SPECIAL CULTURAL ZONES:

PROVINCIALIZING GLOBAL MEDIA IN NEOLIBERAL CHINA

by

Jia Tan

A Dissertation Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE USC GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(CINEMA-TELEVISION: CRITICAL STUDIES)

December 2012

UMI Number: 3551779

Dissertation Publishing

UMI 3551779

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is impossible to finish this dissertation on my own. I am grateful to my advisor, Professor David E. James, for his support, guidance, and unfailing belief in me. I am indebted to my committee members Professors Akira Lippit and Priya Jaikumar, who not only supervised this project but also expanded its depth and breadth in unaccountable ways. Marsha Kinder has shown me how to be a successful scholar and a dedicated teacher. I am grateful to her generosity, support, and friendship. Kara Keeling has always been a source of inspiration. I benefit enormously from my conversations with her. Michael Renov has shared with me not only his admirable knowledge on documentary but also his own journey of becoming a scholar. I want to thank Tang Xiaobing with whom I had an opportunity to work before his departure from USC.

I am indebted to other faculty at USC, including Professors Tara McPherson, Ellen Seiter, Todd Boyd, Aniko Imre, Rick Jewell, Laura Serna, and Bill Willington. I learn so much from their classes and from working with them. My dearest memory goes to Professor Anne Friedberg, who kindly served on my Qualification Exam committee. My special thanks go to Professor Dai Jinhua in Peking University, whose class inspired me to pursue a career in film and media research.

I am also grateful to many other scholars who shared with me their sage advice at t different stages of this dissertation. In particular, I want to thank Philip Rosen, Stanley Rosen, Meiling Cheng, Mary Ann Doane, Wendy Chun, Lynne Joyrich, Gaylyn Studlar, Philip Sewell, Wang Jing, Sun Shaoyi, Matthew Johnson, Chris Berry, Yomi Braester,

TABLE OF CONTENTS

L IST OF F IGURES

A B S T R A C T

Special Cultural Zones: Provincializing Global Media in Neoliberal China explores how digital, televisual, and filmic productions of the liberal economic growth zones mediate constructions of ethnicity, class, gender, and citizenship in the context of neoliberal globalization. Specifically, I look at how the Guangdong Province in Southern China has been configured in media production, policy, and activism in China, Hong Kong, and the U.S. since 1980.

By framing the province as a site of neoliberal globalization in the context of global media rather than a region of China, this project challenges the prevalent conception of mainland China as a monolithic cultural entity and investigates the cultural exchanges among the province, Hong Kong, and diasporic Cantonese. Bordering Hong Kong, Guangdong Province has successfully implemented the liberal economic policy of the "Special Economic Zones" to attract foreign direct investment, develop export-oriented manufacturing sector, and thus launch the nation-wide economic reform. The province has become an integral part of the global economy and it now trades far more with foreign countries than it does with the rest of China.

Postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's argues that we can "provincialize Europe" if we start to deconstruct the myth of "the west" as an original site of modernity by revealing the constitutive positions of the colonies in the modernization process. Chakravarty also criticizes the developmental logic of many third world countries that subscribe to the linear and progressive narrative of modernity. In my project, rather than

provincializing a center, I centralize a province and use the province as an analytic unit to reconfigure debates on media globalization and transnationalism.

Though scholars in political science, economics, and urban studies have all recognized the economic importance of the province, they have rarely taken into account its cultural production and discursive formation. In particular, despite Guangdong's economic prominence, the representations of the province and regional Cantonese cultures have been obscured by the hierarchy in national media industry and the state-enforced monolingual policy of speaking Mandarin in public sections. In my project, I investigate the construction of monolithic Chinese nationhood in Chinese as well as overseas media and the subsequent negotiations with it in popular cinema, independent video-making, and transmedia activism in the province and Hong Kong. These negotiations, I argue, together with the cultural exchanges among the province, Hong Kong, and diaspora Cantonese, create dynamic "Special Cultural Zones" that mediate and question the developmental, economic-centric, and masculine narrative embedded in monolithic Chinese nationhood as well as neo-liberal globalization. Specifically, since province is itself a major political, social, and geographical category to mark and classify differences, I use the provincial as a way to account for the assignation and production of social differences that not comprehended by categories such as nation, citizenship, race, class, and gender.

This dissertation is not a retelling or reclaiming of regional history. Instead, it destabilizes the province as a homogenous entity and utilizes the province as an analytical category to make visible the shifting spatial inter-relations of the national and

the global via contested cultural manifestations. Informed by critical geography, post-colonial theory and transnational feminism, I complicate the geographical dichotomies of center/periphery, global/local, urban/rural through the triangulation of three spatial dynamics of the Special Zones: the provincial, the migratory, and the space of exception. First, this dissertation challenges the prevalent conception of mainland China, particularly the ethnic majority, or the Han people, as a monolithic cultural entity. I argue that such misconception in modern times is built upon the China/West dualism. Analyzing how Cantonese media activism on the Internet and local TV programs interacted with actual street protests, it highlights the state-imposed hierarchical order of central-provincial media productions and expands on the exchange among Hong Kong, provincial Guangdong and diasporic Cantonese.

Second, this project questions recent models of transnational media, specifically the China-diaspora model that transgresses but still relies on the nation-state as an autonomous unit of analysis. By pursuing this strategy, it accentuates the Hong Kong-Guangdong connection and how hegemonic discourses of monolithic Chinese nationhood and the American multiculturalism have shaped the gendered ethnic formation in transnational Hong Kong film *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989) and others that feature transpacific migration.

Third, this dissertation elucidates how the Special Zones reinforce pre-existing urban-rural divide, solidify gendered urban citizenship, and normalize the biopolitical management of the migrant-workers through the politics of exceptional spaces. To accomplish this, it scrutinizes how new media environment facilitates recent digital

documentaries and media art projects such as *Sanyuanli* (2003) for broader considerations of their narrative experimentation, locational aesthetics, site-specific practices, and negotiation with the "neoliberal spatialities" of the Special Zones.

C H A P T E R O N E :

I n t r o d u c t i o n

On a hot summer afternoon in 2011, hundreds of people gathered in the city of Guangzhou in southern China to call for the preservation of Cantonese language and cultures and to question the state policy of promoting Mandarin in public sectors (figure 1). In the foreground of the picture, many protesters hold mobile devices to record the event. Pictures, comments, and videos would soon be published on the Internet via social media, where the organization of this protest started and disseminated earlier. Facilitated by social media, mobile devices, and the Internet, this gathering, seems to mark a distinctively new way to mobilize social participation.

FIGURE 1. Street protest in Guangzhou, July 2011.

The image of the protesters holding cameras and cell phones and pointing to the same direction resonates with the picture of the Red Guards holding Mao's red book during the Cultural Revolution, which refers to a history of mass mobilization and highly politicized mass culture in China 45 years earlier (figure 2). Holding up the hands are not only gestures of physical involvement, political consciousness, but also the symbol of affective investment.

FIGURE 2. Red Guards holding Mao's red book in the Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 1966.

Drastically different from Mao's red books, which are transmitters of Chairman Mao's selected writings; the mobile devices in the hands of the protesters will capture fragmented footages from a personal point of view and become the source for later online posting. Indeed, this picture is taken by one of the protesters in the crowd, who is looking up to his or her surroundings. In contrast, the Red Guards group was captured by a camera, which was not commonly available in the 1960s.

Media plays a key role in both incidents. In the case of the Red Guards rally, Mao's red book is arguably one the most reprinted books in human history. Print media, as similarly observed by Benedict Anderson in his study on nationalism[1], is crucial in creating an imagined community of Red Guards nationwide. Print media also distributed the information to organize the rally, mainly a notification sent out by Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the state council on September 5, 1966. In contrast, mobile and electronic technology has enabled the organization and dissemination of the Cantonese street protest. The media extension of the participants provided a different sense of immersion and embodiment.

The convergence and divergence between the Cultural Revolution and the Internet-infused street activism alludes to a shift from the national project of building revolutionary masses to the communication multitude. As Susan Buck-Morss argues, the term of the mob, referring to chaotic uprisings in the 19th century and prior times, has shifted to the notion of the mass in the 20th century. Modern media technologies not

---

[1] See Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

only manipulate the masses but also create mass solidarity in a positive sense: "when words become part of a mass spectacle and integrated into the scene, the masses speak through them rather than being addressed by them."[2] In the new twentieth century, as demonstrated by the similarities and differences of the Red Guard rally and the street protest, the revolutionary mass has shifted to the communication multitude.

More importantly, the communication multitude is also geographically dispersed. While the Red Guards rally symbolized the highlight of revolutionary culture that took place in the Tiananmen Square, a space that is arguably the center of China, the ephemeral street protest occurred in an obscure locale in the city of Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong province in southern China. For the last three decades, the province manufactures and assembles a substantial part of the world's electronics, from microwaves, TV sets, to game consoles, personal computers, and mobile devices such as smart phones and iPads. Obviously, as shown by the picture of the street protest, the people in the province are also active consumers and users of the media products. Furthermore, the Cantonese activists view the state critically as a homogenizing mechanism, which cannot be explained easily in the nation-state framework in the study of Chinese media and culture. While much scholarship has devoted to the study of media culture in Beijing and Shanghai, there is no singular monograph on Guangdong province. By framing the province as a site of neoliberal globalization, this dissertation examines the digital, televisual, and filmic productions of the province.

---

[2] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe : The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 134.

Bordering Hong Kong, Guangdong is now the most prosperous and populous province in China, primarily because it has successfully implemented the liberal economic policy of the Special Economic Zones since 1980. In mainland China, Special Economic Zones are enclaves with liberal economic incentives in the reform/transition period after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978. Under the supervision of Deng Xiaoping, the first SEZ and the most successful one is the city of Shenzhen, a border city along Hong Kong established in 1980 in Guangdong province of southern China. Other SEZs were gradually implemented in other coastal areas to attract foreign investment. The local authorities in the SEZs enjoyed more economic and administrative autonomy. Around the time when the Shenzhen SEZ was implemented, Deng Xiaoping proposed a flexible arrangement of "one country, two systems," which guaranteed the (partial) political autonomy of the Special Administrative Regions (SAR). Hong Kong and Macau, two former colonies of Britain and Portugal became SARs after they were handed over to China in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

The establishment of the SEZ is understood as a form of neoliberalization as it promotes foreign direct investment with tax incentives. David Harvey contends that contemporary China is experiencing neoliberalization with "Chinese characteristics" through "accumulation by dispossession."[3] Many scholars, especially anthropologists have observed dominant and prevailing neoliberal trends in contemporary China, such as a "neoliberal re-structuring," or neoliberalism as a national project to imagine global

---

[3] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism 'with Chinese Characterisitics'," in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

5

reordering. [4] The suggestion of "neoliberalization with Chinese characteristics," corresponds with the logic of the economic transition or reform promoted by the Chinese officials, which is a kind of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

The Chinese government never officially used the term "neo-liberal" in describing China's embrace of market economy. Instead, China emphasized its exceptional status strategically and deployed slogans such as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" to describe the reorientation of national policies, the intensification of economic reform since the early 1990s and its inclusion in the WTO in 2003. In a similar vein, liberal economists such as Huang Yasheng describe the economic growth in China as "capitalism with Chinese characteristics." [5] Most recently, in 2009, the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the new China, the mainstream Chinese media CCTV (China Central Television) and Xinhua News Agency launched a media campaign of "China model" of development, celebrating the rise of China, whose economy continues to grow after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Generally speaking, the study of neoliberalism has gone beyond the economic policies of the "Washington consensus" and becomes a "culture," or how neoliberal discourse provides the organizing metaphors for a whole way of life. As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberal rationality, "while foregrounding the market, is not only or even

---

[4] See Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China's Population : From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks," *Cultural anthropology : journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology.* 18, no. 4 (2003); Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China : Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, Perverse Modernities (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[5] Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics : Entrepreneurship and the State* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player."[6] Similarly, Nick Couldry called it neoliberalism's normalization, or "the embedding of neoliberalism as rationality in everyday social organization and imagination."[7] Neoliberalism, is a 'hegemonic rationality' and reduces the world into market ,"neoliberalism presents the social world as made up of markets, and spaces of potential competition that need to be organized as markets, blocking other narratives from view."[8] In another critical reflection, Jodi Melamed conceptualizes neoliberalism broadly as a technique of governance that closely related to the issue of race and nationality,

> In defining neoliberal multiculturalism, I work with a more expansive understanding of neoliberalism as a term for a world historic organization of economy, governance, and biological and social life. We can think of neoliberalism as an organization of political governance by recognizing the paradigm shift in its demand that nation-states act in the first place as subsidiary managers of the global economy. We can recognize neoliberalism as a rationalization of biological and social life on the basis of the violence that individuals and communities have had to absorb with social and economic restructuring for neoliberalism.[9]

For Melamed, neoliberal multiculturalism incorporates "a supranationalism into racial formation that privileges the multicultural American citizen as a subject more

[6] Wendy Brown, *Edgework : Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 39-40.

[7] Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters : Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (Los Angeles ; London: SAGE, 2010), 5.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism," *Social text.* 24, no. 4 (2006): 15.

universal and legitimate than even the multicultural world citizen."[10] Correspondingly, other forms of personhood that are in conflict with neoliberal subjectivity are stigmatized as "monocultural" and therefore lesser. In a similar vein, Lisa Lowe looks at the debate on neo-liberalism in political science and points out how the western democratic state functions as the normative ideal type of analysis and omits socialist or pre-communist states. In other words, issues of race and nationality have to be taken into consideration in the study of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon.

In light of these discussions, neoliberalism in the context of China, I contend, cannot be fully apprehended without the rural-urban divide and the biopolitical technique of mobilizing and regulating the peasant-workers. Although SEZs are implemented on a limited and regional scale, they underline the graduate liberalization of the economy that forms major economic-geographical belts such as the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta, the Tianjin-Beijing area, etc. Moreover, the assemblage of these SEZs and smaller development districts are built upon the disposable labor supplied by millions of peasant-workers, or migrant-workers from the countryside. As I will explore in further detail in chapter four, the current Chinese state conveniently perpetuates the rural-urban divide during Maoist China, which sustains institutional, material, and regulatory bases for the "market economy." In other words, though the neoliberalization of economy is most evident in urban and coastal areas, these developments are impossible without the movement of peasant-workers on a national scale. Thus the neoliberalization influences the everyday lives of migrant-workers in the

---

[10] Ibid.: 18.

city and those peasants who remain in or return to the rural area.

Thus, I use of the term neoliberal globalization to describe and specify the unprecedentedly integrated global economy, in which the state is shifting from a political entity to a primarily administrative entity. During this process, the SEZ, the representative of neoliberal spatialities, is only a section of the national spatial re-ordering chain. Conversely, viewing the SEZs as exceptional spaces obscures the structural hierarchy of the urban-rural divide and the neoliberal spatiality on a national scale. Hence, the SEZs that explored in this chapter are located in Guangdong province, but they also speak to a paradigmatic shift of neoliberalization on a national scale that cannot be fully apprehended without the rural-urban divide and the biopolitical technique of mobilizing and regulating the peasant-workers.

SPECIAL CULTURAL ZONES

Despite Guangdong's economic prominence, the representations of the province and regional Cantonese cultures have been obscured by the hierarchy in national media industry and the state-enforced monolingual policy of speaking Mandarin in public sections. By framing the province as a site of neoliberal globalization in the context of global media, this project challenges the prevalent conception of mainland China as a monolithic cultural entity and investigates the cultural exchanges among the province, Hong Kong, and diasporic Cantonese. I evoke the term "Special Cultural Zones" to describe the two-folded spatialized "special status" of media culture and practice in the province, ranging from film, television, and digital media to experimental art and

installation.

On one hand, "Special Cultural Zones" are influenced by the success of "Special Economic Zones" in this region, which is highly related to the blossoming global media industry, especially the manufacture of media hardware. Companies located in these zones manufacture or assemble electronics for the whole world, including media hardware such as television sets, DVD players, personal computers, cell phones, Smartphones, iPad, and game consoles. Meanwhile, consumers in these growth zones are also active users of these media products that transmit local, regional and global media content. And the consumption activities in the growth zones are based upon the recent construction of media infrastructure ranging from multiplex movie theaters, satellite and cable TV connectivity, to Internet broadband and telecommunications signal tower. By 2010, China's Internet user population hits 420 million, and more than 15 percent reside in Guangdong. At the same time, the disparity increases drastically both within these zones, and between the zones and the rest in the developing countries. Such increasing disparity makes the zones more connected with the developed world, and disconnected with the underdeveloped areas in their home countries. Such (dis)connectivity challenges geographical dichotomies of the First/Third worlds, center/periphery, and the framework of the nation-state in current studies of the non-western world.

On the other hand, "Special Cultural Zones" are recent developments of a province that has a rich history of technologized visual cultures, which are heavily connected to transnational movement of money, commodities, and people. Guangzhou, or Canton, the provincial capital of Guangdong, is one of the most important ports in

maritime China. Different from the association with ethnic minority cultures in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces in southwest China, Guangdong was one of the first areas in China to undergo modernization and industrialization. Since 1757, all foreign trade with China had been restricted to Canton till the end of the first Opium War in 1842. After the war, according to the Treaty of Nanking, the Qing regime ceded Hong Kong to the British and opened five port cities in which Shanghai, Fuzhou (Foochow), Xiamen (Amoy) and Ningbo joined Canton. These port cities that imported modern technologies in a relatively timely manner are usually imagined as places where the East meets the West, which entails a hybrid or (semi)colonial modernity that departs from the inland and agricultural Chinese cultures.

These port cities share an extremely rich history in visual, often times proto-cinematic representations. Canton, like other official trading ports and colonial port cities in China such as Macau and Hong Kong, was frequently depicted in export arts and later in photographs, postcards and early cinema. Due to its unique position as the only treaty port in the China Trade before the Opium War, Canton has a particularly rich history in visual representations. In the second half of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, tens of thousands of paintings and artifacts were created by Chinese artists and craftsmen and then shipped from Canton for the export market. Along the Pearl River, ports such as whampoa, Macao, Boca Tigra, and the Hongs (thirteen factories) in Canton were frequent subjects in these export paintings, watercolors and other forms of decorative arts.[11]

---

[11] These objects from the China Trade can be found in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London;

In the mid and late nineteenth century, the circulation of photographic and cinematic technology facilitated the blossoming of what Rey Chow called "technologized visuality," or the production of visual cultures that were facilitated by technological advancements. By the mid-1850s, besides those run by foreigners, an active industry of photographic studios was operated by the Chinese in Hong Kong and Canton. For foreigners who visited Hong Kong, Macau and Canton, the photographs, postcard, together with earlier paintings depicting these port cities, were popular objects to possess or give away.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Guangdong, together with Hong Kong, constituted an active domain of cinematic productions in South China. Before the Cold War divide, Guangdong played an important role in constructing cinematic or technologized visual culture hand in hand with Hong Kong as part of the south China cinema circle.[12] Cinema entered China in the early years of the twentieth century, just before the overthrown of Qing Dynasty, the last imperial dynasty, by the Republicans. In the 1930s, when the technology of sound was adopted in cinematic production, the Cantonese film production started its long-lasting competition with Mandarin film production. The Nanjing-based Republican government demanded mandarin to be the only language to be used in film in order to enhance the unity of the nation. However, as Guangdong was controlled by factional political power, the film policy made by Nanjing was never implemented to a full degree. At the same time, Cantonese films sold well to

the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts; Hong Kong Museum of Art, Museum of Guangzhou, etc.

[12] For example, the establishment of *huanan yingye* (South China Film Association) in pre-Cold War era signified the regional connection.

Cantonese-speakers in Guangdong as well as Southeast Asia. Commercial interests triggered many Cantonese films shown and exhibited despite Nanjing's mono-lingual policy.[13]

After WWII, the border between Hong Kong and China was under tight surveillance and the exchange of commodities was highly controlled. Since a large proportion of the natives in Hong Kong originated from the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong, the places in Guangdong and the Cantonese cultures were frequently depicted, referred, re-imagined and re-constructed in Hong Kong cinema. In parallel, the establishment of the Pearl River Film Studio in 1958 in Guangzhou marked the beginning of a provincial film production center in socialist China. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the Pearl River Film Studio produced plentiful films depicting Guangdong with a local style that delineate and represent local histories, landscapes, customs, and cultures. As I explore in further detail in rest of the dissertation, the media industries in the province are now largely supervised under the state's monolingual policy. Yet its proximity with Hong Kong makes Cantonese a competing language with Mandarin, which forms an important dimension of the "Special Cultural Zones."

---

[13] For a detailed history of Cantonese film production and the censorship policy, see Zhiwei Xiao, "Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade," in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Specifically, I use the province as an analytic unit and "the provincial" as a method to theorize the Special Cultural Zones. Province is the highest administrative rank in China. Currently, there are 34 provinces. Since media industries in China mirror the administrative structure, province is also crucial in understanding the production and distribution of media products such as film and TV programs in spatial terms. Obviously, I am not advocating that there are essential differences among different provinces in China. Indeed, each province is itself a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic entity whose boundary is drawn and enforced by the state. However, taking into account the province as a unit that supervises and creates cultural products can be an effective way to think beyond the binary of local/national or local/global. Moreover, examining the specificity of a province, in this case Guangdong, can contribute to the understanding of the heterogeneity of the Han ethnic majority, which takes up more than 90 percent of China's population.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, provincial, in the Anglophone context, means unsophisticated, narrowed, and limited as opposed to cosmopolitan. In his book *Provincializing Europe*, postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakravarty argues that we can "provincialize Europe" if we start to deconstruct the myth of "the west" as an original site of modernity by revealing the constitutive positions of the colonies in the modernization process.[14] Chakrabarty also criticizes the developmental logic of many third world countries that subscribe to the linear and progressive narrative of modernity.

---

[14] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

In my project, rather than provincializing a center, I centralize a province to explore the theoretical potential of "the provincial" and reconfigure debates on globalization and transnationalism, particularly in the field of culture and media.

The provincial, like the notion of regionality, implied marginalization, or a peripheral position in the global order as theorized by many western theorists. However, Guangdong province is heavily involved in neoliberal globalization, which departs from the notion of periphery. Moreover, as I shown above, province has a specific political and social meaning in China's administrative structure as well as media industries. Since province is itself a major political, social, and geographical category to mark and classify differences, I use the provincial as a way to account for the assignation and production of social differences that not comprehended by categories such as nation, citizenship, race, class, gender and sexuality.

In this sense, I re-orient postcolonial critique of the Western center and conceptualize "the provincial" as an analytical category to intervene in current studies of media and culture in the context of neo-liberal globalization. This dissertation *provincializes* the universal claims of film and media theories that mostly derive from American and European contexts; at the same time, it also *provincializes* the nation-state framework.

"TEMPORALIZATION OF SPACES": EPISTEMIC DEVELOPMENTALISM

Seeing province as a social category and using "the provincial" as a method of critical analysis can push further the postcolonial critique of Euro-American supremacy into a

critique of *epistemic developmentalism*, or the spatial-temporal arrangements of social theory or knowledge production at large that imply a developmental narrative.

As pointed out by David Harvey, social theory "constructed in the diverse traditions of Adam Smith, Marx, or Weber tends to privilege time over space in its formulations, reflecting and legitimizing those who view the world through the lenses of spaceless doctrines of progress and revolution."[15] Aesthetic theory, in contrast to social theory, is deeply concerned with the "spatialization of time."[16] That is to say, the developmental narrative of social theory is inevitably transferred to a spatial mapping, which is a process of "temporalization of spaces."

Such "temporalization of spaces" is crucial in constructing the paradigm of modernity. As Naoki Sakai sharply observed, "although the modernization process may be envisioned as a move toward the concretization of values at some abstract level, it is always imaged as a concrete transfer from one point to another on a world map."[17] In other words, the temporal progression of modernity is translated into a spatial hierarchy of geographical places. Or, the spatial hierarchy sustains the narrative of temporal progression. One version of epistemic developmentalism is criticized as historicism in Chakravaty's project on provincializing Europe,

> Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This

---

[15] David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination 1," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 428.

[16] Ibid.: 429.

[17] Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity : On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 157.

"first in Europe, then elsewhere" structure of global historical time was historicist; different non-Western nationalisms would later produce local versions of the same narrative, replacing "Europe" by some locally constructed center. It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the "country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed the image of its own future."[18]

The temporal-spatial configuration of epistemic developmentalism is largely founded on a dualism: the nexus of universalism-particularism. In postcolonial studies, crucial efforts have been made to critically reflect on the universal-particular dichotomy. On one hand, undoing Euro-centrism remains a persistent project in postcolonial thoughts. Built upon postcolonial thinkers such as Said and Fanon, scholars such as Naoki Sakai, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and others examine the hierarchical and co-dependent structure between the particular and the universal, especially in our perception of the relationship between non-western and western modernity.[19] Likewise, in the field of cultural studies, Paul Gilroy pointed out how the history of slavery become black's "special property rather than a part of the ethnical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole."[20] Through critiquing the same mechanism of universalism, Gilroy's work addresses more the black modernity within the national histories of America or Britain with a transnational framework across the Atlantic Ocean. Gilroy, together with Stuart Hall, are highly influential in disciplines such as

---

[18] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 7.

[19] Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989); Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*; Xudong Zhang, *Quan Qiu Hua Shi Dai De Wen Hua Ren Tong*, Wen Hua Li Lun Cong Shu (Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2005); Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method : Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[20] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 49.

American studies and Ethnic Studies.[21] However, probably due to the geopolitical marginalization of the African nations, these postcolonial or neocolonial nations and their modernization visions were symptomatically neglected in Gilroy's Atlantic framework.

In a similar vein, recent Asian studies scholarship complicates the dichotomy of Asia and the West. Specifically, Asian modernity is no longer seen as a particular or an alternative model validating the western modernity.[22] Here, particularism sometimes translates into the discourse of Asia's exceptionalism. A number of scholars have noted the pitfalls of Asia's exceptionalism, particularly in relation to its economic rise. For example, Ravi Arvind Palat points out the danger of Asian exceptionalism in explaining the significant economic growth of the Asia-Pacific Rim in the 1980s and 90s. For Palat, Asian exceptionalism was aided by area studies and disciplinary inquiries founded by the United States during the Cold-War. Later on, after becoming "emerging powers," Asian countries constantly sees the west as the normative model and dehistoricize and essentializes Asia into a timeless, culturalist and particularistic entity. As Palat argues,

> [T]he dominance of the modernization perspective meant that 'development' was conceived as a convergence to Westernized forms of industrialization. When it became apparent that patterns of industrial organization and labor relations were not converging towards a normative standard derived from a Euro-North American experience, this was explained as a manifestation of a timeless Asian culture.[23]

---

[21] Glen M. Mimura, *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[22] For example, See Lydia He Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[23] D. Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 46 (2005): 130.

Here, the hierarchical spatial designations of the universal and the particular in epistemic developmentalism are tightly entangled with narratives of progressivist temporality. Such spatio-temporal configurations define how the West imagine "the Rest," but also how the Rest imagine themselves.

Neoliberalism re-organizes social orders by establishing narrative of temporal progression. The Special Economic Zones are not simply transformations and remaking of territories; they are also competing narratives of histories and temporalities in spatial terms. Revisiting the legacies of the Bandung meeting of underdeveloped countries from Asia and Africa in the 1950s, Chakrabarty investigates "the pedagogical style of developmental politics" of the postcolonial nations that displayed an uncritical emphasis on modernization. This catching-up-with-the-West style of developmental politics produced "a particular split that marked the relationship between elite nations and their subaltern counterparts as well as that between elites and subalterns within national boundaries."[24]

Although the developmental politics of non-Western countries was not a neo-liberal invention, the socialist China imagined a competitive modernization project during the Cold War in which China is "modern on its own terms." Rewriting the socialist imagination of competitive modernity, neo-liberalism acquires new conception of time and space. As I will explore in greater detail in chapter four, the setting up of the Special Economic Zones entails the developmental narrative of the state, where Hong Kong's economic prosperity is imagined as the future of the Special Economic Zones.

[24] Ibid.: 53.

Here, the most successful SEZs, located in Guangdong province become important sites to examine the developmental narrative of the state. Acknowledging the danger of epistemic developmentalism, my dissertation *provincializes* the universal claims of film and media theories that mostly derive from American and European contexts by using the provincial as a way to account for the assignation and production of social differences that not comprehended by categories such as nation, citizenship, race, class, gender and sexuality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation is not a retelling of a regional or provincial history of cultural production in China. Nor is it simply a re-centering of the study of Chinese media cultures. Instead, it challenges dominant paradigms of studying national and transnational cultures and contributes to a larger field. In its exploration of multiple visual genres and their contexts, this interdisciplinary project speaks to the fields of East Asian Studies, cultural and urban geography, cultural studies, visual studies and U.S. ethnic studies through postcolonial and feminist lenses. Investigating the spatial politics in visual culture, I scrutinize how the cinematic realm function as possible and problematic site to negotiate with the dilemma between state-sponsored centralized containment of Chinese culture and the neo-liberal celebration of cultural multiplicity and heterogeneity.

In the fields of history, political science, economics and urban studies, a sub-national region or province has long been a legitimate subject for studying China. Though scholars in political science, economics and urban studies have all recognized

the economic importance of Guangdong, they have rarely taken into account the cultural production and institutions in this region. Social scientists have studied the economic development in the context of regionalization and globalization.[25] Urban studies scholars have focused on urban expansion and economic developments in the Pearl River Delta area, a cluster of cities along the Pearl River in Guangdong, as a case study of the emerging global city/city-region in a non-western context.[26] Notably, literature on global city/city-region mainly focuses on the urbanization condition under globalization from the perspective of sociological and political-economic study of global cities or world cities [27] with few endeavors to understand it from the cultural perspective. [28] This imbalance between socio-economic study and culture speaks to Rose's feminist critique of the gendered dualism in geography where the "real space" continues to be emphasized in a masculinist manner.

Furthermore, this dissertation incorporates the category of space and place in the study of Chinese cinema or culture, which usually emphasizes on chronological history.

---

[25] See Tung X. Bui, *China's Economic Powerhouse : Reform in Guangdong Province* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Anthony G. O. Yeh, *Developing a Competitive Pearl River Delta in South China under One Country-Two Systems* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006); Yue-man Yeung and Jianfa Shen, *The Pan-Pearl River Delta : An Emerging Regional Economy in a Globalizing China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008).

[26] See Chuihua Judy Chung, Bernard Chang, and Design Graduate School of, *Great Leap Forward Harvard Design School Project on the City* (Köln: Taschen, 2001); T. G. McGee, *China's Urban Space : Development under Market Socialism*, Routledge Studies on China in Transition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

[27] See Josef Gugler, *World Cities Beyond the West : Globalization, Development, and Inequality* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Allen John Scott, *Global City-Regions : Trends, Theory, Policy* (Cambridge, UK New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Klaus Segbers, Simon Raiser, and Krister Volkmann, *The Making of Global City Regions : Johannesburg, Mumbai/Bombay, São Paulo, and Shanghai*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Globalization (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

[28] See Linda Krause and Patrice Petro, *Global Cities : Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, New Directions in International Studies (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red : Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jing Wang, *Locating China: Space, Place and Popular Culture*, Routledge Studies on China in Transition (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

The Anglophone study of mainland Chinese cinema was not in formation until the critically claimed reception of the Fifth-Generation films in the late 1980s and it has expanded enormously ever since. Most of the study focuses on Chinese cinema after the Cultural Revolution [29] with recent trend to situate them under the context of globalization.[30] Since the 2000s, critical works have been produced in understanding the alternative cinematic culture including Sixth Generation films, *New Documentary Movement* in the 1990s in relation to the urbanization process.[31] Until very recently, space is being incorporated conceptually into the study of Chinese cinema, media and culture. The most recent literature examines the urbanization and media (cinema, TV, theater and experimental art) in Beijing and Shanghai and raises important issues of urbanization and media practices. Scholars such as Yomi Braester, Yingjin Zhang and Robin Visser examine space in relation to cinema, culture and urban aesthetics.[32] At the

---

[29] Chris Berry, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, Cornell University East Asia Papers, (Ithaca, N.Y.: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, 1985); Stephanie Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces : Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). For a review of some of these books published between 1993 and 1995 that mainly focus on Chinese films from the 1980s-1990s, see Yingjin Zhang, "Review Essay: Screening China— Recent Studies of Chinese Cinema in English," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29, no. 3 (June-Sept. 1997).

