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**Understanding China's National Identity and Identifications
through Mediated Popular Culture**

by

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A thesis submitted to University of Warwick in support of my application for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Industries

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Abstract

This research sets out to examine China's national identity led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from a mediated popular cultural perspective. Building on the revised model of the "circuit of culture", it attempts to understand how does the CCP (re)produce and (re)distribute China's national identity through mediated popular culture. This thesis defines the central problematics of China's national identity as: domestically, the dynamic between the individual and the collective, and internationally, the tension between China as an ideological minority versus the dominant political culture that is based on liberal humanism.

With this understanding in mind, this thesis adds four elements to the "circuit of culture", and examining China's national identity circulated in the mediated popular culture as political/ethical; subjective/personal; social sedimentation, social imagination and extended social space; last but not least, China's national identity as a temporal construction that evolves in accordance to contingent conditions in China mainland.

After clarifying the key concepts and theories deployed in this thesis, it firstly explores the historical dynamic between the state, the Chinese people and the media, which provides an insight into the modern constructions of China's national identity led by the CCP. Secondly, this thesis analyses China's current official national identity propagated by the state in 2012 and reveals that the construction of the Chinese Dream is a complex process of reworking the old and new political discourses concerning China's newfound position as the world's second-largest economy. Thirdly, as China's state media institutions learnt to adapt to the new media and communication technologies first developed in the west, the political communication of China's national identity has also seen a gradual change in terms of styles, content and method.

The last two chapters focus on how China's national identities are produced, consumed, regulated, and represented in popular cultural industries. The previous case study looks at Chinese blockbusters and examines that if the state-owned media conglomeration manages to encourage Chinese consumers' identification with the nation-state. The latter case study analyses the celebrity-fan network online and its complex entanglement with cyber nationalism initiated by Chinese netizens.

This thesis concludes by suggesting that while mediated popular culture seems to be a required field in generating Chinese people's identification with the Party-state, the real acceptance of one's national identity also depends significantly on what the government deliver to its people, rather than ideology.

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Declaration:

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is written by me and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Introduction

Understanding China's National Identity and Identifications through Mediated Popular Culture

In 1995, Nicholas Negroponte, in his introduction to his influential book *Being Digital* talked about how technology would change people's lives profoundly: "Computing is not about computers any more, it is about living...multimedia will change dramatically with small, bright, thin, flexible high resolution displays. Multimedia will become more book-like, something with which you can curl up in bed and either have a conversation or be told a story" (Negroponte, 1995, p.6, p.71). He also states that books will soon be without pages as they will be easily digitized. This was responded to by Clifford Stoll from *Newsweek* in 1995: "Nicholas Negroponte, director of the MIT lab, predicts that we'll soon buy books and newspaper straight over the internet. Uh, sure." This will surely be the case. In the epilogue of the book, entitled 'an age of optimism', Negroponte considers that as we have interconnected ourselves, "the traditional centralist view of life will become a thing of the past. The nation-state itself is subject to tremendous change and globalization. The forces of nationalism make it too easy to be cynical and dismiss any broader-stroke attempt at world unification. But in the digital world, previously impossible solutions become viable" (Negroponte, 1995, p.230). Twenty-five years later, with the benefits of hindsight, Negroponte may have got this one wrong. He did not foresee the complexity of "interconnections", nor did he fully grasp the case of China under the Chinese Communist Party.

National identity and Nationalism have proven to be a very resilient force in the age of the internet. Global connectivity both in the physical and the virtual world, did not do away with the idea of the nation-state, which is, according to Negroponte, a long outdated concept. In 2012, Gal Ariely based his argument on the empirical research over sixty-three countries, and cautiously indicated that while the impact of globalisation seems to reduce people's ethnic conceptions of membership of the nation, as well as their explicit pride in their country, it does not erode people's national identification or their sense of nationalism (Ariely, 2012, p.477).

This makes the study of China's national identity and identification an interesting and curious topic. While declining in recent years¹, global political culture is dominated by electoral democracy, defined as one man one vote. China as led by one single party is, in this sense, a political minority in the world of nations. So why is it that China, as led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which experienced the disastrous periods of the Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, and the June 4th Incident after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is still standing and has become the world's second largest economy in the world? And given the recent strong nationalist sentiments expressed in reaction to the Hong Kong protest, Chinese people, especially the younger generation still seem to identify with their nation-state very strongly. Academics across various fields have had some answers to this. Some have argued that as an authoritarian regime, the Chinese government has enormous power to control or even coerce its people to follow its national agenda. Some argued from the perspective of education and propaganda, and see the CCP's all-encompassing power over media communication and detailed cultural work with its people as reasons behind China's national identity and strong identification manifested as nationalism.

This research chooses to examine the phenomenon from a mediated popular cultural perspective. This approach was initially inspired by Tim Edensor's book *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* that came out in 2002. First reading it in 2011, it was fascinating for the researcher to attempt to understand China's national identity from a popular culture perspective. This is because at the time, China's national identity was perceived by the researcher as a highly top down political construct and it was clearly not

¹ In 1990, there were 52 nations operated under democratic regimes stressing values such as citizen political participation, rule of law and human rights. The number of democracies has nearly doubled, reaching 89 in 2006. (Rosa, 2019) However, the upward trend is slowing down in the recent decade. According to the Democracy Index, out of the listed 167 countries there were 112 nation-states operating with either full, flawed or hybrid democracies in 2006. Moreover, the quality of democracies has seen a gradual but persistent decline, decreasing from 28 full democracies in 2006 to just 20 in 2018. Freedom House 2018 report suggests that in terms of its basic tenets including guarantees of free and fair elections, the rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law, democracy is facing its most serious crisis in decades.

received well in the wider (international) popular culture, both politically and economically. The former was based on the internationally well-accepted “illegitimacy” of political values that do not seem to support the freedom of speech and some aspects of human rights which manifested in the Party-state’s tight censorship of internet and culture. The latter was demonstrated by the country’s popular cultural industries. For instance, while the total economic value in exporting TV contents had tripled in just three years from 2008 to 2011², the trade deficit remained the same. In other words, the adverse trade balance in the popular culture industries indicates that China is failing to efficiently communicate Chinese cultural identity mediated through commodities on the global stage. Margaret Thatcher once said: “China will not become a superpower in the world, because China today exports TV sets, rather than ideas” (Quoted by ChinaNews.com, date of publication).

Based on these critiques, to examine China’s national identity from a popular culture perspective implies approaching the construction from a western political and cultural theoretical perspective, based on China’s modernization process, with pre-assumed value judgements. In this sense, China’s national identity is a problematic construction that gets stuck on ideological judgements rather than a unique historical, political, cultural, and social developmental formation in the same geographical space that is constantly in the making. Upon this revelation, this research hence redirects its focus from ‘why it is not like that’, to ‘how it is what it is’. In other words, this research sees China led by the CCP as a key condition in order to understand China’s national identity as it is mediated through popular culture. This then leads to framing the research of China’s national identity as a state led project.

² According to National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), the total value of Chinese exported TV programs were just 124.76 million Yuan (about \$20.33 million) in 2008, and quickly rose to 226.62 million Yuan in 2011 (about \$36.93 million). The value has nearly doubled in 3 years. However, if we take a closer look at the NBS annual reports of ‘statistics on imported and exported TV Programs’, the trade deficit of 2008 was 329.45 million Yuan (about \$53.69 million) and 314.37 million Yuan (about \$51.23 million) in 2011. Moreover, this is also the case in other cultural content industries, such as publishing, film and music.

1. China's National Identity as Nation Building Project

China's national identity is primarily a political concept. Politics is essentially about a very complex process of balancing the interests of different groups in a given society. Domestically, among different age, gender, class, ethnicity, and sub-cultural groups. Internationally, among different nations with individual national ambitions and interests. Achieving a delicate balance of social (global) stability and beneficial outcomes for the majority of the people, involves negotiation, compromise, cooperation and at times, coercion. China's national identity is often the subject of contention in politics. Many have explored China's national identity from the perspective of international relations, focusing on its rising global economic status and regional influence (Rozman, 2012; Harnisch, Bersick & Gottwald, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2017). Some have highlighted mainland China's ideological and ethnic disputes with Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan and Hong Kong, discussing the possibilities of China adopting electoral democracy (Gunaratna, Acharya & Wang, 2010; Horowitz, Heo & Tan, 2007; He, 2015, 2018; Dittmer, 2017); some have meanwhile tracked the changes in China's political history, using examples of wars and revolutionary movements, illustrating the instrumentality of the state's constructions of history and memories (Xu, 2005; Wang, 2001; Wang Zheng, 2012; Weatherley & Zhang, 2017; Schoppa, 2017); others have examined China's national boundaries and the ongoing struggles of diasporic Chinese communities (Yuk & Sin, 2017; Lee, 2017). Each aspect of China's national identity, namely international relations, ethnicity, political ideology, defining historical moments, collective memories, territory and diasporic community reveals important perspectives but sometimes conflicting messages of what China is, how it should be governed, what is its origin, how it has developed since modern times, and towards what political future the country should head. For a country that has a long-standing history since 221 BC, with its 56 ethnicities and current population the largest in the world, the perspectives listed above merely reflect a small proportion of issues and concerns. Nevertheless, these aspects of China's national identity are essentially about state governance, and they all concern, one way or the other, the role played by the Chinese Communist Party³ in "steering" China (Ross, 1968).

³ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also known as the Communist Party of China (CPC). The abbreviations are used interchangeably in this research.

In this sense, China's national identity is a form of governance, or means of governing. To define, governance "involves deciding upon collective goals for the society and then devising the mechanisms through which those goals can be attained" (Peters, 2004, p.25). It is argued in this thesis that, the Communist Party of China is increasingly deploying culture to produce and reproduce its legitimacy to govern the nation. In particular, the state and its (struggling) effort at generating a collective identity through popular culture is evidently present. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, since the founding of People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong's leadership has deliberately downplayed and abandoned the influences of religions and traditional cultures that were considered to support feudalism, and instead actively promoted Marxism and revolutionary narratives. After the disastrous period of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people experienced a significant crisis of belief: a crisis of faith in socialism, a crisis of belief in Marxism, and a crisis of trust in the Party (Chen Jie cited in Wang 2013, p.5). The outbreak of the Tiananmen Square Incident placed the survival of the CCP at a critical stage, and the country was on the verge of collapse. To sustain the CCP's definition of China as a "unified" multi-ethnic political entity, national culture has become the ultimate "social glue" that has the potential to hold society together. Moreover, culture is increasingly becoming one of the two main resources (the other one is material betterment and economic growth) to maintain the CCP's position in China.

Secondly, culture as a means of producing and reproducing the state's legitimacy is deployed by the CCP as an important field alongside economic development. After joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), the CCP initiated a process of cultural system Reform. The main purpose of the reform was to turn the cultural sector into an industry, making the cultural industries a pillar of the national economy, meaning that it should account for at least 5 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Thus Chinese cultural products need to compete with foreign popular cultural products both in the domestic and international markets for financial advantage. This has proven to be difficult however, with the technology advancements and the abundance of social and media platforms, the highly regulated and guarded Chinese-made cultural products are under fierce competition from foreign popular cultural products. Moreover, the market relations then transformed Chinese people from

socialist workers to consumers, and national identity in this sense has become a cultural product itself.

Thirdly, China's state-led project of building a collective national identity seems to be struggling especially with popular culture. Popular culture here is understood as a universally accepted "embodied system of value"(Ahearne, 2009). In relation to China's competitive position outlined above and the continuing dominance of Western popular culture in China, the value system of contemporary popular culture closely follows the values of liberal electoral democracy. The triggering cause of the crisis of the Tiananmen Square incident, for example, was because the Chinese liberal nationalists have "called explicitly for the adoption of liberal democratic ideal as the best means of promoting China's renewal" (Zhao, 2005, p.133). In this sense, China's national identity has to deal explicitly with and struggle between the national dominant culture ("socialism with Chinese Characteristics") and the more prevailing culture of liberal democracy. Moreover, it has to continue to answer people's desire for more democratic values.

This study thus argues that China's national identity is better situated in the framework of nation building, as its political legitimacy is still constantly confronted by challenges. The concept as defined by political scientist Fukuyama as "the creation of a sense of national identity to which individuals will be loyal, an identity that will supersede their loyalty to tribes, villages, regions, or ethnic groups. Nation building... requires the creation of intangible things like national tradition, symbols, shared historical memories, and common cultural points of reference" (2014, p.185). Nation building, which is a complementary process to that of state building enables this study to further examine the highly problematic hyphenated phrase: nation-state, which is used by this study to define China. This framework also permits the use of micro studies of media representations of national identity and relating these to the macro studies of political and institutional aspects. Through this combined approach, this study attempts to provide a dual understanding of China's national identity as both a principle of state legitimation and mediated popular cultural constructions. The two subfields presented in this thesis are interactional and complex, co-producing and redistributing the ways in which China's national identity is perceived.

2. China's National Identity as Mediated Popular Culture

On the one hand, media in this research refers to a number of mediums of both physical and virtual as well as old and new media and information communication technology. In the "history" chapter, it means a stele inscription in the Qin dynasty, a print pamphlet with translated passages from Bible in the Qing dynasty, and a revolutionary play in Mao Zedong's Communist China; In the "Chinese Dream" chapter, it means a collection of speeches about China's national identity mediated through the Chinese president Xi Jinping; In the "propaganda" chapter, it means short official promotional videos that was screened on the big screen of Times Square, New York and through the online Weibo account of the *People's Daily*; In the "blockbuster" chapter, it means big budget Chinese blockbuster films that were released both for domestic market and international audiences, to cinema and on Netflix; and in the "cyber nationalism" chapter, it means the virtual celebrity-fandom network identified on Weibo through which the fan community is striving for wider recognition as well as defending China's national identity against external threats. On the other hand, popular culture as defined by this study refers firstly to China's political cultural products and practices, initiated by the Party-state, both in the current situation and historical context; second, to the Chinese commercial mass culture that has been trying hard to compete with American popular cultural products and practices; third, to the potentially subversive subculture that is excluded from the mainstream national cultural order.

When these two aspects combined and become Chinese "mediated popular culture", it potentially adds difficulties to an already complex phenomenon. Hence it is necessary to provide some basic theoretical understanding about what this research mean by popular culture. And it is important to justify why this research chooses to highlight the various mediums. Notably, it does not seek to explore culture and media theory in depth, but rather to understand these concepts in the Chinese context.

To begin with, popular culture is simply culture that is widely accepted or well-liked by many people. This definition provides a quantitative perspective; The second definition is to suggest that it is the culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture: the "inferior"

culture. Value judgement, however, it is often associated with cultural taste being deployed as tools to distinguish social categories. Stuart Hall argues that, instead of focusing on what is high culture and what is popular culture, a more important insight could be gained from interrogating “the forces and relations which sustain the distinction, the differences... [the] institutions and institutional processes... required to sustain each and to continually mark the difference between them” (cited in Storey, 2009, p.8).

A third way of defining popular culture is as mass culture. Storey further elaborates that there are four aspects of thinking about mass culture. Firstly, there is commercial culture, that is culture produced for mass consumption. Secondly, there is American culture, which operates under Americanization. Thirdly, the texts and practices of popular culture are seen as forms of public fantasy. Fourthly, structuralism sees popular culture as a sort of ideological machine which more or less effortlessly reproduces the prevailing structures of power.

Proceeding to the fourth definition, as summarized by Storey, popular culture may refer to culture that originates from ‘the people’. Perhaps the immediate question following such an assertion is: what qualifies as the ‘people’? To argue the authenticity of people’s culture is to imply that the making of culture is free from any external forces and power, which is problematic. The fifth understanding of the term is a political one. This understanding refers to the hegemonic relationship that constantly battles between the “imposed culture” and the “spontaneously oppositional culture of the “people” (ibid, p.10). The final definition is challenged by the postmodernist argument that there is no longer a clear distinction between high and popular culture, or between authentic and commercial culture.

All six definitions according to Storey, share one common theme: popular culture is definitely a culture that only emerged following industrialization and urbanization (ibid, p.12). This then gives popular culture a western emphasis on its unique modernization process. Moreover, Storey argues that the difficulties of defining popular culture arises from “the absent other...it is never enough to speak of popular culture; we have always to acknowledge that with which it is being contrasted. And whichever of popular culture’s others we employ...it will carry into the definition of popular culture a specific theoretical and political inflection.” (ibid. p.13)

Incorporating these insightful theoretical arguments of popular culture with the conditions of China, this research to an extent can be generally summarised as deploying British political and cultural theories about nation and national identity, in order to understand China's national identity as a mediated popular cultural phenomenon, with reference to and in comparison to the American national identity as the American Dream.

Hence, by revisiting the three approaches defined earlier in this section, mediated popular culture in this study firstly refers to China's political texts and practices initiated by the CCP, both in the current situation and its historical context. In the current situation this would include the official texts of China's national identity as the Chinese Dream that were discursively constructed by President Xi Jinping. It is then necessary to examine the practices initiated by the state in order to propagate and popularize the Chinese Dream as socially accepted common sense. And since the current state and its nation building arguably has many historical continuities going back to the Qin state which unified China in 221 BC, it is also necessary to go back through history to track the dynamic among the state, the people and the media communication, in order to shed light in comprehending the current construction. In particular, this study discusses the Chinese Dream as a mythical construction, a fantasy that has a fond vision of the future; and shows how China's dream is constantly defined and redefined in relation to its "absent other": the American Dream. Last but not least, it is necessary to analyse how the state publicity office attempts to reproduce the existing ideological order.

Secondly, mediated popular culture refers to popular cultural products produced in the Chinese cultural industries that have been trying hard to compete with American popular cultural products and practices. This study has chosen to examine Chinese blockbuster films which in quantifiable terms are both mass-produced and consumed. These films are discussed with reference to the textual forms and practices defined by Hollywood.

Thirdly, mediated popular culture includes potentially subversive subculture that is excluded from the mainstream national cultural order, but is later incorporated by the state with emotional sentiments for national identification. This perspective draws attention to the dynamic between "spontaneously oppositional culture of the "people" and the cultural

industry and the dominant, high culture supported by the state. In this study, this relationships is explored using the example of the subcultural *Danmei* fan community, highlighting the role subcultural fan communities play in the construction of cyber nationalisms.

To summarize, “mediated popular culture” refers to a range of highly complex relational cultural texts and practices that are interdependent, interconnected, emergent, diverse, overlapping, adaptive, and contradictory. Thus, China’s national identity through mediated popular culture becomes a process with multiple levels of moments of “articulations” which may or may not generates national identifications. This will be further explored and examined in the methodology and methods chapter that follows.

3. Research questions and the Structure of the Thesis

This research defines its research question as: How does the Chinese Communist Party (re)produce and (re)distribute China’s national identity through mediated popular culture? In order to answer this overarching question, this thesis is structured into seven chapters, each chapter focusing on a mini research question that contributes to answering the question that this study proposes.

Chapter one asks the question, given the highly complex, interdisciplinary and relational nature of this study, of what methodological framework is best suited? Moreover, what are the particular methods that can be adopted to examine mediated popular culture, as defined by this research? It first introduces the ‘circuit of culture’ to understand China’s national identity as a popular cultural phenomenon and discusses the applicability of this model as an overarching framework. It then provides a rationale for the specific methods deployed by this research as a multiple case study, and describes the research design as well as sampling strategies for the following chapters.

Chapter two asks the question of why instead of “nationalism”, this study chooses to use “national identity and identifications”. Through examining seminal thinkers’ accounts of the theories of nation, state, nation-state, and the changing views of culture in the study of modernist nationalism, it concludes by suggesting that national identity is essentially a process. Instead of focusing on the end result of national identification manifested as nationalism, this study is more about an examination of the complex formations of China’s national identity in and through mediated popular culture.

Chapter three asks the question of how the historical dynamic between the state, the Chinese people and the media can potentially provide an insight into the understanding of complex constructions of China’s national identity represented in the media in its current conditions. It visits three historical moments of crisis in Chinese history, and explores the role played by mediated communication in this dynamic. It introduces an important concept of “cooperation” in Chinese culture, because Chinese people’s “obedience” is based on their judgements of the state’s competency in bringing about benefits for the majority in society. In other words, they are not keen on the means of governance, rather focusing on the result of a polity.

Chapter four asks a simple yet difficult question: What, then, is China’s current national identity? It is simple because China’s national identity was officially propagated by the state in 2012 as the Chinese Dream. It is difficult because it is a complex process of reworking the old and new political discourses in relation to China’s rising position as the world’s second largest economy. In particular, to an extent, China’s relationship with America both shapes and stimulates the definition and redefinition of the construct. It is also a difficult question because as the state tries to popularize the state’s construction as commonly accepted knowledge, it seems that the very term “the Chinese dream” has already lost its marketing advantages in popular culture.

Chapter five poses the questions of how the state media institutions have changed their communication strategies in order to generate China’s national identifications in a rapidly changing society saturated with new media and communication technologies? If so, what are

the changes they make? What techniques do they deploy in order to “tell China’s story well”⁴ in popular culture? This chapter then examines the developments in the campaign of “China’s National Image Promotional Film”, initiated in 2010. By tracking the changes and comparing two instalments in the campaign. It seeks to conclude with what China’s national identity in “new era” means.

Chapter six asks questions about how, after joining the WTO and the state’s economic reform in the cultural sector, the media conglomeration as a national strategy was able to compete with Hollywood. By supporting Chinese big budget films, did the state manage to produce Chinese blockbusters that truly generate Chinese consumers’ identification with the nation-state? Through exploring the forms and themes represented in these films, such as computer-generated images, “heroism” and “hope”, China’s national identity as mediated through the films supported by state-owned companies, avoids critical discussions about the present situation. In this sense, China’s national identity is a fond imagination taking consumers’ attention away from the present.

Chapter seven asks to what extent, and in what context, Chinese people spontaneously choose to identify with their nation-state? The particular case chosen by this research is the celebrity-fan network on Weibo, which contributes significantly to understanding Chinese cyber nationalism as fandom nationalism and celebrity nationalism. Moreover, the chapter seeks to present a more nuanced dynamic between subcultural fan communities, celebrities, the Chinese state and the popular cultural industries. It argues that Chinese fandom nationalism expressed in relation to the Hong Kong extradition-bill protest is supported by Chinese younger generations’ living experience, as well as generating wider social recognition through advocating their imagined nation as their “idol”.

The conclusion of this thesis revisits Nicholas Negroponte, and draws its final conclusion entitled “the future of China’s national identity.”

⁴ “Tell China’s story well” is a phrase uttered by Xi Jinping in 2013 to urge the media institutions and industries to better communicate in a global stage.

Chapter One

Methodology and Methods

According to Dew, methodology refers to “the principles underlying particular research approaches, as distinct from “methods”, which are ways of collecting data” (Dew cited in Liamputtong, 2013, p.6). This chapter will provide an overall account of the methodological framework of this research. Moreover, it seeks to give detailed explanations of the methods used by each chapter which underpin the inner logic behind the research design. This study uses a qualitative research approach situated within the framework of the “circuit of culture” (Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus, 1997). This is because the thesis places emphasis on China’s national identity as a state-led project and attempts to understand the political construction from a mediated popular culture perspective. In this regard, there are three key terms in relation to the methodological approach: national identity, popular culture and media communication. National identity is primarily a political concept, whereas theorising popular culture has its origin in British cultural studies, and media communication belongs to the media studies and social sciences which investigate the development of media technologies and how these shape human society. Accordingly this research is an interdisciplinary study that needs to deploy methods across these fields to understand China’s national identity from both the macro (political institutional) and the micro (popular texts and practices) levels. The circuit of culture as a multidimensional research framework addresses these concerns by enabling a researcher to map the connections between production and consumption, between regulation and representation, between identity and identities.

China in the 21st century has proven to be vastly different from the times before the market economy reform. One of the most significant changes is the prevalent use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) which represents a paradigm shift from unitary ways of accessing information to multiple, diffused, and fragmented ways of accessing information. While the new emergence of technology online enables foreign media products to bypass state regulation and to be consumed by millions in the comfort of their personal space, the same technologies also become the tools for Chinese audiences to form their own groups of identification based on cultural tastes and personal interests. The state’s power to construct

national identity and identifications thus become fragmented and diffused. With the help of new media technology, culture becomes “more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over” (Eley and Suny cited by Ozkirimli, 2017, p.182). This further complicates the research agenda set by this study, as the ever present interrelations between politics and economy, state and people, domestic and foreign, are then further entangled by new media technologies which blur the boundary between private and public, physical and imagined world. This has led to the reworking of Du Gay’s original ‘circuit of culture’ model by this research in order to accommodate these complex relationship networks.

This chapter will first explore the validity of the ‘circuit of culture’ as its overarching framework. It will then provide a detailed exploration and explanation of the research approach and methods used by this thesis chapter by chapter.

1. The Circuit of Culture as the Methodological Framework

This section examines the validity of studying China’s national identity through the “circuit of culture” (See figure 1). This is claimed to provide not only a theoretical model, but also “multidimensional methodological frameworks to guide the scholarly analysis of complex social process and power relations that can never be guaranteed” (Hall cited in Scherer and Jackson, 2008, p.508) China’s national identity is an ongoing process. While the Party-state is sustaining their political legitimacy through their capability to govern and bring continuous material betterment to the people, they also rely heavily on reproducing their legitimacy through mediated popular culture. In this sense, the meaning of China’s national identity is a contingent cultural outcome, based on how it is circulated in the complex social process and power relations. In other words, China’s national identity is a matrix of cultural texts and practices, each subject to a cultural construction that is open to (and at the same time, constantly being challenged by) a colossus of complicated and often conflicting identifications.

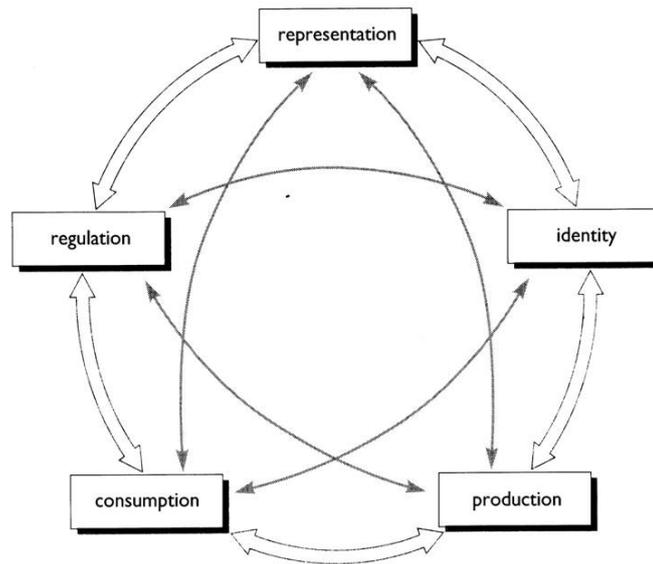


Figure 1: The circuit of culture Paul Du Gay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* 1997

Paul Du Gay (1997) argues that to study any cultural text or practices one needs to analyse the ‘articulation’ of a number of distinctive processes whose interactions can and do lead to variable and contingent outcomes. (p.3) In other words, in order to understand a meaning, an imagination or even a perceived “truth” that China’s national identity comes to associate itself with in the popular culture, one needs to examine the dynamics among various cultural processes and practices. Using Sony Walkman as the case study, Paul Du Gay et al. identify five major cultural processes, as follows: Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption and Regulation. The concept of “articulation” mentioned above was foregrounded by Hall, and was first introduced by Laclau and Mouffe in 1985. In cultural studies, however, the concept of articulation is utilized in order to define “how cultural artefacts are overdetermined by political ideologies, and by social and political identities in terms of class, race, nationality and gender, and how these ideologies and identities are related in and through their cultural representations” (Kellner cited by Torfing, 1999, p.211).

Nonetheless, for Du Gay et al, the social knowledge of a cultural artefact is not overdetermined by political ideologies. Rather, articulation is a linkage, which is “not necessary, determined, or absolute and essential for all the time... it is a linkage whose conditions of existence or emergence need to be located in the contingencies of circumstance...the meaning that an artefact comes to possess...it is in a combination of

process- in their articulation- that the beginnings of an explanation can be found” (1997, p.3). Thus, to apply “circuit of culture” to the examination of China’s national identity through mediated popular culture, the model enables a set of questions to be asked, like: How is China’s national identity represented, by whom and why is it represented in certain ways? How is it regulated, through what media institutions and what are the reasons for such regulations? How it is produced, who gets to produce it and why; how it is then consumed, who are the ‘consumers’ of a national identity. Moreover, an interesting implication of this theory is that within the culture circuit of a national identity, it is also necessary to ask what other identities a national identity chooses to associate itself with, or not. This is a two-way flow. The circuit of culture approach allows the researcher to place the study of China’s national identity within the world of nations and examine the dynamics in-between. In the current situation of international relations and the major trade war between China and America, the construction of China’s national identity, to an extent, has to respond to America’s national identity.

In the introduction to the second edition of *Doing Cultural Studies: The story of the Sony Walkman* (2013), the authors reflect on the criticisms of the model since its first publication in 1996. One such criticism argues that the circuit of culture as a relational research provides a “one size fits all frame that reduced complex and contingently related phenomena to a few moments on a preformatted circuit” (Du Gay, et al., 2013, p. xvii). Moreover, what role could new technologies, such as mobile devices and social networking sites play “in the assembling of contemporary cultural practices and the organization and reproduction of the cultural industries” (ibid, P. xii), and how could they perhaps stimulate new ways of consumption of national identity?

With these arguments in mind, the next section aims to define the specific problematics for researching China’s national identity in relation to mediated popular culture, as well as to address the technological changes in people’s daily lives.

The Problematics of China’s National Identity

Whetherell treats identity as an “open problematic” because it is a site “gathering together a wide range of concerns, tropes, curiosities, patterns of thoughts, debates around certain binaries and particular kinds of conversations” (2010, p.3). Therefore, it is important to pin down the central problematic of China’s national identity. The argument of the current research is based on two problematics: domestically, the dynamic between the individual and the collective, and internationally, the tension between China as an ideological minority versus the dominant political culture that is based on liberal humanism. Hence, building upon the methodological framework of “circuit of culture”, it adds new elements based on the two problematics into the circuit. (See figure 2)

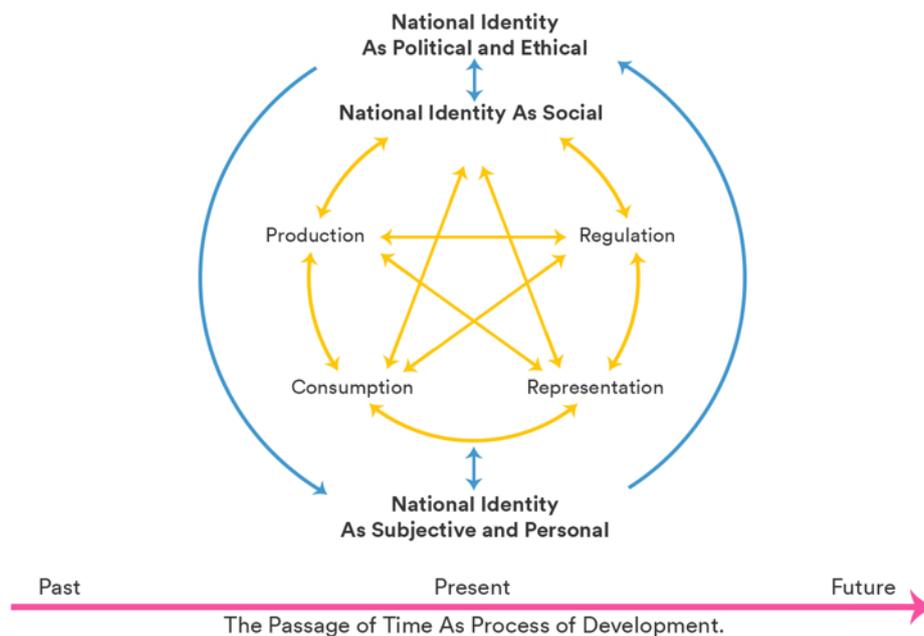


Figure 2: Proposing a research model of Understanding China’s national identity through popular culture: 4 Dimensions of National Identity (Political, personal, social and temporal)

Element one: China’s national identity as **political/ethical**. This is to be understood in two ways. Firstly, it is the current official construction of China’s national identity as the Chinese Dream, with the Party-state is building its political argument on differentiating itself from the American Dream. Moreover, the Party-state attempts to argue why the Chinese Dream is culturally more suitable for the Chinese people. It also implicitly suggests that the values

represented in the Chinese Dream are morally better. For example, In the article published by the state media titled “seven main differences between the Chinese dream and the American Dream”, the Chinese scholar Shi argues that the Chinese Dream must be realised by the Chinese people, but historically the American Dream achieved its success partly by exploiting human resources from other countries, namely slavery and cheap labour from China, Mexico and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Chinese dream is about social harmony because the Chinese historical tradition holds the ideas of homeland and community in high esteem, while the American dream is about individual freedom and happiness (Shi, 2013).

Secondly, China’s national identity as political/ethical is to be understood as a top-down control of the meanings of construction through state media. This is manifested as reproducing its political legitimacy through propaganda/publicity, and deploying market resources to produce “Chinese” cultural commodities with “Chinese values” in order to compete with foreign cultural products that have other ideological implications. As mentioned earlier, the powerful control of media communication was inevitably disrupted by the market economy and ICTs, which means national identity building led by the Party-state is required to constantly respond to grassroots demand and foreign competition, and incorporate and renew its strategies to produce political legitimacy through popular culture.

Element two: China’s national identity as **subjective and personal**. This is to be understood in two ways. Firstly, since the Party-state essentially defines China’s national identity in terms of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, to an extent, it demands Chinese people subordinate their individual pursuits to the collective purposes of the nation. This subsequently creates a tension between the individual and the state defined collectivity. This tension is intensified because after the introduction of the market economy to China by Deng, there is an evident cultural change in which the individual is more driven by personal pursuit than collective motivation. Moreover, with new ICTs and social networking sites, individuals are encouraged and rewarded by their own creative expressions which to an extent deepen the gap between national agenda and personal choice. In this respect, Chinese individuals are required to constantly negotiate between the two, and their daily consumption of mediated culture helps to shape, and is shaped by this relationship.

Secondly, China's national identity in a subjective and personal sense is understood as a bottom-up approach from the grassroots through which the individual's perception of national identity has real effects on the Party-state. To put it bluntly, people have the power to resist or cooperate with the government. As the historical chapter shows, when overwhelmingly defeated by the British navy in the first Opium War, a growing discontent was commonly shared by Chinese people on seeing that the feudalist government was no longer fit for the new challenges posed by the new ideas of science and liberty from the Western societies. The result of this shared discontent is arguably the reason for the government being overthrown.

Element three: China's national identity as social. There are three ways to understand the social element, which refers to China's national identity as social sedimentation, social imagination and extended social space. Firstly, **social sedimentation** builds on the ideas of Billig and Skey, which emphasize the daily reproduction of meanings of China's national identity as common sense. As China's national identity is discursively mediated through complex popular cultural constructions, the relationship between top down and bottom up, and between domestic and foreign cannot be separated. This research argues that China's national identity as a state-led project relies heavily on the active interpretation initiated by the people, and people's identification of the nation-state also depends on the actual performance and production offered by the state. This also applies to the national and international dynamic, which places China within a world of nations. Moreover, the constant balance between the top and the bottom, national and international, and the continuous effort of stabilising this complex balance produces social sedimentation which is perceived by the majority as common sense. In other words, this "dialectical interplay between resistance and incorporation, and structure and agency" (Kellner, Grossberg and Storey cited by Scherer & Jackson, 2008, p.508) frames the inner logic of the thesis.

Secondly is China's national identity as **social imagination**. Referring to Anderson's imagined community in relation to the commercial print media, this study continues to explore how different media, such as television, cinema, and the internet shape an understanding of China's national identity. Moreover, as media communication is heavily controlled and

regulated by the state, the way in which internet communication disrupts, diffuses and fragments the control further complicates the formation of the social imagination. In other words, “unfixity has become the condition of every social identity” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p.85). Furthermore, with the introduction of market economy to China and the cultural system reform, state-owned media communication in China has shifted from functioning mainly as a propaganda mechanism to a dual function, which combines political and economic interests. Hence, social imagination is also shaped by the market forces, which have transformed the Chinese audiences to Chinese consumers. In this respect, China’s national identity as social imagination needs to adapt to commercial cultural practices if it is to remain relevant and popular in the market-place. This market logic implicitly converts China’s national identity into a popular cultural commodity which is subject to people’s consumption choices. Notably, this does not necessarily result in the empowerment of the audiences themselves.

Thirdly China’s national identity as **extended social space**. This refers to information and communication technologies which have extended the playground of China’s national identity from physical space to virtual space. This blurs the geographical boundary between national and foreign, as well as the physical and the virtual. The extended social space also creates new types of human relations. This study analyses the celebrity-fan network online as a new type of social relations. Moreover, it considers how national identity is represented, regulated, produced and consumed within this network. Furthermore, extended social space is characterised by feelings of space otherness. This study defines space otherness as the constant virtual access to other spaces represented on screen which might create a sense of discontent and withdrawal from reality. This in turn contributes to the state’s grand mobilization of its political and economic resources to create Chinese blockbusters in order to compete with those from Hollywood.

Element four: Last but not least, this study introduces the element of “**temporal**” to understanding China’s national identity. This is because first, the official construction of China’s national identity stresses the historical continuity with the past. It emphasizes the importance of China as a civilization of 5000 years, and its political continuity since the

unification of China by the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C. Moreover, it stresses the narratives of China's century of humiliation since the Opium War, and how the country has attempted to modernize in Chinese terms. The historical aspect of China's national identity has led to the thesis revisiting the state formation in the Qin dynasty and the national moments of crisis at the end of Qing dynasty and during Mao's era. Moreover, as China's national identity is constructed around the central arguments that China has modernized in an alternative way, this points to an imagined future depicted in the Chinese Dream, which is "brighter and more beautiful" for every individual. The linear narrative structure of the Chinese Dream as past, present and future in this sense functions as a collective fantasy for the Chinese people.

The last aspect of the temporal element refers to Benjamin Walter's "homogenous empty time". In the context of this research, this refers to how people experience time in the capitalist world of entertainment by which an individual is constantly in a transition from boredom to being entertained. This approach gives importance to understanding China's national identity from the perspective of commercial popular culture, and how China's national identity is negotiated in the process of social communication in virtual space.

The four elements mentioned above, taken together, set out to address the "problematic" identified by this research. By using the revised version of "circuit of culture", this research attempts to understand China's national identity through popular culture that is represented, produced, consumed, regulated in and through the media and ICTs. Its aim is not to provide a critique of a certain formation of China's national identity, nor to reject a particular trend of thought in order to endorse another one. It seeks no particular value judgement of certain perspectives of China's national identity, and offers no correct answer as to What China's national identity really is. Rather, this research focuses on the process of China's national identifications that is initiated from the top down, from the bottom up and at a horizontal level.

The next two sections provides a rationale and research design for the methods deployed in this thesis in details.

2. Literature Review, History and Discourse

This section provides a rationale for the first half of the thesis, namely the Literature review chapter, the historical review Chapter and the Chinese Dream chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

As will be seen in this literature review, only Western scholars' accounts (and particularly those of British scholars) relating to national identity and nationalism are addressed at this point, with no specific mention of Chinese scholars' research on China's national identity. Rather, the Chinese scholars' research on China's national identity in relation to mediated popular culture are discussed within the case studies given later. There are three reasons for this decision: firstly, the concept of nation and nationalism were essentially developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the west as part of "a lively academic debate on nationalism, precipitated by the experience of decolonization and the proliferation of new states in Asia and Africa" (Ozkirimli, 2017, p.5). Indeed it was not until the 1980s that the subject enjoyed a proliferation of scholarly debates. Among them, this study chooses to examine the accounts put forward by Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) which were all published in the same year. These seminal thinkers in the field are all concerned with one issue: modernization. But they contest the ways in which the belief in one's national identity is necessarily an outcome/by-product of such modernization. Notably, the modernization they refer to is based on the uniquely European experiences which have evolved from the traditional to modern society, and which remain very different from Chinese experiences.

Secondly, as this study chooses to understand China's national identity from a cultural perspective, chapter one then turns to western seminal thinkers who challenge the general view among the modernist nationalism scholars which sees culture as a static whole. Since the 1990s, from Billig (1995) to Edensor (2002) to Skey (2011), each commentator considers the reproduction of national identity through popular culture and everyday life, which is the

main research interest of this research. Moreover, Miheli's work bridges the gap between the macro analysis of political institutions and the micro analysis of media texts and practices. This provides a good summary of the approach to this study, as well as showing how China's national identity is highly shaped by state owned media communications. Moreover, McLuhan and Postman's seminal works on the effect of the medium on the message help to understand why China's national identity has, to an extent, been reimagined by popular culture as being a technological form of entertainment.

In this sense, nation and national identity which first developed in the west provide a solid theoretical foundation for the thesis. More importantly, these theoretical approaches can then be applied to the case of China in order to examine the validity of scholarly debates. As the following the chapters have shown, China's national identity is defined in accordance with, as well as in opposition to foreign national identities. In this sense, China's national identity is almost always in dialogue with other national identities. Indeed, dialogue "requires that in some way one abandons one's own position to enter into that of the other. The more I give myself to the other, the better I know myself and the more I acquire a unique identity" (Louis Dupre, cited in Rifkins, 2010)

Chapter Three: History

As discussed earlier, the history chapter is provided for the reasons that the Party-state which shapes China's official national identity traces its political and cultural origins to the beginning of state formation, namely the unification of China in the Qin dynasty, and argues that China is a nation-state with historical continuity. More importantly, since one of the problematics defined by this study is the individual versus the collective, chapter three focus on exploring the dynamics between the Chinese people and the state. With this understanding in mind, the chapter then explores three significant transitional moments of national identity crisis in relation to state formation: these are the end of the warring states and the beginning of the Qin; the end of the dynastic China and the beginning of Republic China; the end of the Republic China and the beginning of the Communist China. With each period of nation building, the chapter examines a particular cultural medium that was deployed by the state

most prominently at the time, namely the Stele inscription, the print media, and the theatre plays. Notably, these examples are chosen for their significant effects on Chinese society which also significantly shaped the relationship between society and the state.

Another reason for providing a historical review is that history is, in fact, an integral part of understanding the current situation. Pickering argues that the studies of history and culture are inseparable, in the sense that the vitality of cultural studies depends, in one key dimension of its development, on keeping the diverse interactions between 'then' and 'now' in continual and active view of each other. (2008, p.194) In other words, in order to study national identity culturally, we also need to study the historical process of China's national identity. Pickering goes on to suggest that there are two main benefits in engaging with history in the study of national identity. Firstly, the present debates about identity, nation, ethnicity, cultural encounter and interaction often register with the values of past histories. For example, Li (2013, p.1) argues that the primary aim of historical writings on "modern China" was to trace the historical roots of the country's current problems in order to legitimize their solutions rather than a truth-seeking process or the reconstruction of the past as it actually happened. Secondly, history reveals 'the power of the past to shock us into relativized awareness of what we may have come to accept as commonplace or taken for granted' (Pickering, 2008, p.2000). In this sense, the current official construction of national identity through culture lies in the past; hence, it is essential to go back to the history and investigate.

Chapter Four: the Chinese Dream

Chapter four provides an official understanding of China's national identity as the Chinese Dream, which is discursively constructed by the current Chinese President Xi Jinping. As the chapter shows, there is a clear effort and intention of the state to popularize the previous political discourses and reproduce these within the more accessible "Chinese Dream". To an extent, the reworking of the previous constructions enables the state-led Chinese national identity to be presented as socially accepted knowledge/common sense. In other words, this

is the government's attempt to challenge the global sedimentation of liberal humanism which was manifested as the American Dream.

Foucault argues that the production of social knowledge is through what he termed "discourse", which is "a more open system, connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power" (Hall, 2013, p.27). Discourse, according to Hall, was initially used in linguistics to mean passages of connected writings or speech. But for Foucault, it means both what one says and what one does, and is about language as well as practice:

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practices and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. Discourse... never consists of one statement, one text, one action or one source. The same discourse, characteristic of the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time (what Foucault called the *episteme*), will appear across a range of texts, and as forms of conduct, at a number of different institutional sites within society. However, whenever these discursive events 'refer to the same object, share the same style and... support a strategy... a common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern' (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, pp. 84-5), then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation. (Hall, 2013, p.29)

In this sense, China's national Identity as discursively, mediated through the language of popular culture, is constructed through numerous inter-connected, overlapping or contradictory popular mediated discourses that could potentially contribute to or undermine a certain formation. However, "construct" or "deconstruct" is a very complicated issue, and intention and the actual outcome is not taken as given, but is a process of interplay through the production, consumption, regulation, representation, and through the dynamic among social identities, which produces a contingent outcome. The Chinese Communist Party is a powerful player in shaping China's national identity, which regulates a certain conduct of others, adapts a more effective technique for its own use, or negotiates with resistant forces,

all of which are important aspects of Foucault's understanding of discourse. China's national identity may be an imaginative construction, but its effects are nevertheless very real.

In the light of these arguments, chapter 4 provides a discussion of the official discursive formation of China's national identity as the Chinese Dream. It seeks to present arguments and counter arguments in comparison to the American Dream. In particular with references to the historical review of the American Dream, it shows the counter intuitive similarities between the two national constructions. It also shows that differences between the two as an individual pursuit versus collective mobilization is oversimplified.

This research seeks to adopt a "critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves" (Burr, 2003, p.2). China's national identity as the product of a culture and history is "dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture and that time" (ibid, p.4). From a methodological perspective, discourse analysis of the Chinese Dream allows firstly, further investigations that go beyond the official "knowledge" of what is the Chinese Dream but questions the complex formation of such construction. Secondly, it suggests that China's national identity can be approached as a process of negotiation, in which the power of the political, the economic and the network social are all entangled and continuously work together. In this sense, this chapter provides a foundational understanding for the subsequent case studies to analyse China's national identity in the political sector, commercial sector and the network social sector.

3. Case Studies: The Political, the Commercial and the Network Social

The general approach to methods in chapters 5, 6, and 7 is that of a case study approach. As the overarching framework of the thesis is the "circuit of culture" which deals mainly with the questions of who, when, where, how and why, it seems appropriate to adopt this method. Yin argues that doing case study research is preferred in situations where (1) the main research questions are "how" and "why" questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events; and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely

historical) phenomenon (Yin, 2013, para. 10.3). Moreover, “a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (ibid, para.10.4). This study defines its research question in the introduction as: How the party-state as a minor political culture (re)produces and (re)distributes China’s national identity through mediated popular culture. This study chooses to examine from the perspective of popular culture mediated through various screens and attempts to track the state’s interplay with (new) media communications with political, commercial and network social agendas.

In the light of these arguments, this section provides a rationale and an explanation for the research design, in order to articulate the logic behind the choices of these mini case studies. The evidence used is based upon academic documents (published books and most recent peer-reviewed articles of the subject), state media’s news coverage (both domestic and foreign), government policy documents, media texts (cross media state promotional films, big screen blockbusters, web series dramas, online fan productions, and conversations), and the author’s direct observations from years of experiences as a fan of popular culture.

Before going into the details of each chapter, it is important to state that the multi-case design of chapter 5, 6, and 7 has a replication logic. The replication logic for multi-case design is that “each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (*a literal replication*) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons (*a theoretical replication*)” (Yin, 2013, para.11.151). As the implications of the research question suggests, though there have been many moments of national identity crisis happening in the history of People’s Republic of China (PRC), From the June 4th Incident to the most recent Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protest, China’s national identity as led by the Party-state has largely remained a stable construction. In this sense, all the examples were largely chosen to demonstrate why this has been the case. And if not, what changes the state’s made in order to cope with rapid societal changes since the market reform and the proliferations of information and communication technologies.

Therefore all case study chapters are consistent in

(a) Structure: each chapter begins with a historical and literature review concerned with a specific field, namely the political (chapter 5), the commercial (chapter 6) and the network social (chapter 7); each chapter then follows with two case studies that demonstrate the changes in the media, communication and technological means of constructing China's national identity. These case studies examine how the party-state deploy various techniques found in the popular cultural texts and practices to generate national identifications.

(b) The case studies explore articulations of the five moments in the circuit of culture: (reproduction) Production, Consumption and Prosumption, Regulation (the negotiation of the regulation), Representation (resistant representation), and China's national identity (in comparison to the American national identity).

(c) Process: this refers to the demonstrations of China's national identity and identification as an ongoing and complex process, as the title shows: "from propaganda to publicity" (the dynamic between top and down) ; "from *Hero* to heroes" (the dynamic between foreign, especially America, and domestic); "Resistance, Incorporation and Spontaneity" (the dynamic among top down, bottom up and side-by-side).

The replications of the structure, the circuit of culture and the emphasis on China's national identity as an ongoing complex process are deployed to demonstrate a "*a logical plan for getting from here to there*, where *here* may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions" (Yin, 2013, para.11.17). The remaining space in this chapter sets out a more detailed account of the rationale behind the choices of materials for each case study.

Chapter 5: the Political

This chapter chooses the example of "China's National Image Promotional Film" campaign as its central case study. This is because firstly, the campaign is a key project foregrounded by the State Council Information Office, which is a part of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee (CCPPD). The campaign demonstrates a transitional change from propaganda to publicity, as the state was increasingly seeking to increase China's cultural soft

power. This soft power is not just intended for the purposes of domestic propaganda, but also for international publicity. Secondly, “China’s national Image Promotional Film” campaign is an active project. Launched in 2011 in Times Square New York upon China’s then president Hu Jintao’s official visit to America, to the “China Enters New Era” released right after Xi Jinping’s official speech at the 19th People’s Congress in 2017, the comparison between the ‘then’ and ‘now’ shows the changes in communication skills, techniques of story-telling, and targeted audiences. This reflects a method in which “historical comparison is a central method of analytical thinking” (Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Madsen, Mackay, and Negus, 2013, p. xiii). Thirdly, the case was chosen for the purpose of demonstrating the state’s understanding of “audiences”. As the first instalment of the campaign was initially aimed at American audiences and received many criticisms internationally and domestically in terms of the content, narrative form and ideology, the “China Enters New Era” was first released online through the state media’s Weibo platform for Chinese netizens. This demonstrates a changing perspective of looking at audiences, from being the “target audience of propaganda” to an essentially online public who have the power to identify for or against the state by expressing their views online.

The case study is supported by textual analysis with reference to the film literature. China’s national identity, as disseminated by the state, is treated as a process of dynamics between cultural texts and practices. As the chapter investigates this process through an analysis of its “outputs” (Davis, 2008, p.56), namely the case of “China enters new era”, it asks questions common in textual analysis, as summarised by Davis: What can be said about the individuals featured in the texts? Who are the contributors to the text? How are the texts framed and presented? What are the terms and phrases used and what is their symbolic meaning? What are the assumptions embedded in the texts?

