44.

This image, to a larger extent, has its continuity with a socialist female image which was constructed by socialist politics in the era of Mao, though Chris Berry argues that this sacrificing female image can be traced back to the Republic of China (1912-1949).[28] Cui Shuqin investigates socialist-feminist culture and suggests:

> Under the socialist system, the nation-state offered woman liberation and the possibility of participation in the social, political, and economic spheres. Her presence, however, is significant only when needed to exhibit the policy or ideology of the nation-state. After many "liberations," the question remains: Does the transition from patriarchal family to the collective nation-state (*from jia to guojia*) really bring woman emancipation? Her escape from the family and to the state freed her from the father figure of the patriarchal household only to subordinate her to the collective father of communism. From familial daughter to a socialist model, she has no name of her own, no subject position.[29]

Thus, under the socialist system, the nation-state offered women liberation and the possibility of participation in the social, political, and economic spheres. However, the notion of feminism in China was not exactly in favour of the liberation of women. Its main purpose was seen as a political discourse and practice to deal with national issues. The female, however, was significant only when needed to exhibit the policy or ideology of the nation-state.

Cui further argues that "after many 'liberations,' the question remains: does the transition from patriarchal family to the collective nation-state really bring the woman emancipation? In both films, Suomiya and Nuan are still given the collective names of a tolerant female and suffering earth. They try to change their position, but the nation-state only provides them with the function as a mother

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[28] Chris Berry, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), 108.

[29] Shuqin Cui, *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 175.

capable of becoming pregnant. Even though Baolige discards Suomiya; she still welcomes him back absolutely when he returns to the prairie after 10 years had passed. Wang Lingzhen also suggests that the socialist state demands women's self-sacrifice and identification with an implicitly masculine model through the promotion and institutionalisation of their political, social, and economic role.[30] Thus, the images of Suomiya, the grandmother or Nuan at the beginning of the films portray a tolerant, maternal and self-sacrificing female, expected to accept all the love and hate coming from the outside.

Although the status of women has been significantly promoted in the postsocialist period since the 1990s, the socialist female image as "oppressed class sister" is still found in both films. This male-centric perspective articulates an imagination of a socialist female image in the context of postsocialism, which not only creates a tolerant and sacrificial female image, but also further deepens the understanding of the image of men's guilt to challenge the discourse of the "youth without regret". Both filmmakers adopt this tolerant female image to present a sense of home for the men's return in the context of postsocialist modernity. As Fred Davis argues, home is a return to safety, comfort and the predictability of metaphoric domicile.[31] However, this social and cultural home may also become an invisible mental shackle that sees the needs and comfort of the man as a priority.

In both films, the tolerant female image is further emphasised through the representation of the classic Chinese cultural image of 'water'. It is a common cultural analogy that the female is depicted as pure and mild, like water. For example, in *A Mongolian Tale*, the grandmother tells Baolige and Suomiya that she has not been back to her hometown on the other side of *Shi Xiang* (石像)River for

[30] Lingzhen Wang, "Socialist Cinema and Female Authorship: Overdetermination and Subjective Revisions," in *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts*, edited by Lingzhen Wang (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011), 17.

[31] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1979), 1-7.

50 years. She hopes to be buried beside the *Shi Xiang* River when she dies in order to be closer to her hometown. At this moment, running water is gurgling, which seems to suggest the grandmother's nostalgic feelings and represents her

Figure 1.2: Jinghe's reunion with Nuan by the river in *Nuan*

homesickness. In *Nuan*, the image of water also appears many times (Figure 1.2), including the reunion of Nuan and Jinghe when the latter returns from the city, which happens on the bridge. The dialogue between Jinghe and Nuan is overwhelmed by the sound of the river. The clear water seems to tell the audience that Nuan has been waiting for his return. Here, the filmmaker Huo uses his experience as a painter to create a classic poetic image: a woman standing beside the river waiting for her husband's return.

Water, according to classical Chinese literature, is not only understood to be a necessary element for living but also has a function of purifying the heart. Here, the gentle image of a woman includes the characteristics of water. To some extent, the portrayal of Suomiya and Nuan as flexible, tough and tolerant, providing a tie of kinship to warm Baolige and Jinghe, may be seen as symbolic of water. The Chinese classical philosopher Laozi says, "the highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting the myriad of creatures, while not contending with them (上善若水, *shangshan ruoshui*)."[32] This wisdom has had a tremendous influence on the development of Chinese philosophy and character. In ancient Chinese poems,

[32] Tzu Lao, *Dao De Jing of Laozi*, translated and commented by Philip J. Ivanhoe (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 8.

there are many famous verses expressing nostalgia through the image of water. For example, Li Bai's "I am urgent to ask the water that is flowing to the east. Please tell me which one is longer between my nostalgic feeling and the length of this river?" [33] Thus, the women in both films are endowed with water's characteristics of tolerance and purity, which provides a sense of maternal warmth to console the loneliness of Baolige and Jinghe. This image of the tolerant female is mainly constructed from male fantasy, which is articulated with the socialist sacrificing female image.

The tolerant and sacrificial female image does not necessarily mean that the female protagonists do not want to change their status, rather that they resist their destiny as a helpless and uncultured woman. For example, although Suomiya has no opportunity to get an education, she tries to support her daughter Qiqige's study by working for the school for free. She does not want her daughter to experience the suffering she has felt. Nuan also strives to pursue her future by keeping an intimate relationship with the actor. She refuses to go to the troupe in a small city but wants the chance to go to a provincial city as she attempts to leave the countryside thoroughly. Therefore, not only the men have aspirations for an urban lifestyle; women also have the desire to change their status by moving to

Figure 1.3: Different angles of the swing scene in *Nuan*

[33] Bai Li, *Li Bai Selected Works,* selected by Xianhao Yu, (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 1990), 23.

the city. In *Nuan* in particular, the repeated image of a swing depicts this aspiration for the city and urban status. Nuan and Jinghe often talk about their dreams together when they play on it and the swing serves as a bridge that encourages them to imagine their futures. Jinghe asks Nuan what she sees from the swing, and Nuan replies that she sees Beijing and Tiananmen Square.[34] The filmmaker uses close-ups, close-shots, long-shots, and wide-angled shots to show this scene (Figure 1.3). Thus, the swing is like a telescope through which Jinghe and Nuan imagine their future that is situated in the city. Through such imagery, we understand that the female characters in both these films are fighting for their future. To some extent, what they are fighting for, therefore, is both their love, and, more importantly, a desire to change their rural status.

From this perspective, the stories of Suomiya and Nuan may be understood as that of the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, in the sense that contemporary women fail to change their destinies as tolerant and sacrificial people. There is a deepening guilt over the self-sacrificing and helpless female image. In other words, the filmmakers reaffirm the unbalanced relationship between the countryside (rural people) and the city (urban residents) through the female's image, as reflected in the fact that it is impossible for Jinghe to bring Nuan's daughter to study in the city. People like Baolige and Jinghe who step out of the miserable countryside and enter the comfortable city, are unlikely to have enough tolerance to save the countryside. The woman is therefore left struggling in a situation where she can only wait and suffer. Neither of the films is feminist films, but we can see from Xie's previous film, *A Girl from Hunan* (1986), a distinct criticism of the inequality between men and women in early postsocialist China is observed. Huo's film *Falling Flowers* (2013) also adopts an exquisite perspective to depict the legendary life of a famous female writer Xiao Hong (萧红, 1911-42) in the period of the Republic of China. Therefore, both filmmakers have at least some consciousness of the patriarchal imagination, and criticise it

[34] Beijing is the capital of China and Tiananmen Square is the centre of Beijing.

by constructing tolerant and self-sacrificing female images. In short, the man is trying to address his guilt through homecoming and the woman's warmth and tolerance. However, the woman is falling into a political and patriarchal trap, through which the guilty feeling is constructed to challenge the discourse of the "youth without regret".

The tolerant female, idyllic countryside and clear water are integrated as a whole, providing a sense of spiritual refuge for Baolige, Jinghe, urban residents and the "educated youth" generation in general. In this situation, the woman and the countryside are not only the rescued, but are also the saviours who provide hope to console urban residents' loneliness. Additionally, one may also understand the tolerant female image from Oedipal stories in which men alienate women (who usually remain at home like Penelope, while men wander the world and risk getting homesick);[35] or using Sigmund Freud's theory of the woman's womb to explain the male fantasy, in that it would be the wish to return to their eternal origin (of the mother).[36] From Oedipal stories and Freud's theory, it seems that returning to the tolerant female and a natural maternal origin is both a wish and an instinct of human consciousness. In the works of "educated youth" filmmakers, this maternal origin (home) is constructed from a very male-centric perspective. Here, 'home', relates to the woman's tolerant character, becoming a cultural construction that forms an idyllic togetherness to console the man's guilt.

The tolerant female image, the idyllic countryside and motherhood are embodiments of rural China. The analysis of the female character offers an analogy with the nation; ancient China's land, like the women in these films, has experienced sufferings because of cultural and political oppression. This suffering female and national image further represents sufferers from the generation of the "educated youth" and those who suffered in the Cultural

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[35] Linda Hutcheon & Mario J. Valdés, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue," 2000:18-41(22). http://revistas.unam.mx/index.php/poligrafias/article/viewFile/31312/28976.

[36] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *Collected Papers* (New York: Basic, 1959), 368-407.

Revolution. Through the presentation of these ultimate suffering beings, the filmmakers not only criticise the Chinese patriarchal system, but also construct a guilty feeling about this tolerant female image, with which they challenge the discourse of "youth without regret".

Therefore, the female has become a tool to stabilise the CCP's regime and comfort urban residents' nostalgia. Even though they try to resist the patriarchal and political system, they may not change their destiny. This image of a tragic, tolerant, sacrificing, and fighting but ultimately failed female image is imagined by the male's fantasy in order to console their guilt. This specific female image deepens the understanding of the male's guilt and presents a tragic destiny, which further challenges the discourse of "youth without regret".

Guilty Feeling for Discarding Cultural Identity

Both films have constructed a guilty male image and tolerant female image to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret". In this section, discarding "agrarian society" and the heart-warming feeling of home in the countryside, seen as a cultural identity for urban residents, will be presented as a third guilt, which further criticises the discourse of the "youth without regret".

The filmmakers present a social transformation between the countryside and the city in the context of unprecedented large-scale urbanisation that started in the early 1990s. China has been connected to global modernity since the policy of "reform and opening up" was implemented in 1978. As Wang Jing suggests, the 1980s was a period in which miracles and superstition triumphed over rational forces; a period in which China was seeking inspiration from the symbols of ancient civilisation, such as the Great Wall and the dragon.[37] The 1980s as a whole was seen as a period of optimism and idealism, which rose with ever greater speed after Mao's authoritarian way of governing. At the same time, a

[37] Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1996), 38.

great deal of Western research methods and ideologies in the natural and social sciences were also introduced to China. Fang Keqiang suggests that various philosophical trends of the West, such as Sartre's existentialism, Freud's psychoanalysis and Nietzsche's philosophy, were introduced into China from the early 1980s.[38] Therefore, the 1980s was seen as not only a period of reflection on the Cultural Revolution, but also a period of learning from the West. This period was therefore depicted as a period of "cultural fever".[39]

This cultural fever and the pursuit of a humanist spirit in the 1980s was, however, lost or eclipsed as a result of commodification in the 1990s and continuous public exposure to high-level corruption.[40] Jason McGrath points out that "money worship, the sacrifice of principle for profit, the loss of ideals, the disintegration of ethics. The 1990s marked a return to questions of capitalist modernity that had been bracketed for decades by the very different utopian vision of modernity offered by Maoism."[41] That is, the idealism and humanist spirit of the 1980s were obscured by postsocialist market economic reform in the 1990s. Thus, the 1990s was not only seen as an era of increasing economic development, but also perceived as a time that regained the humanist spirit lost in the process of market economic reform. Therefore, the culture related to Mao and socialism in the 1990s has had a real and political significance for the reiteration of idealism in the new social context. As Dai suggests, "the popular swelling of 'Mao Zedong fever' signifies the longing of people for a sense of trust and of 'security' in society, the memory of an age that, while not prosperous, still

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[38] Keqiang Fang, "Reinvestigation of the Literature Trend of 'Searching Root' in the 1980s," *Quarterly Journal of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences*, 2001:01, 184-188(184).

[39] Jilin Xu, "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity-the Anti-Westernization Ideological Trend in China's Intellectual Circles in the 1990s," *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology*, 1996:04, 15.

[40] Jinhua Dai, "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso 2002), 128.

[41] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 32.

neither knew hunger nor felt threatened."[42] Through this imaginary redemption and road of return, people—in particular urban residents—looked for an age of idealism, an age with heroes, and an age having less commerce and consumerism.

In this context, the guilt image of the urban residents, such as Baolige, Jinghe, and the generation of an "educated youth", is not only reflected in the betrayal of the characters' girlfriends, but also in the discarding of their faith and the place where they spent their youth, a place of pure and idyllic countryside, with their future situated in the city. They gave up an ideal period and embraced consumerism. This betrayal of the spiritual home in the context of Chinese urbanisation since the 1990s is similar to the situation in which the "educated youth" left the countryside for the city after the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, the "educated youth" filmmakers draw on the betrayal of the spiritual home of Baolige and Jinghe, as a kind of analogy to express their guilt about the lost countryside and faith, in order to rewrite a desire for redemptive memory, reflect on the Cultural Revolution, and challenge the discourse of "youth without regret".

Baolige and Jinghe are representatives of people who were influenced by the "cultural fever" of the 1980s. The underlying reason why Baolige and Jinghe leave the countryside is to go to the city in search of their future and more advanced knowledge coming from the West. In *A Mongolian Tale*, when Baolige comes back from the city after graduating from university, he finds Suomiya is pregnant. What makes him much angrier, however, is that Suomiya and the grandmother are dedicating all their love to this baby. The grandmother, as a traditional Mongolian woman, thinks that it is fortunate that a woman has the ability to conceive a baby. However, from Baolige's perspective, he does not endure their indifference to Suomiya's rape, thus this creates tremendous loneliness, confusion, and desperation for Baolige and further, causes him to leave the

[42] Jinhua Dai, "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso 2002), 128.

prairie (unenlightened rural area) in search of a more modern place in the city. Thus, from Baolige's leaving, different cultures of the countryside (which may represent the Mongolian ethnicity) and the city (which may represent Han ethnicity) may be realised. As Pan Yihong suggests "the Han being agricultural, Confucian, conservative, submissive and soft as sheep, under an authoritarian power symbolized by a dragon totem; and the Mongols being pastoral, nomadic, mythical, spiritual, full of valour and vigour and love of freedom, and unyielding, unified under the wolf totem."[43] Baolige grows up in the Mongolian prairie, but he receives an education in a modern educational system. As a Mongolian, he has access to a collective Mongolian culture. He has a straightforward character, likes horse riding, and playing a traditional Mongolian instrument. Yet, as a modern educated intellectual, he neither approves of the behaviour with respect to the rape, nor accepts the result of Suomiya's pregnancy. His departure is the result of conflict between the different cultures. Baolige sees the tragedy of Suomiya from the perspective of modern moral principles. The baby in Suomiya's womb reminds him constantly that the purity of their love has disappeared, and he will search for his new and modern lifestyle in the city. In this respect, the 1980s was a time when the Chinese people were searching for their (China's) modernity in the context of intense urbanisation and the trend of learning from the West.

The city does not, however, provide them with an ideal life. The period after the early 1990s is not only seen as an era of increasing economic development, but also perceived as an era that searches for a humanist spirit that has somehow been lost in the process of commercialisation. As Jiang and Xie suggest, "spiritual crisis is a big issue which is commonly encountered by modern human beings especially in the last decades when technology promotes the development of society rapidly… now, many intellectuals think that people need spiritual

[43] Yihong Pan, "Revelation of the Grassland: The Han Sent Down Youths in Inner Mongolia," *Asian Ethnicity,* 2006:7 (3), 237.

sustenance, reflection, and reconstruction." [44] Their comments express an intense clash between learning Western ideologies and a return to traditional cultures when China was searching for its modernity during postsocialism. To some extent, coming back to traditional culture to stabilise cultural and national identities may be deemed a conservative ideology when searching for solutions to address the issues of modernity. However, these are the ways in which some intellectuals among the "educated youth" solved Chinese social and cultural issues in the context of aggressive postsocialist capitalism. Furthermore, people did not enjoy economic dividend, without also feeling confusion about fierce competition, a bustling urban lifestyle, utilitarianism and pragmatism, and social moral crisis, which combined to create a kind of cultural shock. Therefore, coming back to the countryside and the prairie in the film and reality may compensate for the discontinuity between present and past and construct a coherent self-narrative; it is the coming back not only to a place or a time in which people feel personal integrity and psychic well-being, but also to a native soil and a traditional culture which allows people to regain national and cultural identity in new contexts.

In the films, when postsocialist modernity came to China, the yearning for the city impels Baolige and Jinghe to leave the countryside to achieve their aspirations. In the eyes of these two male protagonists, the countryside is an unenlightened place compared to the city. Jinghe's yearning for the city and discarding of the status of the farmer is the real reason that stops him from replying to Nuan. One could argue that Baolige and Jinghe are cowardly and irresponsible, but it is more appropriate to situate them within a social context in which people strived for their dreams, wealth, and urban status in an early period of China's market reform. The conflict between sense and sensibility presents a somewhat contradictory feeling that people like Baolige and Jinghe are

[44] Wei Jiang & Fei Xie, "The Dialogue about *A Mongolia Tale*: The Interview of Xie Fei," in *The Works of Xie Fei* (Beijing: China Film Press, 1998), 300-301.

subconsciously or instinctively changing their rural status by going to the city in the face of China's postsocialist modernisation. Meanwhile, in this process, Baolige and Jinghe also feel guilty about the people, countryside and culture they discarded. Wang Ban suggests:

> The village has become a venerable image, a favourite haven, resonating to a general nostalgic desire for authentic experience, which was doubly removed from the real referent, can be attributed to an intensified loss of authenticity and innocence on the more accelerated socio-economic development and also has wide collective resonance in the capitalist sociocultural changes.[45]

Therefore, the filmmakers see the countryside and prairie as a cultural deposit to nourish a more local and adhesive culture in order to resist the incoming Western theories, knowledge, and postsocialist commercial culture.

At the same time, it should be noted that this social issue has not just had a significant impact on Baolige and Jinghe, but has also had a conflicted impact on the former "educated youth" generation. Based on Yang's research, since the 1990s many of the "educated youth" began to become unsettled as a result of a burgeoning social and cultural transformation. One of the most serious problems was that 40-60% of the total laid-off workforce in 1998 was the former "educated youth".[46] To some extent, a kind of disorientation reappeared for the former "educated youth" post-1990s when China's society was experiencing an economic and cultural transformation, which in turn propelled this generation of the "educated youth" to reflect on what caused them to suffer this situation. As Yang suggests:

> The *zhiqing* generation finds itself again in the vortex of social change and in renewed struggles against disruptions of identity— hence also against the social

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[45] Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 189.

[46] Guobin Yang, "China's Zhiqing Generation Nostalgia, Identity, and Cultural Resistance in the 1990s," *Modern China*, 2003:29(3), 274.

> forces that destabilize identities. In these struggles, the past becomes a vital source for coping with the present. The nostalgic experience emotionally connects the generation to its past and compels them to articulate their generational experience in narrative form.[47]

Thus, filmmakers Xie and Huo, as the generation of "educated youth" living in the city after the Cultural Revolution, attempt to draw on their personal experiences to engage with the issue in the city. The chaotic social environment and confused cultural identity in the 1990s have triggered them to imagine a stabilised past in socialism, in the untouched countryside in particular.

For many of the "educated youth", coming back to the cities was a happy thing after the Cultural Revolution. After all, the city was the place where they were born. However, returning to the city meant denying the value of their youth in the countryside. From this perspective, the "educated youth" filmmakers raise a query about the meaning of their youth spent in the Cultural Revolution. Pan Yihong claims:

> After returning to the cities and settling down in various occupations, the former educated youth themselves have reflected on their rustication experiences…They have revisited the rural areas of their settlement, and published collections of reminiscences, trying to come to terms with their lives, and to understand their role in the history of the People's Republic of China."[48]

The filmmakers Xie and Huo and other members of the "educated youth" betrayed the countryside homes of their childhoods where they spent their youth, stored their faith, and where their youth identity was constructed as "youth without regret" and a glorious generation. The generation of the "educated youth" witnessed all the historical and political events of the entire history of the

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[47] Guobin Yang, "China's Zhiqing Generation Nostalgia, Identity, and Cultural Resistance in the 1990s," *Modern China*, 2003:29(3), 276.

[48] Yihong Pan, "An Examination of the Goals of the Rustication Program in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Contemporary China,* 2002:11(31), 227.

People's Republic of China, such as "Red Guards",[49] "up to the mountain and down to the countryside", the democratic student movement of 1989, and reform of the state-owned enterprises, among others. As Stanley Rosen suggests, "this generation has certainly earned the right to speak, and their reflections reveal a great deal, both about the Cultural Revolution years and about current conditions".[50] Therefore, a sense of guilt is an articulated representation of the Cultural Revolution and the current situation that this generation face. They, as the historical witnesses, integrate their experience of the Cultural Revolution with the social situation in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The filmmakers appeal to people to come back to the simple and pure lifestyle that is situated in the countryside. The characters of Baolige and Jinghe, who are urban residents and influenced by the changing economic and cultural environment, attempt to touch the beauty and purity of the countryside again after having left it a decade before. Both films discussed use a similar narrative of 'leave-return-leave' to highlight this 'return'. The Mongolian prairie and village are relatively closed traditional communities, but the vast and magnificent grassland with Mongolian tents, the strong, honest, and hard-drinking herdsmen, and the magnificent steeds that incarnate the spirit of the land, all converge into a mythical, unspoiled paradise of purity and harmony. It is this cultural identity that the filmmakers Xie and Huo want to recreate. As Wang suggests, "this place —a milieu of memory conjured up for nostalgia—is evidently a repository of meaning, value, and wisdom, a source of life and vitality."[51] Further, the caring and nurturing grandmother in the film *A Mongolian Tale* is like the tolerant earth that endures all sufferings. She likes children and has raised many of them,

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[49] Red Guards were a student mass paramilitary social movement mobilized by Mao Zedong in 1966 and 1967, during the Cultural Revolution. Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (University of Washington Press, 1985), 143.

[50] Stanley Rosen, "Foreword," in *Mao's Children in the New China: Voices from the Red Guard Generation*, edited by Yarong Jiang and David Ashley (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 2000), xix.

[51] Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 121-123.

including Baolige. She not only takes care of children but also adopts animals. Meng Gaha (the black horse) is an orphan, who is born on a snowy night. The grandmother saves its life and it becomes part of her family. The old woman also decides to look after Suomiya's baby, regardless of how she was conceived. Thus, an inner powerful emotional bond, an ethical and moral mother's love and respect for human beings, has surpassed Baolige's pursuit of a 'purer' love in the city. It reflects the national and cultural identity that was lost in the market economy reform, that the "educated youth" filmmakers try to rediscover through their homecoming.

The countryside restores the authenticity and innocence of the traditional cultural identity. In this sense, the homecoming to the traditional and national culture may also be perceived as a kind of cultural nationalism, through which the filmmakers want to return to a more 'pure and traditional' pastoralism. After experiencing the period of learning from the West throughout the 1980s, some intellectuals began to question who China is in the unstable spheres of economy, culture, and nation. Svetlana Boym suggests that nationalism tends to fill the gap between socialism and postsocialism, which "modifies capitalist individualism and gives people an imaginary sense of community, a mythical map of rewritten history."[52] Furthermore, the mythical nostalgia in *A Mongolian Tale* and *Nuan* corresponds to the rising nationalistic sentiment in China in the early 1990s. Their warm homecoming not only provides a spiritual placebo to console the confused identity and chaotic urban lifestyle caused, for instance, by McDonald's and Coca-Cola, but may potentially create a kind of nationalist sentiment in this process. Zhu Ying points out that nationalism is a force propelling changes in the way Chinese intellectuals and policy makers have viewed the world since the 1990s. Nationalism in the 1980s was directed towards economic development and a critique of traditional socialism. The 1990s has been perceived as a return

[52] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 285.

to Chinese values.[53] In other words, nationalism in the 1990s may have been an intellectually-led cultural movement, which adopted a cultural reflection on the process of learning Western modernity in the 1980s and the commercialisation of the 1990s.

Through cultural homecoming, we are presented with an image of a guilty urban resident, who gives up the 'pure' countryside but struggles in the postsocialist city. Urban residents feel guilty as they abandon a peaceful lifestyle and lose their faith and cultural identity. Therefore, the film creates a terrain of the past with traditional cultural identity used to represent the best anticipation for recovering a sense of harmony and intimacy in the context of a turbulent society. Fred Davis suggests that nostalgia "does not derive from some inherent quality found in the past, but occurs in the content of present fears, discontents, anxieties and uncertainties. Nostalgia thrives in transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity." [54] Based on Davis's understanding, the personal guilt as a result of giving up cultural identity is indeed triggered by a contemporary, urban and turbulent transformation in the context of postsocialist modernity since the 1990s. Coming home to a cultural root is perceived as a solution for contemporary urban residents attempting to console their loneliness, stabilise their identity, and engage with a social discontinuity in the context of postsocialist transformation.

Xie and Huo, as intellectuals and witnesses of contemporary society, proactively reflect on the influence of postsocialist modernity, engage with issues arising from the process of social transformation, and point out that returning to an idyllic countryside is a good way to console this confusion. They attempt to return to an original point where people regain their peace of mind to resist the

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[53] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 133.

[54] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1979), 49-90.

quick pace of life that postsocialist modernity demands. Although this attempt may be utopian and doomed to fail, it provides imagination and consolation with which to address the social issue of confusion about cultural identity. The pure and romantic grassland and countryside offer a connection to a stable lifestyle. Compared to the modern aspiration for productivity, progress, social mobility, and technological skills in an environment of increasing urbanisation, this grassland is seen as a pastoral community. Thus, when people are attracted by the image of a developed and civilised city, then the countryside is seen as a rural and uncultured place. In this regard, the countryside and prairie in *A Mongolian Tale* and *Nuan* are constructed as romantic, pastoral and redeeming cinematic representations, which provide humane warmth to console the loneliness of city life in the context of intense social transition between the countryside and the city.

To some extent, although Xie, Huo, and even the characters of Baolige and Jinghe have different experiences, they, as contemporary urban residents, are witnessing and experiencing this social transformation. From this perspective, nostalgia is constructed to engage with current social issues such as inequality, unemployment, and the issue of cultural identity. At the same time, the turbulent situation is articulated through the memories of the "educated youth" of the Cultural Revolution. The nostalgia for the lost countryside is drawn upon by the "educated youth" filmmakers, which not only engages with the current social situation, but also brings audiences back to the era of the Cultural Revolution to emphasise the guilty emotions of the "educated youth". This section suggests that the "educated youth" filmmakers articulate their own guilt to current people's anxiety of giving up their national identity, as the third guilty feeling, to challenge the discourse "youth without regret".

In short, both of the films discussed in this section construct the guilty identity of the urban residents in order to validate traditional and national identities and to challenge the values of commercialism. Both films intend to

engage with China's economic reform and social transformation. At the same time, reflection on the Cultural Revolution is also an important goal. It is therefore reasonable to consider that the "educated youth" filmmakers draw on the commercial culture of the 1990s and early 2000s, not only to engage with the current social issues, but also to infuse the experience of the "educated youth" themselves in order to reflect on their lost youth during the Cultural Revolution. Through this psychological process, the filmmakers appeal to the public to stay vigilant of the Cultural Revolution's ideology and to challenge the discourse of the "youth without regret" in postsocialist China. Further, this section rethinks the definition of nostalgia, adopting the representation of the past to engage with the present, and raises another perspective that nostalgia is also logical thinking that draws on the current situation to critique or even criticise history.

Conclusion

When the Chinese government opened its doors after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese film industry experienced a series of reforms. The status of the Chinese film gradually changed from that of a mouthpiece of the CCP to a marketised and political mechanism in postsocialism. In this environment, it becomes possible for film to act as a tool to critique the past and present. The filmmakers draw on their collective experience of "educated youth" in the Cultural Revolution and the chaotic social environment since the 1990s to narrate stories of homecoming in *A Mongolian Tale* and *Nuan*. By constructing a guilty male image, tolerant female image, and guilty feeling related to the discarding of cultural identity, this chapter argues that the "educated youth" filmmakers present a guilty structure of feeling, as a sense of nostalgia, to challenge the discourse "youth without regret" projected by the Chinese government's broadcasting system in a fusion of rapid commercialisation, political control and media marketisation since the 1990s.

In this regard, the sense of personal guilty feelings of the films' male protagonists Baolige and Jinghe in the process of their homecoming becomes a

collective and national guilt. The construction of guilty feeling is a mechanism of self-reconciliation, through which the "educated youth" and other urban residents not only express the suffering they experienced during the Cultural Revolution, but also offer a form of a national indication that people who feel guilty about the Cultural Revolution may regain a kind of national identity as the suffering Chinese. Therefore, if the discourse of "youth without regret" is a cultural construction, through which the "educated youth" generation is connected to the country and that allows for an image of a tough and glorious generation, then, the representation of guilty politics in films made by the "educated youth" is also a cultural construction, which becomes a way to criticise the injustices of the Cultural Revolution itself in the context of China's postsocialism.

Rather than offering a simple interpretation of nostalgia through a binary of anxious present and constructed idyllic past, this chapter presents three kinds of guilty feelings to unpack nostalgia in "educated youth" filmmakers' works. This cultural construction testifies that nostalgia not only adopts the presentation of the past in order to engage with the present, but also draws on the current situation to criticise the past. Nostalgia may therefore be drawn on by "educated youth" filmmakers to engage with current urban residents' unstable identity in the context of China's social transformation since the 1990s. In turn, this contemporary social transformation may be further used, as a kind of guilty feeling, to challenge the discourse of "youth without regret", related to the Cultural Revolution.

Finally, this chapter indicates that both films locate the pure countryside and prairie as 'home' and 'origin' of China's cultural identity. This home may not, however, be a solution for current social issues in the context of historical juncture, but rather a cultural negotiation between the CCP's hegemonic ideology, the intellectuals' appeal for an evaluation of the Cultural Revolution, and a potential conservative tendency in society as a whole since the 1990s. Today, the

Cultural Revolution has been over for forty years. In this context, the purpose of presenting discourses of guilt and regret is not only to highlight how the "educated youth" filmmakers challenge the CCP's discourse of "youth without regret", but also reminds people to reflect on other grand historical narratives in China, through which to open up spaces for contested memories and imaginations of Chinese modernity.

Chapter 2：Nostalgia for a Communal lifestyle in Urban Films: *Shower* (1999) and *24 City* (2008)

Since the late 1990s, the acceleration of urbanisation in many cities in China has resulted in the demolition (拆迁, *chaiqian*) of old buildings and streets. In this context, many cinematic works produced by "urban filmmakers" who grew up in cities and were educated in film academies, captured these changes. Such works not only show a focus on urban transformation in postsocialist China but, more importantly, shed light on the marginalised people and social issues frequently overlooked by society. This genre, addressing urban themes within a nexus of local and global economic, historical, and ideological contexts, is known as an "urban film". This chapter analyses two such films from three angles: the trope of demolition in the city, documentary aesthetics of urban filmmakers, and restorative and reflective nostalgias. Through exploring the representation of urban change since the late 1990s, this chapter argues that the urban filmmakers Zhang Yang and Jia Zhangke draw on nostalgia for the communal urban lifestyle to engage with the social issues of urban changes and the declining status of the working class in a background of state-owned enterprise reform. Both filmmakers reflect on the social rupture between socialism and postsocialism and criticise the CCP's hegemonic politics. In this process, the urban filmmakers' ambivalent identity as the generation discarded by socialism is also presented in the context of postsocialist China.

1. Historical Background of Urban Film

The post-Mao reform, such as those of state-owned enterprise and urbanisation, brought about a visible impact on urban development. The urban changes are identified from four angles: first, the CCP's land policy was changed to promote urban development. Previous land regulation stipulated that all the land in China belonged to the socialist state; now the land has been leased to private individuals

or companies (usually for 70 years, subject to renewal) to make money.[1] In other words, the privatisation of land and the transfer of land rights from the state to private ownership were very important factors that stimulated China's urban development. Second, many Chinese cities, both large and small, underwent an intense process of demolition. Many old buildings, such as *hutong* in Beijing and *longtang* in Shanghai, were torn down to make room for modern skyscrapers. The reform of state-owned enterprise further promoted this urban demolition. Many companies, such as Factory 420 in the film *24 City* (2008), relocated, and the old workshop units were demolished. Third, some coastal cities, such as Shenzhen and Shanghai, were set up as "Special Economic Zones" in the early 1990s. These cities developed quickly, economically promoted by Deng Xiaoping's political slogan that "socialism can also develop market economy".[2] In this environment, many Chinese people conducted their business in these Special Economic Zones.[3] Fourth, two events, namely, China joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and hosting the Beijing 2008 Olympics, further stimulated China's urban development. Stimulated by these policies and events, China's cities profited from a huge influx of capital and a cheaper labour force, not only boosting the development of these cities but also accelerating their demolition and reconstruction.

The phenomenon of urban demolition and reconstruction attracted the attention of many filmmakers, especially urban generation (or so-called Sixth-Generation) filmmakers. Compared to the generation of the "educated youth" discussed in the first chapter, most urban generation filmmakers were born in the 1960s and early 1970s, grew up in the cities and studied in the departments

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[1] "Interim Regulation of the People's Republic of China Concerning Assignment and Transfer of the Right to the Use of the State-owned in the Urban Areas," the Chinese Government, 19 May 1990, http://www.cin.gov.cn/law/other/2000111602-00.htm.

[2] "We Can Develop a Market Economy under Socialism," the Chinese Government, 1979, http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/dengxiaoping/103388.htm.

[3] David S. G Goodman, *Class in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 41-42.

of directing or cinematography at elite universities such as the Beijing Film Academy.[4] For example, Jia Zhangke, born in 1970, has broad experience of living in a small city in Shanxi province and studying at the Beijing Film Academy from 1993 to 1997. Compared to the Fifth-Generation filmmakers who predominantly focus on rural areas and search for rural value and national roots, many urban generation filmmakers have made the city as the subject of their works. This group of filmmakers were born in the latter part of the Mao era and had little experience of the Cultural Revolution. Thus, they are also identified as "Forsaken Generation" filmmakers, referring to their abandonment by socialist China in the social transformation from socialism to postsocialism. [5] To a greater extent, the Sixth-Generation filmmakers, urban generation filmmakers, and "Forsaken Generation" filmmakers are interchangeable terms that depict a new generation who were born in the city and stood out as new social subjects, and who adopted the postsocialist situation as the nurturing ground for their works.

From the late 1990s onwards, the Chinese film industry developed at high speed. The strategies of international cooperation and foreign investment referred to in the first chapter further promoted the development of this industry. At the same time, new film policies, such as the establishment of film group corporations, adjusting the shareholding system, and integration of film production, distribution and screening, further stimulated the prosperous development of the Chinese film industry.[6] The films produced by the Sixth-Generation or "Forsaken Generation" focusing on urban issues are called "urban

[4] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 41-42.

[5] Xiaoping Lin, "New Chinese Cinema of the 'Sixth Generation': A Distant Cry of Forsaken Children," *Third Text*, 2002:16(3), 261–84; Qi Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 10.

[6] "Suggestions on further Deepening the Reform of the Film Industry," the Chinese Government, 6 June 2000, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2001/content_60781.htm.

film (or urban cinema)".[7] Yomi Braester suggests that the Sixth–Generation filmmakers often pay attention to marginalised subcultures and self-marginalising countercultures, addressing young people's alienation and loneliness in the quickly developing metropolises, with the present-day city as the battle-ground between an oppressive collectivity and rebellious individuals. [8] Simply put, as these films often focus on marginalised subcultures, some of the films are also labelled as "avant-garde films", "underground films", [9] or "independent films".[10] In the early period, the urban generation proactively differentiated their works from that of the former generation of filmmakers. In general, their works normally focus on urban places in which physically disabled people, the unprivileged populace, or non-traditional communities live, and explore the lives of individuals who are excluded from mainstream society. Ning Ying, as one of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers, claims that the Sixth-Generation also need to return to their roots.[11] Herein, "their roots" do not derive from "root-seeking" literature and films of the 1980s and the early 1990s, which portray the countryside as the root of culture and national identity. Rather, this new group of filmmakers situate "their roots" in Chinese cities. They focus on urban transformation and engage with the social reality in China's urban

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[7] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 41-42.

[8] Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

[9] Jinhua Dai, "The Sixth Generation and Their Films," 17 January 2012, https://site.douban.com/136388/widget/notes/6509806/note/196321212/.

[10] Independent film: Because of official intolerance for some films, they cannot make and obtain enough capital and opportunities to shoot films, some filmmakers seek recognition through international channels and commit themselves to independent filmmaking as a way out. Therefore, the signature marks of independent films became another way to shoot films for many new filmmakers. Although each director offers a distinct vision, their psychological and cinematic engagements with the city bind them together. The shared urban sensibility often finds rock music as the language of expression, the isolated apartment as a private world, and urban life as a form of youthful self-display. Therefore, shooting independent film is not only a suitable way out of a difficult situation but also an aesthetic practice. The cinema was part of a larger experiment by the socialist state, aimed at producing new spatial practices.

[11] Huadong Qiu, *City Tank* (Beijing: The Writer's Publishing House, 1997), 250.

environments. For instance, Zhang Yuan's films *Beijing Bastards* (1993) and *East Palace West Palace* (1996) and Jia Zhangke's films *Xiao Wu* (1998) and *A Touch of Sin* (2013) belong to the genre of the urban film.

Furthermore, the release of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers' works shows a negotiated process between filmmakers' artistic aesthetics, the interest of the film market, and the CCP's censorship. More specifically, compared to some commercial films, the urban films steer clear of the state-sponsored "main-melody" (主旋律, *zhuxuanlü*) films that project socialist ideologies and the CCP's nationalism. Some works of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers were forbidden to be released in China because they were seen as a kind of threat against the CCP's regime. For instance, Jia's films *Xiaowu* (1997) and *A Touch of Sin* (2013) were banned throughout the country as they describe some serious social issues in China's cities. Although urban filmmakers consider their works as independent (at least, in their early works), they try to maintain some communicative link with mainstream ideology in order to gain permission for their films' release in the Chinese film market. In particular, since the new millennium, their works have received many awards at both domestic and international film festivals,[12] which have, in turn, influenced the aesthetic of the wider Chinese film market. To some extent, the professional environment since the 1990s has improved for urban filmmakers. Their films were proactively brought in line with the Chinese film market by adjusting their aesthetics and adopting common promotional strategies, which gave the Sixth-Generation's films a greater chance of being released in China. In the new environment of filmmaking and film supervision, the urban generation filmmakers presented their works as new subjects, which implicitly and explicitly showed a social and political critique in the context of the postsocialist market economy. Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel remark that due to the nature of an apparent absence of ideological framing coupled with a "common

[12] Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle* (2004) awarded "Silver Bear Grand" at the 51st Berlin International Film Festival. Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (2006) awarded "Gold Lion" at the 63rd Venice Film Festival.

folk" lifestyle within the films, the state found that it was difficult to intervene in the Sixth-Generation's working practices.[13] Therefore, no matter what the reasons for their release, these film products can be viewed as a negotiated result of the stability of the CCP's regime, the filmmakers' aesthetics, and the interest of the Chinese film market. Many urban films were produced in this negotiated context, such as Zhang Nuanxin's *Morning, Beijing* (1990); Zhou Xiaowen's *No Regrets about Youth* (1991); Wang Xiaoshuai's *Winter Days Beijing Bicycle* (2001); Shi Runjiu's *Beautiful New World* (1998); Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* (2000); Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2008); and Zhang Yang's *Shower* (1999), *Quitting* (2001), *and Sunflower* (2005).