[30] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, 2002); Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi, *Chinese Ecocinema : In the Age of Environmental Challenge* (Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

[31] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Other works on film culture in the 1990s includes Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, Asia/Pacific/Perspective (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). Besides the books above, I would also like to mention two very recent unpublished doctoral dissertations of Augusta L Palmer, "Crossroads: Nostalgia and the Documentary Impulse in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas" (New York University, 2004); Qi Wang, "Writing against Oblivion: Personal Filmmaking from the Forsaken Generation in Post-Socialist China" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2008).

[32] See Braester, *Painting the City Red : Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*; Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*, Critical Interventions (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010); Robin Visser, *Cities Surround the Countryside : Urban Aesthetics in Post-Socialist China* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

same time, transnational city/media scholarships analyze the polarization of the emerging "global cities" in the East Asian contexts.[33] These endeavors contributed to the literature on cinema and cities links the study of urban spaces with the cinematic medium or mode, which mostly focuses on European and American urban centers and fictional cinematic works,[34] with notable exception.[35]

Yet, while earlier study of Chinese cinema and culture emphasized on temporary transfiguration and overlooked the spatial politics and geographical differences, this new space-media scholarship largely focus on films produced in Beijing, Shanghai, which again reflect the marginality of the south, or the provincial in cultural production and critical discourse. Hong Kong, though discussed much in terms of its cultural production, is usually linked with Shanghai, instead of its neighbor such as Guangzhou or Shenzhen. City-media scholarship points out the reality of the urban-rural divide, but also reinforces the binary and dehistoricizes the urbanization process and its relationship with neoliberalization. Thus, in this dissertation, I engage the center-provincial structure as well as the urban-rural divide in discussing contemporary Chinese art and visual culture as an attempt to further problematize the national cinema framework and substantialize the diversity and difference under the same signifier of "Chinese-ness."

---

[33] See Tsung-yi Michelle Huang, *Walking between Slums and Skyscrapers : Illusions of Open Space in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*; Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, *Worlding Cities : Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Studies in Urban and Social Change (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[34] Nezar AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* (New York: Routledge, 2006); David B. Clarke, *The Cinematic City* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997); Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[35] Preben Kaarsholm, *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2004); Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Studies in Urban and Social Change (Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001).

In his recent study of Chinese cinema and city, *Painting the City Red*, Yomi Braester sharply points out the symptomatic danger in the studies of contemporary urbanism in China that privileges new urban aesthetic, consciousness and identity in postsocialist China while ignoring the concern of urban subject matter in the Maoist period. [36] Braester expands the inquiry of urbanization vertically and enriches our understanding of the historical formations of urbanism in China by showing the filmic and theatrical representations of urban spaces in Shanghai and Beijing during Maoist period. Keeping the historical trajectory as a backdrop in my project, I argue that we should also expand horizontally, or spatially to question the changing boundary of urban and rural. In China, the distinction between "urban" and "rural" in strict administrative sense is a deliberate implementation of the state; and the boundary of the urban area is constantly expanding, especially in fast-growing regions such as the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong. The transformation of rural land into urban land is a tremendously extreme make-over project of the cityscape but at the same a lasting process that defines the everyday life of individuals over decades. Thus, the boundary of the city, in this case, the city-region has been constantly changing over the last 30 years, which is an obvious output of the fast-growing urbanism. Hundreds of thousands of peasants migrate to the city as peasant-workers yet they cannot easily get a permanent residential permit in the city. Hence, I argue that the urban has to be examined in relation to the rural in order to reveal the "economy of places," the inter-relationality and connect-ness of places.

Addressing more specifically to the discipline of film and media studies, this

---

[36] Braester, *Painting the City Red : Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, 9.

24

dissertation again directs our attention to the issue of space and place in media culture. In her book *Ambient Television*, Anna McCarthy sees place as "a central concept for understanding the relationship between local, site-specific forces of TV and the apparatus's globalizing ideologies of space-binding and 'scale-shifting'"; and "the tensions between specificity and generality" are "political as well as epistemological."

Also, it is a widely-accepted belief that contemporary media culture increasingly complicates everyday spatial experiences in multiple ways. Scholars such as McLuhan argue that media technology and communication networks accelerate the annihilation of time/space and increasingly produce a sense of "placeless-ness," or a multiplicity of the interconnections between spaces. The ubiquity of big and small screens and interfaces, from the cinematic silver screen, TV flat to mobile devices, contributes to the reproduction of imagery across space and hence the spaceless-ness. Yet, the annihilation of time/space thesis is challenged by a more historical materialistic approach to the study of media culture. In her theorization of the "epistemologies of movement", or different ways of "signifying and interpreting movement at a web interface," Lisa Parks acutely points out how knowledge production, including that of media and society, is situated in historical time and space,

> What is perhaps most unfortunate about the idle embrace of the 'annihilation of time/space discourse' is that it has deferred research into how the meanings, knowledges and experiences of time/space and movement have themselves shifted with different technologies, geographies, users and socio-historical conditions. Instead, the annihilation of time/space logic has served a fantasy of digital nomadism that imagines the web navigator is able to move freely, change identities at will, and travel the world without restriction…Both negate the material specificities and limits of network infrastructures in order to privilege and centralize a transcendent Western subject that is imagined as existing

above and beyond technology rather than in relation to it.[37]

Following Parks' recovering of knowledge production in historical time and space, this dissertation traces the power relations of epistemic developmentalism in studying the non-Western world.

TRIANGULATION OF THREE SPATIAL DYNAMICS

This dissertation locates competing narratives about the province in the context of media globalization. It destabilizes the province as a seemingly homogenous and descriptive entity, evoking the province as an analytic unit to make visible the shifting spatial inter-relations of the national and the global. Seeing from the perspective of a specific province, this project also attends to what Leo Ching has proposed the model of "globalizing the regional, regionalizing the global" when "simple models of colonizer/colonized, First/Third Worlds, metropolitan/periphery, center/margin—are inapplicable to a spatial economy of power irreducible to geographical dichotomies."[38] Informed by critical geography, post-colonial theory and transnational feminism, I complicate the geographical dichotomies of center/periphery, global/local, urban/rural through the triangulation of three spatial dynamics of the province: the central-provincial, the provincial-transnational, and the space of exception.

First, this dissertation challenges the prevalent conception of mainland China, particularly the ethnic Han majority, as a monolithic cultural entity. Analyzing how

---

[37] Lisa Parks, "Kinetic Screens: Epistemologies of Movement at the Interface," in *Mediaspace : Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick and McCarthy Couldry, Anna (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 38.

[38] Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 236.

Cantonese media activism on the Internet and local TV programs interacted with actual street protests, it highlights the state-imposed hierarchical order of central-provincial media productions and expands on the exchange among Hong Kong, provincial Guangdong and diasporic Cantonese.

Second, it questions recent models of transnational media, specifically the China-diaspora model that transgresses but still relies on the nation-state as an autonomous unit of analysis. By accentuating the Hong Kong-Guangdong connection, my project unravels how hegemonic discourses of monolithic Chinese nationhood and the American multiculturalism have shaped the gendered ethnic formation in Hong Kong filmmaker Mabel Cheung's "migration trilogy" (1985-89) and others that feature transpacific migration.

Third, it elucidates how digital culture mediates the ways in which the Special Zones reinforce the pre-existing urban-rural divide, solidify the gendered urban citizenship and normalize the biopolitical management of the migrant-workers through the politics of exceptional spaces. To accomplish this, it scrutinizes how new media environment facilitates recent digital documentaries and media art projects such as *Sanyuanli* (2003) for broader considerations of their narrative experimentation, locational aesthetics, site-specific practices, and negotiation with the "neoliberal spatialities" of the Special Zones.

The triangulation of three spatial dynamics of the province create contested zones to examine the multi-layered yet concurrent imagination and conceptions of places within the network of the local, the national and the global. Each spatial dynamic

suggest a varied set of relations among the local, the national and the global. First, the central-provincial dynamic emphasizes the historical subjugation of the province to monolithic nationalism, which was recently aided by the state's neoliberal embrace of transnational capitalism and developmental logic. Yet, the neoliberalization of the provincial media industry provides opportunities for the exchange between provincial media, Hong Kong media and diaspora Cantonese. Here, the provincial is a site to evacuate the central-provincial media industry structure that is embedded in the larger national administrative structure, and to negotiate with neoliberal globalization that promotes state and corporate interests.

Second, the province as the hometown of transpacific migratory imagination manifested the province as a place of nostalgia. At the same time, the province is imagined as underdeveloped and the immigrants originated from the province become the disenfranchised and underprivileged labor within the global economy. Through the examination of a number of Hong Kong films that depict transpacific migration, I use the province as hometown to manifest the discrepancy between regional belonging and national identity. At the same time, the province is subjugated to the imagination of the "American Dream," which signifiers a temporal ladder of individual success and fulfillment based on a spatial and directional flow of transpacific migration.

Third, the Special Economic Zones in the province makes it a more economically advanced area compared to the vast rural area and underdeveloped inland in China. The exceptional status of the zone paradoxically suggests the paradigmatic shift in the state's embrace of neoliberal globalization. The province as Special Economic Zones, or what I

argue a type of "neoliberal spatialities," highlights the national urban/rural divide and the biopolitical management of the bodies of the migrant workers. The SEZ signifies the disparities within the province, which in determined by the national rural-urban divide.

Moreover, the triangulation of three sets of spatial relations among local, national and global is also built upon complicated relationships between the province and Hong Kong, the bordering historical British colony and the current Special Administrative Region of China. Hong Kong is a sustaining influence of Cantonese culture for the province, a stop-over site in the movement chain of transpacific migration from the province to United States, and the projection of future for the SEZs in neo-liberal economy. Thus, the presence of Hong Kong reflects the triangulation of the three spatial dynamics. Specifically, the historical interaction between media industries in Hong Kong and those in provincial Guangdong underpins the regional Cantonese culture in the central-provincial media infrastructure. At the same time, Hong Kong is a stop-over site in the chain of transpacific migration from the province to United States. Also, in the neo-liberal economy, Hong Kong symbolizes the future of the SEZs, in which the rest of the country will eventually catch up with the state-sponsored linear projection of progressive development.

Furthermore, the triangulation of three spatial dynamics traces two different types of migration, the inter-migration within China in neo-liberal economy on one hand, and the historical transnational migration from the province to other countries on the other. Here, the province is a site of spatial inter-relations, and a zone of various cultural manifestations. Hence, the triangulation of three sets of spatial relations positions the

province in a network of shifting spatial and power relations and destabilizes the province as a homogenous entity.

Each of the following chapter closely examines media cultures in relation to the three spatial dynamics of the province respectively: the central-provincial, the provincial-transnational, and the exceptional spaces. Chapter two investigates how digital technology brings about or facilitates new modes of Internet and social activism in both Guangdong and Hong Kong in the 2000s. In July 2010, media and street activism first appeared in Guangzhou and soon spread to Hong Kong and overseas for the preservation of Cantonese language and culture. Using social media, mobile communication and Internet platform, this activism tactically combined cultural, social and political expressions such as antagonism against monolingual policy of Mandarin, or *putonghua*; criticism of urban planning policy; and calling for freedom of speech. Cantonese Digital Activism displayed multiple formats of digital contention, including confessional essays; debates; Internet user-made songs and posters, vidding, and most creatively and effectively, the organization of street gatherings and demonstrations. In this chapter, I re-conceptualize the concepts of the "province" and "the provincial" in the context of China's national cultural industries and media globalization as a way to elucidate the complex relationship among local, national and global. This chapter expands on the exchange among Hong Kong, provincial Guangdong and Cantonese diaspora as possible "cultural zones" that negotiate with monolithic nationalism, which is complicit with both

the national and transnational paradigms.

Teasing out the connections between Hong Kong SAR and the nearby growth zones, chapter three examines the Guangdong regional factor in a larger body of migration films in Hong Kong popular cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989), the third movie of female director Mabel Cheung's Migration Trilogy. Incorporating the history of Hong Kong-China coproduction policy, particularly the location-shooting regulations in China, and the analysis of thematic and genetic conventions of this migration cinema, this chapter studies how hegemonic discourses of "China Syndrome" and the "American Dream" have shaped the gendered migratory imagination in Hong Kong cinema. Through the inspection of linguistic, narrative and visual-audio configurations in *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989), this chapter demonstrates how a popular film text can be a productive site for the critique of the marginalization of first-generation Chinese immigrants in the U.S., and more importantly, for the re-inscription of Cantonese experience as a possible site of "sinophonic articulations," which reveals the artificiality of Chinese-ness both within and outside China. Mainly, in this chapter, I argue that recent transnational cinema paradigms or the China-diaspora model that transgresses but still relies on the nation-state as autonomous unit of analysis.

Chapter four focuses on independent digital media practices in Guangdong province and examines how the socially-engaged subject matter as well as experimental aesthetics responded to the rapid urbanization process in this region, particularly within the context of neo-liberal re-ordering of national space. The "neoliberal spatialities" refers to the re-configuration and re-territorialization of national spaces and the

31

normalization of hierarchical space in everyday life in China's neoliberalization through what Aihwa Ong called "zoning technologies," a governmental technique to create spaces such as the Special Economic Zones for economic growth and development. These neoliberal spatialities reinforce the pre-existing urban-rural divide, normalize the biopolitical management of the peasant-workers, and consolidate a new developmental narrative of the state that endorses linear and progressive temporality. The intersection between space and media culture in this chapter enriches existing scholarship on Chinese media culture that emphasizes on temporary transfiguration and overlooks the spatial politics and geographical divergence. The visual media practices from South China, particularly Guangdong, an area encompasses the most successful SEZs, illuminate the abstract and everyday neoliberal spatialities. In contrast with the numerous artistic explorations of overtly political and monumental space such as the Tiananmen Square, the independent media practices in Guangdong elucidate the changes and new formations of social spaces brought about by economic liberalization. Probing various modalities of spaces such as the village-in-the-city phenomenon, new urban developments, and factory spaces, a number of independent digital videos and media arts in Guangdong capture the production of hierarchical social space in the neoliberal reordering. Particularly, the digital video *Sanyuanli* (2003), a Dziga Vertov style experimental documentary made collectively by u-*thèque* organization members, illustrates the village-in-the-city spatiality, which is emblematic of the urban-rural divide and neoliberal biopolitics on a national scale that foregrounds the prosperity of the Special Economic Zones. Specifically, this chapter investigates how *Sanyuanli* and the cultural practice of its

creator u-*thèque* organization scrutinize the politics of neoliberal spatialities through the employment of "locational aesthetics." The locational aesthetics has three components: the thematic interest in examining neoliberal spatialities; the artistic subjectivity and self-reflexive aesthetics and that locate the media practitioner in social space; and the creation of independent artistic space.

Overall, re-orienting postcolonial critique of the Western center, this dissertation centralizes a province and conceptualizes "the provincial" as an analytical category to intervene in current studies of media and culture in the context of neoliberal globalization. I use the "provincial" as a more nuanced analytical category to account for the designation and production of social differences. Deprived from a specific context of Guangdong province, I demonstrate throughout the dissertation how the provincial as an analytical category intersects and illuminates other social categories such as nationality, and ethnicity.

Provincializing Chinese Mediascape:
Cantonese Digital Activism and Participatory Culture in Southern China

On August 1st 2010, thousands of people gathered in and around the People's Park in the city of Guangzhou in Southern China. Hundreds of police marched in, dragged away protesters, put them into big buses and soon disbanded the crowd. In front of the confrontational scenarios between the protesters and the police, almost every protester holds a digital camera, a camcorder or a cell phone. You can image how some of these pictures, taken by personal electronic devices, were immediately posted online via telecom networks on *weibo*, or the micro blog, the Chinese version of twitter. Larger videos and pictures would soon be uploaded to the Internet as well. And the Internet became a place to disseminate opinions and organize the street demonstrations, which made the fast mobilization of protesters possible in the first place.

What were they protesting against? They were not there for environmental pollution, labor dispute or land confiscation, which are typical social problems and popular topics of online contention in China today. Instead, the protests were triggered by a government proposal for the local Guangzhou TV station to replace Cantonese prime-time shows with Mandarin programming during the period of the upcoming Asian Games in 2010. The protests described above were climactic moments of a series of "flash mob" gatherings[1] and street demonstrations that took place in Guangzhou to call

---

[1] "Flash mob" gatherings are translated as kuaishan in Chinese, which literally means fast flashing, to describe the instant mobilization, gathering and dissemination of a group of people in public space. The first flash mob was created in Manhattan in 2003.

for the preservation of Cantonese language and Cantonese cultures.

Cantonese is a regional language predominately used in southern China and Hong Kong. Most Hong Kong movies made after 1980 are in Cantonese. Cantonese is one of the Chinese languages that are under state's oppression, through the national campaign of Mandarin, or *putonghua*.[2] Netizens (Internet citizens) consciously name such mono-lingual language policy the "Mandarin Promotion Machine," or the "Language Slaughter." The street gatherings were organized through social media and accompanied with debates, netizens-made videos, songs and images online. Such an activism, as I demonstrate in this chapter, is also tactically combined with criticism of urban planning and redevelopment policy and the calling for freedom of script and speech.

Immediately, the activism received support from Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, Macau and overseas in cyberspace, but also in physical space. For example, at the same time of the August 1st Guangzhou demonstration, hundreds of protesters in Hong Kong joined the demonstrations as part of the "Guangdong-HK Support Cantonese Action." It also attracted the attention of diasporic Cantonese-speaking population.[3] I

---

[2] According to the constitution of the People's Republic of China, article 19, the state promotes the use of Putonghua nationwide. The promotion of mandarin in educational sectors started in mid-1950s. Since the mid-1950s, the state started to promote simplified Chinese, mandarin and the pinyin system in educational institutions. Furthermore, enforced in Jan 2001, the Law of the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language established the standard Chinese, which enforces mandarin in public sectors, including the broadcasting industry. For more, see Minglang Zhou and Hongkai Sun, *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China : Theory and Practice since 1949* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004).

[3] For example, facebook groups such as "I am Cantonese" was soon founded by college students in California. Since one cannot access facebook in China without extra VPN or proxy service, one could argue that the activism on facebook is mainly from a diasporic population. Of course, since Internet access in Hong Kong is not censored, many facebook groups such as *chunwang chihan, yuegangao xiongdi jicheng* yueyu (Brothers in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau Supporting Cantonese) were founded as well. The group uses the Chinese idiom "the teeth are cold when the lips are lost" to describe the inter-dependent relationship among these three locals.

use "Cantonese Digital Activism" here to describe the participatory use of the Internet and electronic devices for the articulation of a Cantonese identity. The direct participation of the netizens or protesters is what distinguishes the digital activism from other digital media platforms such as the digital television.

"RAP CANTONESE" NETIZEN VIDDING

The "Rap Guangzhou (Canton)" is one of many netizens-made Cantonese songs to articulate the consciousness to preserve Cantonese, which is tactically combined with criticism of urban planning and redevelopment policy and the calling for freedom of script.[4] This combination is reflected on its lyrics, which elaborate on the disappearance of Cantonese language in everyday experience and the demolition of Cantonese neighborhood in the urbanization process. For example, this excerpt of the song lyrics delineates the disappearance of Cantonese, both as a language and as a way of life,

> Rap Cantonese line by line, please don't say Cantonese is aging. In this grand epoch full of changes, Cantonese is the seal of the past. Rapping Cantonese beat by beat, seeing the change of Guangzhou second by second. English and mandarin are often heard in this busy city, but please don't forget Cantonese. I have been living in this city for twenty years; the old restaurants and neighborhood are all demolished. The news reportages keep reporting on how much money is spent in the preparation for the 2010 Asian Games. I don't care how much is spent. Our collective memories are demolished…Now speaking Cantonese is even becoming an issue. I really want to know what is wrong with you. I never say you cannot promote mandarin, but why are you trying to diminish Cantonese?

The song started with mixing Cantonese and Mandarin audio-track on TV news reporting on Cantonese neighborhoods that facing the threat of demolition in the name

---

[4] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-r556Xb5L8&feature=related, Accessed September, 2010.

of redevelopment. Using first-person experience of living in Guangzhou "for twenty years," the singer strongly asserts the frustration caused by the demolition of old neighborhoods. The song was then re-made by other netizens into numerous versions of online music videos, or song vids. This song was also broadcast on Guangzhou TV station, accompanied by the fast-changing images of the city-scape, as a prominent example of online activism supporting Cantonese. Another popular version of this song is accompanied by the official video of the 2010 Asian Games held in Guangzhou, an event that is specifically criticized in "Rap Cantonese." The song sharply points out that the considerable investment in urban redevelopment for the preparation of the Asian Games had led to the demolition of "our collective memories" as Guangzhouer.

Like any other promotion video on sports games, the Asian Games official video showcases bodily movements in athletic activities such as bicycling, gymnastics, marathon, swimming, running, etc. Heavily relying on crane shots and slow motion, the video exhibits athletic bodies on the move. The video is at the same time a city-branding product. Unfolding modern interior space such as car-resembling lines, music hall, shopping mall, the video also features modern buildings such as skyscrapers, convention center, stadia, airport, etc. Intercutting modern architectural space with athletic movements, the video is a visual statement of Guangzhou's modernization and urbanization, which makes it a desirable city to host the Asian Games.

The images in this video exemplify the mainstream visual narrative or the branding strategy, which is a reoccurring formula of promoting Chinese cities on the global stage. Following the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and the Shanghai Expo in

2010, Guangzhou, hosted the Asian Olympic Games in winter 2010. The international games generated investments and created opportunities for the building of grand stadia and new exhibition halls, skyscrapers and extensive subway systems. The international games demonstrate how the nation-state subscribes to the discourse of neoliberal globalization and its developmental logic.

FIGURE 3. Still of an aerial shot of Guangzhou's cityscape in online video *Rap Cantonese* (2010)

In the online video "Rap Cantonese," the creator not only replaces the soundtrack of the original Asian Games video, but also puts up the lyrics on screen in white character. The visualizations in the video deviate from the meaning in the lyrics. In a typical aerial shot of Guangzhou's cityscape (figure 3), the modern bridge lies in the foreground while the skyline stands up nicely on the background. The white character on screen states the demolition of old Arcade Building, a typical residential-commercial architecture whose exterior arcades provide shelter for pedestrians. Visually, for Cantonese readers, this video questions the demolition in the face of the city's new skyline.

More importantly, the Arcade Building emphasized in the lyrics points to the lived space of traditional architecture, where people still dwell in. In the Asian Games video, traditional architecture are occasionally included, such as the Chan Clan Ancestral Hall and the Sun Yet-San Memorial Hall. However, these places are mostly tourist sites or performance venue, instead of everyday lived space. Thus, the video favors traditional architectures' symbolic and ritual values instead of their everyday-ness in life, which is later questioned in the "Rap Cantonese" video.

Thus, the national celebration of the developmental logic, exemplified by the obsession with skyscrapers, modernist architectural spaces, goes hand in hand with the construction of a local-ness by showcasing the symbolic ethnic cultures such as dragon boat custom, flower boats, Cantonese opera, and historic sites. For example, dragon boat race, an ancient folk ritual in southern China, appears multiple times in the video. In Asian Games 2010, dragon boat race was included for the first time. However, the video

emphasizes on the theatricality of the dragon boat. As shown in the picture (figure 4), the dragon head of the boat, centered on the screen and carried by masculine men on the sides, is much larger than those used in real competition. Such an extravagant representation of the dragon boat is very different from the dragon boat portrayed in *Eight Taels of Gold*, a transnational Hong Kong movie about Cantonese immigrants that I explore in the next chapter.

FIGURE 4. Still of men carrying a dragon boat in online video *Rap Cantonese* (2010)

Again, the lyrics on screen as well as the song complicate the phallic representation of the dragon boat head. While the dragon boat asserts the existence of traditional ethnic culture, the song writer suggests that the urban demolition happen so

quickly and drastically that "one can easily disorient oneself" wandering in the city, even for someone who grew up there.

Furthermore, in the video, the majority of close-ups are on women smiling happily thus reminding us, of the gendering of nationhood. Dressed in traditional clothes, woman or women holding flowers and smiling appear several times throughout the video (figure 5). Superimposed on the smiley lady, the lyrics on screen asks the question: do we have to demolish so many building to prepare for the Asian Games?

FIGURE 5. Still of a smiling woman in online video *Rap Cantonese* (2010)

Such representation of women has been a continuing strategy of China's nation branding in the global stage. For example, during China's President Hu Jintao's state visit to the white house in January 2011, a China commercial was playing on time-

41

square and CNN. One of the images in the commercial displays "stunning Chinese beauty," in which five famous Chinese actresses, including Zhang Ziyi, pose for the camera. This picture, together with the representation of gender in the previous video raises interesting questions about self-orientalism and also how women are objectified as local or national beauties for both the national and international audience.

The superimposition of lyrics on the image is perhaps an idea grown out of the Karaoke culture, and a way to better disseminate the messages of the song to Chinese readers. But the fact that it takes up more than half of the screen created a visual re-inscription of the rap song that conflicted with the "harmonious" developments of the city. The words are almost re-writing the meaning behind the city's urban make-over and re-development. This song vid also shows how the traditional cultures are "preserved" in the images but they are disappearing in people's living experiences.

Besides reflecting the conflict of linguistic and regional differences, the Cantonese activism is combined with the awareness to preserve traditional architecture and historical sites that was thrown in front of the face of intensified urbanization and demolition. The issue of preserving traditional cultures and architectures against aggressive urban planning has long been a public concern in contemporary Chinese cinema. For example, Fifth-Generation director Ning Ying's Beijing trilogy, *For Fun* (1992), *On the Beat* (1995), and *I Love Beijing* (2000) document urban change in the context of police regulation. As Yomi Braester points out, the trilogy dwells on images of demolition and elevates demolition to a metaphor of the erasure of collective

memory.[5] Sixth-Generation director Jia Zhangke's documentary-realist films also weave the demolition as thematic and visual components. Scenes of demolition can easily be found in Jia's *Xiao Wu* (1997), *Still Life* (2006), and *24 City* (2008), featuring urban destruction in small town as well as major cities such as Chengdu. Despite the popularity of the theme of demolition, Guangdong is less represented in relation to rapid and intense process of urbanization in cinema. In contrast, experimental videos and installations from Guangdong, particularly those by the Big Tail Elephant Group, responded quickly to urbanization. Detailed exploration of these experimental artworks is in chapter four. From a more grassroots perspective, Cantonese activism asserts voices against the drastic urban demolition.

Possibilities and Problematics of Cantonese Digital Activism

Notably, compared to previous cases of rights-based activism in China, Cantonese activism has a distinguishing cultural dimension and it departs from those that target on specific economic need and social justice. After the Tiananmen social movement in 1989, massive demonstrations disappeared on the street within China due to high level of state surveillance, the intensified implementation of the Economic Reform and the de-politicization of politics.[6] The previous notable online right-based activism cases were more or less re-claiming rights over specific issues such as labor dispute, legal injustice, corruption, and environmental pollution, which usually were soon oppressed by the state.

---

[5] See Braester, *Painting the City Red : Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, 265-6.

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

Most demonstrations permitted by the state are those with strong nationalistic sentiments, such as the anti-American protest after the bombardment of Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999 and the anti-Japanese demonstrations in 2005. After the controversy of Tibet and Xingjiang conflicts in 2008, the overseas "support Olympics" demonstrations reflected how pan-Chinese cyber nationalism joined street activism aboard.

Equivalently, the most studied cases of culturally-associated online activism in Anglophone scholarship are the cyber articulations of nationalism, which is very much based on the framework of the nation-state.[7] The Cantonese activists, however, view the state critically as a homogenizing mechanism, which cannot be explained easily in the nation-state framework in the study of Chinese media and culture. Cantonese activism, therefore, is a distinctively cultural activism that forces us as cultural critics to think beyond the framework of the nation-state.

More importantly, the activism demonstrated not only political possibilities, but also problematics. For example, such cultural expressions from bottom-up also have limitations in their cosmopolitan roots. A widely-circulated netizen-remade propaganda poster points to the discriminatory side of the Cantonese Digital Activism. The caption says: "Canton people speak Cantonese. Go back to the countryside if you don't understand Cantonese." This slogan may be referencing to those 6 million migrant-workers who actually makes up half of the population in Guangzhou. Here the exclusion

---

[7] The study of online nationalism in China, see Simon Shen and Shaun Breslin, *Online Chinese Nationalism and China's Bilateral Relations*, Challenges Facing Chinese Political Development (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010); Xu Wu, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism : Evolution, Characteristics, and Implications* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

of non-Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou is certainly also based on the lower social status of the migrant-workers. The discriminative tendency in Cantonese activism is easily projected on the most venerable social group: the migrant workers. As I will explore in greater detail in chapter four, the migrant workers are the working class in the urban area. However, their class status is displaced by their country-side residency in the neoliberal biopolitics.

The mixture of revolutionary iconography and ignorant words captured how China "claims to represent a variety of counter-bourgeois publics-peasants, workers, women, ethnic groups, nationalists- is simultaneously engendering a bourgeois class."[8] Instead of the struggle against an authoritarian state, popular containment, including class containment, has become "the political priority of the Chinese bourgeoisie, which as a class has yet to cut its umbilical cord with the party-state."[9] Therefore, though Cantonese is claiming its legitimacy against the oppressive national monolingual policy, it may at the same time exposed to the danger of class prejudice.

Theorizing the Provincial: Reorienting Post-colonial Thought

More broadly, how should we situate Cantonese Digital Activism in relation to current discussions on media globalization, participatory cultures, state surveillance and digital activism, when the role of digital social media is brought to a new height with events in Tunisia and Egypt? It is what Tiziana Terranova would call the "communication

---

[8] Yuezhi Zhao, "Rethinking Chinese Media Studies: History, Political Economy and Culture," in *Internationalizing Media Studies*, ed. Daya Kishan Thussu (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 182.
[9] Ibid.

biopower"[10] in the informational milieu of the network culture? What is the relationship among language, culture, identity and technology in this highly-mediated cultural phenomenon?

Keeping in mind the possibilities and also problematics of the Cantonese activism, in this article, I use the "province" and "the provincial" as a more nuanced way to think beyond the binary of cultural dominance and resistance, which is frequently deployed in the field of Cultural Studies. The provincial, both as a conceptual category and an organizational category, could be used as a more productive term to engage the relationships among local, global, and national. Moreover, the concept of the province illuminates the connections between sub-national regions, such as the exchanges between Guangdong and Hong Kong media industries. The influences of Hong Kong media on provincial media in Guangdong, and the spread of Cantonese digital activism from Guangzhou to Hong Kong and diaspora Cantonese population, demonstrate the historically situated interactions between Guangzhou and Hong Kong. The provincial, I argue, is a productive way to engage Cantonese digital activism as a distinctively cultural activism and to tackle upon its questionable prejudice on other such social groups such as the migrant-workers.

Specifically, in this chapter, after situating the cultural phenomenon in a larger theoretical and historical framework, I first approach the Cantonese Digital Activism by situating it in the larger context of provincial media industries in Guangdong province.

---

[10] See Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture : Politics for the Information Age* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004).

Then I analyze the textual and physical practices of this activism and its engagement with larger visual cultures. Lastly, I explore the limits of such activism and open up the concept of the provincial. At first glance, Cantonese activism may seem to be a sort of provincialism that challenges the monolithic Chinese nationhood. However, the developmental logic of the state, which led to the demolition of Cantonese neighborhoods for real estate redevelopment, is also due to the state's gradual embrace of transnational capitalism since the late 1970s. Such a neo-liberal alliance of transnational capitalism and nation-state is crucial in understanding neoliberal globalization. In this sense, the Cantonese Digital Activism is what Arjun Appadurai has called "grassroots globalization," which "strives for a democratic and autonomous standing in respect to the various forms by which global power further seeks to extend its dominion."[11] In this chapter, I re-conceptualize the concepts of the "province" and "the provincial" in the context of China's national cultural industries and globalization as a way to elucidate the complex relationship among local, national and global.