Chapter 6: the Commercial

Chapter 6 chooses two films *Hero* (2002) and *The Wandering Earth* (2019) which were produced (*Hero*) and distributed (both *Hero* and *The Wandering Earth*) by the China Film Group Corporation (CFG), the largest state-owned media enterprise in China that went public in 2016. The chapter aims to demonstrate how the Global Hollywood shaped the

Chinese government's strategies and policy to support Chinese blockbuster films, and how the Chinese blockbuster films incorporated the government, and to an extent, created an imagined time and space to actively argue a more important role for China in the fictional world of nations. Again, this chapter adopts textual analysis supported by the narrative analysis of the two films. Narrative analysis is used in the sense of Paul Ricoeur's view that "the narrative in its social context: stories completed, not in the components of the story itself, but in the circulation of relations between story, the producer of story, and the audience for the story, in the context of local rules for what constitutes a *meaningful story*" (Lawler, 2008, p.33).

Hence, there are three ways to approach the case studies chosen to be examined in chapter 6. Firstly, the two films *Hero* and *The Wandering Earth* demonstrate a complicated, interconnected and processive narrative structure which is in the circulation of relations of China's national identity: the stories within the academic scholarly debates (foreign and domestic) about the ideological values in the Hollywood and Chinese blockbuster films; the stories about the technologies defined by the west but adopted by the Chinese film industry to imitate the Hollywood technical form to construct China; the stories between the news media coverage (China and Foreign) of the Chinese blockbuster films; the stories of how the market and technology developments in China contribute to the audiences' understanding of Chinese blockbusters based on their past consumption of Hollywood blockbuster films; Moreover, they reveal the ways in which the producers of these two films use the heroic themes to help the Chinese audiences make sense of, and ultimately to construct their own identities and their relationship with the state. (Lawler, 2008, pp.33-34)

Secondly, insofar as the ideas of "homogenous empty time" and "space otherness" defined by this research contribute to the understanding of the specific problematics of China's national identity, this chapter serves to present a fictional space-time represented in the films (the past and the future) and to look at how the missing discussion of the present is shaping China's national identity, led by the Party-state. Thirdly, this chapter analyses the two films in relation to the role played by the state media institution in the marketization of the cultural sector in China. It shows the dynamic among the state media institution, the state-owned media enterprise, and the film industry as a commercial sector, and how China's national

identity is negotiated through representation, production, regulation and potential 'reading' by Chinese film audiences.

Chapter 7: the Social Network

The final chapter of this research focuses on the "network social", a term referring to the celebrity-fan network coined by Zhang in 2016 and how this extended social space has constructed a strong emotional national identification with the nation-state during the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protest beginning in June 2019. It attempts to draw from all the previous power relationships from the political sector, to the interplay between the political and the commercial sectors, and how these entangled relationships interact with Chinese netizens online. Bellotti laid out clearly in his enlightening book *Qualitative Networks: Mixed Methods in Sociological Research* some of the implications of social relations for individual action:

As the tangled nature of social relations, where individuals are connected in overlapping and therefore non-independent dyads, implies that what occurs in one relation may spill over into others, provoking unintended effects that are out of individual (or dyadic) control. Individuals lie at the interlacing points of these overlapping networks, as they are simultaneously embedded in various relational contexts. The unique crossroads in which they are located provide the structural opportunities and constraints that may facilitate or hamper individual action (Bellotti, 2015).

This above comment summarises well the intentions of this chapter. Online social relations such as the celebrity-fan network discussed in this chapter present both opportunities and constraints for online fans, whereby they actively negotiate their "subcultural" identities through creativities which are inevitably connected to, and incorporated by, the popular cultural industries. These relational processes of resistance and negotiation are then entangled with the political sector, in which the fans of subculture spontaneously participate in the construction of "celebrity nationalism" and "fandom nationalism" for wider social recognition, as well as being incorporated by the state advocating the legitimacy of the Party-state facing the crisis of the Hong Kong protest. Moreover, as the research sets out to bring the macro level of institutions and the micro level of media studies together in order to understand China's national identity as a complex phenomenon, this chapter investigates

how the “the micro processes of interactions between individuals, with their unintended and emergent effects, are modelled as endogenous causes that produce effects over the dynamics of macro phenomenon” (Bellotti, 2015, p.60).

In the light of these arguments, this chapter adopts the research method of online observation method. The online observation method refers in this research to the author of this thesis immersing herself in the fan experiences and critically reflecting back on these experiences in relation to the understanding of China’s national identity. As explained by Nightingale about the fan researcher: “who decide to base their research on a phenomenon or community of which they have first-hand knowledge” (Nightingale, 2008, p.119). While claiming this title, this thesis is fully aware of the common drawbacks of fan research: namely, becoming an apologist for fans (ibid, p.120) and being too involved in the fan community, thereby losing the capacity for critical analysis. In order to overcome the latter, the researcher attempts to hold a critical stance and evaluate the subcultural fan communities’ role in the emotional identification with the nation. Moreover, the analysis seeks to understand cyber nationalism by drawing from the wider economic and political implications of Chinese societies. However, as of “becoming an apologist fans”, which is understood as the researcher’s “writing normalises fan interests and activities and informs a larger audience about the nature of fan involvements with fan texts. They are part of the process by which fans , who often consider themselves to be misrepresented by mainstream media and by demeaning stereotyping, consider their reputations to be justified, if not redeemed” (ibid).

In the Chinese context, the question is often not misrepresentation in the state media, but rather the complete absence of the discussion of subcultural fan communities. The dynamic between the subcultural fan community and the state is, to an extent, an implicit survival strategy initiated by fans to allow themselves to be incorporated by the state for national mobilization. Notably, this process gives little space to the discussion of actual subculture and the potentially “subversive” conduct performed by the fan community. For instance, when the state praised the fan community for crossing the firewalls to advocate their emotional identification with the country, it made no mention of the fact that these fans actually “broke” the state regulation that prohibits them from connecting with certain foreign websites such as Facebook through VPN technology. In this sense, rather than being an apologist for the fan

community, this research attempts to understand the “Chinese characteristics” of the relationship between fandom, the state, and the cultural industries. As of now, it would seem that economic interests do not take precedence over political interest in the China mainland, and online fans’ roles in the matrices of network social relations are subject to further investigation.

To conclude, this chapter has explored the methodological framework adopted by this research in order to understand China’s national identity as a complex mediated popular cultural phenomenon. By identifying criticisms of the original “circuit of culture”, four elements have been added, namely political/ethical, subjective/ personal, social and time, to understand the problematics of China’s national identity. It has also served to break down each chapter’s methods in terms of research design, rationale and the sample strategy in order to answer the overall research question proposed by the study: How the party-state (re)produce and (re)distribute China’s national identity through mediated popular culture.

The research journey now begins with the exploration of the theories of nation, national identity and nationalism.

Chapter Two

Concepts and Theories

Nationalism and national identity are often used interchangeably by scholars coming from political science, social science and cultural studies. However, as the research title suggests, this thesis uses national identity in preference to nationalism. This chapter sets out to illustrate the reasons for this decision, by reviewing the seminal thinkers in the field. Both nationalism and national identity seem to evoke a different level of imagination and response in regard to the terms used. As suggested by Fukuyama, the term nationalism developed a highly negative reputation in the twentieth century because it took on military aggressive forms and fed the passions underlying the two World Wars. National identity does not have to be defined in ethnic or narrow cultural terms (Fukuyama (a), 2014, p.30). Bechhofer and McCrone argue that national identity tends to be taken as “natural”, inasmuch as everyone has a national identity. Metaphorically speaking, then, if “nationalism is a form of secular religion”, then “national identity our ‘church’ membership card.” (2009, p.4) Where we are born does not necessarily mean we automatically identify with the place. Rather, our feelings and emotions (and acting upon those feelings) towards the place are manufactured daily and filtered through our experiences with family, friends, and society. This stresses on the ongoing identification processes between the individual and the nation. To an extent, a particular kind of nationalism is only mobilised by a strong point of view which constructs a certain relationship between self and other within a nation. This leads to the following definition:

“...nationalism refers to a set of beliefs about the nation. Any particular nation will contain differing views about its character; thus for any nation there will be different and competing beliefs about it that often manifest themselves as political differences. Some may view their nation as standing for individual liberty, while others may be willing to sacrifice that liberty for security...Distinctive of nationalism is the belief that the nation is the only goal worthy of pursuit- an assertion that often leads to the belief that the nation demands unquestioned and uncompromising loyalty...” (Grosby & Grosby, 2005, p.5).

In this sense, national identity allows more space for examining the processes of identifications, some successful, some failed.

Moreover, this research distinguishes the uses based on different views of conceptualizing culture and the developments of media. Modernist scholars of nationalism in the 1980s tend to see culture as static and instrumental, but later researchers were partly influenced by the developments in social science and cultural studies, namely the linguistic and cultural turn, tending to see culture as a dynamic and everchanging field, in which meanings and ideas are contested and negotiated at all times. By drawing the main arguments from the seminal thinkers in the studies of nationalism and national identity, this chapter attempts to explain the ways in which China's national identity is being studied and why it chooses to understand the current version through mediated popular culture.

Section one of the chapter explores the difficulties of providing a neat definition of nation because cultural exceptions and contradictions can always be found. After briefly examining nation and state, the chapter argues that China is a nation-state. Section two begins by exploring the seminal works of nationalism, and by examining the key ideas of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, it seeks to understand different approaches to nationalism and national identity in relation to political, social and cultural transformation of modernization. This is because since the defeat by the British navy in the Opium Wars, China began its journey of modernization. The struggles with modernization in the last century are one of the key conditions in defining China's current national identity. Modernization in P.R.C context, does not refer to the European experiences, but more as an alternative path of development process that focuses on material betterment, industrialization and technology development. Notably, the thinkers discussed in this section are Europe-based scholars, but their understandings and criticisms of the concepts help to foreground a particular approach deployed by this thesis to understand China's national identity. Section three of the chapter explores the influential thinkers of nationalism and national identity in terms of their changing views on culture and discourse. The arguments presented here shape the methodological approach of this thesis, and more importantly the discussions of media and popular culture, which are particularly relevant in examining the ideas of agency in the context of China's political reality. The last section of this chapter will summarise the arguments discussed and indicates the particular uses and meanings of China's national identity that are mediated

through popular culture, and how the forms of popular culture could shape a particular understanding (or judgement) of a national identity.

1. Nation, State and Nation-State

Barrington has provided a mindful definition of nation in comparison to state. After a detailed review of Anthony Smith, Yael Tamir, Ghia Nodia and Ernst Haas, he states that the common threads of the definitions of nation is a collective of people, and “ what makes nations unique is that they are collectives united by shared cultural features (myths, values, etc) and the belief in the right to territorial self-determination” (1997, pp.712-713). However, territorial control and people united by shared culture are each problematic when considering China. In terms of territory, the CCP’s problematic political inclusion of Taiwan as part of ‘China’ has been a subject of debate long since the beginning of People’s Republic of China. Despite the increasing civil, commercial and cultural interactions between China mainland and Taiwan, the unity of territorial claim and “shared cultural features” can be self-conflicting criteria for understanding what China as a nation means. Another example is Hong Kong. Given the historical past of Hong Kong, a former British colony of a hundred years, now a special administrative region of P.R.C since 1997, their sense of cultural unity with mainland China is a realm of political, civil and academic contestations and practices.

To further complicate the situation, mainland China has 56 different ethnicities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China on *Major Figures of 2010 Population Consensus*⁵, although Han is the dominant ethnicity, accounting for 91.51% of the entire population, there are 113,792,211 minority nationalities mainly living in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Ningxia, Guangxi and Tibet. Among these provinces, the combined area of Xinjiang and Tibet is 2.83 million square kilometres, accounting for around 29% of China’s territory. These two special regions are distinctive in their own ethnicities, religions and cultures. For instance, Xinjiang

⁵ Available from: http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/201104/t20110428_30327.html (Accessed: 22 May 2019)

which is short for Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is a largely Muslim area populated by the ethnic group called Uyghurs. The Uyghurs are “Turkic ethnically and culturally, and strong adherents of Islam” (Mackerras, 2001, p.289). In this sense, cultural unity is highly problematic in China, even though the state has long claimed its definition as a “united, multi-ethnic state founded jointly by the people of all its ethnic groups” (China.org.cn⁶). Barrington’s definition of nation seems to be inadequate when applied to the case of China, and this is not unusual.

In this regard, Eric Hobsbawm, a distinguished Marxist historian, argues that there are no satisfactory criteria for defining any large groups of people that politically and physically belong to a particular nation. On the one hand, objective criteria such as language, ethnicity, shared territory, collective memories of the past and traditional culture are not sufficient because “since some member of the large class of entities which fit such definitions can at any time be described as ‘nations’, exceptions can always be found” (1992, p.5-6). Take language, for instance: Canadine enumerates many of the European nations⁷ apart from Portugal and Sweden during the First World War, were not linguistically homogeneous countries (2014, p.71). China is similar in this regard. There are approximately 200 different dialects across the mainland, with a special region such as Xinjiang having its second official written and spoken languages: Uyghur. On the other hand, however, if to define a nation only by its members’ consciousness of belonging to it is tautological, and provides only a posteriori guide to what a nation is, this can lead the incautious into extremes of voluntarism which suggests that all that is needed to be or to be created a nation is the will to be one (Hobsbawm, 1992, p.8). The separatist movements of Xinjiang and Tibet since 1990s are two examples which coincide with Hobsbawm’s analysis.

Hence, it seems to be difficult to provide a neat definition of what a nation is, because exceptions and specialities are always found in different cases. Nonetheless, Barrington’s

⁶ The “White Papers of the Government” were published on China.org.cn. According to the website, China.org.cn is the authorized government portal site to China. It published under the auspices of the State Council Information Office and the China International Publishing Group in Beijing. (Available from: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/4.1.htm>) [last accessed 06 February 2020]

⁷ Canadine suggests that dialect and Patois were widespread across Europe during the First World War. There was less 5 percent of the population using Italian for everyday purpose in Italy, for example, and half of the schoolchildren engaged with French as a foreign language in France (2014, p.71).

comparison between nation and state is useful in separating the two terms, despite the fact that they are often used interchangeably. As he explains, the state, unlike nation which is a collective united by a shared culture, “is the principle political unit in the international political system corresponding to a territory, a relatively permanent population, and a set of ruling institutions” (1997, p.713). If the concept of nation emphasizes the fact that people have cultural solidarity, and the state emphasises its political functionality, then the hyphen between nation and state (nation-state) is the attempt by the state as a “purposefully constructed, functionally specific machine” (Poggi, 1978, p.101) to demand loyalty and identification with the state, through the medium of the nation. (Gellner cited by Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009, p.3) In other words, “nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p.10). Hobsbawm’s argument places emphasis on the way the state is steered politically in making nations, as may be seen in the common saying that is familiar with almost every Chinese person: “Without the Communist Party, there will be no new China.”⁸

In this thesis, nation and state are regarded as two inseparable concepts, China is arguably a nation-state. Nonetheless, many would disagree with such a view. For example, depending on the circumstances of the historical period, political ideologies, research interests and various purposes of the claimed person/party, China has been considered variously as a race⁹, a civilization¹⁰, or even an empire¹¹. A nation-state according to McCrone, ‘refers to virtually any “independent” state recognized by the United Nations, with “nation” and “state” being largely synonymous...the hyphenated term nation-state aligns the strictly political realm of

⁸ The phrase “without the Chinese Communist Party, there will be no new China”(没有共产党就没有新中国) was originally the title of a “red song” in 1943. “Red songs” refers to songs about the CCP of a praiseworthy nature. The phrase was later popularised through political discourses and propaganda campaigns.

⁹ In Max Weber’s writings of power (translated by Gerth & Turner, 2009, p.174), when discussing the structures of power, Weber described a historical period of which China was not yet recognized as a ‘nation’ but a ‘race’.

¹⁰ Martin Jacques argues that “China is not just a nation-state; it is also a civilization. China became a nation-state only relatively recently... the nineteenth century perhaps, or following the 1911 Revolution.” (2012, p.244) Jacques’ view sees China as a historically continuing polity, dating back to 221 BC. ‘Civilizational China’ also refers to a particular historical discourse of Feudal China’s relationship with foreigners, which described Chinese as the “civilized” ones and foreigners as the “barbarians”. (Gorfinkel, 2017, p.14)

¹¹ In an article by *The Economist* titled ‘Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream: The vision of China’s new president should serve his people, not a nationalist state’, the author critically engaged with the Chinese Dream and argues that the “main focus seems to strengthening the party’s absolute claim on power.” (2013, p.13) The article seems to suggest Xi’s overall intention is to revive China to its past as an empire. Notably, the article made the cover image of the issue which portrays Xi in imperial robes with a sub-title: Let’s party like it’s 1793.

state with the cultural one of nation, thereby fusing two analytically distinct spheres...yoking them together is an ideological act, conferring on states the legitimacy of culture, and on nations the primary right to political self-determination' (2004, pp.215-216). While this has proven to be highly problematic according to McCrone, who argues with the case of Scotland's national identity, this thesis does, indeed, see China as a nation state. This is because firstly, since the founding of P.R of China (P.R.C), the country under the Communist Party was not recognised as the official "China" in the international community, due to the long standing civil wars between CCP and China's Nationalist Party (CNP). After the CCP won the civil war and the relocation of CNP to Taiwan, there were subsequently two self-claimed governments of "China" after 1949. It was not until 1971 that CCP-led China displaced CNP-led Taiwan to become the official members of the United Nations. Soon after this, the Open and Reform policy was carried out in 1978 and China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, indicating the clear intention of the P.R.C to become a valid member of the international political community. Secondly, this thesis defines CCP-led China by its struggles. This is not just the struggles of its legitimacy in the international communities in Mao's era, but also the struggles through the country's modernisation process since the Opium War. Modernization defined by the state is the process of material betterment, industrialization and technology development, rather than value adoption. Nonetheless, the modernization process of P.R.C has encountered various moments of identity crisis in the past relating to value adoption, notably, the Tiananmen Square Incident during which the university students in China "have called explicitly for the adoption of liberal democratic ideals" (Zhao, 2005, p.133).

In other words, China is defined in this thesis as a nation-state as a result of both the state's desires to become an acceptable national player in the global system, and its very struggles of becoming one. China's national identity as a state-led project is an "ideological act" not so much in the sense that the thesis confers on the CCP the legitimacy of culture, but rather, it seeks to understand how the state and state-led mediums produce, maintain and reproduce China's national identity through popular culture despite the incoherence, variations, long standing historical issues and disharmonies in national languages, ethnicities, religions, traditional culture, past memories and territory. Moreover, China's national identity as a state

-led project is not merely an “ideological act”, but is also a condition of China which results from the country’s historical particularity. These ideas will be further developed in chapter 3.

Miheli argues that the story of modernizing developments and their involvements in the rise of nation building and mass communications is a compelling one. However, the common problems of these debates are that they are “overwhelmingly Westocentric: [this] leaves little room for the specificities of modernizations in the rest of the world, and brushes over divergent developments within the West itself” (2011, p.45). The next section sets out to examine the debates of the well-established nationalism scholars, and the strength of their arguments when applying to the case of China. In Particular, it pays attention to their understanding of the role of culture and media communication, and its relationship to state control, and the formations of nationalism.

2. Modernist Nationalism and the Official Culture

Modernist nationalism essentially refers to a belief in the modernity of nations and nationalism: “both appeared in the last two centuries, and they are the products of specifically modern processes like capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, secularism and the emergence of the modern bureaucratic state” (Ozkirimli, 2017, p.81). In 1983, three influential books on nationalism were published. They were Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, and *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Although they were all considered to link nationalism with various conditions of modernity, each arguments has its own nuance in thinking the relationship between the characters of culture and nationalism.

Ernest Gellner and High/official Culture

To start, Gellner postulates three stages in human history: the hunter-gatherer, the agro-literate and the industrial. He argues that it was not until the industrial stage that power and culture needed to come together to facilitate the transformation of modern societies. His definition of nationalism explicitly calls for the marriage of nation and state, and he defines nationalism as “primarily a principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent... Nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy.” (2006, p.1) Gellner views nationalism as a high/official culture which functions as a shared and standardized basis of knowledge that facilitates an industrial society’s need for perpetual growth and continuous improvement. Culture, in Gellner’s point of view, is now the “necessary shared medium...for a given society, it must be one in which they can *all* breathe and speak and produce; so it must be the *same* culture. Moreover, it must now be a great or high (literature, training-sustained) culture, and it can no longer be a diversified, locality-tied, illiterate little culture or tradition” (Gellner, 2006, pp.36-37). Gellner argues that the state is the only organization which can maintain an educational infrastructure so large and expensive as to prepare individuals to fit in with an industrial society. To summarize in his own words:

Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population. It means that generalized diffusion of a school-mediated, academy supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous, impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture (Gellner, 2006, p.56).

The overtly functionalist and reductionist view of culture, and the emphasis of the top-down approach to nationalism and industrialization, has attracted many criticisms since its publication. For example, Breuilly suggests different interpretations of the function of nationalism. While nationalism facilitates the process of industrialization in Gellner’s argument, others may view nationalism as a function of class interest, the preservation of traditional identities and structures or identity need (Breuilly cited by Ozkirimli, 2017, p.143). There is no universal understanding and deployment across all societies. Moreover, his top-

down approach also seems to suggest the passivity of individuals' acceptance of knowledge and identities. Edensor has criticised Gellner's central thesis for only focussing on high culture transmitted through education, and argues that:

Once the nation is established as a common-sense entity, under conditions of modernity, the mass media and the means to develop and transmit popular culture expands dramatically, and largely escapes the grip of the state, being transmitted through commercial and more informal networks. The rise of popular forms of entertainment, leisure pursuit, political organisations and a host of vernacular commonalities is not generated by national elites but is facilitated through the mobilities engendered by advances in transport and communication technologies. (Edensor, 2002, p.4)

Edensor sees that Gellner's argument has historical salience. In other words, Gellner describes a specific aspect of nation and nationalism with historical particularity: industrialization. With the changing conditions of modernization and the ascendant global commercial cultural in our daily lives, the state education system is part of, but no longer a monopoly in producing and disseminating official knowledge of national identity, but rather has to compete with different communication mechanisms, namely media communications such as the printing press, radio, television, internet and smart phones. In the light of these developments, high culture, or official culture depends on reproductions through the understanding and proficiency of the language of media technology. The cultural production of a state's legitimacy needs to constantly compete with un-official cultural productions that may foreground the legitimacy of other states. Edensor's argument has validity insofar as he seeks to widen the horizons of communication channels but gives very little thoughts to the actual polity of a given society. For a country like China, the centralised power of the state is one characteristic that cannot be overlooked. The direct supervision of the state-owned media platforms, and the tight control over the commercial media seems to limit the capacities of the power of international cultural influences.

Furthermore, Gellner and Edensor tend to take for granted the European experiences of the changing natures of modernity, hence to an extent failing to account for the dynamic relationships between different nationalisms across national borders. Moreover, not all societies are transformed from traditional to modern in a progressive linear order; indeed,

some “modern” societies may still have strong features of the “traditional” society. For example, in the Chinese context, his interpretation of the relationship between state (power) and culture proves to be both useful and problematic in construing China as a historically continued entity.

For example, instead of viewing the concept of nation as a recent phenomenon accompanied by the modernization of the state, according to Fukuyama, China was the first country in the world to establish a modern state¹². The unification of Qin (221 B.C) had “succeed[ed] in developing a centralized, uniform system of bureaucratic administration that was capable of governing a huge population and territory...inventing a system of impersonal, merit based bureaucratic recruitment...under a uniform set of rules” (Fukuyama, 2011, p.21). He further argues that, despite the fact that China was able to create a powerful modern state very early, the P.R.C still lacked the other two key pillars to what he identifies as a successful modern political system: the rule of law and democratic accountability. In other words, a proper modern political system needs to have an effective state but is simultaneously restrained by the rule of law and by institutions of accountability to limit the power of the executive. Moreover, political modernization in China was not accompanied by economic, social or scientific modernization which had first taken place in Europe. This in one way demonstrates an alternative modernization process which is different from the European development. The relationship between state and culture will be further examined in chapter three, in which this thesis goes back to the origins of the formation of the Chinese state. In particular, it seeks to demonstrate the historical particularity of China’s cultural past and its potential indication for understanding China’s current national identity.

Benedict Anderson and Print-Capitalism

Benedict Anderson’s widely circulated definition of nation as an imagined community is one of the most cited theories of nationalism. As he states, the nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet

¹² His argument is based on Max Weber’s understanding of ‘modern’ being bureaucratic, rational and impersonal.

them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (2006, p.6) In the introduction of his book, Anderson criticised Gellner’s earlier formulation of nationalism¹³ because the latter appeared anxious to reveal the untruthfulness of nationalism, and consequently equates ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsity’, rather than to ‘imagining’ and ‘creation’. (ibid) Anderson suggests that because it is impossible to know every single member of a nation, the point is not to think in terms of true/false or right/wrong, but rather, the ways in which nationalism is imagined. This approach is liberating in the sense that it breaks loose from the ideological disputes of the concepts. If one only thinks of China’s national identity as a pure “ideological act”, and treats the centralised power of the state fabricates false nationalism, this does not explain the passion of Chinese people to their nation, especially in the age of global mobility and information exchange. Hence it enables one to move on to examining the phenomenon in terms of the techniques and styles of facilitating a certain imagining of a nation.

In order to answer his central thesis, namely why people can have such devotion to the interests of a state in modern era, Anderson uses examples of fiction in the commercial novel and newspaper. He argues that the ascendant subscriptions to nation is achieved by a decline in religious communities, dynastic realms and the apprehensions of time. Borrowing from Walter Benjamin’s concept of homogenous empty time¹⁴, Anderson suggests a strong connection between fiction and reality in forming a collectively imagined world where fellow members of a community all live together. Similar to novels, the daily newspaper is profoundly fictive. Furthermore, he traces the history of the printing press, invented by Gutenberg in 1454, and argues that national imagining is enabled by print technology, in which the collective consciousness is able to be formed and disseminated through the market: he coined the term as “print-capitalism”. Moreover, print-languages formed the basis for national consciousness in three distinctive ways: firstly, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Secondly, print-

¹³ In Gellner’s book *Thought and Change* published in 1964, he argues that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness, it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (cited by Anderson, 2006, p.6).

¹⁴ Homogeneous, empty time was coined by Walter Benjamin in ‘Theses on the philosophy of history’ in *Illumination*. (2015) To put this simply the concept refers to the capitalist effects on the experience of time being nonlinear. The emptiness of time can be filled with moments of other events happening simultaneously elsewhere.

capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build an image of antiquity so central to the subject idea of the nation. Thirdly, print-capitalism created languages of power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars (ibid, pp.44-45).

Anderson's argument suggests that the imagined collectiveness of a modern nation is possible through the human experience of capitalism and technology advanced media. What he described as unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars" is in fact mediated popular culture, with a common accessible language that is mass produced and mass consumed. This creates a sense of a shared past with the continuity of language. By transferring into print, a certain language may transform from being subordinate to dominant. In other words, a language itself became a symbol of power.

Popular consumption of a fiction or a newspaper in Anderson's formulation lays the foundation for a shared rooted culture. The experience of the nation is rooted in the quotidian, and newspapers bolster the assumption that 'the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life' (Anderson cited by Edensor, 2002, p.7). However, his view of culture seems to be a static field, showing no examples of competition from different media technologies, or perhaps the disruptions of various cultures represented by a different newspaper. Moreover, his focus on the imagined "seems to ignore the socio-political realities of power and the organisational structures of the state" (Edensor, ibid). These criticisms are valid when applied to the case of China and its identity. This research is much persuaded by Anderson's account of imagined community, especially after Xi Jinping, the current president of China, who advanced and popularized his vision of the "China Dream"¹⁵ in 2013. Xi's construction of China's national identity as China Dream is an attempt by the state to construct a national meta-narrative in the hope of uniting all Chinese across national borders. By placing CCP at the centre of the narrative, the state is constructing an imagined community in which fellow national members have suffered in the past, are working together in the present, and will

¹⁵ China Dream, also being translated as Chinese Dream. The original Chinese characters of 中国梦 means China's dream. The choices made by different researchers to an extent connotes their insights of the term. Is it Chinese people's collective dream? Or is it a political attempt by the state to generates national identifications? These questions will be further discussed in the chapter "Chinese Dream".

achieve a better future together. This narrative of China's modernization process is generally perceived as highly ideological and has received many criticisms. "At the ideological level, the different visions of modernity all share a particular conception of time, which involves a reflexive attitude to the past and the present and a general orientation towards the future" (Therborn cited Miehle, 2001, p.50). Nonetheless, they dispute what it means to be modern. The past, present and future that are projected in "China Dream" represent both the challenge to the West and the struggles to be reproduced in mediated popular culture, providing a good insight into understanding China's national identity. Anderson's analysis of the role of print-capitalism in the construction of national imagination provides an initial means of examination, along with the historical, political and cultural contexts provided by this research, showing examples of disruption, adaptation and resistance within mediated popular culture. Consequently, this research seeks to contribute to the theories of national identity based on the particularity of the Chinese experience. One rationale for this is that there should not be a universal claim of nation and national identity, but an attempt to treat each particular case individually.

Eric Hobsbawm and "the identification from below"

Like Gellner and Anderson, Hobsbawm contends from the modernist perspective, which sees nation as a changing social entity that "belongs to a particular, and historically recent, period. ...it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the 'nation-state'." (1992, pp.9-10) Moreover, he agrees with Gellner's emphasis on "the element of artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations." (ibid) This coincides with his earlier arguments which treat the "inventions" of tradition as crucial in generating the legitimacy of the nation-state. Hobsbawm defines 'invented tradition' as a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition. This automatically implies continuity with the past. (1983, p.1) Through the examples of large-scale pageants and rituals deployed in the book *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and his co-editor Terence Ranger foreground the ideological manipulation by the state through false tradition, which in a way denies the possibilities of authentic cultural continuities. For instance, Anthony Smith rejects Hobsbawm's notion and 'claims that

“invented traditions” are in fact more akin to ‘reconstruction’ or ‘rediscovery’ of aspects of the ethnic past. Although the past can be interpreted in different ways, it is not *any* past but rather the ‘past of that particular community, with its distinctive patterns of events, personages, and milieux’. This past acts as a constraint on the manipulations of elites, hence of invention” (Smith cited in Ozkirimli, 2017, p.136). For example, Confucianism as a cultural tradition which dated back to two thousand years ago, is a distinctive Chinese intellectual and philosophical formulation that has been developed and re-appropriated over a long course of time in Chinese dynastic history. The ideas of this philosophy were briefly abandoned during the Communist China before again being resurrected at the beginning of the 21st century by the CCP to promote both the legitimacy of the state and of Chinese culture and language in the world. In this sense, the cultural manipulation by the state through “invented tradition” needs to deal with questions of the specific contexts and contingencies and the styles and techniques into the (re)making of national identity, as well as how truthful these constructions are.

Furthermore, Hobsbawm’s later arguments in his book *Nations and nationalism since 1780* added to his earlier arguments, bringing the questions of “individual identification” into the study of nation and nationalism. According to Hobsbawm, nation and nationalism are “dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (1992, p. 10). Moreover, although it is difficult to examine ordinary people who are the subjects of the state’s actions and propaganda, Hobsbawm draws three conclusions in thinking of the relationship between “above” and “below”:

First, official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters. Second, and more specifically, we cannot assume that for most people national identification- when it exists- excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them. Thirdly, national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods. (Hobsbawm, 1992, p.11)

Hobsbawm's account of individual identifications has the effect of freeing 'national subjects' from being two dimensional, thereby bringing lives to the actual living and breathing of people. Although he still views nationalism as essentially a top-down project, he recognises the agency and complexity of individuals making active daily choices in their identification with a nation. His argument is significant in terms of his indications of a potential disjunction between a person's identity (almost always multiple), and the matrix of social relations that confirms, undermines, challenges, or even subverts that identity. The choice made by a person to identify with a nation is the result of balancing his/her multiple identifications in a society and prioritizing the interests of the nation that one imagined to be one's own. In this sense, China's national identity as a state-led project, relies on the constant producing and reproducing "hooks" that are desirable for a person in his/her imagined narrative.

One of the main reasons that this thesis deploys "national identity" over "nationalism" is to underline the fact that national identity is a highly complex, chaotic and contradictory processes. Moreover, it argues that the cultural contents deployed by the state to construct a national identity with CCP in the central role, are "increasingly mediated, polysemic, contested, and subject to change" (Edensor, 2002, p.17). Gellner, Anderson and Hobsbawm all seem to take a perspective of high/official and imply that nationalism is more of a one way communication, and that ideas and meanings of a nation are achieved by a static, elite-led culture. This seems to coincide with the political reality of China, which is characterised by the absolute centralised power of the CCP in China. However, with the state's adoption of market economy since late 1970s, and with the rise in use of the internet and media technologies, culture in China can no longer be viewed as fixed or top-down. There is no denying the growing space for negotiation despite the continuously macro-control (tightening or loosening according to the contingent circumstances) by the state in the cultural realm. It is with this consideration that this thesis brings "popular" into the question of China's national identity. As explained by Edensor:

If we concentrate on those cultural elements commonly ascribed as popular, it will be clear that formations of national identity utilise a huge and proliferating resource that has emerged with the decentring of official, 'high' culture, so that cultural guardianship is no longer such an important feature of national culture. For culture is not fixed but negotiated, the subject

of dialogue and creativity, influenced by the contexts in which is produced and used. A sense of national identity then is not a once and for all thing, but is dynamic and dialogic, found in the constellations of a huge cultural matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices.” (ibid)

Thus far, the aforementioned debates are largely centred on modernist nationalism, especially nationalism as a cultural instrument that is managed by the state to facilitate and ensure nations’ modernization process. The commonalities of their arguments originated in the 80s, suggesting that the nation is a modern phenomenon and that official culture filtered by elites is the ultimate field for nation building. These arguments have been critically challenged by scholars because of their reductionist views on culture. Culture is never static but ever changing, and cultures represented in multifaceted media networks are increasingly dynamic, contradictory and competing. This leads to a different approach to studying nationalism. By deploying the term “national identity”, researchers like Edensor foreground the ideas of agency and highly complex national identifications through mediated popular culture. The coming section sets out to explore the literature of nationalism and national identity in the 90s, 2000s and 2010s that echoes these concerns.

3. National Identity and the Changing Perspectives of Culture

Umut Ozkirimli states that the post-1989 boom in nationalism studies was affected by what has been widely referred to as the “cultural turn” which challenges the claimed homogeneity of national cultures and identities in the west (Ozkirimli, 2017, p.182). Hence “the static notion of ‘culture’ as a coherent, harmonious whole is replaced by more fluid and dynamic interpretations which treat the latter as a deeply contested concept, whose meaning is continually negotiated and revised by successive generations and by different groups that are presumed to make up the national body.” (ibid) Part of this turn to culture, and also one of the key texts that has shaped the initial stance of this research, is Edensor’s book *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Tim Edensor (2002), along with Michael Billig (1995) and Michael Skye (2011) each focus on the daily reproductions of national identity, but diverge in their views on ideology and culture. Moreover, scholars such as Sabina Miheli

(2011) attempt to bridge the gap between the micro and macro analysis of the nation, arguing that it is important to understand from both sides. McLuhan and Postman's study of how messages are influenced by form is important in understanding the effects of a media saturated world and its implications for producing and redistributing national identity.

Banal and the Everyday: From Billig to Skey

Billig challenges the general conceptions of nationalism that are associated with "those who struggle to create new states" and "dangerous and powerful passions" and argues that it is misleading to think nationalism is only a peripheral force in the established nations. Especially among the world of nation-states, nationalism is not only mobilised during extreme situations such as war, but actually relies on the "existing ideological foundations" that are reproduced daily for nations to be nations and citizens to be nationals. As he explains, "for such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesize that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times." (1995, p.6) Billig's focus on the mundane reproduction of nationalism mainly looks at the ideological means or habits which "enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced" (ibid). In other words, despite Billig's focus on the day to day culture rather than the official culture, he sees national identity as an ideology, and is interested in understanding how ideological ideas can be produced and reproduced through banal daily lives.

The vagueness of the word "identity"¹⁶ leads Billig to rule that one's nationality is not forgotten due to the daily reminders and the continual 'flagging' of the nationhood. Moreover, he suggests that an effective ideological operation of national identity in the West depends on the flag that is waved unnoticed in the background. As he argues: "the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" (ibid, p.8). To borrow the metonymy

¹⁶ Billig questions the existence of the "identity" in a person's mind, and suggests to focusing on the operation of identity, namely, how national identity is maintained and sustained in daily lives.

from Billig, to an extent, the problem with China's case is that the daily reproduction of national identity is too conspicuous in a world of cultures that tends to take the values of the West for granted. It is intuitive and almost "natural" to perceive the CCP oriented project of national identity as highly ideological, and hence to see the daily reproductions through media communications as propaganda. In this sense, China's national identity as a state-led project always needs to think in relation to the Western world.

While the case of China seems to confirm Billig's view of national identity as ideology, it has received criticism for its apparent lack of focus on human agency. For example, Antonsich criticises Billig's nationalism as the nationalism of the state, "a top-down rhetorical strategy which conditions and constraints people's lifeworld." (2016, p.33) In other words, Antonish believes that Billig's account treats people as passive subjects, and fails to discuss how individuals daily, actively, and often deliberately 'make' nationhood. (ibid) Following Thompson (2001) and Fox & Miller-Idriss (2008), Antonsich distinguishes "everyday" from "banal", and defines the "everyday" approach to nationalism as exploring how nationhood can be activated from below. This research, however, argues that the top-down and the bottom-up approach cannot be separated in the case of China. Namely, China's national identity as a state-led project relies on the active appropriation by the people, and people's identification with nation also depends on the actual performances produced (reproduced) by the state. For instance, this research looks at examples of the media content produced by popular cultural industries and argues as to how people draw materials and influences from popular cultural products.

Furthermore, closely working with Antonsich, Skey also criticised *Banal Nationalism* for tending to imply a "uniform, homogenous national audience" despite Billig himself rebuffing this criticism (2017, p.3). Nonetheless for Skey, Billig's work is one of the first that opened a new terrain that investigates nationalism in terms of discourse, analysing questions such as the ways in which nations are discursively narrated and reproduced (ibid, p.2). In his 2011 book *National Belonging and Everyday Life*, Skey continued with an exploration focusing on the discursive processes (routine talk and practices, symbolic systems, institutional arrangements) that (re)create the world as a world of nations (2011, p.7). Skey defines discourse as a particular way of talking about...understanding [and acting in] the world that

becomes stabilised through key institutional structures during certain historical periods. As he further explains, this approach is designed to capture the complex framework of individual actions and social structures that (re)create- a world of nations as meaningful and consistent (ibid, p.11). Moreover, the concept of “sedimentation” that he borrowed from Husserl is very useful in examining some of aspects of the current national identity of China as the “Chinese Dream”.

Sedimentation refers to the process whereby a particular discourse comes to be seen as objective or natural rather than one possible way of making sense of the world (ibid, p.12). When the “Chinese Dream” was first introduced by President Xi, many immediate responses were to compare it to “American Dream” which provoked criticisms of the term. American dream as the symbolic national identity of America has been established and popularised through a complex matrix of discourses over the years. The ongoing struggles of the acceptance and identifications of the “Chinese Dream” suggests further analysis of the international and social hierarchies of knowledge of what is perceived as the “natural” meaning of a nation.

Edensor and the Redistribution of National Identity through Popular Culture

Edensor builds his argument on the criticisms of classic nationalism scholars’ reductionist view on culture, which overtly emphasizes the spectacular, the historic and the instrumentality of high/official culture. He contends that cultural forms and practices of the nation are supplemented, and increasingly replaced in their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn from popular culture. (2002, p.12) Edensor criticised members of the Frankfurt school and their homogenised view of seeing popular culture as mass culture which is inherently harmful, thereby neglecting the changing and dynamic nature of popular culture (ibid, p.13). Moreover, he criticised the perception that the colonizing power of popular culture (as American culture) is a threat to national identity, against which Edensor suggests more complex ways to approach such concerns. By drawing examples from audience studies, Edensor argues that it is crucial to consider contexts which “constrain and enable interpretations and uses of particular products” (ibid, P.15). In other words, to always think in terms of the individual’s conditions of identification with a particular social context. A

further point made by Edensor regarding national identity and popular culture is that national guardianship and cultural institutions operating with high culture have become less effective when compared to the international success of popular cultural producers. For example, the idea of Cool Britannia may not be recognised in China, but the sound of the British drama *Sherlock Holmes* would definitely stir some enthusiastic responses from Chinese fans. In this sense, the appeal of national entity increasingly relies on their (re)production through popular culture.

Furthermore, Edensor brings the conditions of globalization into the question of national identity, and argues that national identity is now situated within an ever-shifting matrix, a multi-dimensional, dynamic composition of networks. Within such a matrix, national identity is being continually redistributed: “For emphatically, the evolution of multiple connections does not necessarily dissipate the power of national identity, although it undoubtedly decentres the authoritative formations consolidating around high culture, official political power and national meta-narratives. Rather, points of identification with the nation are increasingly manifold and contested, are situated within dense networks which provide multiple points of contact” (2002, p.30). To put it simply, in the global flows (enabled by immigration, media technology, and popular cultural industries), it has been increasingly difficult for the state to control and evaluate forms of national identity and identification. The points of national identifications are often indirect, random and accidental. For example, the prevalence of smart phone and 4g technology has enabled the exploding phenomenon of short video and online streaming in China since around 2016. Among these, short video social networking app Douyin¹⁷ has gained dominant popularity with 138 million active daily users, as in December 2018. Close to the Chinese new year of 2019, a 15 second video called “four generations under one roof” went viral, which soon became a meme and evoked online challenges across the globe. The structure of the video is simple: a granddaughter appeared in front of the camera, and calls out to her mother. The mother appeared answering her daughter and turning away calls out her mother, and so on until the great grandmother appears in front of the camera. The video was considered as “wholesome” and enjoyed

¹⁷ Douyin means trembling sound. It also known as Tiktok in the international market, which reportedly was the fourth most downloaded non-game app worldwide in 2018. (<https://www.whatsonweibo.com/top-5-of-chinas-most-popular-short-video-and-live-streaming-apps/>, last accessed 25 February 2020) The app is characterised by its 15 second video time span.

favourable reviews online across borders. Notably, the concept of “four generations under one roof” has strong ties to traditional Chinese culture and family values. In Edensor’s words, China’s national identity is thus redistributed through the mediated, multidimensional, dynamic composite of networks. The self-representation of people’s mundane lives voluntarily shared on social media accidentally generated international (and home) identification with Chinese traditional family values, indirectly contributing to the making of China’s national identity. Arguably, a short video like this one probably does more for China’s national identity than any promotional videos produced by the state.

In respect of media representations, especially among the ever developing technology-enabled digital media platforms, for the study of nationalism, or as this research prefers the term “national identity”, it is becoming more and more important to ask the questions “How?” and “How much?”. In other words, it is necessary to take Edensor’s arguments a step further, considering how and how much national identity can be produced and redistributed through popular culture because of the increasingly fragmented, multidimensional and mundane production and redistribution of the networks. This research also sets out to examine when the mundane and individual pleasures of daily practices are in conflict with the national modernization and political discourses, and to what extent the meaning of national identity can be negotiated through mediated popular culture. As Skey suggests, reproduction of national identity in the mass media is much more complex than Billig (and Anderson as well) implied (2017, p.3). Edensor’s research provides a very important approach to examining national identity with popular cultural practices that are “increasingly mediated , polysemic, contested and subject to change”. But he does not seem to foreground the power structures within popular culture and media: for example, the dominations of the cultures and conduct of Hollywood and the subordination of the “other” cinema. The following section continues to examine the link between media and nation in understanding China’s national identity.

Media Nations and the Implications of media technologies

Sabina Miheli, in her book *Media Nations* published in 2011, attempts to bridge the research gap by analysing the relationship between nationalism and mass communications. She states the reasons behind such attempt. Firstly, she identified the micro and macro approach to study nationalism and media which are rarely considered together: the analysis of nationalism as a discourse or imagination embedded in different media texts and genres; and the examination of institutional structures, policies and socio-economic contexts that give rise to nationalist discourse. Secondly, the debates about nationalism and media are often locked into dichotomies, namely, globalization vs. nationalism, cosmopolitanism vs. parochialism, 'good' civic nationalism vs. 'bad' ethnic nationalism. And thirdly, general theories of nationalism and mass communication often fail to address the multiple trajectories of modernity and nation-formation around the globe. (2011, p.2)

Miheli's insight is particularly relevant to this study. In accordance with her first aspect, this chapter, in the beginning, identified the importance of the state in understanding how China's national identity is being represented and reproduced through mediated popular culture. A basic understanding of the Chinese state and its views on culture, and the deployment of culture in nation building will shed light on the analysis of how China's national identity is being represented, produced, redistributed and regulated in the mediated popular culture. As to the second aspect raised by Miheli, China's national identity is a relative concept, rather than a concept of dichotomy. By this, the research means that it is oversimplified to think of China's national identity as a state-led project, an overwhelmingly powerful ideological act in which Chinese people are the merely passive national subjects of the state. This is because in the "world of nations" suggested by Skey, the dominant ideas about nationalism as the legitimization of the state is based on its ability to ensure "the will of the people" manifested through liberal democracy (Miheli, 2011, p.45). In this respect, China's national identity led by the Communist Party is flimsy and vulnerable to international perceptions and challenges. Moreover, while political freedom is constrained and limited in China, the commercial freedom since the Open and Reform policy has exploded. Chinese people as consumers have practiced and enjoyed the freedom enabled by the market economy, which ultimately to an extent challenged (and continue to challenge) the state's power to manage national identity.

Hence China's national identity is a relative and relational concept, which always needs to be analysed in the framework of the global, the national and the individual.

Last but not least, Miheli's third aspect in which she stresses the theories of alternative modernity is highly applicable to understanding the Chinese state and China's national identity. As discussed in section one, modernist scholars of nationalism (apart from Benedict Anderson who evidently deployed examples outside of Europe) tend to imply that the Western experiences of modernity is a "natural" process of modernization. Therefore, these theories need to be approached as illustrations of the Western experience rather than general theories of nationalism. Moreover, the modernization process that has taken place in the media field is also important in examining the ways in which China's national identity is mediated through popular culture. For example, analysing a particular development of a media technology and the techniques and styles of representing and producing an on-screen nation would shed light on the difficulties and new opportunities presented by the media.

This leads to the final studies that this chapter sets out to include: the implications of media technology and its influence upon the reproduction of national identity. McLuhan first coined the phrase "the medium is the message" in 1964. In the introduction to the second edition of *Understanding Media*, he further clarifies this phrase, which essentially means that in terms of the electric age, a totality environment has been created. For example, he gives an example of how machines turned Nature into an art form: "for the first time, men began to regard Nature as a source of aesthetic and spiritual values" (2003, p.13). What McLuhan suggests here is how technology seems to overpower the content and change the ways people understand the content, or the message. Postman takes the idea and further examines the relationship between technological form and the message it mediates. In analysing the televised daily news, Postman states that: "for on television, discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery, which is to say that television gives us a conversation in images, not words." (1987, p.7) His insight is evidently useful in examining, for example, the increasingly deployments of Chinese celebrities to deliver official messages disseminated by the state in promotional videos online. Postman sees the televised message as an imagery conversation, a discursive communication that demonstrates the transition in human communication from "word-centred to image centred" (ibid, p.9). He agrees with McLuhan's study which sees

media as a tool for conversation, and mediated conversation provides a clear way to see through a culture. Moreover, “forms of media favour particular kinds of content and therefore are capable of taking command of a culture.” (ibid) In this respect, China’s national identity through mediated popular culture does not necessarily place form above content, but treats both media and the content as dynamic, inter-related, co-production of the conversation. In other words, medium is a *part* of the message. Postman argues for “the medium as the metaphor” over McLuhan’s “the medium as the message”: A message denotes a specific, concrete statement about the world. But the forms of our media, including the symbols through which they permit conversation, do not make such statements. They are rather like metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality...Our media-metaphors classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, color it, argue a case for what the world is like” (Postman, 1986, p.10). These debates will be further developed in the case studies in regard to media representations of China’s national identity via official promotional short video, commercial cinema and the internet.

The literature review chapter has since been divided into three main parts. The first section indicates that there is no single neat definition of what nation is, because exceptions can always be found. This implies that each nation should be examined based on its own process of modernization with specific historical particularity. It then distinguishes nation as cultural and state as political and suggests the P.R.C is a nation-state. Despite the problems of the hyphenation, namely the ideological act of granting the state the legitimacy of culture, this research does not approach the issue as a question of political ideology, and defines China as a nation-state based on its attempt to become a legitimate member of the world of nations and its very struggles of becoming one. This then leads to the second section where this chapter analyses the modernist scholars of nationalism, and their view of culture as an instrument of nation building. To echo the general criticisms towards these scholars, their focus on nationalism as a static top-down cultural field neglects the dynamic and everchanging nature of culture. National culture is a highly contested term subject to the forces that shape its definition; the unique experiences of each nation’s encounter with global modernity for example, are often neglected in these arguments. More importantly, their understanding of the role of media in nation building is rather simplified, reduced only to the

effects of print technology. Hence the third section of this chapter reviews the nationalism scholars of the 90s, 2000s, and 2010s who focus on the reproductions of national identity through the every day and popular culture. The cultural and discursive turn presented in these studies suggests that it is possible to view nationalism and national identity as essentially ways of talking and debating these concepts in the mediated culture. Moreover, just as Skey defined discourse as a particular way of understanding the world that becomes stabilised, this research seeks to understand the reasons behind the dilemmas of the Chinese state's ability to define itself in accordance to the already "stabilised" world of nations. McLuhan and Postman's analysis of media would also help to shape the understanding of the ways in which China's national identity is represented in media.

Chapter Three

History

Chinese states, People and Mediated Communication

As has been argued in chapter two, although it is problematic, China is a nation-state. This reflects the country's unique history in which China built the world's first modern state since the Qin dynasty. As suggested by Fukuyama, the Chinese modern state characterised by its non-patriarchal, bureaucratic and merit-based natures, has enjoyed a long history of centralised power. Such power supported by the Chinese intellectual classics such as Confucianism and Legalism gradually formed a specific pattern of relationship between the state and the people. This chapter hence seeks to examine the relationship between the state and the people in three historical moments of China, namely the beginning of the Dynastic China (the Qin); the end of the Dynastic China (the Qing); and Communist China with a specific focus on Mao Zedong's construction of China. Moreover, it pays particular attention to the role of cultural communication in the process of nation (empire) building. In each historical moment, it examines a medium: the first stele inscription from the Qin, a printed pamphlet called "Good Words for Exhorting the Age" from the Qing, and a Ballet opera *The White-haired Girl* (1965) that was popularized during the Cultural Revolution. These cultural productions are both contents of communication and media with a particular body of information. They may serve to reinforce the state-orientated national (empire) identity, and could also undermine the dominant beliefs in the ways in which people should live their lives. In other words, mediated culture is the key to success of a collective identity. This chapter concludes with a summary of the key issues identified in the chapter and the implications for my research.