This chapter chooses two urban films—Zhang Yang's *Shower* and Jia Zhangke's *24 City*—to examine nostalgic screen culture. The film *Shower* was financially supported and produced by Imar Film Co. Ltd. Founded in 1996 by an American businessman Peter Loehr, Imar Film Co. Ltd provided financial and technological support for many young filmmakers, resulting in many films doing well at the box offices in the Chinese film market. Zhang's early films, such as *Beautiful New World* (1998), *Shower* (2000), and *Crazy Stone* (2006), were all distributed by Imar Film Co. Ltd. According to Loehr, he adheres to two principles to maintain his business model. First, he provides an available and independent environment for shooting films, with a wide range of resources and the mechanism to sustain good relationships with some international film festivals; this, in turn, provides larger platforms for his filmmakers to access the international film market and communicate their film aesthetics. Second, he maintains a good relationship with China's film authority to obtain necessary film release permissions in China.[14] *Shower* was produced in this context, and

[13] Chris Berry & Lisa Rofel, "Introduction," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: for the Public Record*, edited by Chris Berry, Xinyu Lu and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Pres, 2010), 11.

[14] Zhen Zhang, *The urban generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14

involved not only cooperation with foreign investors and producers but also collaboration with the domestic film company Xi'an Studio in order to be released in the Chinese market. This film, depicting China's urban demolition, had good box office revenue in 1999. The Imar phenomenon testifies that the urban generation filmmakers were able not only to keep their chosen film aesthetic but also to work within the Chinese film market. Zhang, as a successful urban generation filmmaker, brought a new vitality to this market. *Shower* is neither a mainstream film nor a challenge to the political status quo and is typical of a film produced in the context of the negotiated film industry.

Jia's early work was released in a different format. His early films *Xiaowu* (1997), *Platform* (1998), and *Unknown Pleasures* (2001) were shot in China but released abroad. Most were sent to international film festivals. Jia, another of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers, experienced difficulties with budget and film release similar to his peers. The budget for his first film *Xiaowu* (1998) was only 300,000 RMB (around $36,000);[15] a very modest sum with which to produce a feature film. Further, Jia's films *Xiaowu* and *A Touch of Sin* (2013) were banned in China as they depict suffering people living at the bottom of society. Berry points out that the low-budget and the use of realism (纪实主义, *jishi zhuyi*) became the hallmark of independent (the Sixth-Generation) filmmakers from the 1990s onwards.[16] For these reasons, Jia showcased many of his early films at international festivals and his film aesthetics gradually came to be recognised by Chinese and international audiences. In short, since China joined the WTO in 2001 the Chinese film industry has become increasingly marketised and privatised. The Chinese independent filmmakers (in the early period of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers) moved above ground and had their films publicly

[15] "Jia Zhangke: I Am in Charge of My Film," China Weekly, 8 October 2010, http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2010-10-08/14573106303.shtml.

[16] Chris Berry & Lisa Rofel, "Introduction," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: for the Public Record*, edited by Chris Berry, Xinyu Lu and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Pres, 2010), 5.

released. Many of Zhang and Jia's films are often referred to as "art films" and some are labelled as independent films. The conflation of labels indicates that in the shifting social and economic context of postsocialist China, the meaning of independence has been reconfigured by party-state control, market logic and filmmakers' aesthetics. As with Zhang, Jia cooperated with a domestic film studio Shanghai Film Group Corporation to release various films into China's market, such as *The World* (2004), *Still Life* (2006), *24 City* (2008), *I Wish I Know* (2010), *A Touch of Sin* (2013), *Mountains May Depart* (2015), *Ash Is Purest White* (2018). In summary, Jia's early films were released abroad due to his realistic film aesthetic. Later, he proactively positioned his work nearer to the mainstream film market. It seems that Jia also found a suitable way to keep a dynamic balance between sustaining his own film aesthetic and attracting the film market.

Three objectives underpin the comparison in this chapter of Zhang's *Shower* and Jia's *24 City*. First, urban demolition in both films, as a cultural metaphor, reflects upon the collapse of old buildings and transformations of a family, a city, and social ethics, by which the cinematic representation of nostalgia in the context of postsocialist urbanisation can be explored. Second, both feature films are styled as documentaries to engage with social reality in the process of urban demolition. This aesthetic not only emphasises a physical co-presence of the camera but also provides a chance to make close contact with the material world. Documentary aesthetics, seen in this light, may be regarded as social engagement that helps to build up counter-publics, in which alternative narratives may be heard. Third, in the presentation of socialist urban lives, both films show different but related nostalgic cultures connected to Svetlana Boym's concepts of "reflective nostalgia" and "restorative nostalgia".[17] Boym investigates ruins and constructions of the postcommunist cities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, Berlin, and Prague, and classifies nostalgia into reflective and restorative. She defines restorative nostalgia as "reconstructive" and "utopian", which stresses the root

[17] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-50.

"nostos"[18] in "nostalgia" and is linked to a concept of home. To some extent, restorative nostalgia dreams of rebuilding a lost trans-historical home and bridges a perceived gap between the past and present. It does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Restorative nostalgia is at the core of the national and religious revivals and has two main plots—returning to the origins and being seen as a conspiracy—to present a sense of home.[19] Meanwhile, Boym defines reflective nostalgia as "inconclusive" and "ironic". It thrives in "algia"[20] and the longing itself, and delays homecoming wistfully, ironically, and desperately. It focuses on the concept of displacement and is more interested in bringing the displacement without trying to rebuild it.[21] This personal and historical memory, as a global epidemic of longing and dislocation, can also be found in the cinematic presentation of postsocialist China.

This chapter will analyse nostalgic cultures in the films *Shower* (1999) and *24 City* (2008) from three angles: urban demolition, documentary aesthetics, and restorative/reflective nostalgia. Through these angles, two urban generation filmmakers adopt a cultural metaphor of urban demolition to represent their own identity and engage with social issues in the process of postsocialist urban development.

2. Demolition in *Shower* (1999) and *24 City* (2008)

This section explores the cinematic representation of urban demolition in Zhang Yang's *Shower* (1999) and Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2008) with a focus on the

[18] Nostos (Ancient Greek: νόστος) is a theme used in Ancient Greek literature which includes an epic hero returning home by sea. Marigo Alexopoulou, *The Theme of Returning Home in Ancient Greek Literature. The Nostos of the Epic Heroes* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 2–5.

[19] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-50.

[20] "Algia": ἄλγος (álgos), meaning "pain" or "ache", and was coined by a 17th-century medical student to describe the anxieties displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting away from home. Described as a medical condition—a form of melancholy—in the Early Modern period. It became an important trope in Romanticism. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii–xiv.

[21] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-50.

question: how do two filmmakers present the themes of destruction and reconstruction of the cityscape, family, and social ethics? Three dimensions are discussed, namely, the demolition of a building, the removal of families, and the transformation of society. Nostalgia will also be examined in this process.

The film *Shower* begins with a narrative where the protagonist Da Ming, a businessman in China's city of Shenzhen, returns home to Beijing where his father owns an old and traditional public bathhouse. Da Ming stays at home for a couple of days and observes his father working as a marriage counsellor and a dispute mediator for his clients. Da Ming is caught between two worlds: the decaying district that still maintains a socialist and communal lifestyle, and the modern urban life in booming southern China where he has a new family with his wife. After Da Ming reconciles with his ageing father, the father unexpectedly dies, leaving Da Ming to take care of his younger brother Er Ming who has a mental disability. Da Ming gradually learns to accept the public bathhouse culture and communal lifestyle and is eventually able to look after his brother and family while the bathhouse and much of the neighbourhood are torn down to make way for the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The lifestyle in the bathhouse operated by Da Ming's father represents a socialist and communal lifestyle, and its disappearance mirrors the tearing down of this lifestyle. In this bathhouse, the Beijing opera, Chinese chess, massages, and pedicures reflect a traditional Chinese bathhouse culture. At the same time, outside of the bathhouse, old buildings (*hutong*), the exercise of early morning callisthenics, and Beijing's talkative residents are, to some extent, representatives of a traditional Beijing lifestyle which is far removed from the increasing commercialism. To some extent, this communal lifestyle has exceeded the sphere of a socialist lifestyle and become an aspiration for ordinary lifestyle. Thus, the bathhouse is not only a place of business but also a community, which contains a particular form of social organisation based on this lifestyle. As Zhang suggests, "community is seen as something that has been lost to modernity and as

something that must be recovered. As a process dominated by state formation, modernity has allegedly destroyed the community".[22] The bathhouse, as a community, shows people with an ordinary, communal, and harmonious lifestyle in Beijing. This public culture of the bathhouse breaks through the barrier between socialism and postsocialism and creates a communal experience rather than a hierarchical system. It provides a sense of kinship and social networks for entertainment and communication for the residents. The film transposes communal Beijing culture into a bathhouse. The scenes of old buildings, streets, and public playgrounds around the bathhouse become a form of community. This kind of communal lifestyle in the bathhouse and the fast-paced lifestyle in the metropolis may be perceived as a comparison between local and global lifestyle in the context of neoliberalist China.

The presentation of this community in *Shower* seeks to express the desire for harmony and a well-organised environment in the context of the chaotic and large-scale urban demolition. Compared to this film, Wang Di investigates the culture of a teahouse in Chengdu, China, and finds that the bathhouse's community is similar to that of a "plebeian public sphere". Wang argues that "each street or neighbourhood had a teahouse that served as a kind of community centre where people got to know each other very well, sharing information about their work, families, happy and sad events. Someone who needed help might first ask his teahouse buddies for information or advice".[23] In *Shower*, the public bathhouse has a similar social function, and is used to mediate issues between husband and wife, as well as acting as a sanctuary for those wishing to elude their creditors. Further, Wang indicates that the teahouse was a fluid social group, but still functioned as a social force that resisted the wave of modernity and uniformity, along with the growing role of the state in public space and public life

[22] Zhen Zhang, *The urban generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

[23] Di Wang, *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 261.

during the first half of the twentieth century.[24] Thus, the teahouse was a community which maintained a small world when modernity and political ideology gradually imposed their influences on the "plebeian public sphere". When commercialism becomes increasingly prevalent in cities, the bathhouse exerts its social functions as a sanctuary, a mediator, and a place of communication, through which the communal lifestyle is maintained. However, the film *Shower* presents this communal lifestyle as disappearing as a result of the wave of postsocialist modernity. The public bathhouse in postsocialist China has a different destiny from the teahouse in Chengdu in the first half of the twentieth century. The social function of the bathhouse is challenged by China's urbanisation and new housing reform, which, as Chen Tao argues, are two events that lead to large-scale demolition in Chinese cities.[25] Indeed, new modern skyscrapers and commercial, residential buildings gradually replaced old buildings. In *Shower*, the bathhouse is representative of an old communal and collective lifestyle, and its demolition is seen as the epitome of a disappearing traditional lifestyle in the context of rapid urbanisation.

Compared to the plebeian culture of the teahouse in Chengdu, the urban residents' missing of the communal lifestyle in *Shower* articulates a global tendency towards nostalgia. This nostalgic culture, perceived as stronger local attachments, searches for a plebeian community in a chaotic urban environment. The public bathhouse has a distinct regional feature and local characteristics, which presents a nonindustrial image of the past with intimate relationships. However, David Bray suggests that the emergence of 'community' (社区, *shequ*) was also symbolic of the government in urban China from the mid-1990s. Introduced by the CCP, the idea of it was used to distinguish the lowest notion of

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[24] Di Wang, *The Teahouse: Small Business, Everyday Culture, and Public Politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 252.

[25] Tao Chen, "Representations of Urban Demolitions in Contemporary Chinese Cinema," *Studies in Culture & Art*, 2011:4(3), 187.

the “street offices” (街道办事处, *jiedao banshichu*) from “resident committees” (居委会, *jvweihui*).[26] The traditional residential neighbourhood in *Shower* is portrayed as an administrative format. For example, the customers and local residents notice that the old buildings, including the public bathhouse, in their district will be demolished soon. However, the main function of “resident committees” is different from Bray’s account of “a site of government”, in that it aims to show a communal and folk lifestyle in urban China. The communal lifestyle in *Shower* is an organic one compared to that of a regulated administrative entity community. As an autonomous community, the bathhouse is seen as a place where citizens share a multiple interest. It is an urgent task to represent such kinds of community with common interests to recover and express a personal and social yearning for a comfortable social atmosphere in the context of chaos due to the urban demolition, although this communal past may not be existed. To some extent, in *Shower*, nostalgia turns up as a defence mechanism against accelerated urban rhythms and historical upheavals.

The communal lifestyle and postsocialist modernity seem to have an opposing relationship, which causes a sense of discontinuity between the past and present. As Zhang suggests, “unprecedented large-scale urbanisation and globalisation of China” and “socioeconomic unevenness, psychological anxiety, and the moral confusion caused by the upheaval” have had a complicated influence on some urban residents.[27] However, nostalgia has a contemporary resonance, which provides a reflective tool for assessing the past and present and may construct a nostalgic public space in which to narrate a story of a provincial community being converted into ‘modern’ and industrial city living. Fred Davis suggests that nostalgia, as a discontinuity between past and present, is often less

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[26] David Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China*: *the Danwei System from Origins to Reform* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 91.

[27] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

about the past than it is about the present.[28] Davis' investigation has been widely acknowledged and nostalgia shows a sense of discontinuity between a socialist and communal lifestyle and a postsocialist chaotic urban lifestyle. The process of constructing this communal lifestyle may be seen as a kind of resistance culture concerned with roots, and producing identity and aspirations of belonging. The public bathhouse then becomes an image of a past communal lifestyle.

The demolition in *Shower* presents a site urban disappearance and becomes a further cultural metaphor that shows a dynamic relationship between 'father' and 'son'. In other words, the relationship between traditional Beijing and modern Shenzhen resembles that between father (Lao Liu) and son (Da Ming). More specifically, Shenzhen, compared to Beijing, is a young city that has developed rapidly. The character of Da Ming is full of creative spirit like Shenzhen. However, the public bathhouse and the old Beijing City are representative of the communal lifestyle. Since the early 1990s, the state-owned enterprise reform sought to change this old planned-economic system replaced by a market economic system. Thus, many people formed a belief that the old economic system was conservative and lazy, like the father in *Shower*, while the new system (Shenzhen) was developed like the son, Da Ming. The reform of state-owned enterprises starting in the 1990s was an aggressive industrial reconstruction, especially after Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Talks".[29] At the same time, the radical marketisation was promoted by mainstream media. The people who left the planned-economy to do business were regarded as heroes. In this context, *Shower* potentially endorses the CCP's economic reform.

The image of the father (socialism) is also related to the worship of Mao. If the generation of "educated youth" is seen as the son of Mao, then the Sixth-Generation filmmakers and other people of a similar age may be seen as sons

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[28] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 50.

[29] Robert Weatherley, *Politics in China since 1949: Legitimising Authoritarian Rule* (London: Routledge, 2012), 137.

without fathers, as the image of Mao was transformed from the status of God to a man after the Cultural Revolution. From this perspective, the term "Forsaken Generation" not only means that these people were abandoned by the socialist system, but also that they lost their faith: the worship of Mao and socialist ideologies. In the film *Shower*, images of Lao Liu, the bathhouse, the old Beijing lifestyle, and the worship of Mao are seen as representative of the old planned-economic system, while Da Ming, as a son working in the new and rapidly developing city Shenzhen, is a contemporary hero who also feels confused about the discontinuity between socialism and postsocialism. In the beginning, the father (*Lao Liu*) cannot understand Da Ming's lifestyle, in the same way, Da Ming cannot accept the bathhouse culture, which creates conflicts between father and son. The misunderstanding between them is not a symbol of a generation gap, but rather a metaphor of the discontinuity between socialism and postsocialism in the context of the postsocialist modernisation that began in the 1990s.

Lao Liu is representative of the socialist ideology and communal lifestyle. This image is challenged by significant new socio-cultural changes. As Li Yinghui argues, China's social structure and values developed within a period of diversification, which led, to some extent, to mental confusion, loss, and anxiety.[30] In this sense, some people eagerly attempted to regain their ideal traditional beliefs. The folk and communal lifestyle indeed became an ideal image through which the urban generation filmmakers addressed their nostalgia. Wu Jing further suggests that the nostalgia for disappearing socialism was channelled by a passionate reconstruction of benevolent patriarchy, in which the appealing ideas of family, sharing, responsibility, and community took concrete forms.[31] In other words, Da Ming reconciles with his aged father after living with him in the bathhouse for several days. He seems to understand his father's life beliefs and

[30] Yinghui Li, *An Aesthetic Feature of Balance between Popularization and Individuation* (Shandong: Shandong Normal University, 2008), 15.

[31] Jing Wu, "Nostalgia as Content Creativity: Cultural Industries and Popular Sentiment," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2006: 9(3), 364.

accepts this ordinary and communal lifestyle. Such a compromise may also be interpreted through Jinhua Dai's suggestion that the Chinese mainstream culture in the 1990s was influenced by Western cultures, and that the Chinese seemed to be confused about their own culture at this time.[32] This suggestion is related to the issue of cultural identity discussed in the first chapter. As a result of the overlapping conflicts of different ideologies, the "Forsaken Generation" not only feel anxiety for losing the faith in Mao when postsocialism interrupted the progression of socialism, but have also fallen into a historical crevice between socialism and postsocialism. They are facing the absence of the socialist lifestyle and are witnessing or experiencing an urban change in the context of increasing urbanisation.

The relationship between father and son is an important theme in Zhang's films, including *Spicy Love Soup* (1994), *Shower* (1998), *Quitting* (2001), and *Sunflower* (2005). In these films, a similar structure of 'resistance-compromise-understanding' may be recognised. The male protagonist experiences a mental conflict from refusing to accept the 'father'. In the process of constructing this relationship, Zhang normally depicts a communal lifestyle that has relatively stable values and is different from the chaotic urban lifestyle, through which to address the discontinuity between socialism and postsocialism. Ellen G. Friedman suggests that "such longing is a characteristic of male texts of modernity, which exhibits an Oedipal preoccupation with the dead father, and a hankering after the meaning provided by an explanatory past: the yearning for fathers, for past authority and sure knowledge that may no longer be supported, permeates male texts of modernity."[33] In other words, although *Shower* begins with Da Ming's confusion about the bathhouse lifestyle, the focus soon switches to a search for the missing father and the son's longing for the missing content of

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[32] Jinhua Dai, *Sights in the Fog* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000), 407.

[33] Ellen G. Friedman, "Where are the Missing Contents? (Post) Modernism, Gender, and the Canon," in *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender and Nationalism*, edited by Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1997), 159.

paternal order. It is a journey that returns us to the father, elders and ancestors of a community. Rey Chow suggests that "it is a return, now possible only in remembrance, to the utopian possibilities of determination, meaningful action, communal purpose, and happiness—the constituents of a sociality that has since, to all appearances, become lost."[34] Furthermore, Da Ming's return to 'father' and 'communal lifestyle' may be a utopian aspiration in an increasingly commercial urban lifestyle. Through this depiction of a cultural return to the father, the filmmaker seeks to fix this discontinuity between socialism and postsocialism.

Compared to the destruction of the old public bathhouse in *Shower*, *24 City*—documenting nine workers, five of whom were real workers at Factory 420, while four are fictional characters played by actors—mainly depicts the demolition of old buildings at Factory 420. It is a film about state-owned enterprises—set in Chengdu, Sichuan province, that was once home to over 20,000 workers—and the transformation of Chinese society from a planned economy to a market economy, as well as the sufferings of workers during the era of socialism.[35] Factory 420 was a military factory which manufactured aeroplanes for the state in Shenyang, a city in northern China. In 1958, Factory 420 is relocated to Chengdu based on the policy that important military enterprises should be moved to the inner cities to support local economic development in the background of the Cold War. After the reform of state-owned enterprises in the 1980s and 1990s, Factory 420 then begins to manufacture appliances such as televisions and fridges. However, it fails to transform its structure, and the original factory is purchased by a real estate company China Resources and pulled down to make way for the buildings of luxury flats: 24 City.

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[34] Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), 71-72.

[35] Huashan Bai & Lian Duan, "*24 City*: The Interweave of the Real Life and the Real Art," *Social Outlook*, 2009:09, 70-71.

The film is structured around nine interviews with people who are either factory workers or their family members. One interview narrates that female protagonist Da Li's child was lost in the removal of Factory 420 from Shenyang to Chengdu in 1958. Although she expresses her regret and sadness, there is no resentment towards the state. Hou Lijun relates her experiences of working at Factory 420 for many years, of having no chance to return to Shenyang, and being laid-off and re-employed after the reform of state-owned enterprises. To some extent, the nine interviews shape a historical and contemporary context for the condition of workers at Factory 420. Through their individual and incomplete narratives, the trajectory of Factory 420 from thriving to a fading business and community is presented. Furthermore, some historical events behind this transformation are shown, such as how the state prepared for war in the period of the 1950s; the class struggle that was launched in the Cultural Revolution; the battle of the Sino-Vietnamese War that took place in the late 1970s; the reforms of state-owned enterprises and the housing system that began in the 1980s. Out of these events, we are shown the transformation of China's economic system from planned-economy to market economy. Therefore, the transformation of Factory 420 is both about the destiny of the working class in this factory and a representation of the Chinese economic and political transformation over several decades.

The film *24 City* is built by nine stories which record, reflect on, and construct a situation about the working class, who not only worked at Factory 420 but also at other industrial placements in China. In 'traditional' Chinese culture, the number nine means 'whole'. For example, the nine states (九州, *jiuzhou*) is a poetic name for China. Jia remarks that the nine narratives together in this film form a group, which brings a completed feeling about Factory 420 and depicts an ultimate story of state-owned enterprise reform.[36] Thus, nine narratives have an

[36] Zhangke Jia & Jianghe Ouyang, "the Filmmaker of Poet of Interpreting China-dialogue with Jia Zhangke about *24 City*," *21st Century Business Herald*, 2008:38, 2.

intense symbolic function, presenting the transformation from collective socialism to individualist and commercialist postsocialism. The individual nostalgia about socialist factory lives becomes a form used to retain and construct collective memories. Jia is good at depicting people from the bottom of society to engage with social issues in the context of social transformation. In his early films, *Xiaowu* (1998), *Platform* (2000), and *Still Life* (2006), most of the protagonists are people who live at the bottom of a changing society. In *24 City*, the demolition of the old factory and construction of new residential buildings is presented through a group of small figures perceived as 'owners' of socialist China who are now becoming outcasts in the context of state-owned enterprises reform. Once this group of workers was a glorious class in the era of Mao, but they have now fallen into redundancy due to the state's market economic reforms. Most of the workers depicted in the film feel honoured to have been a part of Factory 420, even though they have been abandoned by the state and have had to sacrifice a lot.

As highlighted above, socialist China ruled that the working class were the owners of the country, in order to mobilise their enthusiasm and develop the economy. For example, oil worker Wang Jinxi was praised and showcased as a model worker by the Chinese government because he had worked hard to extract oil during the 1950s and 1960s. However, pride in being the owners of the country was gradually eliminated by state-owned enterprise reform. After the reform, capital and technology became central, and the working class lost their value, seen rather as a cheap labour force, a primitive method of productivity, and even an encumbrance on society.

In the process of representing the changing status of the working class, collective, national, historical, political, and economic changes are also revealed. Maurice Halbwachs divides memory into individual and collective memory. He suggests that "there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the extent that our thought places itself in these frameworks that

it is capable of the action of recollection".[37] In *24 City*, individual memory and collective memory are closely integrated. Interviewees' adherence to socialism and their yearning for a comfortable lifestyle, as an individual memory, are integrated with the collective recollection of China during the transformation from socialism to postsocialism. When the working class are discarded by the new industrial system, their imprinted image of owners of the country may also be reconstructed by a new official discourse within a changing society. In this context, a new individual and collective memory, of these people as a discarded working class, may appear. Through this transformation, *24 City* attempts to make sense of what kinds of influences caused this change from workers being seen as the owners of the country to that of a somewhat backward system of productivity. Thus, the transformation of Factory 420 means the end of the planned-economic system and its substitute residential building, 24 City, representing a new beginning of the market economic system. However, this beginning is full of uncertainty for some people who were once the 'owners' of the country. From nine interviews we can see that the vanishing of old socialist structures has left many people featured in *24 City* with no access to their past. Jia portrays nine workers' dilemmas about two social systems to show that these people are trying to eliminate this confusion and find the meaning of their existence in the context of postsocialist China.

From this perspective, Jia, as one of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers, expresses his critique that the working class, seen as a tool, is used by the Chinese government to stabilise its regime. The people we meet in *24 City* occupy an embarrassing position, where they are seen as inefficient and lazy and therefore, they miss the time of the planned socialist system, in which they felt respected and valued. Indeed, *24 City* exposes the scars of laid-off workers brought about by radical market-orientated reform since the 1990s. After experiencing more

[37] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Francis J, Ditter, Jr and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 38.

than 20 years of marketisation, people have begun to yearn for a stabilised social system. The working class as the 'owners' of the country and with a sense of honour, however, are seen as 'lagging' productivity. *24 City* expresses that many workers became a tool to serve the country and their status has been changed to suit the needs of that country. To consolidate the Party's political legitimacy and the success of the country's economy, the working class must pay a heavy price. From the representation of nine stories, Jia creates a sense of helplessness of the working class in the face of the economic and political movement. Through the identification of this displacement, the transformation of Factory 420 becomes a critical subject in revealing its subjects' destabilised identities and how they have been used by the Chinese government. In this sense, the film exposes the status of the working class, not as an autonomous realm in socialist and postsocialist China, but rather as an economic and social group with important political implications. In this regard, Jia not only urges the Chinese government to focus on this social issue and protect these marginal figures, but also potentially challenges the CCP's authority and its political hegemony.

By drawing on urban demolition, the filmmakers Zhang and Jia express a sense of helplessness in the context of rapidly changing urban environments. For example, at the end of *Shower*, Da Ming seems to recognise the importance of the old community lifestyle and reconciles with his father. However, this may not mean that Da Ming accepts the idea of his father and the old community completely. The conflict between a communal lifestyle and the postsocialist lifestyle is still a source of confusion when thinking about his future. Returning to the past is seemingly not a good way to solve the historical and cultural rupture between a communal lifestyle and postsocialist modernity. Hence, the idealism of the folk and communal lifestyle is not simply a past state of being but something that is actively reconstructed through the representation of postsocialist modernity. Da Ming, as a modern urban resident with an active spirit, is an image of hesitation amid the presentation of urban residents' confusion about the

historical discontinuity. Similarly, the subjects in *24 City* are also suffering this helplessness. Most are facing a situation where there is no way to return, nor a way to yearn for a future.

Such filmmaking is reflective of the cultural and social embarrassment that the Sixth-Generation filmmakers and their peers face. This is because most of them were born later in the Mao era and thus, were not only influenced by Mao's socialist ideology from an early age but also witnessed a rapidly changing social transformation while growing up. Hence, the worldview for some may appear disordered, as they are caught in a confused ideology between a communal lifestyle and a postsocialist one. Demolition in both films is not only an infrastructural construction but also a metaphor that reflects the choice between a communal lifestyle and postsocialist modernity. From this perspective, nostalgia is a characteristic of modernity, as a reaction to the cultural rupture in the context of postsocialist modernity. Both films narrate the folk and communal lifestyle that may not be seen as a self-reaffirming panacea to address this confusion. Rather, it may be seen as an encouragement to reflect on the unstable condition brought about by state-owned enterprise reform. The urban generation filmmakers adopt the changing cityscape in order to engage with a portion of the public's confusion between two kinds of lifestyles, through which they can express their helplessness as a "forsaken generation" and express the political reflection surrounding who should take responsibility for the helpless situation faced by the working class. Braester argues that city and film are more than complementary manifestations of material structure and artistic imagination, and that they play an active role in the imposition of government's power, the formation of communities, the establishment of cultural norms, and the struggle for civil society.[38] That the filmmakers not only portray their

[38] Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

identities as helpless, but also engage with this social issue, is a characteristic of nostalgia in urban film.

3. Documentary Aesthetics: History and Authenticity

The first section has demonstrated how the urban generation filmmakers adopt the subject of urban demolition to express their nostalgia about past socialism and engage with the changing status of the working class in the process of wider social transformation. This section emphasises the filmmakers' use documentary aesthetics in urban films to focus on neglected places and isolated individuals, through which they can create a sense of reality.

In this sense, the documentary form, to a greater extent, has become an important film aesthetic to record and rewrite 'reality' in the urban generation's works. Confronting the ruins of the socialist past and suffering the loss of the 'father', the Forsaken Generation filmmakers left with a sense of loss, pain and even despondency. As Wang suggests, "the doomed incompleteness and brokenness in their (the Sixth-Generation filmmakers) experience produce an intensified reflexive vision on history, reality and the specific contingency and situatedness of their status as postsocialist historical subjects."[39] To some extent, documentary aesthetics meet their artistic criteria through engagement with society. In this process, they also create a new film aesthetic, a "new documentary movement". As Zhang suggests:

> The documentary form is inspiring to find the shape and meaning of a multifaceted social experience in the era of transformation. The documentary method is instrumental in laying bare the oscillation between representation and actuality

[39] Qi Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 50-51.

and in foregrounding the subject-object relation between the filmmaker and his or her subject matter so as to create a more intersubjective or democratic cinema. [40]

In this chapter, both feature films use documentary techniques to record what is happening in the city. Jia and Zhang, as two independent filmmakers (at least in their early careers), express an intense impulse to create a sense of "being on the scene" (现场, *xianchang*). As Luke Robinson suggests, this active reportage provides an aesthetic of presence, which emphasises the physical co-presence of camera and subject during the very moments of collapse, and brings audiences into direct contact with the material world.[41] These film aesthetics provide urban films with a perspective with which to construct a sense of reality and to understand what is happening in Chinese society. Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel also suggest that "the New Documentary Movement in China goes beyond filmmaking and is more fundamentally rooted in its commitment to recording contemporary life in China outside any direct control of the state."[42] Indeed, urban filmmakers see their works as a social practice that opens up new public spaces for the discussion of social dilemmas in the postsocialist era.

In *Shower*, for instance, in the last attempt to keep a memento of local buildings, nostalgia is set at the moment of the demolition of the old city, in which

Figure 2.1: Documentary aesthetics in *Shower*

[40] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 18.

[41] Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 138.

[42] Chris Berry & Lisa Rofel, "Introduction," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: for the Public Record*, edited by Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Pres, 2010),10.

the aged urban residents are encouraged to take a camcorder and chronicle the process of destruction (Figure 2.1). A shaky camera lens shows the existence of urban residents and filmmakers. *Shower*, as a commercial film, takes up the task of home videos, distributes the images of urban change and shows the loss entailed in demolition. The filmmaker Ning Ying, another of the urban generation filmmakers, suggests that the city is changing too rapidly for her to establish a stable relationship. Old buildings are razed, and new ones are built overnight. In the absence of familiar landmarks, her memories are unanchored. Beijing is no longer her hometown. All that remains is the record stored by her camera.[43] Ning sees her films as a repository for the urban transformation and document people's lives. *Shower*, produced in the late 1990s, is also tinged with fear for the future, anxiety over the loss of identity, and an urge to preserve images of the neighbourhoods of old Beijing at the moment of their disappearance. To some extent, such rapid urbanisation has been counterbalanced by an increased interest of the urban generation filmmakers in recording and preserving folk and communal lifestyle. The documentary aesthetic has become a cinematic strategy and a social practice, which exhibits a documentary impulse for preserving the city, although it is only in image.

Throughout the story, in which the aged urban residents capture the process of demolition with the camcorder, Zhang expresses that the documentary form, as a kind of film aesthetic, is adopted to engage with urban change. Further, the process of the media as a witness to events is also presented through the interactions of two separate practices: the first one is the appearance of a witness through a camcorder held by urban residents; and the filmmakers as witnesses themselves. These techniques are called witnessing [memory] in the media and witnessed [memory] through the media, respectively. However, both are a cultural investment in the construction of 'witnessing'. The extent to which they

[43] Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 225.

are telling us the truth through this witnessing may be questioned. In response, Andreas Huyssen identifies with the term "representation" to understand it and argues:

> *Re*-presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. [44]

Representation is a result of a continuous memorial reconfiguration and construction. This notion might be extended, and the claim made that a visual medium is (in part) the art of the representation of the memory. Furthermore, the memorial representation may become a testimony that is adopted by some scholars to critique the tendency that nostalgia is sentimental and unhistorical.[45] In other words, indeed, memory is always in the process of construction and reconstruction. Here, nostalgia has been understood as a form of sentimentality, longing, narcissism, and melancholia, which may dispel history and see it only as discursive imagination, especially for some elites who adopt the past to disclose 'authentic origin'. Based on these debates, this chapter emphasises that nostalgia is understood as a form of cultural construction, in response to which, Marita Sturken suggests that construction is an essential characteristic of cultural memory that is distinct from history.[46] What the camcorder (or documentary form) is doing may be perceived as a cultural construction of urban demolition rather than a replica of an experience. The setting of the camcorder is far away from a discussion of the 'original event', accuracy or authenticity of mnemonic

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[44] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London, 1995), 2-3.

[45] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 11.

[46] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley; London, 1997), 4.

retrieval, rather it focuses more on investigating how urban film chronicles urban transformation in a specific social context.

Therefore, the documentary aesthetic in urban film becomes a social practice that engages with social issues, such as the declining status of the working class. If the challenge in the films of "educated youth", discussed in the first chapter, is a resistance to the CCP's hegemony in the Cultural Revolution, then the documentary aesthetic is a platform for urban filmmakers to engage with issues of state-owned enterprises reform and the declining status of the working class. From this critical stance, urban filmmakers have also been seen as an independent new generation.

In *24 City*, Jia uses documentary aesthetics to present a transformation of socialist state-owned enterprise in the period of postsocialism. This feature film focuses on how different generations of workers at Factory 420 evaluate and present their past in the context of postsocialist China, rather than on exactly what happened at this factory. Compared to Zhang's scenario of using a camcorder to chronicle urban transformation, Jia extends documentary aesthetics to reflect a deeper interpretation of how to understand both fiction and reality. *24 City* is a feature film that documents nine workers, five of whom were real workers at Factory 420, while four are fictional characters played by actors. For example, actress Joan Chen, plays a woman called Gu Minhua in this film. Gu Minhua tells the audiences that her experiences are similar to the eponymous female protagonist of the film *Xiao Hua* (1979), a role also played by Joan Chen. In this instance, Chen, as an actress, integrates a story that happened to another female protagonist in an old film set in *24 City*. Although Chen's performance indicates that Gu Minhua's story may not be real, this metaphor represents the real existence of workers at Factory 420. The other fictional narratives shoulder a similar function. For example, Su Na, as the daughter of an older generation of workers at Factory 420, represents a conflict between the post-1980s generation

and their parents. Su Na feels regret about her parents' ideology that working at Factory 420 is honourable.

Through presenting nine characters' images, the film depicts China's society experiencing a transformation from collectivism to individualism, from the public to the private ownership of property, and from socialism to postsocialism. Thus, individual stories are integrated with social transformation. Some of the interviewees' words may be not narrated exactly according to their own experiences, but they are re-enacted based on the experiences of people like them. These stories span nearly three generations, across 40 years. During this period, the rise and fall of state-owned enterprises and the openness of Chinese people's minds are presented through four real narratives and five fictional stories. Sebastian Veg suggests that though Jia's "reality" is different from actual reality, the fictional narratives also act as a bridge to reality.[47] In other words, these blurred lines between fiction and reality create a kind of augmented reality that enables the film to present a universal experience. Luke Robinson further suggests that "in *24 City*, the actor is ordinary people, and history itself appears almost as a form of performance. Off-camera interjections are thus one of a panoply of techniques used to blur boundaries between reality and fiction, with the consequence that only a contextual understanding can help even an engaged viewer distinguish between the two".[48] Moreover, the film narrates the history of Factory 420, and the destiny of ordinary people between 1958 and 2008, to present an individual's life and a collective history. It does not provide historical facts, but instead shows a possible historical experience that includes elements of reality, while, at the same time, constructing a new one.

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[47] Sebastian Veg, "From Documentary to Fiction and Back: Reality and Contingency in Wang Bing's and Jia Zhangke's films," *China Perspectives*, 2007: 3, 58-64.

[48] Luke Robinson, *Independent Chinese Documentary: From the Studio to the Street* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 138-154.

This aesthetic pursuit reveals that some new documentary films do not simply reflect reality, but further question the 'truth' that is manifested. As Jia suggests, "history in this film is comprised of truth and image, and *24 City* is a story about loss which may not be seen again in reality".[49] In *24 City*, the fictional segments that are represented through documentary aesthetics are essential for making sense of the complex period between 1958 and 2008. Hence, *24 City* contributes to an experiment by which the narratives of fiction and constructed reality may cooperate in creating a lived space and imagined historical time. Jia's camera records a group of people who may disappear in the postsocialist economic reform. As Jia suggests, he seeks to "face the truth, even if it contains some deepening weakness of our human nature…We are considerate to others so that people can communicate with each other in the age of waning faith. We have respect for individual life. We focus on the human condition, through which to engage with the social condition."[50] Through the use of documentary aesthetics and a combination of authentic and fictional narratives, *24 City* presents a lived social transformation.

In this way, the fictional narrative does not reduce the sense of authenticity, but rather emphasises the existence of 'reality'. As Achim Saupe suggests, "this desire for historical authenticity and past 'reality' goes hand in hand with an attachment to "tradition" and a longing to experience history 'first hand' […] Ultimately, this is all bound up with a desire for things regarded as "genuine", with a wish to reconstruct and preserve the "true" and "original".[51] Similarly, the fictional narratives in *24 City* present another way of witnessing historical events; one that replenishes and enriches the recognition of historical authenticity. These fictional narratives may not have happened historically, but they inspire a

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[49] Zhangke Jia, *Jiaxiang 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke's Film Guide* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 249.

[50] Zhangke Jia, *Jiaxiang 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke's Film Guide* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 18-9.

[51] Achim Saupe, "Good old things: Nostalgia and the Discourse of Historical Authenticity," the abstract in the conference: "Nostalgia: Historicising the Longing for the Past," 1 October 2015, https://nost.hypotheses.org/abstracts.

heuristic consciousness in that historical accounts in urban films may be used to make sense of different conceptions of the past. Nostalgia for the socialist period may also present different longings. For example, some are searching for enthusiasm and passion, and others for an ordinary, simple communal life. These diverse nostalgias also carry different functions; some are keeping a critical stance for the CCP's depressing discourse and some are enjoying the postsocialist commodities. These different nostalgias are embedded in the documentary aesthetics of the urban filmmakers and indicate divergent imaginations of Chinese modernity. There is, therefore, no need to assess these constructed memories by the same standards as the written work, but rather by seeing this kind of past as enriching the recognition of the historical events.

This setting also reminds the audience of the existence of filmmakers. The camera and the filmmaker Jia—in the sense of "being on the scene"—are also performers who sometimes jump out of the film and remind the audience that this 'reality' is constructed. Many of Jia's films pay more attention to individual feelings and the unique circumstances of ordinary people. This may be a reflection of Jia's understanding of artistic authenticity. He produced *24 City* in the form of documentary aesthetics and presents 'reality' in the form of authentic and fictional narratives, through which he builds his film world about normal people's problems when faced with the transformation of time and society. This form of filmmaking produces an epic narrative of people's spiritual change, tracking the transformation of socialist China. His films are effective at recreating the chaos, confusion and ambiguity of real life itself, which he then uses to investigate society in present-day China. Jason McGrath suggests that rather than professing to show an ideological truth that underlies apparent reality, it[*24 City*] seeks to reveal a raw, underlying reality by stripping away the ideological representations that distort it.[52] Thus, Jia's film is making meaning rather than

[52] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 132.

being an act of mimesis or providing a copy of 'reality', which can be understood as an aesthetic construction of 'reality'. In this aesthetic reality, the 'traditional' (socialist) order is challenged and eroded by the process of social transformation and the groups shielded in this changing society, for example, the former workers at Factory 420, are exposed as well. In this way, *24 City* finds the means to rewrite modern China's history, and to capture a sense of 'deep reality' of the world.