Post-colonial scholar Dipesh Chakravarty argues that we can "provincialize Europe" if we start to deconstruct the myth of "the west" as an original site of modernity by revealing the constitutive positions of the colonies in the modernization process.[12] Chakravarty also criticizes the developmental logic of many third world countries that subscribe to the linear and progressive narrative of modernity. In my project, rather than provincializing a center, I centralize a province to explore the theoretical potential of

[11] Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000).

[12] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*.

"the provincial" in the field of culture and media. The provincial, like the notion of regionality, implied marginalization, or a peripheral position in the global order as theorized by many western theorists. However, the Guangdong province, where the Cantonese Digital Activism took place, has historically been and still is today a strong player in the global economy, which complicates the post-colonial center-periphery paradigm. Seeing from the perspective of a specific province, this project also attends to what Leo Ching has proposed the model of "globalizing the regional, regionalizing the global" when "simple models of colonizer/colonized, First/Third Worlds, metropolitan/periphery, center/margin—are inapplicable to a spatial economy of power irreducible to geographical dichotomies."[13]

The Province and the "Special Economic Zones" within the "Networked Society"

Bordering Hong Kong in southern China, Guangdong historically was one of the areas in China that first underwent modernization. The province's modernization is facilitated by transnational transactions of capital, commodities and people such as the large population of overseas emigration since the 19th century and the historical China Trade in the 18th and 19th century. Many of the early Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia and North America came from Guangdong. Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong, was the only legal port for China's foreign trade from the mid-18th century to the outbreak of the Opium War in 1840. Canton, the ancient name of the city of

---

[13] Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital," 236.

Guangzhou, is often depicted in early photography, export painting and decorative arts.

Currently, Guangdong is the most prosperous and populous province in China,[14] primarily because it has successfully implemented the state-initiated liberal economic policy of the "Special Economic Zones" in the last three decades. After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, China entered the era of the Economic Reform" under the supervision of Deng Xiaoping, which is to transform state-own planned economy into market economy. The establishment of the "Special Economic Zone" in Guangdong is one of the first and most salient economic initiatives to attract overseas investment, which exemplifies the entanglement between neo-liberal globalization and the nation-state. During the Reform, Guangdong became a mega manufacturing base, a crucial chain of the global labor market. Millions of migrant-workers traveled between their hometown in inland China and their work place in the factories in Guangdong. Such a massive internal migration has been documented and represented in many feature films, documentaries and art works. The "Special Economic Zone" in Guangdong illustrates what David Harvey has called neoliberalization and reconstitution of class power "with Chinese characteristics."[15]

The connected-ness of Guangdong with the global economy, the intensified urbanization and unprecedented migration in this province affirm its position as one of the global city-regions observed by Saskia Sassen; and such entities are becoming the

[14] According to C*hina Statistical Yearbook 2005,* Guangdong became the most populous province in China in 2005, registering 79 million permanent residents and 31 million migrant-workers. Guangdong has the highest ranking of GDP since 1989 amongst all provincial-level divisions.

[15] See Harvey, "Neoliberalism 'with Chinese Characterisitics'."

focal points of what Brenner has identified as a new "global city-centric capitalism."[16] Particularly, the Pearl River Delta (PRD) area, the central part of Guangdong province, is one of the global city-regions that emerged worldwide. Different from the old connotation of regionality or province, the global city-region phenomenon is triggered by the intensifying process of globalization. The relationship between city-regions and globalization is reflexive as "city-regions are arranged in mosaic whose basic outlines are a function of globalization processes," while on the other hand "globalization itself is in significant degree mediated through the same worldwide mosaic of city-regions."[17] In quantitative terms, global city-regions, sometimes noted as megacities, are defined as metropolises with a population of over 10 million. Some scholars set a minimum population density for "megacity" and only include cities with a single dominant centre, where multi-clustered agglomerations are excluded.[18] But scholarship on global city-regions includes multi-clustered city regions to address this phenomenon in a broader scope. If Hong Kong and Macau are added, the larger PRD is a polycentric agglomeration that contains more than thirty million inhabitants.[19] As suggested by Allen Scott, global city-regions do not mean large metropolitan areas, but growing city-regions in both economically advanced and in developing countries.[20]

---

[16] Neil Brenner, "Global Cities, Glocal States: Global City Formation and State Territorial Restructuring in Contemporary Europe," *Review of International Political Economy* 5, no. 1 (1998).

[17] Allen John Scott, *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy* (Cambridge, UK New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiv.

[18] See Frauke Kraas, "Urbanization and Global Environmental Change: 21st Century Challenges: : Megacities and Global Change: Key Priorities," *The Geographical Journal* 173, no. 1 (2007).

[19] Scott, 18.

[20] From the population statistics from 2000, the top five largest city-regions were Tokyo, Bombay, San Paolo, Shanghai

The emergence of a complex system of advanced informational networks ranging from telecommunication to satellites TV to the Internet also signified Guangdong's presence in the "networked society," or what Manual Castells suggests, an informational, global and networked economy. The "network society" is a specific form of social structure of the Information Age, or "a historical period in which human societies perform their activities in a technological paradigm constituted around microelectronics-based information/communication technologies, and genetic engineering,"[21] which replaces the paradigm of the Industrial Age. In the present Information Age, the new economy is informational, global and networked.

Departing from the classical center-periphery model, the provincial economic entities are important players of the network enterprise. At the same time, the heavy presence of industrial manufacturing industries in the province suggests the co-existence of the Industrial and the Informational, which complicated the linear developmental narrative suggested by Castells. The western societies are situated in a post-ford, post-industrial and post-modern discourse, while the developed countries remain places of industrialization. The post-industrial societies are intrinsically connected with the industrial societies and the latter is constitutive of the "network society" in the Information Age. How do we situate places such as Guangdong? Is it one of the new economies that departing from the industrial and moving toward the informational?

---

and New York.

[21] Manuel Castells, "Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society," *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 10.

The difficulty in including or excluding Guangdong as a global city-region or an entity of the Informational Age points to a larger epistemological predicament. The problem of the progressive temporality in Castells' conception of the emergence of the "network society" in the Informational Age is not unlike that of the claim that post-modern era superseded the modern one. Naoki Sakai persuasively points out the chronology of the premodern-modern-postmodern cannot be dissociated from the global geopolitical configuration.[22] In the same vein, it is useful to re-orient post-colonial critique and term with the neo-liberalization of China as it reveals the constitutive positions of the colonies in the "original site" of modernity, which was re-iterated in current discussion of network society and culture, although the network seems to be spontaneously global. Conversely, situating China in the larger post-colonial landscape is to address the importance of the socialist revolution as anti-colonial struggles, which should not be regarded as merely a competitive modernity model that mirrored on the capitalist one, but a constitutive part of the global post-colonial history.

Here, the province becomes a site where the nation-state, neoliberal capitalism, and the discourse of modernity, particularly the idea of progressive temporality, maybe engaged. Historian Prasenjit Duara proposes that we view modernity as "not an essence but fundamentally a new conception of time as linear, progressive, and often accelerating," which is "embedded in institutions and material practices consistent with

---

[22] See Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity : On Japan and Cultural Nationalism*, 153-4.

the logic of capitalism and the nation-state."[23] Duara sees the relationship among the three variables - modernity, nation-state and global capitalism - as a kind of "collusive hegemony," in the sense that it dominates other conceptions, and it is being constructed and institutionalized.[24]

The logic of the national campaign of *putonghua,* or the Common Language, was embedded in the longer history of modernization and the formation of the Chinese nation-state, which subscribes to the "collusive hegemony." Despite Guangdong's economic and technological prominence in the national and also the global market, the representations of Guangdong and regional Cantonese cultures have been obscured by the hierarchy in national media industry and the state-enforced monolingual policy of speaking Mandarin in public sections, which eventually triggered the Digital Cantonese Activism. In my larger project, I investigate the construction of nationhood in state-owned media and the subsequent negotiations with it in independent digital filmmaking, experimental art, and digital activism in Guangdong. These negotiations, together with the cultural exchanges among Guangdong, Hong Kong and diaspora Cantonese, create dynamic "Special Cultural Zones" that challenge monolithic Chinese nationhood as well as neo-liberal globalization.

The mono-lingual policy of the state captures the interplay among modernity, nation-state and global capitalism; and it specifies the cultural aspects of the "collusive hegemony." Speaking Mandarin was not only enforced by the Communist Party from

---

[23] Prasenjit Duara, *The Global and Regional in China's Nation-Formation*, Critical Asian Scholarship (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 8.

[24] Ibid.

People's Republic of China to consolidate state control, but was also imposed by the Guomingdang, or the Republican Party in the early twentieth century. The Guomingdang continued to enforce Mandarin in public sectors after it fled from the mainland to Taiwan in 1949 until the removal of Martial Law in the 1980s. Mandarin is called *Guoyu* or the national language in Taiwan.

The tension between the dialects and *putonghua* has been a much debated issue throughout the 20th century. In his discussion on the local dialect and the national form during the Sino-Japanese war period, Wang Hui argues that the adoption of a national language, which later developed into *putonghua*, was a necessary act for nation-building shaped by forces of cosmopolitism:

> The use of dialect and oral languages must obey the logic of universalism. In fact, such a universalized linguistic logic is not only nationalistic, but also 'internationalist' or cosmopolitan. Thus, the 'local form,' which is characterized by the use of local dialect, were adapted to a universal linguistic paradigm, though such universal language and its regulation itself have not yet formulated (at that time)…the regulations are determined by cosmopolitan language and western languages. [25]

Wang astutely pointed out how the nation-state replicates the discourse of universalism in its formation process. Clearly, Wang sees the national language as universal, urban and at the same time modern. By contrast, the dialects entail provincial, rural and folk cultures. Therefore the dichotomy between the common language and the dialect is based on the universal/provincial, urban/rural binaries. Wang concluded that:

---

[25] Hui Wang, "Difang Xingshi, Fangyan Tuyu Yu Kongri Zhanzheng Shiqi "Mingzu Xingshi" De Zhenglun (Local Form, Dialect and Debate of The "National Form" During the Sino-Japanese War," in *Ya Zhou Shi Ye : Zhongguo Li Shi De Xu Shu (the View of Asia: The Narrative of Chinese History)* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2010), 278. Translation mine.

In the process of building a modern nation-state, the universal national language and the arts that transcend local-ness has always been the main model of forming cultural homogeneity. Among the modalities of the new and the old, the urban and the rural, the modern and the folk, the national and the class, the local-ness of cultures cannot obtain a theoretical base for autonomy.[26]

Here, the national language is designated as the only one that is cosmopolitan and urban. However, many "dialects" are urban-based, particularly those used in provincial capitals all over China. All the other languages are particularized and reduced into dialects in order to create a homogenous and unified nation. In the nationalizing process, languages rather than mandarin have been ethnicized or localized, which is to say, the linguistic signifiers are increasingly attached to certain ethnic groups or geographical locales. While mandarin is nationalized as the official language, Cantonese, among others, are localized as dialects. Notably, Cantonese, one of the "dialects" from the Han ethnic majority, is categorized differently with other non-Han ethnic minorities in China. Comparing with state effort to categorize the non-Han minorities into Yi, Miao (Hmong), among the fifty-five ethnic minority groups, the heterogeneity of the Han people is de-ethnicized or ethnicized differently, and is frequently linked with provincial features or local-ness. Although the ordering of ethnicities is essentially spatial for ethnic minorities in China, I use the term "geo-ethnicization" to describe the categorization of the differences within Han people, which is intrinsically linked to geographically-based attributes of local-ness within the construction of Han unity. In the 20th century, in the formation of modern Chinese nation-state, the administrative unit of the province

---

[26] Ibid., 281.

became the site of the "geo-ethnicization," which restructures the divergences within the ethnical and national imagination. Therefore, the making of the local/provincial is a constitutive part of the construction of the national and the global, and vice versa. In the case of Guangdong, the historical construction of nationhood and neoliberal globalization, and the subsequent negotiations with them in provincial media industries eventually led to the outbreak of Cantonese Digital Activism.

CANTONESE DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND ITS TRANS-MEDIA SPHERE

While many studies of new media stress the possibilities and specificities of the internet, it obscures the trans-media connections in reality. For online activism in general, issues that gained boarder appeals, however, still rely on newspaper or television for in-depth discussion, and at times, state intervention.[27] With no exception, the emergence of Cantonese Digital Activism is aided by the television and press in Guangdong and Hong Kong, which makes the Cantonese activism a trans-media phenomenon. State-owned media in Guangdong, particularly Guangzhou TV station, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, and *Yangcheng Evening Daily*, were in the center of the so-called "battle between mandarin and Cantonese." For example, in July 2010, right after the proposal of canceling prime-time Cantonese TV program on Guangzhou TV was made, Guangzhou TV immediately responded to the controversy in its prime-time program *Daily Report*.

---

[27] The most famous case is that of Sun Zhigang. Sun, a college graduate in Guangzhou, was beaten to death while in police custody in 2003. His death made a heated discussion topic online and then was reported by the newspaper *South Metropolis*. Sun's death triggered wide concern on the media and the system of police custody was abolished later on. In this case, the Internet changed the agenda-setting in traditional media and eventually pushed for positive change of the legal system.

In the beginning of the program, the anchorman first started to report on the controversy in Mandarin, which was soon responded by the anchorwoman who ensured the audience that this policy has not been implemented. Accompanied with several video interviews of Guangzhou citizens who support Cantonese, the program reported that about 80 percent of voters the online survey on the government website were against the proposal. It then explained the fact that Guangzhou TV network also has Mandarin channel, and Cantonese channels were only a few among all other Mandarin-speaking channels. Then the program broadcast the "Rap Cantonese" song that I analyzed in the beginning of this chapter as an audio-visual evidence to prove the necessity for Cantonese programming.[28] Meanwhile, newspapers such as *Southern Metropolis Daily*, and *Yangcheng Evening Daily* kept a close track of the ongoing debate. With more than one million newspapers circulated daily respectively, both presses target on audience in the Pearl River Delta, many of whom speak Cantonese. These newspapers reported on the early flashmob gathering in favor of those support Cantonese. They closely followed the debates online until the actual demonstration took place, which were not reported at all. The demonstrations were covered mostly by user-generation content online in mainland China, while at the same time reported by TVB news in Hong Kong, who was not supervised by the same censor board as those channels in mainland.

The digital activism interacts with traditional media—the television and the press. Several newspapers reported early flashmob gatherings leaving out those with police confrontation. Local Guangzhou TV stations also aired the netizens-made online songs

---

[28] This program is recorded and uploaded by netizens on YouTube. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RowPMa-Scs&feature=related

and images as evidence of Cantonese cultural expressions.

The *weibo* (microblog), a Chinese version of twitter, was one of the most prominent social platforms to promote Cantonese activism in early July 2010. Thousands followed the twit of "abolishing Cantonese," which mentioned the government proposal to change Cantonese prime-time programming into Mandarin. The Guangzhou TV station, whose program was subjected to change, aired the result of an online survey of the proposal. According to the result, more than 90 percent of the survey participants opposed the proposal. On July 10, In the People' Park in central Guangzhou, about 30 young people gathered and sang Cantonese songs, including Canton-pop classic by Hong Kong pop rock band *Beyond*, and a Cantonese Nursery rhymes *Rain*. It was the first *kuaishan* (Flash-mob) gathering, which anticipated later street demonstrations. The gathering was organized by users in the *Guangzhou bentu wang* (Guangzhou Local Website, http://www.gz106.net/), an online forum dedicated to various aspects of living in Guangzhou. The gathering was soon publicized online and by various press and TV news programs in Guangzhou. *South Metropolis* noticed the majority of the participants were young people of the post-1980s generation (80 hou), or the generation that were born in the 1980s.[29] On July 25, thousands gathering in the jiangnanxi subway station in Guangzhou. Netizens used their cell phone to twit the demonstration. It was praised as a "perfect victory" for the spontaneous gathering of netizens and the peaceful process. Outspoken scholar Cui Weipin describes the

---

[29] See the report from South Metropolis, July 12, 2010. http://nf.nfdaily.cn/nfdsb/content/2010-07/12/content_13677089.htm

convergence of online activism and street activism: "Online is more than online, Netizens are more than netizens."[30] And the actual demonstrations or gatherings were mediated through the use of social media both on the computer and mobile devices.

More significantly, the Cantonese Digital Activism is indebted to the development of provincial media industries in Guangdong and the influence of Hong Kong media in the last 30 years. Though Mandarin is forced upon all educational institutions, the local media in Guangdong province enjoy an exceptional "liberal" linguistic policy compared to other provinces due to the fact that TV stations in Guangdong need Cantonese programming to compete with the well-received Cantonese Hong Kong Television within the province. Thus, this exceptional linguistic policy in Guangdong is impossible without the commercialization of TV industry under the state's supervision in the 1980s. This policy is also why Guangzhou TV station, which triggered the Cantonese Digital Activism, was able to broadcast in Cantonese in the first place. I will first brief the history of provincial media industries under the context of neo-liberal economic integration, which makes it possible for Guangzhou TV station to broadcast in Cantonese when it was founded in 1988. I will then contextualize the influence of Hong Kong television and print media, which also contributes to the rise of Cantonese Digital Activism.

---

[30] See http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/yue-07262010093055.html

The reason I use the concept of the "province," instead of other analytical terms such as the region or regionality, is to emphasize the structural hierarchy between the provincial and the national, particularly in the context of the state-sanctioned Chinese media industry. The media apparatuses in China, including the press, radio, film and television, largely mirror the administrative structures. Every media apparatus is supervised by a corresponding department or unit of the Department of Propaganda. For example, on the national level, China Film Corporation is responsible for film production and distribution nationwide while China Central Television (CCTV) has national coverage. On the province level, many provinces built state-subsidized film studios and produced locally-themed films. In the case of Guangdong, Pearl River Film Studio was built as a provincial film production center. In terms of Television, Guangdong Television Networks and Southern Television Networks also enjoy national coverage via satellite signals. On the municipality level and below, no film studios were built and corresponding TV stations only have provincial or local coverage.

China Film Corporation handled the distribution of all films in China until 1987, when the Dept of Broadcasting canceled state subsidy for each studio film. Since then, film studios nationwide are responsible for their own distribution.[31] Regulated under the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), all media companies on different levels need to be more and more self-responsible financially. Such an

---

[31] Deshui Yu, *Zhu Ying Ren Yu Zhu Ying De Lu (People and Works from the Pearl River Film Studio)* (Guangzhou Shi: Guangdong lü you chu ban she, 1999), 272.

administrative centralization and financial decentralization points to the "double properties" of the broadcasting industry in China, which demonstrates the neo-liberal alliance as well as the friction between the nation-state and transnational capitalism.

PEARL RIVER FILM STUDIO AND THE SOUTHERN URBAN CINEMA IN THE 1980S

The establishment of the Pearl River Film Studio in 1958 in Guangzhou marked the beginning of a provincial film production center in a larger wave of building provincial film studios nationwide. Following the neoliberal initiative of the Economic Reform, the film industry and broadcasting media in China were not only part of the propaganda machine, but were also transforming to commercial enterprises that seek for profit.[32] The Pearl River Film Studio was a part of the highly centralized system of film production. The tension between local Cantonese cultures and the monolingual policy was reflected in the representation of local-ness in the films made by the Pearl River studio. For example, *Yamaha Fish Stall* (dir. Zhang Liang, 1985) is a well-received film that features several youngsters engaging in private entrepreneurship in the context of the Economic Reform. It is considered a cinematic realism classic and it shares formal and thematic traits with Italian neo-realism. Using on-location setting of traditional Cantonese architectures such as the Cantonese-style teahouses, Arcade Buildings (*qilou*) and Xiguan Residence, the film portrays the lives of ordinary Guangzhou citizens in the initial years of the Economic Reform. Although the dialogue in the film is in mandarin, a

---

[32] For more information on the reform of film industry on a national scale, see Ying Zhu, *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform : The Ingenuity of the System* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003).

61

regulation still enforced by the Chinese film censor broad today, the film constructs a local-ness through architectural, musical, and social signifiers. For example, the scene where the main protagonist meets with friends for tea (figure 6) takes place in a real Cantonese tea house. Displayed on the table are the small steamer baskets and small plates for dishes of dim sum, a Cantonese-style cuisine.

FIGURE 6. Still from *Yamaha Fish Stall* (dir. Zhang Liang, 1985, Pearl River Film Studio)

The use of local residents as non-professional actors, the preference of location shooting in documentary style, and the adoption of environmental sound to recreate the effect of synchronized sound, all contributed to the realist "local-ness" in portraying the city. Using observational documentary techniques of recording, director Zhang Liang minimizes the presence of camera and captures the real-life of public spaces such as teahouses and marketplaces. Many of the large-scale location shootings in the market

fair proceeded without the intrusion of extra lighting or staging. Zhang also cast local residents as actors. The male protagonist is himself a small street businessman who is playing himself in the movie and the female protagonist used to work as a regular salesperson in a local shopping mall. Several other supporting roles are played by a small business owner, a hotel service-worker and a car company employee.[33] Moreover, although sync-sound equipment was not available for shooting, Zhang considers realistic sound design a crucial part of the "graffiti of contemporary Guangzhou." Zhang consciously incorporated real sounds of cars and people in the marketplace, particularly the Cantonese conversations as part of the sound environment in the background.[34] Ironically, following the standard procedure, all the lines in the film script have to be delivered in mandarin, which is in contradiction with the realistic drive of the filmmaker and the realistic mode of the film. Thus, caught between realistic environmental sound design and standardized dialogue, *Yamaha Fish Stall* demonstrates the dilemma of "provincial films," or films made by film studios on a provincial level. On one hand, provincial films are made for a national audience and the use of mandarin is crucial in transcending local differences and creating an identifiable protagonist. One the other hand, provincial films are supposed to deal with local themes and stories within the province, whose representations inevitably involve realistic use of place, custom, and language. And such dilemma cannot be grasped without the examination on the central-

---

[33] Liang Zhang, "Modeling the New People in New Cinematic Languages—the Experience from the Director of Yamaha Fish Stall " *dianying yishu (Film Art)*, no. 2 (1985): 53-4.

[34] ———, "Elaborations from the Director of *Yamaha Fish Stall*," *dianying xinzuo (New Cinematic Works)*, no. 1 (1985): 86.

provincial structure in Chinese media industry.

Like the film industry, the development of television industry in China was also caught up in the Reform. In the 1980s, the growth in Chinese television, both in terms of the expansion of TV networks and the increase of broadcasting hours were unprecedented. The number of TV channels nationwide grew from 35 in 1980 to more than 500 in 1990.[35] Like other provincial and national broadcasting media, Radio and TV stations in Guangdong are framed in the vertical administration from the old top-down propaganda model, and the horizontal commercial links to local or national enterprises. Obviously, the provincial media may have more leeway to incorporate commercial operations. Only selected stations on the provincial level can be a satellite channel and enjoy nation-wide coverage and sometimes overseas coverage as well. Now China has more than 3,000 TV channels, most of which only have local or provincial coverage.

Unlike the film industry in Guangdong where a singular provincial film studio centralizes all the production resources, the expansive infrastructures of the TV networks make this new medium a more democratic or decentralized platform. The decentralized commercial model is constantly negotiating with the imposing centralizing impulse of the state. For example, in her study of how Hunan Satellite TV, a local media plays a role in the transnationalization of Korean wave, Lisa Leung observes that the state-level legal and regulatory mechanisms creates obstacles for local media to import

---

[35] Junhao Hong, *The Internationalization of Television in China : The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media since the Reform* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 78.

global media and the state "legitimizes and perpetuates its political and ideological domination and economic prowess over the local as the periphery through restrictive broadcasting and financial policies."[36] In this context of the TV industry, "Provincial Media" are the TV networks that 1) are headquartered in provincial and municipal centers; 2) mostly have provincial and local coverage; 3) closely reflect the interest of provincial and local interests.

INTERACTION AND COMPETITION OF HONG KONG AND GUANGDONG CANTONESE MEDIA

The connection between the Guangdong and Hong Kong film industries dates back to the early twentieth century and re-surfaced in the neoliberal era.[37] Collaborations between TV industries in Guangdong and Hong Kong started right after the re-opening of the borders in the late 1970s. In 1979, TVB (Television Broadcasting Ltd.) from Hong Kong and GDTV (Guangdong TV) held the first Guangzhou Spring Festival Gala,[38] which was four years earlier than the famous national Spring Festival Gala put up by the largest national TV network, China Central Television. As the co-producer of the first Spring Festival Gala, GDTV was the pioneer TV network in China to cooperate

---

[36] Lisa Leung, "Mediating Nationalism and Modernity: The Transnationalization of Korean Dramas on Chinese (Satellite) Tv," in *East Asian Pop Culture : Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Beng Huat Chua and K. oichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong and London: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

[37] The collaborations among film industries have a longer history dated back to the establishment of the Pearl River Film Studio. For more, see Hong Kong Museum of History. and Guangdong (China). Wen hua ting., *Dong Xi Hui Liu : Yue Gang Ao Wen Wu Da Zhan* (Xianggang: Xianggang li shi bo wu guan, 2005). In the reform era, one of the most border-crossing instances include film practitioners such as Kong Liang, script-writer for *Homecoming*, a Hong Kong Film Award Best Script winner, was working for the Pearl River Film Studio.

[38] The full name of the Guangzhou Spring Festival is yangcheng kesui fangjiahuan. Jinqin Mao, *Sheng Shi Nan Fang : Guangdong Guang Bo Dian Shi 60 Nian (Southern Sound and Sight: 60 Years of Guangdong Broadcasting)* (Guangzhou: Ji nan da xue chu ban she, 2009), 250.

with overseas TV channels. As a crucial component of the media industry in the Special Economic Zones, GDTV was also the first provincial TV network to engage international programming. For example, GDTV opened news programs on Hong Kong and Macau in 1981.

The border between Hong Kong and China re-opened in the late 1970s after the end of the Cold-War segregation. The "Special Economic Zones" in Guangdong were set up to attract investments from Hong Kong and overseas. Under this trend of regional economic integration, Hong Kong television programs were allowed to air via local TV stations in Guangdong. In the 1980s, the increasing demand for TV programs in Guangdong could not be fulfilled by domestic Mandarin programming. In 1983, 9 out of 10 household owned TV sets in Guangzhou, which is much higher than other areas in the country.[39] Cantonese Hong Kong television became a popular choice by Cantonese-speakers in Guangdong. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong television has taken up more than 50% of the ratings in Guangdong. Such high rating of Hong Kong TV programs in Guangdong did not change until the mid-2000s. The linguistic proximity and the entertaining programming style were the major reasons that Hong Kong television prevailed in Guangdong. In the 1980s, more than a quarter of programs on Hong Kong television were imported from Taiwan, Japan, and the West.[40] Hong Kong television thus functioned as a window for those in Guangdong to get in touch with various media

[39] Xinxin Deng, *Dong Li Yu Kun Jiong : Zhongguo Guang Bo Ti Zhi Gai Ge Yan Jiu = Reforming the Radio Broadcasting Sector of China : Dynamics and Dilemmas* (Beijing Shi: Zhongguo jing ji chu ban she, 2006), 172.

[40] Karin Gwinn Wilkins, "Hong Kong Television: Same as It Ever Was? ," in *Tv China*, ed. Ying Zhu and Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 60.

contents around the globe while most audience in other provinces in China can only receive domestically-made programs. Similar with the film industry which started to import Hollywood films as late as 1995, TV industry in China was not open for foreign programming until the entering of limited Satellite TV channels in selected hotels. In contrast with the popularity of Hong Kong television in Guangdong, the best received national TV programs from China Central Television, for example, the *xinwenlianbo* (News Daily) and the Spring Festival Gala, an annual national media spectacle that carries the ideologies of the party since 1983, has a relatively low rating in Guangdong.

In order to compete with the overwhelming popularity of Cantonese Hong Kong TV programs, several TV channels and radio stations in Guangdong were allowed to broadcast in Cantonese since 1980. By contrast, other provincial TV network started dialect programming in mid-2000s, which reflects Guangdong's exceptional role as "Special Cultural Zones."[41] Four channels in Guangdong TV, four channels in Southern Television, and several municipal-level TV channels, such as Guangzhou Television channels all broadcast in Cantonese.[42] In 2004, Southern Television (TVS) became the only satellite TV channel with nationwide coverage to broadcast in Cantonese. All other satellite TV channels in China are in mandarin or English. The establishment of TVS was an attempt to further actualize the commercial potential of the media. TVS, a

---

[41] With the further commercialization of TV programming, dialect programs emerged nationwide in the new millennium. Other provincial TV networks such as Sichuan, Hunan and Shandong TV use local dialect in news broadcasting and sit-com. Municipal TV stations in Hangzhou, Chongqin, Shaoxin and Quanzhou also incorporate the use of local dialects. For more, see Guangxia Niu, "Fangyan Guangbo Dianshi Jiemu Xingqi Yuanyin Ji Cunzai Zhuangtai Tanxi (Analysis of the Emergence of Dialect Broadcasting Programming)," *Qilu Yiwan*, no. 2 (2006).

[42] Mao, *Sheng Shi Nan Fang : Guangdong Guang Bo Dian Shi 60 Nian (Southern Sound and Sight: 60 Years of Guangdong Broadcasting)*, 208. The Cantonese TV channels include Zhujiang channel, Sports channel and public channel from Guangdong TV networks; and the four channels of TVS (Southern Television Networks).

portion of the Southern Media Corporation is a sister station of GDTV. TVS is another provincial TV network, which is unusual for the media infrastructure that closely resembles political administrative structure. TVS now reach to audience in North America and Southeast Asia, which makes it the only international non-Mandarin Chinese channels from mainland China. Furthermore, Cantonese TV productions are also popular in Guangdong. TV networks in Guangdong started to dub selected mandarin TV drams into Cantonese and target on not only Cantonese speakers in Guangdong, but also those diasporic Cantonese speakers.[43] GDTV's golden program, Cantonese situational comedy *Local Husbands and Migrant Wives*, received high ratings in 2003 and has made for more than 1,000 episodes since its first air date in year 2000.[44] Aside from the distinctive linguistic policy caused by the competition of Hong Kong television, the TV networks in Guangdong also imitate the entertaining and localized programming style of Hong Kong television. TVS adopted a "localization" strategy in programming and brought about a substantial change in the ratings of TV programs in Guangdong. Among the "localization" programming, the news magazine program *chengshi tesou* (*Searching the City*) has been one of the most popular shows in Guangdong.

The preservation of Cantonese, as a spoken language and a written script, is also indebted to the written Cantonese used in Hong Kong popular print media. Cantonese became the official indigenous language in British-ruled Hong Kong in 1974. Since then,

---

[43] Ibid., 209.

[44] According to CSM Media Research, the major TV & radio audience measurement research company that offers rating information for Hong Kong SAR and China,

Cantonese is taught in educational institutions. Indigenous print media in Hong Kong have always used special Chinese characters, which are not available in standard Mandarin. These special Chinese characters include names of persons and places commonly used in Hong Kong, characters used in the Cantonese dialect, etc. In addition to the rich history of using Cantonese characters in print media, the digitization of government procedure pushed Hong Kong government to develop Hong Kong Supplementary Character Set (HKSCS) in order to standardize the written Cantonese in the 1990s. In collaboration with the Chinese Language Interface Advisory Committee (CLIAC), Hong Kong government first developed the HKSCS in September 1999. After several updates, the latest version of the HKSCS is the HKSCS-2008 that was published in December 2009, which contains 5,009 characters.[45] According to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, characters of the Cantonese dialect included in the HKSCS came from the Judiciary, the Hong Kong Police, the Department of Justice, the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Some of these characters can be found in the dictionaries of Cantonese dialect or academic articles. The HKSCS facilitates the Judiciary in recording legal documents, the statements recording by the Hong Kong Police, as well as the study of Cantonese dialect as an academic subject.[46]

Written Cantonese absorbs from the vernacular characters in spoken Cantonese. Some Cantonese characters come from ancient Chinese script and are no longer used in

---

[45] See the record provided by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer http://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/business/tech_promotion/ccli/faq/#when_hkscs

[46] Ibid.

mandarin. Other Cantonese characters are newly created to represent spoken Cantonese. The Cantonese characters are also adopted by Guangdong print media. For example, started in 2008, *Baihua Guangzhou* (Reading Guangzhou in Cantonese), a column introducing local Cantonese culture in *Southern Metropolis*, a Guangzhou-based daily newspaper, also uses Cantonese characters, accompanied by simplified Chinese. Thus, the historical circumstances in Hong Kong made it easier for Cantonese, as a written script, to distinguish itself easily from written mandarin, and thus facilitate the communication among Cantonese speakers on the text-based Internet forums and challenge the nationalist uniform of written language.