1. The Beginning of the Dynastic China

One of the most pivotal turning points in Chinese history was when the first emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China by conquering all six other warring states (Han, Zhao, Wei, Chu, Yan and Qi) in 221 B.C. This is enormously significant because it signifies "China's transition from a

decentralised feudal state to a unified empire". (Fukuyama, 2011, p.111) The state policies that followed since the unification were often described in polarization as being "great" and "cruel" at the same time. These policies that execute uniformity and standardization included: the creation of one single type of currency; the unification of the measures of length and capacity; the standardization of the gauge of cart-wheels; dividing the newly formed territory into a system of thirty-six commanderies with regular inspections from the central government; and the building of the Great Wall on the northern frontier. Last but not least, "the creation of new standard characters intended to replace the various types of writing hitherto in use in the Chinese lands" (Gernet, 1996, p.106). The unification of China by Qin hence was "great" in the sense that it ended two centuries of interstate war, and as Fukuyama suggests, Qin had "succeeded in developing a centralised, uniform system of bureaucratic administration that was capable of governing a huge population and territory...inventing a system of impersonal, merit based bureaucratic recruitment...under a uniform set of rules" (2011, p.21). It is cruel, because behaviours that were considered to be against such rulings would receive severe punishment. For instance, "maintaining local forms of currency, weights and measures, or writing scripts was made an act of treason," and punishable by death (Ebrey, 2000, p.61). Political scientist Victoria Tin-Bor Hui argues that the use of "coercive tools" such as military strength, administrative capacity, and the brutal killing of adult male populations had the side effects of homogenizing, hence the "level of cultural homogeneity in present-day China is better understood as the product rather than the cause of Qin's Success" (2005, p.166). Despite the possibly oversimplified account of cultural homogeneity suggested by Hui, this research recognised the historical continuity of Chinese culture, especially the cultural implications of the relationship between the state and the people.

State and Coercion

Soon after unification, Qin and his policies were under heavy criticism by opponents who used the past records to denigrate the emperor's policies and undermine popular support. (Ebrey, 2010, pp.61-63). In eliminating the opposing voices of the new state, the first emperor banned all books except "treaties on medicine, agriculture, and divination. In 213 B.C came the notorious 'burning of the books', which was followed by the execution ...of over four

hundred opponents of the regime” (Gernet, 1996, p.109). The suppression of cultural pluralism is ironic, as this was one of the key reasons for Qin’s military and culture strength which subsequently prepared the Qin to conquer all the other six states. During the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period¹⁸, philosophers like Kongzi of Confucianism, Han Fei and Li Si of Legalism, Laozi of Taoism and Mozi of Mohism, were among the others constitutive of a period of so called “hundred schools of thought”. This period is considered to be the most flourishing time for cultural and intellectual outpourings in the history of China. Zhao (2015) argued that compared to the other six warring states, Qin had never been at the centre of Chinese civilization, and had never had an indigenous intellectual tradition. However, this motivated Qin to open its doors and attracted ambitious young men with talent. Fukuyama indicates that the key foundation for the unification by Qin in 3rd century was the physical mobility of intellectuals who travelled with their thoughts to Qin. The collective writings then contributed to the state building of Qin, and succeeding in centuries of Chinese politics. Moreover, the Chinese classics composed in this period “became basis of elite education, and the foundation of subsequent Chinese culture. National identity came to be anchored in knowledge of the classics.” (Fukuyama, 2011, p.115-116)

Nevertheless, the extreme brutality to human lives and tight control over culture directly resulted in the Qin being the shortest dynasty in China’s history, lasting for only fifteen years. The Qin utterly failed towards the end in sustaining the legitimacy of the state. State, in the classic political sense, always involves interests in the distribution, preservation, or transfer of power (Brown, 2006, p.85). Power is also exercised by means of violence and the consent from the people in deploying such force. Though there is no generally accepted definition, Max Weber established a collection of parameters of statehood which are still common discussion points in the study of state¹⁹. Particularly, counter to much earlier thinking that defined the state by its goals and functions, Weber argued that: ‘the state cannot be defined in terms of its ends...Ultimately, one can define the modern state only in terms of the specific *means* peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely, *the use of physical force*’ (Cited by Pierson, 2011, p.6). To a certain extent, “the use of physical force” that is specific to a state

¹⁸ The period of “hundred schools of thought” lasted from 6 B.C to 221 B.C.

¹⁹ Pierson reflected upon Weber’s study of modern state and summarized nine features of the modern state: (monopoly control of the means of violence; territoriality; sovereignty; constitutionality; impersonal power; the public bureaucracy; authority/legitimacy; and citizenship (2011, p.6).

determines its capability to maintain a nation's jurisdiction and sovereignty. In other words, failing in the control of the means of violence directly challenges the legitimacy of state rule. Zhao's comparative analysis between Qi and Qin was an advocate example of this argument. Despite lacking in indigenous cultural and intellectual tradition, Qin was being able to adopt only the most utilitarian Legalism²⁰, and greatly promoted an efficiency-driven instrumental culture and help Qin to organize the entire state into a war machine.²¹ (2015, p.13) In the light of this, Legalism which stressed the power of the ruler and the ability of the state to promote "efficiency-driven instrumental culture", ensured the success of the Qin to unify China. Notably, Weber was not arguing that physical violence is the sole means of the state, but rather it will "seek to impose its will through the managed consent of its population- an aspect of legitimation" (cited by Pierson, 2011, p.8).

Fukuyama built on a similar understanding of state, arguing that nation building is critical to the success of state building. "The state consists of tangible institutions like armies, police, bureaucracies, and the like, while the nation has to do with shared traditions, symbols, historical memories, language and other cultural points of reference. The reason that nation building is key to state building reaches to the core meaning of the state: as the organizer of legitimate violence" (Fukuyama, 2014a, p.29). Both Weber and Fukuyama stress the importance of the "managed consent" through a shared culture. A nation develops the shared culture which forms the basis for consent and legitimacy, whilst the state represents the enforcing mechanism which enacts this legitimacy through "violence" and manages consent. Despite Qin Shi Huang's short-lived dynasty, he and the state demonstrated an impressive capacity to mobilise people for a single course through a culture that recognises the central role of the emperor and his state. This makes Charles Sanft's *Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China* stimulating and thought-provoking because at the core of his

²⁰ Legalism is a term that refers to a Chinese philosophical tradition that was developed during the Warring State period. It emphasises the importance of laws administered by a bureaucracy which "out of strong desire to bring peace and order to a chaotic world, not for the purpose of forging contractual relationships between the rulers and the ruled" (Zhao, 2015, p.19). (In the age of total war 419-22BCE)

²¹ Derived from the article: 'In the Age of Total War: Qin and the Drive Toward Unification'.

argument, he stresses the cooperation during one of most well-known tyrannies in Chinese history.

The Ideas of Cooperation and Power

The historian Sanft provides a rather different approach to the Qin and its state building, stressing legalised punishment. Using specific case studies of communication methods, namely the ways in which information was being transmitted, he places the relationship between the state and the people into the framework of communication and cooperation. In other words, while most scholars defined the Qin state as an absolute power of authority²², and people as the victims of the cruel ruling²³, Sanft sees the relationship as cooperative. "Government is impossible without significant cooperation from a large proportion of the population...obedience is ultimately a decision" (2014, p.7). In agreeing with Brashier's observation, which shows Western scholarship's tendency to perceive the relationship between the state and the people as "adversariality", Sanft argues that leading scholars' research on early China seems to underestimate the importance of cooperation and ideas about noncoercive governance (ibid, p.8). Cooperation, as defined by Sanft, denotes a situation in which one person bears a cost in order to benefit another. Moreover, power and cooperation are not mutually exclusive. Nor is direct coercion necessarily excluded from cooperation, it is simply not the primary means by which it functions. (ibid, p.9) For instance, the deployment of Legalism that foregrounds punishment does not mean the absence of a high degree of compliance. Rather, punishment is part of, but not the main feature in, the process of the Qin's state building. Because if punishment as a form of coercion takes the main role in the relationship between the state and the people, as history shows, it will eventually be overthrown by the people. Here is where Sanft comes to his focal point in what

²² For instance, Hui argues that the Han dynasty, which followed the Qin's "façade of legalism" and Confucian teachings of social order, together formed an "authoritarian tradition" that was firmly institutionalized in Chinese history (2005, p.220).

²³ Part of the reasons for such a view is the historiographical problem presented by the lack of writing of the commoners in the Qin period (Falkenhausen and Lewis cited by Sanft, 2014, p.7).

he means by cooperation through communication: “ the most important function does not lie in the punishment itself, but in the communication of that punishment.” (ibid, p.18) For example, Sanft illustrates the functions of standardized measurement which created the common knowledge of the Qin Dynasty.

The ability to create common knowledge among the commoners is very important in Sanft’s framework of cooperation. In the analysis of inscriptions from the Qin, he shows that the state was fully aware of the importance of exploiting new durable materials such as bronze to disseminate the imperial command, establishing the legitimacy of the ruling position known to the people they ruled. (ibid, p.71, p.74) However, the power of common knowledge is not only produced by the state, but can also be created by the commoners. The decision made by the common population to comply can be reversed if they no longer see the emperor as fit to rule. According to an analogy presented in *Xunzi* which was published in 3rd century B.C China, “the water can bear the boat, it can also swallow it.” (水能载舟，亦能覆舟) In this sense, power is not a static existence, and is not forever seized by a ruler, but shifts in-between social relations. This then led Sanft to deploy Foucault’s interpretation of power and his recognition of the close relationship between power and communication to his framework.

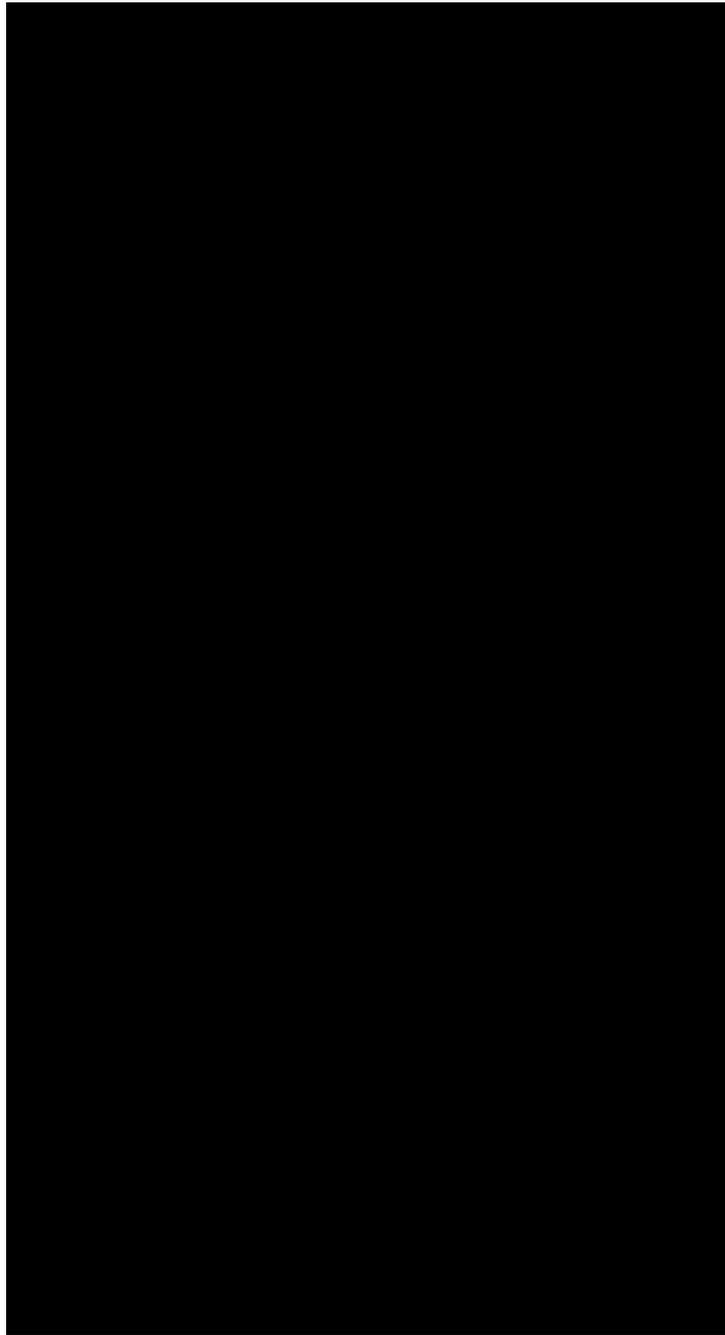
Communication, as defined by Foucault refers to “transmit[ting] information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium... communication is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons” (1982, p.786). Transmitted information, as understood by Sanft, is culture. As defined and well-accepted by many scholars in anthropology, culture is “socially transmitted information”. (Sanft, 2014, p.19) Culture is not action, but rather as a guide, a common knowledge for how things should work in a given society. Communication in this regard is essentially culture mediated through means which create a certain relationship between the communicator and the receiver. In a Foucauldian sense, the capacity, and as this research also suggests, the quality of the communication, help to produce certain power relations. In other words, power is exercised through communication, and communication also relies on power relations, which “always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as means to an end” (Foucault, 1982, p.787). Moreover, power is not a monopoly, “by virtue of

modifying the field of information between partners, produce effects of power.” (ibid, p.787) Again, this explains the popular support for the Qin conquering other states to end the interstate wars, and the collective support for overthrowing the Qin for the possibility of better living standards.

Despite incorporating ideas of power from Foucault’s work, Sanft forms his analysis on more optimistic grounds in terms of Cooperation. He suggests that “the benefits of cooperation have brought about types of group formation based on hierarchy, in which the benefits that accrue from this function for all group members can explain the willingness to obey power.” This view is enlightening, in the sense that it sheds light on suggesting a potentially different approach to understanding China’s current national identity building work in support of the state. Neither the oppositional debates of top-down bottom-up, nor the ideological grass-root, nor the passive and active audiences’ approach is sufficient to understand the relationship between the global, national and the individual. Rather, we must learn to see it as a dynamic relationship, in which the finalised realization of one particular national identity is co-produced through a complex process of interactions, identification, modifications, and adaptations.

The following case study of the stele inscription provides an insight into how the first king of the Qin communicated his ruling position with the ruled, or in Fukuyama’s words, nation building, which generated the loyalty of the commoners to their emperor.

The First Stele Inscription of the Qin



皇帝立国，维初在昔。嗣世称王，讨伐乱逆。威动四极，武义直方。戎臣奉诏，经时不久。灭六暴强，廿有六年。上荐高号，孝道显明。既献泰成，乃降专惠。宠训远方，登于绎山。群臣从者，咸思攸长。追念乱世，分土建邦。以开争理，攻战日作。流血於野，自秦古始。世无万数，陀及武帝。莫能禁止，迺今皇帝。壹家天下，兵不复起。灾害灭除，黔首康定。利泽长久。群臣诵。

Figure 3: The Stele Inscription in Mountain Yi. (Present rubbing from the tenth Century reproduction)
The photo by Seymour and Rogers Funds, 1977²⁴

²⁴ Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64022> [Accessed on: 22 June 2019]

In 219 BC, on his first patrolled tour, Qin Shi Huang and the commissioners travelled to the Mountain Yi where he ordered a stele inscription to be erected on top of the mountain. (see figure 3) According to *Shiji*²⁵, in 219 BC, the Emperor “conducted a discussion with the classicists from Lu and had them carve the stone to eulogize the virtuous power of Qin.” (cited by Kern, 2008, p.217) Moreover, all seven stele inscriptions were calligraphed in the newly standardized style and “adhere to a clearly defined compositional structure...their modular design allows portions of a text to be changed or replaced without affecting the overall sequential structure” (Kern, 2008, p.222). This section sets out to discuss the first stele inscription of the Qin, its content and its function as a physical medium of the emperor’s political message.

To paraphrase, in the first half of the stele inscription, the text praised the first emperor of the Qin’s glorious past as he defeated all six states to found the new empire. And since this great cause has been accomplished, the world is graced by his decision to tour the four corners of his empire. Now arriving at the top of the Mountain Yi, the ministers followed suit and bathed in the grace of heaven. And:

“They [the Qin Ministers] recall and contemplate the times of chaos: When [regional lords] apportioned the land, established their states, And thus unfolded the pattern of struggle. Attacks and campaigns were daily wages; They shed their blood in the open countryside- This had begun in highest antiquity. Through untold generations, One [rule] followed another down to the Five Thearchs, And no one could prohibit or stop them. Now today, the August Thearch has unified All-under-Heaven into one family- Warfare will not arise again! Disaster and harm are exterminated and erased, The black-headed people live in peace and stability, Benefits and blessings are lasting and enduring.”²⁶ (Kern cited by Pine, 2014, p.264-265)

Firstly, as is clearly presented in the text, there is a linear narrative structure identifying the past as the long suffering times of chaos and struggle; the present as saved by the “ August Thearch” (Qin Shi Huang) himself, as he ended the war and unified “all-under-heaven”; hence

²⁵ *Shiji*, also known as the *Historical Records*, written by Si Ma Qian in Han Dynasty, is the first monumental history book in China. In *Shiji*, the author preserves six of the total seven inscriptions in the Qin Dynasty.

²⁶ Kern’s translation of the original text cited by Pine, with minor modification by Pine.

promising a future free from disaster and harm, where all subjects ruled by the Qin will enjoy peace and safety. Pines argues that the presentation of the first emperor's rule as "the end of history" distinguishes him from other dynastic rulers in Chinese history, because no regime 'prior to the Communist Revolution was so consciously derisive of the past, which was rendered infinitely inferior to "the present"' (Pines, 2013, p.270). Secondly, the standardized and normative expression of the text indicates a "non-negotiable style of representation" which is part of the empire building, establishing Qin's authority as the ruler through its capacity for centralised control (Kern, 2009, p.223).

The third point is to do with the particular medium of the Qin inscriptions and their peculiar physical existence, which are on top of the mountains. The question was raised by Kern, a preeminent scholar in the field. If these stele inscriptions were meant to be a medium of communication, through which "common knowledge" (as suggested by Sanft) can be crafted and conveyed, why was it determined to erect these stele inscriptions on top of mountains, instead of in a location that is easily accessed by the public? Kern argues that the stele inscriptions as political representations of the Qin are part of the ritual tradition- in the form of public display, which "referred not merely to the meaning of its words...but to the cultural status and political authority of public calligraphy itself." (2009, p.225) Moreover, these imperial stone stelae "often inscribed into the natural rock itself, sovereignty even extended from the human sphere into the cosmic realm, transforming a natural site into a site of civilization and human history." (ibid) In other words, the very existence of the inscription serves not only to monopolize the empire narrative, but as the extension of the Qin emperor's rule into nature. Nature, in this respect, becomes a resource for the Qin to legitimize its power. Alternatively, in McLuhan's view, the technology of Inscribing calligraphy into the stones has transformed nature into an art form, and the form itself becomes part of the political message.

To summarize, this section has attempted to understand the nature of the Qin state and the role played by cultural communication, namely the stele inscription, in the relationships between the state and the Qin commoners. The Qin state was initially premised on absolute coercion, but the legitimacy of legalised force needs the consent of the people. Hence the idea of nation building is essential in legitimising the state building and the exercises of its

power in a given territory. It then draws on Sanft's study of cooperation and communication, which argues for the possibilities of cooperation from the people even in an absolutist state like Qin. He identifies that compliance is ultimately a choice made by the people for the benefits of cooperation in a larger society. With references to Foucault and his idea of power and communication, this research argues that the oppositional understandings of the powerful and the weak are not sufficient to understand the collective identity of China; rather, they form a dynamic relationship whereby the meanings of the collective identity, the question of who we are and to what future we are fighting for is a co-production between people and state through communication. The last case study of the first stele inscription of the Qin shows that the linear narrative represented on top of the mountains is an attempt by the state to 'naturalize' its ruling over the "ruled". However, this powerful communication does not stop the ultimate failure of the Qin. Jia Yi, a statesman in the Han dynasty²⁷ wrote an important essay 'The Faults of Qin' (过秦论) to analyse the reasons behind Qin's failure. He argued that the emperor's own inability to adapt and change directly resulted in the collapse of Qin. He distinguishes between the means of winning power and of sustaining power: when maintaining a ruling position, it is important to change and adapt based on contingency (夫兼并者高诈力, 安危者贵顺权, 此言取与受不同术也). The Qin's failure stems from the fact that after unifying the country, its political routes and decrees remained the same as when it was trying to win over the power. (秦离战国而王天下, 其道不易, 其政不改, 是其所以取之守之者无异也。) Notably, the ideas raised by Max Weber, Francis Fukuyama, Charles Sanft and Michel Foucault are similar in the sense that they all recognise the importance of cultural negotiation in exercising an established power. National identity, in this sense, is a form of communication, a cultural negotiation, and a means to achieve a collectively beneficial end.

The next section travels to the end of China's dynastic era: the collapse of the Qing Empire. Unlike the Qin, the Qing state deliberately carried out a series of reforms after major defeat in the wars. They nevertheless failed due to the inability to reform effectively, as well as the peasant uprisings and dismal living conditions. All these have accelerated the total collapse

²⁷ The Han dynasty (206 B.C to 220 A.D) was the succeeding dynasty to Qin. Its central administration largely built on the previous Qin's structure, and is considered to achieve a much more balance comparing to Qin's despotic ruling and "increasingly rationalized and institutionalised" (Fukuyama, 2011, p.134).

of the Qing dynasty. China was in crisis. The word “crisis” in Chinese, however, is a phrase combining two words. It consists of Wei 危 (danger) and Ji 机 (Opportunity). In this sense, with the official termination of the Chinese emperor system come the opportunities to contest new directions for the country, to reconstruct China’s national identity and the values which the country and its people should stand for. The next section aims to examine China’s identity crisis at the turn of the 20th century, and how information mediated through print media could challenge the dominant national imaginations.

2. The End of the Dynastic China

In 1838, Emperor DaoGuang of the Qing government appointed Lin Zexu as the special imperial commissioner to stop the Opium trade with Britain. Three years later in 1841, Lin was condemned and banished to Xinjiang because of the overwhelming defeat by the British naval army in the first opium war. On his way to Xinjiang, he wrote a letter to his friend and painfully described the great disparity of weaponry deployed by the two countries. Despite the punishment, his patriotism and allegiance as a government official to the Qing was vividly expressed in the lament towards the end of the letter: “Every time I think of it, my heart is torn to pieces, may the heaven bless our country, for there will be a great man to help us to defeat the foreign enemy.”²⁸

However, it was not merely the differences between the fast shooting gunboats and slow firing primitive firelocks, but more the distinction between industrial revolutionized capitalism and under-developed feudalism that builds its legitimacy on the “Mandate of Heaven”²⁹. The result of the first major clash with Western civilization came as an external shock to shatter the Qing government’s illusion of military superiority that had been sustained by memories of past glory and called into question their ways of existence. After a series of military defeats followed by commercial and social concessions to foreign powers, China

²⁸ Taken from a TV program *Li Ao You Hua Shuo* (《李敖有话说》) which was hosted by a well-known historian Li Ao from Taiwan. The show ran from 8 March, 2004 to 31 December, 2006 on Phoenix TV, Hong Kong.

²⁹ “Mandate of heaven”, a philosophical idea that was well-accepted in dynastic China; “heaven” determines if an emperor is virtuous and capable of ruling the country. It also serves as the moral accountability of rulers’ capability to rule “all-under-heaven”.

under Qing's ruling had tried to adapt various Western techniques to address China's apparent underdevelopment in terms of "solid ships and effective guns"(Feng Guifen cited by Spence, 1999, p.195). In 1861, the "self-strengthening movement" was initiated by the Qing government officials for the immediate needs of building China's strength in facing external military threat. Nevertheless, the main emphasis of this reform was on technology, since "the intelligence and wisdom of the Chinese are necessarily superior to those of the various barbarians." (ibid.) The majority of Chinese elites at the time were still subscribing to the belief of self-asserted cultural superiority and loyalty to the Qing, and thus were reluctant to initiate any reforms beyond military and technology. Nevertheless, this marks the beginning of China's path to learning from the West, in other words, the general movement/ struggle of modernisation. The growing domestic disputes about the country's future and the weak and incapable Qing government further undermined the legitimacy of its ruling position. Despite the Qing government's attempt to continue reforms in the realms of education, policy and economy³⁰, China was in crisis. It was not just an identity crisis deeply felt by its people, but also affected the Qing state, for its ruling days were numbered. The abdication of China's last emperor Puyi in February 1912, indicated the end of China's two millennia of dynastic history³¹.

National Identity Crisis and the Questions of Culture

China's pressing quest for national identity in modern times begins with the country's major defeat by the British Naval Army during the first Opium War. The country's political, economic, social and cultural circumstances experienced dramatic changes during that period of national crisis, and significantly shaped the current understanding of its national identity. Mercer argues that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty (1990, p.43). It is not an overstatement to say that the past nearly two hundred years of China's history is a history of national identity struggle. Following Emperor Puyi's

³⁰ Hundred Days' Reform was undertaken by GuangXu Emperor and lasted only for 103 days in 1898 due to strong objections by the conservatives in the Qing government led by Empress Dowager CiXi.

³¹ From the unification of Qin (221 B.C) to the end of the Qing (1912), consists 2132 years of imperial rule with 83 dynastic changes.

abdication in 1912, the new-found China as a nation experienced thirty years of “democratic” Republican governance, through another thirty years of communist rule before finally reaching its current state, operating under “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. In this respect, China’s national identity as a political concept is not as self-evident as one might initially think. Hall argues that “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’” (1990, p.222).

The process of the constant “production” of China’s national identity in 20th century is at its core, a struggle of modernization. On the one hand, this struggle was under critical terms set by the Western powers. On the other hand, the Qing government’s lacked the ability and capacity to carry on effective reforms. The two thousand years dominance of the feudal system was severely challenged by the emergence of the foreign advanced technology and weapons, and later by the arrival of new ideas in politics, economics, science, and education. The powerful emergence of altogether new cultures and cultural practices undermined the old dominant culture that coincided with the Qing’s rule.

Political scientist Lucian W. Pye argues thus: “In the process of political development an identity crisis occurs when a community finds that what it had once unquestionably accepted as the physical and psychological definitions of its collective self are no longer acceptable under new historic conditions” (Cited by Dittmer and Kim, 1993, p.7). He further identifies four fundamental forms of identity crisis. The first is national identity and territory which relate to feelings about territory and the relationship of geographical space to nationalist sentiments. The second involves issues of class that often occur in nations when the social structure, and particularly class divisions, are so great as to preclude effective national unity. The third refers to the conflicts between ethnic or other subnational identifications and commitments to a common national identity. The fourth is the identity crisis that often arises out of dramatic social change followed by the psychological consequences of ambivalent feelings toward outsiders and complex re-evaluations of the traditional ways of existence. (Pye, 1971, pp.110-118) The first three aspects of identity crisis have all occurred at specific moments/periods in the progression of Chinese society. For instance, Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931 later triggered all-out war between the two countries from 1937 to 1945;

the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution beginning in 1966, is a political movement initiated by Mao in order to resolve the “class struggle” in which the long-term oppressed (workers, poor peasants, revolutionary soldiers, cadres of CCP, children of martyrs) revolted and criticized their oppressors (landowners, kulak, people who counter revolutions, the rightists³², people considered to be opposed to the ‘communist’ society); the more recent riots and protests in Tibet (2008, 2012), meanwhile, have all demonstrated different forms of identity crisis in China. The fourth aspect of identity crisis, however, is a more constant social reality in modern China. This research builds upon this understanding, focusing on the cultural change which follows social change and considers how this crisis in culture challenges assumptions and perceptions of China’s national identity. In fact, the ambivalent feelings towards outsiders and the complex re-evaluation of the traditional ways of living noted by Pye, are a question of culture.

Culture, as noted by many scholars, is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams, 1985, p.87). One of the reasons for its complexity is that it has developed intricately in a very long historical period since the beginning of human groups. Furthermore, it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought. (ibid) As briefly discussed in the case of Qin, culture as socially transmitted information provides a common knowledge of how things should be done in a given society. Anthropologist Lee Cronk brilliantly illustrates this with a metaphor: “Culture is neither the act of baking a cake nor the cake itself, but the recipe, the *socially transmitted information* that tells a person how to bake a cake” (cited by Sanft, 2014, p.19). In this sense, culture is a system of knowledge which helps individuals to make sense of oneself and navigate the world around. In situations like wars, new information transmitted through violent confrontations and new ideas with embedded values are introduced, hence breaking the balance of the old system.

As examined in chapter two, Gellner sees culture as shared information, but largely transmitted by education which facilitates the needs of industrial society for continuous improvement and growth. In the Chinese context, the question of culture is much more

³² In the era of Mao, rightists refer mainly to those who were against the socialist system, the ‘democratic centralism’ that the Communist Party operates under, and questioning the leadership of CCP in China.

complicated than this. In the beginning of modernization process, Chinese culture is a field of resistance, hybridity and divergence, and needs to be defined with a particular identity crisis. The expressions of different types of nationalism, for example, is a reaction to a particular identity crisis which was challenged by the ruptures of culture. Again, this can be traced back to China's relations with foreign powers at the turn of the century.

Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the 20th Century

Towards the end of 19th century, foreign powers further expanded their imperialist interests in China.³³ In the antagonistic atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, different types of nationalisms were expressed. For instance, various uprisings, economic boycotts and events of rejecting the traditional Chinese cultural values took place all around the country. Spencer summarised three forms of nationalism at the turn of the 20th century, "which for the Chinese comprised a new, urgent awareness of their relationship to foreign forces and to the Manchus."³⁴ These were the Boxer Uprising of 1900, the publication of *The Revolutionary Army* by Zou Rong in 1903, and the anti-American boycott of 1905 (1999, p.230). To begin, the Boxer Rebellion initiated in 1898 was violently opposed Christian missionary activities with the slogan of "Reviving the Qing, destroy the foreign". The 'boxers' were later depicted as a 'loyal militia' by Qing when the empress dowager issued a "declaration of war"³⁵ against the foreign powers. (ibid, p.232) Although the movement was recognised as nationalistic and patriotic by the government, it was later highly criticised by the key figures in the New Culture Movement³⁶ as being irrational and barbaric. Zhao (2005, p.136) argues that the extreme confrontational antiforeignism is "nativism" nationalism, which reflects feelings of weakness

³³ The "foreign powers" include countries like Germany, Great Britain, Russia, France, Japan, and United States of America (Spence, 1999, pp.229-230).

³⁴ Manchus: An ethnic minority originally from Manchuria. The Qing empirical dynasty was founded by Jurchen Aisin Gioro Cla, a vassal of the previous Ming dynasty, in Manchuria.

³⁵ "The foreigners have been aggressive towards us, infringed upon our territorial integrity, trampled our people under their feet...They oppress our people and blaspheme our gods. ...Thus it is that the brave followers of the Boxers have been burning churches and killing Christians" –Declaration of War (cited by Spence, 1999, p.232).

³⁶ New Culture Movement, often considered to be the prior intellectual preparation for the May Fourth Movement. The movement centred in thinkers like Hushi, Chen Duxu and Cai Yuanpei, foregrounding ideas of democracy and science, and abandoning autocracy and superstition.

or inferiority rooted in the impact of imperialism on China's self-esteem, as well as the subversion of indigenous Chinese virtues and traditions.

The Revolutionary Army on the other hand, takes a similar stand to that of The New Culture Movement, with an emphasis on placing the ultimate blame on the Qing as representing the old, superstitious and irrational cultural values. And especially, Han Chinese³⁷ should learn from the west and fight for their own destiny in order to free themselves from the Qing tyranny and foreign powers. The emphasis placed on the majority of Chinese people as Han ethnicity coming together to overthrow the Qing (which was under the rule of the Manchu minority) is what Zhao calls "ethnic nationalism". Ethnic nationalism "views the nation as a politicized ethnic group and often produces a state-seeking movement to create an ethnic nation-state" (2005, p.133). The third form of nationalism was an economic action attempted by the Chinese merchants in 1905 against the mistreatment of Chinese in the United States. Although the boycott of American goods was initiated by the Qing Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the action was nonetheless a widespread sentiment financially supported by overseas Chinese communities, forming a nationalistic ally crossing national boundaries.

These three examples demonstrate that nationalism can take many forms, all of the which were claimed to be carried out through the love of the nation, and to restore the country's pride. However, these actions are initiated from different standpoints with different concerns, problematics and interests. Moreover, each type of nationalism reflects a divergent understanding of culture. Boxer Rebellion is built on the foundation of cultural resistance to the influences of foreign religion, and a belief that China should carry on in its own, traditional way. *The Revolutionary Army* sees foreign culture as advancing the values the country can learn from, and directs this cultural impetus against the ruling class which is an ethnic minority in China. And the final economic action against the American goods by the oversea Chinese shows how culture is not locked in one place but is a divergent field with multi-faceted points of entry and identification. In this respect, culture as socially transmitted information cannot

³⁷ Han Chinese is the biggest ethnic group in mainland China. It currently accounts for 91.6% of the population. (CIA The World Fact Book, Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>, last accessed: 8 February 2020)

be assumed to be about shared common sense, especially in the newly developed modern technologies and various mediums of communication. Chinese culture in the context of national identity, is constantly balancing its relationships with different cultures and forces.

The last part of this section seeks to discuss Taiping Rebellion and the print pamphlet as a communication channel for disseminating alternative ideas about a nation.

Taiping Rebellion and the Print Technology



Figure 4: 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age' 《劝世良言》

After the defeat in the Opium War, the Qing government gradually lost its ruling legitimacy among the people. Perhaps what was more problematic for the government, however, was the challenge of severe violence at home: one of the many instabilities were growing uprisings across China. Unlike most of the political elites, these grassroots movements actively embraced the new culture and religious ideas rushed into the country. The biggest uprising between 1850- 1864 was the Taiping Uprising led by Hong Xiuquan who openly preached his

Christian messages to “baptize converts, and openly destroy[ed] Confucian³⁸ and ancestral shrines” (Spence, 1999, p.173). Hong’s vision was in fact enabled by a collection of translated passages from the Bible called “Good Words for Exhorting the Age” (see figure 4) into his hands. (ibid, p.172) According to Spence, this was only possible because the Western Protestant missionaries – mainly British and American - had been working since the early 1800s to translate the entire Bible into Chinese, and had printed numerous copies, which they distributed while traveling up the coast and in the interior. (ibid) The development of the printing technology in the West and the specific historical moment has presented a unique opportunity for the Taiping Uprising, for it not only offered an alternative imagination based on a foreign religion, but more importantly an alternative way of organising life - a culture that was distinctively differentiated from the one the Qing had to offer. For example:

The policies of the Taiping remained, on paper and often in practice, startlingly radical. One facet of their rule was an asceticism that required segregation of the sexes and absolute bans on opium smoking, prostitution, dancing, and drinking of alcohol. ... Most remarkable was the Taiping land law... All land was to be divided among all families of the Taiping and their supporters according to family size, with men and women receiving equal shares. ... The results would surely be, ran a Taiping proclamation, “that nowhere will inequalities exist, and no one not be well fed and clothed.” (Spence, 1999, p.176)

Hong’s vision, or in other words, the imagined world that he created with the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom managed to capture millions of desperate Chinese people. Despite the religious and political passion of military and ideology, Taiping eventually failed to overthrow the Qing government, and it is estimated that 20 million people died during this period. There were perhaps many explanations of the failures of Hong’s not peaceful (at all) ‘Heavenly kingdom’. Kuhn’s research provides an insight in terms of the disparity between his religious vision and the institutionalizing of such visions. He argued that during Hong’s early writings, there was little emphasis on the nation and the people but rather a lot on families and individuals...none of the materials links the advent of Christian revelation to the rescue of a nation or people from its moral perils by a new national leadership (1977, p.359-360).

³⁸ Confucianism was the official doctrine adopted by the Qing to rule over the majority of Han ethnicity living in China.

Moreover, he seems to suggest that the “acceptance of Jehovah and the abandonment of native religion will itself be sufficient to transform world conditions without any political or institutional intermediary” (ibid). Hong’s religious belief did not provide a solid ground for the collective identity accessible for the despairing peasants; instead, his vision became another source of oppression on top of the Qing imperial rule. In this sense, his lack of understanding of the importance of state building to imagined visions, and failure to understand the incompatibility of a foreign religious culture with the historical particularity of Chinese cultural context, contributed to the ultimate collapse of the heavenly kingdom.

The case of the Taiping Rebellion expands the understanding of Anderson’s formulation of seeing the spread of newspapers that were enabled by print technology as a unified field for the collective consciousness. As examined in chapter two, the case of the Taiping Rebellion further demonstrates that technology does not take sides, meaning it can be used to bolster a collective imagination through the daily consumption of a national newspaper, but it can also function as the medium for a new body of information which diverges from the national imagination. Moreover, the practices of such imagination which instigates a collective following is potentially dangerous, as there is often an enormous gap between imagination and the complex realities of political, social, and administrative conditions.

This section has looked at the last dynasty of China and the various reasons for its final collapse. The transitional period from the dynastic China to the Republic China was accompanied by various forms of identity crisis. These identity crises are manifested in forms of nationalism which were based on different understandings of culture. In the following section, this chapter will continue to explore how the founder of Communist China, namely Mao Zedong resolved a national identity crisis through by not just meeting the material interests of the peasants, but more importantly, through cultural communication which generates voluntary compliance to the nation state.

3. Communist China

In 1911, a series of revolutions were attempted, and with the success of the Wuchang revolution led by the Chinese United League (中国同盟会) on October 10, the history of China progressed to the Republic Era (1912-1949). "The beginning of a revolution is in reality the end of a belief" (Le Bon, 1895, p.91). For the next thirty-seven years, the Chinese people were facing battling civil wars between the two political meta-narratives: Democracy and Communism, as well as forming a united front between the two sides to fight against the foreign invasions during the two world wars. After decades of brutal struggles involving warlords, foreign invasions and internal political conflicts, in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded on the ideas of Socialism, defeated the China's Nationalist Party (CNP), founded on the idea of 'democracy'. With the relocation of CNP to Taiwan, there were subsequently two self-claimed legitimate governments of China after 1949. One is the People's Republic of China (P.R.C) representing CCP-led China mainland which was officially unrecognised by most countries at the time, particularly by the West. The other is the CNP-led Republic of China whose actual governing power was restricted to Taiwan, which was the representative of China in the United Nations until 1971.

The lack of international recognition of the P.R.C and the royal and devoted following of Mao Zedong in mainland China reinforced the country's decision to become a closed-off Communist regime that almost fully adopted the Soviet model of socialism with central planning. The P.R.C closed its doors and experienced disastrous periods such as the Great Leap Forward, implemented with the popular slogan "Catching up with United Kingdom and surpassing United States of America". This was first found in Mao's speech: "Comrade Khrushchev has told us, the Soviet Union 15 years later will surpass the United States of America. I can also say, 15 years later, we may catch up with or exceed the UK" (cited in Dittmer, 2014, p.113). The point perhaps is not only the absurdity of such statements and the severe and unnecessary suffering that followed, but also his unrealistic and overly ambitious attempt of positioning the country among the strongest nations in a very short period of time.

To an extent, the devoted following and people's strong identification with Mao at the time, demonstrates how his effective and charismatic leadership brought the nation to its general

united sense, in other words, a temporary state with a seemingly resolved national identity crisis. As Pye states “the resolution of the identity crisis is so fundamental to the very establishment of the nation in the first instance...the identity crisis deals above all with the issue of unity or national coherence, it is generally a matter that tests the national leadership.” (ibid, p.124) One of the commonly accepted explanations of the victory of CCP over CNP is the promises that were made to the peasants³⁹ which accounted for nearly 90% of the entire population: overthrow the despots and distribute the lands. In accordance with Sanft’s understanding, this then laid the common cultural ground for cooperation, which made the peasant choose to support Mao and the Communist Party. However, this does not explain how the state power sustained itself over the first thirty years of Chinese people living with arduous life conditions and mental turmoil.

This section attempts to examine the cultural reasons for Chinese people’s strong identification with the nation state. It will look at Mao’s construction of China’s national identity, with a case study of “Eight Model Plays”. Through the analysis presented in this section, it seeks to understand the dynamics between the people and the state through cultural communication.

Mao’s Construction of China’s National Identity

Elizabeth Perry has argued that the CCP under Mao’s skillful ‘cultural positioning’ and ‘cultural patronage’ was the key to constantly maintaining and reproducing the legitimacy of the ruling position of the CCP, rather than it being challenged. As she further explains regarding the deployment and manipulation of ‘culture’ since the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party: ‘In the revolutionary years, cultural positioning had enabled the communication of foreign concepts through familiar conduits in order to attract a mass following; after 1949, cultural patronage conveyed through state-controlled media-was directed toward burnishing

³⁹ In 1949, 89% of Chinese people living in the country side. Urban population were 57,650,000 (Source: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/中國人口>)[last accessed: 25 February 2020]

the image of the Communist Party and its top leaders by presenting them as national heroes” (Perry, 2013, p.7). Cultural positioning, however, is also a term used to analyse the construction of brand identity⁴⁰ in terms of how foreign products should creatively deploy a combination of local and global cultural codes in order to better channel a sense of identification from local consumers. The term is used by Perry in the sense of “strategic utilization of a diverse array of symbolic resources for purposes of political persuasion” (ibid). There is an implied similarity nevertheless in the use of the term in marketing strategy and political persuasion: to generate wider local acceptance of what is external or foreign. For example, in the case of Mao and his leadership, the CCP successfully localised Marxist Leninist political ideas and structures in China, implemented with full acknowledgement of the destiny of the country and of the emancipation of Mao’s countrymen from oppression and suffering. In Mao’s most famous speech ten days prior to the declaration of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, he dramatically announced that the Chinese people had finally ‘stood up’:

...We are all convinced that our work will go down in the history of mankind, demonstrating that the Chinese people, comprising one quarter of humanity, have now stood up. The Chinese have always been a great, courageous and industrious nation; it is only in modern times that they have fallen behind. And that was due entirely to oppression and exploitation by foreign imperialism and domestic reactionary governments. For over a century our forefathers never stopped waging unyielding struggles against domestic and foreign oppressors, including the Revolution of 1911 led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, our great forerunner in the Chinese revolution. Our forefathers enjoined us to carry out their unfulfilled will. And we have acted accordingly... From now on, our nation will belong to the community of the peace-loving and freedom-loving nations of the world and work courageously and industriously to foster its own civilization...ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up. (Mao, 1949, pp.16-17)

⁴⁰ See Dana L.Alden, Jan-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp, & Rajeev Barta’s article: ‘Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America, and Europe: The role of Global Consumer Culture’.

There are four notable indications of his speech: firstly, it positions the role of the CCP in the enduring history of China as the ultimate representative of the collective interest of the Chinese people, and moreover, as the defender and restorer of national pride. In this sense, he incorporated the people's desire to be freed from the foreign oppressors into the fate of the nation, so doing away with the tension between the state and the people. Secondly, it claims its political legitimacy by emphasising the Communist Party's defense of China from domestic and foreign oppressors, namely the Nationalist Party and imperialist Japan. However, this assertion neglects the fact that the Nationalist Party was a significant armed force in fighting the Sino-Japan War, as well as seeking foreign aid during these wars. Thirdly, the acknowledgement of the founding father of CNP and the Republic of China creates a sense of historical continuation and unification under the broader sense of Chinese nationhood by patriotic spirit rather than ideological separation. Last but not least, the construction of a linear meta-narrative of how the Chinese people have been freed by the CCP from "insult" to "standing up" demonstrates Mao's understanding of the complementary relationship between the sustainability of state power and the building of a collective national identity. In other words, Mao's absolute power lay in his ability to construct emotional and imaginative realities representing a unified, shared and easily identifiable national identity in Communist China.

The historian Yuri Pines made a connection between Mao Zedong and Qin Shi Huang, in which he argued that they were both "messianic" leaders with a peculiar mindset offering a narrative of "the end of the history". Notably, both in the first stele inscription and Mao's speech, there is a clear linear narrative of a sense of past, present and future. The past is unbearable but saved by the political institutions led by the leader, and the suffering present is the beginning of a future of peace and security. There seems to be an evident cultural management with the national image and imagination. In this regard, the following case study further demonstrates how the state communicates through cultural products which generate favourable identification with the nation state.

Eight Model Plays

The Eight Model Plays, also known as the Revolutionary Opera, were a state promoted cultural products during the Cultural Revolution. These carefully selected cultural productions did not just appear on stage, but were heavily promoted through film and music, in factories and schools. The contents and images of the eight model works were widely integrated with the design of everyday objects: mugs, plates and notebooks for instance. Eight Model Plays or eight revolutionary model operas told stories of 'the Chinese people's determined struggle against outer and inner enemies, glorified close cooperation between the People's Liberation Army and the common people, and emphasized the decisive role of Mao Zedong and his thought for socialism's victory in China' (Mittler, 2010, p.377). Notably, although the model works combine both traditional and foreign art forms, consisting of five Beijing operas, two Ballets and one symphony, the contents of the stories were solely based on Communist China, depicting workers, peasants and soldiers as heroes. Barbara Mittler in her detailed analysis of revolutionary works, describes 'the evolution of the "traditional" Chinese operatic genre as a history of unceasing reform and change on the one hand, and of continual confluence and syncretism on the other' (ibid, p.379). In other words, traditional art forms such as the Beijing Opera are cultural constructs that are subject to constant reform and change. Moreover, what was once considered to be "traditional" and "foreign" always syncretizes with the "current" and "local" in order to represent itself as relevant to present day society.

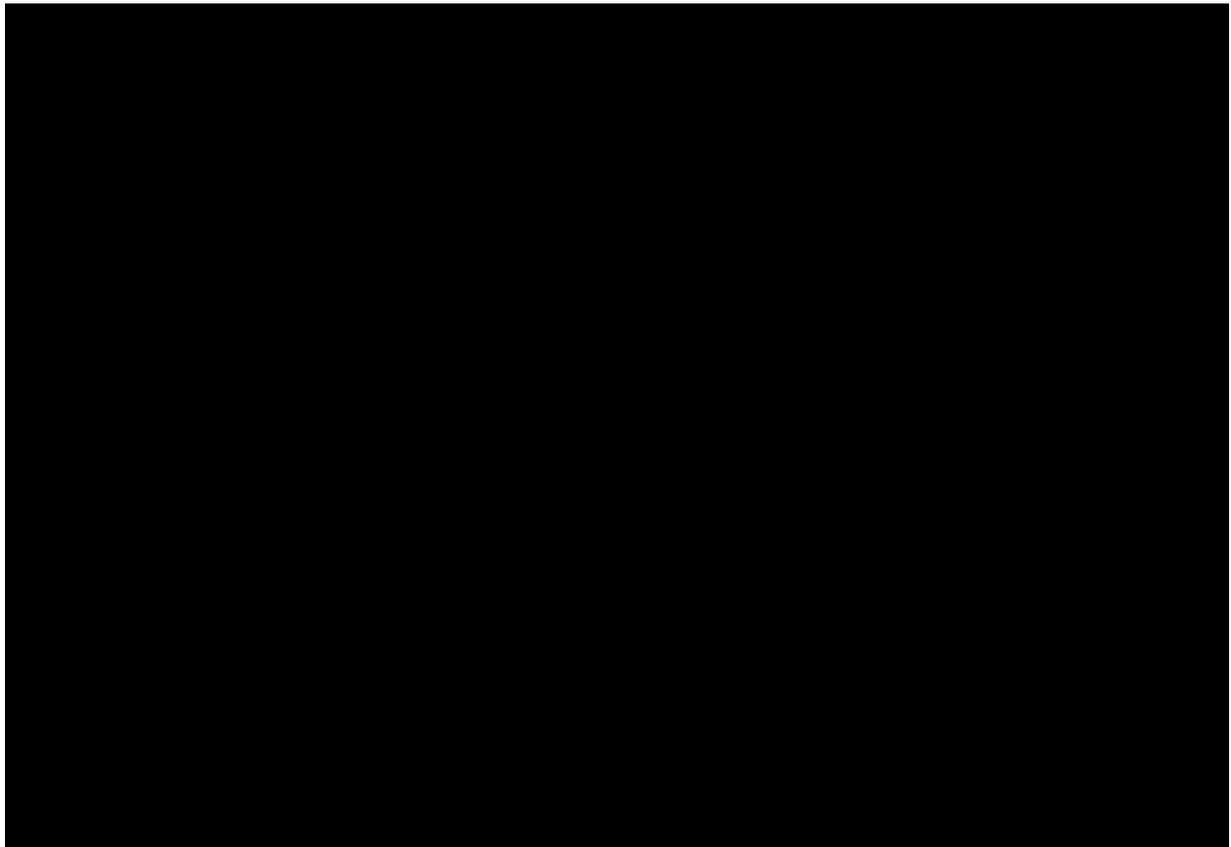


Figure 5 : Revolutionary Modern Ballet: *The White-haired Girl* (1965)

To take one example, one of the Revolutionary ballets *The White-haired Girl* (1965) (see figure 5) was originally a folktale circulated in the areas around He Bei province in 1940s. The original story involves a white-haired fairy who lived in the mountains, she had magic and used it to punish evil and reward goodness. The folktale was later adapted by the literacy workers in the Communist Party into a play and the story was transformed into a revolutionary narrative. The play depicts a girl called Xier, who after her father was murdered by the evil landlord, was forced to become a slave. With some help, she later escaped from torture by the landlord and hid in the mountains. Years went by, and the dismal living conditions made her black hair turn white. In the end, she was saved by her boyfriend Dachun who had joined the Communist Party earlier. The two were reunited in the end, and Xier joined the Revolutionary Army.

The adaption of the local folktale to the revolutionary narrative and then the Ballet opera clearly demonstrates a deliberate effort at cultural reproduction, or in Perry's language, cultural patronage and cultural positioning. The symbolic cultural resources and codes, both

foreign and local, traditional and new are syncretized into a cultural hybridity which is represented as part of current national narratives.

This has shed some light on understanding the dynamics among China's national identity, the ruling party and the Chinese people during the period of Communist China. First, from the direct import of Russian Communist political system characterised by "democratic centralism", to the adaptation and combination of foreign artistic styles with local cultural contents, the Communist Party and its leaders masterfully assimilated and deployed bourgeois and feudal culture in order to construct a seemingly authentic national culture of China. There is no real traditional essence behind this national construct, for the reasons that 'tradition' itself is constantly being invented and 'borrowed'. From a Confucian state to the transition to a "Marxist-leninist" state, Mao's China demonstrates a striking ability to centralise political power through cultural reproduction and communication.

State, People and Mediated Communication

This chapter has visited three moments in Chinese history in order to understand the dynamic between the Chinese state and people. In particular, it regards the role played by cultural communication in such a relationship. In the case of Qin, which is a dynasty infamous for its brutality towards human lives, Sanft argues that such a relationship is not largely sustained by legalised coercion, but rather through the communication of coercion. Sanft denotes that the compliance from the people at its core is part of a cooperation which can potentially be beneficial to the majority in a society. However, this relationship is not stable, as the decisions made by the people to comply to the rulers can also be withdrawn when they deem the rulers unfit for the leading position. This reflected a particular Chinese cultural tradition: the mandate of heaven. In this sense, nation (empire) building which generates loyal feelings towards the state depends on the unity of socially transmitted information. This is shown in the Qin's first stele inscription, which represents a linear narrative of the past, present and future, depicting the Qin state as the ultimate saviour for the people. However, Qin's quick collapse also demonstrates the in-balance between coercion and cultural persuasion, and the inability to adapt and reform in response to new social conditions.