The discussion of documentary aesthetics in both of these films thereafter raises debate about how filmmakers adjust the original intention of filmmaking when it differs from historical authenticity. Jia suggests that he holds a critical consciousness of the old Factory 420 and the socialist system, as many people paid a heavy price for this administration.[53] Hence, he chooses interviewees who have a commonsense moment, such as heartrending memories about that period. However, with the deepening of his investigations, Jia realises that his intention to criticise the socialist system must change, as many workers do not complain about the factory and old system; rather they express a desire to maintain the socialist system.[54] Therefore, the interviewees do not form a consensus of the past, and some workers even have a sense of adherence to the original faith of their youth and the harbouring of socialism. This altered purpose in the filmmaking shows that the filmmaker's nostalgia and his own intentions must be negotiated through the intense endeavour to search for the historical authenticity. The former socialist workers, once seen as the owners of the country, are constructed in the new image of backward productivity, to be replaced by more efficient production in the context of the reform of state-owned enterprise. From this perspective, some workers' nostalgia about their past glorious status does not weaken the filmmaker's criticism of the socialist system but makes the images of socialism and the working class more real.

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[53] Zhangke Jia, *Jiaxiang 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke's Film Guide* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 6.

[54] Zhangke Jia, "Unsafety film: Jia Zhangke Discusses 24 City," *Southern Weekend*, 2009:5(3), 20.

The discussion in this section not only gives a visual form of city space but also presents individuals feelings about urban development. By chronicling the declining status of the working class and the demolition of the old city, Zhang and Jia's films, to some extent, resist the abandonment of the urban past, by which a new history about the working class may be rewritten. *Shower* and *24 City* both use the theme of urban demolition to focus on changes in society and the working class. But a comparison of the two films also reveals some differences. For example, Zhang's *Shower* cooperates with the mainstream social project of building a prosperous China in the 1990s. The film potentially endorses postsocialist urbanisation and the change from an urban culture, although Zhang also expresses a sense of puzzlement about the future. Jia's *24 City* focuses on the influence of a changing society in the context of the reform of state-owned enterprise. The film reminds us that people who worked in the past socialist system should not be forgotten by the country in postsocialist China.

Inspired by documentary aesthetics in Zhang and Jia's films, this section suggests that urban generation filmmakers Zhang and Jia search for effective ways of engaging with urban environments and the problematic situation of socialist workers under the background of the state-owned enterprise. Through this process, urban films focus on the changing status of socialist workers and potentially expressing some workers' problems due to their changing status from the owners of socialist China to the undeveloped productivity of postsocialist China. Documentary aesthetics becomes a means of exploring new forms of realist expression and political criticism during the period of postsocialist reform, and filmmakers further construct their group identity as activists to engage with urban transformation.

4. Reflective/Restorative Nostalgia

This chapter has so far focused on metaphor of demolition and documentary aesthetics. This section refocuses on nostalgia itself from the perspectives of

reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia, to present a more comprehensive picture of socialist memorial types in the context of postsocialist urbanisation.

When she investigates Russian culture after the fall of the Soviet Union, Svetlana Boym breaks nostalgia down into two classifications: restorative and reflective. To some extent, restorative nostalgia tends to be conservative in that it aspires to a homogeneous whole, while reflective nostalgia is potentially creative and productive. Boym further emphasises that both types of nostalgia as contemporary cultural styles cannot be completely separated and often mediate between the poles of yearning for and displacing home.

The presentation of nostalgia in Zhang's *Shower* may be understood as a kind of reflective nostalgia. The difference between Da Ming and his father (Lao Liu) may be perceived as two kinds of lifestyle: socialism and postsocialism. As aforementioned, Lao Liu owns an old, traditional bathhouse and works as a social director, marriage counsellor, and dispute mediator for his customers. Da Ming represents the modern urban life that is situated in booming southern China. He is, however, perplexed by the two worlds when he communicates with Lao Liu and his little brother Er Ming. To some extent, Da Ming's puzzlement may be interpreted as a kind of discontinuity between the socialist communal past and postsocialist present urban life, which is seen as a radical break, a shift from a party-centred public life to an individual-centred consumerist ethos. The rupture between a remembered collective past and an individual present seems entirely unbridgeable. Thus, Da Ming is not only fraught with experiences of fragmentation and anxiety, but also embracing new desires and identities. He does not proactively accept Lao Liu's communal lifestyle. Although Lao Liu and Da Ming try to reconcile their relationship, the intimate family bond cannot bridge this discontinuity. Da Ming still feels a dilemma about his perplexing future and inaccessible past. Indeed, filmmaker Zhang does not think that socialist style, as a kind of nostalgia, is able to address postsocialist spiritual confusion. Essentially, *Shower* is about how to deal with conflicting lifestyles of socialism

and postsocialism. The presence of the public bathhouse reminds the audience that the socialist past was a time of disruption, destruction and trauma. The representation of this past, in turn, becomes an important temporal resource to express another sense of 'suffering' and 'victimhood' in China's postsocialism of the present.

Here, the communal bathhouse for Da Ming is not a place to which he wants to return. He feels nostalgic and develops a particular kind of diasporic intimacy, as Boym suggests, which is an aesthetic of estrangement and longing.[55] This transitory experience of communal life may arouse his memories of other outmoded objects and make him yearn for a community of close friends. However, it does not mean that he considers coming back 'home' permanently. This mental condition allows him and others of this young urban generation to temporarily dream of their escape, while living in the 'reality' of modern cities. Gediminas Lankauskas further suggests that such reminiscences towards relatively recent socialist history are not about a yearning to return to and be at "home" but instead externalise socialism as a time of existential homelessness.[56] This historical and political displacement may become a permanent fracture. It seems that the remembering of socialism is not related to the yearning for return, but, paradoxically, is opposite. The nostalgia in the film *Shower* looks backwards to find whatever might soothe the soul and give the mind a sense of peace in the present. This discontinuity makes the film become a more reflective rather than restorative nostalgic film.

Compared to the reflective nostalgia in *Shower,* nostalgia in *24 City* can be seen as restorative, which invokes memories of the past to create a sense of continuity and to connect memory between socialism and postsocialism. The period of Factory 420 can be divided into two eras: socialism (1958-78) and

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[55] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.

[56] Gediminas Lankauskas, "Missing Socialism Again? The Malaise of Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Lithuania," in *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, edited by Olivia Angé and David Berliner (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 40.

postsocialism (1979-2008). This film tries to eliminate a gap between the two eras and build a sense of continuity rather than a jarring disjuncture between the recent communist past and a consumerist present.[57] In the film *24 City*, Jia constructs restorative nostalgia in three ways.

First, each interviewee's memory presents one example of nostalgia. For example, when a middle-aged man visits his former mentor, who is now elderly, the scene expresses feelings of respect and appreciation for the first-generation workers who have dedicated their whole life to the country since the 1950s. Many first-generation workers brought their family to Chengdu with the relocation of the Factory 420. They were once seen as the owners of the country and were envied by many people but are now retired from the Factory 420. They reluctantly see the changing situation of the working class, who descended in status from that of owners to an undeveloped means of productivity. In the narrative of the second generation of workers, a female worker Gu Minhua, who is proud of her beauty when she is young, is now nearing 45 years old. She does not get married, expressing that she has the confidence to wait for the right man. From her interview, we witness her complex feelings of pride, regret, contradiction, insistence, and even hate about the past and present time. The transformation of Factory 420 over the past 50 years is revealed through these interviews. At the end of the film, there is an interview with a third-generation worker of the Factory 420, Su Na, who is 26 years old and now manages her own business as a purchasing agent rather than working at Factory 420. She expresses an optimistic attitude about her future but feels puzzled about her parents' remaining as employees of Factory 420.

The film follows the memories of three generations of workers in Chengdu (in the 1950s, the 1970s, and the present) to express the changing experience for individuals, the factory, and the whole country. In the other interviews, for

[57] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000),190.

instance, Hou Lijun has lost her work as a result of state-owned enterprise reform since the early 1990s and now receives a subsidy of only 200RMB per month. Da Li loses her son in 1958 when the military Factory 420 moves to Chengdu and she, as a soldier, has to give up looking for her child in order to fulfil her job. Through these interviews, the situation of three generations of people who either worked or lived at Factory 420 is laid out, constructing a connection between socialism and postsocialism.

Second, the filmmaker includes one poem at the end of every interview, which is another form of restorative nostalgia in the film. For example, when Song Weidong stands at the playground with his basketball and watches the camera silently after finishing his interview, William Butler Yeats's poem *The Coming of Wisdom with Time* emerges on the screen: "though leaves are many, the root is one. Through all the lying days of my youth, I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun; now I may wither into the truth".[58] Song, as a second-generation worker, experiences the journey from prosperity to the fading of the factory. His experience is like the flower in Yeats's poem, which enjoys its youth and is now waiting for its death. In another interview, Gu Minhua tells of her experience as the most beautiful woman of the factory in the 1960s and 1970s. Cao Xueqin's poem is used to express Gu's sadness: "it is quite nerve-racking for I like spring and feel sad when it is leaving."[59] This poem represents a sense of contradiction when a once-beautiful woman touches the flowing of time and worries about her future. Herein, the film's narrative and Cao's poem construct a sad and beautiful image of the interviewee Gu Minhua as being moved by the time while feeling helpless in a rapidly changing period. The filmmaker Jia subtly integrates the poem with the destiny of the interviewee, a subtle form through which the film creates a nostalgic feeling. Ouyang comments that Jia is a poet, who uses the film

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[58] William Butler Yeats, *W.B, Yeats*: *A Critical Edition of the Major Works* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 43.

[59] Cao Xueqin is a writer and poet in the Qing Dynasty. This poem comes from his novel *A Dream in Red Mansions* and is translated by the author of this chapter from Chinese-language sources: 怪侬底事倍伤神? 半为怜春半恼春 (*guai nong di shi bei shangshen, ban wei lianchun ban naochun*).

to present an accurate representation of the world.[60] Moreover, the poems in the film cooperate with documentary aesthetics to create a flexible world that shows individual and collective feelings of yearning, desire, and regret about the changing times.

Third, the filmmaker Jia uses the soundtrack, as a kind of film language, to elevate each story, which deploys the musical memory about the past and is an important aesthetic strategy to construct restorative nostalgia. The soundtrack in *24 City* is linked to each narrative and also suggests a conclusion to each interviewee's story, which has a similar function to that of the poem. When interviewing a post-1970s reporter of Chengdu television station who grew up at Factory 420, the music *Outside World* (1987), sung by famous Taiwanese singer Qi Qin is played. It tells the listener: "a long time ago, you owned me and I owned you. Then, someday, you leave me for your dream". The lyrics echo the experience of the 1970s generation striving for their dreams whilst feeling hesitant about their future. Herein, Qi's pop music plays an active role in the construction of the reporter's narrative through its melancholy soundtrack, which creates a relationship between sound and image to represent this generation. As Philip Drake suggests, the work of a soundtrack is to connect with the memorialised knowledge to establish retro feelings of the period. The soundtrack takes on a symbolic function in establishing relationships between characters and their nostalgia.[61] In this sense, the soundtrack cooperates with other areas of film language to evoke an associational structure of feeling for the people who may also have had a similar experience.

The successive time of socialism and postsocialism unfolds through the configuration of nine interviews, nine poems, and nine soundtracks to make up

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[60] Yan Lv, "From Jia Zhangke's film 24 City to Discuss the Possibility Marriage between Film and Poetry," *Movie Review*, 2009:23(27), 2.

[61] Philp Drake, "'Mortgaged to music': New Retro Movies in 1990s Hollywood Cinema," in *Memory and Popular Film*, edited by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 193-5.

24 City. Chialan Sharon Wang claims that "instead of presenting ruptures and disorientation of drastic changes marked by demolition, displacement, and breakups of human relationships, the story about the relocation of Factory 420 seems to be a project of producing a palpable past buried in history."[62] Indeed, the nine stories in the film emphasise a connection between socialist past and postsocialist present, rather than a division between the communist past and consumerist present. This aesthetic construction creates restorative nostalgia (To some extent, the nostalgia for the idyllic countryside discussed in the first chapter may also be read as a kind of restorative nostalgia.). Thus, Jia's *24 City* shows a sense of restorative nostalgia to engage with the chaotic urban environment in postsocialist China.

Reflective and restorative nostalgia overlap in both films discussed in this chapter. Although reflective nostalgia dwells on an ambivalence of human longing and belonging, and does not shy away from the contradiction of modernity, it sometimes shows a sense of consciousness of returning to an original place. In *Shower*, the father character Lao Liu is representative of the traditional Beijing community. Da Ming tries to understand his father and community life, which may be seen as a return to a folk and communal lifestyle, although Da Ming still feels confused about the past time. Additionally, two plotlines that depict water can further be understood as a kind of representation to express restorative nostalgia (Figure 2.2). The two inserted sequences take the audience first to the Loess Plateau, which shares a cultural code with the Fifth- Generation filmmaker Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984). This sequence reveals an active connection with former filmmakers and their film aesthetics of "national allegory".[63] The

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[62] Chialan Sharon Wang, "Confronting the Real, Construing Reality: Artistic Vision and Gaze in Jia Zhangke's 24 City," *Concentric,* 2013:39(1), 97-118.

[63] Jameson's definition of the "third-world" national allegory is that "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society." In a national allegory, the personal is the national. Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 1986:15, 69.

second scene with water brings the audience to a Tibetan holy lake. The water is metaphorically referred to as a cultural soul, which baptises and purifies people,

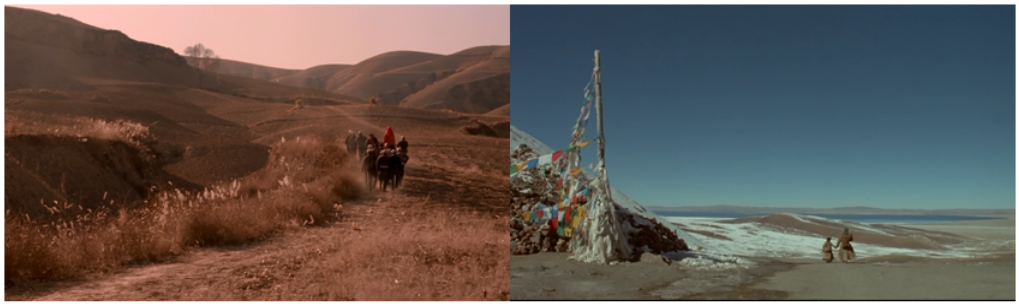

Figure 2.2: Loess Plateau and Tibetan Holy Lake in *Shower*

as discussed in the first chapter. Hence, the two allegories of water may be perceived as a return to former generation filmmakers' aesthetics, which can be understood as a kind of restorative nostalgia not only about the mundane lifestyle depicted but also addressing the work of former filmmakers.

24 City offers a similar connection between restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. For instance, some younger workers express their helplessness and disappointment when facing the transformation of Factory 420. When a woman of the third-generation of the factory's workers talks about her memories and her parents' faith about Factory 420, her conflicting ideas about the past and the desire and yearning for the future may not be interpreted as restorative nostalgia for socialism. However, they are very similar to the protagonist Da Ming's feeling in the film *Shower*. Further, the influences of state-owned enterprise reform continually remind the audience of the rupture between socialism and postsocialism. This sense of discontinuity can potentially be seen as a kind of reflective nostalgia.

Through comparison, restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia do provide a useful schema for identifying people's complex feelings about socialism and postsocialism in Chinese urban films since the 1990s. Reflective nostalgia mainly constructs a different time and place to inhabit, while restorative nostalgia constructs a link between socialism and postsocialism. The mood of hate, critique, and yearning for a communist past is integrated with feelings of

desire and anxiety about a postsocialist lifestyle. It is similar to the position of the "forsaken generation" (or the Sixth-Generation) of filmmakers who are seen as independent. Their peculiar involvement with the past shapes their relationship to the present into something that is characterised by interruption and breakage, rather than a smooth, integral, and solid transition. These characteristics also cause urban generation filmmakers to choose documentary aesthetics to rewrite socialist content in the context of postsocialist China. From the overall style of both films, Zhang and Jia use the documentary aesthetic to engage with Chinese urban issues, but Zhang's film *Shower* presents as a warm atmosphere, while Jia's film *24 City* delivers a colder tone. Both styles use different aesthetics and have a diverse understanding of the postsocialist condition, but it is these differences that ultimately construct a more comprehensive understanding of urban transformation in the context of postsocialist China.

Further to this, by comparing nostalgias in Chapters 1 and 2, some differences and similarities can be found. The "educated youth" generation's idyllic countryside locations have reconstructed the past with a collective guilt image, while the Sixth-Generation filmmakers focus on idiosyncratic and marginal individuals in an urban environment. If "youth without regret" or "guilt" is, to some extent, generational impressions of the "educated youth", then, it is images of irony, helplessness, and a retrospective mood that depicts the young urban generation, when China's cities were experiencing intense changes. Regardless of national allegories or a more personalised approach to representing the past, the nostalgic cultures are paralleled with the privatisation and marketisation process in China. In this transformation, the remembrance of socialism has turned into a powerful moral and social critique of the present, revealing the history of the market economy and society, and exposing people's psychological and economic aspirations, egalitarianism, and social justice. [64] In

[64] Ching Kwan Lee, "What Was Socialism to Chinese Workers? Collective Memories and Labor Politics in an Age of Reform," in *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in*

addition, the transition from state socialism to market socialism has brought undeniable material progress. However, neither system is perfect. The progress of the economy may be paid for by palpable social discontinuity. Therefore, historical representations on screen have an important impact of coding the past by remembering, forgetting and imagining. These representations thus form a significant arena where different discourses interpret the Cultural Revolution, state-owned enterprise reform, and other policies initiated by the Chinese government. The result is that a new or updated social image is constructed to explain what has happened and what is happening in China.

Conclusion

Shower and *24 City* present the city as a battleground to give voice to the urban generation filmmakers and the people, such as small business owners and local urban residents who grew up in the cities and lived among the lower levels of society. Both films map out urban memories, expose material wounds and present the changing status of the working class, which may be seen as a kind of nostalgic recall of a communal lifestyle. In both films, the past is both heart-warming and crude, the present is both prosperous and confused, the future is both bright and ambivalent; all of which occurred in a historical background of social transformation from socialism to postsocialism.

In this regard, restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia create a historical authenticity and a sense of being in the Sixth-Generation filmmakers' works. Restorative nostalgia aims to search for a lost home, which is evident when workers in *24 City* are compelled to leave their native towns. Then, Factory 420 becomes a promise of a new home for them under socialism. As Wu Shu-chin states, individuals are to participate in the common destiny, in all-embracing

Reform China, edited by Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 163.

structures of community inside of Factory 420. However, it voices the anguish and despair of ordinary people as an effect of politics.[65] In this way, nostalgia has become a contemporary resonance in postsocialist changing cities. Today, this home has disappeared with the advent of postsocialist modernity. China's economic neoliberalism has created new social spaces and new cultures for the young urban generation. The overall message of both *Shower* and *24 City* "signals an awareness of both the failures of the Maoist era and the rise of 'desperate individualisms' in postsocialist China".[66] Finally, both Lao Liu in *Shower* and other workers in *24 City* feel worried about their declining status from the owners of the country to a backward system of productivity in postsocialist China. In this situation, the sense of helplessness becomes a resource that admits the legality of the expansion of capitalism in the context of postsocialist neoliberalism in today's China.

This chapter has addressed broader themes such as urban circumstance, history writing, traumatic memory, and globalisation. Urban generation filmmakers use documentary aesthetics to identify themselves as an independent but "forsaken generation". Their films act as agents that engage with postsocialist issues for different generations, especially for the working class in socialist factories of the past. The documentary aesthetics provide filmmakers with a flexible platform with which to engage a shared historical moment and produces a thoughtful approach to investigate reality and history.

Overall, urban generation filmmakers present two types of different but related nostalgias to investigate urban demolition and social transformation and rewrite the past for the future. The deepening marketisation and globalisation have reignited and intensified the debates about a different version of Chinese modernity. Documentary aesthetics are used to engage with contemporary

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[65] Shu-chin Wu, "Time, History, and Memory in Jia Zhangke's *24 City*," *Film Criticism*, 2001:36(1), 17.

[66] Hsiu-Chuang Deppman, "Reading Docufiction: Jia Zhangke's 24 City," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 2014:8(3), 260.

individuals' (including the filmmakers themselves) dilemma, caught between socialism and postsocialism, and also potentially criticise the Chinese government's hegemonic politics. The decline of the working class and the widening gap between the urban and rural, together with people's disillusions with capitalist modernity has incubated the rising nostalgia for the communal past. In postsocialist China, where the grand narratives of socialism and modernity have broken down, Chinese modernities are evinced in personal memories and narratives.

Chapter 3: Youth Nostalgia on Chinese Screen: *So Young* (2013) and *With You* (2016)

This chapter examines nostalgic screen culture through analysing the youth film *So Young* (2013) and Internet drama *With You* (2016) in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics", which aims to produce rational, industrial, commercial, and artistic screen media. Both of the selected two youth screen media examples present nostalgic cultures in relation to the innocent lives of university and school students in the late 1990s and early 2000s. By using Paul Grainge's definition of nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode,[1] a sense of generational yearning in response to life anxiety targeted at those born after 1980 and a form of affective consumption presented through music, posters, food and clothes are identified respectively. Through the presentation of nostalgic culture, the characteristics of youth screen media—homogeneous scenarios; an uncritical historical stance; the adoption of advanced digital technology; and a dynamic balance between market, political discourse, and film aesthetics—are discussed in this chapter. Thereafter, by presenting this specific nostalgic culture, this chapter argues that nostalgia in youth screen media not only engages with specific anxieties and attracts the youth screen market through adjusting strategies of filmmaking, but also shows a closer relationship with the Chinese government's political gains since 2010.

1. Nostalgia in Chinese Youth Media Since 2010

China's accession to the WTO significantly accelerated the integration of the screen industry with global capitalism. Many transnational media corporations extended the scope and depth of their penetration into China's screen market. Furthermore, Chinese domestic officials and private media corporations used

[1] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 24-35.

policies of the WTO to pursue their own interests.[2] Consequently, China's screen industry achieved rapid growth. In 2012, China's film box office made $2.7 billion, surpassing Japan's $2.4 billion, to become the second largest film market in the world.[3] In February 2012, China and the USA signed an agreement which gave permission for a larger quota of imported blockbusters (from 20 films to 34 films) to be released in China's film market.[4] Further, since the early 2010s, there has been much more cooperation with Western media giants in the ways that China invests capital, in exchange for which Hollywood provides scriptwriters, actors, and other creatives to produce a series of high-budget cinema blockbusters with vastly differing degrees of "Chinese characteristics".[5] Films, such as *Iron Man 3* (2013), *Transformers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Kung Fu Panda 3* (2016), *Warcraft* (2016), and *The Great Wall* (2016), were produced in this way. Through international cooperation, Chinese film companies gained access to the world's largest cinema market, as well as to advanced technologies in filmmaking and post-production, and, further, enabled positive images of China to be incorporated into these popular films. In this post-2010 context, China's film industry made great progress and even began to compete with Hollywood.

Within this process, advanced digital technology, in particular, has become an important factor in stimulating screen media creation, promotion, broadcasting and cultural construction. For example, China's social media, such as QQ, Weibo and WeChat have provided opportunities for Chinese people to connect easily in the age of instant communication when Facebook, Twitter and

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[2] Kevin Voigt, "China Firm Buys AMC to form World's Largest Cinema Chain," *Cable News Network*, 21 May 2012, https://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/21/business/china-amc-wanda-theater/index.html.

[3] Michael Cieply, "China Overtaking Japan as the World's Second-largest Film Market," *New York Times*, 22 March 2013, https://cn.nytimes.com/business/20130322/c22box/.

[4] "The Analysis of the Changes in Chinese Film Industry Led by New Film Policy between China and the United States", *China Industry Research*, 25 February 2012, http://www.cir.cn/ZiXun/2012-02/2012NianZhongMeiDianYingXinZhengDaoZhiZhongGuoYingYeBianJ.html.

[5] Michael Keane, "Introduction: Willing Collaborators, the Long Game," in *Willing Collaborators: Foreign Partners in Chinese Media*, edited by Michael Keane, Brian Yecies, and Terry Flew (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 6-7.

other foreign social media were forbidden in China. This aggressive online and digital development further generated many new media formats, such as Internet novels, Internet music, 'Internet big film' (网络大电影, *wangluo dadianying*), and other 'we media' (自媒体, *zi meiti*). Moreover, the introduction of the concept of "Internet plus" by the Chinese government,[6] ushered in a new era of development for China's Internet media. Internet plus changed many traditional screen industries profoundly and promoted their competitiveness, productivity and creativity. For example, when a traditional TV drama is produced and released online, it may further attract more young audiences, especially the netizen generation who watch drama via the Internet. In this context, many Internet dramas have been produced by online media enterprises, such as IQIYI, Youku, and Tencent. From a production perspective, Internet dramas normally have many series like traditional TV drama. They differ in two ways: first, before an Internet drama is produced, it will be analysed by a "big data system".[7] Therefore, the information of the target audience of an Internet drama is more precise than that of a traditional TV programme. Second, this form of release is more diverse, such as one episode per week, two episodes per day, or the release of all the episodes at once. The netizen buying membership has greater access to watch more episodes than those who do not subscribe. Thus, Internet drama and other online videos have become important cultural products. In China's screen industry, the development of digital media has facilitated the convergence of

[6] "Internet plus" is the Internet plus any traditional industry. It refers to the integration, rather than a simple combination, of the Internet and traditional industries through online platforms and information technology. "Guiding Opinions of the State Council on Promoting Internet Plus Action," the Chinese government, 1 July 2015, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-07/04/content_10002.htm.

[7] Big data is a term for data sets that are so large or complex that traditional data processing application software is inadequate to deal with them. Big data challenges include capturing data, data storage, data analysis, search, sharing, transfer, visualization, querying, updating and information privacy. Lately, the term "big data" tends to refer to the use of predictive analytics, user behavior analytics, or certain other advanced data analytics methods that extract value from data, and seldom to a particular size of data set. Nick Couldry & Joseph Turow, "Advertising, Big Data, and the Clearance of the Public Realm: Marketers' New Approaches to the Content Subsidy," *International Journal of Communication*, 2014:8, 1710–1726.

culture, art, business, and technology. In short, stimulated by international cooperation, preferential policies, and advanced digital technology, the Chinese screen industry, in particular film and the Internet, has not only become tangible public media, but further, is seen as an important pillar to promote the development of China's economy.

A new generation of filmmakers and directors with specific styles of filmmaking emerged into this prosperous screen industry from 2010. They consciously adopted Hollywood industrial aesthetics and emphasised the use of a standard and industrial mechanism to produce films and other screen media. However, their works reflected a difference from Hollywood industrial aesthetics in some ways. Xu Zhouchi points out that some films since 2010 show a dynamic balance between Chinese national interest, filmic poetic temperament, and commercial pursuits.[8] In other words, these new filmmakers and directors attempted to give up the critical stance against the CCP's discourse discussed in the first two chapters, but instead adopted an industrial system to cater for the film and other screen media market. Chen Xuguang uses the term of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" to depict the characteristics of the Chinese screen industry since 2010. As Chen suggests, "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" summarises the current situation within the Chinese film industry, which tends to produce a film by adopting a high-quality script, using a suitable film technology, and adhering to a standard process of filmmaking.[9] In short, this filmic principle suggests that filmmaking should not only present the artistic quality, but also demonstrate technical and industrial standards. Furthermore, Chen emphasises that rationality is the first principle in the process of filmmaking, which weakens producers' personal emotion and highlights a rational, standardised, and

[8] Zhouchi Xu, "The Poetic Core and Its Construction of Film Industrial Aesthetics, *Contemporary Cinema*," 2018:06, 112-115.

[9] Xuguang Chen, "Interpretation and construction: 'Industrial Aesthetics' of the Chinese Film in New Period," *Journal of Zhejiang University of Media and Communications*, 2018:25(1), 18-22.

collaborative mechanism.[10] From Chen's description, the term "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" emphasises that filmmaking needs a good script, a technical and industrial operation, and a balance between the film's artistic and commercial goals, and so also sit between institutional and auteurist systems. Overall, it is clear that the principle of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" formed in the context of China's prosperous screen industry and the increasing development of digital technologies. This principle has not only been used in films, but further extended to other screen media, such as Internet dramas since 2010.

"Chinese film industrial aesthetics" is the principle mainly used by the filmmakers and directors who have been identified as "new power" since 2010.[11] The new power filmmakers were usually born in the late 1970s and early 1980s and are therefore younger than the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. Most of the new power group began to produce films and other screen media from 2010 onwards.[12] Influenced by "Chinese film industrial aesthetics", most of these creators have neither the desire to enlighten ordinary people as did the "educated youth" filmmakers, nor feel the dilemma between the box office and film aesthetics, as encountered by the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. They attempt to maintain a good balance between filmmaking, film release, personal film aesthetics, and the box office. In this sense, the producers of "new power" are normally identified as auteurs who live in a mainstream system. To some extent, their works are classified as mainstream commercial screen media.

Many works of the "new power", presenting young people's lives at senior high school and university, which are familiar to the experiences for the post-

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[10] Xuguang Chen, "Interpretation and construction: 'Industrial Aesthetics' of the Chinese Film in New Period," *Journal of Zhejiang University of Media and Communications*, 2018:25(1), 18-22.

[11] Xuguang Chen & Lina Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese 'New Power' Directors and the Principle of 'Aesthetics of Film Industry'", *Film Art*, 2018: 01, 99-105; Xuguang Chen, "Industrial Aesthetics of Chinese Film in the New Era: Interpretation and Construction," *Journal of Zhejiang University of Media and Communications*, 2018:25(01), 18-22.

[12] Xuguang Chen & Lina Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese 'New Power' Directors and the Principle of 'Aesthetics of Film Industry'," *Film Art*, 2018: 01, 99-105.

1980s and post-1990s generation, have gained high box office success since 2010. For example, Xin Yiwu, the scriptwriter of *So Young*, was born in 1981, and its filmmaker Zhao Wei was born in 1976; Bayue Changan, the author of the novel *With You* (2013), was born in 1987. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that both screen media have been influenced by the personal experiences of Zhao and Bayue. Timothy Shary suggests that "films are cultural artefacts revealing much about not only the people who are depicted in them but also those who make and view them."[13] To some extent, these filmmakers and writers integrate the vicarious experiences of their youth into the media they create, through which the 'authors' come into existence inside these screen media. Jin Danyuan also suggests that the reason recent screen media have obtained such high box office success is that these films are made for the audiences of post-1980s and post-1990s, who make up a large percentage of film audiences.[14] In other words, the new power filmmakers and directors may draw on their personal experience to produce youth screen media to grasp the aesthetic needs of current, young mainstream audiences.

This chapter identifies the screen media in which young people's lives are presented as youth screen media. "Youth" is an ambiguous definition when it is applied to the field of screen media. Many scholars have offered different but related understandings about youth in screen media. For example, Daniel Lopez used terms such as "teenage movie", "youth picture", "high school films", "teen-violence films", and "teen comedies", to describe the films that reflect young people's lives.[15] Catherine Driscoll traced the development of portrayals of youth in the early days of cinema and contended that youth, as an important transition

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[13] By Timothy Shary, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 12.

[14] Danyuan Jin, "The reflection on the Narrative of Nostalgia in recent Youth Film," *Literature and Art Studies*, 2015:10, 16-22.

[15] Daniel Lopez, *Films by Genre:775 Categories, Style, Trends, and Movements Defined, with a Filmography for Each* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland and Company, 1993), 331.

to maturity, may constitute a social issue.[16] In the context of Chinese screen media, youth is a wider category. The presentations of young people's lives in Chinese films can be traced back to the early period of the Republic of China (1912-49). At that time, young people's films were normally connected to national liberation. For example, Shen Xiling's *Crossroads* (1937) portrays the growth of young people as a connection to the destiny of the country when they graduate from university.[17] In the period of Mao Zedong (1949-76), youth in films is related to the aspiration of constructing socialist China. For example, *The Song of Youth* (1959) tells the story of two lovers, Lin Daojing and Yu Yongze, who are forced to separate because of their different ideologies with regard to China's revolution. The film praises the greatness of socialism and collectivism and emphasises that young people should put the country first when they search for their dreams. Therefore, liberation and revolution are two common themes in Chinese youth films before 1976.

After the policy of "reform and opening up" initiated in 1978, the theme of the youth film has normally been associated with a critique of the Cultural Revolution and economic market reform. For instance, *Narrow Street* (Yang Yanjin 1981) depicts the story of a woman named Yu, disguised as a man in the period of the Cultural Revolution, and an automobile mechanic called Xia, who is beaten to blindness because he helps Yu recover her identity as a female. *The Mongolian Tale* and *Nuan*, analysed in Chapter 1, may also be seen as youth films, through which the "educated youth" filmmakers critically engage with the Cultural Revolution in the context of China's early economic reform. In the early 1990s, the works of Sixth-Generation filmmakers paid more attention to ordinary individuals, especially people living in the margins of society. The plots, including themes such as sex, rock, vagabondage, drag, death, and eroticism, became the

[16] Catherine Driscoll, *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 1-6.

[17] Zhicheng Wang, Research on the Youth Culture in Movies and TV Dramas of Metropolis Theme Since 1990s, PhD Dissertation, Jilin University, 2015, 85.

main method of expressing their youth, which also caused their early films to be banned in China.

Youth screen media since 2010 have some different characteristics compared to those of the filmmaking generations discussed in earlier chapters. First, youth is portrayed as the period between teenage years and adulthood, a transition from school or university to work life, during which young people ultimately forge an identity for themselves within the social structure in which they were born. Second, youth screen media emerged in the context of the commercialisation and industrialisation of China's screen industry. Their works do not directly endorse the Chinese government's discourse, instead maintaining a dynamic balance between political discourse, film aesthetics, and the film market. Third, from the perspective of the age of youth screen media producers, their audiences (87% aged from 19 to 40),[18] and Internet users (72.1% aged from 10 to 39 years),[19] those of the post-1980s and post-1990s generations are considered to be the main audiences. Therefore, youth screen media since 2010 are normally produced by those born in the late 1970s and aim to attract audiences of those born after 1980.

The film *So Young* (2013) and Internet drama *With You* (2016), which will be discussed in this chapter, are seen as youth media produced in this aforementioned screen industry context. Two reasons underpin the selection of *So Young* and *With You*. First, both express a nostalgic feeling about university and senior school lives respectively, which will be analysed using Paul Grainge's conceptual distinction between nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode. Grainge suggests that "mood" theorists understand nostalgia "as a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some

[18] "China Film Market Influence Research Report 2013-2014," Entgroup, 7 January 2015, http://www.199it.com/archives/320094.html.

[19] "The 40th China Statistical Report on Internet Development," *China Internet Network Information Center*, 4 August 2017, https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201706/P020170608523740585924.pdf.

conceptual 'golden age'",[20] while "mode" theorists are concerned with nostalgia's "stylistic form", "media image" and "retro fashion."[21] Compared to nostalgia mood, nostalgia mode is based not so much on the feared loss of the "golden years" but is connected to the past with a distinct materiality to create a sense of pastness. Second, *So Young* and *With You* not only draw on similar plotlines, such as the narratives of campus life and breaking up with lovers, but also present a changing screen industry influenced by "Chinese film industrial aesthetics".

This chapter will first analyse how nostalgia is constructed as an aesthetic style in the film *So Young* (2013); thereafter the Internet drama *With You* (2016) is investigated from the perspective of nostalgic culture and compared with the youth screen media produced in the early 2010s. In both media, the nostalgic culture is situated at university and in senior high school respectively, which represents a through line to express how nostalgia has been constructed in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" since 2010.

2. Nostalgia in the Youth Film *So Young (2013)*

This section firstly analyses how *So Young* creates a sense of nostalgia mood through constructed university life to engage with a sense of social anxiety. Then, it highlights how a sense of pastness, as a kind of nostalgia mode, is presented through commercial items to attract demographic audiences.

Nostalgia Mood in the Film So Young

The theory of nostalgia mood is understood as a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity that does not necessarily mean a breakage of, or any negative

[20] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 24.

[21] Grainge's "nostalgia mode" departs from Jameson postmodernism. He agrees the theory of nostalgia as a retro style, but rejects the assumption of amnesia and historicist crisis common to much postmodern critique. Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 43-48.

feeling about the present. However, this discontinuity, in youth screen media since 2010, is partly seen as a reaction to address the social anxiety of contemporary young audiences born after 1980.[22] People who were born after 1980 (the post-1980s and post-1990s) are considered as the main audiences of youth screen media. Most have been experiencing an increasingly prosperous Chinese economy and enjoying the fruits of its development. Lian Hongping remarks that the "post-1980s" generation have a feeling of superiority towards material things. They grew up with various types of mobile phones and laptops. They live in an era when material things have become increasingly abundant, and the marketing of almost all products is aimed at their taste.[23] Indeed, developed digital technology and a flourishing commercial environment undoubtedly provide much convenience for young people, especially for those born after 1980, as these represent the main consumers of digital products. Compared to the generations of "educated youth" and "forsaken generation" who experienced or partly experienced the Cultural Revolution in the centralised socialist state, people born after 1980 did not have any experiences of that political movement, instead growing up in a market-based economic society.

At the same time, under the influence of "one-child policy", initiated in 1979,[24] most of those people have no siblings. As a result of growing up as an only child, their parents and grandparents devoted much love to these children.

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[22] The post-1980s generation that this chapter talks about in contemporary China is based on the post-1980s group that mostly grew up, studied and live in mainland cities. Rural post-1980s generation may meet some different social, cultural and economic circumstance.

[23] Hongping Lian, "The Post-1980s Generation in China: Exploring Its Theoretical Underpinning," *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2014:17(7), 973.

[24] The one-child policy is a population planning policy of China. It was introduced in 1979 and began to be formally phased out in 2015. The new law became effective on January 1, 2016, following its passage in the standing committee of the National People's Congress on December 27, 2015.In 2007, 36% of China's population was subject to a strict one-child restriction, with an additional 53% being allowed to have a second child if the first child was a girl. Feng Wang & Yong Cai & Baochang Gu, "Population, Policy, and Politics: How Will History Judge China's One-Child Policy?" *Population and Development Review*, 2012:38, 115–29.

Known as the "strawberry generation",[25] the suggestion is that they need greater care like the strawberry that grows in the greenhouse. When this group succeeded in going to university, they met new opportunities as well as social issues that were different from those experienced by their parents. For example, the policy of expanding university enrolment since 1999 has provided more opportunity for students to go to university in the first place.[26] Under the influence of this policy, the number of students in higher education increased from 1,080,000 in 1999 to 6,850,000 by 2012.[27] The result is that, while more young people have the opportunity to study at university; China's economic growth does not necessarily create enough jobs for graduates and many graduates face serious unemployment issues. In contrast, it has been relatively easy for those who graduated in the 1970s to find jobs in state-owned enterprises and government.[28] In addition to employment pressures, excessively-priced housing is another significant social issue. Before the housing reform, people working at state-owned enterprises or in government would normally be allocated a house. However, many people of the post-1980s generation personally bear the huge burden of house ownership, even though their parents may support them.[29] Then, after they get married, many of them continued to face the social issue that they are expected to take care of the four older parents. Hence, some born after the 1980s faced serious anxiety and pressures brought about by issues of employment, housing, and caring for the elderly, despite enjoying unprecedented material comforts.