THE CONTENT AND FORM OF CANTONESE DIGITAL ACTIVISM: THE COMMERCIALIST AND THE SOCIALIST, SATIRE AND THE HETEROGLOSSIA

After my contextualization of the provincial media history and the influence of Hong Kong media, let's now take a closer look at the specifics of the Cantonese Digital Activism and how they are in dialogue with larger cultural and media history. Besides the analyzing the forms, genres and styles, I will also focus on the mode of practice in Cantonese Digital Activism to explore how the aesthetic properties contribute to the affective outreach in the digital, social and physical space. Cantonese Digital Activism involved multiple digital formats, including confessional essays; debates; netizen-made songs and posters, vidding, and most creatively and effectively, the organization and promotion of street gatherings and demonstrations online.

The netizens not only use but also actively subvert, resist and transform the meaning in commercial and political cultures, frequently in the form of satire and parody.

The rap song vidding that I described in the beginning of this chapter is one of the prominent examples. Similarly, the netizens re-scribes meanings using the commercial form of popular culture, the movie posters. One of the widely-circulated online posters mocks the poster of a Hong Kong movie *Echoes of the Rainbow*, which chronicles the life of a Hong Kong working-class family in the 1960s. In the netizens-made poster, *Suiyue shentou*, the Chinese title of *Echoes*, was replaced with smashing Cantonese. The online poster changes the protagonist, the movie's tagline, the credit, the film festival selection into the satire of Mr. Ji Keguang (JK), the official who proposed the replacement of Cantonese programming on local TV. Mr. Ji is featured as a negative figure in the re-made of movie posters. The picture on the left is the original poster of *Echoes*, and the right one is the netizens remade (figure 7).

FIGURE 7. The original and netizen-remade movie posters of *Echoes of the Rainbow* (2010)

Obviously, the netizens play very well with the visual design of movie posters as an effective way to mock Mr. Ji. The picture on the left is the original movie poster of *Echoes.* On the top right are the director and producer credit. In the netizen-made poster, producer Mabel Cheung is changed into the Office of Demolition, an administration that handling related procedure of building demolition. Many of the demolitions supervised by the Office of Demolition led to the dismantling of Cantonese-style old buildings. On the lower left of both posters, the original movie tagline "in a transient life, time is the biggest thief" is changed into "In Guangzhou's mandarin promotion campaign, Mr. Ji is the biggest thief."

Such parodist mocking of Mr. Ji using popular movie posters can also be found in reference to other pop culture products including Hong Kong movie *Ip Man* (2008) and Japanese horror film *Ju-on* (2002). Replacing *Ip Man*, the martial art master who supervised Bruce Lee and defined southern-style kung-fu, Mr. Ji is depicted as the one who should be interrogated about the disappearance of Cantonese culture. Similarly, Mr. Ji's face turns blue and fills in for the ghost boy in *Ju-on*'s movie poster, and he is now gathering the grudges coming from the devastation of Cantonese culture.

Even more interestingly, the netizens appropriate older forms of socialist political culture. The propaganda poster gained new life online and raised new questions regarding the relationship between image and text. The propaganda posters are one of the visual mediums that the revolutionary masses speak through. The gestural intensity of the propaganda posters also demand the audience's curiosity about what is being said. In the original posters, the nameless and abstraction of new socialist subjects and their

signification of the new nation capture the dialect between the collective and the individual in revolutionary arts in general.[47]

The socialist visual vocabularies of the propaganda poster were appropriated in Chinese contemporary art, particularly in the paintings by artist Wang Guangyi. Mixing the imagery of the peasant, soldier and workers with icons of transnational capitalism such as Coco-Cola, WTO and Walt Disney, Wang's large-scale paintings create an ambiguous interpretation of post-Mao China. Wang's paintings are exemplary of the "political cynicism" style emerged after 1989 that projects an ambiguous attitude toward socialism. The displacement of propaganda slogans and the insertion of commercial brands and random numbers discard the clear and immediate political messages usually attached.

---

[47] For more, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides : The Art of the Political Poster, 1914-1989*, 1st ed. (Milano and New York: Skira in association with Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2005).

FIGURE 8. Wang Guangyi, Great Castigation Series: Coca-Cola, 1993 (Oil on canvas. 79 x 79 in.)

For example, in Wang's 1993 Coca-Cola painting from the Great Castigation Series (figure 8.), he combines the commercial branding of Coca-Cola in red together with the iconography of the propaganda poster such as red flag and red book. In addition to the two conflicting yet visually reconciled iconographies, painting random number in black and white all over the canvas creates a third dimension to contemplate the relationship between the two. While the numbers could be associated with the barcode

of commercial products, it could also suggest randomness in the co-existence of the two iconographies.

While Wang's large, thick, ambiguous paintings were sold for millions of dollars, the netizen-made propaganda posters retain the directness and mass distribution format of the "low form." In the netizens-made posters, the text on the image delivers a clear message, or, as Roland Barthes suggests, the text "loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."[48] Ironically, the form of commercial movie poster and the propaganda poster share similar form of clarity in delivering ideological messages, commercial or political, or what Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out the construction of mass utopia in both its capitalist and socialist forms.[49]

In the netizens-made propaganda posters, the text supports Cantonese and loads the visual form with new meanings. For example, in one of the netizens-made posters, a worker, a peasant and a soldier each holds "the encyclopedia of Cantonese" in hand, smiling and looking at the same direction (figure 9). The caption below explains with Cantonese characters: Speaking Cantonese is the basic right and obligation of every citizen in Guangzhou.

---

[48] Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 26.

[49] Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe : The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, 1.

Visually, in contrast with the thickness and large-scale of Wang's paintings, the netizen-made posters have low-resolution, simple composition, and a direct message, which are more aligned with the original propaganda posters popularized during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. Though both Wang's painting and the netizen poster both utilize vocabularies of propaganda poster, particularly the figures of worker, soldier, and peasant, who are the three main groups that made up socialist China, Wang's painting replaces slogans with commercial brands, which adds to the ambiguity and multi-layered meaning of the painting. In contrast, the netizen-made poster has a very clear message, which is to assert one's right to speak Cantonese. The visual components in the poster, including the figures, the status, and the architecture in the background, all serve to convey the same message of promoting Cantonese. While Wang's painting enjoys its singularity as a million-dollar art work, the netizen poster is

uploaded, copied, and downloaded again and again, which serves its purpose as a tool for activism.

The poster subverts familiar tropes of the propaganda poster and reasserts the netizen's point of view. These netizen-made propaganda posters were widely circulated and some protestors wore them on T-shirt during actual demonstrations. [50] The connections between contemporary art and netizens-made posters; the appropriation of socialist legacy and Hong Kong popular culture demonstrate what Bahktin will call the "Heteroglossia"[51] of media cultures. Moreover, the use of Cantonese characters with simplified Chinese indicates the hybridization of Hong Kong and mainland print culture. Therefore, the netizen poster not only demonstrates the clashes of mandarin and Cantonese, but also the conflicts between sound and image, text and image, which contribute to the different tones of the heteroglossia.

THE LIMITS OF CANTONESE DIGITAL ACTIVISM

As I demonstrated, Cantonese Digital Activism is certainly a negotiation with the mono-lingual policy of the state from the grass-root level. As described in Yang Guobin's utopian vision, it is perhaps true that the Internet provides sites of negotiations towards "unofficial democracy" through the lived experiences of millions of netizens in China.[52]

---

[50] On Aug 1, 2010, TVB evening news reported the day-time demonstrations in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Wearing a sanitary mask, Kelvin, a Guangzhou college student joined the protest in Hong Kong and was interviewed by TVB reporters. Kelvin was among the group who wore propaganda poster T-shirts and shouted "we will speak louder if our voices are repressed" in front of the building of Hong Kong Government Secretariat. For the news clip, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVIJSKWVLFk

[51] M. M. Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xix.

[52] Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China : Citizen Activism Online*, Contemporary Asia in the World (New

And the Cantonese digital activism is part of the tactics of negotiation. Indeed, reacting to the demonstrations, the government soon announced the importance of Cantonese in Guangdong and pushed away the proposal of mandarin enforcement on provincial media. However, the power of the netizens, aided by technology, may likewise cast violence on holders of dissenting opinion, including the disfranchised non-Cantonese-speaking migrant workers in Guangdong. The netizen-remade of propaganda poster that I mention in the beginning of this article seems to suggest the dark side of the utopian vision, which reflects prejudice based on class difference.

Even within the province of Guangdong, Cantonese has dominated other more rural-based dialects such as Hakka, Toisanese, Shaoshanish, and other ethnic minority languages. In her study of Guangdong regional culture and Chinese national identity in the late Qing and early Republic era, May-bo Ching argues that national identity is crucial in the making of Guangdong local cultures. Local intellectuals in Guangdong lean on the discourse of nationalism to elevate their cultural capital as regional elites. Here, regional culture and national culture emerge not in conflict but in the possibility to constitute each other reciprocally.[53] Paradoxically, in many of the pro-Cantonese online discussions, similar logic is replicated by the Cantonese supporters. In defense of Cantonese, many public figures and netizens in Guangdong and Hong Kong have claimed that the superiority or "authenticity" of Cantonese as a Chinese language lies in

York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 224.

[53] See May-bo Ching, *Di Yu Wen Hua Yu Guo Jia Ren Tong : Wan Qing Yi Lai "Guangdong Wen Hua" Guan De Xing Cheng (Local Culture and National Identity: The Formation of Guangdong Cultural Perspective since Late Qing)*, Jin Dai Zhongguo De Zhi Shi Yu Zhi Du Zhuan Xing Cong Shu (Beijing Shi: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2006).

its close linkage to the pronunciation and grammar of ancient Chinese.[54] Others argues

for the superiority of Cantonese culture, referencing Canton pop culture of cinema, TV,

pop music from Hong Kong, and the long history of Canton as an ancient port city.

As described in Yang Guobin's utopian vision, it is perhaps true that the Internet

provides sites of negotiations towards "unofficial democracy" through the lived

experiences of millions of netizens in China.[55] And the Cantonese digital activism is part

of the experience of negotiation. Indeed, reacting to the demonstrations, the government

soon announced the importance of Cantonese in Guangdong and pushed away the

proposal of mandarin enforcement on provincial media. However, the power of the

netizens, aided by technology, may likewise cast violence on holders of dissenting

opinion, including the disfranchised non-Cantonese-speaking migrant workers in

Guangdong.[56]

CONCLUSION: THE PROVINCIAL AS A METHODOLOGY

How can we address the oppression of other local dialect speakers in Guangdong?

Moreover, how can we address those that are less visible in, if not totally excluded from

the digital networks, such as the non-Cantonese-speaking Chinese migrant-workers and

---

[54] For examples, see the chapter on Protecting Cantonese in Yun Chen, *Zhong Wen Qi Yi : Po Jie Wen Hua Cao Zong, Han Wei Min Zhu Yu Yan (Chinese Uprising: Break Cultural Manipulation, Defend Democratic Languages)* (Xianggang: Tian chuang chu ban : Xin bao cai jing xin wen, 2010). In this book, Hong Kong-based cultural critic Chen Yun explained how Cantonese is more aligned with ancient Chinese.

[55] Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China : Citizen Activism Online*, 224.

[56] For example, Wang Qianyun, an overseas Chinese student who voiced her sympathy with the Tibetan Independence Movement became the target of the outrageous netizens. The personal information of Wang's parents, who were still living in China, were exposed online after the *renrou sousuo* (Flesh Search), a search method to identify a person via media. Wang's parents were forced to apologize to the furious netizens.

the growing population of black African independent merchants[57] in Guangzhou? Exemplified by the Cantonese Digital Activism, any kind of media activism is always embedded in multiple dimensions of gendered, economic and symbolic social relations; regional or national history; media infrastructure; and the issue of unequal access to digital technology. Furthermore, the Cantonese activists view the state critically as a homogenizing mechanism, which cannot be explained easily in the nation-state framework in the study of Chinese media and culture. Therefore, the framework of the provincial that I propose is not a middle level between the local and the national, or between the local and the global, but a productive term to see the complicit relationship between the binary parts, and the collusion of the three.

Here we could turn from the province to the provincial, from a metaphor to a method, from the study of a specific geographical, administrative and cultural entity to an analytical concept and a methodology. The concept of the provincial articulates the plurality of Chinese-ness which is obscured by the national framework in the study of Chinese media industries, particularly in the fields of political science, communications and sociology. The concept of the provincial is also a way to bring in a global and post-colonial perspective and expand on current studies of new media in humanities. The connections between Cantonese digital activism and the history of provincial media industries demonstrate how the use of new media technology is always shaped by social, cultural and institutional conditions.

---

[57] In the 2000s, the estimated number of black African merchants increased to 60,000 to 150, 000. They mostly live in working-class neighborhoods and trade with local Chinese small business owners. They experience issues of racism.

I started with Guangdong province, a specific geographical, socio-historical and cultural entity. The limits of Cantonese Digital Activism remind us that the province cannot be simply viewed as an oppositional unit that subverts the nationalism ideology or neo-liberal globalization. Perhaps we could conceptualize the provincial not as bounded geographical entities, but a description or metaphor to address the multiple dimensions and the intricacies of power relations, and arrive at the method to *provincialize*. To provincialize is a methodology and an epistemological reflection, and a way to locate political potential of negotiation with, if not resistance to dominant ideologies. To provincialize is to point out the provincial within the province, which could be extended to examine the provincial within the nation and the globe.

The provincial could be seen as a metaphor, but also a method to explore cultural entities, such as the Cantonese media, that are obscured by the framework of the national cinema or culture. We could find parallel provincial entities, such as the Tamil people in India, French-speaking community in Quebec, Northern Ireland in Britain, Hawaii sovereignty movement, or recent discussions of the indigenous turn in American studies.[58] In chapter five, through the examination of a Hong Kong movie *Eight Taels of Gold*, I combine two provincial perspectives- the oppression of working-class Cantonese immigrants from Guangdong to United States and the national oppression of the Cantonese in China- in the examination of trans-pacific cinematic imaginaries. It shows how the homogenizing effort of the Chinese nation-state is in conjunction with the

---

[58] See Paul Lai and Lindsey Clarie Smith, "Alternative Contact Indigeneity, Globalism, and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 62(September 2010).

reductive ethnicization of minorities in the United States. It is in this sense that we can provincialize the West by teasing out the internal oppressions within developed countries, and at the same time "provincialize" the developmental logic of neoliberal globalization by revealing the complicity between the nation-state and transnational capitalism. Such "provincializing synthesis" extends the post-colonial critique of the intricacies of universalism and particularism between the West and the East and reveals how the modern nation-states replicate the logic of universalism in producing national subjects while at the same time classifying differences.

Such "provincializing synthesis" is also helpful in expanding the fields of global media studies in social science and humanities. As I have suggested earlier, while the study of international media is dominated by the framework of the nation-state, the study of informational technology is overshadowed by the progressive temporality and universal claim. The intricacies of global capitalism, nation-state, and the discourse of modernity by and large shape the existing episteme in the study of culture and cultural economy. By focusing on a specific province, this project unravels the plurality of Chinese-ness which is obscured by the national framework in the study of Chinese media industries, particularly in the fields of political science, communications and sociology. At the same time, other social scientists have studied the economic integration of commerce, telecommunication infrastructures and labor movements in the province; however, they overlooked the cultural component, particularly the provincial media industry and the articulation of sub-national identity. Meanwhile, the post-colonial critique on the developmental logic and the narrative also facilitates the concept

of the provincial as a way to bring in a global and post-colonial perspective and expand on current studies of new media in humanities. And it is by acknowledging the intricacies of power relations that the provincial could be a way to locate the possibility of a political potentiality, or the "communication biopower" in what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called the age of "the empire" and "the multitude."

CHAPTER THREE:

Cinematic Economy of Places: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Migratory in Transnational Chinese/American Cinema

> JENNY: I don't really want to go abroad. Wherever I go, I'll be in Chinatown. I'd rather go to Hong Kong.
> SLIM: Do you know where the largest Chinatown is?
> JENNY: No. Tell me.
> SLIM: It is Hong Kong.
>
>   --- *Eight Taels of Gold*

In recent years, in an effort to overcome the limits of the national cinema paradigm, the model of transnational cinema or diaspora filmmaking has emerged as a useful framework with which to approach the global film industry. Specifically, in the study of Chinese-language cinema, recent transnational "Chinese" blockbusters such as Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) or Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) seem to validate the model of transnational cinema and contribute to the re-definition of "Chinese-ness." Conceptual frameworks such as transnational Chinese cinemas, diasporic cinema or Sinophone culture all speak to the trafficking of people, capital, and films across borders. Recovering the process of cinematic production and consumption as material and locational-specific practices, this chapter accentuates the shifting historical connection between Hong Kong cinema and Guangdong province in a body of migratory films, and challenges recent transnational cinema paradigms or the China-diaspora model that apparently transgresses but nevertheless relies on the nation-state as an autonomous unit of analysis.

In the study of Chinese-language cinema, scholars such as Sheldon Lu forward the concept of transnational Chinese cinemas, which sees cinema as a transnational practice since the advent of cinema.[1] *Ding Junshan* (1905), the first film made by the Chinese, is usually celebrated as the start of Chinese national film history. By contrast, Lu dates 1896, the time when film first circulated in China, as the beginning of Chinese transnational cinema. Lu further suggests the cinemas from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and those about the Chinese American experience can all be grouped in a diverse body of "transnational Chinese cinemas." Though such a model emphasizes the co-production and collaborations across national boundaries, such exchanges are usually understood as transactions among nation-states and territorial entities. The shifting historical connection between Hong Kong cinema and Guangdong discussed later highlights the traffic between Hong Kong and a sub-national region, thus complicates the "transnational Chinese cinemas" model.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong cinema connection also contributes to the discussions of diasporic cinema. In his conception of the accented cinema, Hamid Naficy suggests a spectrum of exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers, according to their relationships between home and host cultures.[2] Hong Kong as the largest Chinatown points to the liminal status of pre-1997 Hong Kong, an entity without sovereignty, and caught between China and the British colonizer. It could

---

[1] See Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*.

[2] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema : Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

also be read as an allegory of Hong Kong cinema as a diaspora cinema. Such an idea immediately raises questions to Naficy's conception of diasporic filmmaking. Naficy's diasporic filmmaking features filmmakers who live in the West: in European-American countries. Though Hong Kong historically differs from China, it certainly cannot be grouped under "the West."

Naficy's framework resonates with previous foundational studies of the diaspora of color as a constitutive part of western modernity. As Paul Gilroy points out, "the history of slavery is somehow assigned to blacks."[3] Critiquing the mechanism of Western Universalist discourse, Gilroy's work better addresses black modernity within the national histories of America or Britain with a transnational framework across the Atlantic Ocean. Probably due to the geopolitical marginalization of the African nations, these post-colonial or neo-colonial nations and their modernization visions were symptomatically absent in Gilroy's Atlantic framework.

By contrast, studies of Chinese diaspora are haunted by the rising power of China and the continuing hegemony of China-centrism, which is based on the centrality of Han or Central Plain cultures. Particularly, Shih Shu-mei's luminous concept of "sinophonic articulations" is more inclusive of Sinophone cultures and incorporates the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other places that are not in the mappings of Naficy. Moreover, the concept of sinophonic and diasporic literature and culture[4] challenges the Chinese cultural hegemony and sees possibilities in diasporic

---

[3] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 49.

[4] See Shumei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, Asia Pacific Modern (Berkeley:

creations as alternative voices. It focuses on the historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture "outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness."[5]

However, inspired by Anglophone and Francophone studies, the concept of Sinophone is at risk of subscribing to a center-periphery model and overlooking the process of heterogenization within China and its various Sinophonic counterparts, as well as the exchanges between the two. Transnational Hong Kong film *Eight Taels of Gold* provides a brilliant case to expand on the Sinophone geographically, including practices in and of the province (filming inside China and representing Guangdong) as possible sites for re-inventing and heterogenizing "Chinese-ness."

In other words, examining the movie's provincial-transnational dynamic not only legitimizes diverse sinophonic practices outside China, but also questions the Western ethnicized reductionism, a tendency to essentialize or reduce heterogonous entity into ethnic labels such as Chinese. At the same time, the provincial-transnational dynamic further problematizes the state-sponsored monolithic understanding of Chinese-ness within China by flexibly and actively re-defining Chinese-ness instead of re-enforcing the binaries of homogenous China and heterogeneous diaspora.

University of California Press, 2007).

[5] Ibid., 9.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a wave of Hong Kong films concerning the issue of transnational migration, exemplified by *Eight Taels of Gold* (dir. Mabel Cheung, 1989), emerged in response to Hong Kong's collective anxiety over its uncertain future after 1997 as well as the actual social phenomenon of migration. Embedded in its historical and social context, this body of "migration cinema" demonstrates the "cinematic economy of places," or the material and symbolic mechanism of geographical or place-referenced production and signification in cinema.

This chapter approaches the "cinematic economy of places" in this body of migration cinema by investigating the importance of place and space from three different but interrelated angles: textual, material, and theoretical. First, over-determined by larger geopolitical circumstances, the thematic and visual characteristics of this migration cinema symptomatically privilege certain places while ignoring others, and subscribe to the ideologies of both the "China syndrome" and the "American dream." Second, this body of migration cinema benefits enormously from a greater preference for location shooting and the distribution policies of Hong Kong films in China and reflects the spatial expansion in and of Hong Kong cinema under the context of China's "Opening up" with the alleviation of Cold War conflicts in the pacific region.

Third and most importantly, in the examinations of the Guangdong factor in Hong Kong cinema, the unstable linguistic and cultural signifier of Cantonese opens up the possibilities of overcoming the Hong Kong/Mainland China dichotomy, a division that is implicitly subscribed to by the theoretical paradigm of transnational Chinese

cinema. While the model of transnational Chinese cinemas transgresses but also relies on the national cinema model, the framework of sinophonic culture sets up the dominant/subversive dichotomy along geographic and territorial lines, simplifying the hierarchy within mainland China and the exchanges between mainland China and its sinophonic counterparts. This chapter argues that the geographical imaginations of Guangdong, along with the Cantonese media, provides a mediated space to produce regional or sub-national identifications that are at odds with state-sponsored monolithic Chinese nationalism, and thus practice "sinophonic articulations" within mainland China.

Specifically, this chapter explores the three angles of "cinematic economy of places" in *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989), the third movie in Mabel Cheung's "Migration Trilogy," which was shot mainly in Guangdong. Examining the linguistic, narrative and visual-audio configurations and the positioning of this film in the larger wave of migration films from Hong Kong, this chapter suggests that the film critiques the marginalization of first-generation Cantonese immigrants in the U.S., interrogates the ambiguous position of Hong Kong between Cantonese Guangdong and the American Cantonese diaspora, and more importantly, re-inscribes the Cantonese experience as a possible site of "sinophonic articulations," which reveals the artificiality of Chinese-ness both within and outside China.

Migration, intranational or transnational, is the movement of people from one place to another. This makes migration films the quintessential place-based cinematic narrative and imagination. Presenting places in migration cinema is to voice the migrant subject's experiences and the place or locational specificity on screen gives the cultural and social presence of the immigrants' past and present. Thus, a cinema that concerns the issue of migration is inevitably full of the politics of places, or "cinematic economy of places": what places or locations are linked together and juxtaposed with each other in what ways? How do migrants depart from their past and arrive at their present? More specifically, how does the place(s) of departure for the migrants differ from or associate with the place(s) of their arrival?[6] And, how does the place they inhabit connect and intersect with other spaces? Hong Kong migration cinema provides a dynamic site for the examination of the cinematic economy of places on the textual and symbolic level.

In 1979, right after U.S. and China established diplomatic relations, Hong Kong Governor, Murray MacLehose, visited Beijing to discuss the possibility of extending the New Territories lease. In 1984, the British and Chinese published a joint announcement on Hong Kong's handover in 1997. Deng Xiaoping announced the blueprint for "one country, two systems," for a smooth handover of Hong Kong. Yet, the Tiananmen

---

[6] A good example of how closely migration issues tie to places is Michael Winterbottom's film *In This World* (2002), which explores the actual process of illegal immigration from Pakistan to Britain. For more information of how Winterbottom use real world components to create fictional stories, see Brian McFarlane and Deane Williams, *Michael Winterbottom*, British Film Makers (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009).

incident in 1989 triggered fear, distrust and further doubts in Hong Kong. [7] Uncertain about the future after the handover to China, many wealthier Hong Kongese emigrated in the 1980s and 1990s. Responding to the emigration wave in the mid- and late-1980s and the anxiety over Hong Kong's future, a considerable number of Hong Kong films explore the issues of overseas migration, diaspora and displacement.

In this pre-1997 migration cinema, the best-known films are the immigration trilogy directed by Mabel Cheung, consisting of *The Illegal Immigrant* (1985), *An Autumn's Tale* (1987), and *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989).[8]

---

[7] After the hand-over, Hong Kong economy suffered the Asia Financial Crisis in 1998.

[8] The trilogy was well-received. According to the Hong Kong Film Archive, the box office records of these three films in Hong Kong are HK$ 4,723,687, HK$ 25,546,552 and HK$ 11,100,359 respectively.

FIGURE 10. Poster of *An Autumn's Tale* (1987)

Shot in New York and produced by Shaw Brothers Studio, *The Illegal Immigrant* deals with a Chinese illegal immigrant who wants to marry a Chinese American girl in New York's Chinatown so he can legally live in the States. *An Autumn's Tale* addresses a middle-class Hong Kong girl and her relationship with a working-class New York Chinatown local. With Chow Yun-fat playing the male protagonist, this movie was a hit in box office in HK and Taiwan (figure 10). *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989), which this

chapter explores in detail later, focuses on the relationship between a sojourner from New York and an about-to-marry-abroad woman in Guangdong. Clara Law, another notable female filmmaker, also directed a migration trilogy: *Farewell China* (1990) tells the tragedy of a woman from mainland China who risks everything to come to the United States and eventually loses her sanity in New York; *Autumn Moon* (1992) looks at a Hong Kong teenage girl's experience before she emigrates; and *Floating Life* (1996) scrutinizes the Chinese immigrant experience in Australia. Moreover, Peter Chan's *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* (1996), produced by Golden Harvest, is a high-grossing film about a romantic relationship between two mainland immigrants who go to Hong Kong and eventually meet again in New York. [9] Stanley Kwan's *Full Moon in New York* (1990) portrays the individual struggle and friendship among three women from mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong respectively. Evans Chan's *To Liv (e)* (1991) and *Crossings* (1994) explore the processes of immigration between Hong Kong and New York.

This wave of migratory cinema from Hong Kong provides a sizeable pool to examine the multiple domination and subordination involved in migratory imaginations, particularly from the viewpoint of Hong Kong. Extending the definition of migration beyond overseas immigration, the Hong Kong films mentioned above only makes up one type, perhaps the most notably type among three types of migratory cinema, which I

---

[9] The choice of actors does reflect their cultural backgrounds. This movie is intended to have both Mandarin and Cantonese in it. The heterogeneity of languages and dialects are part of story in the planning process, too. Leon Lai was selected to play the main protagonist because he immigrated to Hong Kong at the age of 5 from the mainland; and he is still considered as someone who can play a mainlander well. As for Maggie Cheung, she is supposed to play a girl who also speaks Mandarin but because of her heavy accent, her role is changed to someone from Guangzhou, who is fluent in Cantonese.

will later detail**.** Some of these Hong Kong films mentioned earlier address a distinctively Hong Kong experience, such as *Autumn Moon* while most others deal with the broader issues of Chinese migration overseas, sometimes staging Hong Kong as a mid-platform or transition hub (such as in *Comrades: Almost a Love Story*). In these cinematic imaginaries, New York's Chinatown becomes the most frequently represented place for transpacific Chinese immigration. Many of these films treat the urban space as a visual and environmental component, and as narratives, which can be termed as "New York Chinatown narratives."

The second type of this larger body of migratory cinema deals with "homecoming narratives" where mainland China is a place of return for temporary trips or longer stays. Besides the high volume of overseas emigration, Hong Kong itself has been a popular destination for immigration. Historically, a large portion of Chinese in Hong Kong and overseas originated from Guangdong province, particularly Guangzhou (Canton), the provincial capital of Guangdong, and the Siyi area that contains the four major neighboring cities. Even during the close-down of the border between Hong Kong and China from the 1950s to 1970s, illegal immigrants from mainland China continued to enter Hong Kong by swimming or boating, becoming part of a much-needed cheap labor force for Hong Kong as its economy boomed after the war. From the 1980s to the late-2000s, about a million people from the mainland immigrated to Hong Kong. These are usually referred to as *xin yimin* (new immigrants). Thus, in addition to dealing with emigration, quite a few films of this migratory cinema treat the Guangdong province as a temporary or permanent returning place for immigrants, both from Hong Kong and

overseas, usually in homecoming narratives. The most prominent examples include Yan Hao's acclaimed piece *Homecoming (1984)* and the final film of Mabel Cheung's migration trilogy *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989).

The third type mainly follows the new immigrants as they go from the mainland to Hong Kong. In these family-related narratives, the migrant, who is different from Hong Kongese, is usually from rural Guangdong. For example, in two popular comedies, Michael Hui's *Mr. Coconut* (1988) and Alfred Cheung's *Her Fatal Ways* (1990), remotely-related relatives from Guangdong arrive in the colony. Though sharing linguistic and cultural legacy, these characters exemplify different lifestyles and political systems as well as having experienced different popular cultures. Such films center on the dichotomy of urban/rural, socialist China/colonial Hong Kong. In other films, especially gangster films, the evil center of the triad usually speaks Mandarin or other dialects, instead of Cantonese. These thematic configurations highlight Hong Kong culture's affiliation with Cantonese culture, a regional culture based in Guangdong. The changing representations of mainlanders in Hong Kong have been theorized by scholars. Some scholars have suggested that mainlanders in Hong Kong films are reduced to signifying China, with their regional specificities ripped off. [10] For example, mainlanders from all over the nation are mostly referred to as *beimei*, *beigu* and *beilao*, literarily mean northern girls and guys as they come from the north. In the context of a rising

---

[10] For the mainland factor in Hong Kong cinema, see Weifang Zhao, "Bian Yu Bubian: Lun 30 Nian Lai Neidi Yinsu Dui Xianggang Dianying De Yingxiang (Changing and Unchanging: On the Mainland Effects on Hong Kong Cinema in the Last 30 Years) " *Dangdai Dianying*, no. 11 (2008). For representations of mainlanders in Hong Kong as well as Taiwan films and television series, see chapter three, "Geopolitics of desire" in Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*.

economy in China and the re-marketing of Hong Kong films for audience in China, the

characterization of *beimei* and *beilao* changed from cheap labor or socially marginalized

group to owners of great power and wealth in post-CEPA cinema.[11]

POLITICS OF LOCATIONS BETWEEN THE "CHINA SYNDROME" AND THE "AMERICAN DREAM"

The representation of places in this body of migratory cinema was largely shaped by the

"China syndrome" and the "American dream." The intensity, or the excess of violence

and emotion in Hong Kong cinema, both in terms of narrative and style, has long been

historicized in relation to the "1997 syndrome" or the "China syndrome." [12] The "China

Syndrome" refers to a resurgence of China-related films and the "identification of China

as the source of one's culture and language."[13] According to Stephen Teo, this "China

syndrome" specifically refers to the revisiting of Shanghai cinema of the 1930s, the first

golden age of Chinese cinema, as the root of Hong Kong cinema as reflected in films

such as Tsui Hark's *Shanghai Blues* (1984) and Stanley Kwan's *Central Stage* (1991).