Section two examines different manifestations of identity crisis towards the end of the Qing dynasty. It argues that divergence in culture leads to different understandings of a nation's political conduct. Moreover, the disparities of national imagination could potentially be dangerous and becomes the means that contribute to inner antagonistic situations like the case of the Taiping Uprising. In other words, an unresolved national identity crisis has a dangerous outcome, potentially leading to violence. However, section three also points out Mao and the Communist Party's cultural positioning and cultural patronage which generated loyalty and devotion from the peasants, which could also be dangerous. The seemingly resolved national identity crisis led to massive suffering in China: during the cultural Revolution, tens of thousands of people's lives lost because of their unquestioned cooperation with the state. The imagined outcome of cooperation in the end, was not beneficial at all to the country.

Histories has shown that China's national identity as a state-orientated project needs to be understood in two folds: first, as a communication medium for the state to generate high levels of cooperation for the collective national projects, such as modernization; and second, cooperation depends on the unity of culture. Thus, the state tends to monopolize the channels of communication for transmitted official common knowledge. However, with the Open and Reform policy as China reopens its door to the outside world, and with increasing levels of free trade and the development of media technology, the state is losing its grip on communication channels, so that culture becomes diversified again. Third, as history has shown, people are always a powerful constituent in the project of national (empire) identity.

Chapter Four

The Chinese Dream

China's National Identity and the Chinese Dream

The term 'Chinese Dream'⁴¹ was first officially defined by President Xi Jinping during his visit to the exhibition "The Road to Rejuvenation" in November 29, 2012. The exhibition is one of the permanent exhibitions at the National Museum of China. It features China's national experience since the outbreak of the First Opium War, with particular emphasis on the history of the "century of national humiliation" from the Opium Wars through to the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945 (Wang, 2013, p.2). After the exhibition, Xi coined the term Chinese Dream as the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The basic idea of the Chinese Dream summarized by Xi is "to make the country prosperous and strong, rejuvenating the nation, and make the people happy"⁴² (Xi, 2014b).

The simple, yet familiar phrase of the Chinese Dream has quickly captured the attention of mainstream media and become a key political statement put forward by the newly appointed Xi Jinping in 2012. In 2013, a collection of Xi's speeches entitled *The Chinese Dream*⁴³ was published. The book derived from more than fifty of Xi's recorded documents, consisting of his speeches, public talks, conversations, letters and direct instructions. The contents of these discourses further elaborated the core meanings of the Chinese Dream. Notably, the primary purpose of this book is intended for the Party members to study Xi's thoughts. Nevertheless, the contents summarized Xi's account of Chinese Dream from 15 November 2012 to 2 November 2013, serving as an important official approach to the Party's effort of constructing China's national identity through Chinese Dream. The book is divided into eight sections. They

⁴¹ Chinese Dream 中国梦, is also being translated into "China Dream" (Zhou, 2014; Callahan, 2015, 2017; Hizi, 2019). This research critically adopts the Chinese government's official translation of the term as Chinese Dream. This intention was made clear in Xi's speech as "the Chinese Dream is in the end the dream of the Chinese people".

⁴² Excerpts from the speech "Follow the Trend of the Times and Promote Peace and Development in the World", at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, March 23, 2013.

⁴³ *The Chinese Dream* (《习近平关于实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦论述摘编》) is published by the Party Literature Research Centre (中共中央文献研究室) in December 2013. The official English translation is made available online in 2014.

are: We are realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; The Chinese Dream is in the end the dream of the people; To realize the Chinese Dream, we must follow the Chinese path; To realize the Chinese Dream, we must foster the Chinese spirit; To realise the Chinese Dream, we must coalesce China's strength; Chinese compatriots everywhere should work together to realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; Hard work makes dreams come true; The Chinese Dream is a dream of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit.

It is argued in this research that the Chinese dream is a political strategy presented by Xi's government as a crucial resource to understand China's national identity and national belonging. Therefore, this chapter aims to critically examine Xi's discursive construction of China's national identity as the Chinese Dream. In doing so, it is structured into three sections, setting out specific concerns for examination. In section one, this thesis proposes to understand the political, economic and cultural context of Chinese Dream. With the introduction of the market economy to China, there is an evident cultural change, namely Chinese society is increasingly driven by individual pursuits rather than collective motivation. By reviewing the history of the American dream, this research contests the view that sees the American Dream as an individual pursuit of happiness, and the Chinese Dream as a collective national ambition. The main ideas of the Chinese Dream need to be understood as the dynamic between the state and the Chinese people. This chapter further analyses the five features of the Chinese Dream, and shows that the Chinese Dream is a major attempt by the CCP to generate national belonging, which has often resulted in promoting conflicting messages due to its top-down nature. The final section of this chapter concludes with a discussion of Xi's political discourse as a means of communication for nation building.

1. Context of the Chinese Dream

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Deng Xiaoping was reinstated and later recognised by the CCP as the central leader of the party. In 1978, the Open and Reform policy was officially carried out by CCP. Subsequently, a great number of overseas investments were immediately rushed into China. The continuous economic development has lifted six hundred and fifty million Chinese people out of poverty according to the World Bank in thirty years

(1981-2012⁴⁴). However, the integration between China and the “global cities” ‘produced an influx of foreign capital, overseas Chinese, new commodities, images, and desires that bypass government rules and generally challenge the image of the socialist state.’ (Ong, 1997, p.336) The Chinese government therefore decided to ‘embark upon buoyant wave of global capitalism, is...experiencing a crisis of national identity’ (ibid). Furthermore, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the biggest Communist regime that China has initially based its political system and ideology upon, the Chinese state was once again facing a legitimacy crisis for its increasing difficulty in constructing a convincing and easily identifiable identity for the Chinese people. The sharp comparisons of the images constructed by western liberal democracy which were mediated through popular cultural products and the mass immigration wave have challenged the political regime by fuelling a growing discontent of Chinese younger generation. The outburst of the disputing voices was then triggered by five thousand students marched on Tiananmen Square on April 15, 1989. As history has shown, an unresolved national identity crisis is dangerous in the sense that it could have real life consequences. In this sense, the CCP was urgently in the need of redefining its role with the Chinese people, as well as recreating China as a legitimate nation-state led by the CCP in the world of nations.

This section looks at three aspects of China’s new identity crisis with changing social, political and cultural conditions, namely after China adopted a market economy and opened its doors to the outside world. Socialism with Chinese characteristics as the first attempt by the state to redefine and re-justify the nature of the party and its governing position in response to the radical cultural change, will be discussed first. Secondly, this section seeks to discuss the cultural change from “collectivism” to “individualism” in Chinese society, due to the introduction of the market economy. The thesis, however, suggests that individual pursuits and collective actions are much more complicated than the simplistic dichotomies of conceptual categorization. Last but not least, it analyses the history of American dream and

⁴⁴ 84.2% of the Chinese population are living in poverty in 1981, based on the poverty headcount ratio at \$1.25 a day. As of 2015, the percentage of Chinese people living on under \$1.9 per day has decreased to 0.7%, and the goal set by the CCP is to eliminate poverty by 2020.

(Data available from World Bank Website: <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/CHN>; <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414d3541444d33457a6333566d54/index.html>, last accessed: 8 February 2020)

concludes this section by suggesting that there are more common features between the American Dream and the Chinese Dream.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

Prior to the crackdown of the 'June Fourth' incident Deng Xiaoping made a statement on May 19, 1989: "The economy is still the base, if we didn't have the economic base, the farmers would have risen in rebellion after only ten days of student protest- Never mind a whole month." (cited in Huang, 2008, p.275) It is implied by Deng that if China had not initiated the economic reform in 1978 which dramatically improved people's living conditions, the cultural crisis of national identity would have severely challenged the CCP's power to rule. In other words, China ought to continue with the economic reform, and reproduce and adapt the Party's identity to fit with the new social and cultural change. In 1982, Socialism with Chinese characteristics was coined by Deng Xiaoping, and was based on the understanding of the compatibility of the market economy and socialism with central planning. It refers to three perspectives. Economically, China's economy operates through a mixed economy of private and public ownership, with the public sector dominating; Politically, China upholds a system of the People's congress with the central leadership of Communist Party, cooperating and consulting with other parties and a system of regional ethnic autonomy; Culturally, socialist values are the core guiding principle, as well as representing differences and expanding common grounds.⁴⁵

To an extent, Deng Xiaoping was fully aware of the danger that "de-Maofication" could potentially lead to everything being questioned under the rule of the Communist Party. More importantly, the challenges to Mao's vision of China, the "messianic" position of the Communist Party, and the peasants he successfully united under that vision, might present a grave danger to the survival of the CCP. Deng showed a clear understanding that material betterment was the key to persuading people to cooperate under the CCP's leadership, and

⁴⁵ Derived from people.cn, the online platform of the Chinese Communist Party's official newspaper: *People's Daily*.

his pragmatic approach strides across the highly problematic national identity and went beyond the dichotomies of political ideologies of the Liberal capitalism and Socialism with Chinese characteristics. For example, during Deng's southern tour to Shenzhen in 1992, after the stagnation of economic reform followed by the Tiananmen Square Incident, he stated thus: "Capitalism has been developed in the West over several hundreds of years, but how long have we carried out (the reform) here? We have been stuck for decades, if not, our country will be different from now...we have to open and reform in order to access to the latest information... if China does not carry on as a socialist country, does not open and reform, does not engage with economic development, there is no future for this country... we have to continue the open and reform policy with an inexorable will, improving people's living standard. In this way, people will trust and support our Party."⁴⁶

With the emphasis on both the market economy and the continuity with single party rule, China under Deng's leadership attempted to modernise China with an alternative approach that differs from the Western modernization process, namely to continue with economic, industrial and technological modernity, but not cultural and political modernity, as defined by Western experience. As Ong argues:

When market reforms were first launched in 1991, the Deng regime was careful to define Chinese modernity in a fixed territorial position vis-à-vis other nation-states in the world. ... "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" represents an attempt to domesticate freewheeling capitalism through state control, and to drive home the idea that capitalism is ultimately intended for increasing the power of the Chinese nation-state. The goal was to raise China's overall standard of living within a hundred of years, so that the country could escape its developing status... (1997, P.336)

From the state's perspective, China's national identity since the open and reform policy is a pragmatic (re)construction process in response to the changing conditions of Chinese modernization, "which considers the nation as a territorial political unit, gives the Communist state the responsibility to speak in the name of the nation and demands that citizens subordinate their individual interests to China's national ones..." (Zhao, 2005, p.134). From

⁴⁶ Deng Xiaoping Southern tour talk, 1992: Video footage is available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6akkbyeuv8&t=65s> Translated by the author of this thesis. [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zeming to Hu Jintao, the pragmatic leaders by positioning CCP and themselves as the defenders of China's national pride and interests, "continued to undertake a comprehensive effort to strengthen China by gaining access to the world's most advanced science and technology and establishing commercial and cultural exchanges with the national communities...They have also rejected anything, including ideas of liberal democracy, that they deem may threaten the CCP's grip on power and have deemed contrary to 'Chinese characteristics'". (ibid) In this sense, China's national identity is a state-led construction in terms of its structured centralised power. However, the legitimacy of the Party is also fragile and constantly seeking consent from the national subjects. This is because, firstly, the meaning of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" needs to be constantly renegotiated in response to the universal values of liberal democracy. The constant competing ideological and cultural values challenge the regime with questions such as how adequately a "communist party" can serve as the representative of Chinese people under market economy. This is particularly the case with China's growth no longer being in double digits in terms of GDP, losing one of the main resources of legitimation, with the country facing the enormous side effects of rapid economic and industrial development, such as pollution, income inequality and uneven developments.

Secondly, this has to do, again, with the questions of culture. Stuart Hall, cited in Edensor, 2002, argues that national identity is in reality "cross-cut by deep internal division of differences, and 'unified' only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power". (p.25) Unlike in Mao's era, "cultural power" is no longer possessed solely by the state, and Chinese culture is also highly shaped by the internal logic of the market economy. What this means for individual Chinese people is that their primary social relationship is defined not just by the Chinese state, but also by the market. In other words, the construction of China's national identity needs to compete with the ideology that supported the logic of global trade, namely Western values such as the pursuit of individualism.

Implications of Market Economy on Chinese Culture

There are three ways of understanding the implications of the market economy on Chinese culture. These are all loosely contested by the tension between individualism and collectivism. Firstly, many consider that the introduction of market economy to China disrupts cultural unity; Throsby's argument regarding culture and economy might, indeed, provide an initial insight into the problem. Throsby argues that the fundamental distinction between culture and economy is really a difference between collectivism and individualism. "Economic thought as it has evolved over two centuries is founded on individualism, whereas the notion of culture...is a manifestation of group or collective behaviors...the economic impulse is individualistic, the cultural impulse is collective" (Throsby, 2001, p.12-13). Building on Throsby's account of culture, instead of viewing market economy and culture as contradictory, what the Chinese market economy has promoted is an increasingly confusing jumble of cultural collectivities. In other words, an individual in modern society is always multi-cultural with multiple identities. Hence a national identity becomes only a part of one's identity, instead of being the primary one. Moreover, like Billig, who sees identity as an operation rather than something that actually exists in people's minds, political scientist Lebow further rejects the concept of either the individual or collective entity possessing "identity". This is because "so-called identities are really composites of multiple self-identifications that are labile in character and rise and fall in relative importance. They arise from diverse sources and have unpredictable behavioural implications" (2016, p.7).

The market economy, in this sense, serves as diverse sources of identification which might lead to actions that counter the interests of the state. This then comes to the second way to understand the market economy as an alternative political ideology. Peculiarly, while the material betterment enabled by market economy has helped the CCP to advocate its ruling position, it also serves as a potential undermining ideology that challenges the legitimacy of the state. Ideology here refers to "a political weapon, manipulated consciously in ongoing struggles for legitimacy and power" (Cuff cited by Rosenberg, 1982, p.7). For instance, the market economy may promote a certain kind of idea that foregrounds values like individual freedom to pursue surplus profit and the fears of being restrained by the government. Moreover, "a key feature of capitalistic ideology is the promotion of individualism...the

principle that individual effort is rewarded and benefits the individual..., socialist ideology is the promotion of the good of the collective over the individual” (Steele & Lynch, 2013). The term “collectivism” is often considered to be a core socialist value which was prevalingly promoted by the communist party under Mao Zedong’s leadership. However, various recent studies have suggested that after 30 years of economic reform, Chinese society has become increasingly driven by a more individualist culture. This argument was advanced in Steele and Lynch’s article *The Pursuit of Happiness in China: Individualism, Collectivism and Subjectivism*. Drawing their analysis from the World Value Survey conducted in China in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007, their findings indicate that in terms of subjective well-being, collectivist factors have become less important over time, and “Chinese are increasingly prioritizing individualist factors in assessments of their own happiness and life satisfaction” (ibid). From the state perspective, this then potentially becomes a problem for national cooperation for Chinese modernization. Moreover, Wang claims that “as long as the Chinese Communist Party continues to govern in the name of socialism, it must continue to avert the emergence of values such as individualism that are clearly identifiable as central to (Western) capitalism” (cited in Steel & Lynch, 2013).

Thirdly, the implications of the market economy on Chinese culture is understood as the influences of the American dream. The American dream as symbolic representation of America’s national identity, has been the guiding ideology for the people in America. This then introduces the second understanding of ideology, which is broader than the definition of ideology as a political weapon. It is deployed to refer to “a system of beliefs, values, fears, prejudices, reflexes, and commitments.” (Foner cited by Rosenberg, 1982, p.7) In short, it is a culture of a particular kind which then guides anyone who subscribes to that system in terms of seeing the world. In this sense, the American dream, alongside the appealing American mass cultural products, films, music and their perceptions of China are flushed into the country, destabilises people’s identification with the nation-state. The mass immigration to America in the late 80s and 90s is one example of this phenomenon.

The meanings of American dream are often considered to be about individual’s equal opportunity for upward mobility and American way of life: to own a detached house and private cars. However, the evolution of the meanings of American dream has shown that

ideology is not a fixed entity. By tracing the development of American dream helps to understand the cultural context of the Chinese Dream. Moreover, the popular acceptance of the American dream in China reflects what Skey termed “sedimentation”, whereby a particular discourse is perceived as natural, or common sense. This hinders the renegotiated meaning of Chinese Dream that was promoted by the state in China. In other words, the American dream as the dominant ideological discourse challenges the power of the CCP to generate national belonging through the Chinese dream. The discussion of the American dream, and its relationship to the Chinese dream, will continue in the coming section.

The Evolution of the American Dream

On May 23, 2013, two weeks before president Xi’s state visit to America, the *People’s Daily* official website (People.cn) published an article entitled ‘Seven main differences between the Chinese Dream and the American Dream’. To summarise the major differences put forward by the author, the article is essentially centred around the distinctions between the Chinese collective effort of building a strong and prosperous nation-state versus individual American achieving personal economic success, freedom and happiness (Shi, 2013). To an extent, these distinctions are similar to the old debates between socialist values and capitalist values. But to take a closer look at the evolution of the meanings of the American Dream, one might think twice about these assertions. Indeed, the Chinese Dream appears to be the state’s major effort in generating national identification and belonging, and building in meaning in comparison to the American Dream. Moreover, the two constructions share more similarities than its current perceived meanings. Thus, to understand the Chinese Dream, it is imperative to first provide a basic understanding of the American Dream.

The American dream, as a constructed term, is subject to many interpretations during the course of its discursive developments. It may refer to personal fulfilment (Adams, 1933), a phenomenal advertising slogan that sells a pecuniary philosophy (Henry, 1965); Individual freedom to pursue wealth and material goods (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Messner & Rosenfeld, 2007); a political myth (Wysong, 2006; Hodgson, 2009; Walt, 2011; Archer, 2014); an expectation/belief of upward mobility, entrepreneurship and home ownership (Emmett,

2013; Zhou, 2014); a disillusionment (Zhu, 2017); and a national collective aspirations (Hauhart, 2017). It is widely accepted that the first book to coin (or appropriate) the term American dream is by James Truslow Adams, a popular historian living in 1930s America. He depicted the “American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world.” (cited by Cullen, 2003, p. 4) Writing in the early years of the Great Depression, the birth of the American dream to some extent can be seen as a reaction to this national crisis. Cullen, however, suggests that the origin of the American dream dates back to the 17th century when a group of English Puritans travelled to America “seeking a way of worshipping God as they see fit” (2003, p.8), and the values and beliefs subsequently laid the foundation for the nation. This religious aspect of the American dream coincides with historian Rosenberg’s account of the American dream at the turn of the 20th century. She argued that in the 1890s, a new sense of America’s mission is to fulfil the religious duty of expanding the belief and “Christianize India and Africa, Turkey and China.” (cited by Rosenberg, 1982, p.8) This mission is founded on the argument that Christianity was a spiritual precondition for modernization. Moreover, at a secular level, America’s mission is about a worldwide extension of American institutions and industrial civilization. (ibid) Rosenberg argues that this national mission is promoted by an ideology that she called “liberal-developmentalism”.

“Liberal-developmentalism merged nineteenth-century liberal tenets with the historical experience of America’s own development, elevating the beliefs and experiences of America’s unique historical time and circumstance into developmental laws thought to be applicable everywhere” (Rosenberg, 1982, p.7). Moreover, the American dream of mass consumption, mass culture and high technology is also promoted and accompanied by this ideology. In this sense, counter to the prevalent understanding of the term, American dream at the time, is a collective, national dream. Arguably, the national cultural and economic expansion during this period prepared the rise of “American century”, and with the collapse of USSR, America became the only superpower in the world.

Despite the notion of the American dream being upward mobility and home ownership is facing enormous challenges due to the income inequality⁴⁷ and the financial crisis in 2008, Archer (also Emmett, 2013; Zhu, 2017) has indicated the resilience of American Dream. Callahan, for example, argues that national belongings are not fixed entities, but a product of very active and ongoing political and moral debates among popular culture and political leaders (2017, p.249). In particular, popular culture as American mass culture has been one powerful way to sustain the American Dream. Emmett argues that the pursuit of the American Dream is a common plotline in Hollywood films. Contemporary Hollywood is a key site for reaffirming the pre-eminence of the American Dream (Emmett, 2013, p.6). Moreover, Zhu explores the Chinese films with American Dream themes. He describes a popular Chinese imagination of America as being the land of equality and freedom in the 80s, accompanied by the “going abroad fever”. However, this popular imagination is replaced by a sense of disillusionment in the recent US-themed films (2010s onwards) (Zhu, 2017, pp.763-764). Despite these films seeking to problematize the American Dream and reasserting Chinese values and the Chinese Dream, the tight ideological control, potential economic instability and severe air pollution are serious concerns for Chinese people, which makes China a place hard to identify with. He concludes that America, whilst it has “failed many Chinese immigrants, students, and tourists, ironically may remain in their collective imagination a beautiful land of opportunity and success” (ibid, p.767).

Moreover, Eric, Li⁴⁸, a researcher in Chinese Model Research Centre, Fudan University, similarly made an interesting link between presidential speeches and the American dream. He argues that in the period from Theodore Roosevelt to John. F Kennedy, the American Dream represented a collective dream for the rise of America.⁴⁹ Though not directly speaking

⁴⁷ According to the World Bank, the GINI index shows America is at 41.5 in 2016, and China is at 38.6 in 2015. A GINI coefficient of 40 is generally considered as the warning level for income inequality.

⁴⁸ Eric, Li is a venture capitalist and a political scientist. He is also the founder of Cheng Wei Capital in China. His provocative Ted talk titled “A tale of two political systems” in 2013 has generated much discussions and critiques. His main argument suggests China modernizes with an alternative path, Chinese Communist Party’s legitimacy is not based on the “one person one vote”, but its political performance and achievements.

⁴⁹ Derived from his speech on the opening of Chinese Model Research Centre, Fudan University, on 9 December, 2013. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPZoNXh5i0Q&t=306s>. [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

in relation to the American dream, Roosevelt's speech 'The strenuous Life' in 1899 and Kennedy's famous speech "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" in 1961, both called for a collective aspiration for putting the country's interests before one's own. Callahan also argues for a presidential pedigree of the American Dream, and provides an example of Obama's two books entitled *Dreams from My Father* (2004) and *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006) (Callahan, 2017, p.251). In this sense, presidential debates, thoughts and speeches are an important source for understanding their attempt at generating a sense of national belonging through discursive communications.

According to the aforementioned arguments, the American Dream and the Chinese Dream has more common ground than one may initially be concerned with. Firstly, the dichotomies of the two constructions as individualism vs. collectivism are over-simplified, since history shows that the American dream was once deployed by the national ideology for the country's international expansion. Moreover, popular culture and political leaders are active sites for communicating and debating the meanings of the Dreams. The following section provides a more detailed analysis of Xi's speeches in which he defines the aspects of the Chinese Dream from 2012 to 2013.

2. Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream

The original translations of the *Chinese Dream* is categorised into eight aspects; this chapter, however re-structures this concept into five sections, these being: the central ideas of the Chinese Dream; Chinese path; Chinese Spirit; The multi-ethnic, the cross-straits and the Greater China; and China as a Global Power.

Central Ideas of the Chinese Dream

During the speech Xi Jinping made after the “The Road to Rejuvenation” exhibition, he stated as follows:

Everyone has ideals and ambitions and their own dreams. At present, we are all discussing the Chinese Dream. In my opinion, achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times. The dream embodies a long-cherished hope of several generations of Chinese people, reflects the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and is a shared aspiration of all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation. History informs us that each person’s future and destiny are closely linked to those of their country and nation. One can do well only when one’s country and nation do well.” (Xi Jinping, November 29, 2012)

Xi’s speech indicates that firstly, by reviewing the collective memory of the past, he identifies the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” as the common goal of the Chinese people of past generations. Moreover, each individual’s future depends on working together in the present. To some extent, similar to that of Qin Shi Huang and Mao Zedong, president Xi presents a narrative of historical linearity since modern times. Nevertheless, he departs from his two predecessors, namely instead of “the end of the history”, he foregrounds the CCP as the ultimate guardian for continuing the “long cherished hope of several generations of Chinese people” since modern times. Secondly, Xi recognises that individuals’ interests may vary, but “one can do well only when one’s country and nation do well.” Again, he demands cooperative actions from all Chinese people, because a prosperous and strong China is the precondition for every Chinese person’s happiness. To put it more simply, the main ideas of the Chinese Dream is to link personal destiny with the country’s destiny, and to be more precise, China under CCP’s rule. There seems to be a very clear mentality within the CCP’s leadership, namely the constant struggle of self-legitimation as a non-elected government. This was evident in Xi’s speeches during an inspection tour in Guangdong, December 7-11, 2012: “If our Party is to strengthen its position as the ruling party and fulfil its mission when in power, it must take fulfilling, safeguarding , and developing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as the starting point...Our goal is to satisfy the people’s yearning for a better life” (Xi, 2014c).

To some extent, while the American Dream is often perceived as an individual dream for “life, liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, the Chinese Dream is the opposite, and interpreted only as a “collective, national pursuit” (Johnson, 2013). However, such understandings neglect the historical particularity and continuity of Chinese political culture, as discussed in chapter three. Moreover, it overlooks the evolution of the American Dream, as the everchanging nature of any human constructions would be. Last but not least, the views of the Chinese Dream could easily fall into the definition of propaganda, a word that is often mistakenly understood as lies and falsehood (Welch, 2015, p.2), hence underplaying the potential benefits of cooperation at a national level. Nevertheless, the top-down nature of the Chinese Dream makes the term difficult to be seen as a “genuine collective national sentiment” (Edney, 2014, p.119).

This research approaches the individual and collective features of the Chinese Dream as a dynamic relationship of cooperation and tension between the Chinese people and the state. The very translation of 中国梦 almost showcases the anxiety of CCP of this relationship. According to Callahan, in the first few months, the term was translated both as the “China Dream” and the “Chinese Dream” in official and unofficial documents. However, in March 2013, the official English translation of the term became the “Chinese Dream” (2015, p.224). This change occurred was because the Chinese Dream “suggests a grassroots dream of the people, rather than the top-down dream of the party-state”. (Wang, cited in Callahan, *ibid*). It is evident that Xi’s speeches are consistent in constructing a vivid narrative ready to be consumed and identified by the Chinese people. For example, “the Chinese Dream pertains to the past and the present but also the future. The Chinese Dream is the crystallization of the tireless efforts of countless people with lofty ideals, embraces the yearnings of all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, and beckons a bright future in which our country is prosperous and strong, the nation flourishes and the people live happy lives”⁵⁰ (Xi, 2014b). The linear narrative structure of the past, present and future have constructed an all-encompassing story, a collective fantasy, “a fond vision of the future” (Sieber cited by Archer, 2014, p.13) to be brighter and happier for everyone. This narrative structure implicates the Chinese people as part of the historical common mission: by contributing to their country just

⁵⁰ Excerpts from a speech to outstanding young people from all walks of life. May 4, 2013.

like their predecessors, future generations will benefit from their actions at the present. To an extent, this then places the Chinese people in the position of un-sung heroes of the nation, and subtly encourages them to submit to the national project devised by the state. Critically speaking, such a dream functions as an escape from the reality of repressed desires and conflicting wishes necessary to commit to a singular course of national rejuvenation.

Moreover, the relationship between the state and the people implicated in the Chinese Dream can be understood as a continuity of the traditional political culture in the Chinese context. Similar to the case of the Qin, the state is fully aware of the importance of bringing “constant benefits”⁵¹ to the people. This reflects traditional intellectuals’ insights into the political leadership, as Guan Zi⁵² wrote in the classic work entitled *Shepherding the People*:

If the prince can provide them with leisure and freedom from care, the people will be willing to endure trouble and toil for him. If he can provide them with riches and honour, they will be willing to endure poverty and low position for him. If he can ensure their existence and provide them with security, they will be willing to endure danger and disaster for him. If he enables them to live and propagate, they will be willing to endure death and annihilation for him. (translated by Rickett, 2001, pp.54-55)

Guan Zi sees the seemingly oppositional forces as relative concepts. The Yin Yang interplay between people’s hates and wants, toil and freedom, wealth and poverty, danger and security, annihilation and propagation, all seem to be a matter of negotiation. The relative and negotiable balance between people’s sacrifice and happiness is, to an extent, the underlying logic of the Chinese Dream.

Chinese Path

Another important feature of the Chinese Dream is to continue the Chinese path. This is to be understood as both China proceeding as a civilization with along enduring history, and continuing to modernize the country in an alternative way as “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” As Xi further elaborates during the first session of the twelfth National People’s Congress on March 13, 2013:

⁵¹ Excerpts from a speech at the First Session of the Twelfth NPC, March 17, 2013.

⁵² Guan Zi (born around 720 BC and died 645 BC), a reformist from the Qi, the Qin’s biggest rival state before unification.

China must take its own path to realize the Chinese Dream. This is the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This hard-won path came from more than 30 years of great experience in reform and opening up, continuous exploration in the 60-plus years of the People's Republic of China, a thorough review of the Chinese nation's development in its 170-plus-year modern history, and the inheritance of Chinese civilization through more than 5,000 years. This path is deeply rooted in history and broadly based on China's present realities. The Chinese nation has extraordinary creativity with which it has created our great Chinese civilization, and we can also expand and continue on the development path suitable to China's own conditions. The people of all ethnic groups throughout the country must strengthen their confidence in the theory, path and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and steadfastly and courageously forge ahead along the correct Chinese path. (Xi, 2014)

The Chinese path here essentially refers to Chinese modernity, which is different from the West, and "an alternative set of organizing principles for human affairs" (Li cited in Giridharadas, 2011, p.14) with regard to Chinese culture, its unique history, traditional intellectual philosophies, and its current social and economic structures. Giridharadas summarised four principles after interviews with a group of Chinese elites⁵³. The first two principles, in particular, provide a useful, yet critical insights into the "Chinese path". Firstly, liberal, individual right-based democracy is an organic result of the West, and countries like China does not have this process of development; hence, the country needs to progress in its own way under the CCP's leadership. Giridharadas counter-argues by illustrating the case of Taiwan which has moved into "democracy with no disaster" (ibid, p.15). Unlike the author's interpretation and the Chinese elites, this research sees individualistic culture as neither a pure phenomenon of the west, nor an alien concept in China, but rather as an element in Chinese culture. Chinese culture is, and always has been a culture of hybridity. When the Qin was in the process of unifying China, the state deployed intellectual thoughts of both Legalism and Confucianism from other states to win the war and subsequently unify the country. Moreover, since the introduction of market economy, as discussed earlier in the chapter, there is a growing sentiment of individual pursuit of happiness in Chinese society, especially among the younger generation. In this sense, the "Chinese path" is a part of national identity

⁵³ This group of Chinese elites included a newspaper editor (Jin Zhongwei), a venture capitalist (Eric X Li), an international relations scholar (Zhang Weiwei), and a social activist (Rao Jin). (Giridharadas, 2011, pp.11-13)

building. By rejecting what the nation is not, it attempts to develop a distinctive national belonging.

Secondly, the Chinese way is referred to by the Chinese intellectuals as “pragmatism over abstraction”. As appropriated by Giridharadas, Chinese intellectuals have claimed that “China lives by pragmatism a way of life and the West... is defined by a belief, in abstract, universally applicable truth.” (ibid) He pointed out that the philosophy of pragmatism is not a monopoly that can be claimed by either America or China, but he also recognises the Chinese culture is less keen on the universality of a single ideology. It is argued in this thesis that China’s path has been a chaotic, contradictory and inconsistent one. As discussed in the history chapter, China in the 20th century alone has gone from Feudalism, Republican, Communism to Socialism with Chinese characteristics. China’s national identity is not a fixed entity, but as the intellectuals put it, a “pragmatic” construct. In this sense, the Chinese Dream, like the Chinese path, is a mythic construct, and its contents are changing according to the rise and fall of the contingencies. This view coincides with the increasing scholarly perceptions of the American Dream as a myth. Myth here is understood as a set of beliefs that organize social relations. In particular, it serves to “sustain the relationship between the citizen, the broad culture, and social and political institutions.” (Archer, 2014, p.7) In other words, the Chinese Dream as a political myth serves to sustain the relationship between the state and the Chinese people. Its meanings are constantly subject to re-appropriations by political leaders, cultural communications and personal consumption.

Chinese Spirit

French theologian Ernest Renan in his famous address “What is a nation?” delivered at the Sorbonne in March 1882 states that nation is a soul, and a spiritual principle that is in the past, present and future. A nation, Renan insisted, was above all a state of mind and an expression of the collective will, drawing from the past a shared “store of memories”. Especially of “the sacrifices that have been made”; displaying in the present “the agreement, the desire to continue a life in common”; and in looking to the future, accepting and

recognising “the sacrifices the nation is prepared to make” again, as it has done before (Canadine, 2013, p.90). In the Chinese context, the Chinese spirit implicated in the Chinese Dream first refers to the “humiliation discourse”. The major defeat in the Opium War and the foreign invasions during the First and Second World Wars are the major resources for generating the national aspirations for the rejuvenation of the nation. This is then closely linked to the second aspect of “Chinese spirit”, which is patriotism. To start, when the Chinese Dream was first officially coined by Xi, during his speech after the exhibition, he stated that:

The yesterday of the Chinese nation can well be called “an impregnable pass like a wall of iron”, this nation of ours suffered very gravely after the beginning of the modern era, it made enormous sacrifices, such as been rarely seen in the history of the world. But because the Chinese people have never surrendered, and incessantly rose with force and spirit to resist, we grasped hold of our own fate in the end. We began the magnificent process of arranging the construction of our own country. This has fully displayed the magnificent national spirit with nationalism at the core.’ (Xi, 2012)

Wang Zheng argues that the discourse of national humiliation is an integral part of the construction of national identity and nation building for the different periods of China. (2012, p.2) This is evident in Chinese history books, as the two Opium Wars “are described as the first landmark events that directly led China to the subsequent ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’ society or ‘one hundred years of humiliation’ which did not come to an end until the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949”. (Huang, 2017) The younger generation in China has grown up with textbooks, films, TV dramas and visiting museums about the Opium Wars and foreign invasions, especially the Nanjing Massacre which happened during the Sino-Japanese wars. Among these popular cultural texts and practices, humiliation is a common and recurring theme, forming individual feelings of guilt, victimhood, and apology. With the spread of popular media and the growth of public opinion, such individual feelings have been nationalized: the guilt of nations (Callahan, 2004, pp.199-200).

However, the “humiliation discourse” needs to be dealt in a more careful way. Callahan, for example, analyses a picture book *A Record of National Humiliation*, and there were ten

historical moments of national humiliation recorded chronologically since the breakout of the First Opium War. Notably the Taiping Uprising was not included in this collection. This is peculiar because in terms of the degree of destruction and death toll, the Taiping Rebellion is one of the most severe national crises in the history of China. Callahan argues that the pivotal event “is not included in such books because it does not fit in with the moral narrative of national humiliation: foreign imperialism encouraged by domestic corruption” (Callahan, 2004, p.205). Moreover, as explained in *Never Forget National Humiliation: Recreating the Glory*, “the invasion of the imperialist powers and the domestic reactionary ruling class’s corrupt stupidity together created the roots of this catastrophe” (cited in Callahan, 2004, p.204). In this sense, while humiliation discourse is deployed by the CCP to form China’s national identity, it also needs to be deployed to assess the very political performance of the CCP.

The second aspect of the Chinese spirit is reflected in Xi’s speech in the First Session of the Twelfth NPC, March 17, 2013: “To realize the Chinese Dream, we must foster the Chinese spirit. This is the national spirit that has patriotism at its core.” (Xi, 2014e) Moreover,

China’s traditional culture is both extensive and profound, and studying and grasping the essence of its various ideas is very beneficial for establishing a correct world view, outlook on life and sense of values. The ancients said we should have the political aspiration of “being the first to worry about world’s troubles and the last to enjoy its pleasure”; the patriotic feelings of “not daring to ignore the country’s peril no matter how humble one’s position is” and “doing everything possible to save the country in its peril without regard to personal fortune or misfortune”.⁵⁴ (Xi, 2014e)

The post-Tiananmen era has led the CCP to rediscover the importance of patriotism, and more importantly, a patriotic spirit that supports the CCP. This is because the patriotism expressed during the demonstrations of Tiananmen Square by the 5000 students was one that is pro-liberal democracy. In other words, it was a liberal nationalism and a disbelief in the official Communist ideology that were being expressed, which called “explicitly for the adoption of liberal democratic ideals as the best means for promoting China’s renewal” (Zhao, 2005, p.133). Liberal nationalism, according to Zhao, was introduced in the early twentieth century

⁵⁴ Excerpt from a speech at the celebration Assembly of the 80th Anniversary of the Central Party School and the Opening Ceremony of Its 2013 Spring Semester, March 1, 2013.

as a means to improve China through political and social reforms (ibid). The ideas of science and democracy were particularly valued by many of the Chinese intellectuals, such as Hu Shi. Liberal nationalism defines the nation as a group of citizens who have a duty to support and defend the rights of their state in the world of nation-states, but also to pursue individual freedom (ibid). In this sense, the Chinese Communist Party finds itself needing to reconstruct a patriotic national identity that supports the legitimacy of the state.

Within this context and historic conditions, CCP leaders began to place emphasis on the party's role as the paramount patriotic force and guardian of national pride in order to find a new basis of legitimacy to bolster faith in a system in trouble and hold the country together during a period of rapid and turbulent transformation (Zhao, 1998, p.289). Although the state did not openly promote this under the title of nationalism or national identity, it was carried out under the official education and promotion of “爱国” (this means loving the nation- state). With the first official documents issued by the CCP on patriotic education in 1991, and in August 1994, the central propaganda department promulgated “Outline of the implementation of Patriotism Education”. In May 1995, the Central Propaganda Department, the State Education Commission, the Ministry of Culture, the Press and Publication Administration, together with the Communist Youth League Central Committee, issued the “Circular on Recommending 100 Patriotic Education Books to Primary and Secondary Schools nationwide”. Thus, reading textbooks, watching films and singing songs with patriotic themes became an important means to educate the younger generation in China. For instance, in Xi's speech, many quotes derived from the classical Chinese literature were in the textbooks in the primary and secondary schools. Moreover, in Beijing, as the capital and the first place to carry out the policy, by May 1994 more than 95% of primary and middle school students were organized to watch the patriotic films recommended by the State Education Commission (Zhao, 1998, p. 292). The central message promoted by the “Patriotism Education Campaign” is specific, the essential idea is to require the students to “love the socialist system and road chosen by all nationalities in China under the leadership of the Communist Party”⁵⁵. In this sense, patriotic texts derived from traditional Chinese literature were deployed to support the state's agenda. Or in Mao Zedong's own words: the past was used to support the present.

⁵⁵ On the National Day in 1996, *People's Daily* featured an article and clarified what patriotism is.

The Multi-ethnic, the Cross-strait and the Greater China

To trace the political discourses of Xi's Chinese Dream, there is an overall underlying principle of establishing connections beyond the mainland borders. Within the P.R.C, China is a multi-ethnic country, stressing "the strength of the great unity among the people of all ethnic groups"⁵⁶. Moreover, this unity includes the cross-strait relations, namely the ones between mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. It recognises that relationships have had "ups and downs", but because "compatriots on both sides of the straits are members of the Chinese nation, and these natural blood ties cannot be broken by any force", hence "it is finally possible to break the long-stranding estrangement and begin exchanges and cooperation."⁵⁷ These two features of the Chinese Dream then led to the construction of the "Greater China". This essentially means that people of Chinese ethnicity across the globe share "descent within a single, homogenous cultural bloc" (Taylor cited by Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 13). In other words, this discourse places the CCP led China mainland in the centre of the Greater China, while reaching out for overseas Chinese through a common civilizational and traditional cultural identification.

On the one hand, politically speaking, there has long been a gap between the sense of harmony promoted by the Chinese Dream and the reality. Domestically, political separatist movements like the Tibetan independence movement have posed a serious threat to the state's strong mission of a "unified" China. It is argued by Zhao (2005, p.133) that ethnic nationalism has remained alive among ethnic minorities on China's frontiers. And in terms of cross-straits relations, for example, it is evident that Hong Kong has had a problematic identification with the P.R.C since its return in 1997. After being a colony of British Empire for a century as a result of the Opium War, the mentality of the local people and the levels of development in the political, social and economic realms have created a cultural gap between mainland China and Hong Kong. Moreover, Ma (2015, p.40) argues that Hong Kong saw a rise in strong "anti-China" sentiments, and these sentiments reached a peak during the 2012

⁵⁶ Excerpts from a speech at the First Session of the Twelfth NPC, March 17, 2013.

⁵⁷ Excerpts from a discussion with Lien Chan, honorary chairman of the Kuomintang, and his delegation, February 25, 2013.

Legislative Council Election, contributing to a strong showing of prodemocracy candidates who toed a strong anti-China line. Subsequently, the election led to further political polarization and a more difficult period of relations between mainland China and Hong Kong (ibid). Ma's study shows that trust in central government and identification as a Chinese remained at a low level in 2014 in Hong Kong (2015, p.64). In other words, Xi's vision remained highly problematic in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, culturally speaking, there is a growing cultural exchange through market integration among the two special administrative regions (Hong Kong, Macau), Taiwan, and Oversea Chinese diaspora. Although the idea of Greater China has been criticised for blurring significant social and political differences between different geographic contexts, Gorfinkel argues that such imagining is supported by the growing economic strength of P.R. of China. Particularly, it reflects how China mainland is becoming an increasingly significant player in the trans-border flow of Chinese popular culture (Gorfinkel, 2017, p.13). In 2001, Singaporean cultural studies academic Chua Beng Huat first coined the phrase 'pop culture China' in the acknowledgement of the growing strength of Chinese popular cultural industry in Asia (Tay, 2009, p.107). While Chuat's model is a "geographically multi-noded and decentred site in which Mandarin does not occupy a privileged official spot", Tay counter-argues that the size of the Chinese mainland market provides the cultural, economic and political bedrock on which the greater Chinese market depends (Tay, 2009, p.108). In this sense, popular culture sites are becoming critical resources for the purposes of nation building, as will be further discussed in the case studies.

China as a Global Power

The last feature proposed by the Chinese Dream considers China as a growing power and its position in the international community. It has the clear intention of depicting the China Dream as a dream of peaceful development, cooperation and mutual benefit:

Our path of peaceful development was hard won. On the basis of long experience, we... set forth and pursued an independent foreign policy of peace, made the solemn commitment to the world never to seek hegemony or engage in expansion and stressed that China will always be a staunch force

safeguarding world peace.⁵⁸ China's development is inseparable from the world, and the world's development also needs China...It brings development opportunities and not a threat to Asia and the world.⁵⁹ (Xi, 2014h)

Since Xi advanced to the central leadership, he has initiated a series of reforms and national strategic plans in the economic, cultural and political realm. Among those, internationally, 'One Belt One Road' consists of two international trade and development initiatives: "The Silk Road Economic Belt" and the 'Twentieth-first Century Maritime Silk Road'. The policies represent "an ambitious spatial expansion of Chinese state capitalism, driven by an excess of industrial production capacity, as well as by emerging financial capital interests" (Tsui, Wong, Chi & Tiejun, 2017, p.36). Moreover, in 2015, the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was established. According to the official website, AIIB is a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia and beyond. It has a current membership of 80 countries, including the United Kingdom, but notably not the United States and Japan. The China-led investment bank and the "one belt one road" project are complementary, and depicted as part of the "peaceful development" proposed by the state government. Domestically, Chinese Dream, anti-corruption campaign and targeted measures for poverty alleviation⁶⁰ are three of the key policies offered by Xi's administration.

As discussed earlier, the English translations of 中国梦 between "the Chinese Dream" and "the China Dream" is a political issue. Callahan speculates the reasons behind the state's choice of "Chinese" over "China" is because the state worries that the "China dream" would suggest China to be a threatening militarist state, whereas the "Chinese Dream" instead would promote a less threatening notion of Chinese aspirations. (Callahan, 2015, p.224) However, the softer version of the Chinese Dream is at the same time being undermined by its promotion of patriotism. On the one hand, China's leadership "knows that China's economic success depends heavily on integration with the outside world, particularly on cooperative relations with advanced Western countries" (Zhao, 2005, p.139). On the other

⁵⁸ Excerpts from a speech at the Third Group Study Session of the Political Bureau of the Eighteenth CPC Central Committee, January 28, 2013.

⁵⁹ Excerpts from the speech "Hand in Hand Building a China-ASEAN community of Shared Destiny", to the Indonesia Parliament, October 3, 2013.

⁶⁰ This policy is part of the long standing government's mission of "building a moderately prosperous society".

hand, the effective patriotic education has generated a sense of nationalism. There were evident criticisms and protests against the state for being too soft in response to provocations coming from countries such as the United States and Japan. For example, there were major anti-Japan protests in China in 2012. It is reported that tens of thousands of Chinese people across 85 cities took to the street to denounce Japan's purchase of a disputed chain of uninhabited islands in the South China Sea (Lim, 2012). The messages displayed in the protests were often very aggressive. Some directly declare war (Taylor, 2012) (see figure 6). In this sense, the Chinese Dream is a construction with contradictory outcomes. It is ambitious in its attempt to balance the relationships between the state, Chinese people and the international communities. It will continue to define and redefine its identity as a global power in the world.



Figure 6: Chinese demonstrators clash with policemen at barricades during an anti-Japanese protest outside the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, on Saturday, September 15, 2012. The message on the banner: “Declare war with Japan. I will donate 10,000 RMB. Protect Diaoyu Island. I am a Chinese.”

3. Conclusion: the Chinese Dream as Means of Nation Building

This chapter has studied the context of the Chinese Dream in relation to the introduction of market economy to China since the Open and Reform in the 1980s. The economic and political reform in the Chinese society resulting in cultural change with growing individualism among the younger generation. Despite the effort of the state to offer a grand vision of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, a closer look at the Chinese Dream suggests that just like the American Dream, it promotes diverse, and often contradictory values. While the American Dream has experienced crisis because of the financial crisis and income disparity, it is argued by many scholars that the national aspiration remained attractive because of American popular culture. Callahan also suggests that political discourses by Chinese leaders and popular culture are the two main resources for sustaining the Chinese Dream. Notably the contents of the Chinese Dream used in this chapter are derived from a book designed for the Party members to study Xi's thoughts. However, Xi's vision was not only available in the print media; most of these speeches are either addressed on television or reported as news and broadcasted on the state channel: the China Central Television (CCTV). Notably, all the county level local television stations in China are required by NRTA⁶¹ to relay CCTV's prime time news. In other words, the broadcasting mission of the prime-time news is to reach as vast and diverse Chinese people as possible. The daily transmission of CCTV's national news as a political task has become the main means to shape public discourse, and "correctly guide public opinion" (Zhang, 2007).

The monopoly of the prime-time news broadcasting in China is consequently often perceived as propaganda. David Welch defined propaganda as the dissemination of ideas intended to convince people to think and act in a particular way.⁶² He further clarifies the uses of the term by indicating two misconceptions of propaganda. While propaganda does serve to persuade people, more often than not, "propaganda is concerned with reinforcing existing

⁶¹ NRTA (2018-) refers to National Radio and Television Administration, which is a direct agency of the Ministry P.R of China. It is formerly known as the SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, 1998-2013), and SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television 2013-2018)

⁶² Derived from an interview by the British Library. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVGLCgqptI> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

trends and beliefs; to sharpen and focus them” (2015, p.2). A second misconception is “the entirely erroneous conviction that propaganda consists only of lies and falsehood.” (ibid) With the developments of the means of communication, the Chinese Dream as communicated by Xi’s presence on Television news, or as a promotional video, each takes a different form of communication. The quality of these communication methods decides the effects of the message. The next chapter will further examine these arguments with specific media examples.

Chapter Five

From Propaganda to Publicity

How the state promotes China's national identity through media communication

In chapter four, the thesis looked at the Chinese Dream in the context of the changing political and cultural conditions in the Chinese society. In Particular, it has analysed the Chinese Dream in relation to the American Dream. It contests the simple dichotomy between the two constructions as individualism versus collectivism. On the one hand, it suggests that the American Dream was a national ambition for foreign expansion at the turn of the 20th century, and gradually and constantly reproduced according to the changing conditions. For example, President Obama, in his speech to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, offered a new version of the American Dream by stressing the balance between the individualist and communal values. (Rowland & Jones, cited in Zhong & Zhang, 2016, p.55) On the other hand, the Chinese Dream is articulated by the leader and the Chinese intellectuals as a dream of the people to rejuvenate the country, but a closer examination shows that it is a dynamic relationship among the foreign influences (America in particular), the state and the Chinese people. In other words, the Chinese dream is a complex, conflictual and sometimes reactionary construction of what the nation is about. Similar to the American Dream, its meanings are often redefined by the political leaders to “promote their political goals” and deal with national problems (Moore & Ragsdale cited in Zhong & Zhang, *ibid*).

Furthermore, despite the growing discontent of the American Dream after the 2008 financial crisis, the national ethos advocating personal freedom and equality remained a powerful vision. Many suggest that one of the reasons for the resilience of the American Dream is the global success of American popular culture. In other words, American commercial cultural products have been one of the main fields to sustain the validity of the vision. In the Chinese context however, the Chinese Dream as a top-down ideological construction of China's national identity has defined its meanings on the path of the country's distinctive modernization process, namely a path that has not transited from communism to the democracy defined by the Western experiences. Despite grave moments of crisis such as the Tiananmen Square Incident, this path of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been

resilient too, according to political minority in the international community. Zhao Yuezhi, among the many scholars that studied Chinese communication system, has argued that the Party's Central Propaganda Department is crucial in sustaining the party's dominance in the area of ideology and culture. (Zhao, 2008, p.24; see also Edney, 2012; Keane, 2015; Cai, 2016; Callahan, 2017; Klmes & Marinelli, 2018; Sun, 2019;) More importantly, the core responsibility of the mainstream propaganda, includes verifying the legality and effectiveness of the CCP's rule and its intimate bond with the well-being of the Chinese people (Cai, 2016, p.3).

This chapter continues to explore the representations of China's national identity in the case of the Chinese Dream. Especially, it seeks to present the changes in the state propaganda, how it has adapted to new ways to communicate political messages with the ever-changing conditions of "the audience". Hence this chapter will first offer a brief review of the so-called Chinese propaganda system in relation to the construction of China's national identity. It will then examine the publicity campaign launched by the State Council Information Office in 2011, and one of its recent instalments of the series called *China Enters New Era*. These examples do not seek to present an overall review of the historical developments of the Chinese communication systems. Rather, they constitute an attempts to track changes in the means of communication and the role played by communication in the political constructions of China's national identities.

1. Chinese Propaganda system and National Identity

The first section of this chapter aims to provide a contextual background for the two case studies. It will first offer a brief overview of the Chinese propaganda system, its scope and its adaptiveness facing changing circumstances in technological political, economic and cultural developments. It will then examine each propagandistic period with reference to a specific political myth put forward by the Chinese leaders since Mao Zedong. By concluding the section with a focus on Xi's approach to propaganda, it is here argued that the Chinese Dream is the popularized version of China's national identity, designed to better communicate with the audience, both domestically and internationally.