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[25] Denise Sabet, "Confucian or Communist, Post-Mao or Postmodern? Exploring the Narrative Identity Resources of Shanghai's Post-80s Generation," *Symbolic Interaction*, 2011:34(4), 547-548.

[26] Yinmei Wan, "Expansion of Chinese Higher Education Since 1998: Its Causes and Outcomes," *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 2006:7(1), 19-31.

[27] "Statistics of College Entrance Examination Enrollment and Admission Rate over the Years (1977-2017)," *Koolearn*, 6 June 2018, http://news.koolearn.com/20180606/1152629.html.

[28] Denise Sabet, "Confucian or Communist, Post-Mao or Postmodern? Exploring the Narrative Identity Resources of Shanghai's Post-80s Generation," *Symbolic Interaction*, 2011:34(4), 543.

[29] Hongping Lian, "The Post-1980s Generation in China: Exploring Its Theoretical Underpinning," *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2014:17(7), 973-974.

Therefore, nostalgia mood is constructed in the form of 'golden years' in recent youth films to console this anxiety. In the film *So Young*, these 'golden years' are situated on a university campus. *So Young* begins with the story of Zheng Wei as she takes a train to a big metropolis to start her college life. Zheng majors in civil engineering and studies at the same college as her childhood friend, Lin Jing, whom she is determined to marry. However, she finds Lin has left the university to study abroad when she arrives. Zheng feels confused and sad about Lin's leaving without any notice. She then maintains close friendships with her three roommates, Ruan Guan, Li Weijuan, and Zhu Xiaobei. By chance, Zheng falls in love with Chen Xiaozheng who comes from a poor, single-parent family and is raised by his strict mother. Four years later, Chen obtains a graduate fellowship to study architecture in the United States. Before graduating, Zheng and Chen break up and finish their university time with feelings of regret.

A few years later, Zheng has become the head of a successful company. One day she encounters Lin Jing. Lin explains that he left her because he knew his father was having an affair with Zheng's mother and did not know how to face Zheng at that time. He never went to the USA but simply avoided contacting her. Now, however, Lin wants to restart their friendship with Zheng. At the same time, Chen Xiaozheng, now a famous architect, also returns from the USA. Although he owns everything he wants, Chen feels a sense of incompleteness in his life because he has given up Zheng. He also wants to restart their relationship. Zheng Wei chooses neither. The film ends with a scene where Chen Xiaozheng askes Zheng Wei "Can I start over, and love you again?" To which Zheng Wei replies "Xiaozheng, we spent our youth together, we owe each other nothing... youth is something you can release in our memories."

So Young features many symbolic moments and iconic toys of the 1990s and early 2000s to construct nostalgia mood. For example, it uses a narrative of an old green train to present past time. This type of train was the main rail transportation prior to 2007 and has now been almost completely replaced by a

kind of high-speed railway network. The scene of a noisy coach, stale air and uncomfortable seats in the green rail carriages stimulates audiences to recall what old green rail travel was like. Another device is a once-popular pager, which was commonly used in the 1990s and early 2000s in China.[30] The film features a moment when a teacher asks all students to shut down their pagers before a lecture. In the film, the old green train and pager are specific symbols that arouse a resonance, as a sense of nostalgia mood, for the members of the audience who can relate to these experiences.

Nostalgia mood, aroused by the green train and pager, may evoke memories of different things for different audiences. Television drama *New Legend of Madame White Snake* (1992), British rock band Suede's *"*So Young*"* (1993), and Hong Kong's singer Lee Hak-kan's *Red Sun* (1992) may be perceived as fashionable trends with which people born after 1980 are more familiar. These symbols of fashionable culture were welcomed by this group of people in the 1990s and early 2000s, which highlights this group's interests and differences from other generations. As Arthur Asa Berger argues, "fashion has a double valence. On the one hand, it separates and differentiates us from others; on the other hand, it integrates us into society as well as into groups and subcultures with which we share similar tastes."[31] In this film, the memorabilia of the 1990s and early 2000s shoulder a function for the audience of 'double valence' and are a reminder that it is 'our' stories of people born after 1980, thus, constructing a sense of nostalgia mood, which, in turn, addresses the anxiety of people born after 1980 when they began to work. To some extent, nostalgia in the first chapter and restorative nostalgia in the second chapter can also be seen as a type of nostalgia mood. However, the 'golden years', in Chapter 1, is constructed in the idyllic

[30] Pager is a small device, usually carried or worn on the body that vibrating or making a noise to tell the consumer someone is waiting for his/her phone.

[31] Arthur Asa Berger, *The Objects of Affection: Semiotics and Consumer Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 77.

countryside. In Chapter 2, it is presented through the folk and communal lifestyle similar to that of a socialist's.

Further, the film *So Young* constructs nostalgia mood by presenting the lifestyle in student accommodation. The living conditions at many Chinese universities in the 1990s and early 2000s were relatively poor. At many Chinese universities, one room would often be shared by four students, each room with two or three bunk beds; two of the bunk beds, with two of the bunk beds for

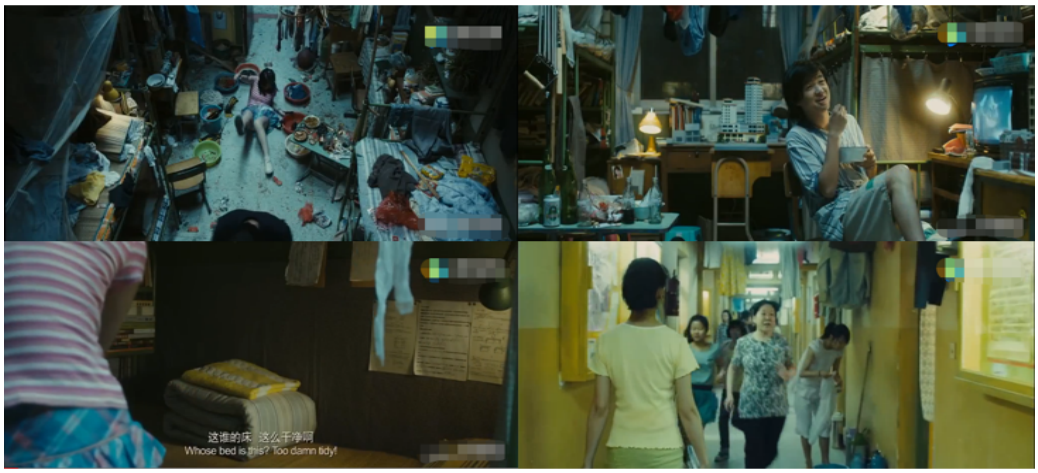

Figure 3.1: Student accommodation scene in *So Young*

sleeping and the rest for storing personal items. As a result, there was little space to hang clothes out to dry, and so most students hung their clothes elsewhere in the building or in the corridor. The film is more elaborate in its depiction of male student accommodation (Figure 3.1). On one occasion, Zheng Wei goes to Lao Zhang's room to borrow his DVDs to find Lao Zhang is watching a pornographic film. Zheng Wei is disgusted by the messy condition of Zhao's room, except for Chen Xiaozheng's bed which is neat and clean. This tidiness stimulates Zheng Wei's interest in Chen and subsequent love of him.

Although the student accommodation and quality of life are harsh, the time in the student accommodation is described with warmth and happiness. People in this environment are portrayed as generally happy, although they experience some bad memories such as breaking up with lovers. These bittersweet memories suggest a happy university life overall. In this sense, a nostalgia mood of warm

student accommodation serves as a kind of aesthetic construction, which pulls away from the memory of the grey, romanticises the pain, and removes the cruelty of youth. Indeed, these scenes show that a shared past is an integral part of the general process of collective identities, which potentially consoles the anxiety of the post-1980s generation. Moreover, nostalgia gives access to a shared university life that is peculiar to the post-80s 'us'. Liu argues that "it［nostalgia mood］thus enhances the cohesiveness and affiliation among the members and gives further legitimacy for the group's uniqueness claim…by which individuals and groups understand their present circumstances, preserve self-esteem and react to perceived threats."[32] Nostalgia about university life thus serves as an emotional support when engaging with a sense of anxiety that some people of the post-1980s and post-1990s generation face in an era of rapid commercial culture.

Nostalgia mood is both presented through some specific memorabilia, and constructed by the film language of lighting. In the film *So Young*, there is a thread of light that is used to show the development of narrative and create a pair of environments: warm and cold. Firstly, the warm lighting presents a beautiful, fresh and warm-toned university life (Figure 3.2). The film adopts the yellow

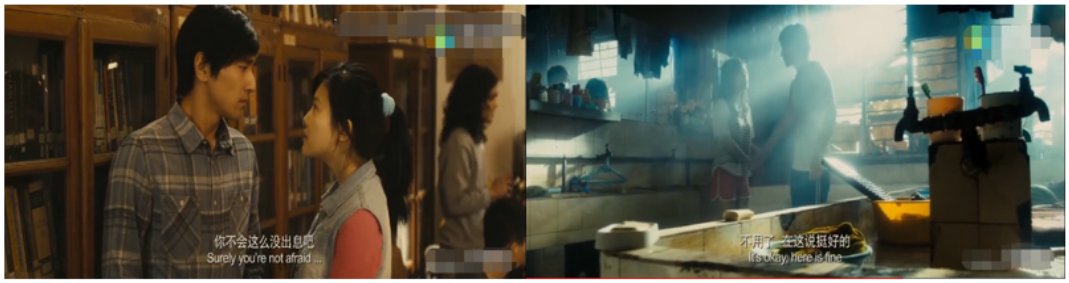

Figure 3.2: Different lights in *So Young*

lights to show Zheng Wei's longing for the love of Chen Xiaozheng. Yellow often implies a sense of mysterious yearning, which reflects Zheng's passionate feelings for Chen Xiaozheng. Similar light-enhanced scenes occur in the library and common room when Zheng Wei and Chen Xiaozheng get together. Carlos Fortes suggests that the "warm light expresses a sensation, something that is engraved

[32] Fengshu Liu, *Urban Youth in China: Modernity, the Internet and the Self* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 156.

in ourselves, almost unconscious, of the incandescent lamp, because we use it at home, you are used to it, this cosy sensation, comfort."[33] Indeed, the yellow light creates a suggestion of the purity of university days and an atmosphere that engenders well-being for audiences. This warm and hazy environment is suitable to present the feeling of Chen and Zheng's feelings when they are in love. Similarly, the filtered blue light, coming through the window in a kind of beam and leaving a lot of shadow in the room, is used to reveal a changing relationship between Zheng and Chen. When Zheng is told that Chen plans to study abroad, she asks why she is the last to know. In this scene, they are shown from the perspective of the backlighting, as if the backlighting is a character. From the image alone, they appear to be in silhouette. The blue light shines between them. The light is full of strong blue and white and creates a shadowy and gloomy atmosphere to express a lonely feeling and uncertain future of Zheng Wei (Figure 3.2).

These lightings produce a mysterious effect to show Zheng's confusion and Chen's self-accusation. Andrew Geoff argues that blue light in film may be used to create moods of melancholy and coldness.[34] The blue light creates a sense of melancholy, mourning, loss, coldness and separation when Chen plans to leave Zheng to go to the USA. The strong backlighting not only increases aesthetic pleasure but also depicts pain, and anticipation as a part of university life. By using lighting to create a nostalgia mood, the film attempts to console the post-1980s generation's anxious feeling caused by a competitive job market, high housing prices and the responsibility for caring for elders in their real lives.

Nostalgia mood is presented through symbols and film language to construct a positive, innocent, enthusiastic and warm memory of university. In contrast, a sense of coldness is presented by the white light, which constructs a negative, corruptible and undisciplined environment in the present. In the film, Zheng Wei

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[33] Carlos Fortes, *Light and Emotions: Exploring Lighting Cultures: Conversations with Lighting Designers*, edited by Vincent Laganier & Jasmine van der Pol (Basel: Birkhauser, 2011), 161.

[34] Andrew Geoff, *The 'Three Colours' Trilogy* (London: British Film Institute 1998), 25.

and Lin Jing meet again at a hospital. Zheng Wei is accompanying Ruan Guan to have an induced abortion while Lin Jing is looking after his girlfriend Shi Jie who has some psychological issues. The cold environment of the hospital suggests the troubled circumstances in which the protagonists find themselves. Although Zheng Wei has become a successful and decisive professional, she still feels lonely and cannot overcome the trauma that Chen Xiaozheng brought about many years earlier; Lin Jing is perplexed by Shi Jie's mental issue; and Ruan Guan has broken up with her boyfriend even though she is pregnant. Therefore, the clinical background of the hospital is seen as a silent language that indicates the protagonists' internal crises. The white light is used to present this cold 'reality', which causes the protagonists to search for a solution to the emptiness. As Richard Dyer suggests, "death may in some traditions be a vivid experience, but within much of the white tradition it is a blank that may be immateriality (pure spirit) or else just nothing at all."[35] Thus, white, as a film language, symbolises a blankness, a void, and death in a social environment when Zheng Wei and her classmates have worked for many years after graduating from the university. By presenting this difference between the warmth of the university campus and the absence of it in the present day, nostalgia mood about the warm university days is emphasised, as a kind of cultural engagement, to relieve social anxiety.

Here, nostalgia is constructed as a kind of mood which allows young adults to escape the stressful, dull and oppressive 'reality' to a happy and carefree time. This is perhaps necessary in the extensively materialistic social context of China after joining the WTO (2001), which is different from the chaotic urban lifestyle in the films of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. Motifs, such as misery, awkwardness, deficiency and frustration that recur across youth films of the 1990s,[36] are barely found in youth media since 2010. People born after 1980 appear to be used to a 'chaotic urban life'. Further, the spiritual torture of the

[35] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 207-209.

[36] Jinhua Dai, *Film Theory and Criticism* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007), 191.

question 'who am I?' that turns up in many avant-garde films, such as *Beijing Bastards* (Zhang Yuan, 1993) and *The Making of Steel* (Lu Xuechang, 1997), has disappeared in recent youth films. Many youth films have given up searching for their home physically and spiritually. Instead, they are used to the urban life and adopt a commercial ideology to engage with the anxiety brought about by its culture.

Nostalgia mode in the film So Young

Nostalgia culture in youth films since 2010 has also connected to how nostalgia is recycled within a climate of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics". What has been conveyed in youth films is not exactly the golden age or a better past. Youth media constructs a sense of pastness to cater to a specific demographic market. Grainge's theory of nostalgia mode will be used to analyse a stylised pastness in *So Young* to further investigate nostalgic culture. Grainge investigates nostalgia mode and retro feeling about this consumer culture and suggests:

> In commercial terms, it [nostalgia] need not depend on a specific idea of the past but can designate anything which has been culturally recycled and/or appeals to a market where pastness is a value. It is not, in other words, symptomatic of cultural or consumer longing but is an index of commodities, media products, and programming orientations, that draw upon notions of tradition or use an idea of the past to position themselves within a particular niche market.[37]

Compared to nostalgia mood, nostalgia mode is not based on a feared loss of 'golden years', but connects the past with distinct materialities, such as clothing, furnishings, foods, and music, to create a sense of pastness. Retro culture offers an interpretation of the past, related to the mainstream media to promote advertising, film, fashion, and other forms of popular culture. To some extent, nostalgia mode and reflective nostalgia are similar in that neither aim to return

[37] Paul Grainge, "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, 2000:23(1), 30-31.

to a so-called past. Reflective nostalgia receives a sense of discontinuity and nostalgia mode is constructed through the elements of consumer past to sell products in a commercial culture. Grainge defines nostalgia mode as a kind of retro culture and claims that it "borrows from the past without sentimentality, quotes from the past without longing, parodies the past without loss […] retro was popularized both as a commercial category and as a cultural practice; it designated a wide range of forms and activities where the past was taken up with a particular, often ironic, self-consciousness".[38] When nostalgia is connected to the consumer culture directly, it expresses more of a desire to cater to consumers rather than expressing a sense of yearning for the past.

In the first chapter, nostalgia mode has been referred to when discussing 'red image'. This 'red image', such as "Mao Zedong Fever",[39] was very ever popular in the 1990s in some Chinese cities, referring to Mao, as the first chairman (1949-1976) of the People's Republic of China, with his portrait painted on caps, T-shirts, and textbooks. At the same time, a lot of music about 'Red China' was composed, such as *Rock on the New Long March* (Cui Jian, 1989). "Mao Zedong Fever" is not about returning to the era of Mao but is rather seen as a form of youth culture related to the early Chinese market economy. Cui states that it is astonishing how past revolutionary artefacts and present commercial packaging have come together. Nevertheless, the carnival of "red classics" is not simply a matter of nostalgia, as revolutionary artefacts and the cult of Mao have become the subjects of mass production and popular consumption.[40] For producers and distributors, the obvious reason for repackaging "red classics" is to generate profits. Nostalgic portraits and music not only cater to an older generation who have memories of

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[38] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 55-56.

[39] Jinhua Dai, "Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s," in *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, translated by Edward Gunn; edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso, 2002), 172.

[40] Shuqin Cui, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 73.

the Mao period, but further attract many young people who enjoy this fashionable culture in the context of the early Chinese market economy.

Since 2010, youth media has revitalised this retro strategy to create a sense of pastness related to the period of the 1990s and early 2000s to attract the youth media market. In *So Young*, some items used to show nostalgia mood also construct nostalgia mode, such as the posters of Suede and Leslie Cheung, a busy public phone booth, and a broken wash basin. Some food and clothes that are normally consumed by the younger generation appear repeatedly. These items are not far away from the present, but have been culturally recycled to attract the Chinese youth media market. Mike Featherstone suggests that these "signs become central to a late capitalist society where commodities have come together to produce the 'commodity-sign'".[41] In other words, some symbols related to the past in the film *So Young* may not be interpreted for their material utility but are understood as symbols to present nostalgia mode. Here, commercial utility is emphasised, which becomes an important factor in attracting the film market.

With the exception of some static symbols understood as nostalgic objects to cater to the screen media market, the plotlines of worshipping wealth are also repeatedly used to present a commercial influence. For example, Chen Xiaozheng leaves Zheng Wei and studies in the USA because it can bring Chen the success to which he aspires. Li Weijuan discards her boyfriend and gets married to an old man who is divorced and has two children because he is very wealthy. Xu Kaiyang does whatever he wants because he has a wealthy father. Therefore, wealth becomes a primary factor when people in *So Young* make choices about their future. In other words, consumer culture uses symbolic goods and narratives that are related to the protagonists' dreams and desires in order to create nostalgia mode. Featherstone comments that "contemporary consumer culture seems to be widening the range of contexts and situations in which such behaviour [worship

[41] Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: SAGE, 2007), 14.

about the capital］is deemed appropriate and acceptable."[42] In this sense, *So Young* broadens this worship of capital in the Chinese consumer society. The construction of the past is related to the worship of wealth, which, further, is an embodiment of consumption. These protagonists are desiring subjects, who yearn for success, wealth and power. Consumption, is, therefore, one of the key means by which urban young people embrace consumerism as an identity.

Further investigation of other youth screen media since 2010 may uncover similar, even repetitive, narratives that are used to create a sense of pastness. Based on Dong's analysis, there are three special characteristics of recent youth films produced in mainland China: 1) overmuch expressing the plotline of abortion, such as in the films *So Young*, *My Old Classmate* and *Fleet of Time*; 2) many plotlines of breaking up with lovers for studying abroad, such as in films *So Young, Fleet of Time, Forever Young and My Old Classmate*; and 3) many narratives of death, such as in films *So Young* and *The Left Ear*.[43] Dong suggests that recent Chinese youth films have adopted formulaic narratives to attract the youth market.[44] In other words, when youth culture becomes popular in East Asia, the Chinese film industry jumps on the bandwagon by producing similar products that contain youth elements. However, these youth media lose vigour and vitality by simplifying youth through the narratives of abortion and some cruel behaviours. As Grainge suggests, the commodification of nostalgia has not been interpreted as a response to arousing cultural longing, but can be explained as market segmentation and media syndication through commercial imperatives.[45] From this perspective, what is consumed in youth media is not past realities, but

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[42] Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: SAGE, 2007), 27.

[43] Yaou Dong, "Comparative Research of New Generational Film Narrative," *Popular Literature and Art*, 2017:07, 197.

[44] Yaou Dong, "Comparative Research of New Generational Film Narrative," *Popular Literature and Art*, 2017:07, 197.

[45] Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2002), 51.

some kind of virtual meanings created to cater to the film market.

This consumer culture is more overt in some films than others, and can be seen in acts such as using a popular British song as a title.[46] Suede's "So Young" was adopted as the name of this film and is referred to four times to parallel the female protagonist's Ruan Guan's subplot. In the end, Ruan Guan dies in a car accident on the way to attend Suede's Beijing concert and to some extent, her stories in *So Young* interpret the meaning that Suede's song "So Young" wants to express: enjoying your youth. Interestingly, Suede held their concerts in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing in 2013, the same year as the film *So Young* was released. When *So Young* was released in London, Suede also attended its premiere.[47] Hence, the music "So Young" and the story related to Suede, as nostalgia mode, are used to sell the musical past and express a theme of being young forever. Nostalgia has become a musical category in its own right within this context. What nostalgia mode wants to create is a sense of pastness to stimulate more audiences to view this film. Besides this musical reference, the poster of Hong Kong singer Leslie Cheung is also seen on the wall of the student accommodation,[48] and Li Hak-kan's *Red Sun* (1992) is sung by Zheng Wei. With the marked increase in youth films since 2010, an attempt has been made to gain more market share in competition with other youth films through media nostalgia. These famous and classic posters and songs are well reconfigured by contemporary media culture and transformed into a nostalgic commodification rather than a nostalgic longing and yearning.

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[46] So Young (1993) is the fourth and final single from the debut album by Suede, released on 17 May 1993 on Nude Records.

[47] Zi Chuan, "Interview: Zhao Wei Talking about Premiere *So Young* in London," BBC, 8 October 2013, http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/indepth/2013/10/131018_zhaowei_lff_iv.

[48] Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing (Chinese: 張國榮; 12 September 1956—1 April 2003) was a Hong Kong singer and actor. He is considered "one of the founding fathers of Cantopop" for achieving a huge success both in film and music.

Indeed, the selling of musical past can be understood as a kind of nostalgia mode and retro culture. Generally speaking, the youth film market provides corresponding products by creating retro culture and products to meet customers' emotional demand. Retro is a non-historical way of knowing the past and may evoke a memory of days that are not quite distant in the commercial forms. As Grainge suggests, "the content and 'meaning' of nostalgia are, in many respects, secondary to strategies of production and the imperatives of niche consumption."[49] Retro in this film, as a new form of revivalism, defines a modern Chinese past in popular imagination. The Chinese youth film and advertising firms since 2010 quickly identified retro as an attractive 'pitchman' for audiences born after 1980.

Hence, nostalgia mode in youth screen media since 2010 is presented through commercial goods, the worship of wealth, and repetitive narratives in the context of Chinese industrial film aesthetics. Nostalgia in recent Chinese youth media not only contains a sense of yearning through which to address a demographic social anxiety, but is also reconfigured as a kind of popular commercial culture to attract the youth screen market. Compared to the nostalgia discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, nostalgia in this chapter has changed with the arrival of fast capitalism and has been portrayed rather as an exuberant individualism in youth screen media since 2010. Consumption, regardless of nostalgia mood or nostalgia mode, becomes an inducement that leads to a sense of anxiety for some young people born after 1980 and further, promotes youth screen media to create a greater sense of pastness to attract audiences.

An intense social engagement (nostalgia mood) and a contrived aesthetic pastness (nostalgia mode) are constructed in the context of Chinese film industrial aesthetics. In one sense, nostalgia is perhaps rendered as engagement

[49] Paul Grainge, "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, 2000:23(1), 31-32.

with a social issue, such as a sense of anxiety for a specific group of people. In another way, it appears to become a sense of melancholy stimulated by the presentation of soundtracks and fashionable items in youth media to attract the screen market. There is an argument that the longing for the past is changing into a desire for commercial advertising products. Thus, nostalgia mood may be gradually disarmed as an influence on the feelings of anxiety and yearning. At the same time, commercial culture and nostalgia mode may take up a dominant position. In this regard, the discontinuity between past and present and consumer preference for nostalgic products are connected, and nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode overlap. In other words, people facing anxiety evoked by discontinuity will show a preference for products that remind them of a simpler past. Hence, consuming nostalgia-related products may also provide a sense of pleasure, stability, security and continuity. The next section provides an analysis of the Internet drama *With You*. The aim, in making the connection, is to explore the development of nostalgic screen culture in film, Internet drama and other screen media.

3. The Internet Drama *With You* (2016)

Nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode have been used to investigate the youth film *So Young* in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" since 2010. The culture of nostalgia since 2010 has become not only popular in Chinese youth films but has also been evident in other screen media. In this section, the Internet drama *With You* (2016) has been selected as representative of nostalgia culture in a broader context of "Chinese film aesthetics". The construction of nostalgia for campus life and senior high school life is a through line to connect the two case studies. *With You* helps explore the way that the young director uses food, music, clothes, and a digital platform to further express nostalgic culture. These symbols become a commercial strategy to promote youth culture in the Internet drama market.

With You is an Internet drama with 24 episodes, distributed through the video website IQIYI, with two episodes released every week. Its narrative follows two main protagonists Geng Geng and Yu Huai, who sit together and become classmates at the senior school, Zhenhua (振华). Their names, Geng Geng *and* Yu Huai, combine as, *genggeng yu yuai* (耿耿于怀), a classic Chinese idiom, which means some regretful experiences are taken to heart and are difficult to move. In *With You*, the unforgettable knowledge of this memory relates to the protagonists' lives in senior school. Geng Geng, Yu Huai and their classmates not only experience military training together at the beginning of the new term, but also prepare for many kinds of exams and deal with some bittersweet relationships with their classmates and teachers. Their negative experiences of family and studies are counterbalanced with their enjoyment of subtle friendships and loves. Another protagonist Lu Xinghe, their rebellious classmate with a talent for painting, bravely expresses his love for Geng Geng though he knows that Yu Huai and Geng Geng like each other. After three years at senior high school, Lu Xinghe is admitted to China's Central Academy of Fine Arts. Yu Huai disappears after failing the college entrance examination leaving Geng behind and not contacting her for the next seven years. At last, the memory for Yu Huai stimulates Geng to find him and refuses Lu's affection again.

Using the analysis of nostalgic culture established in *So Young*, *With You* also presents many kinds of common memories, such as the national college entrance examination, the Hong Kong pop music band "Beyond", television drama *Romance in the Rain* (2001), mischief between classmates, and dreams of the future. These experiences, as discussed in the previous section, have been constructed as a kind of nostalgia mood to address life's pressures for the post-1980s and post-1990s generations. At the same time, nostalgia mode is also constructed through some commercial products. For example, a brand of milk that is normally consumed by young people appears many times in the drama. Here, nostalgia about a past time of comfort is used as a marketing tool to advertise an existing brand. The previous

section emphasised the overlap of nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode in youth screen media since 2010. Based on this cultural and commercial integration, this overlap is further emphasised in the integration of innocent senior high school lives, while further pointing out the differences between the two youth media in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics".

Firstly, the Internet drama constructs a sense of nostalgia mood through the narrative of military training. As shown in Figure 3.3, Geng Geng, Yu Huai, and their new classmates are receiving military training at the beginning of their new term. In the left image, one of their classmates is found looking at a magazine

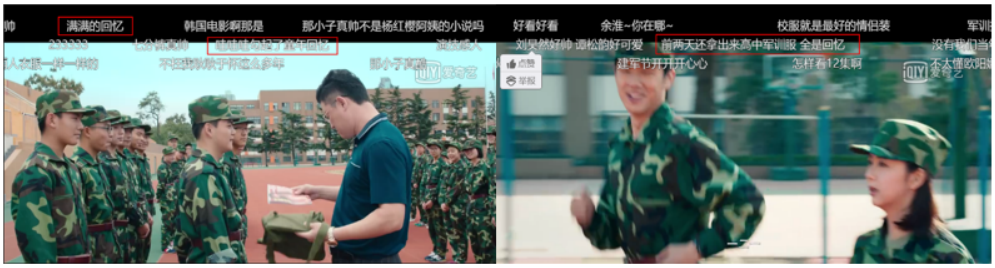

Figure 3.3: Military training in *With You*

during the training. In the right, Geng Geng is punished and told to run 10 laps of the playground as a result of a mistake. Yu Huai is encouraging her by accompanying her on the run. Receiving military training in China for high school students is compulsory, even for those who do not want to join the army. The military training is, therefore, a familiar scene for the audiences, which naturally evokes memories of their senior high school days.

At the same time, nostalgic narratives in *With You* further stimulate audiences to post personal memories of their senior high school lives through "*danmu*". *Danmu* comes from a Japanese video sharing website "Niconico". It is a form of audience engagement with a new digital technology, which enables them to participate in comments that are superimposed upon the screen, sliding from the right to the left. *Danmu* is similar to the comment function of YouTube where people can post their comments on the particular narrative segment. Other netizens are able to comment, respond, and create their forums for discussion. Compared to the comment function on YouTube, the comments on *danmu*,

however, instantly slide from right to left on the screen and remain on the screen where viewers post their comments. Other viewers can watch the video as well as read the related comments and post responses to both the comments and the narrative. The Internet adopts *danmu* to increase interactivity between drama and audiences. It is a special feature of some video sharing websites that allow viewers to post their comments while watching videos. By adding real-time online comments to the screen while the video is playing, *danmu*, as part of the visual screen experience of watching Internet drama, is becoming popular in Asian markets.

The comments in the *danmu* have a direct function of broadening the influence of the drama. For example, Figure 3.3 shows a plotline that new students begin their senior school with military training. In the on-screen *danmu*, one comment says that the commenter 'dug out' their old military training clothes several days ago after watching this drama and it recalled lots of memories. In another scene, when Geng Geng is instructed to sit in the last row of classroom seats as a result of exam scores, one comment in *danmu* says 'the last row is best' and that they sat in the last row for three years at senior high school. Another comment replies that in their class, the second, third, and fourth rows were for the best students. Indeed, these different memories of where they sat when they studied at senior high schools construct another nostalgic narrative. Eventually, audiences creatively use nostalgic narratives and advanced digital technology to interpret their circumstances and construct an image of their meaningful youth, which is related to the Internet drama but may also have different nostalgic memories. Indeed, *danmu* is a relatively convenient platform for the audiences to express themselves and create communities. Here, the constructed memories of senior school are seen as a kind of nostalgia mood that brings audiences back to the past. Moreover, the comments about the past time via *danmu*, regardless of whether they are about the protagonists in *With You* or the audiences, narrate another thread through which audiences' own lives may be interpreted. Netizens

may insert their real identities into the virtual narrative of the drama, which may be seen as a form of narrative engagement, to be consumed by other netizens. As Jon Dovey suggests, web media which invite the user to join, to create a profile, post blogs or other announcements, are seeking a transient marketplace to create *brand engagement*, through which audience behaviours become data that can be sold and then be used to maintain consumption.[50] Hence, the audience's memories of senior high school are influenced by the dynamic interactivity between the Internet drama, comments via *danmu*, and the memories of the audience themselves. This cultural integration has been used by businesses to promote their food and clothes.

This cultural construction and consumption related to senior high school lives prompted the popularity of this drama in 2016. The nostalgic narratives and comments can be seen as a kind of nostalgia mode that attracts more audiences to share and construct their memories, related but not limited to, the life of the senior high school. Ryan Lizardi suggests that this process has dual motivation. For those viewers who knew and loved the original texts, they may pay to see the newest 're-imagining'. For new audiences who are possibly too young to know the original, these older texts may become a trigger for engaging in their own lives.[51] Regardless of what kind of interpretation it is, this new nostalgic style constructed by *danmu* creates contexts in which the audience can respond to their memories. Each form of audience interaction not only enriches the narrative of *With You*, but further builds a sense of visible narrative. Thus, it has the potential to take the original content in new and more creative directions, regardless of whether the 'first author' likes it or not. In the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics", the development of digital technology promotes the expansion of screen media. Grainge writes of "new technological innovations and their ability

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[50] Jon Dovey, "Time Slice: Web Drama and the Attention Economy," in *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, edited by Paul Grainge (London: BFI, 2011), 143.

[51] Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books 2015), 116.

to rescue, recycle, and reconfigure the past".[52] From this perspective, the integration of nostalgic narrative in the Internet drama and simultaneous nostalgic commentary in *danmu* can be seen as an emotional strategy, which not only elevates the Internet drama to achieve a higher 'use value' as a cultural product, but also creates a sense of nostalgia mood around senior high school. Through this cultural and commercial integration, *With You* increases the pleasure and interaction between the viewer and drama.

Secondly, nostalgic memories are connected to the Chinese college entrance examination. Regardless of the result, the pressure of this examination, and many kinds of academic competitions, permanently hang over all the characters in *With You*. Such pressure leads to Geng Geng's classmate Zhu Yao jumping off a building and even Yu Huai, a gifted student, also experiences the same pressure twice; having had to adjust his anxiety and retake the examination. Every character—Geng Geng, her classmates, their teachers and parents—have to bear the pressure brought about by the examination. Therefore, the representation of this examination awakens collective memories that are full of nostalgia, intertwined with anxiety.

The importance and pressure of this examination may also be realised from the slogan "examination of the Chinese college entrance changing destiny".[53] Chapter 1 has referred to the importance of passing this examination, which ultimately allows Jinghe (the character in the film *Nuan*) to change his status from a peasant to an urban resident through studying at a university in the city. To a greater extent, the slogan is accurate for many Chinese students; in particular, those who live in rural areas who only by being admitted to a famous university might have a better future. Besides this slogan, another "youth without regret"

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[52] Paul Grainge, "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, 2000:23(1), 32.

[53] Xuguang Chen, "The Construction about the Internet and Contemporary Young People's Collective Memories: A Research about the Memory of Chinese College Entrance Examination for Some People of the Post-1990s," *Contemporary Communications*, 2017: 01, 66-70.

slogan is also famous. This is not the same as that discussed in Chapter 1. Here, "youth without regret" suggests that students would feel regret if they failed the examination, regardless of whether or not they have worked hard. The slogans of "examination of college entrance changing destiny" and "youth without regret" cause intense pressure for many Chinese senior high school students. In *With You*, Geng Geng, Yu Huai, and many of their classmates are working very hard to prepare for the examination and many other different competitions. At the same time, lots of comments related to this examination were also posted in *danmu*. Indeed, the Internet drama constructs nostalgia through its presentation of different examinations throughout senior high school, which transports the audiences back to a stressful time in their lives during their own senior high school years.

Compared to the students who are working hard, Lu Xinghe becomes a 'weird and bad' student who plays tricks on his classmates and teachers. He likes painting, although his father opposes his career, and he forwardly expresses his love for Geng Geng despite knowing that Geng Geng and Yu Huai like each other. In *With You*, Lu Xinghe is created as a different image against the background of fierce competition for the examination of college entrance. At last, Lu fulfils his dream as a painter, while Yu Huai fails to pass the college examination. To some extent, instead of seeing Lu Xinghe's rebellious tricks on his teachers as a nostalgic reflection of colourful senior high school lives, it is better viewed as a kind of testimony to criticise this cruel educational system. Instead of seeing Yu Huai's failure and second experience of the national college examination as an unforgettable time in the lives of many Chinese students who have had the same experience, it is better to view this as a harsh criticism of the selection system. From this perspective, the representation of the college examination not only constructs a nostalgia mood, but may potentially be a social criticism of the Chinese education system.

This potential criticism of the educational system presents the producers'

aspiration of establishing a more reasonable and effective selection mechanism. The producers express their aspiration through the protagonist Yu Huai's character and dialogue. At one point, Yu Huai complains that most of his classmates have been brainwashed by the mainstream ideology when they shed tears after listening to patriotic music. As Anthony Y. H. Fung and Jeroen de Kloet suggest:

> When youth actively demand their rights, proclaim their autonomy, or even fight for a higher goal in society, youth are considered as a contentious or rebellious group [...] in daily life, Chinese youth will feel uneasy with such official notions that define them either as trouble or as hope. They struggle to negotiate other possible subject positions, neither that of troublemaker nor that of hope for the country.[54]

In other words, some Chinese young people sound out their voices to negotiate with the mainstream ideologies about the education system. From this perspective, the Internet and its media products provide a space for youth to express their annoyance and disappointment in their society. The recognition of "examination of college entrance changing destiny" may represent a mainstream ideology, but the constructed nostalgic feelings about this examination in *With You* have negotiated with this ideology. This point is linked to the concept that nostalgia can be seen as a counter-hegemonic discourse, as discussed in the first two chapters. Similarly, nostalgia in *With You* may also be understood as an aspiration to change the contemporary educational system. It represents a particular use of the past to change the present, and therefore the future. However, in the context of Chinese film industrial aesthetics, the essence of this negotiation should not be seen as a kind of intense social resistance, but as a temperate aspiration. Finally, the Internet drama constructs a sense of innocent friendship between Geng Geng, Yu Huai and their classmates, encouraging the feeling of being forever young to address the pressure of competitive examinations.

[54] Anthony Y. H. Fung & Jeroen de Kloet, *Youth Cultures in China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 13-4.

Therefore, the bittersweet lives at senior high school become a kind of nostalgia mood to console the social pressures of those born after 1980. At the same time, nostalgic comments in *danmu*, and nostalgic and commercial products, further present a sense of pastness to construct a kind of nostalgia mode.

The Transition from So Young to With You

Some similarities and differences between the film *So Young* and the Internet drama *With You* are distinct. Firstly, it seems that almost all historical events in youth media since 2010 are shown from an uncritical stance. More specifically, some historical events, such as China regaining Hong Kong's sovereignty in 1997, the celebration of the new millennium, the World Cup of 2002, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndromes (SARS) epidemic of 2003, Chinese athlete Liu Xiang winning the 110-metre hurdles at the Athens Olympics in 2004, are used to imply a historical moment in many youth screen media released since 2010. However, these historical events serve merely as the news to reveal the time period, and lose any implication that parallels the development of growth of the young people. In other words, contemporary political and historical events seemingly do not influence character growth in youth screen media since 2010. The historical and political events have become a kind of fragmentation, which may indicate a time but maintains an uncritical stance towards its subject matter. Lizardi suggests:

> This past is a commodified version of history that asks consumers to actively maintain a connection to our beloved childhood media objects by reinvesting our energy and, of course, our money over and over again. Mourning a past media text and releasing it would mean that content producers would need to continually replace creative content with innovative fresh media, whereas encouraging melancholia leads to money-saving and demographic-tested continual recycling and repackaging of the same content. A playlist past is an individual and uncritical

familiar past, and an uncritical familiar past is a bankable past.[55]

In this sense, the producers of youth media since 2010 refuse to critique the past but show a simplified version instead. In contrast, the historical representations—for instance, the reform of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s in the film *24 City* in Chapter 2—have had a remarkable influence on the destiny of individuals and country. However, influenced by "Chinese film industrial aesthetics", many youth screen media may have abandoned attempts of critiquing political discourse and instead taken the media market as orientation. These youth media use a nostalgic narrative as a strategy to wrap up their subculture, which not only narrows the gap between youth subculture and mainstream culture, but also establishes a consumption phenomenon of the youth nostalgia media.