Moreover, Ann Hui's Vietnam films such as *Boat People* (1982) also project allegorical

readings of China's communism. In fact, the China syndrome can also be extended as

the China factor in all three types of migration films analyzed earlier. The first type,

which focuses on overseas Chinese immigration, speaks for many immigrants from the

mainland and some of the films have exterior scenes set in China. For example,

---

[11] CEPA (Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) in 2003 was put in place for further economic integration between Hong Kong and mainland China, particularly within the Greater Pearl River Delta region.

[12] See Stephen Teo and British Film Institute., *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* (London: BFI, 1997).

[13] Ibid., 207.

Farewell China juxtaposes a woman's suffering in New York's Chinatown with her husband's life in mainland China. The homecoming stories in the second type of films are set in China with substantial amount of location shooting. The prominent examples include *Homecoming* (1984) and *Intimates* (1993), which are set mostly in rural Guangdong. In comparison, the third type symptomatically generalizes, if not erases, the specificities and the located-ness of mainland immigrants in Hong Kong.

Notably, in the first type of overseas migration films, the "China syndrome" is juxtaposed with the "American dream" narrative, be it successfully achieved or not. Since 1986, two years after the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the emigrant population out of Hong Kong climbed quickly and reached its peak in 1994. Canada is the most popular destination and Hong Kong immigrants made up the largest proportion of Chinese immigrants in Canada and Australia till the mid-1990s.[14] However, as shown in earlier discussion of the "New York Chinatown narratives" in the first type of migratory cinema, New York Chinatown finds itself the most represented place in the cultural imaginations of overseas immigration. Moreover, though Hong Kong was a crown colony of the British Empire, colonial nostalgia is easily found in the idealization of the colonial period, or the glorification of colonial architecture and lifestyle in other films, even though the declining British metropole was less imagined as a site for immigration. Notably, these "Chinatown narratives" in Hong Kong cinema also resonate with the fascination of Chinatown in the history of Chinese-themed films in the US, such as

---

[14] George C.S. Lin, "The Chinese Diasporic Landscape in Hong Kong," in *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity* ed. Laurence J. C. and Cartier Ma, Carolyn L. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 146.

Enter the Dragon (1973) and their later variations in Asian-American cinema, such as Wayne Wang's *Chan is Missing* (1982).

What makes New York Chinatown such an important site in representing the lives of overseas Chinese immigrants? What does this entail for understanding the popular cultural imaginaries of Hong Kong cinema, particularly when the presence of American commodity culture and the longing for America looms large?[15] How does this "China syndrome" interact with the New York-centered American dream? Played by stars from Hong Kong and Taiwan, shot in New York and Guangdong, *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989), the final movie in Mabel Cheung's Migration Trilogy, provides a focal point to examine the politics of location between the China syndrome and the American dream.

GOLD, HOMECOMING, AND CANTONESE IMMIGRATION NETWORK IN *EIGHT TAELS OF GOLD*

Eight Taels of Gold combines the first type, the Chinatown narrative, with the second type, the homecoming narrative of migration cinema. It tells the story of an unresolved romantic relationship between Slim, a homecoming taxi-driver from New York, and Jenny, Slim's childhood friend who is going to marry a Chinese restaurant owner in San Francisco (figure 11).

---

[15] The ubiquitous presence of American commodity culture and the longing for America can be found in songs like "California Dreaming," a recurring musical motif in films such as *Chungking Express* (1994).

FIGURE 11. Poster of movie *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989)

Starting with Slim's life in New York and his enduring trip back to his hometown, the film depicts Slim, the skinny teenager who left home sixteen years ago, returns home as a chubby man. On his way back home, Slim meets his childhood friend Jenny, who is already engaged. Gradually and subtly, Slim and Jenny develop affections for each other. However, when spring comes, Jenny leaves the town with her fiancé for her new life in San Francisco. Weaving the pasts and the futures of the two Chinese overseas immigrants, the movie operates on a circular structure: it starts with the sojourner Slim's homecoming story and ends with Jenny departing for the "new

world."

Eight taels of gold, the literal translation of its Chinese film title, *baliangjin*, expresses the traditional Confucian value of filial piety in the idea of *yijing huanxiang*, or a prosperous homecoming, which was actually the name of this film when it was exhibited in Taiwan and dubbed in Mandarin. A prosperous homecoming establishes a person's— usually a man's—standing in a patriarchal clan linkage. Moreover, the use of gold in the title also registers the historical association between Guangdong and early Chinese transpacific immigrants as gold-digging coulees in the San Francisco area. Terms associated with gold, such as *jinshanke* (gold mountain guest), have been used to describe working-class immigrants ever since.

FIGURE 12. Close-up of the phoenix-dragon pattern gold in *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989)

Thus, the homecoming in *Eight Taels of Gold* not only portrays the physical and psychological transition of Slim, but also the exchange of capital, commodities and artifacts, which is emblematized in the gold. In the beginning of the film, Slim borrows two taels of gold from his country-men in New York in order to stage a prosperous homecoming. The trust between Slim and his fellow Cantonese working class friends is based upon the bond of these emigrant villages, which is largely linked by geographical and linguistic proximity. In Jenny's wedding at the end of the film, Slim has the eight taels of gold molded into a piece of jewelry in a traditional dragon and phoenix pattern (figure 12), and gives it to Jenny to bring to San Francisco. The gold represents the affective exchanges across national borders, which adds to the typical association of gold as the symbol of money and success.

TRANSITIONAL SPACES AND VEHICLES, TIMELESS HOMELAND AND *DIAOLOU*

In *Eight Taels of Gold*, The Chinatown narrative and homecoming narrative primarily set up the immigration experience as contained in transitional spaces and vehicles, and the hometown as a timeless and ideal place. The first third of the movie focuses on Slim's trip back to his hometown in Guangdong, which uses conventions of the road movie genre, another place-based genre. The road movie sequences feature transitional spaces, particularly in different vehicles: Slim first sits in a small airplane that lands in Guangdong, then he takes a taxi and passes through the city of Guangzhou. Learning that his parents are at their hometown place in Taishan, Slim decides to go back by bus. While Slim is waiting hopelessly in an extremely crowded bus, Jenny rides on her

bicycle and easily maneuvers through the traffic jam. Slim catches up with Jenny and they borrow a car from Jenny's uncle to go to Taishan together. Driving carelessly, Slim runs into an accident and the car crashes into the river. Finally, Jenny persuades the boat people to give them a ride. The movement of people in transitional vehicles and the constant motion of the camera register the dynamics of this road movie part. The fact that Slim is a taxi driver in New York also makes his life as an immigrant full of movement, which further reinforces the immigrant life as uncertain and alternating, as the hometown remains unchanged after decades.

FIGURE 13. *Diaolou* and Slim's homecoming in *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989)

Sailing on a boat, the last and slowest transportation in the road movie sequence, Slim, together with Jenny, arrive at his home, a *diaolou* (Chinese tower) in Taishan (figure 13). The camera slowly pans to a *diaolou*, lying on the bank of the river, behind a large red cotton tree. Slim's father is resting leisurely under the tree.

The slow camera movement, together with the melodramatic music, creates an affective gaze on this picture of a sufficient and peaceful rural life. The *diaolou* immediately registers the specificity of the place: Popularized in the 1910s and 1920s, thousands of *diaolou* still exist in the "Four Counties," or Siyi area in Guangdong, where a large part of the laborers to Hong Kong, North America and Southeast Asia originate from. Made of concrete, the multi-story *diaolou* is an impressive –structure that signifies the village's prosperity, which is made possible by the remittances sent by generations of emigrants abroad.[16] The architectural style of the *diaolou* departs from the folk dwellings in *Yellow Earth* (1985), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992), or other Fifth Generation films in the same period with its obvious incorporation of western motifs and decorative styles, such as the use of Roman or Greek inspired columns, domes and arches. The use of *diaolou* in the film registers the specificity of Guangdong regional culture, particularly a history of overseas migration.

Despite the changes in the city, much seem unchanged and untouched by time in rural Guangdong, including the clan structure, the senior midwife, the local customs, etc. In the ancestral village, ancestor worshiping is widely practiced despite the political

---

[16] Guoxiong Zhang and Yuxiang Li, *Lao Fang Zi. Kaiping Diao Lou Yu Min Ju (Old Houses: Diaolou and Folk Dwelling in Kaiping)*, Di 1 ban. ed. (Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu mei shu chu ban she, 2002), 8.

campaigns during Mao's period. The socialist past, particularly the Cultural Revolution comes up only in passing, usually in conversations and depiction of locations. For example, in the early club-dancing scene when Slim meets Jenny, it says "do not attack customers" on the wall, making fun of the notorious poor service one usually gets at state-own restaurants and shops. Here the film establishes the connection between a homecoming individual and his hometown via family linkage, communal or through a villager's network, despite the political differences between the "free world" and the (post)socialist regime. It is the Guangdong regional folk culture, instead of national political campaigns, that brings about the sense of home.

LOCATION-SHOOTING, REALISM AND SPATIAL IMAGINATION

However, the road movie sequence in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong, complicates the dichotomy of transitional spaces and timeless homeland, particularly in its use of location-shooting techniques and realism. The movie is set in the time that it was made, which is during the period of economic reforms in the late-1980s. Showing propaganda slogans on the walls and buildings, the sequence in Guangzhou presents a modern city in the reform era (1978-present), with residues of socialism in the public environment. The locational specificities generated by location shooting set up a continuum, rather than a dichotomy of urban-rural, modern-ethnographic, even though the film sees the rural town as the ultimate home or essence of culture, largely untouched by the grand narrative of modernization, and in China's case, the socialist revolution and modernization.

The migratory imaginations in Hong Kong cinema have been discussed in relation to the generic conventions of romance and family melodrama. [17] However, with shots of propaganda slogans on the wall, location shooting contributes to the realistic style in the film and refers to a (post)socialist reality. The use of exterior locations, particularly street scenes in Haizhu Bridge and Guangzhou Train Station, registers a site-specificity that contributes to the realism of this film. Indeed, though often recognized as a filmmaker drawing from the melodramatic conventions, director Mabel Cheung uses vocabulary of realism as well. For her first feature film, *The Illegal Immigrant*, Cheung uses all non-professional actors due to budgetary reasons. And illegal immigrants played themselves. In the same vein, shooting *Eight Taels of Gold* in mainland China provides the opportunity for Cheung, a Hong Kong-born filmmaker, to visit mainland China for the first time, "it is like a stranger recording what she saw on her first trip to China, like making a documentary."[18] A popular film produced by the D&B studio, *Eight's* cast includes Hong Kong star Sammo Hung as Slim and Taiwanese star Sylvia Chang as Jenny. However, many minor characters such as Slim's parents and relatives of Slim are all local talents from Guangdong, including many non-professional actors. Thus the location shooting, the incorporation of locational or spatial particularity into the filmmaking and the use of non-professional actors in this film are significant techniques used to bring about a sense of reality.

---

[17] Gina Marchetti, *From Tian'anmen to Times Square : Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989-1997* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 191-2.

[18] Gequ Yang, "Kongjian Xingbie Aiqing Yu Lishi: Zhang Wan Ting Fang Tan (Space, Gender, Romance and History: Interview with Mabel Cheung)," *dian ying yi shu* 323, no. 7 (2007): 76.

The significance of location shooting and the specificities it generates in *Eight Taels of Gold* point to the fact that the production, distribution and exhibition of cinema are material and location-specific processes, which are also shaped by the "China syndrome" and the fascination with America. Much has been said about how Hong Kong cinema during the 1980s and 1990s reflected or constituted the collective anxiety of Hong Kong society, yet less attention was paid on the material aspects of cinema. The expansion of imaginary space in Hong Kong cinema coincides with the spatial accessibility of actual locations. The spatial expansion of Hong Kong cinema is made possible by a new permissiveness in allowing location shooting in mainland China after its "Opening up." It was a spatial expansion in cinema as well as of cinema. Since the 1980s, Hong Kong production companies can film in mainland China instead of going to Taiwan or Korea.[19] At the same time, as exemplified by the migratory cinema, Hong Kong cinema in this period also expanded to overseas locations beyond Asia, especially locations in the US.

Filming in overseas locations was not new when the migratory cinema emerged in Hong Kong cinematic history but it was largely confined in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Connections were made between Hong Kong and mainland cities before 1950s. During the Cold War period, Hong Kong was more linked with other cities in the "free

---

[19] Notable cases include historical drama and blockbuster films such as Li hanxiang's *Huo Shao Yuan Ming Yuan* and *Cui Lian Ting zheng*. For more information on the regulations of film shootings in China for Hong Kong film companies, see Mei He, "Mainland-Hong Kong Film Co-Production since the Reform and Open-up Policy. Master Thesis" (Tsinghua University, 2006).

world," such as Tokyo.[20] However, the increasing use of locations in China and America suggests a deeper collective anxiety in Hong Kong's popular culture. Moreover, while the locations expanded, the circulation of Hong Kong films also expanded to mainland China. Many were able to come out in theaters in Cantonese in the Guangdong region, while the dubbed Mandarin versions were exhibited in other major cities across the nation. Thus, the migratory cinema was growing under the larger backdrop of the spatial expansion in and of Hong Kong cinema.

Thus, the thematic configurations in and the spatial arrangement of this body of migratory cinema resemble post-Cold War geopolitical relations. It is in this context that we can understand the "China syndrome" as well as the obsession on migration issues in a new era of transnationalism, as marked by the alleviation of Cold War conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region. Let's take a brief detour into the earlier history of Hong Kong cinema, which sheds light on the discussions of current transnational cinema. Cinema in Hong Kong was transnational throughout the twentieth century. It was marked by the movements of capital, talents, and equipment across national boundaries. During the Cold War, Hong Kong cinema was a crucial component of the Shaw Brothers' entertainment empire, which stretched beyond Hong Kong and into Taiwan, Southeast Asia and all the way to Chinese ethnic audience in North America.[21] Instead of taking current transnational reality at face value, this survey of migratory cinema reveals the

---

[20] For a trilogy of Tokyo-Hong Kong films during the Cold War under Japanese-Hong Kong co-production, see Ain-ling Wong and Pui-tak Lee, *Leng Zhan Yu Xianggang Dian Ying* (Xianggang: Xianggang dian ying zi liao guan, 2009), 191.

[21] See Poshek Fu, *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, Popular Culture and Politics in Asia Pacific (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

trans-Pacific geo-political concerns shaped by China syndrome and the myth of the American Dream, which comprise a set of multiple forces of hegemony at work, or what Prasenjit Duara calls the "hegemonic modernity."[22]

CRITIQUE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE PROCESS OF BECOMING CHINESE

Eight Taels of Gold negotiates the multiple forces of hegemony in its critique of both the American dream and the making of Chinese-ness. In the opening sequence, the establishing long shot with deep focus demonstrates Slim's social and communal environment. With the New York nighttime skyline as the background, Slim is hanging out with his country-men at the rooftop of a building. Some are chatting at the dinner table while others are playing cards. The skyscrapers in the background highly contrast with the impoverished restaurant in the foreground. Such interplay between high and low in graphic composition resonates with the social structure of the city where Chinese working class immigrants are in the lower strata hence the lower part of the screen (figure 14).

---

[22] See Duara, *The Global and Regional in China's Nation-Formation*.

FIGURE 14. Slim and his country-men in New York in *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989)

The ending sequence sharply reflects on the construction of Chinese-ness. Built on the subtle and unfulfilled romantic desire between Slim and Jenny, the film finds narrative closure in Jenny's marriage, a symbolic ritual where she enters her husband's patriarchal structure and leaves her past to become a "Chinatown dweller" in San Francisco. The ending sequence is almost a reversal of Slim's arrival scene. Jenny sails away on the wedding boat, seeing the familiar *diaolou*, and the red cotton tree for the last time. Riding a bicycle, Slim chases the boat on the bank until the road ends. Crosscutting between him bicycling in the mountains and she on the sailing boat, the film presents the shot-reverse-shot of close-ups of Slim and Jenny, as if they can still see each other. Finally, Slim stops and watches the boat sail out of his sight in a long shot.

The film ends with a freeze frame of Slim standing on the top of a hill, with a dragon boat ruins on the lower part of the hill. The boat was the most important

transportation vehicle in early emigration history. Here the dragon boat signifies China and it touches upon the conversation between Slim and his father earlier in the ancestral hall when his father related the legend that Taishan used to be a sea and there are dragon boat ruins in the mountains. Here, the mythic image of the dragon boat makes the man, Slim, the bearer of Chinese culture. The use of freeze frame in the end further implies the ultimate immobility of Slim.

Using the symbolism of the dragon boat, the film transfers the Cantonese experience as a part of the larger Chinese and Chinese diaspora community, evoking different migratory imaginations. The crosscutting sequence between Slim in the mountains and Jenny on the sailing boat could be read as an entangled relationship between the "yellow civilization" rooted in agriculture and the land, and the "blue civilization" of the sea. *River Elegy*, an influential TV program in the 1980s from CCTV (China Central Television) proposed that China is an ancient "yellow civilization" that needs to learn from the "blue civilization" from the West. Such a dichotomy essentializes China as an immobile and passive agricultural civilization and the West as a mobile and aggressive marine civilization. Though the crosscutting sequence sets up the male/female, mountain/river, earth/sea dichotomies, the circular structure of the film, which starts with Slim's return and ends with Jenny's departure, registers the mobility of these Cantonese immigrants and their association with the boat and marine cultures, thus complicates the dichotomies that sees China as a monolithic "yellow civilization" of the Central Plain.

Moreover, the Hong Kong perspective of the film further complicates these dichotomies. Hong Kong is mentioned in Slim and Jenny's brief discussion of Jenny's feelings before her emigration, a symbolic conversation between a soon-to-be-migrant and a sojourner. During the spectacular firework show sponsored by Jenny's fiancé, Jenny sneaks out of the crowd and finds Slim sitting under a big tree. Jenny confesses her doubts about her choice and her future:

> JENNY: I don't really want to go abroad. Wherever I go, I'll be
> in Chinatown. I'd rather go to Hong Kong.
> SLIM: Do you know where the largest Chinatown is?
> JENNY: No. Tell me.
> SLIM: It is Hong Kong.

Jenny states a true reality faced by many immigrants like her, whose lives are contained in the geography of Chinatown in various cities, a byproduct of racialized containment. What Jenny says also resonates with the position of Hong Kong cinema as a diaspora cinema, particularly during the Cold War era and before the further integration of mainland and Hong Kong.[23] In this period, Hong Kong was the largest Chinatown, the center of diasporic Chinese-language filmmaking.

Furthermore, Cheung, the filmmaker herself claimed her Chinese identity through her journey abroad. In one interview, Cheung states the relationship between her study abroad experience and the formation of her Chinese identity, in which the diaspora experience for Cheung is a re-inscription of her Chinese identity:

---

[23] One such integration will be the CEPA in 2003, which enable Hong Kong films to enjoy the exhibition privilege as a domestic film and retain a bigger proportion of the profits.

111

I found my Chinese identity abroad. The first time I left Hong Kong for my study in Britain, I wore *qipao*, as a Chinese woman would do; I read books on China; and I answered questions about China when asked. The Chinese identity makes me feel more valuable. The root-seeking, the discovery of my Chinese identity is worthwhile.[24]

As one of the Hong Kong movies that deals with emigration from mainland China and that employs location-shooting in Guangdong, the film reveals the imaginary relationship between Hong Kong and other diasporic communities, which see Hong Kong as the largest Chinese diasporic community. Such a connection between Guangdong, Hong Kong and overseas Cantonese enclaves reveals how the category of "Chinese-ness" is constructed as exemplary in the crosscutting sequence and in Cheung's sense of her own Chinese identity. The processes of becoming Chinese, both for Slim in the film and for Cheung, is related to our earlier analysis of how Western ethnicized reductionism goes hand in hand with monolithic China-centrism in creating the category of the "Chinese." However, at the same time, the film can be read as a re-inscription of a Chinese identity with Hong Kong-based consciousness and Cantonese specificity, which critiques American racial containment and monolithic understanding of Chinese-ness.

GUANGDONG FACTOR IN HONG KONG CINEMA HISTORY: DESTABILIZING NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CINEMAS

A closer look at the Guangdong factor in Hong Kong cinema leads to the theoretical potential in thinking about the relationship between place/locality and (sub) national or

---

[24] Yang, "Kongjian Xingbie Aiqing Yu Lishi: Zhang Wan Ting Fang Tan (Space, Gender, Romance and History: Interview with Mabel Cheung)," 77.

quasi-national cinema or culture. Many studies on Hong Kong cinema focuses on its status as a quasi-national cinema and its negotiation with Chinese nationalism and British colonialism.[25] However, such discussions rarely look beyond the conceptual framework of national cinema nor take into account the connection between Hong Kong and the regional Cantonese culture. Does Guangdong, or Cantonese regional culture provides a mediated space, a regional or sub-national identity that overlaps with or contradicts the Chinese national identity? How does Hong Kong cinema negotiate this regional and cultural attachment in the shadows of coming to terms with the Chinese national identity?

Some have suggested that local Hong Kong identity "has been based on a sense of cultural marginality by comparison to China at large"[26] and the predominantly Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong have "strong attachments to native place in southern China rather than to less known larger entity of China."[27] In other words, a large number of Hong Kongese share linguistic, cultural and sometimes kinship connections with those in Guangdong. Paradoxically, regional culture and national identity do not always conflict but at times reciprocally constitute each other. In her study of the Guangdong regional culture and the Chinese national identity in the late Qing and early Republic era, May-bo Ching argues that national identity is crucial in the making of Guangdong local

[25] See David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong : Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Ching-Mei Esther Yau, *At Full Speed : Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Yingchi Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self* (Routledge, 2009).

[26] Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn L. Cartier, *The Chinese Diaspora : Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 382.

[27] Ibid.

cultures.[28] Local intellectuals in Guangdong lean on the discourse of nationalism to elevate their cultural capital as regional elites. However, the status of colonial Hong Kong, separated from the Chinese state, bred an interesting relationship with itself, Cantonese regional culture and the Chinese national culture.

In the history of Hong Kong cinema, the Cantonese regional factor was at times in competition with the national project led by Mandarin productions. Because of the free movements between the colony and China before 1950, Hong Kong's cultural image was constructed as part of the Chinese national culture in conjunction with a Cantonese regional culture. Notably, such a conjunction is filled with tensions and contradictions, particularly in the long competition between Mandarin films and Cantonese ones. Since the advent of cinema, Hong Kong has been the most productive place for dialect filmmaking. Cantonese films, which were produced mostly in Hong Kong and Guangzhou (Canton), were threatened by the ban of dialect filmmaking during the 1930s under the Republic of China. Such state-enforced attempts in history to contain dialect filmmaking in favor of Mandarin films are symptomatic of what Poshek Fu calls the "Central Plains syndrome," which refers to "a Chinese-centered nationalism that has been embedded in the centralizing, anti-colonial state-building discourse underlying twentieth-century representations of Chinese culture."[29] The "Central Plains syndrome," together with the hegemonic rule under British colonization, shapes the

---

[28] See Ching, *Di Yu Wen Hua Yu Guo Jia Ren Tong : Wan Qing Yi Lai "Guangdong Wen Hua" Guan De Xing Cheng (Local Culture and National Identity: The Formation of Guangdong Cultural Perspective since Late Qing).*

[29] Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 52.

"double marginality" of Hong Kong. In the early 1950s, the competition between Cantonese filmmaking and its Mandarin counterpart continued after the ban of Hong Kong films in mainland and the market re-oriented to Taiwan and Southeast Asia. After the close-down of the Hong Kong-China border in 1950, Southeast Asian Chinese took charge of film production in Hong Kong and put in place a vertical integration of film production, distribution and exhibition in 1956, which marks the beginning of a diasporic cinema. [30]

In the mid-1970s, Hong Kong cinema emerged from and shaped the rise of a Hong Kong identity and the domestic market grew more and more important. The once prolific productions of high-production-value Mandarin films in Hong Kong, exemplified by the commercial success of the Shaw Brothers studio, faded away. Hong Kong New Wave directors shared the experience of growing up in Hong Kong and of being the first post-war generation who lives in a predominantly Cantonese-speaking society. Cantonese cinema replaced the Mandarin one and evolved into Hong Kong cinema. Filmic adaptations of Cantonese operas, folklore, and Chinese literature and mythology decreased in 1970s and films exhibited a new realism and addressed more contemporary topics. At the same time, Hong Kong cinema expanded in both narrative and spatial configurations, and more and more films moved away from studio mise-en-scene to real locations. According to Shi Qi, a veteran film critic based in Hong Kong, the Chinese culture-related genres such as martial art films (*wuxia*), historical drama and Opera films reached a low point in the 1980s. Instead, China-related films were told

---

[30] Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*, 31.

with a Hong Kong perspective.[31] Traditional stories were replaced by urban stories. Though film companies may hold different political views, they all produced movies based on *xianggang benwei yishi* (Hong Kong based identity or consciousness).

As analyzed earlier, homecoming stories such as *Eight Teals of Gold* (1989) rely on the specificities of the Cantonese immigration network and built environment in Guangdong, instead of larger national signifiers, to construct a timeless home. Other homecoming stories such as *Homecoming* (1984) and *Intimates* (1993) in this period of Hong Kong cinema are mostly set in rural Guangdong, highlighting the Guangdong-Hong Kong connection, particularly the kinship, cultural and linguistic links. In the same vein, among the third type of migration cinema that features new immigrants from mainland to Hong Kong, many stories frame these newcomers as cousins and relatives from Guangdong, who also speaks Cantonese but are out of touch with the political and social reality in Hong Kong.[32]

However, this shared regional Cantonese cultural legacy can in no way obscure the historical differences between Guangdong and colonial Hong Kong, particularly in different historical moments. The 1989 Tiananmen incident triggered many Hong Kongese to realize the political differences between China and Hong Kong.[33] Earlier films in the third type of migratory cinema such as *China Behind* (1974) and *Long Arm*

---

[31] Qi Shi, "Xiang Gang: Ba Ling Nian Dai Dian Ying De Cheng Jiu Gan He Wei Ji Gan (Hong Kong: Accomplishment and Anxiety in Hong Kong Cinema in the 1980s)," in *Xin Ya Zhou Dian Ying Mian Mian Guan*, ed. Xiongping Jiao (Taibei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1991), 35.

[32] The most famous series is *Her Fatal Ways*.

[33] Zhuotao Li, "Xianggang: Bo Ling Nian Dai Xin Dian Ying De Zhong Guo Mai Luo (the Chinese Context in Hong Kong Cinema in the 1980s)," in *Xin Ya Zhou Dian Ying Mian Mian Guan*, ed. Xiongping Jiao (Taibei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1991), 56.

of the Law (1984) deal with the split of Cantonese Guangdong and Hong Kong in political terms. Both films refer to the Cultural Revolution as a distinctively different political reality that separates mainland China from the political reality in Hong Kong. Tang Shuxuan's *China Behind* portrays people from Guangzhou who seek refuge in Hong Kong to avoid political turmoil in China but couldn't find their footing in Hong Kong. Though sharing a Cantonese regional culture, this film symptomatically highlights the socialist elements of Guangdong as an easily recognizable marker of the "other." *Long Arm of the Law* features a group of *daquanzai*, the sent-down youths from Guangzhou.[34] During the Cultural Revolution, sent-down youths were forced to live in rural Guangdong and some of them entered Hong Kong by sea and became illegal immigrants who caused social problems. A number of Hong Kong films express this anxiety over historical and political differences.[35] Indeed, the construction of regional Cantonese culture and Hong Kong culture are historically contained instead of essentially defined. Thus, the border of Hong Kong identity is defined in relation to the Cantonese culture while always positioned under the shadow of the China-centered nationalism.

CONCLUSION: SINOPHONIC ARTICULATIONS IN THE "CANTONESE SPHERE"

Examining the narrative, visual-audio and linguistic configurations and positioning of this film in the larger wave of migration films from Hong Kong, this chapter argues that

---

[34] Daquan (big circle) means Guangzhou, which occupies a relatively large circle, indicating a place with a bigger population on the map.

[35] Of course, it is not always the case. For example, in *Rock n'roll Cop* (1994) gangs from Guangzhou cooperate with Hong Kong local gangs.

Eight Taels of Gold critiques the marginalization of first-generation Cantonese immigrants in the U.S., interrogates the ambiguous position of Hong Kong between Cantonese Guangdong and American Cantonese diaspora, and more importantly, re-inscribes the Cantonese experience as a possible site of "sinophonic articulations," which reveals the artificiality of Chinese-ness both within and outside China. However, this film may run the risk of homogenizing Cantonese itself as a tactic to struggle against the totality of homogenous Chinese-ness. Such dilemma or tension in the re-inscription of diaspora Cantonese is curial to understanding the possibilities and limits of Sinophone cinema, and a more multi-directional counter-hegemonies perspective should be taken in examining the "cinematic economy of place."

What is at stake in re-visiting the pre-1997 Hong Kong cinema and revealing the historical situated heterogeneity within the signifier of Cantonese? The significance of Hong Kong films lies in the possibilities of sinophonic articulations in several levels: firstly, the body of migratory cinema examined in this chapter contains stories told from the perspectives of immigrants. They invest in the immigrants' past and future; give subjectivity to the working-class Cantonese diaspora--a group of socially marginalized ethnic immigrants restricted in "Chinatowns"--a result of America's racial containment policy and history. More profoundly, monolithic understanding of China and Chinese-ness that privileges the central plain culture from the north goes hand in hand with Western ethnicized reductionism. Secondly, *Eight Taels of Gold* registers social reality and Cantonese specificity through location-shooting and the use of realism, and re-inscribes the Cantonese experience via the point of view of Hong Kong.

The symptomatic absence of the specificities of new immigrants, or immigrants from mainland China in Hong Kong, singles out the blind spot in this body of migratory cinema. Though addressing the diaspora experiences of mainland Chinese and Hong Kongese, the marginalization of mainland immigrants can easily be found in the stereotypical representations of mainland immigrants. However, through films such as *Eight Taels of Gold*, the re-inscriptions of Cantonese immigrant in Hong Kong cinema register Hong Kong as a major site of cultural production in the "Cantonese sphere," including the cultural sphere based in Hong Kong, Macau, the clusters of cities along the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province, and the overseas Cantonese populations. Such a "Cantonese sphere" is aided by the development of communication technology and media industry and the de-politicized environment, and Hong Kong cinema, television and pop music are vital forces produced and distributed in such a cultural realm.

The signifier of Cantonese or the "Cantonese sphere" is as fleeting, contingent and contested as *Chinese*, as the marker of Cantonese itself contains subordination across class, gender, urban lines. Moreover, the heterogeneity of the Cantonese language itself could be obscured in this body of migration cinema: though a number of these films address the overseas migration experience, they are mostly in Cantonese or Mandarin, instead of other dialects, for the sake of Hong Kong, Taiwan or diasporic audience. The linguistic or cultural signifier of Cantonese can be a hegemonic force at given moments. Especially in the third type of the migratory cinema, Hong Kong-style Cantonese functions as a marker of Hong Kong authenticity while other Chinese languages such as Mandarin, accented Cantonese or other dialects represent otherness in

relation to Hong-Kong-ness. In *Eight Taels of Gold*, Cantonese is used as the spoken language while Taishanese, usually grouped under the umbrella of Cantonese, only showed up in one or two sentences. In other words, the use of Cantonese in presenting life in Taishan already blurs the differences within the Cantonese community. The use of Cantonese in portraying the lives of people in rural Guangdong seems "authentic" at first glance, but it is largely catering to Cantonese-speaking audience in Hong Kong. [36]

However, the history of Cantonese media industry under the context of larger economic integration within "Cantonese sphere" contributes to later awareness against state monolithic containment of regional culture and language,[37] which is explored later in this dissertation. The notion of "Cantonese media sphere" could be a productive term in thinking beyond the category of nation and national cinema, which will facilitate the larger project of challenging monolithic China-centrism that undervalues non-Mandarin cultures and questioning the ethnicized reductionism employed by American hegemony. At the same time, the employment of "Cantonese sphere" should consider the unstable nature of any given category and not obscure the heterogeneity within the sphere. "Cantonese sphere" is a site full of struggle and negotiation embedded in historical, political and social differences. It is where the extended understanding of "sinophonic articulations" could happen, not because of Hong Kong cinema's marginality but its

[36] Of course, for the sake of domestic audience in Hong Kong, many films set in Vietnam, even not addressing Vietnamese Chinese, also use Cantonese ostensibly. For example, Ann Hui's Boat People (1986), read as a political critique of Chinese communist authorities, was set in Vietnam and is indeed critical of the Vietnamese communist party.