Chinese Propaganda System

To echo the definition of propaganda discussed by David Welch, the concept not only refers to the art of persuasion, which is often perceived as political manipulation, it also foregrounds the pre-existing beliefs in a given society. Welch recognises that the term is often associated with an irrational human instinct, manifest in the extreme forms of nationalism and mobilised for antagonistic situations like wars. However, he also points out that such an approach ignores “the basic fact that propaganda is ethnically neutral- it may be good or bad” (Welch, 2015, p.2). Moreover, “in any body politic, propaganda is not, as is often supposed, a malignant growth, but is an essential part of the whole political process.” (ibid) This is the case in China. Chinese communication scholars like Zhao Yuezhi (2008) and Zhang Xiaoling (2011) argue that the Chinese propaganda system has been an integral part of the Chinese Communist Party. Zhang further elaborates that P.R.C’s approach to media and communication is based on the Marxist theory that media functions as an ideological state apparatus; hence its primary responsibility is to reflect the regime’ point of view on ideological issues for social mobilisation (Zhang, 2011, p.32).

Since the founding of People’s Republic of China, the Propaganda Department of CCP Central Committee (CCPPD)⁶³ is known internationally for its ability to control the flow of information, especially during the era of Mao. The scope of propaganda oversight up until 1991 includes newspaper office, radio stations, television stations, publishing houses, magazines, and other news and media departments; universities, middle schools, primary schools, and other vocational education, specialized education, cadre training, and other educational organs; musical troupes, theatrical troupes, film production studios, film theatres, drama theatres, clubs, and other cultural organs, literature and art troupes, and cultural amusement parks; cultural palaces, libraries, remembrance halls, exhibition halls, museums, and other cultural

⁶³ The official state’s English translation of 中共中央宣传部 is the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. (<http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/206972/206981/8223996.html>) The difference being of between “propaganda” and “publicity”. Despite the direct translation of 宣传 (xuanchuan) means “propagate political information/messages”, the official choice of the word “publicity” over “propaganda” shows that the Party is fully aware the international perception of the institution, and its attempt of managing its perception in the international community. [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

facilities and commemoration exhibition facilities.⁶⁴ The encompassing scale often leads to the single belief that the media in China is all about control by the Party. Zhang however contests such perception as over-simplified. He argues that it ignores the challenges coming from the rapid development of the media as well as social forces. Moreover, media industry has also transformed from being a mouthpiece of the Party-state into an entity that performs multiple functions. Therefore, given the rapid changes of the means of media communications, “the Party-state is pressurised to adjust and refine its institutions and methods of governance in order to stay in power with legitimacy (Zhang, 2011, p.10). In this sense, while the primary functions of CCPPD remained the same, namely to generate people’s identification with the nation-state, it has changed, adapted, diversified in accordance to the new conditions in politics, technology, economy and culture. For example, *People’s Daily* as the mouthpiece of the Party-state, has actively adapted its contents to suit different new media platforms such as Weibo, Wechat and Douyin (Tik Tok).

As discussed in chapter one, Douyin is one of the most popular short video social networking apps in China, with 150 million active users daily by August 2018 since its launch in September 2016.⁶⁵ The daily users quickly climbed to 250 million, with 500 million monthly users according to the official ‘2018 Big Data Report’ provided by Douyin.⁶⁶ Since the *People’s Daily* opened an account on the platform, its followers have quickly risen from 7.93 million by the end of 2018 to 34.398 million by July, 2019. *People’s Daily* has generated 350 million users across all new media platforms by May 2018,⁶⁷ showing clear intentions and actions of adapting to the continuing developments in the mobile internet.

⁶⁴ 中国共产党建设大字典 1921-1991 (An Encyclopedia on the Building of the CCP) cited by Shambaugh (2007, pp.27-28)

⁶⁵ TikTok launched “Government Affairs Media Platform Growth Plan”, People.cn (Available from <http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0904/c40699-30271586.html>) [Last accessed: 7 August 2019]

⁶⁶ ‘Douyin Big Data Report in 2018’. (Available from <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/56864388>) [Last accessed: 7 August, 2019]

⁶⁷ ‘The total number of new media users of *People’s Daily* have broken 350 million’, People.cn (Available from: <http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0513/c40606-29984741.html>) [Last accessed: 7 August 2019]

From Propaganda to Publicity: Re-articulate Official Discourses

Zhao argues that “China’s elaborate regime of party-state power in public communication has few parallels in the contemporary world. What is apparent is the party’s determination to sustain this regime..., its ability to constantly revamp and perfect this regime, and its progressive amplification and modernization since the early 1990s” (Zhao, 2008, p.61). Published in 2008, Zhao in *Communication in China* points out that, counter to some wishful thinkers for a more liberal regime, there has been a growing intensification of rearticulating official discourses on Socialism under President Hu Jintao’s leadership. (ibid) As the successor of Hu, Xi Jinping continues with the ideological “rearticulation”, to borrow the term from Zhao, and released the newly widespread slogan of the Chinese Dream in 2012. Zheng Wang argues that the Chinese Dream is actually not new. Political leaders since modern times have used the national rejuvenation narrative to “bolster their own legitimacy, promote their own interests, encourage a nationalistic spirit, and mobilize mass support for social change.” (Wang, 2014, p.11) For example, while Mao is often considered to be the first to deploy national rejuvenation narrative, as represented in the slogan as “Catching up with Britain and surpass American”(赶英超美), the urgency of national rejuvenation was expressed in *The Strategy for Nation Building (1917-1920)* (《建国方略》) by Sun Yat-Sen, the founding father of the Republic of China in 1912. In the preface of the book, he stated that: “With my aspiration and years of research, I have written a strategic plan for building our nation. By executing the plan, I hope China will soon become a thriving and prosperous place.”⁶⁸

Furthermore, for Zhong and Zhang, since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the CCP has had a long history of using political myths in its propaganda and crystallized into a myriad of political slogans. (2016, p.55) They categorised Chinese propaganda into four periods: first, from the founding of P.R.C 1949 to the death of Mao 1976: “under Mao’s rule, China’s propaganda was characterised by the revolutionary themes of anti-imperialism, anticolonialism, antirevisionism, and socialist construction. (Zhang cited by Zhong & Zhang,

⁶⁸ Translated from the text: “欲以予生平之抱负与积年研究之所得，定为建国计划，举而行之，以冀一跃而登中国于富强隆盛之地焉。” (Sun, 1927)

2016) Qin Lei suggests that in Mao's era, the media were primarily understood as a tool for propaganda to mobilize the masses for revolution. For Mao, the success formula for each revolution is "30 per cent battling and 70 per cent propaganda work". (Qin, 2019, p.85) Second period refers to from 1976 to 2003, namely the Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin's Era. Whereas Deng directed the country into economic pragmatism with "Open and Reform" policy in 1980s, Jiang put forward "Three Represents" in 2000 which refers to the CCP representing the development trends of advanced productive forces, the orientations of an advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people of China⁶⁹. Following Mao's understanding of audience as objects of "education", Deng's government placed the propaganda into the framework of "Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction" (社会主义精神文明建设) which supports his path of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". He referred to the people working in the newspaper as "the warriors on the battlegrounds of thought" and likened them to "the engineers of the human soul" (Qin, 2019, p. 85). Jiang's media policy on the one hand, still follows a "one-directional flow of information" (ibid), but there is a gradual changing perspective of media which prepared the cultural system reform initiated in 2003. For Jiang, media and culture are not only deployed for political interests, but also as part of the important economic pursuit of the country's continuous modernization.

The third period consisting from 2003 to 2012, when Hu Jintao was the President of the country. Hu's government is what Brown and Berzina-Cerenkova called technocratic leadership based on the main members of the Politburo Standing Committee all having studied "various aspects of engineering or hard science". (2018, p.326) His "political myth" is characterised by "Scientific Outlook on Development" and "Harmonious Society" with a strong emphasis on the use of "soft power". (Wang cited by Zhong and Zhang, 2016, p.55) To some extent, Hu's administration had downplayed the media's propaganda function, but focused more on the softer, and more effective way to "channel public opinion and social situations, to guide hot topics of society, to dredge public emotion, and to improve media

⁶⁹ Derived from "What is Three Represents CPC theory", China.org.cn (Available from:<http://www.china.org.cn/english/zhuanti/3represents/68735.htm>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

supervision” (Hu cited by Qin, 2019, p.85). Edney argues that this adjustment in the Chinese propaganda system showcased the CCP’s desire to increase China’s “Discourse power” and counter the “discourse hegemony” of the West. (2012, p.905) In other words, the CCP Propaganda Department has strategically re-adapted itself to cover both the domestic propaganda work and international publicity. For example, Hu used the term “soft power” in relation to Chinese culture in the official address to the CCP’s 17th National Congress in the context of the CCP’s socialist path:

In the current period, culture is becoming an ever more important source of national cohesion and creativity and an ever more important component of comprehensive national power competition... we should maintain the progressive direction of socialist advanced culture, raise a new high point in the building of socialist culture, increase the country’s cultural soft power, arouse all of the people’s cultural creativity vitality... (Hu cited by Edney, 2012, p.908)

Edney correctly places the discourse of Chinese “cultural soft power” (文化软实力) in the framework of nation building. (2012, p.907) This is because since the cultural system reform in 2003, along with the continuous development in the media technology, cross country mobility, and the dominant popularity of foreign cultural products in China, have weakened the CCP’s control of media content. The CCPPD therefore has to adapt its system to the changing circumstances in order to maintain its dominant position in ideology and culture. More importantly, it is required to boost the attractiveness of China’s national image using marketing techniques and methods for both the international and domestic audiences. For instance, the State Council Information Office⁷⁰ launched a key project entitled “China’s National Image Promotional Film” (中国国家形象宣传片) in 2010. According to the *China Daily*⁷¹, the project was assigned to the Shanghai Lowe & Partners advertising company which indicates the state’s efforts to diversify its means to better communicate with the public. The

⁷⁰ The State Council Information Office (SCIO) is the administration office under China’s state council. According to the main official website, the major function of SCIO is to propel domestic media further along the path of introducing China to the international community, including China’s Domestic and foreign policies, the development of the Chinese economy and society, as well as China’s history, technology, education and culture. (Available from: <http://english.scio.gov.cn/aboutscio/index.htm>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020] Notably, the SCIO is also part of the CCPPD, as the current head of the SCIO is also the deputy director of the CCPPD.

⁷¹ ‘National Publicity Film to Boost Chinese Image’. *China Daily*. 30 July 2010. (Available from: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/30/content_11070013.htm) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

upcoming case study will explore further to the changes of top-down communication in relation to China's national identity building.

Last but not least, the fourth period is Xi Jinping's era (2012-) is characterised by the all-encompassing political construction of the Chinese Dream. As discussed in chapter 4, the Chinese Dream re-appropriates the aforementioned "political myths", including the national rejuvenation narratives, Open and Reform, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the three represents, the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction, the Harmonious society, and the peaceful rise. The Chinese Dream is the popularized version of Chinese official discourses, designed to be more attractive, emotionally resonant, and hopefully meet less-resistance in the international market. The following section continues to explore the changing nature of the Chinese Dream campaign.

Popularizing China's National Identity and the Changing Views of Chinese Audiences

According to Zhong and Zhang, the Chinese Dream campaign has an explicit international publicity purpose as well as a large-scale top down domestic propaganda agenda. (2016, pp.56-57) As the core political myth put forward by Xi's administration, the Chinese Dream "has continuously used Chinese national identities or nationalism as a primary guiding myth to construct its propaganda discourse (Zheng cited by Zhen, 2017, p.114). Notably, as it directly references the American Dream, the Chinese Dream as an official propaganda rhetoric has many more opportunities to be embedded in the popular media texts compared to the previous political myths. For example, Callahan examined a Chinese Television singing contest the "Voice of the China Dream"⁷² in comparison to the slogan⁷³ spelled out on the deck of China's first aircraft carrier and argues that the Chinese Dream "has been recruited into an on-going conversation about Chinese values, and about who belongs in the Chinese nation" (Callahan, 2017, pp.254-255). With a similar line of thinking, Gil Hizi also chooses a

⁷² The "Voice of the China Dream" (2013-2014) is a reality TV programme whose format is based on the British music contest "Pop Idol". Despite the Chinese version being called "Chinese Idol", the translation of "Chinese Idol" is "中国梦之声, which means the voice of the China Dream.

⁷³ "The China Dream is Strong Military Dream" (中国梦 强军梦)

new genre of reality TV show- public speaking show “Super Speaker” (超级演说家) (2013) and examines the dynamic/tension between the individual pursuit and nationalism. Hizi suggests that Chinese public-speaking shows “celebrate a national identity while promoting a self-responsible, self-realizing citizenship, that assists in stabilizing the political system. These shows interpret and reproduce the China Dream, constituting links between the individuals’ ‘dreams’ and the national one” (2019, p.46). Yanhong Zhu, meanwhile, examines films such as *American Dreams in China* (2013) and argues that films like these fit into the CCP’s official rhetoric to “rebut the American image of the uncivilized and threatening China and to replace the *false* American Dream with the *real* Chinese Dream” (2017, p.765).

These popular media texts and practices of the Chinese Dream suggests the party-state’s changing views of the Chinese audiences. After examining the animated political cartoons from when Xi took office to 2017, Qin Lei argues that there is an evident change in perspectives on Chinese audiences from “target audience of propaganda” to guided audience, and then to central players in popularizing the Party. (2018, p.73) This approach sees the public as no longer a “passive target for mobilization, nor as the target for social development through education. Instead, it has been realized that the online public now have unprecedented opportunities to air their opinions, so that netizens need to be attracted to the Party, not dictated to by it” (ibid, 87).

Xi’s media policy has been widely regarded as increasingly tightening control over mediated culture and ideology in comparison to Hu Jintao. At the same time, this control is characterised by the deliberate deployments of the means and techniques of popular culture text and practices. As in Xi Jinping’s book *The Governance of China*, he stated that:

The key to success lies in raising the quality and level of our publicity and theoretical work. We should have the proper timing, tempo and efficiency, make this work more attractive and influential, inform the people about what they love to hear, read and watch, and let positive publicity play its role in encouraging and inspiring the people.

...As an old Chinese saying goes: “ A wise man changes his way as circumstances change; a knowledgeable person alters his means as times evolve.” As for publicity and theoretical work today, we should pay close attention to innovation in the fields of ideas, methodologies and grassroots work, and move forward with new ideas to tackle difficulties, with emphasis on work in local communities. We should step up cultural reforms, push forward the culture industry, and build China into a country with a strong socialist culture. (2014i)

In this sense, China's national identity under Xi's leadership is continuously playing a vital role in generating national cohesion and mobilizing for collective cooperation under the CCP's guidance. Similar to his predecessors, Xi sees propaganda as an integral part of the CCP. While the meaning of propaganda and its role in the CCP remained the same, the Chinese propaganda system has shown a continuous effort to adapt and diversify its means to better communicate with the Chinese people. Moreover, since Hu Jintao, the Chinese propaganda system has gradually placed importance on increasing "Chinese soft power". As distinct from Nye's original definition, the Chinese soft power is deployed for nation building as well as international diplomacy. Xi carries on with this approach, and takes the political construction of China's national identity to the next level. As an example of Chinese reality TV shows and films discussed above suggest, the rhetoric of the Chinese Dream is much easier to introduce into the field of popular culture. Its meanings are discussed, circulated and reproduced, hence sustaining its vitality in the daily mediated lives of the Chinese people. This seems to agree with Edensor's argument that national identity increasingly depends on popular culture and everydayness to be reproduced and redistributed. The following two case studies set out to examine how the state constructs national identity through media communication, and how it deploys popular culture and techniques in order to adapt to the changing conditions in the Chinese society in the hope of generating people's identification with the nation-state.

2. Promoting China's Image: A Case Study of *China Steps into New Era* (2017)

At the 19th People's Congress held between 18th and 24th October 2017, Xi Jinping delivered a three hours and 23 minutes opening speech entitled "Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era" at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During the speech, he proclaimed that "socialism with Chinese characteristics has crossed the threshold into a new era, and this is a new historic juncture in China's development." Three days later, on 21st October, the three-minute film *China Steps into New Era* was released on the *People's Daily* Weibo platform. (See figure 7) Up till now, the film on the Weibo platform has been

viewed more than 18 million times, with around 52 thousand likes, 17 thousand reposts and 4,398 posted comments. Notably, because the comments are selected by the *People's Daily* Weibo account, they are all positive. As figure 8 shows, the top ten most liked comments are 1: "Come on, China!"; 2: "Da Da's⁷⁴ last sentence: "Continue to strive" [hand clapping emoji]"; 3: "The Chinese Dream is the dream of the Chinese nation. It is also the dream of every Chinese. Chinese people living in the great motherland shares equal opportunities to shine, to realize our dreams and enjoy opportunity to grow and progress with the motherland."; 4: "I cried after watching the film, my motherland, my home."; 5: "I could almost feel that every muscle of the motherland is working hard!"; 6: "China [PRC flag emoji][heart emoji]"; 7: "I watched the film in the early morning and cried [laughing cry emoji] [laughing cry emoji] I hope the motherland is getting better and better, and more and more powerful! [thumbs up emoji][thumbs up emoji][thumbs up emoji]"; 8: "The Chinese Dream My dream [PRC flag emoji]"; 9: "My dream is to make the Chairman no longer concerned about me [allowing sadness emoji] [allowing sadness emoji] [allowing sadness emoji]; 10: "Salute! [PRC flag emoji]. Reading these highly selective comments would suggest the film aroused strong emotional and patriotic feelings among the Chinese viewers, but a closer examination is required to further understand the film and its contextual meanings.

⁷⁴ Da Da in Chinese northern dialect means uncle, whom is often older than your father. "Xi Da Da" is a popular netizen term that using an endearing way to refer to the President Xi Jinping.



Figure 7: A Screenshot of the People’s Daily’s Weibo Page of the publicity film *China Enters New Era*.



Figure 8: A screenshot of the top ten selected comments on the post.

Background

China Enters New Era is part of a publicity series called 'China's National Image Promotional Film' which was officially launched by the State Council Information Office (SCIO) in 2011. Back in July 2010, *China Daily* reported on the details of the project as the first national publicity film following the country hosting the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Unlike the previous propaganda films, this project was assigned to a commercial advertising company in Shanghai to produce the content. The public diplomacy campaign is a key project which sets out to shape the image of China as a country of prosperity, development, talent and harmony. According to the New York Times (Barron, 2011), The 60-second version of the film was released on a series of Billboard size screens on Times Square in January 2011, which coincides with President Hu Jintao's state visit to America. From January 17 to February 14, 2011, the trailer was scrolled 15 times per hour for a total of 8,400 plays (Cao & Xia, 2015, p. 100). Moreover, the film is a display of around 60 distinguished Chinese figures in different areas of professions in an attempt to demonstrate the country's modern achievements. (See figure 9) There are thirteen different categories represented in the film, these being: Stunning Chinese Beauty; Inspiring Chinese Bravery; Award-Winning Chinese Talent; Enchanting Chinese Art; Leading-Edge Chinese Agriculture; Influential Chinese Wealth; Extraordinary Chinese People; Thrilling Chinese Athletics; Thought-Provoking Chinese Scholarship; Aesthetic Chinese Design; Trend-Setting Chinese Supermodels; Captivating Chinese Dialogue; Chinese Space Travel. And the commercial concluded with a title "Chinese Friendship".

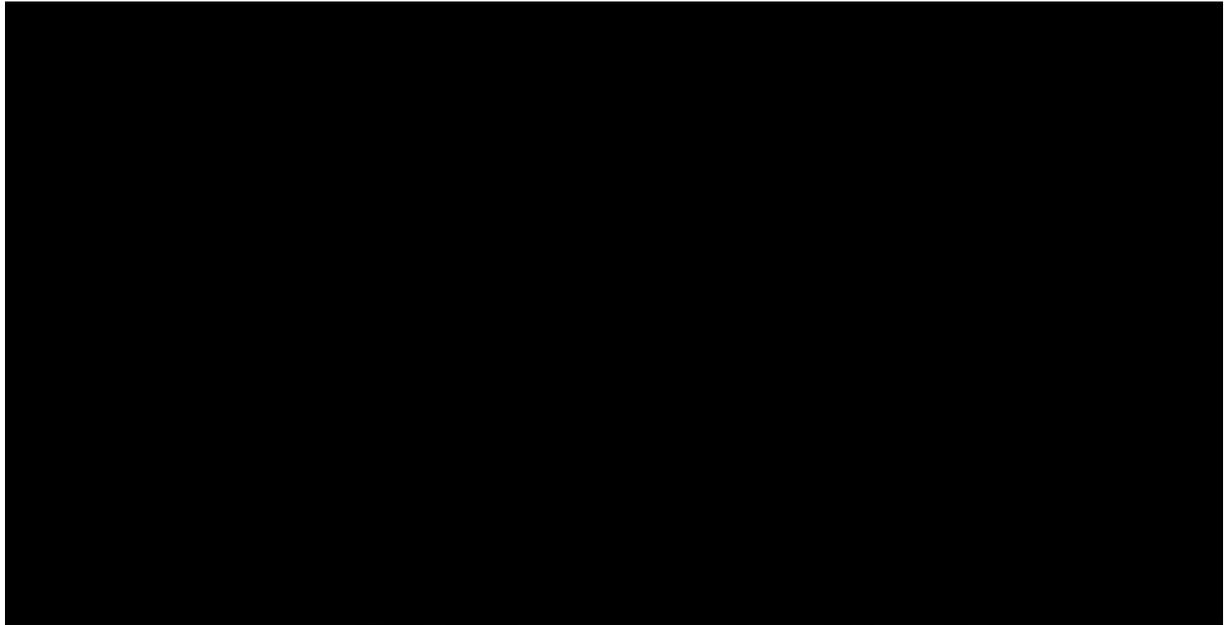


Figure 9: The opening frame of the Commercial. From the left to right: Super model Zhang ZiLin, actress Zhou Xun, dancer and choreographer Yang LiPing, actress Fan BingBing, and international film star Zhang ZiYi.

Prior to the release of the film, there were many positive expectations of the film. For instance Li Weining, a researcher at the Communication University of China, thought that the film indicated that China was becoming more confident in demonstrating its “soft power”, competing for the international discourse power, and the arrival of the era of the Chinese national public relations.⁷⁵ However, Cao and Xia argue that the national publicity campaign did not meet the anticipated effect that it set out to achieve. Moreover, after the quantitative analysis designed to measure the actual effects of the film, Cao and Xia found that “the number of U.S. mainstream media reports was less than expected and their evaluations were quite negative; the participation of American people was low and the extent of the favourability both of the publicity film and China was not high; and the launch of the publicity film did not trigger a travel boom to China.” (Cao & Xia, 2015, p.98)

In this sense, the publicity campaign was not successful in promoting the imagined identity of China constructed in the film. There is an evident gap between the rather static

⁷⁵ Ifeng.com. Available from: http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2010_08/05/1892831_0.shtml [last accessed: 21 August 2019]

representations of China's modern accomplishments and the reality. Moreover, there was no underlying story line connecting these figures presented on the screen. They were featured like window display models, seemingly creating a distance from the viewers rather than generating favourable identification. Furthermore, if the campaign was targeted at the international audiences, especially in the U.S, this film shows lack of the understanding of the market. As discussed in chapter 4, America's identity is largely sustained by its popular cultural products, in which national values, individual pursuit and social achievements are promoted in a more subtle and identifiable way, whereas China's national publicity campaign does little to win over its audiences. In other words, the first film launched by the SCIO failed to communicate with the targeted audience in the language of widely accepted American popular culture.

The following section now turns to *China Enters New Era*, which is the later instalment of the "China's National Image Promotion" campaign six years apart from the first one. This section offers a detailed textual analysis with regards to the filmic techniques of the film and concludes with a discussion.

Analysis

The film is structured into three parts. The first part introduces seven representative protagonists of the Chinese people, including an American CEO who was working in China. The second part shows all seven protagonists' own interpretations of the Chinese Dream. And the third part of the film concludes with a footage of Xi' speech proclaiming China has stepped into a new era.

Part One: Introducing the Seven Heroes of the Chinese Dream

The first part of the film introduces the seven carefully chosen people: a six year old girl from Tibet (figure 10); a welding machine operator from a major fast-speed train manufacturing company (figure 11); the president of Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute (figure 12); an American who speaks Chinese and is a CEO of Lufax, which is an international financial

asset exchange company (figure 13); a seemingly ordinary worker from a television manufacturing company, but who self-identifies as a member of the Communist Party (figure 14); a 69 year old farmer (figure 15); and a captain and deputy political commissar from the People's Liberation Army, the official armed force of the People's Republic of China. (figure 16)

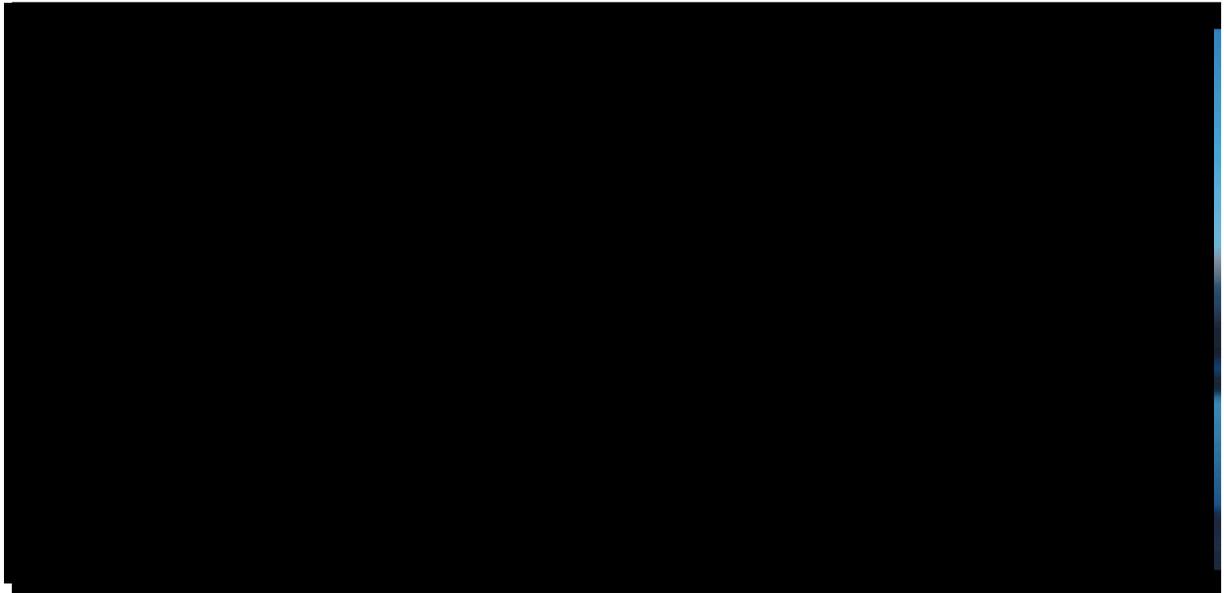


Figure 10: Screen capture from the film: "My name is Tseyang Lhamo, I am six years old. I am a pre-schooler."

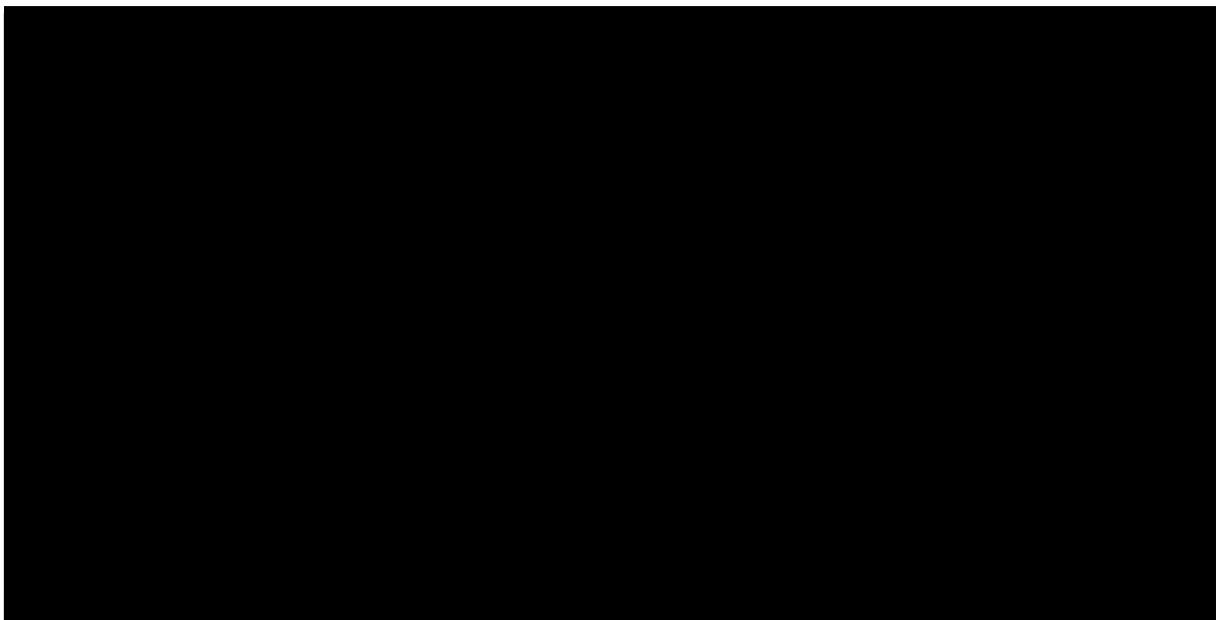


Figure 11: Screen capture from the film: "My name is Xie Yuanli. A welding machine operator."

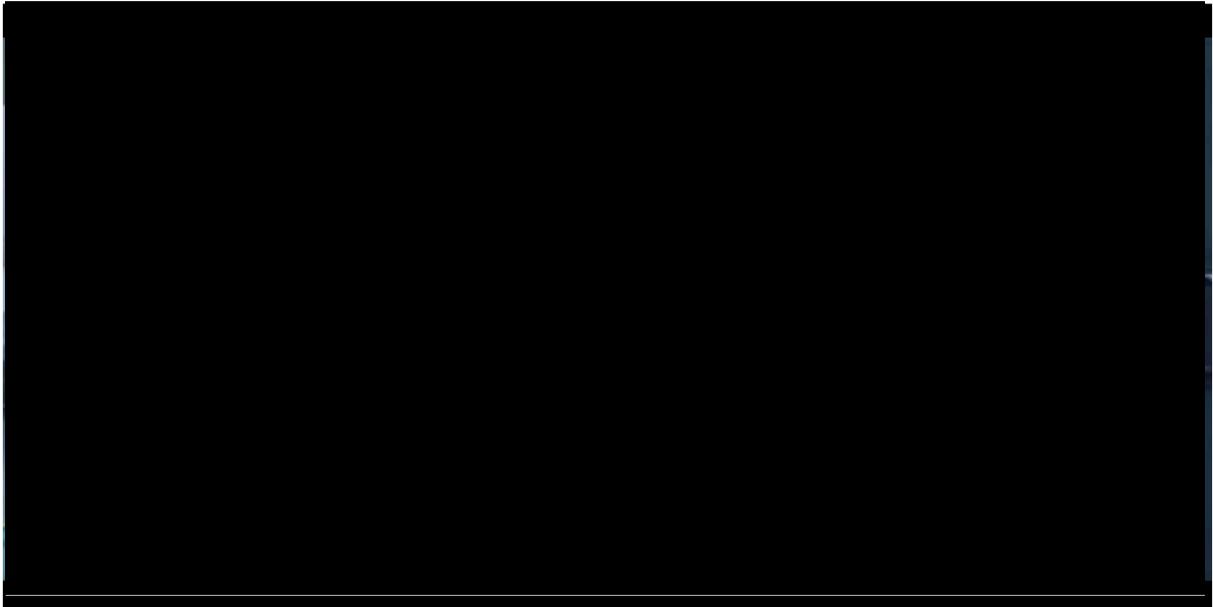


Figure 12: Screen capture from the film: "I'm Guo Bozhi, president of China COMAC Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute."

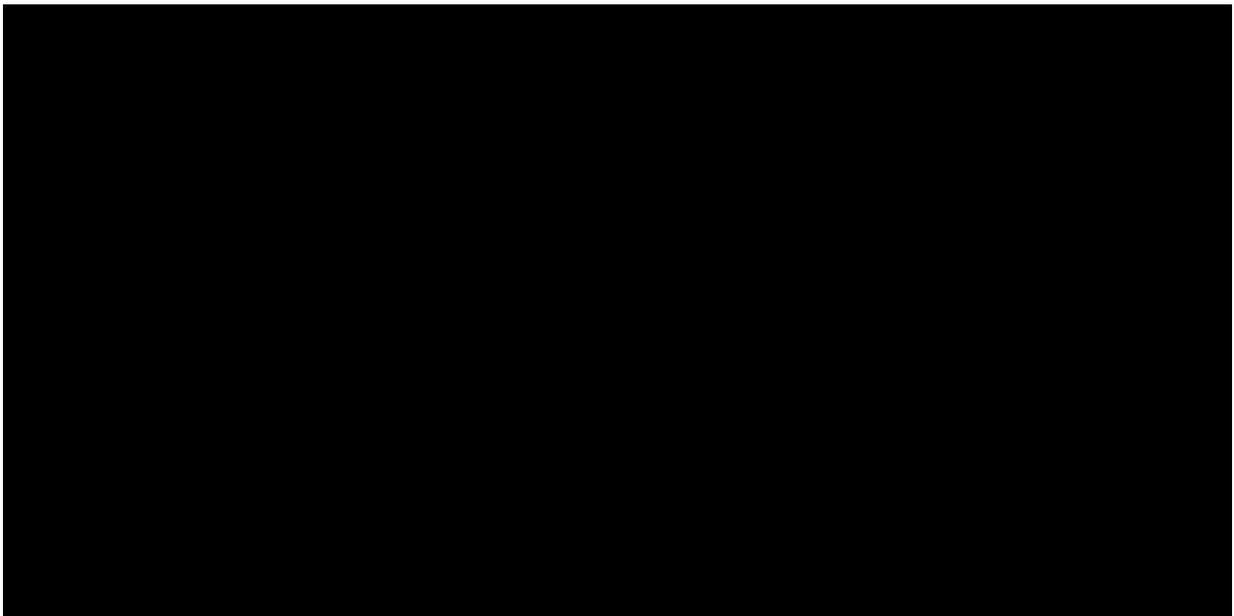


Figure 13: Screen capture from the film: "I'm Ji Kuisheng. Now the CEO of LuFax in China."

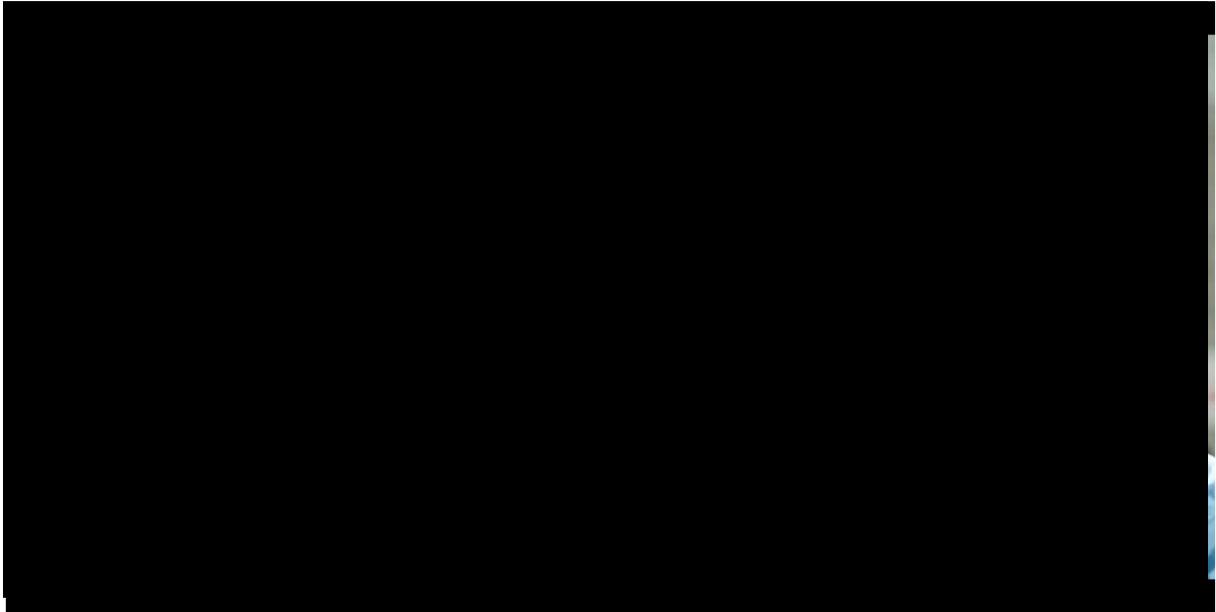


Figure 14: Screen capture from the film: "I'm Li Xujun. I work at Peony Electronic Group. I am a member of the Communist Party of China."

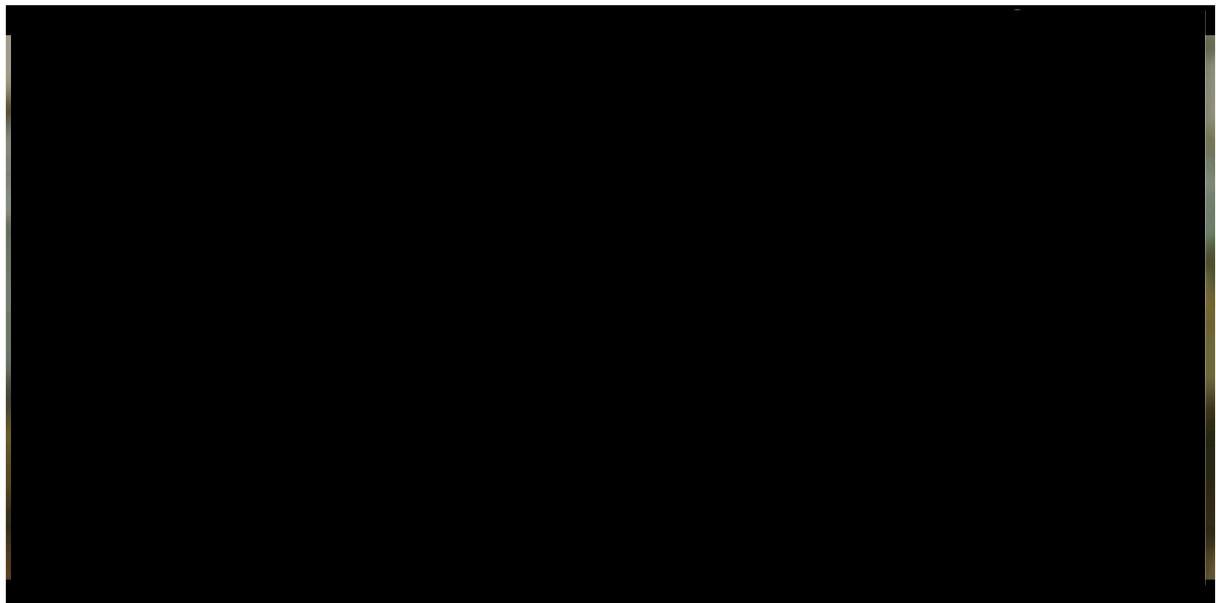


Figure 15: Screen capture from the film: "My name is Chen Zeshen. I'm 69 years old. Living in Dawan Village, Huashi County."

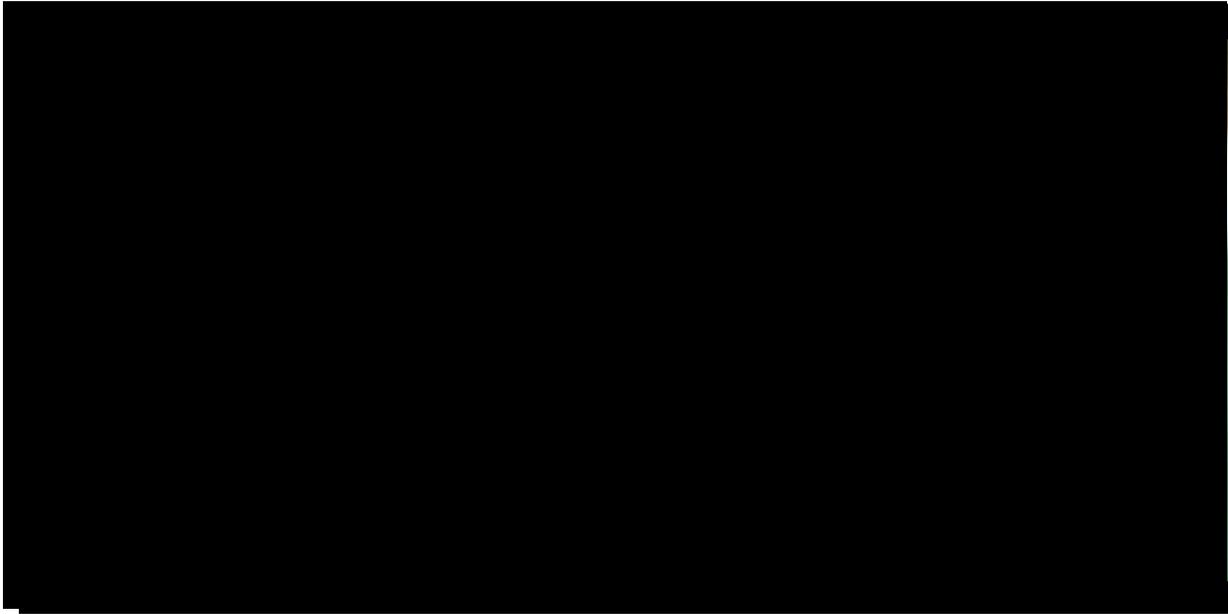


Figure 16: Screen capture from the film: “I’m Li Qiang, serving the PLA guard of Honour, as a deputy political commissar and captain.”

The film begins with an extreme close-up shot to the Tibetan preschooler girl (see figure 17). As the film is a two-dimensional medium, the camera shots present the world to its viewers. The field of view relates to how close or far away an object on screen appears (Greer, Hardin & Homan, 2009, p.177). The extreme close-up shot is defined by Zettl as shots that frame an entire face or focus on a body part or object. The close-ups seem psychologically and physically closer to the viewer, and invite more viewer involvement (Bucy & Newhagan cited by Greer, Hardin & Homan, *ibid*). In this sense, the beginning of the film invites viewers to mostly identify themselves with the girl from Tibet, an ethnic minority of China. Notably, ethnic nationalism has remained alive in places like Tibet and XinJiang of which the central appeal is to seek for a separate state, in other words, ethnic independence. Xi’s speech on the 19th National Congress states that China’s new era is “an era for the Chinese people of all ethnic groups to work together”. China as a multi-ethnic political community is still of vital importance to the CCP’s vision, an essential part of the state interests.

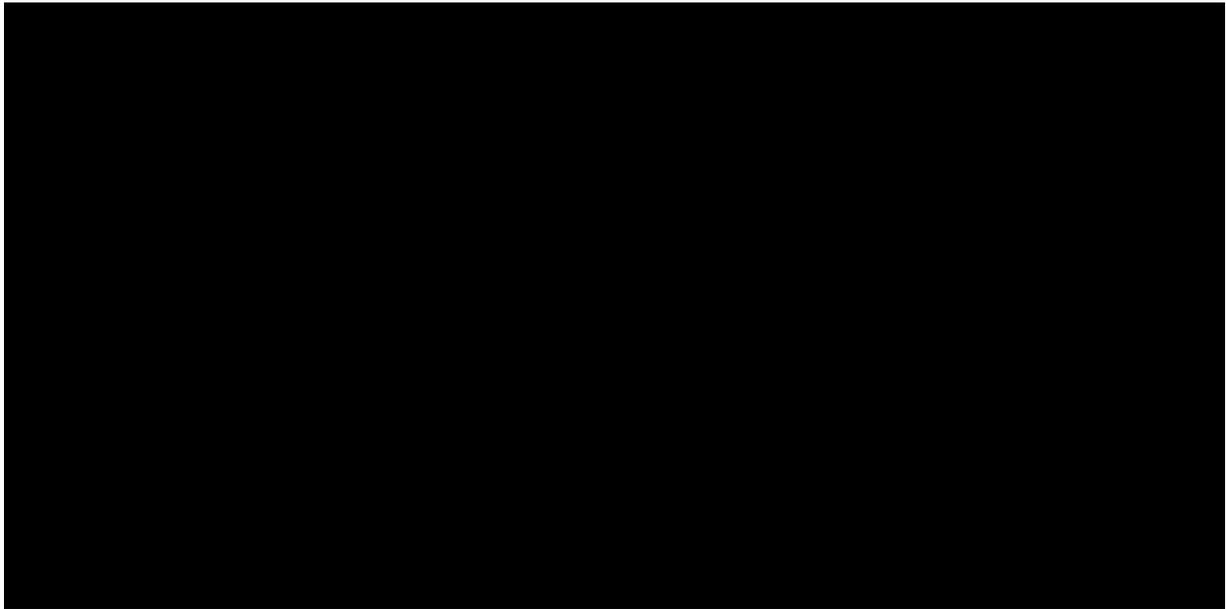


Figure 17: An extreme close-up shot to the eyes of the Tibetan girl.

Moreover, except for the opening shot, the first part of the film introduces all protagonists from either long shots or medium shots without the complete face features (see figures 7-13). The long shot, according to Millerton (ibid), “establishes location and allows the audience to follow the purpose or pattern of the action.” The first minute of the film establishes the locations and working and living environments of the protagonists, as well as showing China in the “new era” as a country that is technologically modern (grand shots of the locations of the modern working environments where the welding machine manipulator, the CEO and the president work); with beautiful landscape (a beautiful lake beside which the Tibetan girl stands); a friendly atmosphere (the medium close shot depicts the member of the CCP smiling and talking to two foreign tourists); with solemn military force (where the captain trains his honour guards); and last but not least, with a very hopeful and optimistic spirit (the farmer was the only one that was shown with a full front smiling face in a medium close-up shot). In the light of this analysis, the scene is set in the first part of the film and attempts to show China in a “new era”, where all people, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, social status, financial conditions, foreign or domestic status, membership or not of the Communist Party, can live happily in the new era of China. The *mise-en-scène* however, is almost fairy-tale like,

a utopia that is significantly lacking the real flavours of daily life. The heroes of the narrative constructed by the film in this sense seem distant and unrealistic

Part Two: “My Chinese Dream”

The second part of the film shows the testimonies of all protagonists’ interpretations of the Chinese Dream. It begins again with the girl stating that: “I want to go to Beijing when I grow up, to visit Tian’anmen Square.” The film then transitions to the next protagonist Li Qiang, the captain of honour guard. As he states: “I am an honour guard, I feel very honoured and proud. Our dream is to do our jobs well, devote ourselves to the cause of honour guard, and strive for a strong army by contributing my own strength.” The transition of the shot is interesting and yet seamless because, whilst he was introduced last in the first part of the film, his views of the Chinese Dream are introduced immediately following the girl. There seems to be a continuity of the narrative: the girl wants to go to Tian’anmen Square to see guards of honour raising the national flag. Notably, guards of honour and the national flag raising ceremony have entered Chinese popular culture recently, not merely as a stately patriotic ritual, but as a pleasurable cultural text circulated among online social media platforms. As the representatives of the national image, there are reportedly very strict selection criteria for guards of honour of the People’s Liberty Army in China. The average height of male guards of honour is about 1.88 meters (around 6.2 feet). After the guards strode forward in strict, synchronized steps at Moscow's Red Square in their first display at the May 9 Victory Day parade (Xinhuanet, 2015), the guards of honour have often been referenced in images of the handsome Chinese army man which circulate in popular culture and on online social media platforms. In the light of its newly found status as a popular icon on internet, the film attempts to generate both patriotic and warm sentiments among the viewers of the film. The national flag performs a symbolic function, acting as a “condensation symbol” and “a focus for sentiment about society” (Firth, cited in Billig, 1995, p.39). In this sense, the eight seconds of film that transition from the girl to the honour guards potentially constructs a pleasurable narrative, and generates proud and patriotic sentiments from viewing the film. And for a Western viewer, “Tiananmen Square” could immediately evoke memories of the 1989 incident, so the transition from an optimistic child to a proud soldier also reframes that narratives as something aspirational and proud, not shameful.

The film continues with the remaining answers offered by the other five protagonists; the details are as followed:

Xie Yuanli, the welding machine manipulator: “Our Chinese Dream is to produce high-speed trains which are faster, more stable and safer. So as to connect the world and benefit mankind.”

Guo Bozhi, president of China COMAC Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute: “The large aircraft dream is a part of the Chinese Dream. Those aircrafts that airlines want to buy, pilots like to fly, and passengers are willing to take, are the commercial aircrafts we want to make.”

Ji Kuisheng, the CEO of LuFax in China: “My Chinese Dream is a wish that China can maintain a sound development. Now China’s plan for the future development of the Belt and Road makes me feel that China has changed from a passive to a more active role.”

Li Xujun, a member of the Communist Party of China: “A stronger China and happier life for all Chinese people are our dream.”

Chen Zeshen, a farmer: “Chinese Dream, is to lift the poor out of poverty, and to lead a better life for all (speaking in a local dialect.)”

It is evident that all these answers are carefully constructed in accordance with the very content stressed by President Xi’s vision of the Chinese Dream: Xie and Guo’s answers are about the technological advancements which demonstrate that China has achieved “a tremendous transformation, it has stood up and is becoming strong”; Ji, the American working in China seems to provide a reassurance of China’s peaceful development and its contribution to the international community; Li, as a CCP member, offers his interpretation of the Chinese Dream as something rather inclusive and comprehensive, but at the same time, elusively imagined. Chen, the farmer has a more detailed and down to earth approach to the Chinese Dream, just like the key policy carried under Xi’s leadership which is about taking targeted measures to ensure that assistance and resources reach poverty-stricken villages and households. In this respect, the film and the interpretations offered by the featured heroes are perfect representations of the Chinese Dream. And the problem is also that it is too perfect. This will be discussed in relation to the concluding part of the film in the following section.

Part Three: “China Steps into a New Era”

The last part of the film concludes with footage derived from Xi’s opening speech at the 19th National Congress during, which he states that: “the entire Party and the Chinese people of all ethnic groups should share the same breath and the same fate, and live with each other. The entire party should always take the aspirations of the people to live a better life as the focus of all CPC comrades’ effort. To secure a decisive victory in finishing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects. To strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation and see that our people realize their aspirations for a better life.”