Underpinning this transition, a complex relationship between the autonomy of cultural production and hegemony of state institutions and ideology is investigated. Culture in youth screen media since 2010 has been commodified, subjected to the market mechanism and the profit imperative. Gary Cross suggests that an uncritical stance may become dangerous as it depletes the difference in a surface level past and diverts attention away from the critical comparison, creating a present couched in a past that advocates for the uncritical status quo.[56] From this perspective, the new power producers and the principle "Chinese film industrial aesthetics" may indicate a collusive relationship between presenting youth culture and sustaining mainstream ideologies. This uncritical stance against the past conveys a national image of a rising and harmonious country rather than a chaotic and unstable society. Jeroen de Kloet and Anthony Y.H. Fung describe today's political situation in China and point out that "what we

[55] Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 144.

[56] Gary Cross, *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 15-6.

are witnessing today is a China with a huge bureaucracy, a booming economy and an allegedly 'harmonious society' highly regulated by the Party and bound by their doctrines. All these factors merely seem to render the revolutionary ideal nonsensical, anachronistic, and inapplicable to contemporary China."[57] Moreover, under the influence of a 'harmonious society',[58] this uncritical representation may be a strategy through which youth screen media avoid touching on any sensitive political themes and therefore obtain permission to be released in the Chinese screen market. Paul Clark further suggests that many youths have learned how to protect themselves from the State and are not interested in politics. Consumption and material concerns have taken over from political participation in the fate of the nation that the "Red Guards" or "student protestors" had shown earlier.[59] In other words, the uncritical stance has become a political strategy that helps keep the works of the new power filmmakers and directors far from being banned. This uncritical stance further highlights that the state censorship and control of screen media since the 2010s are not in decline, but rather that it may have become more intense when Chinese screen media deepened its internationalisation and marketisation.

This process of rejection of political and radical thoughts, is becoming what Wang calls "depoliticised politics".[60] In this sense, youth memories bear a submissive discourse which serves as a way of writing history that facilitates a smooth transition between the past and the present. It is the representation of depoliticised and smooth social transition that indicates the more strict political

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[57] Jeroen de Kloet & Anthony Y.H. Fung, *Youth Cultures in China* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 2.

[58] "Harmonious society" put forward by former President Hu Jintao in 2004, which has been seen as a response to the increasing social injustice and inequality emerging in China. Maureen Fan, "China's Party Leadership Declares New Priority: 'Harmonious Society'", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 12 October 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/11/AR2006101101610.html??noredirect=on.

[59] Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 195.

[60] Hui Wang, "Depoliticized Politics: From East to West," translated by Christopher Connery, *New Left Review*, 2006:41, 29-45.

environment and ideological control in the process of screen media-making since the early 2010s. At the same time, as Chen suggests, it is a natural phenomenon for the youth screen media since 2010 to create a prosperous national image as the new power producers try to keep a balance between mainstream ideology, the film aesthetics, and the box office.[61] Further, the uncritical stance does not mean that the "film industrial aesthetics" endorse political discourse, but rather aim to build an effective communicating bridge between projecting national discourse and developing the Chinese screen industry. Hence, what youth screen media since 2010 has potentially spread, may be neither a mainstream ideology nor a critical stance, as was the case with the Sixth-Generation filmmakers.

The new power filmmakers and directors may realise a similar situation to that described above by Jeroen de Kloet and Anthony Y.H. Fung. These young filmmakers and directors choose an eclectic, rational and industrial aesthetic to produce their youth screen media in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics". What the youth media does present, therefore, benefits from contemporary power structures and creates a rising and harmonious image of current society. At the same time, the political engagement of the Chinese youth screen since 2010 has disappeared dramatically. To some extent, China's youth screen media has paid much more attention to a market-orientated industrial system. In such a context, the selling and circulation of nostalgia has become less dependent on the content of any specific past, but rather constructs an affective economy of pastness. Memory, nostalgia, and the past have been integrated and have become an amplified site where affective investment, new technologies, and the CCP's political discourse are mobilised to present a new commercial, cultural, and political phenomenon.

Secondly, the differences between *So Young* and *With You* are also distinct. As some scholars point out, recent youth films present a somewhat cruel time of

[61] Xuguang Chen & Hui Li, "Reinterpretation of Aesthetics in Film Industry: Reality, Theory and Possible Space for Expansion," *Journal of Communication University of Zhejiang*, 2018:25(4), 104.

being youth.[62] In fact, many narratives, such as abortion, death, and breaking up with lovers, present a cultural phenomenon that young adulthood is a miserable period. For example, the central characters in *So Young* have the painful experience of breaking up with their lovers, especially Ruan Guan, who aborts her child after she breaks up with her boyfriend. Love for these young people becomes torment, through which they grow up. Features like rock music, violence, and profanity become the most obvious speech marks in their cruel tale of youth. Their works have a strong characteristic of youth subculture which can be traced back to the early works of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. These miseries have become selling points to attract audiences. It is clear that youth screen industry has produced a phenomenon of similar narratives in the context of the standardised and industrial mechanism. In the first few years since 2010, much of the youth literature and music, many games and scripts (intellectual property, also known as IP) with large readerships or audiences were purchased by film enterprises and video websites to produce youth screen media. To some extent, the prosperity of the Chinese screen industry is related to the recreation of this IP. However, much of the IPs related to youth culture were adapted into films and other screen media that were too similar, which caused a decline in the quality of youth screen media. In particular, for the filmmakers and directors of the new power with insufficient experience of filmmaking, it is easier to lose their creative personality and initiative under the influence of capitalism. As Chen and Li suggest, the rise and fall of IP fever in the field of film creation in recent years reflects the contradiction between pursuing a commercial interest and maintaining high-quality media aesthetics.[63] Based on this phenomenon, it should be emphasised that screen media is both an industrial product and also

[62] Yuhui Guo, "Analysis of Domestic Youth Films since the New Century," *Today's Massmedia*, 2017:02, 81.

[63] Xuguang Chen & Hui Li, "Reinterpretation of Aesthetics in Film Industry: Reality, Theory and Possible Space for Expansion," *Journal of Communication University of Zhejiang*, 2018:25(4), 104.

belongs to the arts. The customer may lose interest if different screen media copy each other's narratives.

In *With You,* this situation changes significantly. The narratives of cruel youth disappear and are replaced by a 'pure' lifestyle supposed to be part of a senior high school experience. Geng Geng, Yu Huai, Lu Xinghe, and the other named characters strive for their dreams. Although there are some conflicts around love, study, and work, the main narrative presents a beautiful and innocent youth. Hence, Wowen comments that *With You* presents a youth that is closer to 'reality'.[64] This 'pure and real' youth is an important factor that promotes this Internet drama into first place of 'customer click rate' in 2016.[65] *With You* keeps a balance between box office and media quality. It pays more attention to the story itself and pulls audiences back to focus on normal youth culture rather than the cruel experience of drama, which is an adjustment based on the former critique of the cruel youth and the similarity of such narratives. Chen and Li point out that commercial aesthetics lead to inferior products. But industrial aesthetics maintains a balance between industrial criteria and the pursuit of art, which will solve the issue of repetitive narratives.[66] In other words, the repetitive narratives are caused by capitalism, and "industrial aesthetics" is able to solve this issue.

This change from cruel youth to innocent youth may be further related to Thai and Taiwanese youth films which express the theme of 'pure love'. The development of Chinese youth screen media is not only influenced by China's increasing cultural industry, commercial culture, and specific consumer group, but is also consistent with the influence of youth media in the other Asian screen markets. For instance, the Thai film *First Love* (Puttipong Pormsaka Na-Sakonnakorn, Wasin Pokpong, 2010) gained huge success at the box office. This

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64 Rushi Wowen, "With You Builds a New Benchmark of Youth Media," *TV Guide China*, 2016:05, 60-61.

65 "Top 100 of Chinese Internet Drama in 2016," Sohu, 22 March 2017, http://www.sohu.com/a/129787383_465911.

66 Xuguang Chen & Hui Li, "Reinterpretation of Aesthetics in the Film Industry: Reality, Theory and Possible Space for Expansion," *Journal of Communication University of Zhejiang*, 2018:25(4), 104.

film tells the moving story of a young man and woman when they are studying at a middle school. Themes of Thai cultures, such as worshipping Buddhism, the respect for elders, and care for the young, are presented in this film. 'Pure love' is used as the core element to express a depiction of youth. Furthermore, the Taiwanese film *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (Jiu Badao, 2011) is also famous in the Chinese film market, and tells a beautiful and loving story. The notion of 'pure love' has had an impact on the narratives and themes of Chinese young people's films since 2010. The Internet drama, to some extent, has adopted this style to depict an innocent youth within the Chinese screen market. Rushi Wowen comments that the director Liu grasps youth accurately and presents it deliberately.[67] Moreover, if the film *So Young* is an imagination of the youth produced by an adult, *With You* is a youth drama that depicts ordinary young people's lives and therefore is more relatable to its audiences. The popularity of youth nostalgia, therefore, has a global reach and has not been specific to China since 2010. The 'innocent youth' nostalgia of the late 2010s is situated in a range of national contexts but may have been influenced by a transnational trend.

Further, in *With You*, youth is constructed not only as related to the innocent past but also tends towards utopia, desire, hope, aspiration, and a possibility of the future. Nostalgia is imagined from the perspective of looking back into the future. It is a sign of revitalisation of utopian desire instead of being seen as a cultural reflection.Therefore, nostalgia is not only about the past but is also an aspiration of the future. Young people desire subjects for consumption, and desire has become a kind of identity of the youth. In *With You*, the nostalgia of youth can be understood as a desire that shapes the future, as an alternative place in which new generations in China have the ability and the power to change the contemporary educational system and live without hegemonic political restrictions. The innocent past may provide positive models of resistance to the status quo and show possibilities are still valid in the present. In other words, this

[67] Rushi Wowen, "*With You* Builds a New Benchmark of Youth Media," *TV Guide China*, 2016:05, 60-61.

backwards-looking culture contains a utopian impulse of longing for another place, an alternative, better world. As Spender suggests, one of the nostalgic tendencies is to return to an "imaginative terrain of an idealised past, another tendency, much more future-oriented in its aims, [which] consists of exploiting the capacity of nostalgia to expose the mechanised brutalities, social inequities, dizzying effects of technological change, the spiritual emptiness of the age."[68] Therefore, youth nostalgia may have productive and progressive forces. When "film industrial aesthetics" becomes a key medium in Chinese youth screen media, nostalgia may be constructed as a kind of embodiment of desire rather than homogeneous commercial products.

Thirdly, advanced technology plays an important role in the transformation. Based on statistics of the video website IQIYI, the post-1985s and post-1990s account for 86.3% of the audience of *With You.*[69] Zhu Zhenhua, the producer of *With You,* says that the drama attempts to attract audiences who are mainly from the post-1985 generation.[70] It is clear that this Internet drama was analysed by IQIYI's "big data system" before it was produced. IQIYI belongs to China's biggest search engine company Baidu and its "big data system", known as "Green Glass", collects, stores, and analyses audiences' watching behaviours to identify in which kinds of narratives that audience may be interested. Based on the statistics provided by the producer of *With You*, it is reasonable to think that the crew of *With You* used these when they produced this Internet drama. From this perspective, a distinct change can be found that youth media have been gradually using advanced technologies to position and attract their audiences, rather than relying on traditional methods of market promotion, such as microblogs, forums, or off-line activities. For example, statistics of *So Young* indicate that more than 2,000 posts on microblogs related to the theme of nostalgia, and were written by

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[68] Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 212.

[69] Rushi Wowen, "*With You* Builds a New Benchmark of Youth Media," *TV Guide China*, 2016:05, 60-61.

[70] Rushi Wowen, "*With You* Builds a New Benchmark of Youth Media," *TV Guide China*, 2016:05, 60-61.

its actors, actress, producers, and other crew members from March 2012 to June 2013.[71] However, *With You* has used more advanced technology to select which narratives may appeal more to a young audience.

In short, *With You* presents a pure and innocent youth for young audiences in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics", which may not only de-centre a recognition of cruel youth in Chinese youth screen media but also indicate an uncritical stance and loss of a cultural engagement since 2010. Further, this Internet drama highlights the pressure of the national college entrance examination, which potentially negotiates with China's educational authority about establishing a more effective elected system. Moreover, *With You* and other youth screen media since 2010 have been gradually influenced by transnational youth culture and new digital technology, which has stimulated the Chinese screen media to improve its narratives and to position itself more accurately for its target audience.

Conclusion

The proliferation of nostalgia in Chinese youth screen media since 2010 can be related to a specific demographical and commercial culture in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics". Nostalgia, in the film *So Young*, is related to an innocent university time, through which nostalgia mood provides a sense of continuity for people born after 1980. Furthermore, the commercial impulse has drawn upon colours, symbols, and music to construct its pastness. Unlike a longing for the idyllic countryside (discussed in Chapter 1) or the recapturing of the lost community (discussed in Chapter 2), nostalgia in this chapter is further understood as a kind of mode of attracting the youth screen market. *With You* highlights that nostalgic culture has transferred from film to Internet drama and

[71] "The Promotion of *So Young*," Zhihu, 2013, https://www.zhihu.com/question/21054367/answer/17022380.

become prevalent in the development of digital technology. In *With You*, nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode are constructed through the representation of senior high school lives. At the same time, nostalgic commentary in *danmu* further provides a relatively convenient platform for audiences to construct their nostalgia that is related but not limited to the Internet drama. Further, youth nostalgia in *With You* has a potential cultural engagement and aspiration for a better future. This should not be overestimated, but assessed as a potential negotiation in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics".

By analysing *So Young* and *With You*, the similarity of an uncritical stance in youth screen media can be found, which indicates that the hegemonic influence of the Party-State still controls the media content when screen media expand themselves through marketisation and international cooperation. At the same time, the tendency to move from the cruel youth to the innocent youth may be identified. More importantly, this change is related to the development of advanced technology in youth screen media. Overall, this chapter argues that nostalgia in youth screen media is situated in an innocent university and school time, which not only engage with specific anxieties and attract the youth screen market through adjusting strategies of filmmaking, but also present a closer relationship with the Chinese government's political gains in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics".

After presenting constructed nostalgia in the first three chapters, the differences and connections between types of nostalgias are evident. In Chapter 1, nostalgia is about the utopia of the countryside and is drawn upon by the "educated youth" filmmakers to criticise the CCP's discourse of "youth without regret". In Chapter 2, nostalgia is related to the communal collective way of life in urban contexts in the works of the Sixth-Generation filmmakers, through which to engage with the influence of urban reform and the decline of the working class. In Chapter 3, nostalgia is related to the innocence of school and university in the context of Chinese film industrial aesthetics. The industrial mechanism,

commercial consumption, and digital technology are emphasised in the process of classifying nostalgia mood and nostalgia mode. In the process of transformation from "educated youth" to the Sixth-Generation, and "new power", three tendencies can be identified. First, the increasing influences of global capitalism and media marketisation can be seen, which have promoted the development of the Chinese screen industry. Second, nostalgia may be highlighted as a counter-cultural engagement to criticise materialism and capitalism. Nostalgia is further packaged as an alluring commodity and a fashionable culture to cater to commercialism. Third, the critical stance against the CCP's political discourses is declining. Predominantly, the new power filmmakers and directors express a potentially uncritical stance on the influence of Chinese film industrial aesthetics. In this process, nostalgia culture is not only transforming, but also breaking apart, diversifying, and becoming ever more difficult to describe. A visible market integrated with the CCP's political discourse has exerted its influence to engender new autonomies of popular culture, allowing new genres of screen media to appear and occupy an increasingly large space.

The first three chapters in Part I, have identified nostalgic cultures in the context of postsocialist China from the perspectives of different generational producers and various screen formats. These perspectives show how nostalgia is constructed to engage with China's social transformations and political discourses in the postsocialist era. In Part II (Chapters 4 and 5), this thesis will further broaden its examination of the screen format to TV documentary to further investigate how nostalgia is politically adopted to project the Chinese government's discourses.

Chapter 4: Culinary Nostalgia: CCTV's Representation of China through Documentary: *A Bite of China* (2012)

The Chinese government enacted its cultural strategy "going out" in 2001 to convey its soft power globally and to counter negative perceptions stemming from its controversial human rights record, authoritarian political system, and military expansion. In this context, China Central Television (CCTV), the national media broadcaster, became an important cultural and political apparatus in projecting positive, contemporary images of China. This chapter takes as an example CCTV's documentary *A Bite of China* (2012) to examine this projection, focusing on how nostalgia is connected to Chinese 'traditional homemade food' in targeting domestic and international audiences; specifically, Western audiences. Through emphasising the process of food-making and preservation, *A Bite of China* highlights that Chinese people cherish their families. 'Traditional homemade food' consoles people's homesickness, especially for those who leave their homes in the context of urbanisation. Thereafter, this chapter examines how the concept of family-state related to nostalgic food culture is constructed by *A Bite of China* to project a sense of nationalism. In this sense, the stability of the 'tradition' is used to stabilise the CCP's regime. Furthermore, the documentary constructs a sense of harmony through food culture in ways that connect to the CCP's political discourse of a 'harmonious society'. 'Harmony' is depicted as a national image of a peace-loving China for international audiences. This chapter argues that *A Bite of China* highlights the relationship between Chinese people and their food to not only propagandise the CCP's specific nationalism but also to emphasise China's peaceful development. In this regard, food is no longer only for survival but has a multi-dimensional function, connecting culturalism and nationalism in the context of CCTV's internationalisation.

1. CCTV's Internationalisation in the Context of the Strategy "Going Out"

The Chinese government launched an economic strategy "going out" in 1999,[1] which was not only aimed at buying resources that China needed from other countries, but also exporting China's goods and services. Through this policy, the Chinese government planned to support its multinational companies to build their international brands. Following the economic strategy "going out", details of the cultural strategy of "going out" were also launched on 24 December 2001. As Yu Hong noted, the first wave of strategies to expand soft power in the 2000s, saw the SAPPRFT invest in CCTV, China Radio International, *Xinhua* News Agency, and China Daily, as well as the establishment of Confucius Institutes in universities around the world.[2]

The cultural "going out" strategy was implemented for two reasons. First, at the turn of the 21st century, a series of international events, including the sovereignty handover of Hong Kong from the British to China (1997), the sovereignty handover of Macau from Portugal to China (1999), the hosting of the Beijing Olympics (2008), and China's GDP achieving second place worldwide (since 2010), stimulated the rapid rise of China's international status. This further prompted Chinese political leaders to pursue a better international image which was consistent with its economic power around the world. The CCP's political leaders repeatedly emphasised the importance of Chinese culture when projecting images of China. For instance, on 23 July 2010, former President Hu Jintao (2002-2012) highlighted the importance of promoting Chinese cultural brands and improving its international competitiveness in the international cultural industry.[3] President Xi Jinping further proclaimed that it is a good way

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[1] "Implementing the Strategy of 'Going Out'," the Chinese Government, 15 March 2006, http://www.gov.cn/node_11140/2006-03/15/content_227686.htm.

[2] Hong Yu, *Networking China: The Digital Transformation of the Chinese Economy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 138-139.

[3] Wen Liu & Guotao Zhang, "Saving the Time for China, Resonating with the World—the Responsibility and Mission of CCTV Documentary," *Modern Media*, 2011:1, 79-81.

to innovatively use international media to communicate China's voice to the world.[4] In other words, the discrepancy between China's actual status and the status that its leaders think it ought to have based on China's economic status, stimulated China's policymakers to project a more diverse image of China to the world. In this context, many advertisements conveying a positive image of China were broadcast around the globe. For instance, a microfilm of China's national image was shown in Times Square, New York City on January 17, 2011, which presented the country as prosperous, democratic, civilised, and harmonious. Thus, conveying the Chinese soft power has become a necessary national strategy in the new domestic and international contexts and the Chinese government may set the rules in international organisations through its culture and ideas rather than depending on economic carrots, political sticks, or military threats.

Second, the cultural strategy "going out" was also expected to deal with some controversies about China's negative impact on international affairs and global stability. Controversial topics, such as the CCP's authoritarian regime, China's human rights record, and military expansion in East Asia and Africa, brought about a negative impact on the Chinese government. Furthermore, coverage by foreign media of the riots in Tibet in March 2008 was a turning point for the Chinese government and its determination to launch a full-blown image-building campaign.[5] Former president Hu Jintao pointed out that the main reason for the "anti-China" tide was that the West had an advanced international broadcasting system. However, the gap between China and the West regarding international communication capacity was huge.[6] The 'negative comments' stimulated the Chinese government to provide extra funding for its broadcasting system. Some state-run media, such as CCTV and *Xinhua* News Agency, soon became primary

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[4] Jinping Xi, "The Speech at the Conference of Urbanization," 14 December 2013, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-12/14/content_2547880.htm.

[5] Ying Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 174.

[6] "The Report of The Third Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Congress," the Chinese Government, 13 October 2008, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/67481/94156/135472/.

platforms for expanding China's soft power to the world.[7] For example, state news agency *Xinhua* launched a 24-hour global news channel in English in 2010.[8] William A. Callahan points out that in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games, CCTV presented a peaceful, civilised China; one that is friendly with the world.[9] CCTV, as the mouthpiece of the CCP, is an important state television broadcaster, which undertakes the job of promoting China's views and vision to the wider world and countering negative portrayals of the country in the US-dominated international media. An estimated seven billion dollars was earmarked for external communication, including the expansion of Chinese broadcasting networks, such as CCTV News and Xinhua's English-language TV, CNC World.[10] The CCP realised that it was unrealistic to expect the West to promote China's image, and therefore, expanding CCTV to advocate on behalf of China and Chinese culture overseas has become one part of China's "going out" strategy.

China's political and economic growth has driven the country to pursue greater cultural influence over the world. Furthermore, CCTV, as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, has built different types of broadcasting platforms to expand Chinese voices overseas in the context of the cultural "going out" strategy. The process of projecting a positive image of the Chinese government is, at the same time, a gradual procedure of CCTV's marketisation and internationalisation. Chwen Chwen Chen argues that "if we put it in the broader context of China's emergence as a global actor, CCTV's expansion is a natural development of China's firms' internationalisation strategies."[11] Chen believes that the key to the

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[7] Ying Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television* (New York: The New Press, 2012), p.174.

[8] "China's Xinhua launches global English TV channel," BBC, 1 July 2010, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10473645.

[9] William A Callahan, *China: the Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

[10] Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi, "Introduction," in *China's Media Go Global*, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi (London: Routledge, 2018), 1-2.

[11] Chwen Chwen Chen, "CCTV Going Global in a Digital Scenario," 17 November 2014, http://theasiadialogue.com/2014/11/17/cctv-going-global-in-a-digital-scenario-some-reflections/.

success of CCTV going global is incorporating a well-developed business model into its organisation and operation. CCTV has implemented many strategies to propel its globalisation. For example, CCTV-4's overseas Chinese service was divided into three regional channels in 2007, namely, CCTV International Asia, International Europe and International America, while the original CCTV-9 became CCTV-News (or CCTV-N) in 2010 to service English-speaking audiences. Moreover, CCTV-French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian channels were established between 2004 and 2009 to target more international audiences.[12] In particular, CCTV-4 and CCTV-9 (Chinese and English) have become important apparatus to broadcast China's voices around the world, initially to Western Europe and North America.[13] In this period, lots of television dramas and documentaries were produced by CCTV to convey China's soft power. For example, the twelve-part historical documentary series *The Rise of the Great Powers* (大国崛起, *da guo jueqi*) was released on CCTV from 13–24 November 2006. It depicts the evolution of European statecraft from monarchy to democracy and examines nation-building and the territorial expansion of nine countries: Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States. The documentary highlights that historical events aligned with social stability, industrial investment, peaceful foreign relations and national unity are important elements for the rise of great power. Michael Keane suggests that the emphasis of these elements, rather than "military strength, political liberalisation or even the rule of law", is to publicise to the world that the rise of China is also a peaceful one.[14] Thus, CCTV's *The Rise of the Great Powers* unveils China's cultural soft-power strategy, to broadcast a peace-loving national image globally. For the Chinese government, building a modern broadcasting system through a wide

[12] Junhao Hong & Youling Liu, "Internationalisation of China's Television: History, Development and New Trends," in *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media*, edited by Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 430.

[13] Ying Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 172.

[14] Michael Keane, *The Chinese Television Industry* (London: BFI, 2015), 132.

coverage has become an urgent task to break the Western media monopoly, to defend against the "theory of China's threat", and to obtain a higher status based on its economic development. CCTV, as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, has been building its international broadcasting system accordingly to convey this voice.

CCTV gradually expanded its international market share not only by the diversity of its channels, but also by cooperating with international media. For example, CCTV has secured its position as a strategic collaborator of the BBC and has cooperated with the BBC to shoot three documentaries—*Wild China* (2008), *Africa* (2013), and *Hidden Kingdoms* (2014)—since 2008.[15] At the same time, CCTV signed deals with many other international media organisations. For instance, in October 2001, CCTV expanded CCTV-9 into cable delivery and began to partner with global media firms such as AOL, Time Warner and News Corporation. By giving Time Warner cable delivery and News Corporation's BSkyB satellite service limited access to the television market in Guangdong Province, CCTV is able to access New York, Los Angeles, and Houston in the United States, as well as some areas in Europe.[16] Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley suggests:

> In addition to in-house production, CCTV has adopted three methods to internationalise and upgrade its documentary profile in recent years, namely procurement from foreign sources, coproduction and joint venture. The advantageous resources, finance and an enormous market potential have empowered the CCTV to be able to target at elite broadcasters as its international partners, such as the BBC, Discovery Channel and National Geographic."[17]

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[15] Tongdao Zhang & Lan Liu, "The Research Report of Chinese Documentary Production in 2014," *Contemporary Cinema*, 2015:5, p.103.

[16] Yuezhi Zhao, "Transnational Capital, the Chinese State, and China's Communication Industries in a Fractured Society," *Javnost - The Public*, 2003:10(4), 56.

[17] Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "Reflections on the Transformation of CCTV Documentary," 14 November 2014, http://theasiadialogue.com/2014/11/14/reflections-on-the-transformation-of-cctv-documentary-2/.

Through cooperation with the BBC and other reputable international broadcasters, CCTV has gained credibility and experience in documentary-making, and established itself as a major player in the international TV documentary industry. They adopted news practices steeped in the tradition of Western journalism, introduced live studio interviews, and made room for a greater diversity of opinion. Based on its international broadcasting system, CCTV not only "presents a Chinese perspective on issues that interest the world and reports world news in a timely fashion",[18] but, more importantly, it learns advanced ideas about media creation by cooperating with News Corporation, CNN, BBC, and NHK. Berry has identified this situation as "the hegemony of the party-state apparatus and the marketplace".[19] This suggests that CCTV's internationalisation must put the CCP's political imperatives as a priority, but also needs to survive within the market's rules and project its positive image overseas. In short, CCTV, as the mouthpiece of China's government, has carried out many strategies to identify itself as a comprehensive broadcasting system through which to communicate Chinese stories, voices, and national images. In this context, CCTV has further strengthened itself by cooperating and competing with other international media companies.

Expanding the CCP's broadcasting system not only serves to project China's positive image globally but is also frequently related to the CCP's nationalist propaganda for domestic audiences. The CCP locates its nationalism partly within the discourse of China's past 'humiliation and greatness'. More specifically, the unequal Western treaties since the Opium War (1840) and Japanese aggression (from 1895 to 1945) led to a situation of suffering for China, known as the 'hundred years' humiliation', while the wars led by the CCP against both domestic and international opponents (1921-49) are depicted as a great success. Therefore,

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[18] John Jirik, Marking News in the People's Republic of China: The Case of CCTV-9. PhD Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2008, 103.

[19] Chris Berry, "Shanghai Television's Documentary Channel: Chinese Television as Public Space," in *TV China*, edited by Ying Zhu and Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 73.

the content of the CCP's nationalism contains the wars of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism led by the CCP.

The discourse of national humiliation shows China's insecurity about the past, which is often used by the CCP to maintain its regime legitimacy in the present. For example, the humiliation of the Japanese aggression (1895-1945) is often aroused by a current territorial dispute about whether China or Japan has the sovereignty of the *Diaoyu* Islands. In 2012, anti-Japanese protests took place in many cities in China, triggered by this territorial dispute. China's media, such as CCTV and many local television stations, connected the territorial dispute of the *Diaoyu* Islands with the history of the Japanese aggression to challenge Japanese behaviours surrounding the *Diaoyu* Islands. Neil Renwick and Qing Cao suggest that the lost territories and wars before 1945 remind the Chinese government that they cannot lose any territory to its neighbours again.[20] The discourse of the 'hundred years' humiliation' is constructed and used by the Chinese government to present a national rejuvenation, which serves the CCP's long-term goals of uniting its people, lifting national morale, and reaffirming its regime legitimacy. Prasenjit Duara further argues that "on the one hand nationalist leaders and nation-states glorify the ancient or eternal character of the nation, they simultaneously seek to emphasise the unprecedented novelty of the nation-state, because it is only in this form that the 'people' have been able to realize themselves as the subjects or masters of their history".[21] In this sense, the CCP's propaganda machine has used China's historical and cultural connotations to serve its ideological goals. The nationalism of postsocialist China serves as a legitimising tool that focuses on constructing China's past humiliation to maintain the CCP's regime in the context of China's rapid economic development. The CCP used this constructed 'history of suffering' to propagandise its patriotism and

[20] Neil Renwick & Qing Cao, "Chinese Political Discourse towards the 21st Century: Victimhood, Identity, and Political Power," *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, 1999:17 (4), 112.

[21] Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation, Jonathan Unger," in *Chinese Nationalism*, edited by Geremie R. Barmé (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 42.

regime legitimacy. In this process, a transfer from culturalism to nationalism under state-led discourse is indicated. To some extent, the globalisation of Chinese media and promotion of Chinese public diplomacy go hand in hand as a packaged tool to improve China's international image and stabilise the CCP's regime. In short, CCTV's internationalisation was situated against the background of the Chinese government proactively strengthening its ability to go global to gain discourse power and a greater capacity for media communication.

A Bite of China (2012) is a food documentary produced in the environment discussed above. It firstly was released through CCTV-1 on 14 May 2012. Its average rating was up by 0.5% and episode 4, *The Taste of Time*, reached to 0.55%, which exceeded all TV ratings at that time and had a similar rating to some BBC documentaries. Thereafter, it was re-released on CCTV-4 and CCTV-9 Documentary (Chinese and English channels) many times between May 23 and June 23, 2012, with an average rating was 0.481%. *A Bite of China* also achieved a huge success in the international documentary market. Based on the data,[22] it has been translated into different languages, including Spanish, German, English, French, and Portuguese, and has been released in over 20 countries. At the same time, it was released in Hong Kong TVB, Taiwan Public Television, Malaysian Astro, Singapore Channel 8, and Belgium RTBF.[23] It is significant that *A Bite of China* was sent to the Cannes international film festival in 2012.[24] The sale of a single episode topped 40,000 dollars, and international sales reached up to 2.26 million dollars.[25] Overall, *A Bite of China* has achieved huge success in the documentary market around the world.

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[22] Huaibing Zhang, Research on the Documentary *A Bite of China*: Artistic Expression and Aesthetic Characteristics, PhD Dissertation, Shandong Normal University, 2015, 15.

[23] Yu Zhao, "Tasting a Nation: A Case Study of Documentary '*A Bite of China*'," https://kingsasiancci.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/a-bite-of-china-ppt-yu-zhao.pdf.

[24] Huaibing Zhang, Research on the Documentary *A Bite of China*: Artistic Expression and Aesthetic Characteristics, PhD Dissertation, Shandong Normal University, 2015, 15.

[25] Xi Zhao & Danli Zhao, "The Realistic Approach of International Communication for Chinese Documentary-An Analysis of the Strategy of CCTV Documentary Internationalization," *Modern Media*, 2014:01, 90.

Besides this, there are a number of other reasons why this chapter focuses on *A Bite of China*. First, the series does not have any obvious political or pedagogical function. Compared to CCTV's other documentaries, for example, selling the Confucian tradition, the Chinese government's discourse, or more specifically the history of the PRC and CCP, food in *A Bite of China* becomes a more relaxed and accessible subject through which to disseminate political and pedagogical messages. Second, China's public concern about food safety has risen due to incidents of food poisoning. Much of China's dairy industry was exposed in 2008 as having used the industrial chemical melamine to produce milk products. Thus, the safety issue of food has caused large-scale panic and worry, resulting in widespread distrust as well as social insecurity. Yan Yunxiang suggests that even though China's market economy has developed rapidly, social trust has generally declined in recent years.[26] In this respect, the promotion of social trust has become an urgent task for the Chinese government. *A Bite of China* investigates original ingredients as well as the process of food-making to enhance confidence in food safety and restore social trust. This confidence is further related to the stability of the CCP's regime legitimacy. CCTV, as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, thus conveyed the message of a safer environment for its domestic audiences to deal with social panic. Stuart Hall evaluates that the BBC is an instrument, an apparatus, a machine through which the nation is constituted.[27] CCTV, to some extent, is also constructed as a national machine to present China's image for domestic and international audiences. Thus, the combination of nostalgic food culture (traditional homemade food) and the influence of CCP's politics makes *A Bite of China* a suitable example to examine how nostalgia in contemporary Chinese TV documentary is constructed by the political discourse of the Chinese government. Compared to the first three

[26] Yunxiang Yan, "Food Safety and Social Risk in Contemporary China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2012:71(3), 705-729.

[27] Stuart Hall, "Which Public, Whose Service?" In *All our Futures, the Changing Role and Purpose of the BBC*, edited by W. Stevenson (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 32.

chapters, nostalgic culture in this chapter, is not limited to feature film, arthouse film or Internet dramas but is extended to documentaries produced by the state-owned media CCTV.

This chapter examines how the rhetoric of nostalgia, linked to particular ideas of 'family-state' and 'harmonious society', has been mobilised by the CCP's political discourse in attempts to stabilise the CCP's regime legitimacy and project China's peaceful development. Transnational and transcultural perspectives are identified to investigate how China's public diplomacy intends to build an objective and friendly publicity environment through CCTV's documentary, in the context of China's strategy "going out".

2. Nostalgia in the Documentary *A Bite of China* (2012)

A Bite of China is a CCTV documentary series comprised of seven episodes. Each episode expresses a different but related theme. Episode 1, *The Gifts from Nature,* presents the hard work involved in the process of cooking food. Episode 2, *The Story of Staple,* shows the inheritance of Chinese traditional food culture. From a pan of ordinary rice to delicate staple food, each delicious type of food contains an accumulation of life experience and philosophy. Episode 3, *The Inspiration of Transformation,* discusses the wisdom of eating. This episode attempts to tell audiences that people intelligently use natural materials to create new tastes. Episode 4, *The Taste of Time,* relays to audiences the various ways to preserve food, such as curing, air-drying, and smoking. Episode 5, *The Secret of Kitchen,* shows superb cooking skills; that the percentage of condiments and time-control are key to cooking delicious food. Episode 6, *The Harmonization of Flavours,* represents how Chinese traditional philosophies are used in the process of food preparation. Episode 7, *Our Farm,* returns to the wisdom of a "unity of nature and living" (天人合一, *tian ren he yi)* and claims that human beings' lives are dependent on nature.

The exploration of food in each episode is mixed with the everyday lives of ordinary people, which makes the food seem full of vitality. In the process of food-making, some philosophies for life and social transformation are presented. The ordinary and delicious foods have a common characteristic in that they imply 'family'. The first section below begins by analysing where the nostalgia is in *A Bite of China.* Then, related to this nostalgic culture, the second section examines how the repeated concept of 'state-family' is a potential form of propaganda by the CCP to encourage nationalism and patriotism for domestic audiences. The third section investigates how CCTV presents China's image of a peace-loving nation to international audiences. Food in *A Bite of China* becomes a transnational and transcultural lens through which the image of China is projected to both Chinese domestic and international audiences.

Nostalgia Embedding in Home-made Food

A Bite of China shows China as an agricultural society. The activities of food-making, food-collection, and food-selling are connected to rural China and nostalgia is integrated with the fundamental social unit of the family. As sociologist Fei Xiaotong suggests, from a grass-roots perspective, Chinese society is rural.[28] In this sense, China is an ancient agricultural country and the consciousness of rural (countryside), and family values have become a collective consciousness. *A Bite of China* presents this specific identity to awake a common nostalgia related to the feeling of family (home). Further, it constructs its nostalgia in two ways: first, people are missing homemade food; and second, people are worried about the fact that some homemade foods are disappearing as a result of the rapid social transformation.

[28] Xiaotong Fei, *Rural China* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012), 89.

Firstly, most subjects featured in the seven episodes are situated within a family setting. Their decisions and feelings are often motivated by ties of kinship, whether between mother and daughter in the case of the mushroom gatherers (episode 1), or between parents, grandparents, and children in other stories. *A Bite of China* tells audiences that homemade food spreads the taste of people's memories in the period of childhood, related to their mothers, grandmothers, and the disappearing countryside (episode 1). Margaret Morse suggests that "a

Figure 4.1: Scenes related to the concept of 'home' in *A Bite of China*

fleeting smell, spidery touch, a motion, a bitter taste-almost are thus ephemeral and potential triggers to search familiar memories in this sensory world."[29] In other words, nostalgia is not only an individual feeling but also a product of a social environment in which people's lives are embedded. Many plotlines about the warmth of family are narrated by 'real' people living in the countryside, which suggests that nostalgia is a sense of yearning for past home and countryside (Figure 4.1). For example, one scene (episode 1) delineates a time of the sunset. In this beautiful environment, some workers travel back home by horse-drawn vehicle after they finish their work. This scene evokes an image of a very ancient lifestyle of "people going to work during sunrise and leaving work at sunset" (日出而作，日落而息, *richu erzuo, riluo erxi*). Feelings of absence, desire, and aspiration for the warmth of home may be imparted by this, which in turn, triggers feelings of nostalgia among viewers. Another scene in episode 2 describes a family, made up of different generations, getting together to celebrate the Spring Festival. An old cutting board is used to cut fresh ingredients. Through

[29] Margaret Morse, "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam," In *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, edited by Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 63.

the use of vivid colour contrast, one may recall a scene when the mother or others were using this old cutting board to prepare food for the family. Especially for those who are far away from their home, any images of old cooking items, homemade food and family reunion may effectively arouse nostalgia. These scenes illustrate a self-sufficient community in the rural countryside, which is often depicted as an idyllic paradise in Chinese classical literature. Thus, nostalgia is situated in the moment when people cook food for their families.

A Bite of China does not introduce any cooking masters or food experts to share expertise about how to cook, but creates narratives of ordinary people who hunt in the wild for, and cook food for a living and for their families in order to express nostalgia. For example, episode 1 begins with rural people collecting pine mushrooms at three o'clock in the morning. A Tibetan girl Zhuoma and her mother have to walk 20 kilometres to reach the jungle. Her mother insists on collecting mushrooms in spite of her old age and poor health. The story does not romanticise the work of picking pine mushrooms; instead, they emphasise the intense competition among villagers. When asked why she gets up so early, Zhuoma replies honestly, "if we were late, others wouldn't give us a chance. We won't find any pine mushrooms because others would have picked them all" (episode 1). During the two-month mushroom-picking season, Zhuoma and her mother earned 5000 yuan (approximately £450), and the narrator comments that their hard work pays off. Compared to picking pine mushrooms, digging lotus roots is even more laborious, but the relatively high income from this job is the main incentive. In addition to showing the technique used by the lotus roots diggers to dig them out from deep muds in the lake, the documentary also presents their complaints: "I feel the ache of my back and arms, my legs are sore and my stomach is upset. My wife always tells me to take care of my body" (episode 1). Even though cold weather makes their work painful, lotus root diggers continue to be motivated as lotus roots sell well. One of the lotus root diggers in the documentary says that "because I dig the lotus roots out with my

own hands, it gives me a good feeling when I see them in the market. I get a definite feeling of intimacy" (episode 1). Further, in the episode *The Taste of Time,* the voiceover says it seems that Beijing is a city without nostalgia as many kinds of food coming from different places may be found in Beijing. However, the documentary tells that Jin Shunji, living in Beijing, still has a special yearning for the traditional hometown's pickle, though it is easy to buy pickle in Beijing. As Anita Mannur argues, food nostalgia leads immigrant communities to become invested in an image of the homeland as an "unchanging and enduring cultural essence".[30] This story, further, shows that food has a specific meaning for those who live far away from their hometowns. The camera turns the narrative to Jin's hometown in North China, where her mother can be seen carefully pickling spicy cabbage for the family. A simple jar of pickle connects both locations with the mother representing hometown and the daughter Beijing.