[37] In July and August 2010, triggered by a government proposal for the Guangzhou TV station to broadcast in Mandarin during prime-time, a wave of local and grassroots media and street activists appeared in Guangzhou to "protect Cantonese". See Tania Branigan, "Protesters Gather in Guangzhou to Protect Cantonese Language, guardian.co.uk" http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/25/protesters-guangzhou-protect-cantonese.

capacity to re-inscribe the Hong Kong perspective into the making of "Chinese" and Chinese-ness, thus opens up the space for critiquing China-centrism as well as Western ethnicized reductionism.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Visualizing Neoliberal Spatialities and Biopolitics: Locational Aesthetics of Digital Media Practices in the Special Economic Zone

This chapter focuses on independent digital media practices in Guangdong province and examines how the socially-engaged subject matter as well as experimental aesthetics responded to the rapid urbanization process in this region, particularly within the context of neo-liberal re-ordering of national space. The "neoliberal spatialities," I argue, refers to the re-configuration and re-territorialization of national spaces and the normalization of hierarchical space in everyday life in China's neoliberalization through what Aihwa Ong called "zoning technologies," a governmental technique to create spaces such as the Special Economic Zones(SEZs) for economic growth and development. These neoliberal spatialities reinforce the pre-existing urban-rural divide, normalize the biopolitical management of the peasant-workers and contribute to a new developmental narrative of the state that endorses linear and progressive temporality.

The intersection between space and media culture in this chapter enriches existing scholarship on Chinese media culture that emphasizes on temporary transfiguration and overlooks the spatial politics and geographical divergence. The visual media practices from South China, particularly Guangdong, an area encompasses the most successful SEZs, illuminate the abstract and everyday neoliberal spatialities. In contrast with the numerous artistic explorations of overtly political and monumental space such as the Tiananmen Square, the independent media practices in Guangdong elucidate the changes and new formations of social spaces brought about by economic

liberalization. Probing various modalities of spaces such as the village-in-the-city phenomenon, new urban developments, factory spaces, etc., various independent digital visual works in Guangdong have captured the production of hierarchical social space in the neoliberal reordering. In Particular, *Sanyuanli* (2003), a Dziga Vertov style digital documentary made collectively by the u-*thèque* organization members, illustrates the village-in-the-city spatiality. The village-in-the-city spatiality is emblematic of the urban-rural divide and neoliberal biopolitics on a national scale, which foregrounds the prosperity of the Special Economic Zones. Specifically, this chapter investigates how *Sanyuanli* and the cultural practice of its creator u-*thèque* organization scrutinize the politics of neoliberal spatialities through the employment of "locational aesthetic." The locational aesthetics, I argue, comprise three components: the thematic interest in examining neoliberal spatialities; the self-reflexive aesthetic that locates the media practitioner in social space; and the creation of independent artistic space.

Structurally, this chapter first explains the formation and development of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and its relationship with the urban-rural divide in China, and how neoliberalization normalizes these spatialities. Second, it examines how the cultural practice of u-*thèque* organization and their *Sanyuanli* project exercise "locational aesthetics" and negotiate with neoliberal spatialities in an area largely affected by the establishment of the SEZ. Third, it explores how *Sanyuanli* obscures the neoliberal biopolitics through its exhaustion of experimental aesthetics and its emphasis on locational identity, which speaks to the symptomatic absence of the peasant-workers in the Chinese mediascape.

123

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES: THE POLITICS OF EXCEPTION AND NEOLIBERAL TEMPORALITY

As I explained in chapter one, in mainland China, Special Economic Zones are enclaves with liberal economic incentives in the reform/transition period after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978. The first SEZ is the city of Shenzhen, a border city along Hong Kong established in 1980 in Guangdong province of southern China. Other SEZs were gradually implemented in other coastal areas to attract foreign investment. The local authorities in the SEZs enjoyed more economic and administrative autonomy. Around the time when the Shenzhen SEZ was implemented, Deng Xiaoping proposed a flexible arrangement of "one country, two systems," which guaranteed the (partial) political autonomy of the Special Administrative Regions (SAR). Hong Kong and Macau, two former colonies of Britain and Portugal became SARs after they were handed over to China in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

In her book *Neoliberalism as Exception*, Aihwa Ong takes into account neoliberalism in non-western contexts (primarily northeast and southeast Asia), and complicates the typical treating of the state as an abstract and ideal unit of analysis in social science, which privileges Western states. In contrast with European Union, according to Ong, China's opening and market reform policies "have relied not on unbundling or denationalizing sovereignty but on the production of new spaces of exertion and border-crossing powers." [38] Market reforms in mainland China have

---

[38] Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception : Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 102.

provided an opening "for greater flexibility in sovereign rule, in the astute use of the exception to construct zones that spread economic networks and foster political integration."[39] One of the exceptions is the "zoning technology," deployed by the Chinese government for a creative re-territorialization of the national space, which realigns mainland enclaves with various Chinese-dominated political entities overseas such as Singapore and Hong Kong. Among them, the establishment of SEZs and the SARs are the most salient examples. The "spaces of exceptions" of SEZs and SARs complicate Agamben's elaboration on the logic of exception, which is associated with the deprivation of rights and the reduction to bare life. By contrast, for Ong, "the sovereign exception" that embedded in the "one country, two systems" scheme, together with the economic exceptions of the SEZs, have created conditions for "giving life, freedom, and new political openings."[40]

However, while exploring neoliberalism in non-western context and *provincializing* the western democratic state as the normative ideal type of analysis, Ong observes that neoliberalism in these places adopts the governance of exceptions. Such a discourse of exception bears the risk of re-establishing the Western neoliberal democratic state as the norm or a self-evident object of knowledge. Is neoliberalism in Asia, exemplified by SEZs (Shenzhen, Zhuhai) and SARs (Hong Kong, Macau) in China truly exceptional? Or, is it initial and concentrated articulation of larger and deepened national reforms that normalize the neoliberal logic? To put simply, what are the larger social,

---

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 117.

political and economic structures that give rise to the zones? Could the zones be the *paradigm* of the state-sponsored neoliberalization? Shenzhen, the most successful SEZ that created along the Mainland-Hong Kong border in 1980 is only a predecessor of a number of other SEZs and "development districts" that continued to be set up in the following decades. Furthermore, the privatization of state-owned factories all over the country was executed throughout the country and forced millions of workers to resign or retire. This phenomenon is called *xiagang*, or stepping off one's post. The post, or *gangwei*, describes one's position in the socialist *danwei* (work unit) system, in which the post not only includes the job, wage, but also all sorts of medical, housing and social benefits. The massive downsizing of socialist factories on a national scale, a product of "market economy," cannot be explained by Ong's argument of neoliberal exceptions. In short, seeing the SEZ as exceptions obscure how larger social, political and economic restructuring and neoliberalization give rise to the SEZs. The epistemological tension between exception and generality in terming with China and neoliberalism will be inspected more explicitly in the next section of this chapter.

Nevertheless, Ong's conception of "spaces of exceptions" are illuminating as it lay out how neoliberalism relies on re-spatialization of territories. Neoliberalism re-organizes social orders by establishing narrative of temporal progression. The zones are not simply transformations and remaking of territories; they are also competing narratives of histories and temporalities in spatial terms. Revisiting the legacies of the Bandung meeting of underdeveloped countries from Asia and Africa in the 1950s, Chakrabarty investigates "the pedagogical style of developmental politics" of the

postcolonial nations that displayed an uncritical emphasis on modernization. This catching-up-with-the-West style of developmental politics produced "a particular split that marked the relationship between elite nations and their subaltern counterparts as well as that between elites and subalterns within national boundaries."[41] Although the developmental politics of non-Western countries was not a neo-liberal invention, the socialist China imagined a competitive modernization project during the Cold War in which China is "modern on its own terms." Rewriting the socialist imagination of competitive modernity, neo-liberalism acquires new conception of time and space,

> [T]he act, in Guangdong, of abandoning the province's claim to be "modern on its own terms" in favor of Hong Kong's designation of the province as 'not yet modern,' illuminated the profound reorientation of the relationship between these rivals in the reform era, but it also enabled a re-writing of the delta's post-War development.[42]

The setting up of the "special economic zones" entails the developmental narrative of the state, where Hong Kong is imagined as the future of Shenzhen, or the SEZs, and the SEZ as the future of the rest of the country. In the same light, Ren Hai argues that the handover of Hong Kong and the establishment of Hong Kong SAR symbolize the *jiegui,* or the China-HK synchronization. This temporal rearrangement, or the desire to be on the same track of the world, is crucial to the neoliberalization of China, a transition from a political state to an administrative state that emphasizes on growth, capital and development.[43]

---

[41] Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture," 53.

[42] See the conclusion in Seth M. Harter, ""Time Is Moving Forward but We Are Moving Faster": Racing Towards Modernity in Hong Kong and Guandong" (University of Michigan, 2006).

[43] See Hai Ren, *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong : The Countdown of Time* (New York, NY:

Thus, neo-liberalism acquires new conceptions of time and space, including the re-spatialization of national spaces by creating SEZs and SARs. However, far from what Ong has suggested the exceptional status of these spaces or spatial practices; I contend that neo-liberalism *normalizes* these spatial arrangements, and thus consolidates a new developmental narrative of the state that endorses linear and progressive temporality. Such a normalization of spatial orders, I argue, is mainly based upon the maintenance of pre-existing urban-rural divide and the naturalization the biopolitical management of the peasant-workers.

THE URBAN-RURAL QUESTION: NEOLIBERAL SPATIALITY AND BIOPOLITICS

The establishment of the SEZ is usually understood as a form of neoliberalization as it promotes foreign direct investment with tax incentives. However, whether China is a neoliberal state or undergoing neoliberalization remains heatedly debated and the debate is caught up in the discourse of exception discussed above. David Harvey contends that contemporary China is experiencing neoliberalization with "Chinese characteristics" through "accumulation by dispossession," or a neoliberal shift that dispossess the public of their money or land, centralizes wealth and power in the hands of a few, and thus restores class differences. [44] Many scholars, especially anthropologists have observed dominant and prevailing neoliberal trends in contemporary China, such as a "neoliberal

---

Routledge, 2010).

[44] Harvey, "Neoliberalism 'with Chinese Characterisitics'."

re-structuring," or neoliberalism as a national project to imagine global reordering.[45] Others such as Nonini oppose the view that China is going through neoliberalism because it dismisses the afterlife of socialist values, or "the modality of those supporting a return to socialist values of justice and redistribution for the majority of the population – workers and peasants."[46] Nonini also points out that China experiences neoliberalization in a limiting regional scope, which does not translate into a national neoliberal restructuring.

The suggestion of "neoliberalization with Chinese characteristics," corresponds with the logic of the economic transition or reform promoted by the Chinese officials, which is a kind of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." The Chinese government never officially used the term "neo-liberal" in describing China's embrace of market economy. Instead, China emphasized its exceptional status strategically and deployed slogans such as "socialism with Chinese characteristics" to describe the reorientation of national policies, the intensification of economic reform since the early 1990s and its inclusion in the WTO in 2003. In a similar vein, liberal economists such as Huang Yasheng describe the economic growth in China as "capitalism with Chinese characteristics."[47] Most recently, in 2009, the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the new China, the mainstream Chinese media CCTV (China Central Television) and Xinhua News Agency launched a media campaign of "China model" of development, celebrating

---

[45] See Greenhalgh and Winckler, *Governing China's Population : From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*; Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks."; Rofel, *Desiring China : Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*.

[46] D. M. Nonini, "Is China Becoming Neoliberal?," *Crit. Anthropol. Critique of Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2008): 157.

[47] Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics : Entrepreneurship and the State*.

the rise of China, whose economy continues to grow after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Following my earlier response to Ong's theorization of the SEZs as "spaces of exceptions," I argue that the success of the SEZs is impossible without the movement of millions of migrant-workers on a national scale. Although the vast rural economy is far from a neoliberal economy, tens of millions of peasants from the rural area are participating in the neoliberalization of Chinese economy without being recognized as full-fledged workers. Although SEZs are implemented on a limited and regional scale, they underline the graduate liberalization of the economy that forms major economic-geographical belts such as the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta, the Tianjin-Beijing area, etc. Premiered with the Shenzhen SEZ in Guangdong, provincial or local/municipal governments all start to develop smaller-scale special economic zones and districts. Among them the most notable cities and districts with exceptional regulations are Pudong District in Shanghai, Binhai District in Tianjin, etc.

Moreover, the assemblage of these SEZs and smaller development districts are built upon the disposable labor supplied by millions of peasant-workers, or migrant-workers from the countryside. In 2009, the number of peasant-workers increased to 200 million. Among them, 30 million worked in the Pearl River Delta. The success of the SEZs is engineered upon the urban-rural divide from the Maoist period, which continuously provides cheap labor to the SEZs. The current Chinese state conveniently perpetuates the rural-urban divide during Maoist China, which sustains institutional, material, and regulatory bases for the "market economy." As sociologist Pun Ngai points out, the corporations and the state do not pay for the cost of urbanization of these

peasant-workers, thus the peasant-workers have to endure their peasant status although they work and live as a worker in urban areas.[48] Using the *hukou* system, or "household registration" system, the state excludes the peasant-workers from the social security system of urbanities.[49] Those peasants who are born in the rural area are not allowed to stay in the cities if they cannot find a job in a short period of time. Thus, the term peasant-worker itself signifies the neoliberal spatiality and biopolitics. Based on neoliberal logic of economic rationality, the neoliberal biopolitics are founded upon the *maintenance* of the urban-rural divide, the encouragement of the movement of peasant-workers, and the constant regulation to supply the city and the economic zones with only usable labor. Founded on the rural-urban divide, such incorporation of spatial reordering and bio-political techniques continuously prevents the formation of a new working class in neoliberal globalization. The SEZ itself is a bio-political technique to concentrate and gather the labor from the countryside temporarily.

In other words, though the neoliberalization of economy is most evident in urban and coastal areas, these developments are impossible without the movement of peasant-workers on a national scale. Thus the neoliberalization influences the everyday lives of migrant-workers in the city and those peasants who remain in or return to the rural area. Thus, I use of the term neoliberal globalization to describe and specify the post-Cold War global economy, in which the state is shifting from a political entity to a primarily administrative entity. During this process, the SEZ, the representative of neoliberal

---

[48] Ngai Pun, "The Metaphor of the Peasant-Workers: The Unfinished Proletariatization."

[49] For more about the Hukou system and its history, see Fei-Ling Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion : China's Hukou System* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

spatialities, is only a section of the national spatial re-ordering chain. Conversely, viewing the SEZs as exceptional spaces obscures the structural hierarchy of the urban-rural divide and the neoliberal spatiality on a national scale. Hence, the SEZs that explored in this chapter are located in Guangdong province, but they also speak to a paradigmatic shift of neoliberalization on a national scale that cannot be fully apprehended without the rural-urban divide and the biopolitical technique of mobilizing and regulating the peasant-workers.

LOCATIONAL AESTHETICS AND CINEMATIC CONTEXTS

Exploring particular physical and social production of space, digital media practices in the "special zones" deploy what I call "locational aesthetics" in the context of neoliberalization. The locational aesthetics has three components: the thematic interest in examining neoliberal spatialities; the self-reflexive and experimental aesthetic that locate the media practitioner in social space; and the creation of independent artistic space. The locational aesthetics interweave thematic spatial interest and the concern on local and locational identity with stylistic tactics such as innovative sound-image relationship and self-reflexive techniques.[50] Besides the conceptual exploration of new spatialities and the specific textual techniques, the "locational aesthetics" also combine the creation of the artistic space and the insertion of the artist in social spaces on a textual level. The three components of locational aesthetics are highly connected. The theme and style of these media practices can hardly be separated; and the self-reflexive

---

[50] For more on locational identity, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another : Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

shots represent the artistic presence in social space.

Specifically, the media practices examined in this chapter are from the "special zones" of the Pearl River Delta, a geographical area that includes the two SEZs of Shenzhen and Zhuhai, as well as other smaller districts with tax incentives to attract foreign investment. As I explored in the introduction chapter, the clusters of cities in Pearl River Delta area at the center of the Guangdong Province constitute an economic and industrial center that borders Hong Kong and Macau. The prosperity of this city-region is based upon the successful state-led implementation of market economy by first establishing the SEZs. Economically, this area has been one of the leading regions since China's reform and "Open-up" policy in the late 1970s. Culturally, it is a predominately Cantonese-speaking area with its own heterogeneous regional cultures.

The digital media production in the Special Zones has two roots, one from cinema and the other from contemporary art. From the 1990s, a great body of documentaries emerged in and around the Special Economic Zones in Guangdong as part of the *New Documentary Movement*, a nationwide grassroots documentary filmmaking wave. [51] Following the independent film movement in mainland China, which is also framed as "the underground cinema," the DV counterparts employ even more subversive themes and formal strategies within a wider range of marginalized filming subjects and empower the underclass—peasants, unemployed workers, soldiers, homosexuals, transgender, prisoners, and so on. Community-based DV clubs, screenings,

---

[51] For more about the *New Documentary Movement,* see Chris Berry, Xinyu Lü, and Lisa Rofel, *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement : For the Public Record* (Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

festivals, forums and award granting are organized semi-publicly by filmmakers or related practitioners. Avoiding the existing institutions of state-controlled film and television industries, the proliferation of DV films, sometimes coined as the "DV movement", is based on communities, or more likely, individual creativities, constructing a new order of the moving image culture.

The locational aesthetics in digital media production depart from, but also form dialogue with earlier use of "on-location-ness" or "documentary realism" in the cinema of the "urban generation." Chinese cinema in the last twenty-years has been strongly theorized in relation to reality. The works of "urban generation," the Sixth Generation as well as the *New Documentary Movement* have been defined by a "documentary impulse" that uses "on-location-ness" or "documentary realism" as a central narrative and aesthetic device.[52] The locational aesthetics that I investigate in more specific terms later in this chapter differ from the cinematic documentary realism as it expands to creative, stylistic and experimental arrangement of sound and image. For example, the deliberate use of non-synchronic sound in *Sanyuanli* deviates from earlier documentary style of "direct cinema" and the Sixth Generation's documentary realism.

These makers of digital videos include amateurs and the professionals, whose difference is arbitrary. The former are the general public while the latter include people relatively literate in filmmaking, such as members in film or TV industries or students from related majors. Student-made DVs, mostly short films, are often associated with official domestic film festivals, such as the College Student Film Festival (*daxuesheng*

---

[52] See Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*.

dianyingjie). Meanwhile, personal or family entertainment remains the major application of DVs in domestic spaces. Thus, relatively amateur-oriented magazines, such as *DV for the General Public (dazhong DV)*, emerge to provide basic technological guidance to non-professional users. This type of DV periodicals and related exhibition venues are supported by commercial digital camera and cassette manufacturers such as SONY.[53]

Additionally, thanks to the commercialization of TV industry and the proliferation of distribution companies of audio-visual products, independent digital videos can be officially released as DVDs. Unlike the production and distribution of feature films or television programs, the distribution of videos is not required to go through the same uptight censorship system. Thus, a lot of the independent videos can be released legally in China and they cover a wide range of sensitive topics, including queer-themed digital films such as *Shanghai Panic* (dir. Andrew Cheng, 2002), *Postman* (dir. He Jianjun, 2001), and *Feeding Boy, Ayaya* (dir. Cui Zi'en, 2002). After being selected and shown in international film festivals such as the ones in Berlin, Venice or Vancouver, some digital films may release on DVD in other countries then circulate back to China in the form of copyrighted or pirate DVD.[54] In the late 2000s, the Chinese equivalents of YouTube that manage video sharing such as Tudou, Youku and PPTV become popular websites for online video distribution. These websites become popular databases for online video viewings and sharing, including the most recent foreign and

---

[53] For more about the DV movement, see Pickowicz and Zhang, *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*.

[54] For example, *West of Tracks* (dir. Wang Bing, 2002), a nine-hour long documentary about an abandoned factory in northeastern China was released in a 3-disk DVD set in France and then was pirated back to China.

domestic movies, TV programs and user-made videos. A few are pay-per-view videos while most other online streaming movies and TV shows are free. Many of these videos are uploaded by Internet users, including the most recent movies and TV programs, and user-made videos, many of which are fan viddings, fan-subbed TV shows, etc. Some of the entertainment content obviously has copyright infringement issues. However, these websites such as www.tudou.com starts to produce its own entertainment news and organize digital film festivals, which will open up an online flat form for distributing and publishing user-made digital media content.

LOCATIONAL AESTHETICS AND THE EXPERIMENTAL ART GROUP *BIG TAIL ELEPHANTS*

While the locational aesthetics are evident in the new order of video culture, they are also visible in experimental art practice. For example, Guangzhou-based art group the Big Tail Elephant is significant for their use of video installations, digital photography, and multi-media images to allegorize and negotiate with the experience of intensified urbanization processes. Similar to the overlooked provincial history of visual cultures in Guangdong, the active provincial experimental art scene in the last two decades have largely been marginalized in the study of contemporary Chinese art.

Southern Art Salon from Guangdong, the predecessor of Big Tail Elephants, was one of the hundreds of local and regional groups caught in the national "85 Art New Wave."[55] Immediately after the Cultural Revolution in 1978, amateur painters who were

---

[55] Another noted event during the 85 new wave from the pearl river delta region is the *lingzhan* (Zero Exhibition) held in Shenzhen in the public area next to Shenzhen theater. This street exhibition featured paintings, sculpture, wood cut

not part of the state-patronizing art institution organized themselves to form associations and exhibited their works. For example, Nameless Painter's Association, the first non-official art association after the Cultural Revolution was founded in 1979. Also, The Stars Exhibition in 1979 and 1980 marked the beginning of post-Cultural Revolution experimental exhibitions. This exhibition took place in the park of the China Fine Art Museum in Beijing. Most artists who exhibited their works had no formal trainings and they were not affiliated with any art institutions.[56]

During 1985 to 1987, eighty-seven "avant-garde" art groups emerged nationwide. This flowering of art groups, also referred as the "85 Art New Wave," was examined in greater detail by art historians such as Wu Hung, Gao Minglu and Lü Peng.[57] These self-supported art groups all over the country actively organized exhibitions and activities outside the official venues and attempted to interact with the general public. In 1989, right before the Tiananmen Incident, this art movement reached its peak when selected works generated from the movement were displayed in the *zhongguo xiandai yishu zhan* (Chinese Modern Art Exhibition) in the China Fine Art Museum in Beijing, the official national venue. This exhibition is highly significant as it symbolizes the establishment of the self-named "avant-garde" art from the 1980s in official venues. Ironically, it also

---

painting by 25 art academy graduates and several local young artists in Shenzhen.

[56] hong Wu, *Zuo Pin Yu Zhan Chang = Art Work and Exhibition* (Guang zhou: Ling nan mei zhu chu ban she, 2005).

[57] See Minglu Gao, *'85 Mei Shu Yun Dong = the '85 Movement*, [Xiu ding ban], di 1 ban. ed., 2 vols. (Guilin: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2008); Peng Lü, *20 Shi Ji Zhongguo Yi Shu Shi = a History of Art in Twentieth-Century China* (Beijing Shi: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2006); Hung Wu and David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art., *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, the University of Chicago, 2000).

marked the end of official exhibition of experimental art as the political and cultural environment was tightened after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident.

Influenced by the passion for art shared by earlier art groups of the 85 Art New Wave, the *Nanfang yishujia shalong* (Southern Art Salon) was founded on May 14, 1986 in a conference held in the Guangzhou Youth's Palace. Representatives from the China Artist Association, the principle national institution for art attended the conference. Southern Art Salon called for a broader definition and practice of art, which envisioned art as a collaboration between disciplines such as fine art, architecture, philosophy, literature, music, dance and film. Southern Art Salon held various conference, symposiums and discussions on the relationship between art, culture, religion and philosophy. Similarly to other 85 art group activities, these events were held in universities and public parks.[58] In September 1986, the First Experimental Exhibition of the Salon, primarily conceived by Wang Du, was a practice of the cross-disciplinary conception of art. The exhibition was a performance that tried to combine fine art and dance. Since the Southern Art Salon was not a part of the official state-run art institutions, the participants self-supported their conferences and the First Experimental Exhibition. Unfortunately, shortly after the one-year anniversary of the founding of Southern Art Salon, no more activities were organized due to the lack of further funding and institutional supports. The Southern Art Salon is a generic part of the 85 Art New Wave in two ways. First, the Southern Art Salon attempted to initiate an intellectual

---

[58] For example, the events were held in the Liuhua Park and the Wenhua Park. See Gao, *'85 Mei Shu Yun Dong = the '85 Movement*, 572.

movement with artistic statements and goals; and its members publicly addressed metaphysical issues such as the nature of art and its relation to society. Second, the Southern Art Salon also targets a boarder audience. The members organized the events collectively in a large group[59] and tried to recruit as many members as possible and spread their ideas. Due to financial difficulties and lack of institutional support, the Southern Art Salon dissolved even before the Chinese Modern Art Exhibition in Beijing in 1989. Big Tail Elephants group was formed against the backdrop of the post-85 Art Net Wave and post-1989 contexts.

The Big Tail Elephants group was founded in 1991 by Chen Shaoxiong, Lin Yilin and Liang Juhui in the city of Guangzhou. Chen, Lin and Liang were active participants in the Southern Art Salon in Guangzhou, the predecessor of the Big Tail Elephants. Xu Tan entered the group by joining the group's exhibition in 1992. Chen, Lin, Liang and Xu were the four major members of this group. Occasionally, other artists joined the group for exhibitions. The name Big Tail Elephants was inspired by the European situationist avant-garde art group COBRA, which used an animal name that does not link directly to any approach to or understanding of art.[60] The group deliberately avoided any statement on collective goals, which was usually shared by art groups from the 85 Art New Wave, such as the Southern Art Salon.

---

[59] Zhuan Huang, "Zuowei Lixiangshi Yundong De Bawu Xinchao Meishu = 85 New Wave Art as Movement in the History of Consciousness," *Wenyi yanjiu = Literary Studies* 12, no. 6 (2008): 106.

[60] In the very initial stage, the group was named Big Rhino Elephant, which combined two animals to intentionally create confusion. However, in Chinese characters, *xi* (Rhino) is similar with *wei* (Tail) and the name was misspoken once and later on it was changed to Big Tail Elephants. This information comes from an interview with group member Lin Yilin I conducted on Jan 29, 2009. More about the COBRA, see Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra : The Last Avant-Garde Movement of the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot ; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2004).

The Big Tail Elephants employ distinctive locational aesthetics to term with the drastic changes in urbanization and neoliberalization in the Special Zones. First of all, a substantial number of their works deploy ready-made materials usually found in construction sites. Thematically, these pieces tackle on the endless construction and demolition in the urbanization reality. Second, these works also engage with the quotidian urban space with concrete and expressive details. Third, their art performances and exhibitions took place on the streets and in real construction sites.

For example, Lin's early works, mostly site-specific installations utilize basic construction materials such as bricks, concrete, and steel to reconstruct the process of building residential apartments. In *Standard Series of Ideal Residence* (1991, installation; bricks, steel), artist Lin Yilin uses brick as a basic and fundamental element for his works. Specifically, he used iron bars and holding bricks to form a half full, half empty brick wall. He rebuilds a construction site on progress, which are common realities throughout the fast-growing cities. Displaying a half-built house walls *House Hold Goods 1& 2: Equipment for living* also featured widely used construction materials—bricks, waste pipes, toilet plunger, and iron wire as reinforcement mat. In the first one of this series, two waste pipes were hung through the iron wire. In its second part, the iron wires were standing on the foundation of bricks, placed with a line of toilet plungers. And several bricks are hung in the empty holes in the reinforcement mat. Lin's 1993 installation *Room No.3* also re-created construction sites by spreading the iron bars, black bricks and axes. Here, using ready-made construction material, Lin exposes the

process of building the actual building and the standardized conception of designing and materializing space into a habitable place.

While Lin's early installations decode the construction process and call attention to the meaning behind the endless construction in China's urbanization process, Lin's early performances demand active participation from the audience to contemplate the emerging consumerism and its material embodiments. Lin's performance, *100 pieces and 1000 pieces* (1993, performance, 50 min) took place outside the Red Ant Bar, a new type of social space re-appeared in the post-socialist period. In Chinese, *kuai*, which literally means piece, is a homophone of the Chinese currency (RMB) unit. Here, 100 *kuai* refers to 100 pieces of bricks and 100 yuan of RMB at the same time. During this performance, Lin climbed up a ladder and used the bricks hitting the bank notes and then threw them to the audience that were surrounding the ladder. Deliberately linking the capital, in the form of bank notes, and the material base of the city, in the form of bricks, Lin threw the bank notes with brick residue to the audience around and forced them to make a choice: to pick up or not to pick up the money. Exposed to the relationship between the abstract money and the material city, the audience was facing a choice-making process and their actions of picking up the money would be immediately under scrutiny of other audience members. By juxtaposing money's symbolic value with the materiality of the brick, Lin explores the relationship between the two by asserting his own body in the middle of action and by soliciting the reactions from the audience. This exploration on capitalist symbol and materiality through the interactions between the artist's body and audience was carried one step further in his later performance

installation *The Result of 1000 pieces* (1994, Installation, bricks, money). In this performance installation held in a commercial building, Lin became a part of the wall that made of 1000 pieces of grey bricks (figure 15).

FIGURE 15. The Result of 1000 pieces (1994, Installation, bricks, money)

When building the wall, he also inserted a hundred bank notes of 10 RMB, which made up 1000 RMB. Dressing in a typical worker's outfit (*gongzuofu*), Lin was standing in a fixed gesture as a part of the brick wall while the audience around tried to take away the bank notes without destructing the wall, which may hurt the artist's body. The outfit includes a pair of green pants and a grey shirt, which are typical factory worker's outfit from the 1950s to the 1980s. These colors are still associated with

working-class-ness in contemporary China. These colors are popular, if not dominant during the socialist period to confirm solidarity of the people and the awareness of class. A considerable majority of Chinese captured in *China,* Michelangelo Antonioni's renowned 1972 documentary about the Cultural Revolution, wear clothes in this blue and green.

Here, the audience confronted an ethical choice since fetching the bank notes from the gaps of the bricks may lead to the collapse of the wall, which may injure the artist. This performance/installation suggests that the city is literarily built upon the physical labor and the body of the construction workers, most of them migrant-workers who don't have permanent residencies in the city.

The brick material used by Lin varied according to the actual exhibition space and environment. In the early stage, the bricks Lin used were ordinary bricks that can easily be found in construction sites for temporary housing, or for buildings of lower technical difficulty. In *Safely Maneuvering across Lin He Road* (1995), Lin used large concrete bricks that responded to the surrounding, an 80-story high-rise that was under construction (figure 16).

FIGURE 16. *Safely Maneuvering across Lin He Road (1995, performance, bricks)*

Lin carried the bricks one by one across the street, disrupting the traffic of cars and pedestrians right next to the construction site for about 90 minutes. As shown in the picture, the brick wall that Lin built is in aligned vertically with the half-finished concrete structure of the skyscraper from the perspective of a lower camera angel. However, the brick wall that Lin built was ephemeral and the labor he committed has no economic outcome. The ultimately empty economic value of Lin's performance was in sharp contrast with the enormous presence of the actual building, which would eventually turn into the building illustrated on the billboard at the upper right of the picture. Thus, through the repetition of everyday labor associated with construction work, Lin reversed the productivity-oriented nature of construction as a critique of the obsession of growth.