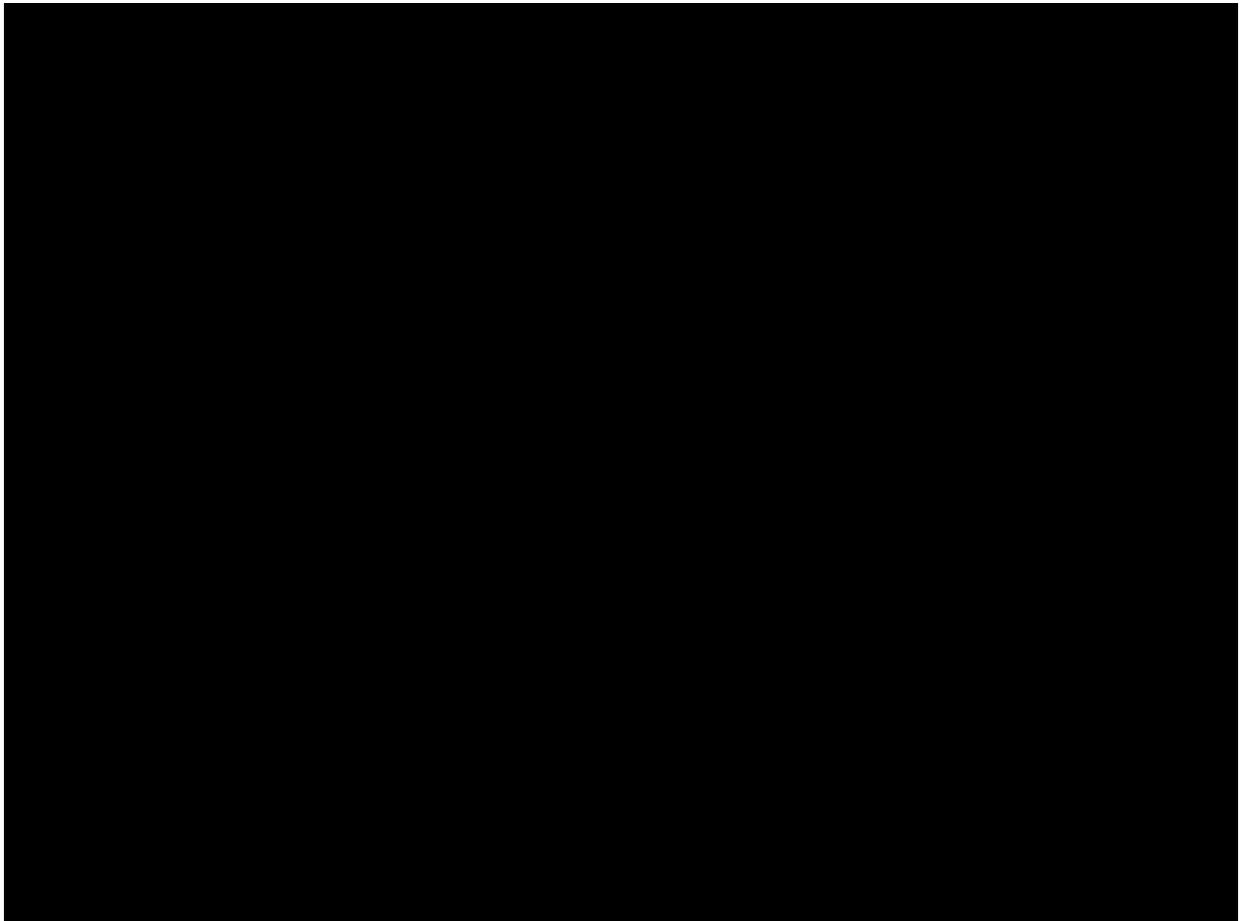


Figure 18: A collage of the capture moments from the montage sequence

Xi’s speech is interwoven with a montage sequence of all the protagonists facing directly to the camera and smiling, silently (see figure 18). And towards the end of the film, a second

montage sequence is featured just before the ending title appears on the screen: China steps into a new era (see figure 19). The series of shots follows the protagonists from the back as they are walking, as if the film maker is attempting to construct a narrative where the heroes of the film are walking toward a desired and better future as “China steps into a new era”.

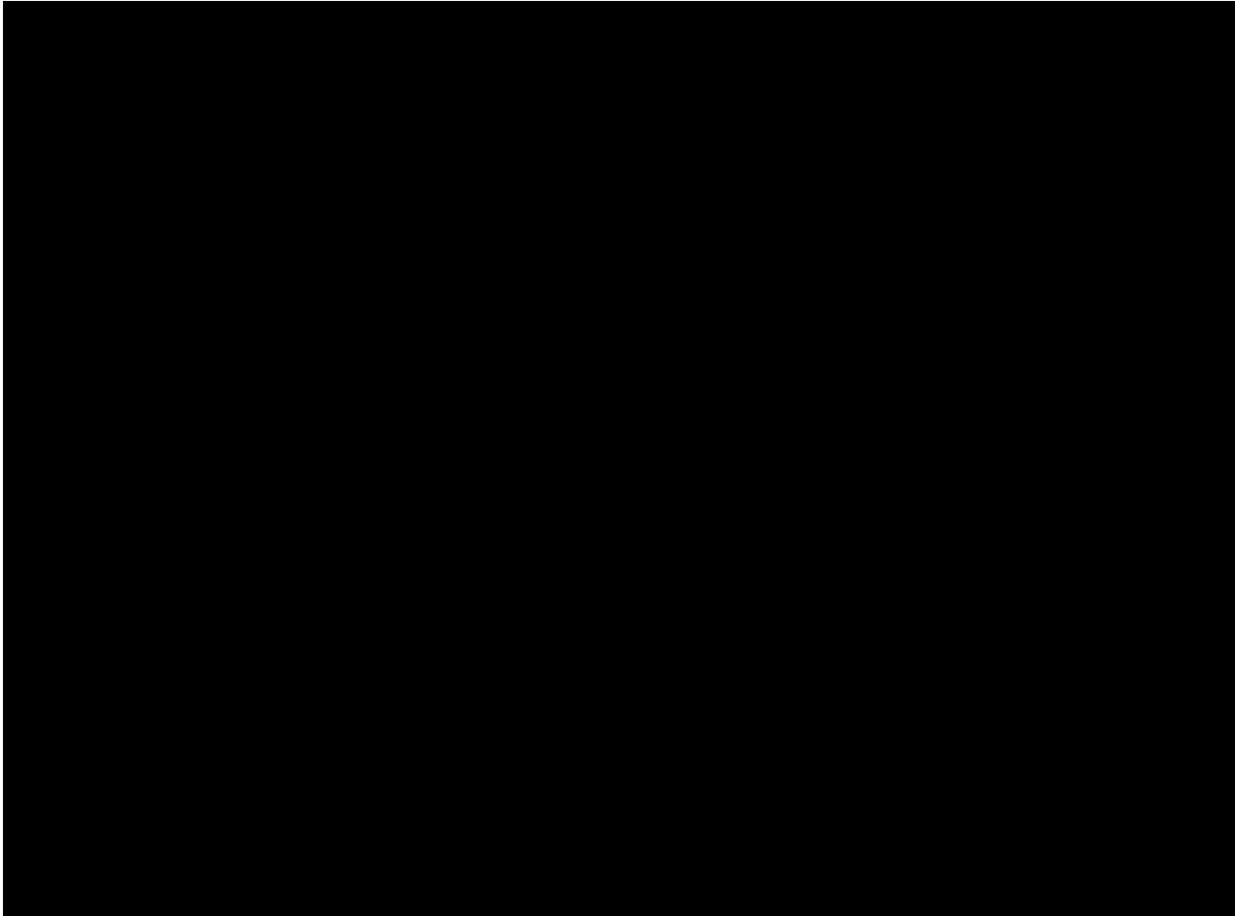


Figure 19: A collage of moments capture from the second montage sequence

The first montage sequence uses a film technique called “breaking the fourth wall” or “direct address” in which the protagonists of the film seem to acknowledge the viewers’ presence. As shown in figure 15, all seven protagonists are looking directly to the camera smiling with a voice-over of Xi’s speech. It aims at creating an effect as if these lovable characters are directly communicating Xi’s messages with the viewers. Brown argues that this technique is often deployed in a film to intensify the relationship between the fiction on screen and its viewers (2012, p. X). Auter and Davis (1991) conducted an experiment to examine viewers’ reactions when comedy film characters directly look at the camera and speak to them. The result of the study shows that the participants, made up of young college students, generally like to feel

included in the context of the media and ready to take part in the narrative (p.170). In this sense, the promotional film seems to successfully deploy an involvement technique to invite the audiences' participation in the optimistic narrative of the "Chinese Dream". The second montage sequence also creates a similar effect which invites its viewers to actively join the "Chinese Dream" and walk towards a "new era".

However, like most propaganda cultural products, this promotional film has no regard for the difficult social issues and the real struggles of ordinary Chinese people. It reveals no interest in showing, for instance, the problematic identity disputes between mainland China and Hong Kong, nor does it pay attention to environmental problems, corruption or food security issues. The China displayed in the film is detached from reality. Reality has both an optimistic side and a dark side. The elimination of the dark side to a large extent makes the montage sequence where the protagonists cheerfully face the camera seem slightly ironic, and a little puppet like.

Discussion

In comparison with the first promotional film of the campaign, *China Enters New Era* has shown several notable improvements. Firstly, the promotional film is beautifully shot, deploying various cinematic techniques to increase the impact of the film. The camera movements and editing have been carefully deployed to support the characters and the story. However, although the film is an almost ideal interpretation of Xi's vision, the dream-like scenery of the film exposes the lack of a more realistic representation of the Chinese realities, hence the Chinese dream constructed by the film becomes a political myth, as Zhong and Zhang have suggested. This is similar to the understanding of American Dream as a myth-dream suggested by Archer. There are three ways to approach this view. As the myth "establishes a framework and sets the terms by which people encounter, comprehend and shape social relations and space around them" (Archer, 2014, p.7), both the American dream and the Chinese Dream are highly political constructs, the main function of which is to sustain the system. Moreover, they are designed to capture the collective imagination, or as this study refers to as the 'social imagination' to maintain the balance between the relationship

of state and people, dominant culture and minority culture, political interests and commercial interests, political institutions and social/civil institutions. In other words, myth-dream is a social imagination of the national identity that helps individuals within society to navigate the world. Last but not least, myth-dream is always in the danger of becoming a “fallacy or falsehood” (ibid, p.8). Media products that advocate and propagate the myth-dream would also risk becoming “lies and falsehood” (Welch, 2015, p.2). In this sense, while *China Enters New Era* increased the impact of film by telling the story of the Chinese Dream well on screen, the emotional resonance could not bridge the gap between utopian on-screen world and the Chinese social realities. In this sense, the effects of the publicity campaign initiated by the party-state remain limited. This is especially the case among the younger generations whose attentions are diffused in the world of popular culture, placing the state production in fierce competition with market entertainment.

Secondly, there is an evident attempt by the film to deploy symbols and techniques in the popular cultural texts and practices to tell the story of the Chinese Dream. In comparison to the first instalment of the campaign which simply displayed the Chinese achievements mediated through 60 or so elites within one minute, *China Enters New Era* only chooses 7 people to tell the story of China. This allows more space and time to explore the characters in the commercial, making it easier for the viewers to identify with their “Chinese Dream”. Moreover, among these 7 representatives, the choice of the Honour Guard of the people’s Liberation Army closely follows the online popular trends, in which the honour guards are conceived as handsome and attractive by online audiences. This cultural phenomenon coincides with the vigorous fan culture in mainland China, where online audiences, especially female fans are becoming the central players in creating the desirable narratives that generate consumption and identification. (The influence of online fan culture on media representations of the Chinese Dream will be discussed further in chapter x). As reported by Qin Lei, in the conference on “national propaganda and thought work” in August 2013, Xi Jinping called for better ways to increase the impact on political communication: to “forge new concepts, new categories and new expressions to communicate throughout China and abroad...and tell Chinese stories well, communicate the Chinese voice well, and demonstrate Chinese characteristics well” (Zheng, cited in Qin, 2018, p.87).

Thirdly, while the Chinese propaganda system remains powerful and resilient to the foreign challenge in terms of culture and ideology, the Chinese propaganda system as manifested in the publicity campaign has limited impact, due to the way in which it is communicated: it is top-down communication. To put it in another way, when there is power, there is resistance. Especially in a world that takes the values of liberal humanism as “natural”, this form of media communication that are embedded with overwhelmingly political messages, are subject more to critiques rather than appreciation, especially in the global market. This shows the CCP’s shortcomings and lack of confidence in communicating ideas through commercial entertainment products. This is very problematic in the media environment as the competition to grab the attention of audiences becomes increasingly fierce. This might also explain Xi’s administration’s further tightening of regulations controlling the internet before the opening of the 19th National Congress. However, measures like these can paradoxically make the outside cultural world seem more desirable. More importantly, this approach further widens the cultural/information gap in the formation of a collective social imagination, namely the gap between those who have access to the outside world and those who do not. Early propaganda efforts were directed inwards to a domestic audience. The attempt to launch propaganda films internationally shows the Chinese state realising it needs to engage not only an international audience, but also a more cosmopolitan (‘global, elite’) audience at home. However, while they recognise the need, they lack the media sophistication to pull this off. Chinese soft power, unlike the soft power of Hollywood, is directed inward at the domestic audience as much as (or maybe more than) a global overseas market. In this perspective, the policies and representations of the Chinese Dream as national identity and nation building seem to be counter-productive to the state’s intention of forming an identifiable collective identity for all the Chinese people across-Straits, and across differences in ethnicity, age, social status, economic resources and cultural capital, and the greater Chinese living outside of China mainland.

3. Conclusion: Propagate China’s National Identity in “New Era”

So, what does China in new era mean? And how does this reflect on the means of communication for building China’s national identity through the Chinese Dream?

Firstly, China's entering the new era aims to continue with the Chinese way, namely socialism with Chinese characteristics. As summarised by Xi in the opening speech of the 19th People's Congress: "The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation. It means that scientific socialism is full of vitality in 21st century China, and that the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics is now flying high and proud for all to see" (Xi, 2017, p.9). Notably, Xi referred back to all his predecessors' achievements: Mao and his "China has stood up" speech in 1949, Deng's Open and Reform policy has made China "grown rich", and Jiang's administration and the "three represents" had correctly continued in the path of the country "becoming strong", and finally Hu's "scientific development" is "full of vitality" in the 21st century. In this sense, China's national identity is essentially built on Chinese socialism, and the core of political communication will still focus on foregrounding these pre-existing political beliefs in Chinese society.

Secondly, China in the new era means that the CCP's growing confidence in the effectiveness of its political system and belief that this can provide a new option for other developing countries. As Xi explains: "It means that the path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind... It will be an era that sees China moving closer to centre stage and making greater contributions to mankind." (ibid) This take coincides with Xi's grand "one belt one road" initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank launched in 2013. It seems that what is insinuated here is that Xi's "New Era" will see the party-state take an increasingly important role in the international community. This change however, is generally perceived as "threat" by America, signalling a global competition between two ideological/ political systems. What this means for media communication in China mainland is to increase the "discourse power" in order to battle the "hegemony discourse" of the west as Edney examined.

Thirdly, Xi's new era means that China's current pivotal task is that of "building a moderately prosperous society in all respects", as depicted in the film citing Xi's speech to the 19th People's Congress: "this new era will be an era of building on past success to further advance our cause, and of continuing in a new historical context to strive for the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It will be an era of securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and of moving on to all-out efforts to build a great modern socialist country." (ibid) What is left unsaid in Xi's speech is the function of media and culture as playing an important supporting role of building a "great socialist country". This seems to run counter to the cultural system reform initiated in 2013, in which the media and cultural sector were transformed from being a mouth piece of the party-state into an industry that has many functions as Zhang in 2011 suggested. However, given the recent developments in the international relations, particularly the grand trade war between America and China, and the protests in Hong Kong, culture and ideology will remain under direct supervision of the CCP. The political function of the media and culture will continue to be persistent, and remain primarily under Xi's administrations.

This chapter has examined Chinese propaganda system in relation to the politics orientated national identity. While the meaning of propaganda and its vital role in the CCP has remained the same since Mao, the changing means of communication, the technology, international relations, economic situations and cultural developments have pushed the Chinese propaganda system to change as well. As shown in the preceding analysis, there is a gradual shift from the traditional domestic propaganda to that of including the international publicity with Chinese cultural soft power. Along with the changes in the propaganda system, is the constant re-articulation of China's national identity manifested in political myths. This study argues that the Chinese Dream is the popular encompassing version of all the previous political myths. It is not new, but constructed in the conscious language of popular culture. Its meanings and practices are built on the understanding of the American dream and counter argue that the Chinese dream is the dream for the Chinese people. Through the case study of *China Enters New Era* which is part of the "China's National Image Promotional Film" campaign since 2011, this chapter indicates that the media and culture communication in China will continue to remain as primarily a supporting system which is required to advocate China's national identity with the Party-state in the leading role. Hizi argues that the Chinese

Dream campaign is a propaganda tool that reinforces the CCP's legitimacy (2019, p.40). It seeks to present the CCP as both serving the Chinese people's collective interests for the revitalization of the country and as a call for the emergence of individual dreams: better income, housing and environment. (ibid) However, it is important to note that the Chinese Dream is not just a tool for the CCP's legitimacy. This is because in the Chinese context, the real legitimacy is built on the competency of the state to govern, and the actual benefit that is brought to the people who made the choices to unite under such a vision. Therefore, the meanings of the Chinese Dream as national identity will continue to be debated, change, and adapt in the circulation of popular cultural texts and practices.

The next chapter will shift attention to the commercial sector of the Chinese media communication, and sets out to understand how the Chinese blockbuster films represent national identity. From *Hero* to heroes in the *Wandering Earth*, China's national identity continues to deploy, adapt and re-appropriate the techniques found in popular culture as defined and developed by the West.

Chapter Six

From *Hero* to *Heroes*:

China's Commercial National Identity in *Hero* (2002) and *Wandering Earth* (2018)

The theoretical chapter of this study discussed the validity of Benedict Anderson's concept "imagined community" in understanding the role of fiction in generating a collective sense of national belonging. Anderson used the examples of commercial newspaper and novel and argues that a collective consumption of the stories could create a strong connection between reality and the imagined world. This argument builds on Walter Benjamin's concept of homogenous empty time from 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' written in 1940. Benjamin argues that people experience time in a non-linear fashion in modern capitalist society. 'Homogeneous empty time is the kind of time measured by clocks and calendars...one "day" or "minute" or "hour" is treated as equivalent to any other...On the whole, it lacks special moments which give it meaning (in contrast to Cyclical, ritual and biological time). It simply passes, and people fill it with contingent contents.' (Robinson, 2013) In the day to day, mediated popular cultural products become one of the main resources for "contingent contents". As shown in the introduction, Chinese people spend more time than ever in front of various screens, from cinema to living room, on their way to work and before bedtime. This chapter goes on to explore the commercial narratives produced by the film industries in China. It chooses to examine firstly *Hero* (2002), China mainland's first blockbuster film in the sense that it was the most expensive film project to make at the time⁷⁶ and the first Chinese language film to gross \$53,710,019 in the American market. It has remained at the second place in the domestic box office from 2002 to 2006.⁷⁷ Secondly, it chooses to examine *Wandering Earth* (2019) because as of August 2019, the film is currently ranked No.7 in the 2019 worldwide grosses chart. (Box Office Mojo) With a total \$ 699.8 million dollars, it is also the second highest grossing film of all time in the Chinese film market.

⁷⁶ According to Box Office Mojo, the film's production cost is \$31 million.

⁷⁷ According to Tao Piao, which is an online ticket selling platform under the Alibaba Picture Group, *Hero* was also the first Chinese mainland film to enter the top 3 in the domestic box office.

There are several reasons for choosing these two case studies. First, each of these two films each has an interesting take on “time” in relation to China as a nation-state. While *Hero* goes back to the beginning of unified China, namely the Qin dynasty to explore the formation of Chinese nation, *Wandering Earth* is the first Chinese science fiction film set in an eschatological future that explores the idea of nation in the context of “United Earth Government”, a fictional earth government that is similar to the function of United Nations. These two films represent the changes in the self-representation of China’s commercial national identity in the course of almost 20 years. The fictional “past” and the “future” has many implications for the present China and its national identity. Secondly, these two blockbusters have showcased changes in terms of market orientation. When *Hero* was finally released in the U.S two years after Chinese market in 2004, the film was praised by the media for its record-breaking performance in the global centre of the film industry: Hollywood. Fifteen years later, *Wandering Earth* which was released in the week of Chinese New Year, was primarily targeted at Chinese audiences in the Chinese market. This shift demonstrates that the Chinese film industry is developing in terms of scale, professionalism and genre. It also has to do with the continuous economic development which enabled the country to become the second largest economy, and the number one country in terms of purchasing power. Moreover, it seemingly demonstrates a gradual change from seeking outside recognition to inside identification. To echo what Edney argued about the particularities of Chinese “cultural soft power”, these two blockbusters are an important part of China’s nation building in the commercial sector.

Last but not least, the case studies chosen by this chapter critically reflect back on previous discussions about the historical formation of China in Qin which has both the political and cultural influences on the current government, and Xi’s domestic and global vision represented as the Chinese Dream . Particularly, these examples allow further discussions of the dynamic between the individual pursuit and the collective interests of the nation-state, which is argued by this study to be the central theme defining China’s national identity as a state-led project. Moreover, it seeks to understand how national identity is mediated through the commercial popular industries, in which norms and conduct are defined and developed by the west.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section sets out to present a brief account of cultural policy and practices in the film industries. In particular, it considers nation building on the Chinese big screen in relation to global Hollywood. The second and third sections then examines *Hero* and *The Wandering Earth* in terms of narratives, technological form and Chinese culture. More importantly, the chapter considers how they construct commercial national identities that are politically satisfied by the state and commercially welcomed by audiences. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the missing discussion of the present in Chinese films is not necessarily helping the state to form national identity that is in favour of the CCP.

1. Chinese Cultural Industries and Media Conglomeration

This section aims to provide a brief overview of the Chinese cultural industry, especially the emergence of the China Film Group Corporation (CFG), the production and distribution company behind *Hero* and *Wandering Earth*. The media conglomeration is a national strategy initiated by the state to resist the influences of Hollywood since 1996. CFG, as the biggest state-owned film enterprise, has played a major role in (re)producing and (re)distributing China's national identity as well as legitimating CCP's ruling position in China. This section offers an insight into the Chinese film industry and its general developments in the face of Global Hollywood.

Cultural System Reform

Before 1979 (especially during the Cultural Revolution 1967-1977), there were no independent cultural enterprises in Communist China. The main function of the state-run system of cultural organizations was to perform as a propaganda mechanism. China's Open and Reform policy guided and implemented a large-scale and sophisticated economic transformation from a planned economy to a market economy. In other words, the time between 1980s and the beginning of the new millennium is a period of rigid and slow transformation from government funded cultural institutions to profit-seeking cultural

enterprises. However, since 2003, China's cultural system has undertaken an all-round reform: from cultural institutions to "industries".

The concept of "cultural industries" was first officially put forward in the Chinese government's tenth 5-year Economic and Social Development plan (2001-2005) in October 2000. The plan states, though very briefly, that it is important to improve the policies towards the cultural industries in order to strengthen the construction and management of cultural markets, and to promote the development of cultural industries. The term is deployed either as "cultural industries" or "creative and cultural industries" in China, which is understood mainly in the following points:

Firstly, it is based on individual creativity in the creative sphere, a kind of intelligence, knowledge, copyright and aesthetic-based industry, and it features the artistic innovation of a particular place's traditional culture; secondly, it is based on modern technology and new media, a type of agglomerative media and content industry capable of large-scale reproduction and mass production; thirdly, it is modern and international market oriented, catering for the formation of a large-scale cultural market and cultural consumption, and; fourthly, it is a combination of product management and business operation and of industrial management and capital management, with the long-term overall value of business operations increased by profits from short-term fragmented projects. (Xiang, 2013, pp3-4)

According to the definitions here, the embodied values of cultural industries in China are based on individual creativity, using modern industrial methods, orientated for the global market, and following a capitalist pursuit of profit. Nevertheless, how these features fit with "one party market economy" (*New York Times* cited by Su, 2016, p.13) remains problematic. To an extent, it is double the difficulty for China's creative industries to achieve success, not only due to the need to respond to the unpredictability of audiences' tastes, but also their need to make sure their business is highly responsive to "socialist values" and to a political climate which is both elusive and constantly changing. For example, in order to protest against South Korea deploying the United States' Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in the China South Sea, the CCP allegedly issued a ban on Korean entertainment products being shown in China in 2016. This resulted in an economic backlash for the Korean entertainment industry, but also for domestic cultural businesses. Films which had already

been made featuring Korean stars, Korean TV dramas which had been acquired, imported reality TV shows already paid for by Chinese cultural businesses were all of a sudden no longer allowed to make profits from the domestic market, losing millions of revenue. This might well be catastrophic for small or medium cultural enterprises. Although the government officially denied the “ban”, and claimed the action was merely a regulation on trade in the cultural industries between the two countries, according to a report of the CCP’s official news agency Xinhua news, the official nature of the ban was apparently confirmed: “A recent survey showed that more than four-fifths of Chinese people would support the ban on the appearance of South Korean entertainers in Chinese TV programs if the government does so. It reflects Chinese placing love for their home country before popularity of entertainment stars” (Xinhua net, 2016). From this perspective, it seems that political interest is always above economic interest in the commercial culture sector.

There is a general criticism of the multi-functionality of the creative industries as problematic, and at times, contradictory. Zhang Xiaoming for instance argues that on the one hand, there is still a great tendency for the government to interfere in, or restrict the cultural industries from growing organically; on the other hand, the economic pursuit suggests that the government fails to “provide substantial support for those cultural institutions with strong characteristics of public service provision” (Zhang, 2006, p301-302). This critical approach is valid and very useful, but nevertheless unproductive in the sense that the judgements are based on the understanding of how the creative/popular culture industries operate in the west. This research, however, proposes to view the contradictions and problems of the Chinese popular culture industries as conditions: as the “Chinese characteristics” of media and cultural business. One of the main characteristics is the role of state as a centralised power played in the media sector, manifested as state-owned enterprise (SOE) in which they have two masters to serve: the CCP and the consumers.

Media Conglomeration and China Film Group Corporation

Zhang Xiaoling argues that while the party-state was deepening the market logic in the cultural sector, it also determined to “maintain and securing the commanding heights of the

commercialized media industries” (2011, p.48). According to Zhang, from mid-1990s to 2002, the period was characterized by “re-centralisation and rationalization, especially the consolidation of diverse media through the creation of conglomerates, to achieve the optimal integration of political control and market efficiency.” (ibid) And in 1996, the Central Party Committee and the State Council jointly issued a critical policy called “Circular on the Administration of Press, Publication, Radio and Television Industries” which encouraged the formation of media groups in order to achieve “optimal integration between control and business”. (cited by Zhang, 2011, p.48) Under such developments, the China Film Group Corporation (CFGC) was thus formed in 1999 to ensure the national film industries are prepared for the country entering the World Trade Organization (WTO).

CFGC is the largest state-run film enterprise in China, “responsible for carrying out state policy, including propaganda functions, cultivation of market and co-production development” (Yeh & Davis, 2008, p.38). The enterprise started as China Film Management Corporation in 1951 in charge of domestic sales and distribution. It was not until 1999 that the state-owned institution had transformed itself into “the most comprehensive and extensive state-owned film enterprises in China with the most complete industry chain that facilitates film production, distribution and exhibition as a coordinated process and integrates film, TV and video into one single entity” (cited by Yeh & Davis, 2008, p.42). Then in 2016, CFGC went public and officially listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange as China Film Co.⁷⁸ CFGC is characterised by its vertical integration developing “an industrial linkage that extended to production, distribution, exhibition, printing and processing” (Su, 2016, p.88). Moreover, by 2010, the group owned fifteen fully funded companies, and was a shareholder in a further thirty plus companies. (Su 2016, Yeh & Davis 2008) By 2019, the company owned consolidated total assets of 16.337 billion yuan.⁷⁹ Among the subsidiaries of the Group, China Film Import & Export Corporation had been the sole government-authorized importer of films. Another CFGC subsidiary, China Film Co-production Corporation, is supervised by the

⁷⁸ Available from CFGC’s official website: <http://www.zgdygf.com/Introduction> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

⁷⁹ China Film Group Corporation 2018 Annual Report. Available from: <http://file.finance.sina.com.cn/211.154.219.97:9494/MRGG/CNSESHTOCK/2019/2019-4/2019-04-27/5310047.PDF> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) to oversee and manage all Sino-foreign co-productions.⁸⁰

Su argues that while the Chinese film industry is characterized by a monopoly which led to a problematic industrial structure and uneven development, the blockbuster films produced by CFGC nevertheless played an important role in reaffirming China's national identity and legitimating the ruling of the CCP during its long and complicated engagement with Hollywood (Su, 2016, p.43. p.97). China's first and its most recent blockbusters *Hero* and *Wandering Earth* in this respect can be considered to actively participated in global communication, exercising "Chinese soft power" in the domestic and international market. The Party-state, according to Su's examination, is capable of bringing both market forces and global capital under its control, and "incorporates party ideology and the leadership of state-owned groups with private and global capital, and its status as both a policy maker and a market player" (Su, 2016, p.43). For example, according to Chan, the production of *Hero* was supported by the People's Liberation Army (see figure 20). The film held its grand premier at Beijing Great Hall of the People, which is the home of the National People's Congress (Chan, 2009, p.92). And when *Wandering Earth* was released during the Chinese lunar New Year in 2019, the CFGC released a notice shortly before, urging all three holding cinema chains⁸¹ and four shareholding cinemas to ensure the "work of presales" of the film. The notice further elaborates on the causes of the action, stating that: "*Wandering Earth* is the first domestic science fiction produced by China Film Co., Ltd and other production companies. The film has an epoch-making significance in the history of Chinese cinema... (all cinemas need to) strive to complete the task of 30% projection ratio⁸² during the first week of its release." (See figure 21)

⁸⁰ Market Line Industry Profile: Media in China August 2016. Available from:

<https://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50SeqLE4v%2BvIOLCmr1Gep69Ss6i4S7GWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGntk60p65Juerwgd%2FiuY%2Fx1%2B6B&T=P&P=AN&S=R&D=bth&K=121679336> [last accessed: 23 August 2019]

⁸¹ These cinema chains including China Film Xing Mei (中影星美) China Film Southern New Line (中影南方新干线), and China Film Digital (中影数字), which are among the top ten biggest cinema chains in China.

⁸² In the Chinese film market, if a film is released with 30% projection ratio among all national screens, it is considered to be a blockbuster film (大片). According to the Statista, there were over 60,000 screens in China. (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/279111/number-of-cinema-screens-in-china/>) As of 2015, CFGC accounted for 28.9% of the total number of cinemas in China. (<https://m.jiemian.com/article/789347.html>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

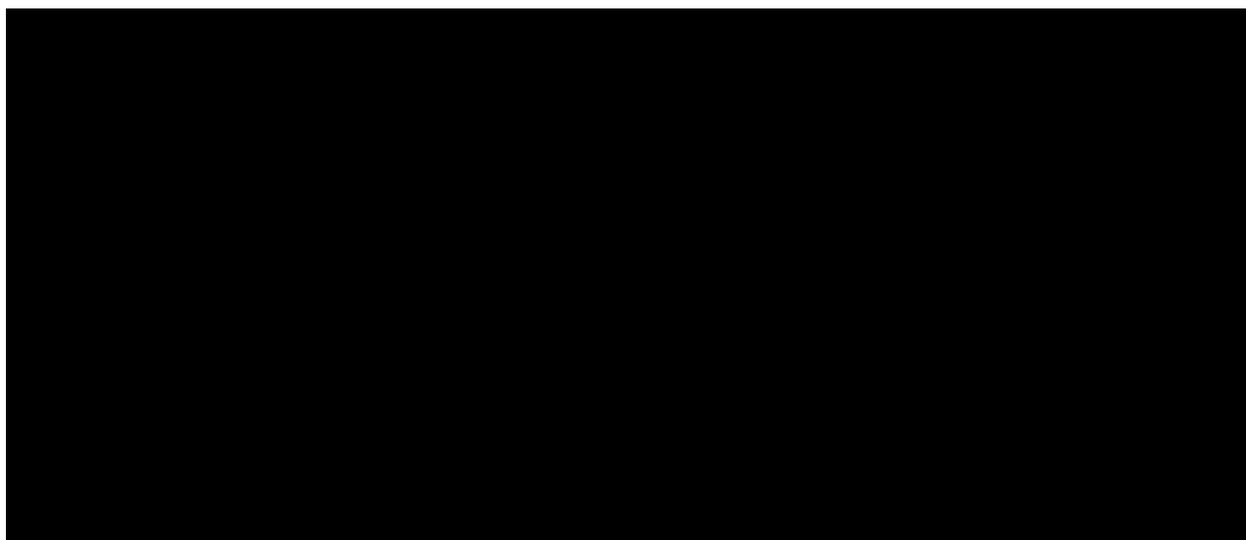


Figure 20: The Qin Army in *Hero* were portrayed by around 10,000 People's Liberation Army.

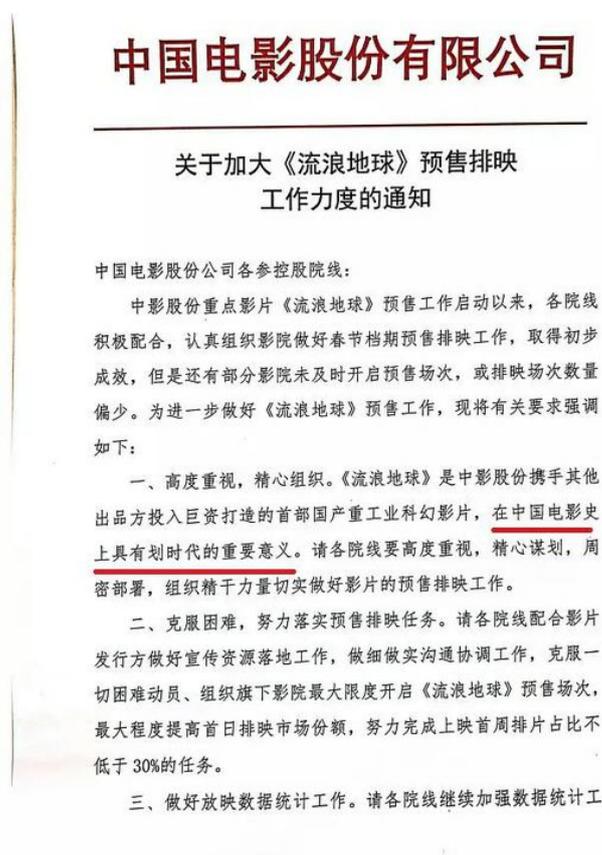


Figure 21: The “Notice on Increasing the Presales of *Wandering Earth*” is derived from sina.com.cn., one of the four major Chinese Portal sites.⁸³

⁸³ Available from: http://k.sina.com.cn/article_6876846661_199e45a4500100gtzu.html?from=ent [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

Critique of Hollywood and Chinese Blockbusters

In the previous chapters, this study has discussed some of the western scholars' views on how America's national identity manifested as the American Dream sustained its validity through the production and distribution of Hollywood films. With a similar line of thinking, the global dominance of Hollywood also stirred negative concerns within the circle of Chinese scholars. Among the criticisms, Dai Jinhua argues that: "Hollywood is the product of 'U.S.- made' Dream Works. It is the carrier of the 'American Dream' that is wrapped in 'the universal dream of human beings', which is nothing but the American way of life and American ideology... If there is an export called ideology, Hollywood is no doubt the most successful exporter. On the vast territory of developing countries, Hollywood has always been the advancing army of American transnational capital." (Dai cited by Su, 2016, p.54) This coincides with the Party-state projects the American Dream and American popular cultural products as part of the "hegemony discourse" which Edney observed in relation to "Chinese soft power".

Wendy Su, a Chinese scholar specialising in media studies and global communication, summarizes the Chinese scholars' analysis of the ideological implications of the Hollywood films. In particular, the "hero myth" which is often deployed to reproduce the cultural hegemony of America in the world. As she states: the introduction of the "hero myth" often describes the United States as a "paradise on earth" where freedom, equality, and fraternity are achieved, and justice is promoted by heroes. (ibid) Moreover, this illusion is an ideological illusion, "boasting American Exceptionalism... always portray Americans as the world's police force and saviours, and they always exaggerate American style glory and dreams." (Chen cited by Su, 2016, p.54) British political scientist Callahan compares the American Dream with American Exceptionalism and argues that, "while the American Dream states that the US is unique and superior, American exceptionalism goes further to state that the nation is uniquely superior and the best in the world: the chosen nation." (2017, p.260) However, Callahan also points out that Xi's vision mediated through the Chinese Dream is not so different from American Exceptionalism in terms of self-claimed uniqueness and superiority.

He argues that while American exceptionalism takes pride in the idea of being world's first nation, and a beacon of freedom and democracy, Chinese exceptionalism sees China as the world's first ancient and continuous civilization, and the country as a peaceful and harmonious alternative to American hegemony (Callahan, 2017, pp.261-262). In other words, while some Chinese scholars seemed to be focusing on battling American nationalism, China's national identity mediated through the Chinese Dream is perceived by some foreign scholars such as Callahan as representing nationalistic aspirations that counter the American nationalism. This ongoing self/other discourses creates potential tension in between the two countries: a clash of cultural values and national identities.

In the light of these arguments, the mega media enterprises like CFGC which have the resources and capabilities to produce Chinese blockbusters are deployed by the state as resistant to Hollywood. For example, since the success of *Hero* in 2002, CFGC funded a total number of 169 martial arts films from 2003- 2010. (China Film Yearbook) These films are common in drawing on the Chinese ancient cultures and epic legends, as well as martial arts fiction, to propagate Chinese history, cultural values and national heroes. "The Movies are therefore a deliberate (re)construction of Chinese national identity and nationalism" (Su, 2016, p.150). Moreover, these films are more easily marketed as alternative entertainment, taking the technological form of Hollywood, with Chinese aesthetics and spectacular martial arts scenes which create multiple levels of audience appeal in the global market. The downside is nevertheless evident in terms of narrow subject matter and lack of creative freedom. Moreover, this boom in the martial arts genre would soon lead to market saturation and audience boredom.

Chinese blockbusters in the first 10 years of the 21st century are characterised by the domination of martial arts films. To an extent, this boom in the genre has helped the Chinese film industry to resist the foreign competition in the domestic market, especially the challenges from Hollywood. However, this "soft power" desired by the state also limits the film market from growing organically, "it has not done enough to support artistic experimentation, foster young and inexperienced talent, and enact antitrust laws to create an environment that is conducive to fair competition." (Su, 2016, p.97) The next section looks

at the example of *Hero* and examines the ways in which traditional culture, ancient history and high technology were used to shape the sense of Chinese national identity.

2. The Past: The Case of *Hero*

Hero is Zhang Yimou's first major commercial success, his previous film works being considerably different from this one. This is because, according to many Chinese film critics, his previous works generally shared a consistent central theme: a critical examination of the history and the cultural tradition of China, which seemed to some as an offensive denigration of China. (Zhang, 2005, p.48) This film, however, was criticised especially by the Chinese audiences online for serving as propaganda for the People's Republic of China: a hero has to sacrifice himself for a bigger cause, in this case national interest, and this is a theme that is compatible with the state's interest and ideology (Fung & Chan, 2010, p.200). Moreover, the narrative and ending of the film was condemned as too pro-China, and for apparently justifying the one-party dictatorship. (ibid) Despite the contestations of values, the film was nevertheless well received in terms of its visual aesthetics and box-office records, and it was the first global blockbuster produced in mainland China. The film's success was achieved because arguably, it satisfies both political requirements and the need for global expansion, arousing a national discourse that corresponded to the state's agenda without undermining the movie's market potential. (ibid, p.199)

This section looks at the underlying meaning of the narrative and the technology deployed in the film. The case study offers an insight into the origins of the Chinese blockbuster within the martial arts genre.

The Visual Effects, CGI and the Chinese-ness

Curtain argues that *Hero* demonstrates the Chinese film industry in a state of transition, "from being products of indigenous process of creation, distribution and reception, to embracing transnational methods of production and market appeal" (Cited by Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 2010, p.5). While much controversy surrounded the narrative, the deployments of colour by

the director and the visual effects of the film were generally praised. The company responsible for the special effects in the film was an Australian company called Animal Logic, which is recognised as one of the world's leading independent creative digital studios. Although the film director Zhang Yimou and the Australian cinematographer Christopher Doyle downplayed the role that special effects played in the overall visual results (Farquhar, 2009, p.206), it is however, evident that *Hero's* visually stunning images and scenery were enhanced and recreated through visual effects produced within a new, global film making paradigm (ibid, p.205) While the director Zhang's ambition is to make "Chinese films significant to a worldwide audiences" (cited by Lau, 2007), it is worth noting that the impact of the "Chinese" story telling was significantly advanced by the technical support, thus making the meaning constructed in the film more accessible and engaging for worldwide audiences to engage.

For example, Farquhar analysed and compared the before and after footage of *Hero* from Animal Logic, and drew a specific example from the lake scene⁸⁴ where " a lake is still as a mirror where two men convey their sorrow [at Flying Snow's death] through their swords like birds flying on the water, like dragonflies" (Zhang Yimou cited in Farquhar, 2009, p.214). This scene that is described by the director as the most memorable from the viewing experience is, in fact, highly dependent on sophisticated computer software. As Farquhar points out, the water droplet that lands like a tear on Flying Snow's face was animated: "Virtual water droplets took about eight weeks of post-production and half spent on animation: producing, lighting, rendering and finally composing" (ibid, p.214). In this respect, the success of the visual result is a combination of Zhang Yimou's authorship and digital imagery. In other words, the language of the medium- technology helps to reproduce and realise the Chinese-ness of the film. This language of the medium, is the message: for a Chinese language story needs to redefine and adapt to the Hollywood modes of production to communicate its meanings.

Moreover, Farquhar seems to agree with the director and the cinematographer's decision on downplaying the visual effects "given apparent authenticity of action and combat is so integral to the martial arts genre" (2009, p.211). This is particularly interesting because

⁸⁴ The location of the lake scene was carefully chosen by the director, and it was shot at Situ, Tibet.

although the story of the film was criticised by the audiences and critics for being propagandistic for legitimating the authoritarian regime, this film is considered to be a highly authentic Chinese film among foreign audiences, both in terms of the Wuxia (武侠)⁸⁵ genre and the representation of traditional cultures. It seems that the representations of an already accepted cultural form, namely the martial arts genre which is perceived to be “authentic” by the foreign audiences, is to an extent as important as the film’s actual message. In other words, in order to be accepted as “authentic Chinese”, the film has to represent itself through the martial arts genre, a category that is sedimentary through years of popular cultural practices in Hollywood, mediated through stars like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. In addition to the deployment of the most advanced foreign technologies, a gradual understanding of professional film making in a global paradigm, and the management of international production, content distribution and reception thus emerged in *Hero*. In this respect, in order to sell China’s national identity in a global market, it is not just the story itself, but also how well one can tell the story through a technical language and accepted cultural form, creating an ambiguous imagery space that is highly identifiable across national borders.

Narrative and the Dynamic between Individuals and the State

Hero depicts a swordsman called Nameless and his journey of vengeance before the unification of China in 221 BC. His target was the King of the Qin, who was ruthless in conquering the other six warring states and has killed the swordsman’s family during the wars. In order to be close to the King, he has to first kill three other swordsmen who have made attempts on the life of the King. The film unfolds between the dialogues of Nameless and the King, during which Nameless tells the story of his encounters with the other Swordsmen. In the end, he has not killed the other swordsmen as he claimed; instead, he was convinced by one of them called Broken Sword that he should not kill the king because of 天

⁸⁵ Wuxia is a mainland Chinese term which is also known by the global market as the Kung Fu or martial arts genre. Notably, Kung Fu is popularized in the Hollywood by Bruce Lee in 1970s, a Hong Kong- American martial arts actor.

下 (All Under heaven). When the King comes to the realization of the importance of “peace” (See figure 22), and with his intention of unifying China so that people from all seven states will no longer be at war, Nameless has abandoned his mission to assassinate the King (see figure 23). As a result, he sacrifices his life willingly for the greater cause: the “unification of China”.



Figure 22: A collage of captured images from the film *Hero* (2002) King: “I have just come to a realization! The desire to kill no longer exists. Only peace remains.”

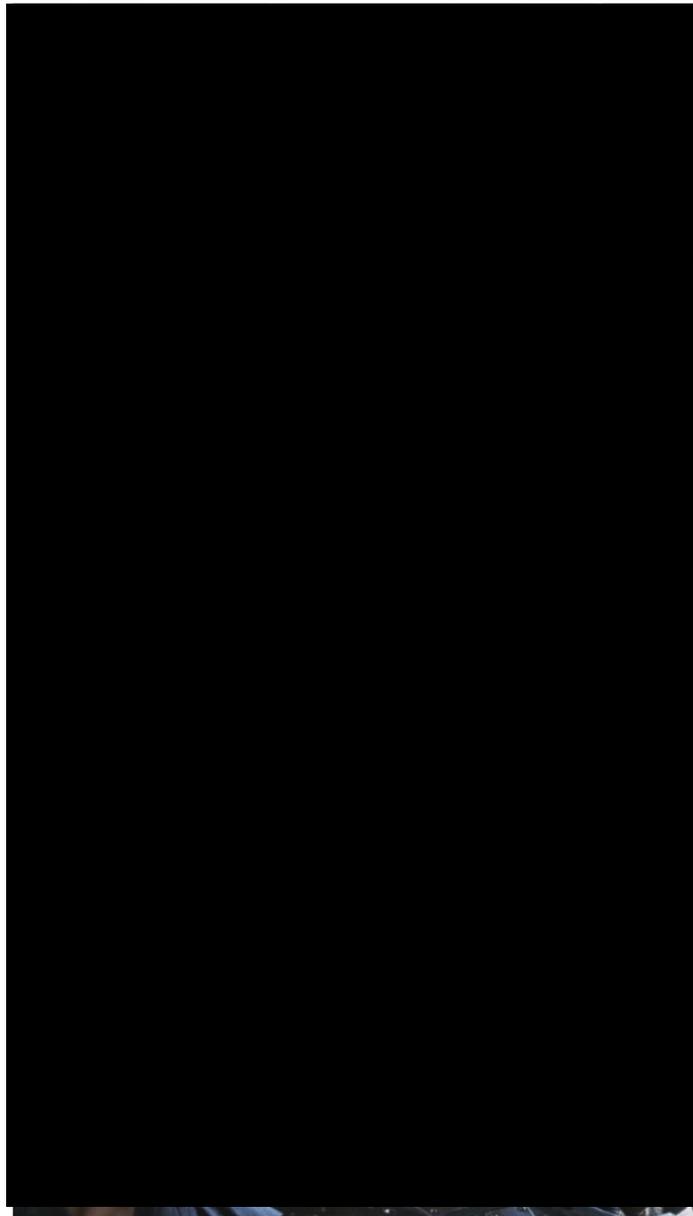


Figure 23: A collage of captured images from the film *Hero* (2002) Nameless: “Your majesty, I have now completed my mission. Because of my decision today many will die, and your majesty will go on living. A dead man begs you never to forget the ultimate ideal for a warrior (is not to kill).”

Much of the critical analysis of the film has centred on interpreting the Chinese concept: All Under Heaven. According to Zhao, this concept is closely related to the idea of empire. But the cultural specificity of the term found in many of the oldest Chinese texts, means firstly the earth, and the whole world under heaven. Secondly, it means the “hearts of all people”, or the “general will of the people”. Its third meaning refers to the ethical and/or political meaning, as a world institution, or a universal system for the world, a utopian of world-as-one-family. (ibid) It is with this understanding in mind that the choice made by Nameless- his

sacrifice of personal vendetta for the possibility of a peaceful future, is placed at the heart of the dynamic relationship between individual and the state.

As the narrative of *Hero* suggests, China's national identity is defined as a negotiation between the people and the state: to be more specific, the "general will of the people" and the competency of the state. The legitimacy of the ruling class can be taken away, because the people have the power to do away with the government when it is perceived as no longer being fit for the governing position. This is symbolized in the film when Nameless had the power to kill but chose not to. Despite the ruthlessness of the emperor, he was the only one that had the power and the means to end the wars. This dynamic is also symbolized in Nameless' self-brought death. He only pretends to stab the King because he wants the King to be aware that he knowingly walks into his death, and his sacrifice serves as a constant reminder, urging the King to "remember the ultimate ideal of a warrior" which is not to kill but bring peace to "all under heaven". In this sense, the core dynamic of China's national identity cannot be simplified into a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. As discussed in the history chapter, the power is not only negative, but productive at the same time. (Foucault, cited in Hall, 2013, p.34) It can be used to destroy as well as to build.

Moreover, while the identity of the hero in *Hero* is disputed in various analytical essays, it is argued by this research that the symbolized "hero" is really this sophisticated relationship between the King and the swordman Nameless. In other words, the film represents the process of balancing and re-balancing the interests of the "general will of the people" for the collective benefits of "unified China". The word "nation" in Chinese language is 国家 (Guo Jia) The direct translation means "nation-state" and "family". In this sense, China's national identity manifested in the film, as well as in the Chinese Dream, is not about oppositional forces, but rather needs to be constantly balanced and negotiated with an imagined broader sense of national "family".

"Heroism" and the Martial Arts Genre

This section thus far has analysed the production of Zhang Yimou's film *Hero* in terms of its technological form and narrative implications. The significance of *Hero* as the first blockbuster

of martial arts genre in the first decade of the 21st century lies in its deployment of the language of Hollywood with Chinese traditional culture and history. Zhang Yimou's filmic "historical rewriting of a pivotal moment in Chinese history for a contemporary audience" (Chan, 2009, p.93) breaks the traditional martial arts genre and displays the core values of "peace, harmony, self-perfection, and mutual understanding" (Su, 2016, p.153). These values are in line with the state-led nation building at the time, which continuously referred to the construction of the Chinese Dream put forward by Xi. However, the heroism and the subject matter attracted many criticisms since its release.

Chan, for instance, found the idea of personal sacrifice for the greater good problematic as this narrative is only retrospectively possible and effective with a form of historical hindsight. (Chan, 2009, p.95) Moreover, the heroism that *Nameless* displays "is premised on the idea that the individual must always forgo his or her own desires and rights in order to achieve social, cultural, and political unity... it risks criticism that Zhang has capitulated to the ideological pressures... encourages a submissive citizenry even in the face of violent oppression, all in the name of Chinese cultural tradition and authority." However, as defended by Zhang Yimou himself, the core theme of *Hero* is peace and the desire to end war: "For real martial- arts masters, true heroes, the heart is far more important than the sword" (cited by Chan, 2009, p.96).

The success of *Hero* opened the door for other martial arts films made in the modes of Hollywood production and distribution in the first decade of the 21st century. According to China Film Yearbook 2001-2011, the total numbers of martial arts films skyrocketed from 83 in 2000 to 526 in 2010. However, the boom in the genre also reflected China's strict censorship, "under which any film that touches on contemporary subject matter is too politically sensitive and financially risky" (Su, 2016, p.145). This is highly problematic as the "Chinese soft power" gained from the market is an escape from the current discussion of China's modernity and polity. Moreover, the genre that has been strategically deployed by the state to battle with Hollywood actually confirms with the outside criticism of China's lack of support for artistic and creative freedom, and a deep anxiety over its political identity. In this respect, China's national identity still faces enormous challenges with the crisis of faith in

modern Chinese culture. In the end, the costumed martial arts films set in ancient China reproduce the legitimacy of China as a civilization, rather than China as a modern nation.