The documentary tells audiences that it is the result of the workers' hard labour that many other people have the chance to eat fresh mushrooms, lotus root and pickle. Here, traditional homemade food arouses people's nostalgia for a self-sufficient community and a countryside lifestyle in the context of China's rapid urbanisation. However, there is not any romanticised beautification about these hardworking people, rather nostalgia is infused into an ordinary and even harsh lifestyle. In short, almost all characters featured in the seven episodes are related to the concept of home and family. *A Bite of China* does not show any mystified and profound philosophy but highlights ordinary people's feelings in the process of food-making, which conveys an idea that everyone has an understanding of home through their sense of taste and everyone is longing for their hometowns. Nostalgia is conveyed by these food practices, which may contribute to shaping families, increasing intergenerational links, and transmitting rituals. For migrants and other people who are away from their

[30] Anita Mannur, *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2010), 31.

home, eating these homemade foods may console their nostalgia about a past time and their lost homelands. Although people leave their homes, the connection with their hometown is still anchored in their hearts. In this sense, the hometown's food is their emotional connection with family. These mixed emotions contain many silent cares and yearning for the lost countryside, which is fundamental to the success of this documentary. Therefore, food is not only necessary for living but also undertakes a social function, through which the past time, warm family bonds, and countryside are presented again in a contemporary changing society.

Secondly, nostalgia is also related to a sense of anxiety about disappearing traditional foods and the countryside as a result of China's rapid urbanisation. Nostalgia can be interpreted through Chinese words *xiangchou* (乡愁). '*Xiang*' means home, hometown, and countryside. '*Chou*' suggests an emotion of melancholy or sadness. In the context of China's rapid urbanisation, much of the countryside is disappearing. Thus, *chou* gradually dominates the process of searching for rural China. Homemade food as a symbol of a past lifestyle, and even a kind of traditional culture, is also facing a dangerous decline, which triggers people's complex collective memories about traditional culture and lifestyle in the countryside. In this context, *A Bite of China* frequently questions the fate of traditional culinary culture. For example, in *The Story of Staple*, Lao-Huang continues to make numerous yellow steamed buns with his wife using a traditional procedure of milling flour, kneading the dough, and fermentation, despite their daughter and son having left their home to go to the city. On the one hand, Lao-Huang expresses pride when his customers praise his steamed buns; on the other, he is somewhat worried that this skill is in danger of disappearing. The documentary shows that many younger generations who used to live in the countryside have moved to the city. As a result, the connection between the younger generation and the countryside has vanished. The documentary repeatedly expresses a sense of worry that the traditional agricultural civilisation

is shrinking. Xiao Mingwen claims that a more serious concern is that some traditional handicrafts are challenged by China's increasing industrialisation.[31] Hence, from the perspective of heritage conservation, nostalgia is triggered by the fading production of some homemade food and traditional craftsmanship in the context of urbanisation.

Based on Zhang's statistics, 3. 6 million villages existed in 2000, which had reduced to 2.7 million by the end of 2010. This equates to an average of 25 villages disappearing every day.[32] In contrast, the development of the urban population in China rose from 20% to 54%, indicating a move of more than 300 million people from rural to urban areas in a 30-year period alone (1984–2014), whereas the equivalent migration in Great Britain took approximately 100 years, and 60 years in the USA. [33] This rising urbanisation brings about significant homesickness and pain for many people, especially for those who have had the experience of living in the countryside. Further, the Chinese government notes this hyper-urbanisation, hence, "Remember the Nostalgia" was put forward by President Xi Jinping at a conference on 12th December 2013. Xi pointed out that the city can be reintegrated completely into the natural cycle in the process of urbanisation.[34] In other words, the unique scenery of water and hills in the city can be preserved, providing a good chance for urban residents to enjoy nature and remember the past. Moreover, Zhang also argues that the Chinese government should realise that China has a 5,000-year history of agriculture when it boosts its rate of urbanisation.[35] Thus Chinese traditional culture is

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[31] Mingwen Xiao, "Ecocriticism and National Image in *A Bite of China*," *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 2014:16(4), 5.

[32] Xiaode Zhang, "Why do You Want to Emphasize Remember the Nostalgia?" *China Economic Report*, 2014:02, 26.

[33] Jin Feng, "Food Nostalgia and the Contested Time," *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 2016:10(1), 60.

[34] Jinping Xi, "The Speech at the Conference of Urbanization," 14 December 2013, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-12/14/content_2547880.htm.

[35] Xiaode Zhang, "Why do You Want to Emphasize Remember the Nostalgia?" *China Economic Report*, 2014:02, 27.

based on rural agriculture rather than urban industry. The countryside may therefore be seen as a spiritual home for many Chinese people. Homemade food in the countryside not only provides a social palliative to console nostalgia caused by the quick pace of urbanisation, but further, sustains many social transformations in China's long history.

The rapid pace of industrialisation and urbanisation not only causes the disappearance of the countryside, but also leads to people's concern about food safety. China's public concern for food safety rose dramatically in 2008 due to exposure to food scandals in China.[36] As discussed above, nostalgia is therefore not only stimulated by the disappearance of homemade food and the lifestyle of the countryside, but by a sense of worry about the food safety issues. The documentary presents many kinds of traditional homemade foods produced in an ordinary family kitchen to show the 'warmth' of food. Alongside this, the presentation of food-making procedures aims to restore people's confidence in food safety. Therefore, the documentary presents multi-layered and tasteful processes of food-collection and production to stimulate memories of the taste of authentic food and ingredients, whilst enhancing consumers' knowledge of actual preparation procedures for the many foods that they eat. This constructed nostalgia may help Chinese consumers regain confidence in food safety.

In this regard, nostalgic food culture related to the concept of family and home may be considered as a typical form of "root-seeking", as discussed in Chapter 1. *A Bite of China* imagines a taste of simplicity, which has been passed on from generation to generation in rural China. Furthermore, it presents an understanding that people respect food, as it is the result of their hard work and relates to the memories of their families. This respect and "root-seeking" become a kind of collective unconsciousness for Chinese people. Therefore, protecting food culture becomes a form of conservation ('root-seeking') movement in

[36] Of these, the one caused by the Sanlu Group's melamine-contaminated baby formula in 2008 was perhaps the most widely reported and condemned.

CCTV's documentary. Compared to other 'heritage' preservations, the preservation of food culture in rural China is closely linked to China's rapid pace of urbanisation. When people feel anxious about the disappearing countryside and alienated by urban culture (as discussed in the first two chapters), some may search for their roots in homemade foods. As director Chen Xiaoqing says, "a person may speak with a London accent, but his stomach is still a Chinese."[37] In this sense, many Chinese people may travel abroad, but the tie between palate and memory of their hometown remains constant. Overall, the documentary highlights that home lies where homemade food is.

Nostalgic Food Culture and the CCP's Nationalist Propaganda

Nostalgic food culture is connected to the concept of family, rather than other grand themes or symbols, such as the Yellow River (黄河, *huanghe*) and the Great Wall (长城, *changcheng*), that are often used to symbolise the image of China in CCTV's documentaries. Through this link between smaller kinship and ethnicity-based units, the larger 'national family' as a whole is presented. It is understandable, therefore, that in the eyes of a veteran television documentary director, *A Bite of China* presents a new milestone for Chinese documentary-making, in that it is "the best propaganda for China" without a "propagandist tone".[38] The chief editor Chen Xiaoqing further points out that *A Bite of China* is a documentary which both introduces Chinese food, and provides a window to investigate the relationship between food, people, and country.[39] From this perspective, this section analyses how the documentary adopts nostalgia in food culture to communicate an image of China as a united country to propagandise the CCP's nationalism and its patriotism for its domestic audiences.

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[37] Fan Yang, "*A Bite of China*: Food, Media, and the Televisual Negotiation of National Difference," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2015:32(5), 411.

[38] An Huang, "*A Bite of China* won Grand Jury Prize," Guangzhou Daily, 5 December 2012, Http://gzdaily.dayoo.com/html/2012–12/05/content2051024.htm.

[39] Xuan Yu, "Ideology Constructing of National Identity in *A Bite of China*," *Beijing Social Sciences*, 2012:06, 68.

As previously discussed, an emphasis has been placed on nostalgia being embedded in homemade food, which hints at a very important concept of family. In this section, the concept of family in this documentary is further explored as a means of awakening the concept of a 'family-state'. The 'family-state' is a social and political structure that emphasised the importance of a 'small family' in the period of imperial China. More specifically, this structure sees the father as the leader of a family. At the same time, a family is a small state, and the state is a big family. Therefore, a country is seen as a big family and the emperor as the father of this country. This patriarchal ideology has had a huge impact on Chinese feudal history. Homemade food and people's hard labour may be seen as cultural symbols of home but, through this constructed 'small family', the documentary reveals its real purpose of presenting a concept of the state. Swislocki has argued that culinary nostalgia is a means for people to imagine themselves and their region among the broader processes of social change.[40] For this reason, this section suggests that this form of nostalgia further enables people to imagine the nation and state.

The documentary links nostalgic food culture to the concept of state to emphasise China as a united country under the leadership of the CCP. For example, in *The Gifts from Nature*, the first scene which describes the life of Laobao, who makes his living by digging winter bamboo, is shot in Zhejiang province. The next scene then transfers immediately to depict A-Liang's work of digging bamboo in Guangxi province. The two stories are matched to construct an inner intercommunity in which people in different places may do similar things. Overall, the first episode includes a reference to seven different places around China. Most provinces around China, including Taiwan, are present in this

[40] Antonia Finnane, "Mark Swislocki' *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai*," *the American Historical Review*, 2011:116(3), 779-780.

documentary.[41] More specifically, the documentary begins with the following passage:

> China has billions of population. It also has the world's most abundant and diverse natural landscapes: plateaus, mountain forests, lakes, (and) coasts. The span of geography and climate contributes to the formation and preservation of species. No other country has this many potential primary ingredients for food. People collect, pick up, dig out, and fish, in order to obtain the gift of nature. Across four seasons, we are about to see the stories about human and nature behind the delicacies. (episode 1)

This 'national' narrative in many ways sets the tone for each episode. This geographical characteristic, both visually and verbally, serves the purpose of identifying China as an expansive country; its people variously tied to the specific natural surroundings through nostalgic food culture. The regional diversity among its people is featured, which includes the Tibetan mushroom collector, several bamboo-shoot and lotus-root diggers in southeast provinces, and an elderly fisherman from the north. They are integrated by scenic montages of natural landscapes, all of which belong to the national territory of China. Through presenting different stories from different areas of China, this documentary attempts to create a feeling of China being an expansive and united country. People may eat different food and live in different locations, but their relationship to the mountains, the land, and the water of their country makes them Chinese. David Morley argues that national broadcasting creates a sense of unity, which links the periphery to the centre, and the national public to the private lives of its citizens.[42] Therefore, *A Bite of China* adopts nostalgic food culture to connect all Chinese cultural territory to emphasise the image of a united China. Herein, 'culture' is a highly politicised category, which signals the political intention of

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41 Some countries around the world acknowledge that the Republic of China (Taiwan) is a country now.

42 David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 107.

the CCP's plans to project a united image of China to the domestic audience. Nostalgic foods are cooked, eaten, and consumed by numerous family members. There is a strong connotation here, which basically conceptualises the 'family' as a sphere of 'politics'. Thus, CCTV's television documentary articulates folk and culinary culture and national life, as a specific political discourse, to communicate a concept of a united China. As Sun Yunfan notes, many microbloggers quickly identified *A Bite of China* as none other than a subtler form of "patriotic education", which deploys "taste buds to summon people's cultural identity" aims to "get (people) back on track, shift their focus of life back to eating, and thus return to being truly Chinese".[43] The process of eating food links people of different cultural backgrounds and geographical locations throughout China. The documentary becomes a potential vehicle to communicate that China is a united country and that people eating homemade food is a regular feature of Chinese life.

Eating traditional homemade food enables people to imagine themselves in a place with a similar history and culture, and further enables them to feel part of China. This has some obvious parallels with the ethnic food boom in the ethnic areas where the association of different foods with different ethnic groups constitutes an imaginary 'multicultural' nation named China. Therefore, it is not just the ethnicity of Han that is referred to, but many other ethnic minorities, such as Korean and Tibetan ethnicity, are also included in order to construct an image of a united and multicultural China. In some ways, this 'cultural coding' of minorities is parallel to the long-standing strategy of CCTV to showcase Chinese ethnic diversity. In *Our Farm*, the documentary introduces various food cultures among the *Dong*, *Miao*, *Zhuang*, and *Tibetan* ethnic groups to show different cultures in China. As John Fitzgerald states, herein, the nationalist government prescribes an elaborate cultural regimen in which it asks people of Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Sinkiang, and the Han regions to gain an understanding of

[43] Yunfan Sun, "Food Paradise or Hell: A New Chinese Documentary Sparks Debate," 5 June 2012, http://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/food-paradise-or-hell-new-chinese-documentary-sparks-debate.

their common racial identity and to recover the sentiment of "central loyalty" toward the nationalist state.[44] The representation of ethnicity through food culture serves to reinforce a national cultural unity. This united China spreads a potential identity that 'we are Chinese'. From this perspective, the documentary constructs the notion that China is a united country with ethnic variety. People may have different dietary habits and lifestyles, but they live in the same land. Thus, these different food cultures substantiate and clarify the idea of the Chinese nation.

Rich ethnic diversity, seen as one of the characteristics of the Chinese civilisation and Chineseness, is thus depicted to emphasise an image of a united China. Chineseness, as Chow suggests, may no longer be held as a monolithic given, tied to the mythic homeland or a traceable origin, but rather be understood as provisional and plural identities, and an ongoing history of dispersal.[45] From this perspective, Chineseness may also be an imaginary construction, which has been built from contemporary social discourse. Therefore, in *A Bite of China*, it is not necessarily to renounce one's ethnicity in order to identify oneself as Chinese or having Chineseness, but to present the food they cook and eat. Being Chinese for different people primarily involves participation in traditional cultural food practice. The concept of family and food culture has become an essential criteria for defining the national community in this documentary. This mythology and symbolism of a united China foster a sense of belonging as an organic entity presented by nostalgic food culture. In this respect, nostalgic food culture is thus able to feed on the official discourse of nationalism in its attempt to 'nationalise' the notion of 'China' built by the CCP. The conflation of nostalgia and nationalism is matched by a similar conflation between the nation and the home. Therefore, *A Bite of China* makes use of food nostalgia in the construction of national identity

[44] John Fitzgerald, "The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism," in *Chinese nationalism*, edited by Jonathan Unger & Geremie R. Barmé (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 69.

[45] Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *Boundary 2*, 1998:25(3), 24.

and the food, endowed with a symbolic representation of a united China, marks a collective as well as an individual identity, which then binds a group together and confirms group loyalty. Further, from the name *A Bite of China,* it is evident that food is a decoy, while 'China' is the real theme that the documentary wants to express. Nostalgia related to the concept of family has transferred from yearning for a sense of home to yearning for national identity.

The CCP's nationalism places the state at the centre of its concerns and "portrays the state as the embodiment of the nation's will, seeking for its goals the kind of loyalty and support granted the nation itself and trying to create a sense of nationhood among all its citizens".[46] The very seemingly innocent activities of cooking and eating familiar foods prepared by ordinary people, are seen as a nostalgic enactment of ethnic identity. Hence, the union of multiple ethnicities is necessary for stabilising China as a united nation. Through the construction of an image of a united China, a common national character is produced. Here, culture, seen as a kind of platform (food), is adopted by the political carrier CCTV to project, construct, and shape people's consciousness of a united China.

Through constructing the image of a united China with different ethnicities, people's experiences may be transformed into a collective history and they will learn to instinctively value a particular set of symbols of China. In this sense, *A Bite of China* achieves its goals of promoting political propaganda and patriotism for domestic audiences. The classical Chinese concept of the 'family-state', which was seen as an important governing tool in Imperial China until 1905, is restructured through nostalgic food culture to serve the CCP's nationalist ideas of united China. Prasenjit Duara argues that the concept of the 'family-state' as a constructed Confucian culture has been seen as a specific culture of the imperial

[46] James Townsend, "Chinese Nationalism," in *Chinese Nationalism*, edited by Jonathan Unger & Geremie R. Barmé (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 18.

state and as a criteria of orthodoxy to define a community.[47] The significant transition here is from 'culturalism' to 'nationalism', to the awareness of the nation-state as the ultimate goal of the community. In short, *A Bite of China* emphasises that China is a country with a rich historical culture and multiple ethnicities, through which the CCP's nationalism is communicated.

In the first three chapters, nostalgia is first presented as firstly connected to the desire to return to a specific utopian countryside, then the return to a communal collective way of living in urban contexts, and finally, the return to the innocence of life at school and university. Compared to the nationalism of the first chapter, in which "educated youth" filmmakers construct an idyllic lifestyle of the countryside and prairie, counter-active to the appeal of Western-style modernity, here the imagined 'home' becomes articulated in terms of the nation-state, and nostalgia begins to take on its direct associations with the CCP's nationalism. Nostalgia in this chapter is an orchestrated revival of Confucianism to recentralise an alternative path for the 'family-state' towards modernisation. To some extent, neo-Confucianism has been used as a kind of politics of nostalgia.

A Bite of China attempts to build a connection between family (smaller kinship) and country (a larger national family). In this way, the CCP uses the revival of Confucianism through the representation of nostalgic homemade food, to strengthen the traditional ideology of 'family-state', for which the Chinese government acts as the father. In this respect, the nostalgic homemade culture is adopted to propagandise a sense of nationalist sentiment to maintain the legitimacy of the CCP's regime. Further, the CCP's legitimacy relies on the image of a united China in the context of national humiliation since the Opium War (1840). In other words, the CCP's nationalism implies the recovery, revival and success of the Chinese nation, led by the CCP, against the backgrounded of failures from China's 100 years of national humiliation. This united China presented

[47] Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation, Jonathan Unger," in *Chinese nationalism*, edited by Jonathan Unger & Geremie R. Barmé (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 34.

through nostalgic homemade culture, becomes a fertile ground for imagining a sense of loyalty for the CCP. Thus, China's historical struggles "for national survival and nation-building" have long endorsed the CCP's legitimacy of regime. The Chinese government practises its political doctrine that only the CCP and China's socialism can save China and provides social stability for Chinese people. In *A Bite of China*, the nostalgic yearning for homemade food is integrated with the CCP's discourse around the 'family-state', to emphasise the importance of the CCP for Chinese national independence and social stability.

Food is an important element of cultural identity in many societies. In postsocialist China, traditional homemade food has become an essential component of the representation of the "imagined community" of the nation.[48] Although it is difficult to evaluate to what degree *A Bite of China* propagandises the CCP's nationalism, its commercial success potentially disseminates the discourse of a united China and shows the CCP's interest in maintaining its regime. After this series, many other similar documentaries and TV dramas were produced by CCTV and other provincial television stations to project the image of China made up of a diverse food culture and a range of ethnicities, which has formed a cultural fashion called 'the style of the bite' (舌尖体, *shejianti*). From this perspective, *A Bite of China* gains its success both from the documentary market and its broadcast of the CCP's nationalism in the context of the strategy "going out". Distinguished from some other documentaries talking about the history of the PRC and the CCP, *A Bite of China* presents a version of the CCP's nationalism that is somewhat easier to digest.

[48] An imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson to analyse nationalism. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 6-7.

Harmonious Society and China's Peaceful Development

The former section has suggested that the concept of a 'family-state' is constructed by the documentary to propagandise the CCP's nationalism for domestic audiences. This section examines the concept of 'harmony' and how this is presented by the documentary to show China's peaceful development to international, particularly Western audiences.

The term 'harmony' has many meanings, such as gentle, smooth, compromise, cooperation, balance, and adaptation. These connotations originally reflected the relationship between human beings and nature. In Chinese classical philosophy, harmony is explained as "unity of heaven and human beings" first elaborated by the philosopher Zhuangzi (BC 369-BC 286), and later developed into a philosophical system of "harmony between human beings and nature" by the Confucian thinker Dong Zhongshu (BC 179–BC 104). Although there are many interpretations of "unity of heaven and human beings" in Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, this "harmony between human beings and nature" is consistently understood. In contemporary China, harmony is seen as a political rhetoric that supports and consolidates discourse of a 'harmonious society'—put forward by former President Hu Jintao in 2004—which has been seen as a response to the increasing social injustice and inequality emerging within the country.[49] In other words, promoting harmony is a response to the portrayal of a Chinese society suffering some unharmonious issues, such as uneven economic development and political reform. As Zhu Ying suggests, China emerges as a benevolent world leader and uses cultural legacy, particularly updated Confucian heritage, to practise a responsible and egalitarian path towards modernisation and development.[50] China's development has been identified by a Confucian ethic

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[49] Maureen Fan, "China's Party Leadership Declares New Priority: 'Harmonious Society'," Washington Post Foreign Service, 12 October 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/11/AR2006101101610.html??noredirect=on.

[50] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 126.

that highlights central authority, state benevolence, national stability, and family values.

Now, harmony has been used by the CCP to construct a social condition in contemporary China. It broadcasts a Chinese environment in which politics is stable, economic development is prosperous, people live in peace and work in comfort, and social welfare improves quickly.[51] In contrast, it implies that people should abide by the state's regulations in many significant and collective projects. That means recentralisation has reemerged as a key political tool for the Chinese state to regain its control over the direction and speed of China's economic and political modernisation. Here, the 'harmonious society' is similar to the concept of 'family-state', both of which are representative of China's need for contemporary politics.

In the former chapters, nostalgia has been repeatedly portrayed as a reflective apparatus based on the situation at present. In this chapter, the renaissance of Confucianism may further be seen as a kind of nostalgic thinking that is reconstructed by the CCP to engage with the contemporary situation. After investigating the renaissance of Confucianism in the 1990s, Wang suggests that:

> The discovery of the Confucian tradition as a timeless cultural repository by the school of national essence (*guocui*) at the turn of the twentieth century was repeated by the revival of "national learning" in the 1990s. But the "memory" of Confucianism does not repeat itself exactly. In the first instance it was a defence of the crumbling tradition as it came under assault by the radical reformers; in the 1990s, the memory was recast by a neoliberal discourse as consorting with global capitalism, so that the native cultural "essence," instead of being an obstacle to

[51] Feng Ling & Newton Derek, "Some Implications for Moral Education of the Confucian Principle of Harmony: Learning from Sustainability Education Practice in China," *Journal of Moral Education*, 2012:41(3), 345.

modernization, is seen as having all along predestined the Chinese for capitalist development.[52]

Indeed, in the 1990s, this renaissance happened in the context of market reform, which became a negotiated weapon when China's scholars and political leaders discussed how to develop the country. The renaissance of Confucianism reinvents a tradition of images, values, and historical memories to form a repository of Chinese culture. Social harmony is seen as a very high moral ideal in the Confucian tradition. In the context of the strategy "going out", the concept of harmony is also seen as a kind of renaissance of Confucianism, which, as Sally Chan notes, may be interpreted as a preference for compromise over conflict, reform over revolution and eclecticism over dogma.[53] *A Bite of China* has been released in different countries and translated into different languages. It emphasises the importance of harmony in the process of food gathering, harvesting, and collection, which may be seen as a kind of national image to depict China as a peace-loving nation. This section suggests that the Chinese government has tried to pre-empt any suspicions by calling for the construction of ''a harmonious society'' both domestically and globally.

A Bite of China, to some extent, functions as China's public diplomacy of "peaceful development". The concept of harmony is constructed through nostalgic food culture to propagandise the CCP's discourse of a 'harmonious society'. This form of 'harmonious society', as a kind of national image, presents China's commitment to developing itself in peace in the context of "going out". Firstly, regardless of regional staple foods (episode 2) or sustainable local food practices (episode 7), the documentary focuses on the concept of keeping a balance between 'human beings and nature' to express the importance of harmony. For example, in episode 1, the documentary uses two narratives to

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[52] Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004). 5-6.

[53] Sally Chan, "The Chinese Learner—A question of Style," *Education and Training*, 1999:41(6/7), 294–304.

show this theme: 1) that fishermen only catch fish that are more than two kilogrammes and purposefully omit smaller ones; 2) Zhuoma covers a fungus' pit within pine needles to protect it from hyphae after collecting mushrooms. From both stories, *A Bite of China* constructs a faith that Chinese people keep a harmonious relationship between nature and human beings. They respect nature and carefully use every inch of land to produce food.

Secondly, the concept of 'harmony' is presented in the process of adjusting five flavours: sweet, bitter, salty, sour, and spicy when Chinese people cook food. For example, the Chongqing hotpot mirrors the local people's characters, such as frank, bold, and fiery. In the process of choosing ingredients and adjusting flavours, the hotpot is seen as a perfect blend of meat and vegetables, raw and cooked ingredients, spicy and sweet taste, and light and heavy flavours (episode 6). The voiceover tells audiences that life is like the adjustment of the five basic flavours used when people cook the Chongqing hotpot; only when using different flavours may life be harmonious. The documentary also tells audiences that from five basic flavours new tastes may be created. For example, in the process of cooking stewed duck, the documentary says that the bitter and sweet taste of orange peel will be mixed with the duck. This procedure indicates that the sense of happiness may often come from sufferings. Therefore, the concept of 'harmony' in this aspect of food preparation does not only mean the adjustment of original taste but also means to create new tastes. Frederick Simons suggests that Chinese food culture is related to the philosophy of "*yin* and *yang*".[54] The concept of *yin* and *yang* is understood as an important explanation of the origin of the world. The traits of *yin* are mostly cold, dark, and feminine; *yang* is heat, light, and masculine. An imbalanced adjustment may lead to ill-health and disaster. Indeed, "*Yin* and *yang*", may also lead to a kind of harmonious life. Regardless of the five flavours, or "*yin* and *yang*", harmony in the process of food-cooking is emphasised and transformed to support and consolidate the CCP's discourse of a 'harmonious

[54] Simons Frederick J., *Food in China: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry (*Boca Raton: CRC, 1991), 22.

society'. In the context of the "going out" strategy, this discourse, presented by *A Bite of China*, reflects a harmonious nation, and therefore the series becomes an advertisement for the Chinese government to project its image of peaceful development.

Thirdly, *A Bite of China* documents food ceremonies as another way of presenting the concept of 'harmony'. In episode 2, the documentary shares with its audience a food ceremony on the Double Ninth Festival (a national festival praying for the health of the senior citizens). Ouyang, as a cook in the countryside, prepares a longevity banquet for the whole village every year. The delicious food cooked by Ouyang is a collective celebration and prayer for a long life for the old, and a wish for the safety of the whole village. Before eating, everybody picks out the longest noodle from their bowls and places it in the bowls of the elderly. Through this ceremony, the villagers show their respect for their elders. This ritual is not only interpreted as a religious ceremony, but also as a decorous and respectful behaviour towards family and the wider human community, including the state. Through this ritual, people are taught to cultivate harmonious relationships. Edward Shils writes that "the charisma of the centre, discerned by study, cultivated by ritual and the reverence for ancestors, brings the peripheral common people closer to the moral order occupied at the centre by the emperor and his counsellors and officials."[55] The villagers may be positively influenced by this food ritual and are taught to become refined individuals who respect the elderly, their ancestors, and the community. Vignolles Alexandra and Pichon Paul-Emmanuel have argued that food is associated with rituals performed on feast days, significant events, birthdays, and new seasons to structure families.[56] This longevity banquet is an adhesive for a village and a country, which stimulates

[55] Edward Shils, "Reflections on Civil Society and Civility in the Chinese Intellectual Tradition," in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity: Moral Education and Economic Culture in Japan and the Four Mini-Dragons*, edited by Tu Wei-ming (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 65.

[56] Alexandra Vignolles & Pichon Paul-Emmanuel, "A Taste of Nostalgia Links between Nostalgia and Food Consumption," *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2014:17 (3), 225–229.

people to think about their cultural inheritance, family values, and how humans and nature maintain a harmonious relationship. This community is similar to the community of the public bathhouse discussed in the second chapter. There, Beijing residents enjoy the comfortable lifestyle of the public bathhouse. The difference is that the communal bathhouse lifestyle is in danger of disappearing as a result of rapid urbanisation, while the collective food ceremony is presented as an ordered and harmonious social structure to show the CCP's discourse promoting a 'harmonious society'.

By eating food, some people celebrate and memorialise the past and their ancestors to express their respect and humanity. The meals included in the ceremony are like a kind of offering, which not only expresses people's respect for their ancestors but also prays for fortune and happiness for their communities. Through collective celebration, traditional cultural traits such as ritual and benevolence are consolidated by culinary practices. In this respect, the documentary constructs the cultural matrices of collective identity, inspiring people's love of national culture, and educating the community in common cultural heritage.[57] *A Bite of China* shares this ceremony to form an integrated image of a harmonious village and society. This concept of the harmonious village and community is then used to more broadly project the discourse of China's peaceful development. Therefore, through presenting a harmonious society, the documentary attempts to show that China's society is a harmonious environment. The 'reality' that arises from the presentation of food in *A Bite of China* reflects a packaged concept of 'Chineseness'. The 'harmonious society' becomes one characteristic of the 'Chineseness' to project the discourse of China's peaceful development.

Food has become a lens through which the political discourses of 'harmonious society' and 'peaceful development' are presented. The

[57] John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 3.

documentary emphasises that people may not know many cuisines, however, they use their harmonious beliefs and sincere hearts to cook food. Food-making becomes a kind of social ceremony and identity-marker to show a harmonious society. Harmony, as an ancient cultural ideology, has achieved its practical value in contemporary China, which is seen as a nostalgic feeling for resolving conflicts that have emerged in today's modern society. Callahan argues that "China's domestic policy of a 'harmonious society', and its foreign policy of peacefully rising in a harmonious world, are reconfigured based on the idealised view of Chinese civilisation as open to the world and tolerant of outsiders."[58] China officially announced its political rhetoric of a "peaceful development" or "peaceful rise" in 2005,[59] with the core of this foreign policy aimed at selling the idea that China would not be a threat to other nations, thus a rebuttal against the 'China threat theory'. In the context of this, harmony is drawn upon by CCTV to present a peace-loving national image as a gesture that China will defuse international conflicts through peaceful methods. Thus, China aims to reassure other countries that its rise will not be a threat to international peace and security. China implements the policy of 'peaceful development' by internally harmonising its society. Further, it emphasises that China is committed to addressing its internal issues and improving the welfare of its people, rather than interfering with world affairs. Hence, the term 'peaceful development' suggests that China would seek to avoid unnecessary international confrontation and would not overturn the current international system. Moreover, former Chinese President Hu Jintao spoke at the United Nation's sixtieth-anniversary celebration in September 2005 with a speech entitled "Strive to Establish a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity."[60] This concept is an extension of the Chinese government's policy for a 'harmonious society'. The meaning of acceptance,

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[58] William A Callahan, *China: the Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2010), 20.

[59] Shaohua Hu, "Revisiting Chinese Pacifism," *Asian Affairs*, 2006:32(4), 256-278.

[60] Jintao Hu, "Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity," 15 September 2005, http://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf.

tolerance, mutual respect, equality, and patience are now included in the concept of 'harmony', which has been given great importance by the Chinese government to propagandise its discourse of a 'harmonious society' and peaceful development, mainly for international audiences. The CCP's ideological works may therefore be masked, based on a more effective broadcasting method of harmonious food culture.

In order to be more effective in projecting this harmonious image, the crew of *A Bite of China*, learned from an international style of documentary-making. For example, *A Bite of China* features characteristics of BBC documentaries, such as using high-definition camera technology and adopting short and interesting stories in every series. Through this standardised mode of storytelling, the food culture in *A Bite of China* is integrated with a globalised audio-visual market. A combination of traditional Chinese homemade food and international standard documentary aesthetics, *A Bite of China* is seen as an "international language of communication" to publicise China's soft power.[61] Indeed, *A Bite of China* finds a union with the international audio-visual medium of television to broadcast Chinese values globally. This global communicability is directly linked to CCTV's increased efforts to communicate itself overseas more effectively by adopting a narrative with which other audiences, particularly Western audiences, are familiar. As Liu Wen, the Director of the Documentary Division of CCTV, suggests, "documentaries about Chinese reality" will no doubt "play a bigger role in the foreign market" than other television shows as the latter's "narrative style, editing, and subject matter" often limit their popularity to Asia alone.[62] From Liu's perspective, the cultural difference between China and the West is the main problem that often hinders the spread of Chinese television shows beyond Asian regions. However, food as an international language has little cultural difference

[61] Jie Zhang, "*A Bite of China*: Intercultural Communication in the Cultural Visual Feast," Guangming Daily, 19 July 2012, http://media.people.com.cn/n/2012/0719/c40606-18548649.html.

[62] Runzhi Zhang, "*A Bite of China*: The Tip of Your Tongue Stirring all over China," Time Weekly, 31 May 2012, http://time-weekly.com/story/2012-05-31/124502.html.

compared to other genres, such as history, and may be bridged by the adoption of the global-friendly documentary format to project China's national image. Seen in this light, the choice of food as the subject matter is closely connected to China's ambition of bringing Chinese culture to the world.

This discourse, of projecting China's harmonious image to the world, should be further understood from the perspective of media marketisation and internationalisation. Prasenjit Duara suggests that the development of Chinese media is evidence that the global market has granted Chinese culture a more significant status than that of the state in delimiting the ways in which the nation should appear to the world.[63] Therefore, in the context of China's media internationalisation, CCTV also takes into consideration how to deliver an acceptable image of China for its international audiences, rather than delivering an image totally in accordance with the CCP's interest. The discourse related to 'official', 'state' and 'nationalism', shows an intense purpose in producing this documentary. However, CCTV further understands that it should obey the WTO's regulations and market economy to produce and promote this documentary. Guo Yingjie suggests that the intended global market and the marketisation and the state-subsidised media production system have combined to privilege the construction of a "cultural nationalism".[64] That means CCTV's documentary *A Bite of China* is funded by China's government and aims at attracting diverse audiences across national boundaries. *A Bite of China* presents an endeavour that the Chinese government's cultural diplomacy and soft power, as an officially endorsed discourse, will be broadcast to the world. Moreover, it shows a strategy that CCTV develops its internationalisation in the context of media globalisation. CCTV has also tried to develop itself in the context of an economic strategy of "going out". Therefore, political need and the development of CCTV itself together

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[63] Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation, Jonathan Unger," in *Chinese nationalism*, edited by Jonathan Unger & Geremie R. Barmé (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 36-8.

[64] Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1-8.

promote CCTV to produce an acceptable documentary for domestic and international audiences.

Food becomes a carrier with which to spread the discourse of soft power. Here, CCTV seems to create a stylistic image called 'Chineseness' to propagandise the CCP's nationalism and image in the context of media globalisation and marketisation. The second chapter has discussed the "new documentary movement" initiated by the Sixth-Generation filmmakers in China. Most of these documentaries or films produced with documentary aesthetics often intensely engage with social margins and even resist the CCP's official discourses. *A Bite of China* is funded by CCTV, which means that it could not have any negative critique of the CCP, as the Sixth-Generation filmmakers did in their films. This constructed Chineseness, as Yang Fan puts it, does not, however, mean that their work should be seen merely as state-compliant propagation of cultural nationalism.[65] This situation can be seen in the composition of the production crew. The crew of *A Bite of China* is predominantly made up of self-employed freelancers and not regular employees of CCTV, with only two members having an official affiliation with CCTV.[66] In this situation, it is therefore difficult to assert that *A Bite of China* endorses the discourse of the Chinese government.

He Dongping, the Associate Editor-in-Chief of Guangming Daily, spoke at a CCTV-held conference about the combination of "modern means of communication" and "business operation" that may become a possible method to project China's soft power globally. These programmes related to the possibility of China's food culture may beat "McDonald's, KFC, and French or Italian cuisines" and achieve a leading status in the world.[67] Therefore, the state and the market

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[65] Fan Yang, "*A Bite of China*: Food, Media, and the Televisual Negotiation of National Difference," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2015:32(5), 411.

[66] Runzhi Zhang, "*A Bite of China*: The Tip of Your Tongue Stirring all over China," Time Weekly, 31 May 2012, http://time-weekly.com/story/2012-05-31/124502.html.

[67] Dongping He, "Showcasing China's Cultural Soft Power," Conference on *A Bite of China*, 1 June 2012, http://jishi.cntv.cn/sjsdzg/classpage/video/20120601/100574.shtml.

transform each other, and ultimately push China (China's food) onto a higher geopolitical stage. This documentary should not be limited to the sphere of state-compliant propagation of cultural nationalism; *A Bite of China* may be better seen as participating in a kind of cultural struggle that seeks to "generate more productive rethinking of the nation's present and future 'possibilities'".[68] CCTV, as the biggest of China's broadcasting systems, may explore a path to compete with other international broadcasting enterprises to strengthen itself and even become one of the globalising powers. In the context of the "going out" strategy, the Chinese traditional homemade food has promoted the Chinese national image to within international reach. In turn, this cultural communication, as a peace-loving nation, may help China's enterprises gain more business opportunities globally.

A Bite of China is simply one event in the recent history of CCTV's documentary programming and is an artificial piece of media produced by China's state-run enterprise in the context of the "going out" strategy. Although China has carried out the policy of "reform and opening up" and developed its market economy, named "socialism with Chinese characteristics", the CCP is still espousing a communist regime. Ideological differences between China's state-media and Western media are unavoidable. Against this complex background, the Chinese government has both embraced the market ideology and consumerism to integrate with the international economic system and further, it has projected its peaceful development with socialist ideology and maintained the one-party system. Thus, it is an inconsistent action between developing Chinese democratic society communication and controlling hegemonic ideological formation. Gary Rawnsley suggests that the strategy designed to support the government's public diplomacy campaign and soft power, is currently still unable to change the global

[68] Xinyu Lu, "Rethinking China's New Documentary Movement: Engagement with the Social," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record*, translated by Tan Jia and Lisa Rofel; edited by Chris Berry, Xinyu Lu and Lisa Rofel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 48.

conversation about China. The main reason is due to the tight connection between the Chinese authorities and CCTV, which inevitably hinders the credibility of the message.[69] Therefore, this contradiction brought about some difficulties when the Chinese government projected its positive image around the world based on its increasing economy. Xin Xin further notices this phenomenon when examining the globalisation of *Xinhua* Net, arguing that "massive expansion and technological prowess have not translated into professional output: none of the Chinese international media has ever broken a major global story."[70] For this reason, the increasingly important role CCTV played in the international television documentary sector deserves serious attention, as the huge investment in CCTV documentary may not broadcast a positive image of the Chinese government but rather have a negative influence on its image. In this context, *A Bite of China*, as an industrial production related to the CCP's nationalism, is neither directly orchestrated by the state nor is completely separate from it. In fact, it is more accurate to see it as a co-production of national culture endorsed by the CCP's nationalist discourse as well as produced and released based on market discipline. Global and market forces have pushed the state to transform itself from an ossified, omnipresent communist ruler to a manager, negotiator, and regulator.[71] Furthermore, the state has changed its way of governing by introducing the market mechanism into the cultural arena and by combining more business management methods with mandatory administrative means.

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[69] Gary D. Rawnsley, "Chinese International Broadcasting, Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," in *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media*, edited by Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 462.