In their early works, though the Big Tail Elephants didn't share a collective manifesto, other group members also endorsed the format of installation. They employed other ready-made materials such as color-tube, fluorescent lights, glass and reflective materials that were also commonly used in actual constructions.

While the earlier works of the Big Tail Elephants questioned the standardization of the residential areas or the construction of space and meaning in a given place, their exhibitions were more or less contained in private or semi-public indoor locations. In the second half of the 1990s, the Big Tail Elephants extended their practices, moved onto streets and major construction sites and situated their works within a boarder picture of the changing cityscape and growing skyscrapers.

A skyscraper is usually understood as a symbol of a city's wealth and prosperity and an indicator of the intensity and centrality of urbanization. The rising global cities, especially from the Asian regions, have long been caught in the competition of building the highest building. With no exception, Guangzhou, an expanding city under Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door" policy is also caught in such a contest. By year 2010, most of the world's top 20 high-rise buildings are all built in 1990s and 2000s in Asia, except the Willis Tower in Chicago (built in 1974) and the Empire State Building in New York City (built in 1931). Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, three major cities from the Pearl River Delta region made in the list in 1990s, and later, Shanghai, Taipei and Dubai caught up in 2000s. Closely resembling the direction of the capital flows, the skyscrapers manifests and symbolizes the ambition and self-positioning of the global cities.

Built in 1997, CITIC plaza building, an 80-story high rise in the Tianhe District, Guangzhou, is one of these symbols. In mid-1990s, works from Lin, Chen and Liang all played with the space or image of the skyscraper. Most of these works utilized images of or referred to the CITIC plaza building. In 1995, CITIC plaza building, located on Lin He road, was still in the process of construction in the newly planned city center of Guangzhou.

FIGURE 17. Liang Juhui's *One Hour Game* (Installation, video game equipment, 1995)

As analyzed earlier, in *Safely Maneuvering across Lin He Road* (1995, performance, 90 mins), Lin moved concrete bricks one by one across Lin He road and interrupted the traffic physically. In the picture documenting the performance (figure 16),

146

we can see the half-built CITIC plaza building with large blackboard illustrating the future look of the building. Liang Juhui's *One Hour Game* (Installation, video game equipment, 1997) was set in a construction site of another high rise in Guangzhou (figure 17), overseeing the then completed CITIC plaza building and other high rises that were recently constructed at that time. Installing the video game in the high latitude cell of a real construction site, Liang invited the workers to play the video games wearing the safety helmets, thus interrupted regular construction flow. Similar to Lin's disruption of traffic, which used the artist's body to execute activity with no economic output, Liang's strategy of mixing work space with game space also put a pause on the construction of new building, which physically embodied the economic growth of China's intensified urbanization.

Consistent practices of installation works or performances in site-specific spaces made their earlier workers uncollectable and the only available documents now are photographs. Nevertheless, similar concerns and issues reoccurred in their later installations that were shown in museum spaces. For example, Liang's later work, *City* (Installation, wood, glass, photographs, 2003) involve monumental building-shape installation with hanging photos, highly reflective glasses and screens. The use of highly reflective glass for Liang is inspired by the popular use of glass for skyscraper surfaces during 1990s.[61]

---

[61] In the same vein, in Chen Shaoxiong's *Landscape 2* (video installation, 1996), skyscrapers are not intimidating objects but a background from which imaginative conflicts occur. Similar anxiety and counter-tactics towards skyscrapers developed into the *Anti-terrorism Variety* (video installation, 2002) series, in which skyscrapers can bend or split to avoid terrorist attacks.

Emerging at the convergence of independent cinema and experimental art in the late 1990s, contemporary digital media practices in the "special zones" provide interesting cases to inspect the "spaces of exceptions" and the "neoliberal spatialities" involved. Besides the works of the Big Tail Elephants, a number of digital video, photography and multi-media works negotiate with the ways in which neo-liberalism normalizes new spatial arrangements of the Special Economic Zones and reinforces the urban-rural divide. Most of the documentaries from the "special zones" elucidate the human condition and social problems in the rapid urbanization and neoliberalization process. Some tackle the uneven development of urbanization; some focus on the migrate-workers' working and living condition in manufacturing while a handful others express the anxiety and alienation of living in the drastically changing cityscape of the "special zones."[62] For example, digital documentary *Houjie Township* documents the informal and temporary housing area of the migrant-workers from the perspective of the migrant-worker community in the town of *houjie*, a manufacturing center of electronic products. Cao Fei's multi-media project "Whose Utopia" examines the micro everyday living and working environments inside a SIEMENS-owned light bulb manufacturer. Turning the fordist factory space into the stage for singing and dancing performances, Cao's project elucidates the micro-spatial technique of the modern factory.[63] Jiang Zhi's digital photography depicts lost young women wandering in the dream-like, if not surreal

---

[62] These videos works include *Houjie Township* (Zhouhao, 2002) and *Taishi Cun* (Ai Xiaoming, 2005).

[63] Unlike most other productions of self-financed digital media practices, this project is funded by the SIEMENS Corporation as a part of the service programming.

cityscape of the Shenzhen SEZ.

Among the digital media practitioners in the "special zones", "u-*thèque* organization" has been one of the prominent organizations that have promoted socially-engaged video-making and practiced with experimental aesthetics. The productions of this organization also walk between the grass-root documentary movement and the globalized contemporary Chinese art scene. Specifically, this chapter will focus on a collaborative project made by the u-*thèque* organization called *Sanyuanli*. Sanyuanli is a local village famous for its historical struggle against the British during the mid-19th century. Now the village has become a "village-amidst-the-city," a symbolic and material phenomenon that captures the inequality and unevenness of the intensified process of urbanization and neoliberalization.

Sanyuanli project, produced by the u-*thèque* organization, was screened internationally as a part of the "Canton Express" group first in the Venice Biennial in 2003 and later in Guangzhou Triennial in 2005. Notably, members of Big Tail Elephants also were featured in the same group. After its premier in the Venice Biennial, *Sanyuanli* was screened in semi-public spaces such as local bookstores in Guangzhou and the Box Cafe in Beijing as. It also traveled to Geneva, Paris, Macau, Shanghai, New York, Brussels and Seoul in a museum context.[64] Situating the u-*thèque* organization and its work *Sanyuanli* in the larger context of the DV movement and experimental art in China,

---

[64] To name a few of them: Past in Reverse: Contemporary Art of East Asia (San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, November 2004); China Now screening program in Gramercy Theatre, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 2004; Public Space and Personal Eye - New Vision of China (Kampnagel, Hamburg, October, 2003); 10th Biennial of the Moving Image (Centre pour I'image Contemporaine, Geneva, November 2003).

I will examine the thematic characteristic, aesthetic quality as well as institutional history of the digital video practices in the "special zones."

THE U-*THÈQUE* ORGANIZATION: GATHERINGS OF CINEASTES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The "locational aesthetics" roots in the active creation of locally-engaged artistic space. Established in 1999, u-*thèque* is a non-profit film-related organization devoted to a wide range of activities involving the production, distribution and exhibition of independent film and videos and relating publishing.[65] Based in two major cities in the Pearl River Delta, the provincial capital Guangzhou and the most successful SEZ, Shenzhen, u-*thèque* started as a film club organization that engaged in art film screening programs and publishing. By 2003, it had organized more than 200 film screenings in the two cities. Its film programs engaged works by Euro-American auteurs such as Luis Bunuel, Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Pedro Almodovar and Woody Allen;[66] as well as those directed by established art cinema auteurs from Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan.[67] More importantly, u-*thèque* organized screenings of underground or banned Chinese films and grass-root documentaries. Besides a brochure-like periodical titled *u-fax* that provided detailed film synopses and reviews accompanying the screening programs, u-*thèque* also published several formal special issues engaging in in-depth film analysis,

---

[65] u-theque, http://www.u-theque.org.cn/.

[66] The list also includes directors such as J.J. Bigas Luna.

[67] The long list includes Japanese directors such as Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizuguchi, Kazuyoshi Kumakiri, Nagisa Oshima, Masaki Kobayashi, Iwai Shinji, Shinya Tsukamoto; Korean director Hur Jin-ho; and Taiwanese directors Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang.

including one issue on Japanese Cinema, and several others on the Fifth Generation directors Tian Zhuangzhuang and Ning Ying and the Sixth Generation director Jia Zhangke.

U-*thèque* is hardly the only alternative art space in Guangdong. Small organizations outside of official art venues in Guangzhou started to appear in the form of bookstores, publishing house, galleries and film clubs. Providing exhibition space for emerging local artists, Libreria Borges, a bookstore and a small publishing house, is one of these venues. As a publishing house, Libreria Borges is famous for publishing Chinese versions of the nouveau roman books. As an exhibition space, it held a number of solo photography exhibitions and also screened local documentary and experimental videos works. As an active player in the art scene, the bookstore itself participated in the Gwangju Biennial in 2002 and Venice Biennial in 2003 as a part of the "Canton Express" group. Similarly, Vitamin Creative Spaces is another local art organization actively promotes mainly local artists from Guangdong founded in 2002. Rather than establishing a solely commercial relationship with the artists, this organization emphasizes on the input of the artists in the curating process.[68] As an independent art space, the space participated in the Venice Biennial in 2003 and later became a participant in Art Basel 2009. Vitamin Creative Spaces featured solo exhibitions by the Big Tail Elephant members, including Chen Shaoxiong's *Anti-C.S.X* in 2003, Xu Tan's *Xu Tan-Loose* in 2005, and Zheng Guogu's *My Home is Your Museum* in 2005.

Yet u-*thèque* is most outspoken in its commitment to cinema. Rather than

---

[68] The Vitamin Creative Spaces was co-founded by Hu Fang, Zhang Wei and Zheng Guogu in 2002.

focusing on a small niche of members, u-*thèque* tried to reach a boarder public. Collaborating with *Southern Metropolis Daily*, one of the best-selling daily newspapers in southern China,[69] u-*thèque* participated in the creation of the Southern Movie Forum, a media platform for art film programming. South Movie Forum eventually involved into the Chinese Film Media Awards, the only award in mainland China that choose films from mainland, Hong Kong as well as Taiwan.[70] In the 1990s, movie-going population declined in China while the TV industry expands enormously, together with the spread of telecommunication devices and the Internet. As media scholar Anne Friedberg describes, we are now living in a world in which big and small screens such as cinema screen, personal computer screen, mobile screen, TV screen and others, are all in competition for users' attentions.[71] Though Friedberg's observation is mostly based upon a Euro-American context, China, who now has the largest population of Internet users in the world and a booming telecommunication industry,[72] is certainly relevant to the discussion of multi-media and multi-screen environment. Moreover, the rarity of art film and documentary on big screens in China is in high contrast with the wide accessibility of these works via bootleg VCD, DVD, and online file-sharing, which are usually viewed in private spaces. Screening domestic and foreign art films, videos and

---

[69] Established in 1997, *Southern Metropolis Daily* is a daily newspaper based in the Pearl River Delta. The daily sales volume in August 2003, the approximate time of the *Sanyuanli* project, was over 1.4 million copies, the best-selling one in Guangdong province.

[70] This is in contrast with other national cinema awards such as the Golden Rooster in mainland and the Golden Horse Award in Taiwan.

[71]See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping : Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[72] By the end of year 2009, China has a population of 384 million Internet users.

documentaries is significant here as these movies are hardly screened in commercial theaters. China has a highly limited quota for theatrically released foreign films every year and art films are hardly the subject of exhibition.[73] Though multiplex theaters are common in major cities, their sources of movies are highly limited.

U-*thèque*'s activities responded to these shifting modes of cinematic spectatorship. One of the posters that call for more u-*thèque* members depicts a hand reaching for the switch for a light bulb and it states "celebrate being in the dark" (figure 18).

---

[73] Now the quota is 20 films every year, mostly Hollywood blockbusters such as *Titanic*, *Avatar* and the Harry Potter Series, etc.

FIGURE 18. u-*thèque* call for members poster (2001)

Under the eye-shape u-*thèque* logo, a line in smaller font says "let's enjoy the movies together." Such an advocacy, if not nostalgia, of cinematic spectatorship registers the power of the big screen and the traditional charm of the cinematic apparatus on fixed and immobile spectators in the dark. More importantly, in the context of contemporary China, it expresses the significance of communal and interpersonal aspects of movie-going as a social and collective ritual. After all, when TV screens grow bigger and bigger, home theater equipments provide 5.1 surround sound and project wall-size images, the theater experience of immersing oneself in the movie as an

immobile spectator in the dark can now be replicated in a domestic setting. What remains particular about movie-going is the actual spontaneous and interpersonal interactions within a group or loosely-defined community of movie-goers. The Chinese name of u-*thèque*, *yuanyinghui*, literarily means meeting through movies. Thus, u-*thèque* provides cineastes in Guangzhou and Shenzhen opportunities to communicate with filmmakers based in Beijing or Hong Kong. More importantly, it facilitates the sharing of life among the cineastes themselves.

U-*thèque* is hardly the only film club that organizes and screens foreign and domestic art films. Similar film clubs have flourished in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, Chengdu, and other major cities since the mid-1990s. In his sociological study of film clubs in Beijing, Seio Nakajima observes two types of screenings of the film clubs in Beijing, one is the art cinema classics and the other is independent fictional and non-fictional Chinese films. [74] The general film programming of u-*thèque* coincides with Nakajima's observation.

However, u-*thèque* significantly departs from other urban film clubs in many ways. First, it encourages a multi-lingual and multi-media venue. Its location in the "special zones" and its geographical proximity to Hong Kong facilitate the members to obtain VCDs, DVDs and prints that are not available in China, especially before the wide-spread of bootleg DVDs of art films in 2001. Since Cantonese is the local language in the Pearl River Delta, screenings of Hong Kong films and symposia with Hong Kong

---

[74] Seio Nakajima, "Film Clubs in Beijing," in *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, ed. Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

filmmakers were held with less linguistic barrier. The fast transportation between Guangzhou and Shenzhen within the Pearl River Delta city-region makes it possible for u-*thèque* to organize events in both cities, utilizing both commercial and official spaces.[75] Besides fictional art films, u-*thèque* also invests in showcasing documentary and experimental works in the form of short film or experimental video installation.

Second, u-*thèque* engages in mobilizing its members and turning the spectators/cineastes from consumers into practitioners in image-making and self-expression. U-*thèque* endorses professionalism in the use of digital technology, which is different from but also related to the "amateur filmmaking" that proposed by Jia Zhangke, a renowned sixth-generation filmmaker famous for his use of documentary realism. Jia's take on amateur filmmaking is clearly summarized by Yiman Wang,

> One important champion of amateur film is Jia Zhangke, commonly recognized as the Godfather of the Chinese DV documentary, who declared in 1999 that the "amateur DV age is just around the corner," for which he offered unreserved support. In response to the ensuing misappropriation of this statement, Jia later clarified his stance by arguing that the "amateur" refers to new blood and an experimental spirit, which is opposed to staid filming conventions, especially the extant film system in China, and that "amateur" does not imply lowered standards, nor is amateur filmmaking a single-person business. The reason is that filmmaking inherently relies upon teamwork, and not individualistic heroism. Indulgence in personal authority and low-quality DV images are, therefore, antithetical to what Jia sees as the amateur spirit.[76]

U-*thèque* productions could be seen as "amateur" by Jia, whose later conception

---

[75] Notable, u-thèque has an expanded film screening venues besides commercial venues such as bars, restaurants, or commercial exhibition space. It organized screenings in Hexiangning Museum in Shenzhen, a national-level museum.

[76] Yiman Wang, "The Amateur's Lightning Rod: Dv Documentary in Postsocialist China," *Film Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2005). Please refer to the article for more discussion on the cultural politics of documentary filmmakers as amateur-authors.

of "amateur" does not imply lowered standards, but "new blood and an experimental spirit." However, U-*thèque* endorses professionalism instead of the rhetoric of the amateur and it fosters an environment for members to grow into professional filmmakers or media artists. Ou Ning, one of the major founders of U-*thèque*, touched upon the issue of professionalism in the epilogue of u-*thèque* produced *Cineaste Magazine.* He asserted that independent filmmaking does not conform to "images with bad quality" but to "a mode of production against commercial or mainstream restriction." [77] Though it is not unusual for filmmakers to be a member in a film club in Beijing or elsewhere, the film club itself rarely takes up the organizing role for film production. By contrast, many early u-*thèque* members continue to make movies or media art works till this date.[78] Moreover, independent films are usually stamped with individual authorship yet u-*thèque* made collaborative projects such as *Sanyuanli*, which I will analyze in detail later.

Third, u-*thèque* consciously devotes itself to polished publications in order to communicate with a broader audience. Compared to Nakajima's case studies of film clubs in Beijing, u-*thèque* promotes a high-quality publishing agenda, not to mention the collaboration u-*thèque* made with major newspaper *Southern Metropolis Daily*. These distinctive practices mentioned above can easily be traced in the publications of u-*thèque*. To give an example, one of the early short-lived u-*thèque* periodicals, the *Cineaste Magazine*, featured Dogma 95 and their leading practitioners, Lars Von Trier and other Denmark directors. It also presented an interview with director Ann Hui, an

---

[77] Ou Ning, "In the Name of the Independent" in *Cineaste Magazine*, vol2, 64.

[78] For example, Cao Fei is now one of the most known media artists from China. Other members such as Huang Weikai made documentary *Disorder* (2010).

important figure in Hong Kong New Wave. Besides reviews on films by Wang Xiaoshuai and other Beijing-based filmmakers, this magazine also introduced video works created by local filmmakers Jiang Zhi and Cao Fei. Both of the two local filmmakers were u-*thèque* members who started to make video and multimedia works on their own.[79]

"BREATHING CAMERA" AS A WEAPON: CONTEMPORARY RE-IMAGINATION OF VERTOV IN *SANYUANLI* PROJECT

The publication and publicity materials created by u-*thèque* members, best exemplified by the image of the "breathing camera," also expressed their self-positioning as a practitioner in digital and multi-media practices. The image of the breathing camera (figure 19) comes from a promotion poster for a screening of a u-*thèque* member, Cao Fei's works. The combination of camera and heart, machine and organ in a gun-shape corresponds with other famous analogies of camera in cinematic history, particularly Vertov's theory of the "kino-eye" and Alexandre Astruc's notion of the caméra-stylo or camera-pen.

---

[79] Jiang Zhi's *Forefinger* and Cao Fei's first video work *Imbalanced 257* (1999).
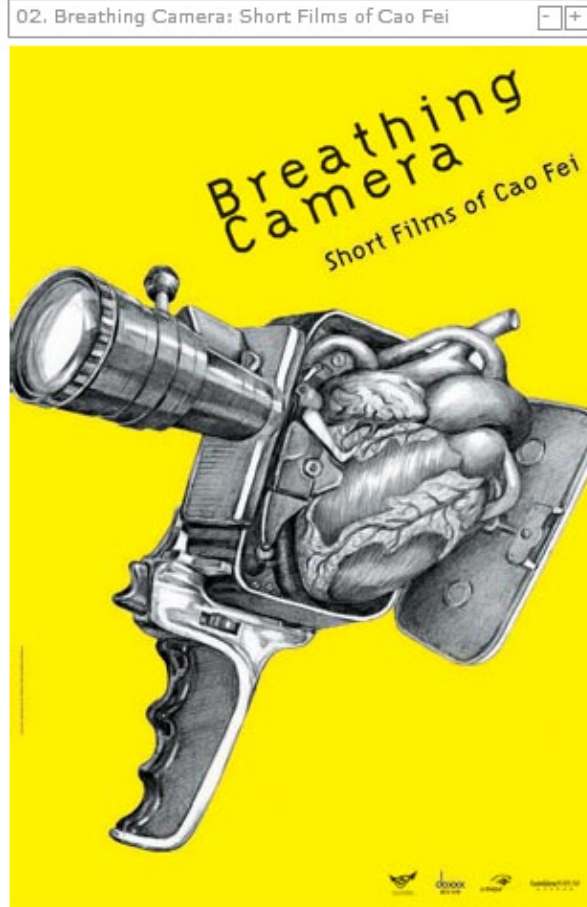
FIGURE 19. Breathing Camera poster for screening activity organized by u-*thèque* (2003)

As Vertov theorized, camera, the instrument that takes the shot is the kino-eye, a mechanical eye, which is more perfect than the human eye. The task of the kino-eye is not to record physical reality by imitating it, but to get away from the material world by using apparent abnormalities of the camera.[80] Alexandre Astruc's notion of the caméra-stylo or camera-pen, by contrast, envisions camera as a device of self-expression for the

---

[80] About Vertov's theory of the Kino-eye, see Dziga Vertov and Annette Michelson, *Kino-Eye : The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1984).

cinema auteur, just as a pen is for a writer.[81]

In contrast with Vertov's superimposition of human eye and camera lens, the breathing camera here is combined with another human organ, the heart, which suggests that the conscience of the filmmaker is the inner-mechanism of the camera. Instead of seeing camera as a pen, this gun-shape image proposes that filmmaking is an act, a practice that could penetrate reality with explosive impact. Camera is no longer merely a device for recording reality, nor is it only to achieve "abnormalities of the cinema camera," it is now a mechanical gun, or in this context, a digital gun that uses human conscience as bullets to intervene reality. The gun-shape breathing camera also implies possible media guerrilla activities with a digital revolution imagination. Such a vision of camera-gun with conscience or consciousness epitomizes the "locational aesthetics," or more specifically, the artistic subjectivity that locates the artist's position in the social realm, as well as on the screen.

THE *SANYUANLI* PROJECT: ORCHESTRATING THE SELF-REFLEXIVE CITY-ELECTRONICA

The conception of the breathing camera-gun as a way to intervene reality is practiced in the *Sanyuanli* project, the first collective endeavor carried out by more than ten u-*thèque* members. Besides the socially-engaged attitude, the use of self-reflexive techniques registers its employment of locational aesthetics. *Sanyuanli* involves a photo book, a website, and most importantly, a 40-minutes black-and-white video shot on digital

---

[81] See Alexandre Astruc, *Du Stylo À La Caméra--Et De La Caméra Au Stylo : Écrits 1942-1984* (Paris: L'Archipel, 1992).

camcorders and digital cameras.[82] As noted in the self-introduction in the accompanying photo book publication, the filmmakers try to record the atmosphere of the city of Guangzhou in a Dziga Vertov way.[83] Exposing the uneven developments during the urbanization process, this video uses the camera as the kino-eye to record people's daily lives in the city of Guangzhou, paying homage to Dziga Vertov's theory of the kino-eye.[84] It consists of black-and-white quick cuts of clips and digital photographs of the cityscape. The deliberate use of black and white instead of color is a way to pay homage to the "city symphony" tradition, but also a way to minimize the color difference shot on separate digital camcorder and cameras.[85] With no central characters, events or stories, *Sanyuanli* is a city-symphony in the beginning of the new millennium, accompanied with fast-beat electronic music. It departs from typical observatory independent documentary style and experiments with the moving-image form, particularly the narrative structure, editing, and sound-image relationship.

The formally conscious, self-reflexive *Sanyuanli* project exemplifies a new stream of the *New Documentary Movement*, which in its early stage favored Frederic Wiseman or Ogawa Shinsuke's "direct cinema" style. *Sanyuanli* provides a different view on cinema's relationship to reality, seeing cinema or documentary as a visual form

---

[82] Digital video cameras used in the video include Canon XM1, Sony PD150p, Panasonic NV-GS3, Sony DSC F707 and Casio Exilim EX-M1.

[83] U-thequeOrganization, *The San Yuan Li Project* (2003), 43.

[84] *Man with a Movie Camera,* together with *Triumph of the Will,* was shown by the u-thèque as part of the "documentary classics" screening series in May 2001. The image of the gun-shape camera also responses to the quote in the *Sanyuanli* book.

[85] Xiaolu Wang, "Interview with Ou Ning ", http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a2f8ae30100acxz.html

that is not secondary to reality. It also emblematizes the intersection of experimental art scene and the *New Documentary Movement* in contemporary China, which is also manifested through the programming strategy u-*thèque* employs. Such intersection also speaks to the re-convergence of experimental films and documentaries in the digital age after its heyday in the 1920s and 30s.

The credit sequence reveals the nature of the project behind the cameras: it presents visions through the eyes and cameras of a group of videographers. Spending half a year filming and recording in the city like camera-equipped urban flâneurs and flâneuses, the u-*thèque* members took actions together as a group of digital video-making practitioners. Connected through u-*thèque*, these crew members mostly worked as journalist, videographer, and editor in local press, TV stations, or advertisement industry. They devoted their free time to this project voluntarily. Facilitated by recent development of digital technology, *Sanyuanli* demonstrates the collaboration among a high-media-literacy group in the "special zones."

The ending sequence fully locates the filmmakers in a self-reflective manner. Near the end of the video, different social groups living or working in the village pose for the camera as if they are taking portrait pictures. These social groups include the traditional lion dance group, Cantonese opera group, restaurant staffs, public servants, the video production group itself, etc. All people look directly into the camera, fully acknowledging the existence of the camera. Notably, the filmmakers are presented as one of many social groups inhabiting the same space. The reflexivity of the camera is also evident in the sequence that captures the buttocks of young women on the street.

The camera deliberately centers on the buttocks so repetitively that it makes the audience conscious about the camera's projection of a male gaze on the female body. Moreover, shots of videographers photographing the villages from various angles present the filming act itself part of the everyday reality and reveal the interactive nature between filmmaking and the sites. The self-reflexive techniques exemplify the "locational aesthetics," which expose the camera gaze and thus locate the media practitioner in social space.

"Debts of History": Negotiating with the Past and the Neoliberal Present

While *Sanyuanli* invests on the formal aesthetics of seeing and unfolding the urban architecture, space, and place in a moving pace, it also examines what Henri Lefebvre called the "lived space"[86] with a historical consciousness. Different from Vertov's vision of the filmmaker as an observer, producer as well as participator in the socialist new life, *Sanyuanli* creators are clearly conscious of the present-day urbanization condition in neoliberal context.

Besides the prominent position Vertov holds in world cinematic history and his enthusiasm in exploring the potential of the cinematic apparatus, there are other connections that inspire Ou Ning, the u-*thèque* co-founder to appropriate *Man With a Movie Camera* instead of other early city symphonies in the late silent era such as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and *Manhatta* (Charles Sheeler and

---

[86] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991).

Paul Strand, 1921).[87] The particular neoliberal spatialities in contemporary China, in Ou Ning's mind, affiliates with Moscow, the first socialist metropolis.[88] Because of its praise of socialism, when Vertov's film was screened in Britain, it was held in underground film clubs. The unofficial screening situation for *Man*, again, reverberate the exhibition venues of *Sanyuanli* in contemporary China despite their obvious historical and social divergences.[89]

FIGURE 20. u-*thèque* screening poster of *Man with a Movie Camera*

---

[87] Other city-symphonies in the late silent era may include *Etudes sur Paris* (Andre Sauvage, 1928) and *Regen* (Mannus Franken and Joris Ivens, 1929)

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

Ou's awareness of the shared socialist heritage also resonates with the poster for the screening of *Man* organized by u-*thèque*. In this particular interpretation of the movie (figure 20), the man with the movie camera in a grand scale is standing out of and above the mass on the street, holding the movie camera toward the city in the background. This image is directly a re-creation from a famous shot in *Man* in which the image of the man with a movie camera is superimposed with the crowded street and the wire poles (figure 21). Using the visual vocabulary of the woodcut print, this graphic recreation of a still in Vertov's movie appropriates the style of the woodcut prints that originated in the woodcut movement 1930s in China and popularized in socialist China, which is a crucial part of the massively-consumed "socialist visual experience."[90]

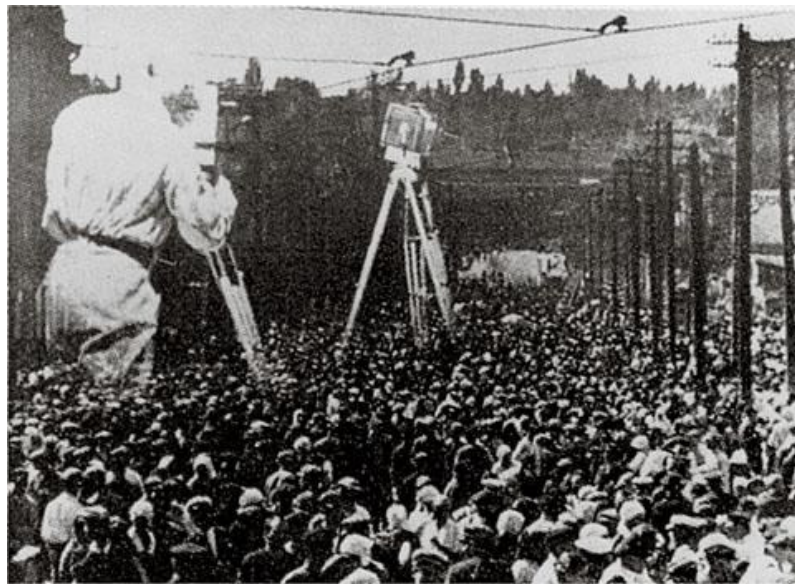**FIGURE 21.** Still from Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)

---

[90] More about the modern woodcut movement, see Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 6.

Sanyuanli starts with a title card describing the historical significance of the village in fighting against the British during the Opium War in the 1840s. Accompanying with a piece of Cantonese Opera chanting the brave and bold resistance of the villagers against the British, the video fades to black and then cuts to an overhead shot of a model of Guangzhou cityscape in late imperial period. The camera hovers above the walls and houses in the imperial city and clearly shows the boundary of the imperial city has. Panning above the five-story pagoda, or the *zhenhai lou*, a historic tower built in the 1380s and an iconic site of Guangzhou,[91] the camera tracks a narrow road outside of the city wall and moves on to a cluster of houses isolated from the city center: the *Sanyuanli* village.

The opening sequence, albeit relatively short, establishes the historical consciousness of evacuating a neglected history of the past. Simply through small-size model of the imperial city, the video travels back to the time when Guangdong was already a trading center for exporting tea, silk and artifacts in the 18th century. The first Opium War in the 1840s, the historical moment that the video singles out as a reference point is perceived as the beginning of China's modernization process. Such historical consciousness is manifested in Ou Ning's article "Debts of History," an explanation of *Sanyuanli*. Ou suggests that *Sanyuanli* tries to rethink the "confrontation and reconciliation between the process of modernization and the patriarchal clan system as well as rural community system in Canton,"[92] which intrinsically links to the urban-rural

---

[91] It is now the location of Guangzhou Municipal Museum.

[92] On the organization's website: http://www.u-theque.org.cn/en/production/index.html

dichotomy and the neoliberal spatialities.

Focusing on the village-in-the-city space as the subject of the video, *Sanyuanli* demonstrates the locational aesthetics, particularly the thematic interest in examining neoliberal spatialities. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the neoliberal spatialities reinforce the pre-existing urban-rural divide and naturalize the biopolitical management of the peasant-workers and contribute to a new developmental narrative of the state that endorses linear and progressive temporality. Besides the early city-symphonies, the city-country dichotomy is played in various cinematic texts. [93] For example, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Sunrise: a Song of Two Humans* (1927) construct the country as the innocent and the urban as the abundant and the decadent through the bodies of a country woman and a city woman. *Sanyuanli*, however, focuses on the village-in-the-city phenomenon and speaks to the urban-rural dichotomy that inherently connected to the socialist history in China's pursue of modernization and the neoliberal present via the use of "locational aesthetics."