3. The future: The Case of *Wandering Earth*

The Wandering Earth is a film adaptation of the short story of the same name by Liu Cixin, whom is the leading figure in the Chinese science fiction. After its release on February 5, 2019, the film's performance at the box office quickly attracted foreign news coverage on the film. On 17 February, 2019, *New York times* reported on the commercial success of the film, and commented that: "It certainly proves that the Chinese film industry can hold its own at the multiplex: it is just as awash in murky computer imagery, stupefying exposition and manipulative sentimentality as the average Hollywood tentpole."⁸⁶ *The Telegraph* reported on 23 February, 2019 on Netflix's decision to acquire the rights to the film, and its intention to translating it into "28 languages and [release it] into more than 190 countries", accessible by 149 million people. The article also pointed out that China is among the few regions where the platform is not available, along with North Korea, Crimea and Syria.⁸⁷ On March 13, Aynne Kokas, the author of *Hollywood made in China* argued that the film is a major achievement by the Chinese government, which "offers a template for China's patriotic film industry ambitions. It is also a prototype for exporting an image of China as the leader of the future."⁸⁸ Muqing, Zhang contests this view, arguing that "the film sends the message that international cooperation is necessary to address climate change, ...and go against the Western superhero trope of one man, one country saving Earth."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ "The Wandering Earth' Review: Planetary Disaster Goes Global" Reviewed Ben Kenigsberg *New York Times*, Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/movies/the-wandering-earth-review.html> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

⁸⁷ 'Netflix doubles down on Chinese language push, buying blockbuster *The Wandering Earth*'. Reported by Hannah Boland. *The Telegraph*. Available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/02/23/netflix-doubles-chinese-language-push-buying-blockbuster-wandering/> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

⁸⁸ 'How China is using science fiction to sell Beijing's vision of the future'. Aynne Kokas. *The Washington Post*. Available from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/03/13/how-china-is-using-science-fiction-sell-beijings-vision-future/?noredirect=on> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

⁸⁹ "What Western Media Got Wrong About China's Blockbuster '*The Wandering Earth*'" April 2, 2019. *Vice.com* Available from: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/j577z3/the-wandering-earth-what-western-media-got-wrong-about-chinas-sci-fi-blockbuster [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

This section aims to offer a textual analysis of *The Wandering Earth*. The case study offers an insight into the political economy of Chinese commercial national identity. Notably, while the main news stories of the film in Chinese media have been dominated by praise for the film's authentic depiction of traditional Chinese values and its achievement in having 75% of special effects made by a domestic team, there was another story happening alongside the commercial success of the film: Zhang Yimou's new film *One Second* which depicts people's curiosity and desire for films during the Cultural Revolution was withdrawn from the Berlin International Film Festival.⁹⁰ At a regular press conference on February 13, the spokesperson Hua Chunying of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked about the reasons for the withdrawal of Zhang's film withdrawn from the Festival. She replied to this the question by suggesting that the reporter refer the question to the relevant authorities, and she further suggested that the foreign reporter to go and see "a very popular film called *The Wandering Earth*." In this sense, the martial arts era led by Zhang Yimou which is endorsed by the state seems to be replaced by the upcoming blockbuster genre. Hence this section is divided into four short sections with a narrative overview; Chinese culture, Hollywood form? China's political identity and the representations of heroes; and last but not least, "community of shared future for mankind" and the myth of hope.

Narrative Overview

The story sets its world view in the first 5 minutes of the film: As the sun is rapidly degenerating and expanding, it will engulf earth in about 100 years, and the solar system will no longer exist in 300 years. Hence in order to maximize the chances of human survival, the United Earth Government (UEG) decides to propel earth out of the solar system to fly towards a "new home" that is 4.2 light years away. And "this mighty and enduring human migration is named as the Wandering Earth Project". In order to carry out the migration, all the resources are devoted to build 10,000 "earth engines" on the surface of the planet to "propel earth out of the solar system". Meanwhile, in order to safeguard the trajectory of the earth to its "new home", the UEG selects pilots and engineers across the world to build the "navigation

⁹⁰ The official explanation given by the Berlin International Film Festival was "due to the technical difficulties encountered during post-production". And the original scheduled dates were instead showing *Hero*. (Mtime: Available from: <http://news.mtime.com/2019/02/11/1588966.html>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

platform international space station that provides warnings, navigations, and communications for earth.” The main protagonist’s father Liu Peiqiang is one of the 311 Chinese pilots who chose to go to the international space station in order for his son Liu Qi and his father-in-law Han Ziang to live safely in the underground city. Liu Peiqiang promises his son of his eventual return, nevertheless the two have not spoken in ten years because Liu Qi has not forgiven his father’s decision to give up saving his mother who had a terminal disease.

Seventeen years later, one day before Liu Peiqiang is released from his duty as an astronaut, the earth’s trajectory is off course due to Jupiter’s gravitational spike. Because half of the “earth engines” have malfunctioned, torque is thus lost completely, and earth is expected to collide with Jupiter in thirty-seven hours. Meanwhile Liu Qi takes his adopted sister Duoduo out on the ground, and they are caught up by their grandfather. After surviving the earthquake, the grandfather and his truck have been requisitioned for an emergency rescue mission to restart the earth engine in Hangzhou. Grandfather dies on the way and entrusts Duoduo to Liu Qi. Despite 90 percent of the earth engines being reactivated, the rescue mission on earth is doomed to fail according to MOSS, the artificial intelligence on the space station. In the end, Liu Qi was inspired by a conversation with his father when he was a child, and proposes to ignite Jupiter to push the earth away. In the end, the mission is joined by different national teams, and with Liu Peiqiang’s self-sacrifice, the earth is saved from destruction. Liu Qi and his adopted sister survive. Like his grandfather, Liu Qi became a formal transporter driver.

Chinese Culture, Hollywood Form?

Wang Xiaohui, the executive deputy head of the Publicity Department of the CCP and the director of the NRTA stated at a film seminar in Beijing that the film shows the fine Chinese traditional cultures of collectivism, patriotism and love for homeland. It also “manifests the Chinese people’s non-utilitarian, cosmopolitan and cooperative spirit.” Moreover, in the face of possible disaster for all mankind, the film provides a Chinese way and method that is

different from the west.⁹¹ Wang accounted for the success of the film primarily for its “value benchmark and moral heights”. This view was, however, criticised by Chinese netizens (see figure 24). One comment states: “Please stop the vacuous nonsense but focus on the practical aspects such as the timing of the release, marketing strategy, production standard and screenplay writing.” It seems that while the state official praised the film for its ideological “correctness”, the Chinese audiences appreciated the quality of the production and professionalism the film showcased.



Figure 24: The Comments are screen captured from Weibo Available from: <https://www.weibo.com/1896650227/HhE9VuXXK?sudaref=www.google.com&display=0&retcode=6102&type=comment>

⁹¹ 'China's film authority hails 'The Wandering Earth''. People.cn February 22, 2019. Available from: <http://en.people.cn/business/n3/2019/0222/c90778-9548796.html> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

As Figure 25 shows, the film has a similar look to Hollywood Sci-fi films such as *Independence Day* (1996), *2012* (2009) and *Interstellar* (2014). But at the same time, the film is filled with traditional Chinese cultural symbols such as mah-jong, the lion dance and Chinese language banners (see figure 26). Moreover, it is sprinkled with various current popular culture references throughout the film, such as the internet viral song “Seaweed Dance”, played by the Grandfather to connote the generation gap between him and Liu Qi and Duoduo. The subtleties of cultural references to music, colour, accents, sense of mundane humour and internet slang successfully create an imagined world that is familiar to Chinese people, offering a viewing experience that is different from watching a Hollywood Sci-fi film. But the real cultural distinctions centres on the “Wandering Earth Project” itself, rather than “Chinese people’s non-utilitarian, cosmopolitan and cooperative spirit” claimed by Wang Xiaohui.

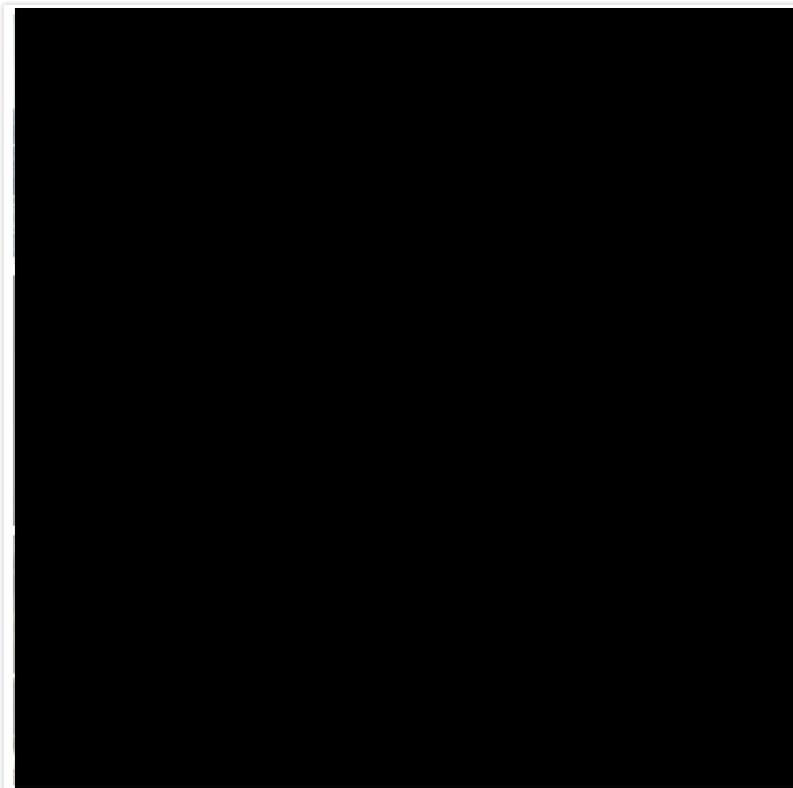


Figure 25 : An Image collage from screenshots of *The Wander Earth*

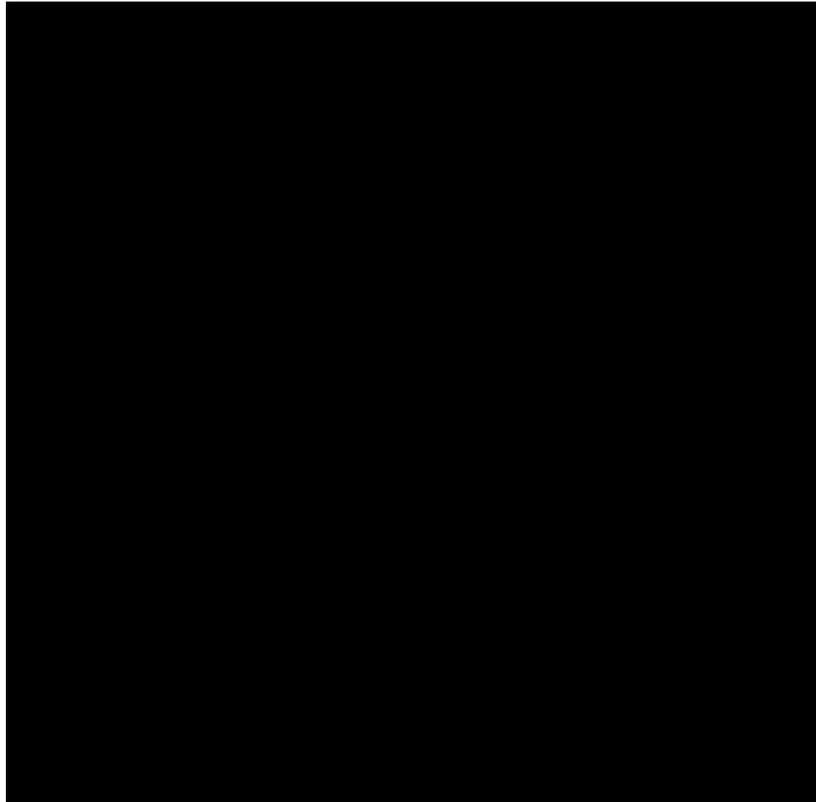


Figure 26: An Image collage from screenshots of *The Wander Earth*

In the original fiction, Liu Cixin presented a debate between the ‘Leavers’ who wish to build spaceships and leave the Earth behind and ‘Takers’ who are the supporters for the “Wandering Earth Project”. The conclusion drawn in the novella is that a small ecosystem like a spaceship “no matter how precisely designed, cannot endure the passage of time...only an ecosystem the size of Earth, with its unstoppable ecological cycle, could sustain us indefinitely! If humanity leaves Earth behind, then we would be as vulnerable as an infant separated from its mother in the middle of the desert.” (Liu, 2017) This approach depicting the inseparable relationship between man and land is arguably one of the main features of China as an agricultural civilization. Guo Fan, the director of the film, compares the uniqueness of Chinese culture and the western culture: “Since ancient times, the West has been an oceanic civilization, constantly going out to sea, and looking up at the stars, [While] for thousands of years, the Chinese people have faced the earth, with the sky behind them. They have a deep affection for the land and can’t let even an inch go. They fight with their lives for the land” (cited by Chen, 2019).

The Chinese audiences' assessment of the film was arguably based on their understanding from watching Hollywood Sci-Fi blockbusters. In other words, their identification seems to be more about the underlying narrative pattern that is often found in Hollywood blockbusters. For example, in analysing of *Independence Day*, King argues that there are two powerful components of American ideology: "The myth of the frontier and alternative myths of technological modernity, according to which America is defined as a model of modernizing progress, whether industrial or post-industrial" (King, 2000, p.22). The "frontier myth" refers to extreme situations in which individuals can make a difference, "where immediate human agency is presented as free from social constraint" (ibid, p.18). He further argues that the two are in some respects mutually exclusive, but because of their ideological resonance in American culture, the contradictions can be resolved, or at least displaced (ibid, 22).

This contradiction between the frontier myth and the myth of high technology is evidently manifested in the oppositional relationship between Liu Peiqing and artificial intelligence MOSS. When MOSS calculates that Earth has no chance of surviving the collision with Jupiter, the artificial intelligence supported by the UEG changes the Wandering Earth Project to the Helios project, which ensures the continuity of human civilization. Liu learns the fact that the space station has stopped assisting the Earth and forcefully breaks out of the Hibernation. When he makes the decision to sacrifice himself along with the space station, Liu states that "a civilization without humans is meaningless" and burns the central control room. Moss replies with one last sentence: "It is unreasonable to expect humans to stay reasonable." The ending rewards Liu's decision against all odds based on his strong sentiments for his family and fellow humankind on Earth.

In this sense, the narrative core of *The Wandering Earth* is arguably American. The so-called Chinese values claimed by the executive deputy head of the Publicity Department of the CCP such as family connections and nobility of sacrifice are not distinctively to Chinese. They are the values rewarded in Hollywood too. But perhaps what is different here is that the central protagonists are Chinese, and the film constructs an imagined world that is mundanely familiar to Chinese, technologically advanced and where a group of individuals' will eventually make the differences and achieve redemption through continuing the "voyage of hope and despair".

China's Political Identity and the Representations of Heroes

The representation of China's national identity has to be discussed in the context of the "United Earth Government" (UEG), a fictional "United Nations" depicted in the film. There are two aspects this study aims to analyse: the representation of the methods in gaining the underground residency as well as the representation of Chinese Heroes among the other heroes with different nationalities.

Though briefly, the film in the beginning explains that the right to underground residency is obtained by drawing lots. The lottery result cannot be transferred, borrowed, or gifted. Notably, this method is vastly different from the method presented in *2012* (2009). In *2012*, under the neoliberal capitalist background, people gained seats to the "ark" by funding the secret project led by the G8⁹² and China to build 9 arks in total to ensure human survival. Notably, a ticket is sold at the price of 1 billion Euro per person and is only available for the extremely wealthy and powerful. Conversely, in *The Wandering Earth*, all people regardless of class, race and gender can only earn the rights to the underground city by winning the lottery. This then defines the relationship between Liu Qi and his father Liu Peiqiang. As Liu Peiqiang's wife is diagnosed with a terminal disease, he makes a decision to volunteer to work at the space station, hence entrusting the guardianship of his son with his father-in-law. The plot implies that children are guaranteed a place in the underground city with one adult allowed for the guardianship.

The Wandering Earth attempts to present a utopian global unified socialist polity that is different from the one presented in Hollywood. Whereas the Chinese Egalitarianism described in the film seems to be based on compromise and cooperation on a global scale, the American Egalitarianism is based on individuals' equal rights to compete for resources. This approach is deliberately evident in the representations of heroes that work under the

⁹² G8 refers to the Group of eight nation-states: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia (currently suspended after 2014), United Kingdom, United States and European Union.

system of UEG. Towards the end of the film, when most national rescue teams have given up the hope, an authorised broadcast by UEG change their decision and they go back to join the Chinese rescue team at Sulawesi. Notably, these heroes of different nationalities all speak in their own languages, thus creating a more authentic appearance of global cooperation. Although the Chinese team of heroes is foregrounded in the narrative, the film ultimately pay attention to the details for a more balanced system of heroes.

However, when Netflix bought the rights of the film, the English dubbing and translation overlooked the part when all national rescue teams joined the Chinese to push the engine. This difference was then picked up by the Chinese netizens who claimed that the platform had no marketing for the film's release and "deliberately" ignored the representations of different national teams led by the Chinese. Notably, the foreign press also points to the fact that while the heroic moments of countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, Russia, France, Singapore, South Korea and United Kingdom were included in the film, the role of the United States remained minimal. The only notable moment for the U.S.A is when the nation is listed as one of the 5 members of the UEG that co-sign the authorization of the Helios Project. Instead, China's strategic political relationship with Russia is manifested through Liu Pei Qiang and his Space station Russian "buddy" Makarov. Moreover, the special effects of the film were done 75% domestically, and the rest were supported by companies from Germany and South Korea. In this sense, the film is inevitably a reflection of the current international relations, shown in its attempt to catch up with America in the technology realm, and some even argue that there is a political/ideological competition with the west. In this respect, it is necessary to understand China's political identity in terms of its ideological foundation, namely the Chinese Dream.

"Community of Shared Future for Mankind" and the Myth of Hope

Liu Cixin, who first published the story of *The Wandering Earth* in 2000, explained his original intention of creation during an interview. "In the story, human beings are seen as a whole- it is not about the conflict between different individuals and races- this approach can be seen as the idea of "community of shared future for mankind". I created the story under the

background of the greater Chinese culture, and the Earth is a symbol of the roots of all history, culture and civilization.”⁹³ Liu’s post-interpretation of his creation was in line with Xi’s foreign policy.

“Community of shared future for mankind” is a slogan first put forward by Hu Jintao and was advocated by Xi Jinping since 2013. In an important speech given at the UN in 2015, Xi explains that “The greatest ideal is to create a world truly shared by all... In today's world, all countries are interdependent and share a common future. We Should renew our commitment to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation, and create a community of shared future for mankind.”⁹⁴ After the 19th Party Congress, Xi’s “novel foreign policy signature was incorporated into the party Constitution as an essential part of Xi Jinping Thought.” (Lams, 2018, p.397) This policy is a good summary of one important aspect of the Chinese Dream by which China as a rising global power values peace, cooperation and mutual benefits.

In the film, the idea of cooperation and mutual benefits is realized by Duoduo, the adopted sister of Liu Qi. Her changing views of “hope” shaped the outcome of the dynamic of international rescue teams from fragmentation to unified strength. As she called out in the global broadcast channel:

“Hello, people from every rescue unit. My name is Han Duoduo. I am a junior high school student. Our rescue unit is executing our final mission. Right now, I am extremely terrified. My legs are trembling. Everybody in my unit is fighting tooth and nail and making every possible effort, but there is nothing I can do to help! Yesterday, my teacher asked us, What is hope? In the past, I never believed in hope. But now I do. I believe that for our time, hope is precious like a diamond. Hope is the only way to guide us home. Please come back and fight together! Light up Jupiter! Save our Earth! We are at Sulawesi 03 Torque Engine. Under the command of Captain Wang Lei. Chinese rescue unit CN171-11, Han Duoduo, End of Broadcast.”

⁹³ “电影局局长：流浪地球成功得益于占据道义制高点” (The director of the NRTA: *The Wander Earth* succeed in taking the moral high grounds) Sina Entertainment. February 21, 2019.

Available from: <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2019-02-21/doc-ihqfskcp7151458.shtml> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

⁹⁴ ‘Xi Jinping Gneral Debate at United Nations’. September 28, 2015.

Available from: https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70_ZH_en.pdf [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

“Hope” is represented closely with the idea of “Community of Shared Future of Humankind” in the film. In fact, this is also the underlying theme of the Chinese Dream. However, a closer look at the concept reveals that it is more problematic than originally perceived. In defending the views of *The Wandering Earth* being nationalistic, Zhang argues that the film “sends the message that international cooperation is necessary to address climate change and criticises the US for its failure to do the same” (Zhang, 2019). As China faces severe challenges from environmental and air pollution, the concept of “ecological civilization” was put forward by Xi to deal with the issues at present. However, as Marinelli suggests, the main characteristics of the discourse set by the political establishment is in its “projective temporality, characterised by what I defined as *Future Perfect Tense*” (Marinelli, 2008, p. 368). She further argues that this is a common theme in all political “Chinese story” in which “China is presented as a unified, ontogenetic civilization that developed according to a linear, rational and almost mechanically instantiated teleology.” (ibid) Moreover, China’s story reifies the success story of the Party-state, and hence, tries to conceal the “time space crisis”, by projecting “into the future with the assumption of a perfect aspect that views an event as completed priori and therefore indicative of progress.” (ibid) In this sense, the concept of “hope” becomes a mythical construction which serves to legitimize the ruling position of the Chinese government.

Conclusion: The Missing Present? China’s Commercial National Identity in Blockbuster Films

The introduction of this chapter presented the term “homogeneous empty time” coined by Walter Benjamin and used by Benedict Anderson to form his much celebrated “imagined community”. Anderson argues that one of the important ways to generate the national allegiance is through collective consumption of commercial stories in a given community. Benjamin associates “homogeneous empty time” with boredom. This is understood as “homogeneous empty time passes in an eternal present which remains fundamentally the same. The new reproduces the old in a series of structurally similar moments. This experience of time arises from the constant replacement and renewal of commodities. People experience time this way because of its technological and social underpinnings in the capitalist way of life.” (Robinson, 2013) There are many ways to interpret Chinese polity: post-socialism, capitalism with one Party or the self-claimed socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Nevertheless, the commonality of these perceived political identities is a market economy in which individuals' freedom is realised (and encouraged by the state) through commodity consumptions. To an extent, Chinese people's lives can be defined by the constant replacement and renewal of commodities. Popular cultural products as a field of fierce competition always seek the new markets to capture people's attention. As people's life is a continuous stream of transiting moments from "boredom" to "entertained", their identities are highly influenced by their choices of cultural consumption.

Perhaps this helps to explain the CCP's national strategy on media conglomeration before joining the WTO. Chinese scholars see Hollywood as an ideological institution which potentially undermines the established Chinese society with its own modernization path stressing the leading position of the CCP. During the first ten years encountering global Hollywood, China's cultural policy, based on co-production between Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, has helped its resistance to the domination of global capital and American culture. By fully supporting the costumed martial arts blockbuster films, the state monopoly has managed to avoid the political and financial risks and enjoyed a growth in the Chinese film market. The external success of films like *Hero* also created a sense of national identity and "Chinese soft power". However, the market saturation and audience boredom which demands a diversification of the subjects and genre changes. The appearance of *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017) and *The Wandering Earth* seemed to provide an example of a cultural commodity that is both politically satisfying to the government, and commercially welcomed by audiences. Unlike the *Wolf Warrior 2*, *The Wandering Earth* was a much more advanced production in terms of its special effects, themes, styles, colours, and philosophy. The success of these films on the one hand, are the major contributor to China's politically approved commercial national identity. On the other hand, strict censorship gravely endangers creative freedom in the film industry, which ultimately undermines the intention of the state which is to generate national identification through domestic cultural productions.

Just as this chapter draws to the end, animation film *Nezha* (2019) that released on July 26, 2019 has surpassed the box office performance set by *The Wandering Earth*. Notably, the film is not produced and distributed by any state-own media conglomerations, and the film is directed by Jiao Zi, a first timer to produce a full-length feature animation. This is significant

as it shows that peoples' cultural choices are not necessarily controlled by the government. Their consumption would inevitably base on the ones that truly resonated with them, mediated through professionalism. Moreover, Chinese nation's "hopeful" future is not guaranteed by the missing discussion of the present and the constant reaffirmation from the civilizational past. In the end, the state cannot shape people's social imagination through heavy censorship. Because individuals' imagination is achieved spontaneously. At least it needs to appear to be so. These points will be further examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Resistance, Incorporation and Spontaneity

China's Network National Identities Online

This chapter explores the manifestations of China's national identity online: Chinese cyber nationalism in relation to the celebrity-fan network. Nationalism, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, is understood as the belief of one's national identity which has strong emotional attachment to a political entity. This form of nationalism often deals with political legitimacy (Liu, 2019, para 16.15) and homeland (Smith, cited in Liu, *ibid*). In the Chinese context, nationalism is about the belief of the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party to rule in the land of China, including the disputed territories such as Tibet, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Furthermore, Yang argues that nationalism provides strong emotional resources for personal identity and a sense of belonging (2019, para 9.19). Moreover, "the internet is crucial in organizing, mobilizing, guiding, and shaping nationalism" (Li, 2019, para. 10.47).

This chapter therefore examines two case studies that manifest these complex and manifold circuits of production, consumption, regulation, resistance, negotiation, (re)adaptive production, and (re)distribution online. The case studies centre on the idea that the sustainability of national identity relies on the constant remaking of identification cues: this is exemplified by the celebrity-fan network, which simultaneously represents through top-down deployment and bottom-up identification, as well as side-by-side co-production and co-performance. As the power of Party-state to control the communication is significantly decreased in the internet era, the state increasingly relies on the voluntary self-identification of the Chinese people. This change also reflects the government's changing view of the audience, from passive subjects of education for mobilization to active online public that has the power to promote or resist state-led national identity through their creativity. The power of participatory media has, to an extent, transformed the top-down production of nation to bottom-up co-production, as in the term use by Schneider: "user-generated nation" (2018, p.165).

Section one of this chapter provides a brief overview of Chinese cyber nationalism, which prepared the ground for understanding the case studies which follow. Section two of the chapter sets out to explore the dynamics between *Danmei* subculture and the dominant value system, and how this relationship influences the state's decision to channel *Danmei* stars for national identification. The last section looks at Chinese celebrity nationalism and fandom nationalism manifested online in relation to the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protest since June. It argues that Chinese fans, as public, are shaped by both the physical/material world and the new technologies and are in the process of striving for Chinese modernization, rather than democratization as defined by the western experiences.

1. China's Cyber Nationalism and New Relationships Online

Chinese cyber nationalism as observed by Yang has experienced a transition in the way in which it is expressed, from angry earnestness to playfulness. (Yang, 2019, para.9.27) This concept may be seen to have emerged in the middle of 1990s with access to the internet and the country's "deepening of global participation- economic, political and cultural- and its rising power are also accompanied by increasing clashes with the United States" (Li, 2019, para. 10.27). Incidents such as United States' bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia caused Chinese people's anger towards the United States in 1999. According to Jiang, Chinese bloggers' antipathy reached a peak in 2008, when 6000 Chinese American and overseas Chinese students protested against a CNN news commentator who described Chinese products as "junk and Chinese people as goons and thugs" (2012, p.11). This was followed in the same year by protests by overseas Chinese students in Britain against the inaccurate BBC coverage of the details of the Tibetan unrest. The anger expressed in anti-western sentiments, however, has gradually changed alongside the continuous domestic economic development and the global financial crisis of 2008, which "made Chinese more assertive in claiming Chineseness. Younger generations in particular who benefit from China's economic prosperity have a positive view of China" (Li, 2019, para 10.30). The growing confidence of China's national identity, as well as China's flourishing internet culture, was led by the

younger generation of post 80s and post 90s⁹⁵, which then led to a style change in the expressions of cyber nationalism from “sombreness” to playfulness. This is showcased in the example of “Diba Expedition” in 2016: a collective self-organised action by online community members to “attack” Tsai Ing-wen’s Facebook page and the websites of several Taiwanese newspapers by using a meme package (表情包) (Yang, 2019, para. 9.4).

In the light of this, it seems that while Chinese netizens’ attitude towards domestic issues are largely critical, their response to outside challenges are generally nationalistic/patriotic. As the examples of 2008 and 2016 show, these types of nationalism are characterised by their grassroots, self-organized nature. In 2005, Wu contests the foreign views of the CCP’s “calculated maneuver to shift its legitimacy basis from the waning Communism doctrine to a nationalist appeal” and points out that the CCP does not possess all the means of communication (2005, p.2). Li Hongmei further states that in fact, the CCP has an ambivalent attitude towards nationalism out of the fear that “many nationalist movements later turn to criticizing domestic issues hence threatening the rule of the CCP” (Li, 2019, para. 10.29).

What are the reasons behind this changing style of grassroot nationalism, and who are the people behind this phenomenon? The following section sets out to address these questions. More importantly, these arguments will prepare this chapter to ask the most important question: is the state in fact manipulating (or adapting) grassroots nationalism to promote the legitimacy of P.R.C under the Chinese Communist Party?

Chinese Cyber Nationalism: An Explanation

Chinese nationalism, as discussed in chapter 3, started with the Opium War. With the major defeat by the British navy and subsequent invasions by the western countries and Japan, this historical period is recognised by the current state as the period of China’s humiliation. Within this discourse, the rousing of nationalistic consciousness in China by Western powers is

⁹⁵ Post 80s and post 90s means Chinese people that born after 1980s and 1990s. Especially in the post 90s, they grew up with new technology, hence they are digital natives.

understood in two ways. According to Liu, firstly, “they strengthened the solidarity of the Chinese people, who put aside their national disputes in defence against foreign invasion.” And secondly, “these reluctant encounters with Western powers introduced the concept of modern nation-state to China and set an example for Chinese nationalism with their national independence” (Liu, 2019, Para.16.17). Moreover, the CCP has strengthened Patriotic education since the June 4th Incident, which is believed by some scholars to be a propagandistic manipulation by the CCP in order to remain in power. However, this neglects the issue of grassroots nationalism which has been enabled by the internet across national borders since 2005.

There are three ways proposed by this chapter to understand the strong emotional identification with China’s national identity online. Firstly, the historical, political and economic context which prepared China’s cyber-nationalism. On the one hand, China’s political identity is problematic according to the western concept of modernization of the nation state. Thus, China’s national identity has been struggling with the existing international structures of “nation-state”: namely the dominant beliefs in democracy versus the subordinated authoritarianism. Especially after the Open and Reform policy and the continued advancement of information and communication technologies, foreign products have flooded into China which to some extent reproduces the legitimacy of the western ideas of “nation-state”. On the other hand, China’s younger generation, comprising a large part of China’s online public, has grown up to enjoy significant material benefits from the resulting economic development. In this sense, their identification with their nation has a solid economic base.

Secondly, Chinese people have been reproduced by the market economy as consumers. This, in turn, reproduces China’s national identity in economic terms, by which China’s national identity is now understood both as a political construction and an economic product. This economic nationalism is highly influenced by the Party state, as well as by the Chinese audiences consuming popular culture texts which they can play with. For example, the memetic communication used in cyber nationalism is the product of online culture. As Guobin Yang argues: “the playful culture in Chinese cyber space is a central part of the heteroglossia in contemporary Chinese culture... this cultural plurality releases the creative energy directed

at the mocking of power and authority.” Interestingly, the same cultural communication that used to mock the domestic authorities are self-mobilized by the same groups of people as a means of defending their nation. In the case of Diba Expedition in 2016, this “image-driven nationalism” (Qiu cited Yang and Guo, 2019, para. 13.13) is a softer version of traditional nationalism, “with strict discipline to achieve emotional control and emotional management” (Yang and Guo, 2019, para. 13.5). Moreover, they are highly integrated with popular cultural elements, which are humorous and entertaining. Hence audiences derive pleasure from these collective actions of consuming China’s national identity in a playful encounter with the world outside the firewall.

Thirdly, this chapter particularly pays attention to the implication of fan communities in understanding China’s cyber nationalism. According to Fiske (2001), “fan is a common feature of popular culture in industrial societies. It selects from the repertoire of mass-produced and mass-distributed entertainment certain performers, narratives or genres and takes them into the culture of a self-selected fraction of the people... It is thus associated with cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people.” (p.30). In this senses, through the collective consumption of a particular popular culture, a fan community is in fact a process of negotiation and interaction between personal identities and the dominant value system. In the context of this study, with the development of communication technology, especially the expansion of the internet and easy access to social networking sites such as Sina Weibo on mobile phones, fans are enabled to form, interact with and negotiate between their personal identity and national identity. Thus, one of the focuses of this chapter is on the way in which fan communities have formed from bottom-up, self-mobilized nationalisms in China. Liu has observed this phenomenon, and coined the term ‘fandom nationalism’, which refers to “lov[ing] your nation the way you love an idol” (Liu, 2019, para. 16.81). But before examining the fandom nationalism with case studies, this chapter will first verify a new type of relation that has emerged on Chinese internet, namely the relations between celebrity and fans in order to understand the phenomenon.

Celebrity-Fan Network on Weibo

Weibo is a Chinese social networking site developed by Sina corporation and launched in 2009. According to Statista, the platform has 374.1 million users⁹⁶ as of February 2019. Moreover, 90% of active users are under 35 years of age (Sina, 2017). This makes Weibo one of the best platforms for exchanging ideas among young people, and in particular, for fan communities. The platform is known for providing a microblogging service that primarily relies on celebrity users to maintain its popularity (Zhang, 2016, para. 17.5). Zhang argues that Weibo enables a new type of relationship between celebrity users and fan publics which is different from any previous traditional relationships in the Chinese society: that is, the traditional understanding of social relationship in China is pretty much limited by Guanxi (关系), which is materialized in social connections such as kinship, neighbours and colleagues who share the same physical place. In modern times, Chinese people were placed into other types of relationship through social institutions such as schools and working units. However, these are all state-led social institutions started back in the Communist years, and the relationships formed under such institutions are structurally shaped instead of culturally inherited. The marketization reform begun in the 1970s brought into existence new social institutions that are not under full control of the state, such as privately owned companies. However, new social relationships such as business partnership and employer-employee relationship seemed to continue the tradition of Guanxi, where social sentiment or human feelings are not separated from these economic relationships (Zhang, 2016, para 17.8).

However, the type of relationship between celebrity and fan manifested on Weibo are different from the material relationship of the traditional Guanxi. It is non-personal between strangers but has very high levels of one-way emotional attachment. Moreover, information, sentiment and emotion are transmitted in the celebrity-fan network which is not only defined by celebrity action and fan reaction. More importantly, celebrities are highly capable of linking their fans to the various social issues that they choose to perform on Weibo (Zhang, 2016,

⁹⁶ 'Number of Sina Weibo users in China from 2017 to 2021', Statista.
Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/941456/china-number-of-sina-weibo-users/> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

para. 17.42). For instance, if a celebrity is propagating a fund raiser event about helping the poor in a rural area of China, the common responses from fans is to repost the propagation and voluntarily donate to the charity alongside their celebrity as a show of support. Nonetheless, this link is unstable, or even “flashy” in the sense that fans’ attention and reaction to the issues are highly fragmented. This is because the constant scrolling down the screen on Weibo limits their attention to a very short period of time, and once their celebrity stops propagating a certain issue, their attention will also shift to the next thing that the celebrity chooses to perform.

The analysis provided by Zhang on celebrity-fan network is valuable, as this example also helps to comprehend Stuart Hall’s identification theories: “Identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origins or shared characteristics with another person or group, or an ideal and with natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on the foundation... the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed- always in ‘process’... identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency... it obeys the logic of more than one” (Hall, 1996, pp.2-3). Celebrity-fan networks precisely reflects this ‘process’ which is loyal and fluid, strong and weak at the same time. To apply this thinking to China’s national identity, it is therefore necessary to constantly create links to the nation, mediated through a matrix of complex, contradictory and fragmented links in the popular culture.

The next section concerns fans’ performance in the current modern and virtual world, and argues that in order for the party-state to maintain the complex matrix of links of national identifications, it has to allow a certain level of personal freedom for the people to perform.

Fans as diffused Audiences and the Performative Society

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) argue that audiences today are becoming more and more diffuse as a result of modernization, enabled by the prevalence of mass media. The paradigm shifts from simple audience, mass audience to diffused audience has given rise to the importance of analysing the relationship between performance and reception. While ‘simple

audience' may be characterized by its direct, focused and often local communication between a sender and a receiver, 'diffused audience' is depicted by its inattentiveness, fragmented and local/global communication. According to Abercrombie and Longhurst, there are four ways of understanding diffused audience: first, the media and technology saturated society leads people to spend a lot of time in consumption of mass media both at home and in public. Second, media such as newspaper, television, internet, and now the ultimate combination into one smart phone, are constitutive of our everyday life (1998, pp.69). In other words, media and our mundane everydayness are interwoven to an extent that is almost indivisible. Especially among the younger generation, the mobile phone has become their ultimate device for communication, information, music, social networking, emails and media contents.

Thirdly, diffused audience is understood through Kershaw's 'performative society':

Simultaneously, the mediatization of developed societies disperses the theatrical by inserting performance into everyday life – every time we switch into the media we are immediately confronted by a performative world of representational styles – and in the process the ideological functions of performance become ever more diverse and, maybe, diluted. Moreover, the globalization of communications stages the life of other cultures as unavoidably performative, as widening realms of human identity become object to the spectators' gaze, and the social and political resonances of particular crises, such as the suffering of starving Somalians or the quasi-invasion of Haiti by the United States, are absorbed by the relentless opacity of the spectacle. (Cited by Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.71)

Though written in 1996, the depiction here is still very applicable to what is happening after twenty years. With microblogging sites like Weibo, we constantly perform and watch, construct and consume, we are objects and subjects at the same time. Moreover, meanings that are embedded in short sentences and images become fragmented and more dependent on interpretation. Media and technology are, indeed, intimately connected with our daily life, to the extent that we are unaware of ourselves being performers and audience at the

same time; this is suggested as the fourth sense of diffused audience and characterized by “the virtual invisibility of performance” (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p.72).

In the case of Chinese fans on Weibo, either the memetic communication in cyber nationalism or their collective actions in reposting the celebrity’s propagation of social issues are to an extent a performance for wider recognition. While gazing and judging other fans’ performance, they are self-representing through their imagined relationship with their nation or a celebrity. Through this complex process of interaction, negotiation and reconfiguration, they are defining and redefining themselves through these networks of identifications. Moreover, even moments of national crisis can become resources for personal performance as the cases of cyber nationalism show. In this respect, National identity as a state-led project needs to understand the performative-ness of the online public, hence leaving more freedom for personal interpretations and styles of performances for national identification.

This section has looked at the theoretical approach to Chinese cyber-nationalism and a new type of social relationship on Weibo, namely the celebrity-fan network. From the early 2000s to 2016, Chinese scholars have observed a transition in styles of cyber nationalism from anger to playfulness. While consumer culture has enabled a new market approach to China’s national identity as a traditional political construct, new media and communication technology has enabled the online public to perform their national identity through moments of crisis encountering foreign challenges. This grassroots image-driven nationalism has been born out of the subculture of fan experiences which was originated to negotiate subordinate identities with dominant values. This resistant yet “rebellious obedient” (Liu, 2017, para.16.92) nature of fan behaviours are this chapter’s focus, which will be further discussed in the cases which follow.

2. Channelling *Danmei* Stars for National Identification: The Case of *Guardian* (2018)

The success of the Internet drama *Guardian* (镇魂) was arguably the cultural phenomenon of the summer of 2018. This section examines the complex dynamic between the dominant national culture order and a subculture that is highly regulated by the state. It especially pays attention to the ways in which the Weibo fan community and cultural industries negotiate/incorporate with the state regulation. Moreover, it seeks to understand how national identifications are enabled by this new type of relationship on Weibo: the celebrity-fan network.

***Danmei* Novels turned to Dramas (耽改剧)**

Danmei (耽美) or Boy's Love (BL), is a genre of "male-male romance created by and for women and sexual minorities" in China (Yang & Xu, 2017, p.3). Though originated in Japan, it was further adopted by the Korean popular cultural industries to encourage the consumption of idol groups. This then has later become a popular cultural phenomenon across Asia and has continued to expand internationally. *Danmei* culture is considered to be a subculture due to its marginality and is stigmatized in the Chinese mainland society. However, recent developments, especially the commercial practice of turning *Danmei* novels into dramas, has shown an interesting turn from subculture to mainstream popular culture. As Yang and Xu argue, BL culture has "successfully merged with a diverse range of local and global media and celebrity cultures, and developed into a transnational, all-inclusive, and female dominated meta-fan culture (ibid).

The phenomenon of converting *Danmei* novels to drama began with the success of *Addiction* (上瘾) in 2016. The online fiction written by Chai Jidan was adapted by the author into an internet series that was aired in January, 2016 (see figure 27). The drama enjoyed an immediate popularity across the transnational community of online *Danmei* fans. On its first day of release, the web series became the most watched drama on the media content platform Iqiyi (爱奇艺) at the time. However, after 12 episodes, the drama was banned by the government on account of its "vulgar, immoral and unhealthy content" (Peterson, 2016).

Although the series was taken down by the platform due to the accusation of normalizing corruption, the ban led to furious responses expressed by online fan communities. It was reported that in an online poll by the Chengdu Committee for the well-being of Youth and Teenagers, a government-backed social organization, more than 93 percent of the 20,000 respondents disapproved of this removal (*Daily Mail*, 2016). China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) was reported to have received direct guidance from the state to ban the series. These new guidelines indicated that "no television drama shall show abnormal sexual relationships and behaviours, such as incest, same-sex relationships, sexual perversion, sexual abuse, sexual violence, and so on" (Peterson, 2016).



Figure 27: Huang Jingyu (rear) & Xu Weizhou (foreground): official marketing poster derived from *Addiction* Weibo official marketing platform.

Nonetheless, the case of *Addiction* provided a model of star making in Chinese popular culture industries. After the ban⁹⁷, the web series and the two main protagonists became one of the hottest topics on the internet. Their Weibo followers skyrocketed from thousands to millions.⁹⁸ Huang and Xu went on to launch their careers separately in the film and fashion industries. Especially, Huang (see figure 28) later starred in a blockbuster film *Operation Red*

⁹⁷ The two main actors were prohibited to be shown together on any on-screen occasions, such as reality TV shows and fan meetings.

⁹⁸ Weibo followers are one of the main indicators for the popularity of a star in China. As of August 2019, Huang and Xu each generated little more than 10 million followers on Weibo.

Sea (2018), playing a soldier of the People's Liberation Army, which currently ranks as the fifth highest grossing film in China.



Figure 28: Huang Jingyu as Gu zhun in *Operation Red Sea* (2018), Image derived from: <http://dingyue.ws.126.net/biQsG4VRfqNNwM0nTirs7hJiitCnxWa028DQWgnLNOXwD1519726048172.jpg>

Arguably, the selection of actors made by *Addiction* drew lessons from the idol industries in South Korea. Korean boy bands often feature suggestive ambiguous relationships between two members of the group. This has proven to be particularly useful in generating popularity among girl fans. Cieko and Lee's study of Korean film star Han Suk-kyu interprets this cultural phenomenon as "flower boy" phenomenon. "Flower boy" refers to feminized masculinity that is "slim, fashion-conscious, and pretty in a way that contests gender and sexual ambiguity." (Cieko & Lee, 2007, p.227) In the context of popular culture industries, this ambiguity then becomes a hook that leaves space for fan girls' active interpretations. Different from Chai Jidan's previously produced drama⁹⁹, she has deliberately taken the appeal of the actors rather than their actual acting skills into consideration, and casted Huang (previously a fashion model) and Xu (a senior university student major in acting at the time) in the series. The success of *Addiction* thereafter encouraged other online *Danmei* intellectual properties (IP)

⁹⁹ *Counterattack* (2015), Chai Jidan's first attempt to convert her written fictions to web dramas.

to be turned into web series. Among them, *Guardian* (2018) stands out in terms of its casting and online fans' active resistance and creativity.

Guardian: A Negotiated Success

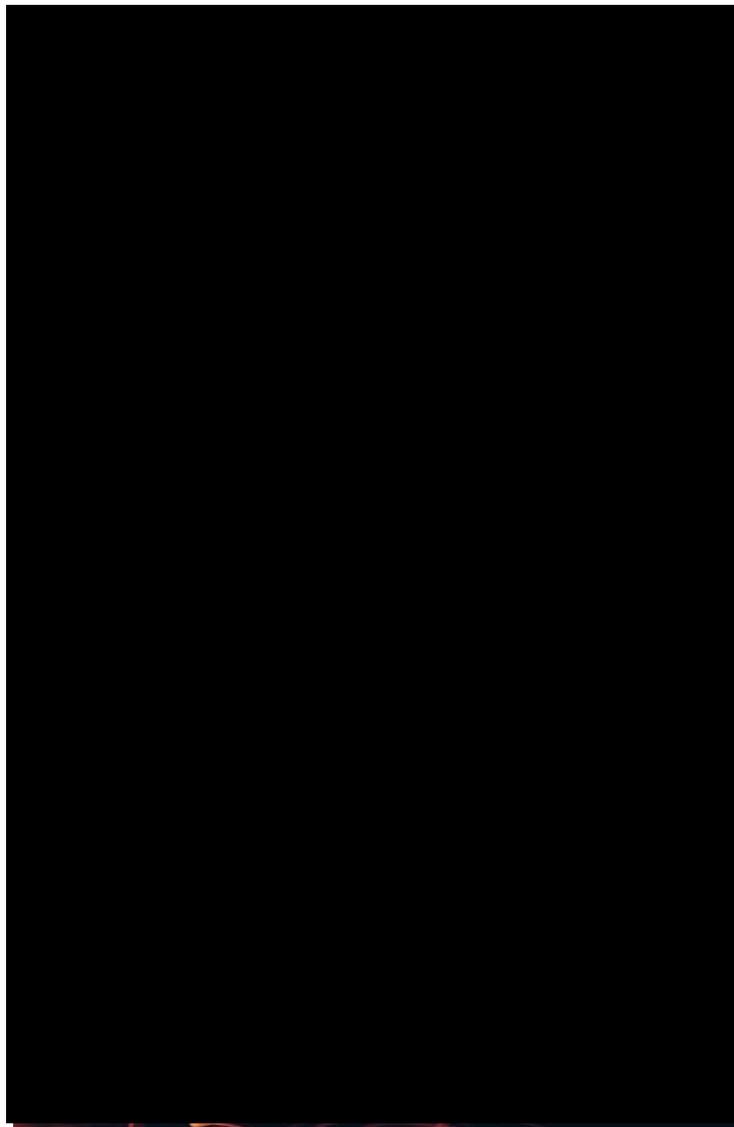


Figure 29: The official poster of *Guardian*. (Available from: <https://www.jianshu.com/p/7bc61e50b8b7>)

The discussion of the success of *Guardian* (see figure 29), also known as its Chinese name *Zhen Hun*, needs to be understood in two respects. Firstly, it needs to be placed in the general context of “little fresh meat” (小鲜肉). The internet buzzword “Little fresh meat” is essentially

a Chinese version of the Korean “flower boy” to describe young, beautifully handsome men.¹⁰⁰ While the official authorities “slams” the masculinity represented by this cultural phenomenon¹⁰¹, the media industries have been continuously deploying stars in this category to ensure return on investment and profit in the market. However, criticisms from the general public are often directed towards their enormous salary and poor acting skills. Secondly, the success of *Guardian* also needs to be understood in the context of the negotiation between the internet *Danmei* drama and state regulation. After the ban on *Addiction*, the “General Rules for Television Series Content Production” announced in March 2016 by SARRFT, listed homosexuality as “vulgar content” and feudal superstitions that are contrary to science as not appropriate for dramas. In the light of this regulation, *Guardian* which was adapted from the online popular *Danmei* fiction of the same name, changed the mythological world view of the story to a “scientific” world view. More importantly, the web series changed the relationship of the two lead actors from romance to friendship.

In this revised format, with the professional acting given by Zhu Yilong and Bai Yu (see figure 30) , the lead actors of the drama, as well as the online fans’ spontaneous marketing by creating *Guardian* related memes (镇魂表情包), short video, slash fiction, paintings and humorous interpretations, the *Guardian* won the Weibo TV award as the most popular drama in 2018. This award is in fact based on the fans’ blaze activities on the Weibo platform. The term used to describe the general phenomenon of the fandom of the drama is “镇魂女孩” (see figure 31), which refers to their active reading and reproducing of the subtext and paratext of the friendship depicted in the drama as romantic love between two equals. However, while this blooming of creativity is based on mining the details of love and relationships, they also show a peculiar self-organized restraint over the drama and the two leading actors. This is manifest in the fans’ insistence on calling the bond between the on-screen duo “socialist brotherhood”.

¹⁰⁰ Wu Haiyun argues that the meaning of Chinese “little fresh meat” other than being the object of female gaze, also refers to innocent, naïve boys in which their fans often self-referred as their aunty. (Sixth tone.com) (Available from: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1201/how-little-fresh-meats-are-winning-china-over->) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

¹⁰¹ According to the People.com, People’s Liberation Army Daily Slammed several “little fresh meats” for their performance in a military-themed TV shows. (Available from: <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/1126/c90000-9147430.html>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

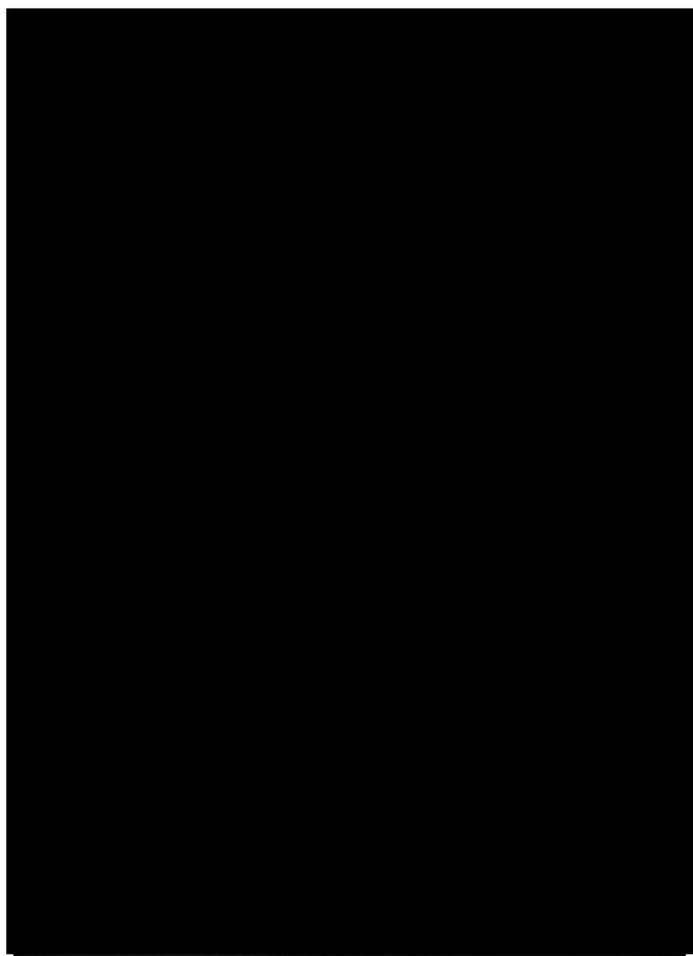


Figure 30 : From left to right: Bai Yu, Zhu Yilong. Both graduated from top acting universities in Beijing and are considered to be actors rather than “little fresh meat”.