[70] Xin Xin, *How the Market is Changing China's News: The Case of Xinhua News Agency* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 129.

[71] Wendy Su, *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 6.

Conclusion

The Chinese government was keen to project its positive images around the world after it was criticised and challenged inside and outside of China because of some controversial behaviours. CCTV, as the CCP's mouthpiece, implemented the Chinese government's "going out" strategy, through which they planned to communicate China's positive image in the world. In this situation, food is not only a "system of communication", a medium of meaning-making, and a maker of identity, but also a leading force in the communication of national image to the global community. The reconstruction of family and nostalgic food is an action of political empowerment: it is a demand for the CCP to propagandise its importance for the Chinese people and project its image of peaceful development to the world.

The nostalgic food culture is adopted to construct China's national image as a united, peace-loving and harmonious society. Nostalgia in the context of postsocialism is not just a sentimental emotion, but is a strategy that combines both cultural and national identity to present China's image as a united country made up of different ethnic minorities. The image of a united China propagandises the CCP's patriotic idea that China has become a strong country under the leadership of the CCP. In *A Bite of China*, food also shoulders the responsibility of attracting audiences of those who are living far away from their hometowns due to urbanisation. Shannan Peckham contends that nations are the product of the food they ingest.[72] Therefore, 'home' is not a physical or fixed place but 'feeling at home' may be essential and real. It may well be due to this dissociation that some individuals and communities have formed a persistent desire to remember, as evidenced in regularly produced narratives on the Internet, both traditional food and the ritualistic context of eating traditional

[72] Shannan Peckham, "Consuming Nation," in *Consuming Passions: Food in the Age of Anxiety*, edited by Sian Griffiths & Jennifer Wallace (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press,1998), 171-183.

food.[73] Therefore, eating has become a fetishised feeling, through which to mediate the impossibility of going back home due to urbanisation. Through this feeling, some people may gain a sense of solidarity and belonging (feeling at home). Overall, this chapter argues that the nostalgic food culture not only constructs the CCP's nationalism to confirm a belief-system of a united China and maintain its one-party regime but also presents a national image of a harmonious society to project the peaceful development of the Chinese government in the context of the cultural strategy of "going out". When talking about CCTV's internationalisation, it is necessary to emphasise that CCTV, a state-owned media organisation of China, represents the official voice of China, the authority of the Chinese state, and the national image of China as a priority. Any discussion, therefore, about the role of CCTV and other state-owned media in the changing world communication order should be based on this. In China's case, CCTV's expansion has both media commercialisation and geopolitical implications, which have often gone hand in hand. This unbalanced structure between being a global organisation and as the CCP's ideological representative may further impede its reliability.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of food culture in CCTV's documentary, it is understood that culture, seen as a kind of platform (food), is adopted by some political spokespeople (CCTV) to project, construct, and/or shape people's consciousness about certain political discourses, such as national union, nationalism, and patriotism. At the same time, politics itself is one presentation of culture, which uses its influence to reconstruct text and visual materials (the Confucian theory of harmony) and enrich forms of cultural production and engagement. Thus, the terrain of cultural struggle via CCTV documentary has thus been structured not only by China's burgeoning capitalist-oriented economy but, simultaneously, by anxieties about existing ways in which China is perceived and

[73] Wanning Sun, *Leaving China: Media, Migration, and Transnational Imagination* (Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 150.

understood. In the promotion of “going out”, and support from the Chinese government, CCTV’s goal is to become a world-class documentary producer and broadcaster, promoting it to a source of credible and high-quality documentaries that demonstrate Chinese cultural diplomacy and soft power in a way that appeals to a global audience.

Chapter 5: Nostalgia in Chinese Provincial Television Documentary: *Maritime Silk Road* (2016)

"The Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) was proposed by the Chinese government in 2015. The BRI, as an international policy, publicised that the Chinese government was building an economic belt with countries in southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe. This political and economic policy is also linked to the slogan 'Chinese dream', emphasising national rejuvenation, put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013. The documentary *Maritime Silk Road* (2016) was coproduced by three Chinese television stations at the provincial level and was the first television documentary situated in the context of the BRI. This documentary not only uses the ancient Maritime Silk Road as a glorious period (historical nostalgia), but also presents the yearning of overseas Chinese (diasporic nostalgia). These two forms of nostalgia present a prosperous China, focusing on developing the Maritime Silk Road economic belt and communicating culture with the countries along the Maritime Silk Road. Furthermore, this documentary emphasises that China and the countries along the Maritime Silk Road have a similar culture and complementary economic structure to highlight the concept of 'community of shared future', seen as the aim that BRI attempts to build. The notion of a 'community of shared future' potentially indicates that China will be the centre of this community. However, other countries and scholars challenge this claim. Overall, this chapter argues that the documentary *Maritime Silk Road* creates historical and diasporic nostalgias to publicise the Chinese government policy of the BRI and propagandise China-centred 'community' in the context of Xi's 'Chinese dream'.

1. Contexts of the Documentary *Maritime Silk Road* (2016)

Maritime Silk Road (2016) was produced in the context of BRI proposed by the Chinese government in 2015. Chinese President Xi Jinping first raised the initiative of rebuilding the ancient "Silk Road Economic Belt" with European and

Asian countries when he visited Kazakhstan on September 7th, 2013.[1] Following that, he raised another initiative of building a "21st century Maritime Silk Road" with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), when he visited Indonesia on October 3rd, 2013.[2] On March 28th, 2015, the Chinese government officially published the "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road" ("the Belt and Road Initiative" or BRI).[3] BRI announced the construction of two international trade routes by land and sea. The first one is a land route that connects the western areas of China, such as Xinjiang, Qinghai, Ganshu, Shanxi, and Chongqing, to Central Asian countries and Europe. Through building infrastructures in these countries and regions, China aims to handle domestic excess production capacity and labour force, guaranteeing China's energy and food supply, and promoting the development of west China.[4] The second one is a maritime route that links China's seaports with those in the South China Sea, the South Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean and Europe. Along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, the Chinese government seeks to develop economic cooperation with countries across Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.[5] Under the BRI, China-ASEAN will focus on the construction of infrastructure,[6] through which to build an economic belt between China and ASEAN. The Chinese government stresses that the BRI is a paradigm-shifting approach to international

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1 Jinping Xi, "President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries," the Chinese government, 2013, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml.

2 Jinping Xi, "Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament," ASEAN-China Centre, 2013, http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm.

3 "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," the Chinese government, March 2015, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html.

4 Usman W. Chohan, "What Is One Belt One Road? A Surplus Recycling Mechanism Approach," June 13, 2017, https://ssrn.com/abstract=2997650.

5 Jiangsheng Chen & Miao Tian, "The Formation, Implementation and Influence of 'the Belt and Road Initiative'," 31 March 2017, http://www.zgdsw.org.cn/n1/2017/0331/c218998-29182692-2.html.

6 Simon Xu Hui Shen, "Special Issue: New Silk Road Project," *East Asia*, 2015:32, 1-5.

relations, and is more egalitarian, inclusive and responsive than the existing regional and international order.[7] Based on this plan, the BRI looks to build the longest economic corridor that links 65 countries, with the aim of connecting China with the countries in Central Asia, ASEAN, Middle East, and Europe.

The ancient Silk Road can be traced back to 2,000 years ago. Zhang Qian (BC 164-BC 114), a diplomatic envoy of the Han dynasty (BC 202-AD 220), travelled to the western countries to establish international relations by land in BC 139, which later basically formed a corridor of international trade. The goods for trade along the route consisted mainly of China's silk, ceramics and tea, while a variety of spices, flowers and grasses were imported from the Middle East and South Asia. This corridor therefore became known as the Silk Road.[8] However, due to the wars between Imperial China and other nations along the Silk Road by land, the maritime trade route was opened up from port cities on the east coast during the Han dynasty to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. This maritime trade route was called the Maritime Silk Road.[9] Normally, the Silk Road refers to the ancient land and maritime trade route. In the period of Imperial China, the Han dynasty (BC 202-AD 220), Tang dynasty (AD 618-907), Song dynasty (AD 960-1279), and Ming dynasty (AD 1368-1644) are seen as a prosperous era of the Silk Road.[10] Guangzhou was the starting-point of the Maritime Silk Road in the period of Imperial China and became the first great harbour at the time of the Tang and Song dynasties. It was later substituted by Quanzhou harbour in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368).[11] Zheng He's navigation (AD 1371-1433) to the West in the early

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[7] Jeffrey Reeves, "China's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative: Network and Influence Formation in Central Asia," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2018:112, 1-17.

[8] Yaguang Zhang, "'One Belt and One Road': The Logic from History to Reality," *Southeast Academic Research*, 2016:03, 13.

[9] Yong Zhang, "The Significance of National Development Strategies of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," *Journal of ocean university of China*, 2014:05, 13.

[10] Yaguang Zhang, "'One Belt and One Road': The Logic from History to Reality," *Southeast Academic Research*, 2016:03, 13.

[11] Dingxiong Feng, "A Brief Review of the Hot Issues of China's Maritime Silk Road Research Since the New Century," *Trends of Recent Researches on the History of China*, 2012:04, 61.

Ming dynasty further promoted the development of the trade road. However, from the later Ming dynasty and through most of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese government issued sea bans (海禁, *haijin*), which negatively influenced Chinese maritime trade.[12] Western countries such as Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, and Britain gradually dominated the Maritime Silk Road route from the 15th century onwards.[13]

The implementation of the BRI can be investigated from two background contexts. First, it was initiated by the Chinese government in the context of China's political power transfer. Since coming into the highest power in 2013, President Xi Jinping made multifaceted adjustments to China's domestic affairs and foreign policy. He put forward a nationalist slogan of the 'Chinese dream' (national rejuvenation), which emphasises the government's plans to build a great power and regain the glory of ancient China.[14] Further, he has proactively adjusted diplomacy to build new relations with neighbouring countries. Rather than being limited to the countries in China's periphery, relations have been extended to the Eurasian continent, Africa, and Oceania to further boost China's economic and political influence. At the China-hosted "Belt and Road Forum" in 2017, Xi identified the BRI as part of a regionally-based approach to redefine Asian geopolitics in the context of China's growing interconnectivity in Central Asia.[15] In this light, the BRI can be interpreted as a specific strategy to fulfil China's economic and political ambition. Second, the BRI was put forward when China faced a new economic situation. After the global financial crisis of 2008, the

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[12] Wanling Chen & Chuantian He, "Game between Parties and Economic Orientation of the Maritime Silk Road," *Reform*, 2014:03, 76.

[13] Yaguang Zhang, "'One Belt and One Road': The Logic from History to Reality," *Southeast Academic Research*, 2016:03, 15.

[14] "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," the Chinese Government, 28 March 2015, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html.

[15] Jingpin Xi, "Working together to Promote the Construction of 'the Belt and Road'-Speech at the Opening Ceremony of International Cooperation Forum of BRI," 14 May 2017, http://www.beltandroadforum.org/n100/2017/0514/c24-407.html.

development of China's economy was described as a "new normal", and the growth of China's GDP maintained at around 6.7%.[16] Yong Wang points out that China's BRI was proposed as the new Chinese leadership faced the combined pressure of the economy slowing down, the US pivoting to Asia, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP),[17] deteriorating relations with neighbouring countries.[18] In this context, the BRI cooperates with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank constructed mainly by the Chinese government to deal with growing global issues, and the increase of Chinese government influence on international affairs.

Furthermore, the BRI can be seen as an extension of the Chinese government "going out" strategy. Chapter 4 has analysed how nostalgia is mobilised by CCTV's documentary *A Bite of China* in the context of the "going out" strategy. This current chapter will further articulate Chinese nationalism in the context of "the Belt and Road Initiative" to examine how nostalgia is used to service the needs of the Chinese government. The main difference is that the Chinese government presents a more active attitude towards participating in international affairs and expanding its economic, cultural and political influences through intercontinental trade between Asia and Europe. William A. Callahan argues that the BRI acts as a means of promoting China's global development through hardware (the construction of infrastructure) and software (cultural communication).[19] Indeed, the BRI intends to weave neighbouring countries into a network of economic, political, cultural, and security relations, to form a new regional economic

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[16] Jing Zhang and Jian Chen, "Introduction to China's New Normal Economy," *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 2017:15 (1), 1-4.

[17] TPP was signed on 4 February 2016 in the presidency of Barack Obama but US government withdrew its signature when Donald Trump became president in 2017. The remaining nations negotiated a new trade agreement called Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which incorporates most of the provisions of the TPP.

[18] Yong Wang, "Offensive for Defensive: 'The Belt and Road Initiative' and China's New Grand Strategy," *the Pacific Review*, 2016: 29(3), 4.

[19] William A Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream': The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 2016:1(3), 8.

community, and to boost China's economic and political influence.

Maritime Silk Road (2016) was produced in the context of the BRI. At the same time, it is a collaborative documentary produced by three provincial television stations: Shanghai TV (SHTV), Guangzhou TV (GZTV), and Quanzhou TV (QZTV). In addition to CCTV, China's provincial, municipal and rural television stations are also important components of the Chinese television broadcasting system. One main difference between CCTV and other provincial TV stations is that CCTV, as the main broadcasting system in China, has a more comprehensive and competitive method of communicating the Chinese official voice. The provincial television stations undertake a cooperative and supplementary function in the aspect of projecting national images. Since the late 1990s, especially after China joined the WTO in 2001, the Chinese government encouraged private and foreign companies to invest in China's television industry. In Chapter 4, CCTV's internationalisation through cooperation with foreign television stations and innovating itself has been discussed. China's provincial television stations have also undergone development. For instance, some large metropolitan city television stations including those in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing television stations have more autonomy in terms of finance, employment and equipment management, to create visual works. Based on Chris Berry's investigation, advertising accounts for as much as 99% of the revenue from Chinese television: "the Chinese provincial television has been transformed from a medium owned and funded entirely by the state to one owned by the state but funded by advertising."[20] These metropolitan television stations promote their city's culture through commercial, participatory and entertaining programmes. For example, as Berry points out, Shanghai Television has multi-channels broadcast by cable and satellite to not only attract audiences of all over

[20] Chris Berry, "Shanghai Television's Documentary Channel: Chinese Television as Public Space," in *TV China*, edited by Ying Zhu & Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 73.

China but also in Hong Kong.[21]

Compared to metropolitan television stations, some television stations at municipal and county levels have adopted a different strategy to attract audiences with lower socio-economic status. For example, some of their programmes are aimed at providing practical assistance to ordinary viewers who live in small cities or the Chinese countryside. After analysing *Let Me Help You* (Bengbu Television Station, 2011), Wanning Sun claims that the programme stays close to ordinary people (接地气, *jie diqi*) and has the function of a facilitator, enabler, and platform for the resolution of everyday concerns of ordinary people.[22] Meanwhile, the TV industry, between provincial levels and between provincial TV and CCTV, also has a somewhat competitive relationship. For example, SHTV, GZTV, and QZTV, as an integrated whole, participated in the bidding for the documentary of *Maritime Silk Road*, supported by SAPPRFT, with CCTV and other local television stations. Ultimately, SHTV, GZTV, and QZTV won the bid.[23] To some extent, the three provincial television stations exploited their advantages to project their cities and the Chinese government's BRI policy to the world. However, as Sun suggests, China's provincial television networks are owned and funded by the government at various strata. They use one political voice and promote an identical image of the Chinese nation.[24] Therefore, although this documentary was produced by provincial television stations, it may still propagandise the Chinese government's voice abroad. In short, *Maritime Silk Road* was produced in the context of the BRI. This documentary was funded by SAPPRFT and co-produced by the three provincial television stations of SHTV,

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[21] Chris Berry, "Shanghai Television's Documentary Channel: Chinese Television as Public Space," in *TV China*, edited by Ying Zhu & Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 75.

[22] Wanning Sun, "Scaling Lifestyle in China: The Emergence of Local Television Cultures and the Cultural Economy of Place-Making," *Media International Australia*, 2013:147(1), 65.

[23] Wei Zhang, "Seven Episodes Documentary Maritime Silk Road Is Coming," *Documentary New*, 1 Feburary 2016, http://www.docuchina.tv/show_news.aspx?News_Id=188&CateId=7&order=215&ParentId=5.

[24] Wanning Sun, "Scaling Lifestyle in China: The Emergence of Local Television Cultures and the Cultural Economy of Place-Making," *Media International Australia*, 2013:147(1), 63.

GZTV, and QZTV. It has been released through many of China's provincial TV stations in cities of the southeast coast. Furthermore, it has been interpreted into at least 10 editions and broadcast on many foreign TV stations, such as Pakistan's state television PTV, Singaporean StarHub TV, Malaysian Astro TV American SinoVision, and Australia Plus TV.[25] It seems that this documentary seeks to attract both domestic and foreign audiences of countries along the Maritime Silk Road.

Three reasons underpin this documentary as a case study in this chapter. First, *Maritime Silk Road* is the first documentary produced in the context of the BRI. Thereafter, four other documentaries about the Silk Road were produced, namely, *Maritime Silk Road* (2016, CCTV), *The Silk Road across the Sea* (2016, CCTV), *The Belt and Road* (2016, CCTV), *The Silk Road Economic Belt* (2017, CCTV), and *Maritime Silk Road* (2017, Guangdong TV and the USA PBS).[26] Thus, this is a typical and original example of a documentary examining the relationship between artistic pursuit and the projection of political discourse in the context of the BRI. Second, this documentary presents many narratives related to the ancient Maritime Silk Road and overseas Chinese, which are characterised by a rhetoric of nostalgia. Through an examination of these narratives, the key research question of how nostalgia is constructed by political discourse, will be addressed. Third, this documentary is a collaborative work produced by three provincial television stations. By analysing this documentary, a more comprehensive function of Chinese TV industry (including CCTV and other provincial TV stations) will be examined.

Of the three sections that follow, the first and second discuss how historical nostalgia and diasporic nostalgia are presented in the documentary, and the purposes of this. The third section addresses how the documentary builds an

[25] Wei Zhang, "Maritime Silk Road: Moving and Adventurous Journey," *International Talent*, 2017:09, 18-9.

[26] This documentary was produced by Guangdong TV and the USA PBS, which won Maritime Silk Road Cultural Documentary Award and Maritime Silk Road Screenwriter Award in 39th Telly Awards in 2018.

'imagined community' through nostalgic narratives, as well as how it responds to some controversial issues related to the BRI.

2. Nostalgia in *Maritime Silk Road* (2016)

The documentary is a series of seven episodes, each episode expressing a different but related theme. Episode 1, *Cross the Sea and Land,* presents the technical development of navigation and the large-scale construction of harbours along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, which boosts the economic development of many countries along the route. Further, this episode emphasises the importance of international cooperation and depicts it as of 'mutual benefit'. Episode 2, *Good Products from the Earth,* discusses how the development of the Road promotes agricultural civilisation. Episode 3, *Trade with Different Countries,* describes how the 21st century Maritime Silk Road links markets to boost the development of different countries. Episode 4, *The Light of Wisdom,* talks about how advanced science and technology provided by the Chinese companies promote ASEAN's economic and social development. Episode 5, *Fusion and Mutualism,* discusses how the 21st century Maritime Silk Road promotes the collision and blending of different cultures. Episode 6, *The Connection between Heart and Motherland,* relates it is a road with good-neighbourly and friendly values, which attracts many foreigners to migrate to China to do business. Episode 7, *Sailing for the Future,* shows audiences that new ports and navigation routes have been increasingly expanded, through which China and the countries along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road will become an organic community.

Historical Nostalgia within the Nationalist Discourse of the 'Chinese Dream'

Nostalgia has been partly depicted in the former chapters as a yearning for the past in response to a loss, absence or discontinuity felt in the present. As sociologist Fred Davis puts it, nostalgia is "a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual

'golden age'".[27] Further, nostalgia can be seen as a loss of tradition and may be used in conservative political rhetoric to carry out a radical nationalism and project a national image. In this chapter, the ancient Maritime Silk Road is depicted as a prosperous period of Imperial China. This historical representation serves to integrate the ancient Maritime Silk Road with the contemporary one, to project the Chinese government's policy of "the Belt and Road Initiative". Therefore, the rhetoric of nostalgia is developed by glorifying a historical discourse where the constructed cultural values are further politicised to communicate Chinese government's policy.

This specific nostalgia related to the ancient Maritime Silk Road is referred to as historical nostalgia in this chapter. Christopher Marchegiani suggests that "historical nostalgia is generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born."[28] In other words, representation of the past does not necessarily imply the experience of first-hand memories, but may be constructed to imagine other periods and even other dynasties. Based on this understanding, the ancient Maritime Silk Road may be imagined as a 'golden age' that contemporary people have not experienced but have attempted to represent. In this sense, historical nostalgia is a kind of simulated emotional process towards a history in which people were not involved. Jonathan Steinwand further argues that nations make use of nostalgia in the construction of national identity. The myths of any nation appeal to the national nostalgia and encourage identification with such nostalgic images as the nation's 'founding fathers' or some 'golden age', or decisive events in its history and the culture of the people.[29] Hence, nostalgia has become a particularly useful tool to

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[27] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1979), 52.

[28] Christopher Marchegiani & Ian Phau, "Away from Unified Nostalgia: Conceptual Differences of Personal and Historical Nostalgia Appeals in Advertising," *Journal of Promotion Management*, 2010:16(1-2), 86.

[29] Jonathan Steinwand, "The Future of Nostalgia in Friedrich Schlegel's Gender Theory: Casting German Aesthetics beyond Ancient Greece and Modern Europe," in *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism*, edited by Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 10.

present a national image.

This documentary firstly identifies historical nostalgia by glorifying the ancient Maritime Silk Road in the Han, Tang, Song and Ming dynasties. During this period, the voiceover tells audiences, many Chinese silks and ceramics were sent to Europe through Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East, facilitating not only the economic success of Imperial China, but also the promotion of the economic prosperity of the countries along the Maritime Silk Road. The Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties are constructed by the documentary not only as strong and prosperous dynasties but also as the centre of the world. The documentary uses the advanced technology of computer-generated imagery (CGI) to represent the prosperity of this period (Figure 4.2). CGI simulates a busy scene at Quanzhou

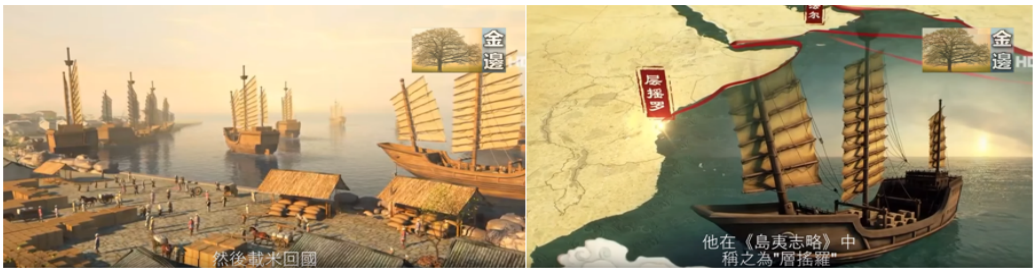

Figure 5.1: The Computer-generated imagery of the ancient Maritime Silk Road in *Maritime Silk Road*

port, presenting the image of a busy maritime trade from China's harbours to those in the Indian Ocean during the Song dynasty. Tens and thousands of merchant ships are berthing at the ports of India to obtain food and fresh water before they go on to the Middle East. The voiceover tells audiences that Quanzhou harbour was the biggest port in the world at that time. Today, people can see many thousand-year-old masjids in Quanzhou City, which is evidence that Quanzhou City was popular and prosperous thousands of years ago. At the same time, the CGI in many episodes of this documentary also suggests that vast numbers of ships coming from different countries along the Maritime Silk Road arrived at Quanzhou harbour every day. Quanzhou is shown as a major international harbour that attracts many foreign business people. Robert Burgoyne comments that digital techniques in current epic films are important technical and aesthetic

innovations, which create a sense of historical eventfulness.[30] Moreover, through the representation of a prosperous ancient Maritime Silk Road, Imperial China is represented and thus, historical nostalgia is reflected in this ancient civilisation.

Further, the documentary adopts archaeological discoveries to build these images of a busy maritime trade and show historical nostalgia. For example, many ancient porcelains and coins have been discovered in a sunken ship of the Song dynasty (named South China Sea No.1). Some of these artefacts were made in distinct styles of the Middle East, which indicates that ancient maritime trade between Imperial China and countries along the Maritime Silk Road were prosperous. Furthermore, the documentary also explores the history of Semarang (三宝垄, *Sanbaolong*) City in Indonesia in order to present a long history of communication between Imperial China and the countries along the Maritime Silk Road. Semarang City is an important harbour city in Indonesia, given the title of Sanbao, to commemorate Zheng's contribution. Through archaeological discoveries and historical representation, nostalgia for an imagined developed economic system in the era of Imperial China is constructed. In short, the documentary uses advanced technology and archaeological discovery to present a period of the Han, Tang, Song and Ming dynasties as a glorious era, a period in which Imperial China became the centre of the world, and tremendous commodities were exchanged through the Maritime Silk Road.

By presenting this historical nostalgia, the documentary creates a connection between ancient maritime trade along the Maritime Silk Road and the contemporary policy of the BRI. As the voiceover points out, the Maritime Silk Road since ancient times has had a profound influence on countries along the maritime route. The contemporary Maritime Silk Road is still a path of openness, integration, mutual benefit and peaceful development (episode 1). Therefore, the presentation of the historical nostalgia of the ancient Maritime Silk Road is used

[30] Robert Burgoyne, "Introduction," in *The Epic Film in World Culture*, edited by Robert Burgoyne (New York; London: Routledge, 2011), 4.

to draw out that the new Maritime Silk Road, raised in the context of the BRI, will have a similar function of facilitating global economic development.

In this sense, historical nostalgia is used by the documentary to propagandise the political rhetoric of 'coexistence' (共存, *gongcun*) and 'mutual benefit' (共赢, *gongying*) to project the Chinese government's BRI policy. 'Coexistence' may be understood as a kind of acceptance, tolerance, equality and patience, and mutual respect when people deal with different cultures and viewpoints. This understanding can be traced to classical Chinese literature *The Book of History* (《尚书》, *shangshu*) and *The Analects of Confucius* (《论语》, *lunyu*). In the documentary, the concept of 'coexistence' is repeatedly adopted to emphasise that historical Imperial China or the People's Republic of China (PRC) can coexist along the Maritime Silk Road. At the same time, based on the concept of 'coexistence', the documentary puts forward another concept of 'mutual benefit' to communicate that both China and the other countries along the Maritime Silk Road can be successful through the BRI policy. Therefore, the concept of 'coexistence', as a kind of political rhetoric, is a precondition of the cooperation that the documentary presents, while 'mutual benefit' is the result of cooperation through the BRI. Compared to the concept of 'harmony' that is seen as 'Chineseness' in Chapter 4, the concept of 'coexistence' may be seen as another characteristic of 'Chineseness', through which the documentary conveys that China wants to coexist with the countries along the Maritime Silk Road.

More specifically, the documentary presents the concepts of 'coexistence' and mutual benefit through examples of international cultural communication in the context of the BRI. For example, the documentary tells a story about religious communication between China and Sri Lanka. In the Eastern Jin dynasty (AD 410), the eminent monk Faxian went to Sri Lanka to learn Buddhist doctrine and brought significant knowledge of Buddhism back to China. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan monk Latalaxi came to China in 2007 to learn Buddhism (episode 5). The documentary creates a narrative that shows the monk Latalaxi as a contemporary

Faxian seen as a new centre of Buddhism, who came to China, to communicate Buddhist ideology. Through the presentation of Buddhist communication, the documentary shows that the PRC, as the successor of Imperial China, welcomes different religions. At the same time, this documentary further points out that China provides a peaceful and friendly environment for the preaching of Islam in China. In Quanzhou City, for example, there are many ancient mosques, which shows that in both ancient and contemporary Quanzhou, people are invited to worship, no matter their religion and telling the world that different beliefs, religions, and cultures are respected and coexistent in China.[31] Not only the cultural heritage of Islam can be found in Quanzhou City, but also historical antiquities of Christianity, Hinduism, Manicheism, Judaism, and Matsu. By presenting the 'coexistence' of different religions in China, the documentary portrays the ancient Maritime Silk Road as a multicultural trade route, and suggests that the 21st century Maritime Silk Road is equally open to embracing different cultures. The contemporary economic and cultural road inherits the ancient peaceful and cooperative spirit and further creates a good environment for international cultural and economic communication. In this sense, historical nostalgia indicates that the Chinese government's BRI policy is one that welcomes different countries to join. When some nations expressed their concerns about the real purpose of the BRI, the documentary, as a mouthpiece of the Chinese government, communicates that the BRI is a cooperative and coexistent policy.

The concept of 'coexistence' constructs an image of China as an open and free country, both historically and in the contemporary period. More importantly, the documentary draws on this concept to indicate that the Chinese government attempts to develop a close relationship with Buddhist and Islamic countries along the Maritime Silk Road, particularly now Islam is one of the most influential and widely disseminated religions in the world. Li Fuquan argues that Islamic

[31] Related to the current strategy of cultural destruction underway in Xinjiang, this discourse of "coexistence" should be critiqued.

culture is a dominant one in core sections of the Maritime Silk Road, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.[32] The concept of 'coexistence' shown throughout the documentary aims at promoting a diplomatic ideology that China welcomes multiple ideologies, cultures, and religions. The documentary emphasises that only by accepting diversity and otherness, can different countries deal with international conflicts and maximise their interests.

Therefore, good relations with predominantly Islamic countries are critical for successful implementation of the BRI. Li further points out that China's population of over 23 million Muslims (especially the people of Hui ethnicity) know two cultures (Chinese and Islamic culture) and have two identities (Chinese and Muslim), which can be viewed as a natural bridge between China and Islamic countries. [33] The Chinese Muslims are playing an important role in the development of Islamic finance and the production of Muslim licit (halal) food products which are two potential areas of cooperation between China and Islamic countries. Therefore, it is necessary for China to expand its cultural diplomacy to the Islamic world in order to eliminate misunderstanding with one another. The documentary highlights China's attempts to develop friendly relations with Muslim countries through the BRI. Zhang Yaxin points out that cooperation, openness, and mutual benefit are the motifs of this documentary.[34] The series repeatedly emphasises that the Chinese government will deal with conflicts in a peaceful manner and find common interests everywhere to fulfil the promise of 'coexistence'. It seems that another wave of modernisation has also been used in the process of conceiving the route, which begins from the East to the West along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road and expresses its purpose: 'coexistence' and

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[32] Fuquan Li, "The Role of Islam in the Development of the 'Belt and Road" Initiative'," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2018:12(1), 38.

[33] Fuquan Li, "The Role of Islam in the Development of the 'Belt and Road Initiative'," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2018:12(1), 38.

[34] Yaxin Zhang, "Maritime Silk Road: Telling a Grand Story from a Tiny Perspective," *Review of Radio and Television*, 2016:05, 40.

mutual benefit.[35] Through this new modernisation, the Western 'modernisation' is edited, and another modernisation focusing on 'coexistence' and mutual benefit is growing; this is seen as another kind of 'Chineseness' to project the Chinese government's BRI policy. Thus, this documentary uses historical nostalgia to show that China will no longer be simply a participant of modernisation and globalisation, but rather a sponsor to project new standards of modernisation, centred on China rather than the West.

Further, historical nostalgia is connected to Xi's political discourse of the 'Chinese dream'. What this political discourse attempts to convey is the building of a contemporary socialist China as strong and prosperous as that of Imperial China. The glorious period of the Han and Tang dynasties that the documentary reconstructs to show historical nostalgia also represents a prosperous period that Xi's 'Chinese dream' attempts to rejuvenate. For example, in episode 7, the voiceover says that "the 21st century Maritime Silk Road is linked to the 'Chinese dream' that aims at fulfilling the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and achieving a 'global dream' of durable peace and common prosperity." In this respect, the documentary adopts the BRI to fulfil Xi's 'Chinese dream'. Theresa Fallon argues that the BRI sits well with Xi's "great national rejuvenation" to show the Chinese government's confidence and international clout.[36] Thus, the "great national rejuvenation" may be achieved by maritime trade and China will regain its dominant position therein, previously lost during the century of humiliation. Hence, historical nostalgia is not only related to the Chinese government's BRI policy, but further, an extension of Xi's political discourse of "national rejuvenation". The documentary tells us that the essence of both the BRI and

[35] The theory of the modernisation originates from the ideas of German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) and develops by Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), which is described as a social model spread to the East from the West. Henry Bernstein, "Modernization Theory and the Sociological Study of Development," *Journal of Development Studies*, 1971:7(2), 141–160.

[36] Theresa Fallon, "The New Silk Road: Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy for Eurasia," *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 2015:37, 143.

'Chinese dream' is to achieve the goal of developing China into a rich and powerful country, revitalising the nation and enhancing the well-being of the people. President Xi claims that 'Chinese dream' is the inner meaning of upholding and developing "socialism with Chinese characteristics".[37] To some extent, the CCP's legitimacy is situated in national development and security. Herein, the documentary becomes a mouthpiece of the Chinese government to propagandise the CCP's ideologies of 'Chinese dream' and the BRI.

Historical nostalgia is constructed by the documentary to show a close connection between the ancient and the contemporary Maritime Silk Road, to communicate a cultural and economic 'coexistence' between China and the countries along the Road. The BRI has become a practical step with which to carry out Xi's 'Chinese Dream'. Compared to the nostalgic food culture in Chapter 4, however, the 'Chinese Dream' and the BRI in this documentary have become two distinct types of 'official' and propagandist political rhetoric. In short, this documentary directly conveys the Chinese government's discourse of rebuilding a powerful country through cooperation with countries along the Road.

Diasporic Nostalgia in Maritime Silk Road

The documentary tells many stories about overseas Chinese who are living in countries of the ASEAN and foreigners who are living in China to construct a sense of diasporic nostalgia. Robin Cohen suggests that "diaspora signified a collective trauma and a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile. Now, people living abroad with collective identities also define themselves as diasporas, though they are neither active agents of colonisation nor passive victims of persecution." [38] In other words, the word diaspora was originally used in reference to scattered refugees who were compelled to leave their indigenous origin territories and live in a separate geographic locale. Thereafter, this concept

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[37] Jinping Xi, General Secretary *Xi Jinping: A Reader of a Series of Important Speeches* (Beijing: Xuexi, 2014), 27-8.

[38] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), ix.

gradually loses its passive characteristic and normally refers instead to communities settling outside their imagined territories or the country. In this documentary, the concept of diaspora is more about collective memory and consciousness of the ethnic Chinese outside the PRC. The documentary sets many stories in diasporic communities to present a sense of nostalgia. This concept of diasporic nostalgia implies a real or imagined link between dispersed overseas Chinese and a notional motherland, through which to further convey the BRI policy.

Based on research published on 9 December 2014, there are more than 50 million Chinese ethnics in South East Asia, making up for more than 10% of the regional population and 83% of the global Chinese diaspora.[39] Many terms are used to name Chinese migrants and their descendants. For example, *huaqiao* (华侨) means overseas Chinese; *huayi* (华裔) is used for the people who are Chinese descendants; *huazu* (华族) is understood from the discourses surrounding nation, race and ethnicity; *huaren* (华人) generally refers to Chinese people who live outside China and reflects the connections, negotiations, and dialogue between Chinese and other nations and races; *xin yimin* (新移民) is a term to describe a collective community of new Chinese migrants. These names reflect not only specific periods when these Chinese people emigrated outside of China, but also show various relationships between China and these groups. For example, *huaqiao* was a historical name that emerged during the Second World War. Many Chinese merchants, known as *huaqiao* and living in Malaysia and Singapore, actively supported the anti-war campaign of the Japanese invasion into China (1937-45) and the establishment of the People's Republic of China.[40] The representation of *huaqiao* can be interpreted as a kind of CCP nationalism,

[39] "'One China'? Beijing and its Diaspora-Opportunities, Responsibilities and Challenges," Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/one-china-beijing-and-its-diaspora-opportunities-responsibilities-and-challenges.

[40] Steven Phillips, "National Legitimacy and Overseas Chinese Mobilization," *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 2013:7(1), 66.

through which the Chinese government encourages this group of people to support the establishment of postsocialist China. Yow Cheun Hoe argues that the mentality of Chinese diaspora was increasingly shaped by China's national and patriotic discourses.[41] From this perspective, the emphasis on *Huaqiao* remaining loyal to China is partly due to the proliferation of China's nationalism.

Produced in the context of the BRI, *Maritime Silk Road* explores many diasporic stories to convey a sense of diasporic nostalgia, imparting a message that today's overseas Chinese proactively contribute to building the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. The documentary depicts many stories of how overseas Chinese still maintain a connection with China spiritually or physically, even though they may have become foreigners. For example, Chen Kaixi, as a second generation of overseas Chinese, operates a big international company in Malaysia (episode 6). He expresses his worries about the city's reconstruction after the Wenchuan earthquake of 2008 and donates large amounts of money to help Wenchuan residents. At the same time, he tells the next generation that they should accept their responsibility if China suffers any disasters in the future. From Chen Kaixi's story, the documentary creates a sense of diasporic nostalgia to show that overseas Chinese keep their loyalty and concerns about the situation in China. Julia Kuehn argues that diasporic Chinese may obtain national consciousness and national identities by engaging with and making a contribution to the "motherland".[42] These overseas Chinese may have different languages, religions, and customs than ordinary Chinese people, but the documentary reveals that many of them keep an enduring cultural, economic and political connection with China. The diasporic nostalgia is constructed through this emotional and physical connection.

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[41] Cheun Hoe Yow, "The Chinese Diaspora in China–Malaysia Relations: Dynamics of and Changes in Multiple Transnational 'Scapes'," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2016:25(102), 841.

[42] Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie, and David M. Pomfret, China Rising: A View and Review of China's Diasporas since the 1980s, in *Diasporic Chineseness after the Rise of China: Communities and Cultural Production*, edited by Julia Kuehn, Kam Louie, and David M. Pomfret (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 8

The documentary further emphasises that the status of overseas Chinese has significantly improved, as China's international status is growing quickly. This connotation of interdependency may be interpreted by a Chinese idiom: if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold (唇亡齿寒, *chunwang chihan*). This idiom depicts a close relationship between two countries, if one country is facing danger, then, another one is also in peril. Indeed, an unstable relationship between China and the countries of the ASEAN brought about a complex influence on the life of overseas Chinese. For example, many overseas Chinese in Indonesia were killed in 1998.[43] Then, with the rise of China's international status, China and Indonesia repaired their relationship, which provided many opportunities for overseas Chinese to develop their business in Indonesia. Therefore, the documentary relates some stories of overseas Chinese living in Indonesia today to emphasise that a powerful China can sustain a reassuring framework to protect the interests of overseas Chinese. It may be seen as a connotation of national rejuvenation for China and can be related to Xi's 'Chinese dream', and further shows that China has overcome the trauma of humiliation in 1998 and has the ability to protect the interests of overseas Chinese. In this sense, the documentary not only projects Xi's 'Chinese dream' but also provides confidence for the overseas Chinese. This emotional narrative may generate a sense of diasporic nostalgia.