Though the video deploys fast camera movement and quick-editing, it actually operates through a clear editing logic. The major body of the film is divided into two parts: the first part consists of sky-scrapers, modernist architectures and newly developed spaces in the city of Guangzhou. It captures the new life in the cosmopolitan city in the neoliberalization process. The first part begins with sequences filmed along

---

[93] For more about the representations of the city in the cinematic context, see Clarke, *The Cinematic City*.

the Pearl River and gradually moves on to the inner city life. Capturing the emerging urbanism and its multi-faceted reality, the first part shows glimpses of suburban housing, gated real estate, and the urban ruins. The second part turns to the village-in-the-city—*Sanyuanli*. When this video was made, *Sanyuanli* village was a notorious neighborhood for drug and human trafficking. The second part examines the spatial particularities of the "village-in-the-city," from the "threads of light" leaking from the narrow gaps of the high-density building, to the rooftop gardens where local residents continue to farm when their farm land no longer exists.

On the surface, the narrow alleys in the high-density dwellings captured in this video may not be that different from other urban slums in Mexico City or Bombay, where the urban poor share living spaces with migrants who seek jobs in the city. The phenomenon of village-in-the-city, however, is particular in China as it reveals the urban-rural divide and the process of urbanization in which the land from the peasants transforms into urban land. It is a new spatiality defined by the urban-rural divide and produced in the neoliberalization process. In such particular sites scattered in various major cities all over China, the villagers themselves newly acquire "urbanite citizenship" by voluntarily or involuntarily selling their lands to the government. These villages house the local peasant-turned-urbanites who newly acquired "urban residency" as well as the migrant workers who don't have the "urban residency." Village-in-the-city involves hierarchical and dynamic system of (im) mobilization from "rural residency" to "urban residency" for people who live in these villages in the outskirt of the cities. These villages-in-the-city not only single out the hierarchy *within* the city itself but also the

conjunction of the migrant-workers, urban poor, peasant-turned-urbanites *within* the same village space. The village-in-the-city could serve as a conceptual category to rethink the unevenness uneven nature of neoliberal spatialities in China as a whole.

The conjunction and synchronicity of the unevenness is visually investigated through the juxtapositions of contradictory sets of spatial arrangements and physical objects such as the co-existence of airplanes and farms, and the rooftop verandas *inside* the villages. Such contradictory set of meanings can also be found in the ghost city sequence in the first part, where a large area of buildings is deserted. *Sanyuanli* also delivers social commentaries in a visual language of montage. For example, in the second part of the film, after a group of elementary students worship the tombs of anti-colonial soldiers as a part of the mandatory patriot education curriculum, the camera immediately cuts to ancestor and religious worshipping in ancestral temples and joss houses, including a shot in which a student worships the Buddhist god at home with his grandma. The montage connects the similarities of these two kinds of worshipping by the same group of local elementary students. Similar "Kuleshov effects" can be found in the montage of the image of a bird cage and the shot of the narrow alleys, which suggests the imprisonment of human in such a high-density residential area. Using innovative editing, sound design and camera composition, the *Sanyuanli* video brilliantly reveals that China's modernization project is intrinsically captured in such contradictory conjunction of past and present, rural and urban, development and decadence.

In short, *Sanyuanli* reveals the complicated rural-urban relationship on several

levels: first, the national urban-rural divide creates or forces the peasants to migrate to the city for work, which gives opportunities for local Guangdong peasants to build temporary houses and rent them out. Second, not unlike the temporary and disposable labor provided by the peasant-workers, the village-in-the-city is itself a temporary phenomenon, which enlightens how local rural lands near the city transform into urban lands. Neoliberal spatialities not only create peasant-workers, but also invent peasant-property-owners. While the former were constrained to original permit-holding place, the latter is able to transform into urbanities.

NEOLIBERAL BIOPOLITICS AND THE BODIES AND VOICES OF THE MIGRANT-WORKERS

In the final group pictures sequence, the shots of the videographers and sound recording staff are among other group pictures, as the creators obviously imagine themselves sharing the experience of living in *Sanyuanli* village. However, the sound design of the video privileges the voice of the Cantonese dialect therefore minimizes the linguistic and cultural diversity of the migrant-workers from other provinces.

Sound-image relationship is another aspect of *Sanyuanli*'s formal experimentations. Though the main body of this piece is orchestrated through electronic music, the tone of the video shifts when the soundtrack changes. In the worshipping montage sequences described above, the electronic beats and environmental noise on the soundtrack undermine the social meaning of the religious and patriotic "worshipping" acts. The accelerating electronic beat matches, if not celebrate the over-the-night appearance of high-rises, suburban homes, highways, subways as well as temporary

renting housing for migrant-workers.

Though the video signals out the Cantonese presence in such a neighborhood through the use of traditional Cantonese opera in the opening shot, such sound design privileges the fast-pace of the urban transformation at the expense of the multi-layered linguistic environment in a village-amid-the-city. The absence of the sound of the migrant-workers in *Sanyuanli* is emblematic of a question of representation on a much larger scale, which is the absence of the migrant-workers in media culture.

The representation of migrant-workers is much more evident in the urban cinema in the 1980s. The urban cinema from Guangdong not only examined the lives of the urbanities in the wave of individual entrepreneur-ship, but also created mainstream representation of the migrant-workers collective in the 1980s and early 1990s. It is a stream of an urban cinema portraying the lives of peasant-workers in the early phase of the reform in the 1980s. By contrast, the Sixth Generation cinematic visions of the floating individual and isolated migrant-worker in the following two decades more or less illustrated the artist's or filmmaker's own sense of alienation. The representational technique and ethical ideal of socialist realism, aided with funding from the state-subsidized provincial film studio help establish new subjectivities of the peasant-workers in the early reform era. Movies such as *tequ dagong mei* (Factory Girls in the Special Economic Zone, 1990), produced by the Pearl River Film Studio, clearly outlines the stories of the young factory girls, who leave their rural hometown to seek fortune and future in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. The factory girls are represented as a collective who come from the same home place, speak the same

language and experience the working-in-the-city collectively. They encourage, comfort, and compete with each other. In other words, since the 1990s, the peasant-workers social group has disappeared in media culture at large. In this context, the artistic choice of privileging the regional Cantonese voice and diminishing those from the migrant-workers become more problematic.

In short, *Sanyuanli* exemplifies the experimental media practice in the Special Cultural Zones yet it privileges the Cantonese folk color at the expense of the voices of the migrant-workers. Unlike other digital documentary from the SEZ, such as *Houjie*, which explores more explicitly the everyday experience of migrant-workers and the neoliberal biopolitics, *Sanyuanli* reveals the neoliberal spatiality yet obscures the gendered neoliberal biopolitics through the innovative use of locational aesthetics, sound-image relationship, self-reflexivity and minimal dialogue.

RACE AND CHINA IN GLOBAL MEDIA STUDIES

On July 15, 2009, more than 100 African people surrounded a police station in Guangzhou after a Nigerian expatriate died in an immigration raid. The Nigerian man jumped out of window on a second floor when police ran surprise passport checks. In July, 2012, after a Nigerian died in a local police station, hundreds of Africans protested on the street and disrupted the traffic.[94] One of the protest held a piece of cardboard that says "give us the dead body" in front of a building for textile trading (figure 22).

FIGURE 22. Africans protest after death of expat in Guangzhou, 2012

---

[94] The protesters asked for the return of the body of the Nigerian, who was taken to the police station due to a fare dispute with an electric bicycle driver. Fare disputes are not uncommon between African expats and local people in the service industry.

As seen from the pictures published on the website of *South Metropolis Daily*, a newspaper that played an important role in promoting Cantonese activism, mobile devices such as smartphones and digital cameras were again heavily present in the protest (figure 23).[95]

FIGURE 23. The presence of mobile devices in the African protest in Guangzhou, 2012

Notably, in another picture seeing from the back of the cardboard, one of the black participant on the lower right is using an iPad like device to record the encounter between the black protesters and the police (figure 24). These social outcries related to race and African nationals again demonstrate the heterogeneity in China, which this dissertation aims to analyze and theorize.

---

[95] http://gcontent.oeeee.com/d/ba/dba132f6ab6a3e3d/Photo/cd3/0c4d4e.html?id=4

FIGURE 24. The presence of recording devices in the African protest in Guangzhou, 2012

Despite the fact that many Africans in China felt that they are judged by the color of their skin, discussions of race or racism are largely absent on Chinese media. The absence of race is not only found in the public discourse in China, but in the study of Chinese media in general. In fact, race is still a less explored issue in global media studies, a loosely defined field that increasingly encompass the research on media cultures in non-West countries. Or, as others have point out, there is a tendency of "deracialization" in global media studies in contrast to the emphasis on cultural imperialism, globalization theory, and concepts such as hybridity.[96] At first glance, the deracilization of global media studies seems to lie in the questionable legitimacy and adequacy to analyze "race" outside of American-British context. Asking the reason behind the deracialization of

---

[96] For detail, see the research question "The Deracialization of Global Television Studies" in the Call for Responses of the Flow 2012 Conference.

175

global media studies may run the risk of imposing the analytics of Cultural Studies such as race, class, gender, and sexuality that deprived from American-British context onto non-western contexts, while ignoring the fragmented, contradictory, and historically specific natures of these analytics. Moreover, these analytics such as "race" could be entangled with other social categories that produce and assign differences in a specific context.

However, while it is important to pay attention to the different historical configurations of race/ethnicity out of United States, it is equally crucial to recognize the fact that seeing race as an essential American-British problem obscures the existence of racism in other parts of the world. Race is never a flat issue in the "West." As Fatima El-Tayeb points out in her book *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, racial issues in Europe get sidelined when french intellectuals pinpoint race as an essentially American problem.[97] Similarly, in the Chinese context, the continuing believe that "race" is a "western problem" fails to comprehend the complex and racialized reality such as the recent incidents of black protests mentioned above.

Thus, on one hand, we need to resist the temptation to universalizing critical and analytical tools; and one the other hand, we should be cautious about the over-emphasis on cultural differences, an essentialism or particularism that sometimes disguised in exceptionalism. As I lay out in chapter one, the universal and the particular are mutually constitutive and hierarchically structured. And their imbalanced structure enables the

---

[97] See Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others : Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

epistemic developmentalism, or the spatial-temporal arrangements of social theory or knowledge production at large that imply a developmental narrative.

In this dissertation, I use the provincial as an answer to the epistemic questions such as the one on China and race. The "provincial" is a more nuanced analytical category to account for the designation and production of social differences. Deprived from a specific context of Guangdong province, I demonstrate throughout the dissertation how the provincial as an analytical category intersects and illuminates other social categories such as nationality, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. I start with a specific province, namely Guangdong in southern China, which is an entity embedded in the political, economic, social, and cultural history of China. Exploring how digital, televisual, and filmic productions of the liberal economic growth zones mediate constructions of ethnicity, class, gender, and citizenship in the context of neoliberal globalization, I look at how the Guangdong province in Southern China has been configured in media production, policy, and activism in China, Hong Kong, and the U.S. since 1980. I utilize "the provincial" as an analytic unit to critique *epistemic developmentalism* through the triangulation of three spatial dynamics of the province: the provincial-transnational, the central-provincial, and the neoliberal exceptional space. The significance of the method of "the provincial" lies much more beyond the study of media cultures in a specific province and can be extended in the following ways.

In chapter two, I challenge the prevalent conception of mainland China, particularly the ethnic majority, or the Han people, as a monolithic cultural entity. I argue that such misconception is built upon the China/West dualism. Analyzing how Cantonese media activism on the Internet and local TV programs interacted with actual street protests, I highlight the state-imposed hierarchical order of central-provincial media productions and expand on the exchange among Hong Kong, provincial Guangdong and diasporic Cantonese. While drawing attention to how online user-generated-content such as "Rap Cantonese" music video criticizes stereotypical representation of gender, ethnic culture, as well as the monolingual policy and developmental logic of the state, I also point out the possible danger of class prejudice in Cantonese activism.

Thinking beyond the binary of cultural dominance and resistance, I use the provincial as a more productive term to engage the local/global and local/national relationships. Moreover, the concept of the province illuminates the connections between sub-national regions, such as the exchanges between Guangdong and Hong Kong media industries. The influences of Hong Kong media on provincial media in Guangdong, and the spread of Cantonese digital activism from Guangzhou to Hong Kong and diaspora Cantonese population, demonstrate the historically situated interactions between Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

The central-provincial dynamic has much more ramifications beyond Guangdong. In 2011, *Day Day Up*, a popular variety show on Hunan Satellite TV, another province-level TV network, featured two Thai actresses who recently play the two female leads in

a lesbian-themed Thai movie *Yes or No* (2010). Throughout the one hour program, nothing is said explicitly on the lesbian content of the film or the sequel that is in the production process. Clearly, the actresses and hosts on the stage, together with the enthusiastic audiences in the television studio know who the Thai actresses are and their roles in a same-sex romantic story. This is one of the many instances that Hunan Provincial Satellite TV plays on the margin of media censorship in China.

Again, the dynamics of media production and policy in China cannot be grasped without the acknowledgement of the central-provincial hierarchy. At the same time, with the further commercialization of Chinese media industry, dialects and local languages start to appear in films. Set in Chongqing, Ning Hao's popular hit *Crazy Stone* (2006), for example, is a black comedy that mainly delivered in Sichuan dialect. Besides a mandarin version, actor-director Jiang Wen's high-grossing blockbuster *Let the Bullets Fly* (2010) that featured Chow Yun-fat and comedian veteran Ge You also released a Sichuan dialect version. Similarly, more and more dialect-speaking TV programs emerged in various province-level or municipality-level TV channels nationwide despite the contusing top-down supervision. All these multi-lingual media phenomena demands further investigation in relation to the central-provincial dynamic.

THE PROVINCIAL-TRANSNATIONAL DYNAMIC: CONFLATION OF NATIONALITY AND ETHNICITY

In chapter three, I question recent models of transnational media, specifically the China-diaspora model that transgresses but still relies on the nation-state as an autonomous unit of analysis. By pursuing this strategy, I accentuate the Hong Kong-Guangdong

connection and how hegemonic discourses of monolithic Chinese nationhood and the American multiculturalism have shaped the gendered ethnic formation in transnational Hong Kong film *Eight Taels of Gold* (1989) and others that feature transpacific migration.

Here, the provincial problematizes the state-sponsored monolithic understanding of Chinese-ness within China by flexibly and actively re-defining Chinese-ness instead of re-enforcing the binaries of homogenous China and heterogeneous diaspora. Seeing the provincial within the transnational legitimizes diverse sinophonic practices inside China and questions ethnicized reductionism in America.

The provincial-transnational dynamic can be extended to question the main reasons behind the above-mentioned "deracilization of global media studies" when China and race are seemingly incompatible. The reason of deracilization in global media studies, I contend, is that racial and ethnic issues are subsumed, obscured, or displaced by nationality, thus dismissed as "local" problems by existing scholarship on global media studies, which mostly privileges transnational and transregional flows.

As I shown in chapter three, overseas Cantonese immigrants are seen as Chinese mainly because of their nationality. At the same time, Cantonese is not a sufficient ethnic marker as Cantonese is understood as part of the Han ethnic majority albeit its specificities in linguistic, cultural, and architectural terms. Here, the provincial is an analytic unit to delink nationality and ethnicity and account for social differences beyond ethnic and racial markers in transnational contexts. Using the provincial accounts for differences that are under-theorized by existing "Western" media theories, a system of

knowledge grounded on "regional" histories and practices, instead of universal experience. Hence the "West" is provincialized in the sense that Chakrabarty proposed.

More importantly, the provincial points to a method to incorporate other social categories that are under-theorized by "western" theories without essentializing them. Specifically in China, the provincial is one the many categories for the production of difference. Other categories have different names in different contexts. Caste system in India and race and ethnicity in Latin America, for example, are historical constructs are not raw materials to prove or disapprove existing "western" theories but social categories that should be further theorized and contextualized. Hence I see the provincial as a further step to provincialize the West; and this dissertation is only a beginning.

THE POLITICS OF EXCEPTION

In chapter four, I elucidate how the Special Zones reinforce pre-existing urban-rural divide, solidify gendered urban citizenship, and normalize the biopolitical management of the migrant-workers through the politics of exceptional spaces. To accomplish this, I scrutinize how new media environment facilitates recent digital documentaries and media art projects such as *Sanyuanli* (2003) for broader considerations of their narrative experimentation, locational aesthetics, site-specific practices, and negotiation with the "neoliberal spatialities" of the Special Zones.

As I pointed out, the SEZ, the representative of neoliberal spatialities, is only a section of the national spatial re-ordering chain. Conversely, viewing the SEZs as exceptional spaces obscures the structural hierarchy of the urban-rural divide and the

neoliberal spatiality on a national scale. Hence, the SEZs that explored in this chapter are located in Guangdong province, but they also speak to a paradigmatic shift of neoliberalization on a national scale that cannot be fully apprehended without the rural-urban divide and the biopolitical technique of mobilizing and regulating the peasant-workers.

Indeed, the SEZs are now widely deployed in the developing world, especially Asia and Latin America. Similar processing zones and export zones can be found in Taiwan, Mexico, Malaysia, Singapore, among others. Tijuana, for example, develops into a labor-intensive processing zone because of its proximity to San Diego. Moreover, China's successful implementation of SEZs is now influencing economic policy-making in Africa. The media cultures of these growth zones and the politics of these "exceptional spaces," are yet to be written. And the provincial that I propose is a methodological framework to further these studies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AlSayyad, Nezar. *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso, 1991.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination." *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 1-19.

Astruc, Alexandre. *Du Stylo À La Caméra--Et De La Caméra Au Stylo : Écrits 1942-1984*. Paris: L'Archipel, 1992.

Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Berry, Chris. *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, Cornell University East Asia Papers,. Ithaca, N.Y.: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, 1985.

Berry, Chris, Xinyu Lü, and Lisa Rofel. *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement : For the Public Record*. Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

Bordwell, David. *Planet Hong Kong : Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Braester, Yomi. *Painting the City Red : Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Brenner, Neil. "Global Cities, Glocal States: Global City Formation and State Territorial Restructuring in Contemporary Europe." *Review of International Political Economy* 5, no. 1 (1998): 1-37.

Brown, Wendy. *Edgework : Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe : The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000.

Bui, Tung X. *China's Economic Powerhouse : Reform in Guangdong Province*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Castells, Manuel. "Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society." *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 5-24.

Chakrabarty, D. "Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 46 (2005): 4812-18.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Chen, Kuan-Hsing. *Asia as Method : Toward Deimperialization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Chen, Yun. *Zhong Wen Qi Yi : Po Jie Wen Hua Cao Zong, Han Wei Min Zhu Yu Yan (Chinese Uprising: Break Cultural Manipulation, Defend Democratic Languages)*. Xianggang: Tian chuang chu ban : Xin bao cai jing xin wen, 2010.

Cheng, Meibao. *Di Yu Wen Hua Yu Guo Jia Ren Tong : Wan Qing Yi Lai "Guangdong Wen Hua" Guan De Xing Cheng (Local Culture and National Identity: The Formation of Guangdong Cultural Perspective since Late Qing)*, Jin Dai Zhongguo De Zhi Shi Yu Zhi Du Zhuan Xing Cong Shu. Beijing Shi: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2006.

Ching, Leo. "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital." *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 233-57.

Ching, May-bo. *Di Yu Wen Hua Yu Guo Jia Ren Tong : Wan Qing Yi Lai "Guangdong Wen Hua" Guan De Xing Cheng (Local Culture and National Identity: The Formation of Guangdong Cultural Perspective since Late Qing)*, Jin Dai Zhongguo De Zhi Shi Yu Zhi Du Zhuan Xing Cong Shu. Beijing Shi: Sheng huo, du shu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2006.

Chu, Yingchi. *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*: Routledge, 2009.

Chung, Chuihua Judy, Bernard Chang, and Design Graduate School of. *Great Leap Forward Harvard Design School Project on the City*. Köln: Taschen, 2001.

Clarke, David B. *The Cinematic City*. London; New York: Routledge, 1997.

Couldry, Nick. *Why Voice Matters : Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*. Los Angeles ; London: SAGE, 2010.

Deng, Xinxin. *Dong Li Yu Kun Jiong : Zhongguo Guang Bo Ti Zhi Gai Ge Yan Jiu = Reforming the Radio Broadcasting Sector of China : Dynamics and Dilemmas*. Beijing Shi: Zhongguo jing ji chu ban she, 2006.

Dimendberg, Edward. *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Donald, Stephanie. *Public Secrets, Public Spaces : Cinema and Civility in China*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Duara, Prasenjit. *The Global and Regional in China's Nation-Formation*, Critical Asian Scholarship. London ; New York: Routledge, 2009.

El-Tayeb, Fatima. *European Others : Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping : Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Fu, Poshek. *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.

———. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, Popular Culture and Politics in Asia Pacific. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Gao, Minglu. *'85 Mei Shu Yun Dong = the '85 Movement*. [Xiu ding ban], di 1 ban. ed. 2 vols. Guilin: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2008.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler. *Governing China's Population : From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Gugler, Josef. *World Cities Beyond the West : Globalization, Development, and Inequality*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Hairong, Yan. "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks." *Cultural anthropology : journal of the Society for Cultural Anthropology.* 18, no. 4 (2003): 493.

Harter, Seth M. ""Time Is Moving Forward but We Are Moving Faster": Racing Towards Modernity in Hong Kong and Guandong." University of Michigan, 2006.

Harvey, David. "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination 1." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (1990): 418-34.

———. "Neoliberalism 'with Chinese Characterisitics'." In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 121-51. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

He, Mei. "Mainland-Hong Kong Film Co-Production since the Reform and Open-up Policy. Master Thesis." Tsinghua University, 2006.

Hong, Junhao. *The Internationalization of Television in China : The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media since the Reform*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998.

Hong Kong Museum of History., and Guangdong (China). Wen hua ting. *Dong Xi Hui Liu : Yue Gang Ao Wen Wu Da Zhan*. Xianggang: Xianggang li shi bo wu guan, 2005.

Huang, Tsung-yi Michelle. *Walking between Slums and Skyscrapers : Illusions of Open Space in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

Huang, Yasheng. *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics : Entrepreneurship and the State*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Huang, Zhuan. "Zuowei Lixiangshi Yundong De Bawu Xinchao Meishu = 85 New Wave Art as Movement in the History of Consciousness." *Wenyi yanjiu = Literary Studies* 12, no. 6 (2008): 120-9.

Kaarsholm, Preben. *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience*. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2004.

Kraas, Frauke. "Urbanization and Global Environmental Change: 21st Century Challenges: : Megacities and Global Change: Key Priorities." *The Geographical Journal* 173, no. 1 (2007): 79-82.

Krause, Linda, and Patrice Petro. *Global Cities : Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, New Directions in International Studies. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another : Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1991.

Leung, Lisa. "Mediating Nationalism and Modernity: The Transnationalization of Korean Dramas on Chinese (Satellite) Tv." In *East Asian Pop Culture : Analysing the Korean Wave*, edited by Beng Huat Chua and K. oichi Iwabuchi, 53-69. Hong Kong and London: Hong Kong University Press, 2008.

Li, Zhuotao. "Xianggang: Bo Ling Nian Dai Xin Dian Ying De Zhong Guo Mai Luo (the Chinese Context in Hong Kong Cinema in the 1980s)." In *Xin Ya Zhou Dian Ying Mian Mian Guan*, edited by Xiongping Jiao, 47-66. Taibei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1991.

Lin, George C.S. "The Chinese Diasporic Landscape in Hong Kong." In *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity* edited by Laurence J. C. and Cartier Ma, Carolyn L., 141-61. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Liu, Lydia He. *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Lü, Peng. *20 Shi Ji Zhongguo Yi Shu Shi = a History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*. Beijing Shi: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2006.

Lu, Sheldon H., and Jiayan Mi. *Chinese Ecocinema : In the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.

Lu, Sheldon Hsiao-peng. *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

Ma, Laurence J. C., and Carolyn L. Cartier. *The Chinese Diaspora : Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Mao, Jinqin. *Sheng Shi Nan Fang : Guangdong Guang Bo Dian Shi 60 Nian (Southern Sound and Sight: 60 Years of Guangdong Broadcasting)*. Guangzhou: Ji nan da xue chu ban she, 2009.

Marchetti, Gina. *From Tian'anmen to Times Square : Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989-1997*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

McFarlane, Brian, and Deane Williams. *Michael Winterbottom*, British Film Makers. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009.

McGee, T. G. *China's Urban Space : Development under Market Socialism*, Routledge Studies on China in Transition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007.

Melamed, Jodi. "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism." *Social text.* 24, no. 4 (2006): 1.

Mimura, Glen M. *Ghostlife of Third Cinema: Asian American Film and Video*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema : Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Nakajima, Seio. "Film Clubs in Beijing." In *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, edited by Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, xii, 268 p. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Niu, Guangxia. "Fangyan Guangbo Dianshi Jiemu Xingqi Yuanyin Ji Cunzai Zhuangtai Tanxi (Analysis of the Emergence of Dialect Broadcasting Programming)." *Qilu Yiwan*, no. 2 (2006): 52-60.

Nonini, D. M. "Is China Becoming Neoliberal?" *Crit. Anthropol. Critique of Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2008): 145-76.

Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception : Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.

Palmer, Augusta L. "Crossroads: Nostalgia and the Documentary Impulse in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas." New York University, 2004.

Parks, Lisa. "Kinetic Screens: Epistemologies of Movement at the Interface." In *Mediaspace : Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*, edited by Nick and McCarthy Couldry, Anna, 37-57. London ; New York: Routledge, 2004.

Pickowicz, Paul, and Yingjin Zhang. *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, Asia/Pacific/Perspective. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Pun, Ngai. "The Metapher of the Peasant-Workers: The Unfinished Proletariatization."

Ren, Hai. *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong : The Countdown of Time*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.

Rofel, Lisa. *Desiring China : Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, Perverse Modernities. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Roy, Ananya, and Aihwa Ong. *Worlding Cities : Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Studies in Urban and Social Change. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

Sakai, Naoki. "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism." In *Postmodernism and Japan*, edited by Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harootunian, 93-122. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

———. *Translation and Subjectivity : On Japan and Cultural Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Schnapp, Jeffrey T. *Revolutionary Tides : The Art of the Political Poster, 1914-1989*. 1st ed. Milano and New York: Skira in association with Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2005.

Scott, Allen John. *Global City-Regions : Trends, Theory, Policy*. Cambridge, UK New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———. *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy*. Cambridge, UK New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Segbers, Klaus, Simon Raiser, and Krister Volkmann. *The Making of Global City Regions : Johannesburg, Mumbai/Bombay, São Paulo, and Shanghai*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Globalization. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

Shen, Simon, and Shaun Breslin. *Online Chinese Nationalism and China's Bilateral Relations*, Challenges Facing Chinese Political Development. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010.

Shi, Qi. "Xiang Gang: Ba Ling Nian Dai Dian Ying De Cheng Jiu Gan He Wei Ji Gan (Hong Kong: Accomplishment and Anxiety in Hong Kong Cinema in the 1980s)." In *Xin Ya Zhou Dian Ying Mian Mian Guan*, edited by Xiongping Jiao, 30-46. Taibei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1991.

Shiel, Mark, and Tony Fitzmaurice. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Studies in Urban and Social Change. Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001.

Shih, Shumei. *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, Asia Pacific Modern. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Smith, Paul Lai and Lindsey Clarie. "Alternative Contact Indigeneity, Globalism, and American Studies." *American Quarterly* 62 (September 2010).

Stokvis, Willemijn. *Cobra : The Last Avant-Garde Movement of the Twentieth Century*. Aldershot ; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2004.

Tang, Xiaobing. *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Teo, Stephen, and British Film Institute. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: BFI, 1997.

Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture : Politics for the Information Age*. London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004.

u-theque. http://www.u-theque.org.cn/.

u-thequeOrganization. *The San Yuan Li Project*2003.

Vertov, Dziga, and Annette Michelson. *Kino-Eye : The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1984.

Visser, Robin. *Cities Surround the Countryside : Urban Aesthetics in Post-Socialist China*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Wang, Fei-Ling. *Organizing through Division and Exclusion : China's Hukou System*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Wang, Hui. "Difang Xingshi, Fangyan Tuyu Yu Kongri Zhanzheng Shiqi "Mingzu Xingshi" De Zhenglun (Local Form, Dialect and Debate of The "National Form" During the Sino-Japanese War." In *Ya Zhou Shi Ye : Zhongguo Li Shi De Xu Shu (the View of Asia: The Narrative of Chinese History)*, 237-82. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Wang, Hui, and Theodore Huters. *China's New Order : Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Wang, Jing. *Locating China: Space, Place and Popular Culture*, Routledge Studies on China in Transition. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.

Wang, Qi. "Writing against Oblivion: Personal Filmmaking from the Forsaken Generation in Post-Socialist China." University of California, Los Angeles, 2008.

Wang, Xiaolu "Interview with Ou Ning ", http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a2f8ae30100acxz.html

Wang, Yiman. "The Amateur's Lightning Rod: Dv Documentary in Postsocialist China." *Film Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2005): 16-26.

Wilkins, Karin Gwinn. "Hong Kong Television: Same as It Ever Was? ." In *Tv China*, edited by Ying Zhu and Chris Berry, 56-70. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Wong, Ain-ling, and Pui-tak Lee. *Leng Zhan Yu Xianggang Dian Ying*. Xianggang: Xianggang dian ying zi liao guan, 2009.

Wu, hong. *Zuo Pin Yu Zhan Chang = Art Work and Exhibition*. Guang zhou: Ling nan mei zhu chu ban she, 2005.

Wu, Hung, and David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art. *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*. Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, the University of Chicago, 2000.

Wu, Xu. *Chinese Cyber Nationalism : Evolution, Characteristics, and Implications*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007.

Xiao, Zhiwei. "Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade." In *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, edited by Yingjin Zhang, 183-99. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Yang, Gequ. "Kongjian Xingbie Aiqing Yu Lishi: Zhang Wan Ting Fang Tan (Space, Gender, Romance and History: Interview with Mabel Cheung)." *dian ying yi shu* 323, no. 7 (2007): 75-80.

Yang, Guobin. *The Power of the Internet in China : Citizen Activism Online*, Contemporary Asia in the World. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Yau, Ching-Mei Esther. *At Full Speed : Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Yeh, Anthony G. O. *Developing a Competitive Pearl River Delta in South China under One Country-Two Systems*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006.

Yeung, Yue-man, and Jianfa Shen. *The Pan-Pearl River Delta : An Emerging Regional Economy in a Globalizing China*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008.

Yu, Deshui. *Zhu Ying Ren Yu Zhu Ying De Lu (People and Works from the Pearl River Film Studio)*. Guangzhou Shi: Guangdong lü you chu ban she, 1999.

Zhang, Guoxiong, and Yuxiang Li. *Lao Fang Zi. Kaiping Diao Lou Yu Min Ju (Old Houses: Diaolou and Folk Dwelling in Kaiping)*. Di 1 ban. ed. Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu mei shu chu ban she, 2002.

Zhang, Liang. "Elaborations from the Director of *Yamaha Fish Stall*." *dianying xinzuo (New Cinematic Works)*, no. 1 (1985): 84-7.

———. "Modeling the New People in New Cinematic Languages—the Experience from the Director of Yamaha Fish Stall " *dianying yishu (Film Art)*, no. 2 (1985): 48-56.

Zhang, Xudong. *Quan Qiu Hua Shi Dai De Wen Hua Ren Tong*, Wen Hua Li Lun Cong Shu. Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2005.

Zhang, Yingjin. *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*, Critical Interventions. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.

———. *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, 2002.

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

Zhao, Weifang. "Bian Yu Bubian: Lun 30 Nian Lai Neidi Yinsu Dui Xianggang Dianying De Yingxiang (Changing and Unchanging: On the Mainland Effects on Hong Kong Cinema in the Last 30 Years) " *Dangdai Dianying*, no. 11 (2008).

Zhao, Yuezhi. "Rethinking Chinese Media Studies: History, Political Economy and Culture." In *Internationalizing Media Studies*, edited by Daya Kishan Thussu, 175-95. London ; New York: Routledge, 2009.

Zhou, Minglang, and Hongkai Sun. *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China : Theory and Practice since 1949*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.

Zhu, Ying. *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform : The Ingenuity of the System*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003.