- 解释：一个擅长抠糖产粮的特殊群体，指那些被剧版《镇魂》中赵云澜、沈巍两位主角之间浓浓社会主义兄弟情所感动的女孩们。
- 造句：我镇魂女孩绝不认输！

Figure 31 : An internet meme that defines *Zhen Hun Girls* (镇魂女孩): A special community of girls that are good at reading and creating the subtext of the main protagonists of the drama *Zhen Hun*, who are

touched by the representation of strong “socialist brotherhood” (社会主义兄弟情) performed by Zhu Yilong and Baiyu. The ending sentence in the meme reads as: “I, *Zhen Hun* Girl, will never give up!”



●解释：指 < 镇魂 > 官博宣传时试图曲解两位主角的社会主义兄弟情，遭到镇魂女孩强烈反对的现象。

●图解：



Figure 32: “Guan Lang Fen Chou” (官浪粉愁) is created by the *Guardian* fans to describe the phenomenon that while the official marketing account of the drama on Weibo was deliberately showing behind the scene footages of Zhu and Bai and implying their “affections” towards each other, the fans were worried that such marketing could undermine the “safety” of the drama, and resulting being removed by the state regulation body.

“Socialist brotherhood” (社会主义兄弟情) is best understood as both resistance and acceptance. Firstly, the disruptive creativity and spontaneous marketing by the *Guardian* fans can be seen as a collective act of resisting the dominant symbolic order of marginalizing *Danmei* culture as subversive and vulgar culture. By self-promoting the drama online, and thereby competing with other TV dramas that enjoyed much greater commercial and political resources as mainstream cultural products, the collective identity of the Chinese *Danmei* fans has thus been negotiated through the success of *Guardian*. Secondly, their peculiar carefulness around the “sensitive” marketing contents made by the official *Guardian* Weibo account demonstrates a form of self-incorporation, which suggests that they have accepted their position as subversive to the mainstream “socialist conduct” defined by the CCP (see

figure 32). Moreover, this self-incorporation is negotiated through the appreciation of the performances given by the two leading actors, and in the fear that the possible ban on the actors, as the case of *Addiction* suggested. (Notably, *Guardian* was taken down by Youku for three months allegedly for the reason that the drama “promotes feudal superstition, over-emphasis on the dark side of society, and bloody and violent scenes”.¹⁰²) In this sense, their contradictory persistence on both mining the “love” out of friendship as well as propagating the “socialist brotherhood” outside their own fan circle is cooperation on the surface and resistance at its core. The phenomenon of “*Zhen Hun* Girls” thus became a process of reproducing the already existing cultural order powered by the Party-state, rather than challenging the dominant order.

Moreover, the success of *Guardian* is both a commercial incorporation and ideological incorporation. Dick Hebdige argues that there are two forms of incorporation of subculture: the commodity form and the ideological form. The former refers to the meaning that “as soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen’. Once removed from their private contexts....and produce[d] them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once... profitable merchandises” (1979, p.96). Though this was written in the context of styles, it is highly applicable to understanding the commercial success of *Zhen Hun* as a business model for web series and star making. In the context of Chinese online video platform, paid membership has become an increasingly important business model. According to Sina.tech¹⁰³, the *Guardian* generated 5 million new paid members for its broadcast platform: Youku. Moreover, Zhu Yilong and Bai Yu rise to their new popularity, each having more than 10 million followers on Weibo. This is especially true of Zhu Yilong, whose stardom has transformed since the release of the drama, helping to become the official endorsement person for global brands such as Coca Cola, Tom Ford, L’Oreal, Chopard, L’Occitane and Kentucky Fried Chicken, to name but a few. Furthermore,

¹⁰² ‘为什么镇魂突然下架’. (‘Why *Zhen Hun* suddenly disappeared?’) 02 August, 2018. Sohu.com

Available from: http://www.sohu.com/a/244852826_100113123 [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

¹⁰³ “三大视频平台厮杀：爱奇艺弃播放量，腾讯改革会员拉新体系” (‘Three major content platforms stifle: Iqiyi abandoned the assessment based on viewing account, Tencent reform on the paid membership system’) Sina Technology, 21 October, 2018. Available from: <https://tech.sina.com.cn/roll/2018-10-21/doc-ihmrasqt3450494.shtml> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

the success of *Guardian*, including its marketing strategies seems to generate more commercial attempts at adapting *Danmei* online IP to web series. For instance, *The Untamed* (陈情令) (see figure 33) released by Tencent on 27 June, 2019 followed the success of *Zhen Hun* which changed the bond between the lead characters from lovers to bosom friends and became the most discussed online dramas in summer 2019. Notably, *The Untamed* is only available for subscription members of the platform, releasing six episodes each week. Towards the end of the series, Tencent offered an option for its subscribers to unlock the final episodes one week early for an extra 30 RMB, and reportedly generated an additional 78 million RMB (about 9 million pounds)¹⁰⁴. Again, the two male leads of *The Untamed* have also risen to their new popularity with current Weibo followers of 25 million (Wang Yibo) and 17 million (Xiao Zhan).

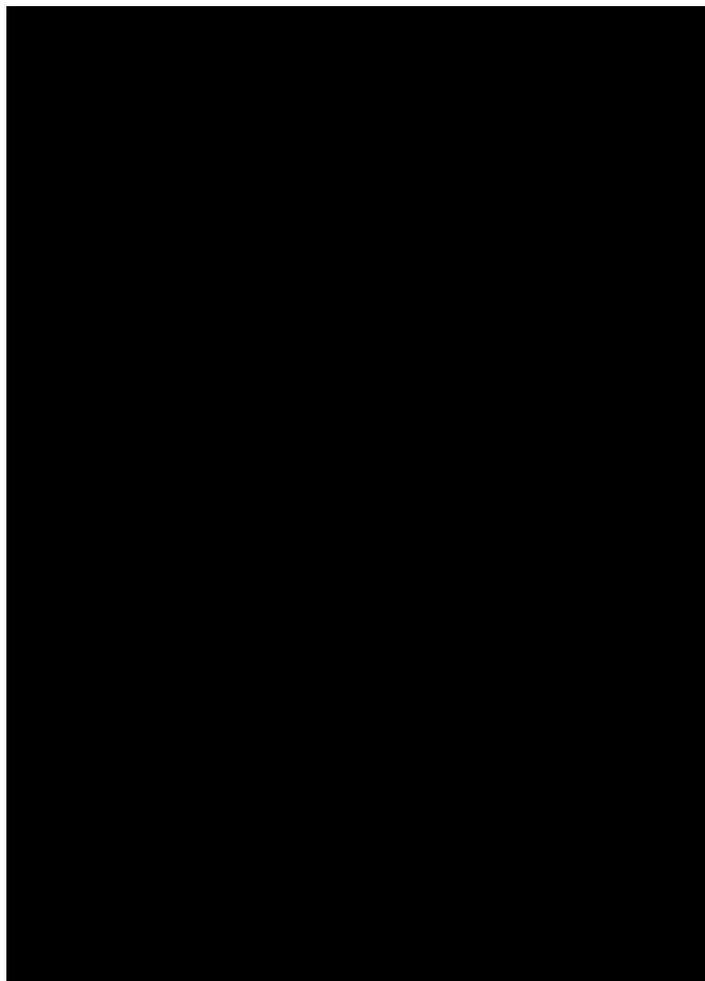


Figure 33: The official poster of *The Untamed* (2019).

¹⁰⁴ '30 元提前看大结局《陈情令》让腾讯一夜到手 7800 万' ('Advance access to the finale of *The Untamed* led Tencent earned 78 million RMB overnight') 10 August, 2019. Wen Menghua & Bi Yuanyuan. Available from: <https://tech.163.com/19/0810/10/EM7BQBUG000999LD.html> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

In this sense, the commercial practices of converting *Danmei* online fictions to web series seems to echo what Hebdige coined as the commercial form of incorporation: from subculture to mainstream commercial culture. Especially the fandom of *Guardian* to an extent showcased resistance to the dominant symbolic order, but in the end largely reproduced the dominant cultural order. In this sense, *Danmei* as a subculture is perceived to be a homogenous part of the structural Chinese cultural system led by the state. However, a closer examination of the developmental process from *Addiction* (2016), to *Guardian* (2018) to *The Untamed* (2019), reveals the negotiation between the industry, state and fans and demonstrates a much more complex process of regulation and self-regulation, adaptation and alteration, resistance and incorporation. From this perspective, online fandom is characterised by “textual proaching” (Jenkins, 1992, p.24) which actively constructs and circulates meanings as a form of empowerment alongside the commercial incorporation. In other words, the system is not defined by the state, but is rather, with the power of media technology, co-produced by the online public.

The following section continues to explore the ideological incorporation in relation to the *Guardian* stars Zhu Yilong and Baiyu.

Zhu Yilong & Bai Yu Performing at the May 4th Gala

The fourth of May 2019 marked the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement in China. This Movement centred on student protests and a national strike against the then government’s inability to battle with western colonialism and feudalism. Moreover, it is a Movement defined by the CCP as patriotic, because it also contributed to the establishment and development of the Chinese Communist Party. One of the celebration events is a Television gala presented by the CCTV, entitled “We Are All Dream Chasers”¹⁰⁵. According to

¹⁰⁵ This title is in accordance to Xi Jinping’s 2019 New Year speech in which he stated: “we are all running very hard, we are all dream chasers.” (*China Daily*, ‘President Xi Delivers New Year Speech for 2019’. 31st December, 2018. Available from: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201812/31/WS5c29f7f7a310d91214051d6d.html>) [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

China Global Television Network (CGTN), the state-owned English language news channel, the gala's theme "is to demonstrate the spirit of Chinese young people" as well as showing the audience "the charm of traditional Chinese culture, as well as the achievement of cross-cultural exchanges in recent years"¹⁰⁶ (CGTN, 2019). Notably, the gala is filled with stars/celebrities who enjoyed high popularity among the young demographic, including *Guardian* stars Zhu Yilong and Bai Yu.

The reunion of the lead actors on screen is considered by fans as "unusual". As briefly mentioned earlier, one of the after-effects of *Addiction* is that the two main characters were banned from being seen on screen together, and this subsequently became a regrettable result for the fans of Huang and Xu, the lead characters of the *Addiction*. Therefore, when Zhu and Bai's participation in the May 4th Gala was confirmed by the relevant authority, the "*Zhen Hun Girl*" fans were over the moon and referred to their happiness "as if it is new year". The fans expressed their excitement through creating memes (see figure 34), thanking their country and the CCTV for the reunion, and promoting the Gala.

¹⁰⁶ Available from: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774e344d444e34457a6333566d54/index.html> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]



Figure 34: A collage of fan made memes captured from Weibo regarding the reunion of Zhu and Bai on May 4th Gala. Top left: “Believe in the brand Power. CCTV is our daddy.” Top right: “Thank you to the May 4th Youth Festival. Thank you to my nation. Thank you, CCTV. As long as you let Zhu and Bai appear together, you will always be my daddy!” Down left: “I love my country! I am kneeling down! Thank you, CCTV! I am going to cry!” Down right: “Whoever you are, if you watch the May 4th Gala, you will be my good friend for a lifetime!”

Zhu’s singing performance of “Hero Rhyme” and Bai’s poetry recitation “The Backbone of the Republic” were circulated on Weibo and reposted by many fans, while those figures who were celebrities in the *Danmei* community have been incorporated by the state to be the ideological representatives of the nation. Ideological form of incorporation as defined by Hebdige refers to “the ways in which subcultures are represented in the media makes them both more and less exotic than they actually are” (1979, p.97). This is not the case here. More often than not, the ideological incorporation in China is more about doing away with the cultural marginality and becoming a “legitimate” part of the national cultural system, rather than a direct debate on the subculture. In other words, the decision made by CCTV to invite Zhu and Bai to perform at the May 4th Gala is focused on accessing the young audience

through their beloved celebrities, rather than negotiating with the values of a certain subcultural group. The ambiguous implication of the state's decision is however knowingly overlooked by the fan community, as suggested by the memes (calling CCTV and the nation "daddy" is in fact a mocking acknowledgement of the power of the authorities). Perhaps from the fans' perspective in the context of consumerism, *Danmei* subculture is to an extent, merely a means to personal enjoyment rather than an "authentic" part of their personal identity. Their consumption needs are thus achieved by the state fulfilling such needs by inviting Zhu and Bai, which indirectly help the state to sustain the existing national cultural order.

Zhang Weiyu argues that the celebrity-fan relationship is a new type of social relationship in China, enabled by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is different from any old type of relationships in China, such as *Guanxi* (meaning 'relationship') which is personal, reciprocal, and connotes an exchange of resources. The relationship between celebrities and fans is emotionally charged: "the emotional attachment from fans to celebrities is so strong that it almost equals a romantic relationship." (Zhang, 2016, para 17.9) Moreover, it is not personal nor reciprocal, "and the formation of such relationship is highly individualist and fluid, albeit the apparent influence of media institution." (ibid, para 17.10) Firstly, Zhang's observation rightly points out the strong sentiment and emotions involved in this celebrity-fans network. As the meme (figure 34) shows, the appearance of the celebrities together has successfully turned their fans into fans of CCTV (for the time being at least), and even fans of the nation: "Thank you to my nation, thank you CCTV, as long as you let Zhu and Bai appear together, you will always be my daddy." Their strong emotional identification with the celebrities is simultaneously transferred to the 'nation-state' who met their desire. However, such transferred strong emotions are mostly fleeting and fluid, "flashy in the sense that their attention to and performance on" (Zhang, 2016, para 17.43). The state agenda is largely subject to the media institution's constant (re)identifying and (re)deployment of the most current popular celebrities to channel their emotions for national identification.

To summarize, this section has looked at examples of the web series based on *Danmei* fictions, and how on the one hand, the state regulates the subcultural commodities deemed to be "subversive" whilst deploying stars associated with this subculture to propagate state

agenda; and on the other hand, Weibo fan communities actively resist the state regulation through their “subversive” creativities, while paradoxically ending up by reproducing the existing national value system. In this respect, there is an increasingly complex dynamic between the popular culture industry, the state and the fans, which is enabled by ICT. Moreover, China’s national identity online is increasingly intertwined with the popular cultural practices, as the following case further highlights the phenomenon of “fandom nationalism” in relation to the recent case of the Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Bill Protest.

3. Celebrity Nationalism and Fandom Nationalism: The Case of the Hong Kong Anti-Extradition Bill Protest

The Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protest started on 9th of June 2019, against the government proposals to allow extradition to mainland China. According to the BBC, opponents feared this would risk giving China mainland’s government greater influence over Hong Kong and “could be used to target activists and journalists”.¹⁰⁷ The protest however soon escalated to physical encounters between protesters and the Hong Kong police. While the foreign media focuses on the potential violence from the Hong Kong police, the Chinese news media tend to focus on the violent behaviour initiated by the protesters. On August 13, a Chinese news reporter from *Global Times* Fu Guohao was tied to a cart in Hong Kong international airport and “brutally assaulted by rioters” (*China Daily*¹⁰⁸). According to the BBC, this was due to a fear that the police would disguise themselves as anti-government protestors, and “it is not clear if he (Fu Guohao) identified himself.”¹⁰⁹ In the video which captured the moment when Fu was stripped of his yellow reporter vest and tied to the cart, he stated that: “I support the Hong Kong police, you can now beat me.” This then became the pivotal moment for Chinese cyber nationalism manifested by most Chinese celebrities

¹⁰⁷ ‘The Hong Kong protest explained in 100 and 500 words’. BBC News.

Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49317695> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

¹⁰⁸ ‘Condemnation pours in over brutal attack on GT reporter’ *China Daily*. 14 August, 2019. Available from: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201908/14/WS5d534e5ba310cf3e35565946.html> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

¹⁰⁹ ‘China describes Hong Kong Protests as ‘near terrorism’’ BBC. 14 August 2019. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49348462> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

(including some celebrities from Hong Kong) reposting Weibo image feeds by *People's Daily* account and CCTV news centre account to support Fu Guohao. (see figure 35 and figure 36) Moreover, Chinese online fan communities, including Diba, were actively involved in contesting the “biased” western news reports on the Protest, as well as defending China’s national identity online. The fandom nationalism coined by Liu is thus fully demonstrated in these examples. This section will also examine how the state encouraged and incorporated these types of nationalism in order to maintain political stability.



Figure 35: A collage of four image Weibo feeds posted by the *People's Daily* official account and CCTV News Centre official account. Top left: "I am guarding the national flag." Top right: "Hong Kong is part of China forever." Bottom left: "I support the Hong Kong Police. You can now also beat me. What a shame for Hong Kong." Bottom right: "I love Hong Kong, I love China. I, too, support the Hong Kong police."

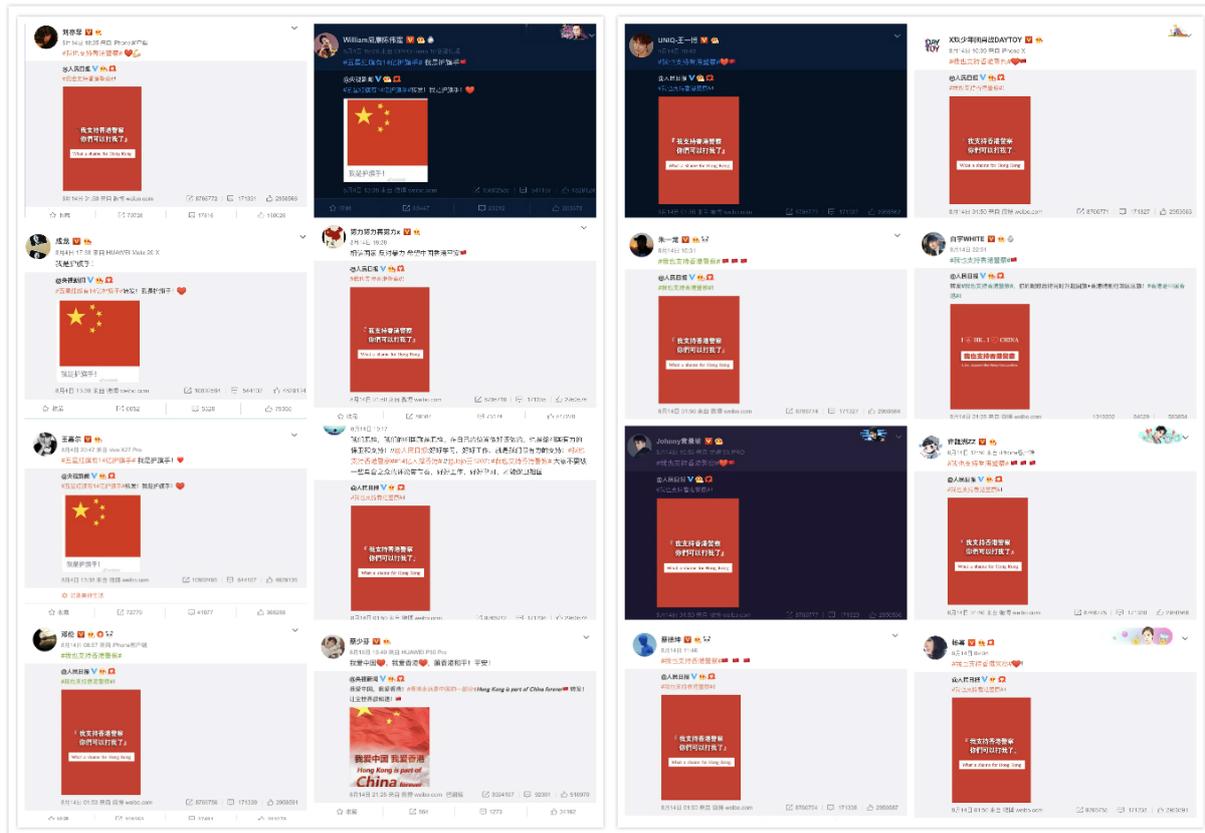


Figure 36: A collage of screenshots from sixteen celebrities among the many other more celebrities who reposted the image feeds posted by the *People's Daily* official account and CCTV news centre official account on 14th August and 15th August, 2019. Including all six aforementioned *Danmei* drama stars, they are: Wang Yibo, Xiao Zhan, Zhu Yilong, Baiyu, Huang Jingyu, Xu Weizhou, Liu Yifei, He Jiong, Cai Xukun, Zhang Yixing, Yangmi, Deng Lun, Wang Jiaer (Hong Kong), Jackie Chan (Hong Kong) Chen Weiting (Hong Kong) and Cai Shaofen (Hong Kong).

Celebrity Nationalism

China's celebrity nationalism, as defined in this study, is used to describe celebrities' public endorsement of a national issue that is initiated by the state. One of the main features is to repost official Weibo account's feed to show support for a political agenda. In this case, as figures shows, reposts supporting the messages of "Hong Kong is forever part of China" and "I, too, support the Hong Kong Police" form a particular route of national identification, however questionable the "authenticity" of these collective actions. Most of the reposting feeds have no personal comments but the same hashtag topic suggested by the original official post to create a link to the discussion page, apart from the TV program presenter He Jiong, who has 100 million followers on Weibo, and Zhang Yixing who is a Korea popular industry trained Chinese idol who is well known for his patriotism, said a few words to express their advocating opinion on the issues. In this respect, celebrities' collective endorsements,

to an extent, function more as a role model for their fans as well as a political performance to show their identification with the Party-state.

Chinese celebrities have been deployed by the state to propagate a national agenda and promote the national image since the 2000s. As shown in the example discussed in the state's publicity film campaign in chapter 5, the state actively uses celebrities to promote China's national identity for foreign audiences. More often than not, however, they are also mobilized by the state to promote the national interests for the domestic audiences. For example, popular celebrities who have millions of followers online and social impact such as Jackie Chan, Wu Jing and Yang Mi are commonly used as the faces for national messages, as one of the many campaigns like "Glory and Dream: Our Chinese Dream" demonstrated in 2017. This practice is not new, with "research on celebrity activism show[ing] that celebrities can enhance the visibility of social movement, attract audiences and supporters to donate to the causes, and grab the attention of policy makers. Meanwhile, the fandom of these celebrities could also shape the supporters' values, attitudes and behaviours" (Meyer, 1996 & Schultz, 2001 cited in Zhang, 2016, para 17.3).

However, this collective reposting as public endorsements is relatively new and significant, in the sense that it is highly shaped by the new media and network technologies, which allow people to communicate through "complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-by-side" (Ito, cited in Zhang, 2016, para.18.6). In this respect, celebrities' public endorsements online demonstrate a multifaceted dynamic which moves from traditional one-way deployment towards a side-by-side co-performance enacting the national agenda. On August 20, 2019, The *People's Daily Weibo* account posted a feed praising the celebrities from Hong Kong for their patriotic support on against the violence and advocating Hong Kong is part of China. (see figure 37) The state media's swift following-up on the Hong Kong celebrity nationalism, in this respect, re-strengthens the links between celebrity followers and China's nationalism which is being co-produced and mediated through the celebrity-fan networks.

Furthermore, celebrity's nationalism is also urged from bottom-up. On August 12, Chinese international super model Liu Wen issued a Weibo post on her decision to terminate the

contract with global brand Coach for one of their T-shirt designs which did not list Hong Kong as a part of China. Prior to her decision, online public, including her fans, criticised her inaction in the face of global brands' neglect of the idea of "one China". In her statement supported by a lawyer, she commented: "we have noticed that the behaviour of the Coach brand has seriously hurt the national sentiments of the Chinese people, its actions should be severely condemned." Coach later joined other brands like Versace, Calvin Klein and Swarovski that issued an apology and support for Hong Kong as a part of China. According to the BBC, this bottom up celebrity nationalism is a "brand witch hunt" which results in global brands' "fulsome" apologies out of the fear being boycotted in "one of the world's most lucrative markets".¹¹⁰ In this sense, there seems to be an increasing blend of both economic and political power married for the cause of nationalism, mediated from bottom up and co-performed by the state and celebrities.

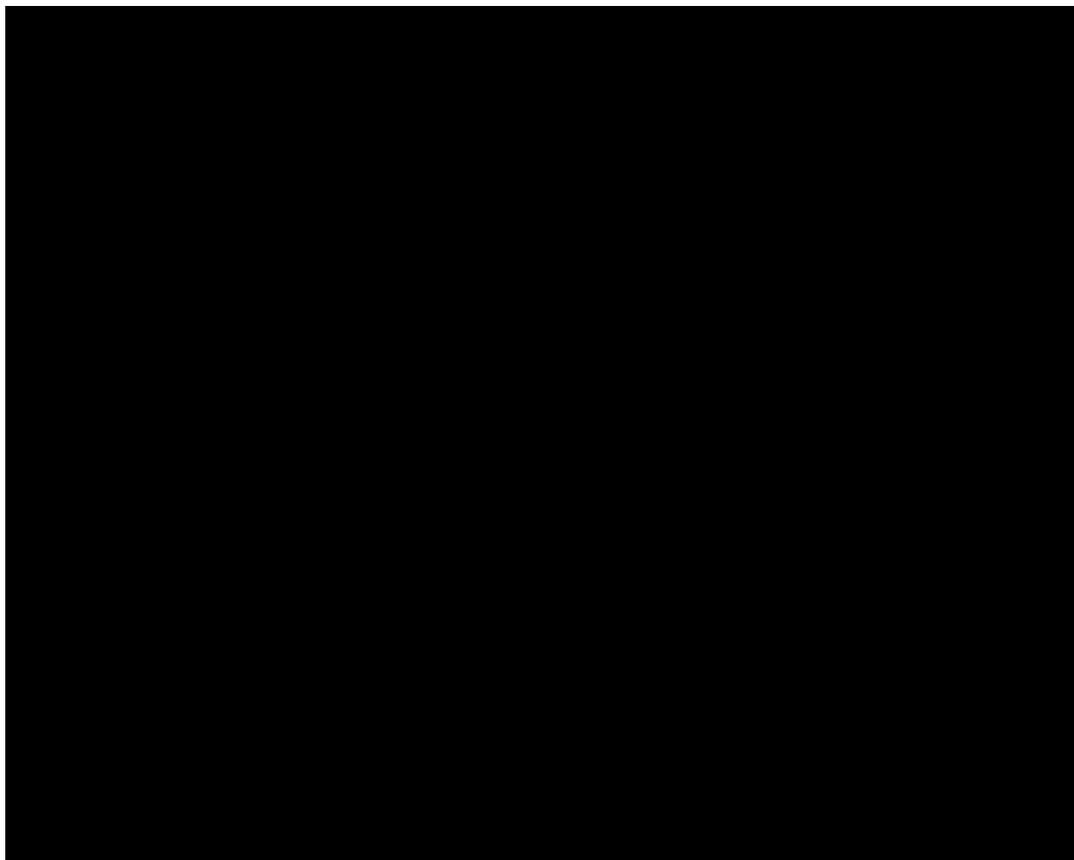


Figure 37: On August 20, 2019, *China's Daily* posted a Weibo feed praising the Celebrities from Hong Kong who expressed their political stand of recognising "Hong Kong is part of China" on Social networking sites.

¹¹⁰ 'Hong Kong Protests: Celebrities, big brands and China's media game' Kerry Allen. BBC. 28 August 2019. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-49428931> [Last accessed: 25 February 2020]

Fandom Nationalism

Armstrong, at the beginning of his path breaking book *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982) defines nation as an intense group identification. In the language of popular culture, such intense group identification today is recognised as “fandom nationalism” in China. Fandom nationalism as defined by Liu, means that fans apply what “they have learned from celebrity worship to their relationship with the nation. They presume their ownership of the nation, get emotionally engaged, assume responsibility to help their nation win in all competitions against others in the world, and rise up against competitors when their nation is suffering injustice. They personalize the nation as equal subjects and get engaged rather than admire or worship it” (Liu, 2019, para.16.81). According to the post by the *People’s Daily* which demonstrated fans’ supporting messages using the “fan language” (see figure 38). For example, one weibo posts captured by *People’s Daily* is a fan of Zhu Yilong, the leading star from *Guardian* (2018). As seen in figure 39, she states that:

“A Zhong (China) gege (older brother) only have us now. [disappointment emoji] Our brother was born in a prominent position with nobility, but was bullied and his family was in straitened circumstances, three children were also looted (Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau). He has been struggling so hard for so many years, yet still suffered from other people’s disdain and being taken advantage of. When his days are just getting better, he wants to pick up his children and come home. Little did he know, two of the three children (Hong Kong and Taiwan) recognised the thief as their father and broke our brother’s heart before his birthday (1st October 2019 marked as People’s Republic of China’s 70th anniversary). [sad emoji] Our brother only have us now. [tear emoji] Though I am just a little rabbit (fandom language derived from meme, “little rabbit” may refers to vulnerable little girl) I still want my A Zhong brother to walk his way on a flower road (fandom language, “flower road” means a future that everything goes smoothly with good things happening).”

As the translation of her post shows, the fan used language distinctive to the circle of fan subculture, personified China as A Zhong brother; Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau as children; foreign countries as “other people”; and composed an imagined narratives that depicted (possibly) America and UK as thieves. The phrase “gege only have us now” is particularly used

in the fan community to mobilize financial, emotional and moral support for their idol to compete for the resources in the market competitions.



Figure 38: On 15 August 2018, the *People's Daily* posted an image feed with nine screen shots of fans' half text half emoji comments on supporting their nation. The post is hashtagged with a topic "we all have an idol called A zhong". A Zhong is the most recent internet buzzword created by fans which refers to China in an endearing way. The post is liked by 2.1 million people, which is a very popular response among the other posts.



Figure 39: One Weibo post on August 14, 2019, with hashtag topics “We all have an idol called A Zhong”, “Guarding the world’s best A Zhong”, and “The globe’s circle top A Zhong ge (“ge” means older brother in Chinese, not necessarily blood related). This post had 124,244 likes and 8702 reposts.

There are four ways to understand the fandom nationalism manifested in relation to the Hong Kong anti-extradition bill protest. Firstly, it is a reactive action built up from the trade war between China and America beginning in 2018 and increasingly intensified in 2019. Moreover, it reflects the speculations in Chinese news media about the potential interventions of foreign forces in mobilizing the protests in Hong Kong, especially America’s involvement arousing nationalistic sentiments among the online fandom public. Furthermore, as also examined by other Chinese scholars in the case of Diba Expedition in 2016, the emotional identification has an economic foundation, as the younger generation experienced a general upward material betterment growing up.

Secondly, there is a changing style of communication in fandom nationalism since 2016. From 2005 to 2016, the Chinese scholars identified the period as a transition from expressing anger to playfulness with mockery, parody and self-deprecating humours. There is an increasing trend of cuteness expressed in 2019, indicating that the demographic in fandom nationalism has potentially changed from the post 80s and post 90s to the post 90s, and young girl fans born after 2000. As figure 40 shows, a little rabbit holds the flag of Hong Kong with caption text: “Do you want this? This belongs to China!”.

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(•••)

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想要这个吗

Do you want this?

{_}

(•-•)

🇭🇰 < \

这是我们中国的

This belongs to China !

Figure 40: A fan made meme captured from Bilibili, the biggest video sharing website in China centred in media contents of animation, comic and fan-made videos.

Thirdly, China's national identity as fan-made cultural texts clearly shows that rather than being a political concept, it is more and more consumed by the fandom public as a popular cultural commodity in which they can exercise their playful creativity. In other words, China's national identity becomes a fan object in the marketplace. Furthermore, in the context of the consumer culture in China, alongside the development of ICT, the imagined construct of China is shaped by both political and market forces, mediated through networks which have made China's national identity instantly social online.

Fourthly, fandom nationalism manifested in this case has an evident pattern of resistance/incorporation, as well as performance/spectacle. Figure 41 shows a meme depicting "izhong", the name of the fans of A Zhong, protecting "gege". The caption underneath runs as follows: "Nobody can bully him". "Izhong" is directly derived from the fandom of Cai Xukun, a controversial Chinese popular idol who has been criticised by the state media before on account of his irrational followers. As the state media now celebrates the fandom of the nation, there is an ideological incorporation of youth subculture. Moreover, the crisis of Hong Kong, to an extent, provides rich resources for fans' creative performance to form an emotional spectacle for wider social recognition of the subculture. The 2.1 million likes of the official post by *People's Daily* is an example of their acceptance of this official acknowledgement.



Figure 41: a fan made meme derived from Weibo. The word “izhong” originated from the popular idol Cai Xukun’s fan club name: “ikun”. The “i” here pronounced in Chinese as “love”.

Conclusion: Fandom Public and China’s Network national identity

Fandom public, as developed by Weiyu Zhang, is characterised by focusing on the process or the movement for forming the publics around fan objects through new ICTs (Zhang, 2016, para. 18.12). In the context of this study, China’s national identity is an economic fan object mediated through the celebrity-fan network. In the first case study, this chapter shows the process of how the popular cultural industry used web dramas adapted from *Danmei* fiction to negotiate a lucrative business model with the state. Moreover, the chapter has considered how the state then deployed *Danmei* stars to mobilize their fans for popular support of the national agenda. The negotiated process of resistance and incorporation largely sustained the dominant cultural order, with minor space for fans’ desire of wider social recognition. The second case study offers an analysis of celebrity nationalism and fandom nationalism manifested online in relation to the Hong Kong protest. It shows the changing direction of cyber nationalism from Bottom-up in 2005 to a complex dynamic of bottom up, top down and side-by-side in 2019. It also observes a changing style in communication, from the previous recognised transition from anger to playfulness, parody and mockery, to newfound “cuteness”. This complex negotiation process of resistance, incorporation and spontaneity demonstrates that China’s network national identity is a highly complex construct that is both

shaped by the natural/physical world as well as the technological medium, as in the examples of Weibo microblogging service.

While the Hong Kong protesters seemed to appeal for “democracy”, Chinese fandom public seems to show no interest in democratization as it is defined by the Western experience. Their creative fandom online seems to focus more on the wider social recognition which is to become a legitimate part of the dominant value system rather than undermining it. In this case, this study partly agrees with Zhang as he argues: first, fandom publics do not regard democratization as their ultimate goal; secondly... the politics of fandom publics is not a politics of democracy, but a politics of survive first, then a politics of recognition” (Zhang, 2016, para. 18.27). This study builds its thinking on Zhang’s analysis, and argues that the fandom nationalism manifested in idol-fan network and nation as celebrity-fan network is a process of modernization with “Chinese Ways”. Chinese fans are in fact basing their fandom on the search for democratic self-expressions, but they seem to regard democracy as something that can be negotiated, rather than as naturally given. When facing foreign challenges, they downplay their resistance and criticisms towards the domestic issues, and mobilize their emotions for national support.

However, fandom nationalism is a double-edged sword, with the state’s active incorporation and mobilization is to an extent dangerous as irrational sentiments and imagery narratives filled the internet, China’s national identity is under threat of being captured by populism which is neither beneficial for the nation’s stability, nor desirable in sustaining international relations. In the end, the dynamic between the state and people is never the relationship between idol and fans, but legitimate government and citizens.

Conclusion

The Future of China's National Identity

In 1996, Nicholas Negroponte's book *Being Digital* was published in Chinese. It had an enormous impact on the development of Chinese internet and technology companies. According to the translator of the book Hu Yong, the book inspired many then young Chinese entrepreneurs who had later founded companies such as Baidu¹¹¹, Sohu¹¹² and Meituan¹¹³ which shaped Chinese people's digital life tremendously. Negroponte's work was celebrated by the internet elites in China for its accuracy in grasping the digital world in the future. Upon the 20th anniversary of the Chinese version of the book, the translator asked him to write a short introduction to the new edition, and he talked about one thing: nationalism. He stated that compared to all the things he was right about, there was the biggest misjudgement of his life which made his other so-called predictions trivial:

Twenty-five years ago, I was convinced that the internet would create a more harmonious world. I believe that the internet will promote global consensus and even enhance world peace. But it didn't, at least not yet. The real situation is nationalism is rampant; regulation is escalating; the gap between rich and poor is increasing. I also expected that China would play a better and bigger role in leading the global internet because of its size, determination and socialist advantages. What is the actual situation? ...the ubiquitous digitization did not bring the world together.¹¹⁴

By the end of the preface, he suggested that the nationalist divide between "us" and "them" could be solved by a simple but important step: to open the internet in a comprehensive and thorough manner. This advice was largely meant for China, as China's internet and culture censorship were growing tighter under Xi's administration. Negroponte had written this second introduction on 27th May 2016. One month later, the British public voted to leave the European Union, and Donald Trump was elected in November under the campaign slogan "make America great again." In March 2018, Cambridge Analytica was under the public

¹¹¹ Baidu is one of the biggest three technology companies in China among Alibaba Group and Tencent. Founded in 2001, one of its main services is the Baidu internet search engine.

¹¹² Sohu was developed by Zhang Chaoyang in 1998, currently as one of the top 5 portal sites in China. The company went public in NASDAQ in the United States in 2000.

¹¹³ Founded in 2010, Meituan is the first Groupon E-commerce website in China mainland.

¹¹⁴ This is translated by this researcher from the Chinese edition of *Being Digital* that published in 2017.

scrutiny for the company's role played in using Facebook data for "strategic communication" during the electoral processes in the Trump and Brexit campaign. Perhaps the human network societies are far more difficult to predict than the actual evolutions of technologies itself.

While remaining absent from the global connectivity online, China is expanding its physical connectivity in a way that has been unprecedented in Chinese history. In 2013, upon his state visit to Indonesia and Kazakhstan, President Xi announced China's "One Belt One Road" initiative, ten months after his first mention of the Chinese Dream. According to the official documents released by the leading office¹¹⁵, The belt and road initiative (BRI) (see figure 42) symbolize the historical Silk Road that began in the Han dynasty (207 BCE- 220 BC), and aims "to maintain an open world economic system, and achieve diversified, independent, balanced, and sustainable development, and also a Chinese proposal intended to advance regional cooperation, strengthen communications between civilizations, and safe-guard world peace and stability." (p.1) According to the World Bank research on the project, if completed, the initiative "could reduce travel times along economic corridors by 12%, increase trade between 2.7% and 9.7%, increase income by up to 3.4% and lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty" (World bank, 2018).

In 2016, Parag Khanna's book *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* was published, in which he defines connectography as bringing connectivity and geography together. As he explains: "we are moving into an era where cities will matter more than states and supply chains will be a more important source of power than militaries- whose main purpose will be to protect supply chains rather than borders. Competitive connectivity is the arms race of the 21st century." (2016) Moreover, according to Khanna, China's "relentless" pursuit through BRI is another way that this competitive connectivity might "takes place through infrastructure alliance: connecting physically across borders and oceans through tight supply chain partnership. China has...elevated infrastructure to the status of a global good on par with America's provision of security. Geopolitics in a connected world plays out

¹¹⁵ 'Building the Belt and Road: Concept, Practice and China's Contribution', Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative. May 2017. Available from: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/wcm.files/upload/CMSydylyw/201705/201705110537027.pdf> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

less on the Risk board of territorial conquest and more in the matrix of physical and digital infrastructure” (2016, Khanna, 2016). (See figure 43 for the countries for which China or America is the largest trade partner.)

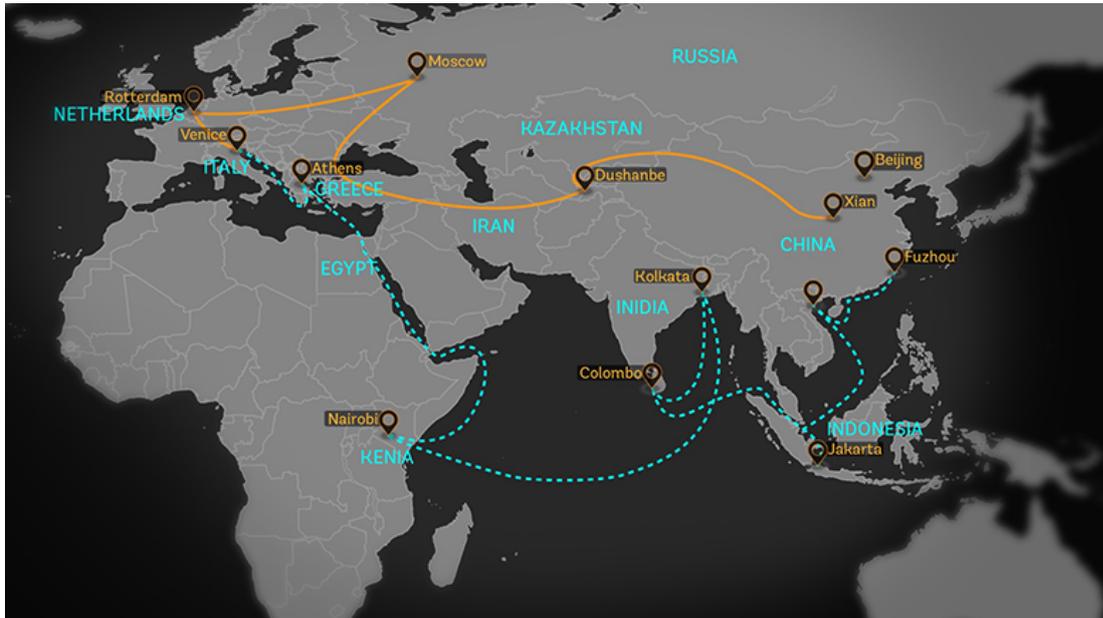


Figure 42: The map of the plan of BRI is retrieved from The World bank website. The Blue line represents the “21st century Maritime Silk Road”. And the yellow line represents the route of the “Silk Road Economic Belt”.



Figure 43: The map of the comparison between China and America’s trade partners. (Available from Parag Khanna’s official website: <https://www.paragkhanna.com/connectography> [Last accessed: 25 February 2020]

Margaret Thatcher once said: "China will not become a superpower in the world, because China today exports TV sets, rather than ideas." (Quoted by ChinaNews.com) Perhaps TV sets are not just TV sets after all. They are the symbols of China's economic development for the last 30 years and its global pursuit for infrastructure connectivity and supply chain for the next 30 years. While remaining absent from the global internet network, the country connected with the world through building physical (BRI) and digital (5g technology led by Huawei) infrastructure. It is these arguments that place this study into perspectives. Before bringing the research into this bigger picture, the following section serves as a summary for the key findings, and an answer to the research question.

Answering the Research Question

In retrospect, three critical conditions/forces shaped the Party-state's strategies for building China's national identity: modernization, market economy and information and media communication technologies.

If modernity is defined as industrialization, science and democracy, China has been struggling with modernity since the Opium War. The civil wars between the Chinese Nationalist Party, which founded on the ideology of "democracy" and the Chinese Communist Party which guided by the principles of "communism", had intensified the suffering for the Chinese people. Moreover, after World War two, with the CCP winning the civil war, China experienced thirty years of being closing off from the outside world. While the Chinese people had suffered significantly during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the country under Mao Zedong's leadership began to establish an independent and complete industrial system. With Deng Xiaoping's Open and Reform Policy, China started to modernize on its own terms: it was neither a communist regime nor liberal capitalism, it was a market economy with one Party system.

But here comes the problem. China, according to the traditional western understanding of the meanings of "modern nation", is not a "common-sense entity", to use Edensor's

terminology. This made China's national identity particularly problematic in terms of the way in which popular culture circulated. Hence, much effort made by the state communication institutions was devoted to propagating/persuade the Chinese people the legitimacy of the CCP's ruling position in China mainland. In this respect, traditional culture and the country's humiliation discourse are deployed by the state to support its argument. However, this study suggests that Chinese people's "obedience" to the Party-state is based on material betterment in the last 30 years, which is largely beneficial for every social group within the country. However, China's economic development is slowing down in recent years, and this again makes culture a vital field to generate the CCP's legitimacy. This is because China has no strong ideological belief which tends to mobilize people's support for national agenda. Thus, in order to remain a unified China, the state needs to reproduce and redistribute a collective imagination which encourages people to go beyond their interests in cooperation at a national level. In this sense, China's national identity as the Chinese Dream is a meta-narrative provided by the state about China's modernization process: from the suffering past to the hard-working present, in order to have a better future for every Chinese citizen. Moreover, since 2013, it seems this grand vision was also meant for international audiences and potential cooperation that was "intended to advance regional cooperation, strengthen communications between civilizations, and safeguard world peace and stability."

This understanding then brings to the following crucial conditions that shaped China's national identity as a state-led project: market economy, especially the interplay between state-owned media groups and popular culture industries. The central finding through the case studies of Chinese blockbuster films and the Danmei cultural industry is that economic interests in China do not surpass political interests. The publicity department of the CCP, as well as state-owned media groups, will continue to be dominant players in the popular cultural industries.

Furthermore, understanding China's national identity through popular culture industries indeed serves to bring changes to the state's communication strategies for nation-building: China's national identity becomes a cultural commodity and has to be subject to market logic of producing, distributing according to the Chinese popular cultural audiences' consumption taste and habits. However, their consumption tastes and habits are significantly shaped by

their past experiences of watching foreign cultural products. In this respect, the state and the state-owned media enterprises need to continuously compete with foreign cultural goods for people's indirect identification with their country.

These findings then lead to the final critical condition, namely, to understand China's incorporation strategy for generating national identification through subcultural communities online. As the state gradually shifts their communication practices from propaganda to publicity, and now to adopting the techniques prevalent in the cultural industries, China's national identity enabled by ICTs in a way, becomes a marketing strategy for selling China to its targeted market. This study uses the idea of "emotional selling proposition" to understand the phenomenon of fandom nationalism, which asks fans to love their country as they love their idol. As discussed in the last case study of the celebrity-fan network, Chinese fans online have developed an imagined "lover-like" relationship with their idol. They defend and safeguard their idol to compete in the market for resources. In this sense, nationalism manifested in the fandom network is about developing a strong emotional tie with their "country idol". This is a highly emotional relationship. Though emerging spontaneously, with highly self-organized nature, this practice was incorporated by the state media during the Hong Kong protest. Emotional selling proposition represents the emotional levers "beneath the service" that trigger the emotional connection with customers. "Emotional levers" refer to "feeling important, valued and part of a unique group; feeling whole, remembered, attractive, trendy, safe and accepted."¹¹⁶ In the context of Chinese fandom nationalism, China's national identity becomes a commercial service which is consumed in the online market place by subcultural fans who seek to be included, valued, accepted and part of a group membership that they want to feel proud of. This is also highly dangerous in terms of being manipulated for antagonistic situations, which lead the research aims to conclude this conclusion with the following section.

¹¹⁶ 'This is why you should develop an emotional selling proposition', Business strategy and marketing. Available from: <https://www.sapiensmediacoaching.com/this-is-why-should-develop-an-emotional-selling-proposition/> [last accessed: 25 February 2020]

Functionalities, Not Emotions: The Future of China's National Identity

This research began six years ago with a pre-understanding that China's national identity is not popular in the mediated popular culture. However, a closer examination of the phenomenon suggests that China's nation-building through mediated popular culture is a highly complex process that is interdependent, adaptive, and diversified with Chinese characteristics that can be found in its history, culture, politics and geography. While the American national identity is to an extent reproduced and distributed through Hollywood, China's national identity is managed through its state-own media communications with dual interests of politics and economy. It is also effective to an extent in generating China's national identification among its citizens, especially when challenged by the outside world. While the legitimacy of the Party-state can be manufactured through their progressive ways of capturing people's imaginations through mediated popular culture, the spontaneous support received from the Chinese people, especially among the younger generation, is through the functionality of the Chinese Communist Party. In other words, the Chinese have cooperated with the government for economic betterment, social stability, and ontological security, which refers to "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of actions" (Giddens, cited in Skey, 2011, p.23).

Under the leadership of the CCP, with the efforts and past sacrifices of the Chinese people, and the help the country received from the international communities including Japan after World War two, the country developed from extreme poverty to occupying the status of the world's second largest economy. The mainland Chinese people's national identification in this respect is pragmatic. In a way, it is more about the benefits for the majorities in society for harmony, stability, material betterment and security, rather than political ideologies. In this sense, this research concluded with suggesting that China's national identity in the sense of the global market, needs to be further examined through its "unique selling proposition".

"Unique selling proposition" refers to finding a unique selling point for a product or service, which places the functionality at its core, rather than emotional attachments. As suggested

by Khanna, if the future world is not just about connectivity online, but also connectivity through supply chain and infrastructure, China's role in the world of nations needs to be approached by the potential unique services that the country may bring to human societies in general.

To go back to the beginning of this chapter, it was quoted that there were potential benefits of BRI, suggested by the World Bank. This ambitious initiative is depicted in the Chinese Dream, which foregrounds peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit. Notably, these claims are complex human ideas which always involve balancing interests between groups, with the possible conduct of corruption, conflicts, environmental damage, and human cost. The critical concern here is how valid these claims are, and what the actual benefits are for the international community.

Just as Negroponte claimed in 1985, "the future of television is to stop thinking of television as television."¹¹⁷ To imitate this syntactical structure, the future of China's national identity is to stop thinking of China's national identity as China's national identity. It is also necessary to stop approaching it through fear, resentments, or "lover-like" sentiments that are common in some of cultural entertainment, but to examine the constructions by its potential benefits. In other words, to value "functionality" rather than irrational emotional attachments. It is necessary to ask questions like what benefits (rather than values) China is actually promoting through the Chinese Dream, rather than questions such as whether China will become a global threatening power, so as to put its claims and actual conducts into stricter scrutiny.

As for the Chinese state media, this is evolving in terms of its means of generating national identification through popular culture. It would seem dangerous to promote any forms of nationalism with strong emotional sentiments, for there is always the danger of being mobilized for conflict. This is especially the case when the gap between the rich and the poor is widened, since populism, as manifested in the forms of strong emotions and resentments,

¹¹⁷ What Negroponte meant was to stop thinking of TV like technology, but as a way of life.

is dangerous for any societies. This then raises the spectre of the younger generations not dwelling on the nationalist sentiments, but continuing to approach the Party-state with rational thinking, based on their judgements of the governments' capability to govern.

In the final analysis there is in all likelihood no such tangible thing as China's national identity. But it is something that can be deeply felt, imagined and acted upon in the common vision. It has very real-life consequences, as history has shown. While this thesis mainly seeks to understand the popular cultural constructions of China's national identity from the Party-state's perspective, the underlying intentions are to seek to take this research as a preliminary step in order to provide a basic understanding of individuals' approach to understand this relationship between individuality and collectivity, between domestic and international, physical and virtual. More importantly, one must learn to understand the phenomenon by its functionality based on ontological security, material betterment and the possible democratization (in Chinese terms) rather than emotional sentiments. We are, after all, living in an increasingly complex, interdependent, interconnected, and diversified world, and it is up to each one of us to choose what future we are working towards.

(Total word count: 72,653)

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