The documentary further showcases many stories in which overseas Chinese do business with companies in China to imply that good relationships between them can obtain tangible economic benefits. One such story is that of Lin Shizhong, a tea merchant from Malaysia and a member of the third generation of overseas Chinese. He has been doing business with Chinese people for many years and invested in a tea factory in China's Yunnan province. Most tea produced in his factory is delivered to Malaysia and other countries of the ASEAN. To some extent, this transnational community may prove an important determinant in securing

[43] Jie Zhang, "The Transformation of Indonesia's China Policy after the Cold War," *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, 2005:03, 1-3.

the 'Chinese dream'. Therefore, the series presents a trend that more and more overseas Chinese come back to China to do business. Trissia Wijaya argues that overseas Chinese have the edge over other diasporas in the world when they come to trade in the Chinese market, namely, personal networks (关系, *guanxi*). Through these networks, the "borderless economy" may be realised. With these networking advantages, alongside the significant capital they have accumulated, overseas Chinese may become major lynchpins and beneficiaries of the BRI.[44] The documentary illustrates that economic incentive and a similar ethnic affiliation have combined to shape the identity of overseas Chinese. This specific identity of overseas Chinese may become a sense of unconsciousness to stimulate their diasporic nostalgia when they do business with China. Indeed, China's burgeoning economy has provided a huge market for overseas Chinese. Thus, diasporic nostalgia is not only an emotion but also an experience related to the profit when overseas Chinese do business with Chinese people in the context of BRI. Therefore, the documentary implies that it is the BRI that provides a convenient method for doing business, through which the overseas Chinese may maintain a close relationship with China and gain realistic benefits. Through constructing diasporic nostalgia, this documentary emphasises that overseas Chinese may have an important function in the plan to enact "the Belt and Road Initiative".

This section further points out that this diasporic nostalgia also has a purpose of attracting more capital to invest in China, in the context that the Chinese economy fell into the situation of "new normal" since 2008. Indeed, the investment coming from overseas Chinese has an important function in supporting the development of China's economy. In many countries of the ASEAN, Chinese diasporic communities dominate the main sectors of the national economy. For instance, an estimated 90% of Indonesia's commerce with China

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[44] Trissia Wijaya, "Can overseas Chinese build China's One Belt, One Road?" East Asia Forum, 2 June 2016, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/?p=50783.

involves Chinese-Indonesians, despite being concentrated in sector-infrastructure and natural resources in which they are not major owners.[45] As John Lee puts it, the diasporic investment revitalised the Chinese private sector's flagging enterprises of 'township and village' and underpinned a national balance of payments that allowed importation of capital goods to upgrade the wider economy. It more than compensated for the fall-off in Western investment during the post-Tiananmen years, when China's growth dropped to levels that provoked fears of a recession.[46] Therefore, the diasporic communities have played an important role in their countries and provided substitutive capital for the development of China's economy. From this perspective, it is reasonable for the documentary to focus on this diasporic community made up of potential investors. Herein, the documentary becomes a tool to help Chinese enterprises gain more business opportunities globally. Linked to the cultural "going out" strategy discussed in Chapter 4, China's media is projecting positive images of China and increasing its soft power through diasporic nostalgia.

In the documentary, diasporic nostalgia for some overseas Chinese may be a collective memory which constructs an 'imagined community' to project the 21st century Maritime Silk Road as a road of 'coexistence' and mutual benefit. The overseas Chinese are agents who promote China and other countries of the ASEAN to keep good relations. Through this construction, the documentary ignites a new round of ancestral homeland ties for the overseas Chinese. In this light, the diasporic nostalgia may arouse a sense of belonging and even nationalism for overseas Chinese. This sense of nostalgia shows a revived nation and conveys a message that the Chinese government anticipates overseas Chinese to play an important role in the process of carrying out the BRI. Jayani Jeanne

[45] "'One China'? Beijing and its Diaspora-Opportunities, Responsibilities and Challenges," Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/one-china-beijing-and-its-diaspora-opportunities-responsibilities-and-challenges.

[46] John Lee, "The Chinese Diaspora's Role in the Rise of China," 14 September 2016, East Asia Forum, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/09/14/the-chinese-diasporas-role-in-the-rise-of-china/.

argues that the experiences of overseas Chinese are "lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory."[47] In other words, diaspora, in its different density variations, may place China and overseas Chinese together, which guarantees a desirable outcome for China and overseas Chinese.

Furthermore, this diasporic nostalgia is not only shown through the narratives of overseas Chinese but also constructed by foreigners who are living in China. For instance, the documentary tells of a story that an envoy, a prince of ancient Ceylon (called Sri Lanka today), visited China during the Ming dynasty. After the visit, however, he was forced to stay in Quanzhou City forever due to a coup in Ceylon in 1459. Today, the prince's descendant Xushi Yin'e brings a handful of soil picked from her family grave back to her motherland Sri Lanka. This homecoming happens after the death of the prince more than 600 years earlier (episode 6). Through this typical memorial ceremony, not only the prince returns home, but Xushi Yin'e herself as a descendant of a foreigner asserts her identity. Indeed, this nostalgic journey from China coming back to Sri Lanka helps Xushi Yin'e confirm her identity as a diasporic person living in China. Furthermore, it also provides a historical nostalgia that Imperial China has kept a good relationship with the countries along the Maritime Silk Road for a long time. The documentary further presents some other foreigners who are working in China and consider China to be their home. These diasporic narratives demonstrate that China is the second homeland for foreigners. China provides a good environment for them to live and work, which, to some extent, attracts more foreigners to China.

Through presenting the diasporic nostalgia, the documentary mainly attempts to call upon overseas Chinese to support the BRI policy. In the process of building diasporic nostalgia, an imagined community in which people keep an

[47] Jayani Jeanne Bonnerjee, Neighbourhood, City, Diaspora: Identity and Belonging for Calcutta's Anglo-Indian and Chinese Communities, PhD Dissertation, University of London, 2010, 42.

emotional tie to their homeland and roots are presented. At the same time, the storytelling of diasporic nostalgia revitalises a collective memory of Imperial China, which, in turn, emphasises a historical nostalgia. Further, the documentary highlights China's great cultural traditions and Confucianism value system, while promoting a sense of its own development trajectory that is different from those of advanced Western societies.[48] Therefore, through emphasising the cultural and economic connections between overseas Chinese and China, the documentary becomes a cultural carrier to create and present narratives of China, doing business with peoples and nations in the name of 'coexistence' and mutual benefit.

In the former two sections, the documentary depicts the ancient Maritime Silk Road and diasporic stories to project the Chinese government's policy of the BRI. Historical and diasporic nostalgias are viewed as 'imagined communities' to unite different groups to support the political and economic policy of the BRI, symbolised as a precise step to achieve Xi's 'Chinese dream'. Compared to the "going out" strategy discussed in the fourth chapter, "the Belt and Road Initiative" can be seen as a further step to propel China's soft power. In this chapter, it is very clear that the documentary produced by provincial TV stations endorses the Chinese government's policy through constructed nostalgias. The last section will further explore how the documentary expresses the political ideals of the 'community of shared future' in the context of Chinese new modernity.

The "Community of Shared Future"

Through the presentation of historical and diasporic nostalgias, the documentary attempts to project that "the Belt and Road Initiative" is an international strategy aimed at providing benefit for the people along the Maritime Silk Road. In this section, nostalgia, as a rhetoric, is further constructed by the documentary to

[48] Suzanne Xiao Yang, "Soft Power and the strategic Context for China's 'Media Going Global' Policy," in *China's Media Go Global*, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi (London: Routledge, 2018), 95.

project the Chinese government's ambition of building a 'community of shared future' along the Maritime Silk Road, in which people can strive for their future and enjoy shared interests. This "community of shared future" is portrayed as a kind of 'home' in the documentary. Compared to the concept of 'home' examined in the former chapters, the 'home' herein is closely related to the political discourse of the BRI, which indicates a distinct political agenda of unifying the areas and countries along the Maritime Silk Road. However, there are many worries and suspicions about what the real purpose of the 'community of shared future' is. Thus, the documentary, as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, uses various stories to interpret the meaning of "community of shared future" in response to these inquiries.

Generally speaking, three kinds of challenges about China's BRI can be found. Firstly, this policy aims at reviving the ancient Silk Road through building transportation and infrastructure across the countries of the ASEAN. However, as Timur Dadabaev suggests, this transportation and infrastructure, such as pipelines, railroads and highway construction, are largely beneficial to China, which will pave the way for the expanding exploration of cheap Chinese consumer goods into Southeast Asia, leaving little opportunity for local production capacities.[49] Some ASEAN countries also feel puzzled as to whether 'coexistence' and 'mutual benefit' are political rhetoric, through which China is essentially touching on the core interests of others. Secondly, the BRI has challenged the national security of some countries. For example, India, as the biggest country around the Indian Ocean, pays attention to the Chinese government's construction of a port and petroleum pipeline in Pakistan. From India's perspective, new ports in Pakistan can be used for China's military, which threatens India's national security. At the same time, the China-Pakistan economic corridor will cross Kashmir, an area which is administered by Pakistan but is a

[49] Timur Dadabaev, "'Silk Road' as Foreign Policy Discourse: The Construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2018:9(1), 36.

disputed area between India and Pakistan. India believes that the cooperation in Kashmir has violated India's interest and its national security. Therefore, 'mutual benefit', as the documentary demonstrates, does not benefit everyone but could be repackaged by political rhetoric to express the Chinese government's diplomatic ambition. Thirdly, as Li Mingjiang argues, Chinese culture during the era of Imperial China is emphasised as a kind of social hierarchy and a Sino-centric international order. The BRI policy generates some suspicion about whether China attempts to reconstruct this hegemonic social order in Asia again.[50] In other words, some people worry that 'coexistence' and 'mutual respect' are two dangerous forms of political rhetoric, through which China is proposing to rebuild another Imperial China. Summing up all these worries, some ASEAN countries are concerned that the BRI may be a conspiratorial strategy, which adopts a warm, nostalgic, diasporic appearance to expand their economy and rebuild another Imperial China.

With regards to these concerns, Chinese senior official Tan Jian said, "we are not imperialists, and we do not want to colonise the world. The Maritime Silk Road is a concept of peace and economic cooperation. Those who participate will benefit from it".[51] The documentary repeatedly emphasises the discourse of 'mutual benefit' to eliminate these worries, propagandise differences, and show the joint development of the South China Sea. Actually, many ASEAN countries are in a conflictual situation, in that they want to join in "the Belt and Road Initiative", because of the attraction of huge economic interests, however, they worry about Chinese economic and political invasion. Beijing's Maritime Silk Road may be a trade initiative, but economic and political interests are not easily separated.

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[50] Mingjiang Li, "Introduction: Soft Power: Nurture Not Nature," in *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*, edited by Mingjiang Li (Lanham; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 3.

[51] Bernhard Zand, "The Maritime Silk RoadChina's High Seas Ambitions," *Spiegel Online*, 8 September, 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/china-increasing-overseas-ambitions-with-maritime-silk-road-a-1110735.html.

In order to address these worries, the documentary emphasises that the BRI is a 'community of shared future' in which ordinary people are working hard to make a living for themselves and their families. The documentary highlights the meaning of 'community of shared future' from two angles. First, the documentary highlights that BRI has brought about many job opportunities for people in different places and countries to make their living. For example, when talking about cooperating infrastructures, such as the China-Pakistan friendship road, Madeleine island port of Indonesia, and Mombasa port of Kenya, the documentary shows individuals who are working hard at these collaborative projects to learn advanced technology and make a living for themselves and their families. In episode 1, the construction of Pakistan Gwadar port provides an opportunity for resident Jiao Motong to earn enough money to build his own house for his wife and children. In another example, Iranian Hami, doing business in China, has got married to a Chinese girl and settled down in Yiwu City, Zhejiang province. He sees China as his home and works enthusiastically in public welfare as a mediator. Further, the documentary tells that Thai rice, Burmese seafood, Egyptian staple cotton, and many spices are produced by ordinary workers to make a living for their families. These foods and materials are shipped to different areas by the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. Zhang suggests that the documentary crew adopts 'small characters' and tiny and lived images to demonstrate the close relationships between countries along the Road, through which the documentary reveals a value of cross-regional circulation and complementation and shows a motif of "cooperation, opening, and mutual benefit" that represents the BRI.[52] From these stories, the documentary conveys a message that the BRI is a strategy for cooperation rather than an unequal policy. With the help of this policy, people along the Maritime Silk Road have many opportunities to fulfil their dreams.

At the same time, the documentary indicates that the BRI brings China's

[52] Yaxin Zhang, "Maritime Silk Road: Telling a Grand Story from a Tiny Perspective," *Review of Radio and Television*, 2016:05, 41.

communication technology, manufacturing technology, and high-quality products to the countries of the ASEAN and the Middle East to emphasise that this policy is beneficial for local people. For example, in episode 3, the documentary focuses on how the BRI provides advanced Internet technology to promote the development of international trade. The documentary introduces how the development of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone, the China-Asian Free Trade Zone, and Dubai Free Trade Zone eliminates trade barriers and enhances the convenience of commercial trade in the context of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. Behind these international trades are many ordinary people who have worked in obscurity for decades. Through these warm and moving stories, the documentary shows that everyone has a dream and that the BRI provides opportunities for these ordinary people to fulfil their dreams. In short, the documentary presents the BRI as a way of connecting the countries along the Maritime Silk Road, which helps many ordinary people to fulfil their dreams, through which to highlight the 'community of shared future'.

Cultural communication between countries along the Maritime Silk Road is the second level with which to present this 'community of shared future'. One distinct example is that the Chaozhou opera becomes popular in Thailand (episode 5). Zhuang Meinong is an overseas Chinese who studied Chaozhou Opera in China for ten years and created a new style that is integrated with Thai cultural elements. Through this story, the documentary shows that ASEAN countries and China have similar cultural traditions. The documentary tells audiences that Chaozhou Opera is an old type of music—which was brought overseas following the trade of the ancient Maritime Silk Road—and whose artistic style is renewed through the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. The documentary tells audiences that there is a large population of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries. Although they are foreigners, they still pay attention to China and Chinese culture. Here, Chaozhou opera, as traditional art, is framed in relation to a cultural nostalgia, constructing public memory between China and

overseas Chinese to highlight a 'community of shared future'. Wang Wei and Chen Siyang suggest that many traditional operas have been changed based on different cultures of countries along the Maritime Silk Road, however, these operas act as DNA within collective cultural memory for overseas Chinese.[53] Therefore, the documentary uses an updated vision of Chaozhou Opera to awaken and establish cultural memory in ways that motivate a sense of national identity among overseas Chinese.

Through constructing an economic and cultural 'community of shared future', the documentary indicates that the BRI provides an appropriate mechanism to deal with international political and economic challenges and encourages all countries along the Maritime Silk Road to do business with China. The Chinese government has convinced the world that China's rise is not a challenge or a threat to the current world system. What 'community of shared future' aims to construct is an economic alliance. Therefore, the documentary repeatedly emphasises that only through respecting different national modes of development, can a 'community of shared future' be achieved along the Maritime Silk Road. Through the presentation of the shared community, the documentary underlines that China and the countries along the Maritime Silk Road are an integrated whole. China does not want to colonise the countries along the Maritime Silk Road. The BRI policy respects different cultures and political systems. As the voiceover of the documentary states, "'the Belt and Road Initiative' is an open network of friends and a kind of chorusing rather than soloing (episode 7)". This statement emphasises that different countries, cultures, and social systems can coexist and be of mutual benefit. More importantly, this community, based on economic cooperation and cultural communication between different countries along the Road, is a non-coercive and non-military organisation. The 'community of shared future' communicates a positive image of involvement and

[53] Wei Wang & Siyang Chen, "The Maritime Silk Road and the Development of Contemporary Minnan Opera," *Forum of Arts*, 2015:02, 10-13.

a sense of common belonging including the common historical and economic background of the people living along the Maritime Silk Road. As Zhang suggests, "the documentary not only shows a similar historical discourse, but also records contemporary situation and constructs a prosperous picture about the future."[54] Hence, the documentary conveys the Chinese government voice that the BRI provides a chance for people along the Road to fulfil their dreams.

This constructed community has, however, some issues when the documentary propagandises the concept of a shared future. For example, there is no narrative about the Philippines, Vietnam and India, who have border disputes with China. From this perspective, 'coexistence', mutual benefit, and community of shared future that the documentary projects may be seen as political rhetoric of the Chinese government and an attempt to build a political arena and economic belt with the countries that have befriended China. India, especially, has expressed strong opposition against cooperating with ports in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Christopher Len observes that this maritime network can dramatically reduce Indian authority throughout South Asia and the Indian Ocean, which it regards as its core sphere of influence.[55] It is a reasonable consideration for the Chinese government to build these harbours as this community may be more beneficial for China's economic development. From a historical perspective, China may not implement an economic or political offensive in the areas of the ASEAN. However, many countries in this area feel that the goal of constructing a trans-regional community could threaten their economic and cultural independence. Moreover, the documentary implicitly expresses that the community is largely beneficial to those countries who have a good relationship with China.

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[54] Yaxin Zhang, "Maritime Silk Road: Telling a Grand Story from a Tiny Perspective," *Review of Radio and Television*, 2016:05, 39-42(42).

[55] Christopher Len, "China's 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Energy Security and SLOC Access," *Maritime Affairs*, 2015:11(1), 3.

The documentary does not discuss Japan and Korea regardless of historical or contemporary stories. It mainly depicts three ports of China, which are interpreted as busy ports in the history of the Maritime Silk Road, and depicted as a China-centric commercial road through which large amounts of merchandise was shipped to different places around the world. However, the main controversy is that China is positioned as the centre of the ancient Maritime Silk Road, which firstly may invite some academic challenge as to whether China was central in the history of the Maritime Silk Road. For example, as Timur Dadabaev suggests, Japan and Korea were also important countries along the ancient Silk Road.[56] This controversy may be related to the three provincial TV stations of Shanghai, Guangzhou and Quanzhou, which produced the documentary *Maritime Silk Road*. These are three important Chinese harbour cities and it is reasonable for their TV stations to openly advertise their own harbours and cities rather than broadcasting the existence of other harbours, with which they may have a competitive relationship.

In the context of the national interest, this section points out that the documentary aims to construct China as the centre of the historical and contemporary Silk Road. Dadabaev suggests that the notion of the Silk Road has changed from a static concept of a historical trade route into a product of social construction of some powerful states, strategies that are constantly shaped, imagined and re-interpreted.[57] In other words, the ancient Silk Road does not belong to one specific country's policy but is a discursive strategy that requires the cooperation of different countries. China, Japan, Korea, and the Middle East were important components of this ancient trade route in different historical periods. The notional centre of the Silk Road may change with time and the international environment. The documentary *Maritime Silk Road*, as a broadcast

[56] Timur Dadabaev, "'Silk Road' as Foreign Policy Discourse: The Construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2018:9(1), 30-41.

[57] Timur Dadabaev, "'Silk Road' as Foreign Policy Discourse: The Construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2018:9(1), 30-41.

linked to the political interest of Chinese government, attempts to create China as the centre in order to compete with other countries. Therefore, this documentary deliberately omits Japan and Korea to contest the priority of the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. The narratives of the past in this documentary are framed by the concerns of the present. The documentary texts draw on an idealised period of the ancient Maritime Silk Road, which may be different from histories in other countries, to reaffirm China's dominant narrative in the present. The past is utilised as a force, creating a form of historical nostalgia to nurture a future sphere in which China is seen as the centre of the BRI.

From this perspective, the documentary communicates an image that China adopts the ancient Maritime Silk Road to re-establish a 21st century Maritime Silk Road (community of shared future), and China is central along the Maritime Silk Road. Shi Anbin argues that 'community of shared future' is a supranational and transcultural policy. It intertwines the classical Chinese philosophy of *tianxia* (i.e. under the heaven, 天下) with the Euro-American concept of cosmopolitanism, which aims to gain its potency and relevance to remapping the topography of global communication.[58] In other words, the documentary potentially projects a discourse that the Chinese government is seeing Asia as its *tianxia* and constructing a transnational alliance centred in China. In this light, the concept of *tianxia* may imply a changing geopolitical relationship between China and the rest of the world. Compared to the "Euro-American concept of cosmopolitanism", 'community of shared future' or *tianxia* has a typical characteristic of Chinese modernity. This concept holds that all human beings belong to a single community, which is also related to the concept of a 'family-state' discussed in Chapter 4. In this sense, it is not that the ancient Maritime Silk Road conceived the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, but rather that China's current political and economic situation produced the ancient Maritime Silk Road and gave it a gilded aura to

[58] Anbin Shi, "China's Role in Remapping Global Communication," in *China's Media Go Global*, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo De Burgh and Anbin Shi (London: Routledge, 2018), 34.

fulfil a political aim. From this perspective, the past in the documentary no matter whether it is accurate or historical is seen as an allegorical narrative and societal commentary that represents China's intentions of the present.

Compared to 'harmonious society' and 'peaceful development' discussed in Chapter 4, 'community of shared future' demonstrates more directly Chinese government's policy. In the context of cultural "going out" and the CCP's leadership from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, three provincial TV stations are less worried about "the theory of China threat" but are responding to various challenges through the constructed image that China positions itself as the centre of the Maritime Silk Road and Asia. This new image is further linked to President Xi Jinping's 'Chinese dream'. Thus, the documentary creates the 21st century Maritime Silk Road as the successor of the ancient Maritime Silk Road. This is an action of political empowerment, through which the documentary endorses the Chinese government's discourse of rejuvenating ancient national civilisation and constructing a great contemporary power. Huang Xinyan suggests that *Maritime Silk Road* bears an important mission of external propaganda, through which a new Chinese image can be built, and China's status established. [59] This documentary shows that the Chinese government attempts to construct a nostalgic community to recall a glorious era of Imperial China after suffering a hundred years of humiliation (discussed in Chapter 4). Therefore, the concept of community of shared future connects China's constructed past and the complex external situation in the present. This China-initiated project attempts to construct a community that is integrating the notion of 'cosmopolitanism' with the traditional Chinese philosophy of *tianxia*, in order to regain leadership in Asia. No matter whether it is the intention of the Chinese government, a Confucian 'harmony', or a Utopian vision of *tianxia*, and universal values are reached through

[59] Xinyan Huang, "Interpretation of Contemporary China Image in the Documentaries about 'One Belt and One Road': Taking *Maritime Silk Road* (2016) Produced by Shanghai Documentary Channel as an Example," *China Television*, 2017:07, 87.

the communication of these Chinese provincial television stations.

Even though the documentary suggests that the 'community of shared future' will eliminate the boundary of nations and bring modernisation to the people along the Maritime Silk Road, not everyone may share this interest. The Chinese economy is increasing rapidly after joining the WTO, and China is also regarded as one of the biggest beneficiaries in the process of globalisation.[60] However, not everyone's lives will be improved through international trade. The discourses of 'coexistence' and 'mutual benefit' that the documentary highlights may intentionally ignore the negative consequences of the BRI. In particular, in the context of China's economic "new normal", the declining Chinese economy may propel the Chinese government to export more products and attract more foreign capital to invest in China. Despite the benefits of the BRI, as Jing Yin points out, only the Chinese government, business elites and transnational corporations can benefit from trade; millions of workers, both in China and in developing countries, would be harmed by them.[61] According to relevant data, China had a total of more than $5 trillion in overseas assets by the end of 2016, and large amounts of capital has been invested in the ASEAN under the strategy of "the Belt and Road Initiative".[62] Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that the Chinese government will be the final beneficiaries of the BRI policy.

Economic development and national/regional securities are two major concerns for China and the ASEAN countries. However, the documentary only focuses on the two core interests of security and economy from China's sovereignty, which may negatively impact the conveyance of the concepts of 'coexistence' and 'mutual benefit' and cause the other countries to suspect the

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60 Ning Wang, "Globalisation as Glocalisation in China: A New Perspective," *Third World Quarterly*, 2015:36(11), 2062.

61 Yin Jing, "China's Second Long March: A Review of Chinese Media Discourse on Globalization," *The Review of Communication*, 2006:6(1-2), 32-51.

62 "How Much Assets Does China has in the outside of China?" 13 October 2017, *National Business Daily*, http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2017-10-13/doc-ifymviyp0667904.shtml.

real purpose of the BRI. At the same time, the narrative conveyed by the documentary is similar to the situation of British free trade in the 19th century. British free trade was seen as an economic policy that would retard or distort the development of backward countries' economies through integration into the world market system. Based on Palme Dutt's investigation, "the victory of foreign capitalism in India differed from the victory of capitalism in Europe, in that the destructive process was not accompanied by any corresponding growth of new forces".[63] In other words, the industrial capital of Britain was far from bringing about the material base of development of new productive powers; rather British capitalism may have blocked the development of underdeveloped countries. The Chinese government's BRI policy may have a similar influence on the countries along the Road. The 'coexistence', 'mutual benefit' and 'community of shared future' publicised by the documentary may bring about the destruction of the old economy. However, a new society is not necessarily better. The countries along the Road may lose their national independence. From this perspective, China's capitalism may promote the development of the countries along the Road, but its economic and political influence is able to bring about a complex situation for national independence and economic security. Therefore, many countries realise that the economic interest that "the Belt and Road Initiative" brings is instead about a political temptation, military expansion, colonialism, capitalist globalisation, and regional insecurity.

Therefore, the presentations in the documentary are contradictory in some aspects. The discourses of 'coexistence', 'mutual benefit', and 'community of shared future' can be considered as flexible political rhetoric that the Chinese government adopts to peddle its economic and political ambitions. This economic and political cooperation might bring about disaster rather than interest. The documentary implicitly constructs China as the centre of this community. This

[63] Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today* (Behala: Manisha Granthalaya, 1970), 87.

distinct Sinocentric cultural construction is related to the transformation of Chinese politics and economy. Therefore, the deployment of a rhetoric of nostalgia is used for neither 'retreat' nor 'retrieval', but to adapt the ancient Maritime Silk Road to mobilise another hegemonic discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the documentary *Maritime Silk Road* produced by three Chinese provincial television stations, and seen as an important mouthpiece through which the CCP can propagandise the political discourse in the context of the more general marketisation of the TV industry. Firstly, historical and diasporic nostalgias are presented with Xi's nationalist slogan 'Chinese dream'. The third section suggests that the documentary draws on historical and diasporic nostalgias to convey the ideology of 'community of shared future'. The documentary constructs 'community of shared future' through ordinary people who work hard and live along the contemporary Maritime Silk Road. Compared to the 'harmonious society' and 'peaceful development' in Chapter 4, the 'community of shared future' is a more radical statement, through which the documentary implies that the Chinese government will be the centre of Asia. The documentary draws on a sense of homesickness and emphasises the notional unity of the Chinese diaspora as a powerful emotional tool to convey an image of 'coexistence' and 'mutual benefit'. However, this discourse is controversial as it is suspected by some countries to centralise China's strategic position in Asia and fulfil President Xi's political ambition of the 'Chinese dream'. Overall, this chapter argues that the documentary constructs historical and diasporic nostalgias in order to project the policy of the BRI. However, under the influence of Xi's 'Chinese dream', the BRI may be presented by the provincial television stations as a radical policy to build China as a powerful and regional leader in Asia.

Despite China claiming its policy's benign objectives, strategic mistrust for the BRI is alive as 'community of shared future' has been perceived by some

countries as a hegemonic move by China. This China-centred policy, as Callahan suggests, may reinstate the hierarchical and Sinocentric tributary system in the era of the first Maritime Silk Road.[64] From this perspective, this documentary, as a distinctly political broadcast, may not fulfil its job to propagandise the Chinese government's discourses of 'coexistence' and 'mutual benefit'. However, what this documentary conveys is a new situation in the transformation of Chinese politics and economy. By presenting nostalgic political rhetoric, a new party-state image is shown which confidently propagandises its economic and political discourse and attempts to be the leaders of the Road. In this sense, China's TV industry is communicating China's cultural, economic and political modernity to the world through a process of sinicisation.

Finally, Chapter 4 and 5 may be seen as an integration that the state-owned TV industry presents the ambition of the Chinese government in the context of media marketisation. Nostalgia is articulated in the context of the Chinese government's policies of "going out" and the BRI. The agenda of Sino-globalisation is gradually forming based on international economic and cultural communication. In Chapter 4, the CCP's nationalism, harmonious society, and peaceful development define China as a unified political and territorial state. Meanwhile, in Chapter 5, the philosophical legacies of cosmopolitanism and *tianxia*, as a common cultural heritage, may undertake a more detailed elaboration of China's diplomacy and convey China's soft power. This media community includes Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and overseas Chinese everywhere, through which to cultivate a scope with similar cultural-linguistics. Moreover, in Chapter 5, it is noted that *Maritime Silk Road* highlights a deeply Confucianism-rooted cultural theme in order to negotiate concerns about the BRI. In this light, the 'community of shared future' maps out a China-edited modernity to reshape the order of global economic and cultural communication. Nevertheless, the media message coming from the China-based

[64] William A Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream'," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 2016:1(3), 13.

and state-owned media organisations also face challenges about the authenticity of the news in a global media market, especially when the rise of China is seen as a threat to the current global order.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the postsocialist transformation of the Chinese society through an investigation of articulated nostalgia within Chinese screen media in the post-1990s period. The various forms of nostalgia are explored and shaped by a standpoint in the present, and often carrying a vision of the future.

In postsocialist China, many media policies were issued to strengthen the competitiveness of the Chinese media industry. The Chinese screen industry developed quickly through media marketisation and globalisation. During this time, the Chinese party-state embraced the market economy, implemented privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and promoted marketisation of screen media to maintain the legitimacy and the vitality of the screen industry, through which it strengthened the state's propaganda apparatus and ideological control. Neoliberalist economic reform, associated with postsocialism, did not destabilise China's party-state regime, reduce the state's hegemonic power or loosen its surveillance of the media. In fact, as Zhu suggests, in the context of postsocialist China, the reassertion of content is controlled not only by a combination of legal and administrative but also by personal intervention from the top leadership.[1] Furthermore, since the new millennium, the Chinese government has broadened its cultural reach, harnessed cultural forms as a tool of soft power in increasingly international diplomacy, and sustained the CCP's legitimacy through diverse Chinese screen media productions.

The period since the 1990s has been characterised by neoliberal market development (in the Chinese context) and a steady increase in government surveillance and media censorship. Within this context, the development of Chinese screen media has assumed three goals: increasing the share of Chinese media in the global market, strengthening the capacity to maintain the legitimacy of the CCP regime and projecting Chinese soft power onto the world stage. As this

[1] Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership, and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 11.

thesis has demonstrated, the core question—how different forms of nostalgia have been constructed by Chinese screen media since the 1990s—has been explored across the five chapters. Part I (Chapters 1, 2 and 3) examined articulated forms of nostalgia from geographical, demographic and generational perspectives. Nostalgias are triggered by displaced individual and collective identities, the dynamics of commercial culture, and screen media's marketisation and globalisation. They engage with the CCP's hegemonic politics and address a sense of social or group anxiety in the context of rapid social transformations. Chapter 1 investigated the films *A Mongolian Tale* (1993) and *Nuan* (2001), which were produced by the generation of "educated youth" filmmakers. The complex tensions between yearning for the idyllic countryside, dissatisfaction with chaotic urban lifestyles, and criticism of the patriarchal system were examined. The "educated youth" filmmakers made efforts to expose a political trauma infused with the imaginary countryside. In Chapter 1, case studies are discussed where nostalgia is constructed as a resistant force, challenging the CCP's discourse "youth without regret". This chapter argued that a guilty structure of feeling is constructed as a form of nostalgia to challenge the CCP's hegemonic discourse of "youth without regret" and to criticise the Cultural Revolution itself.

The second chapter focused on the "urban films", *Shower* (1999) and *24 City* (2008), shot by the Sixth-Generation filmmakers. Both films draw on the social phenomenon of the demolition of old buildings and community, not only to identify the Sixth-Generation filmmakers as a "forsaken generation" deserted by socialist China, but also to engage with postsocialist politics, especially the lives of the working class in former socialist factories. The chapter argued that constructed nostalgia about the communal lifestyle has become part of cultural politics to address the social issue of the declining status of the working class, and to potentially criticise the CCP's hegemonic influence in the context of intensified market reform. Herein, nostalgia has been used affectively in urban films to conjure up socialist histories and memories against increasing social disorder.

The third chapter scrutinised the youth media texts *So Young* (2013) and *With You* (2016) in the context of "Chinese film industrial aesthetics". Youth nostalgia is, on the one hand, anchored to innocent university and senior high school lives and provides impetus to address the anxiety experienced by those born after 1980. On the other hand, youth nostalgia is created as a commercial incentive through the use of light, costume, food and music, to construct a sense of pastness to attract specific audiences. In this Chapter, nostalgia can, however, be understood as a stylistic mode and generational expression linked to the context of an increasingly commercialised culture. To some extent, this nostalgic culture has endorsed the CCP's political discourse of 'harmonious society'. This chapter argued that nostalgia in youth screen media not only engages with specific anxieties and attracts the youth screen market through adjusting strategies of filmmaking, but also shows a closer relationship with the Chinese government's political gains since 2010.

Part II (Chapters 4-5) examined the national strategies of "going out" and "the Belt and Road Initiative" to further interrogate how nostalgias have been mobilised by the CCP to convey the soft power of the Chinese government. The fourth chapter explored CCTV's documentary *A Bite of China* (2012) in the context of the Chinese government's "going out" strategy. This documentary presents stories about homemade food in China's different provinces and among ethnic minorities in order to construct an image of a united China, through which the CCP's nationalism can be conveyed and its one-party regime justified. Further, *A Bite of China* emphasises the CCP's political discourse of 'harmonious society' in the process of food preparation and preservation to project China's 'peaceful development'. When China emerged as a global economic power in the late 2000s, the Chinese government began to construct its peace-loving image through the redefined discourse of Confucianism. In this chapter, nostalgia works with a conservative political agenda of a 'harmonious society' and the 'Chinese dream' to publicise the voice of the Chinese government in the context of the national

strategy of "going out". Food becomes a vehicle to convey China's cultural, economic, and political power and to counter alternative discourses domestically and globally.

The fifth chapter explored the documentary *Maritime Silk Road* (2016) produced by three Chinese provincial television stations in the context of the CCP's BRI policy. The ancient history of the Maritime Silk Road and stories of overseas Chinese are articulated with historical and diasporic nostalgias. This imaginary past becomes a tool to underpin President Xi Jinping's nationalist slogan of the 'Chinese dream'. The BRI becomes another policy to continue implementing the "going out" strategy and to fulfil Xi's idea of constructing China in the role of leadership along the 21st century Maritime Silk Road. The concepts of 'coexistence', 'mutual benefit', and 'community of shared future', articulated with great cultural traditions and a neo-Confucianist value system, have become political rhetoric strategies to further convey the Chinese government's soft power and to conceal the ambition of the country's government. This chapter argued that *Maritime Silk Road* creates historical and diasporic nostalgias to publicise the Chinese government's BRI policy and to propagandise the notion of a cultural and economic community with China at its centre in the context of President Xi's 'Chinese dream'. If China was compelled to renegotiate its own international influence through the CCTV's documentary *A Bite of China*, as outlined in Chapter 4, then, the documentary *Maritime Silk Road* has become a strategic site for the Chinese government to construct its identity as the centre of Asia and create the sinicisation of the world. In Chapters 4 and 5, the Chinese government's nationalism (politics of nostalgia) has been articulated to embrace and accommodate a changing China, its international environments, and the emerging geopolitical order of neoliberal globalisation. Thus, CCTV and the provincial TV stations have been tasked with developing the capability of international communication to highlight China's great cultural traditions,

represented by a neo-Confucianist value system, and to create contemporary narratives of China.

The five chapters (eight case studies) in the corpus of this study share a common theme of constructed nostalgia, through drawing upon the guilty structure of feeling, the decline of the working class, innocent youth, 'harmonious society', and 'community of shared future'. Thus, these chapters collectively answer the core question of this thesis, namely, how different forms of nostalgia have been constructed by the Chinese screen media since the 1990s, by providing key examples of the construction of nostalgia on Chinese screens in this postsocialist period. In this research, nostalgia, triggered by the context of the present, has become a critical lens through which to study the relationship between past, present, and future. By returning to the imaginary past, Chinese screen producers try to make sense of what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen in China. Nostalgia has been used in various ways by the Chinese government for State building and by social groups as critiques of the present, or as inspirations for an alternative future. At the same time, nostalgia is also a cultural phenomenon, a site of memory narratives, and stylistic images. From this perspective, nostalgia, as a form of cultural memory, bridges screen media and social contexts, and in doing so, engages with individual and collective demands. Furthermore, the Chinese government has used the rhetoric of nostalgia to globalise its cultural reach, and to match its powerful economic status. In this thesis, nostalgia has been discussed beginning with Fred Davis's emphasise of anxieties that arise from processes of social and cultural discontinuity. In Chapter 1 and 2, nostalgia is related to the Chinese word (乡愁, *xiangchou*), centring on the process of searching for home (the countryside and communal community respectively). Then, in Chapter 3, nostalgia has transferred from a loss of home to the projection of an imagined home (怀旧, *huaijiu*) related to commercial consumption, and on to the imposition of a version of home serviceable to the CCP agendas in Chapter 4 and 5. Different articulations of

nostalgia, presented by different screen producers and the diverse range of screen formats, mobilised individual and national identities, and even potentially challenged the CCP's hegemonic cultural norms, at the same time, nostalgia was linked to conservative political agendas that serviced the interests of the Chinese government. Hence, the trajectory of nostalgia from searching for home physically or mentally to servicing for the CCP's nationalism is identified. Nostalgia has transferred its original meaning of homesickness, to an imaginative construction. Overall, through a comparative study of diverse constructions of nostalgia on different forms of screen, specifically, commercial film, art house film, TV documentary, and Internet drama, this thesis argues that nostalgia culture has changed from filmmakers' intellectual and critical engagements with China's postsocialist condition to its co-option by the Chinese government and screen media industry's for political and commercial gains over the past few decades.

This thesis offers two main contributions to academic scholarship. Firstly, in the marketised-political media industry, various forms of nostalgia, criticising social issues or endorsing policies of the Chinese government, were mediated and navigated with different inflections. It has engaged with multiple expressions and formations of political and cultural discourse and interpreted different and even new visions of China (from the 1990s to 2010s) in the context of China's market economic reform. Lu has argued that the Chinese government exerted its economic influence and state-controlled media to construct its own national image and its own version of modernity.[2] Here, nostalgia, as a kind of nationalism, has defined a new approach for interpreting Chinese modernity; a hybrid model that combines an authoritarian state with a market economy. Moreover, with increasingly strict media censorship and ideological control, the constructed nostalgia, though unexpected by the Chinese ordinary people, may be used by the State to create more hegemonic policies and discourses which become one part

[2] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "What Is Chinese Postsocialism?" in *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 204–10.

of Chinese modernity. From this perspective, the constructions of nostalgia in different works produced by different generational media creators present a contribution to the existing literature on nostalgia, which is further constructed as an imagined community by the authority to pursue its global interests.

Secondly, discourse analysis, in the context of Chinese screen media, has explored the intentions behind the nostalgia discussed in this research. Through this critical examination, integrated with textual analysis and media industry analysis, a nostalgic culture has been identified in China in the past three decades. The nostalgic culture speaks to (or engages with) China's postsocialist condition and social changes including the urban-rural divide, urbanisation, commercialisation, and youth experience, as well as China's domestic and international policies. Thus, discourse analysis not only moulds a matrix about how to investigate screen culture in postsocialist China, but, more importantly, stimulates future scholars to critically consider the 'truth' and 'purpose' of some 'common sense', such as youth without regret and the community of shared future. Hence, discourse analysis reminds us to reflect on some 'grand historical narratives' in China, through which space can be opened for the public to contest old recognitions of individual, collective, and national identities, and make meanings of new Chinese history. This transformation reflects the struggle to remap China by revaluating or blocking old identities and validating certain new ones in new contexts. Therefore, discourse analysis helps to demystify a monolithic and grand narrative of history and presents a postsocialist modernity negotiated among the CCP's political discourse, marketised neoliberalism, media globalisation, and public appeal for democracy. This postsocialist Chinese modernity is not homogeneous, but rather a process of cultural diversification and negotiation that incorporates global cultural elements into China's politics, culture, and economy, through which the concept of 'China' has been constantly unpacked and constructed.

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