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Intellectual Constellations in the Postsocialist Era: Four Essays

A Dissertation Presented

by

LI GU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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DEDICATION

To

Sui Gu, Zhizhong Li, and their generation

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ABSTRACT

INTELLECTUAL CONSTELLATIONS IN THE POSTSOCIALIST ERA:
FOUR ESSAYS

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In an attempt to facilitate the task of charting a path toward a radically different future, a future without the bourgeois intellectual property regime (IPR), this dissertation searches back in history by examining China's loss of socialism.

The guiding question can be formulated thus: Why did the People's Republic of China give up its socialist mode of intellectual production only to embrace the bourgeois intellectual property regime (IPR), which had been subjected to devastating criticism by progressive scholars in the West since mid-1990s? Situating this rupture of China's approach to intellectual production within the ongoing process of postsocialist structuration in the wake of the waning Chinese socialism, this dissertation focuses on Chinese intellectuals as social mediators and locates the traces of the loss of socialism in various cultural productions during the postsocialist era.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 China and Intellectual Property

1.1.1 Domestication

On January 9th, 2006, the Fifth National Science and Technology Congress of the People's Republic of China was held in Beijing. At this televised and live broadcast event, President Hu Jintao delivered a speech titled “Forge ahead on the Path with Chinese Characteristics of Autonomous Innovation, and Strive toward the Building of an Innovative Country” (“Zou Zhongguo tese zizhu chuangxin daolu, wei jianshe chuangxinxing guojia er fendou”). The key word of this speech is unmistakably innovation (chuangxin) – it occurred 133 times in this text of 9235 characters. However, it is a particular kind of innovation that is being promulgated, namely “autonomous innovation.” The term “autonomous” (zizhu) appeared 39 times throughout the speech, and, apart from “innovation,” it was also combined with “intellectual property rights” and “well-known name brand,” hence the coinage of neologisms such as “autonomous intellectual property rights” and “autonomous well-known name brand.” The key message of these new catch phrases is that, whereas “innovation” in itself is supposed to solve a slew of problems confronting today's China, it has to be accompanied by “autonomy,” which, understood as self-control over the undertaking of innovation, would guarantee China's access to and appropriation of the new developments.

This desired state of autonomy, a state of self-determination and self-sufficiency, however, is fraught with paradoxes. The emphasis on “autonomous innovation” would be

unnecessary in a world where innovations are free for access and appropriation. In Hu's urge toward "autonomy," one can recognize the anxiety of a China caught in a world and era not of its own making, an era in which the world remains fragmented with peoples and countries divided by property relationships, an era in which market price of innovation is high while "Made in China" is assigned to the lower end of a global chain of values that, in its turn, is beyond China's control. In this regard, then, China's path toward autonomous innovation that Hu's speech delineated seems quite un-innovative as it is hardly distinguishable from obeying the established rule in the global market. That intellectual property – calculated as a strategic tool in this project toward autonomy – happens to be one of the key links of the post-industrial chain of values that currently dominates the world market is no accident, although it does appear to be a paradoxical figure: While intellectual property is supposed to give China greater freedom by raising it above outside control, it also marks the deepening of the outside world's penetration into China.

1.1.3 Penetration

According to legal scholar William Alford (1995), the pre-modern China was "a culture of piracy," a culture where cultural artifacts are highly regarded but rarely exploited as capital. With its distinct hegemonic norms and values, this "culture of piracy" may explain why dynastic China did not see the rise of a Chinese counterpart to Western "intellectual property" as a legal category, and would have called into question the legitimacy of the underlying principles of the latter. However, when China's resistance in mid-19th century against Western imperialists was defeated, it had to spend a few decades "learning law at the gunpoint." Yet, even a century later, at the end of the

Nationalist government's regime in Mainland China, intellectual property law was hardly more than a nominal existence in China.

At the closure of three decades of socialist economy, during which China's approach to intellectual labor followed the Soviet model, the penetration of "intellectual property" resumed soon after China re-inserted itself into the world economy with its Reform and Opening policy in the late 1970s. China's reform coincided with the structural transformation of industrialized societies into information economies, which, in turn, coincides with the move toward neoliberalization since late-1970s (Posner & Landes, 2003). While knowledge had always been an indispensable part of means of production, it would now become the privileged commodity thanks to its perfect compatibility with "flexible accumulation." Intellectual property underlies the law and order of the information age. Thus, to reconnect itself to the world circuit dominated by the universalizing logic of capitalism, the opening China found itself under the pressure to adopt and adapt to world standards, of which the intellectual property rights regime plays an increasingly infrastructural part.

In the 1980s, when the industrialized societies, especially the U.S., found their traditional industries under the burden of high labor cost (due to factors such as comparatively high living standards) and progressively losing competitive advantages to industrializing economies, their knowledge industries emerged with promising trade surplus. Under the effective lobbying of knowledge industries, intellectual property protection gained unprecedented attention at the national level in the U.S., and its legislation and enforcement were strengthened at unprecedented speed and intensity (Sell, 2003).

The 301 Special Clause under the 1988 U.S. Trade Act was a protocol to ensure the harmonization in the international arena, representing a U.S. brand of trade-approach to intellectual property issues. On the basis of its perceived performance in providing trade access and intellectual property protection to U.S. industries, a foreign country may be put on “Watch List,” “Priority Watch List” (hereafter PWL), or “Priority Foreign Country List.” “Watch List” and PWL constitute warnings against unfavorable treatment, while “Priority Foreign Country List” subjects the listed country to a period of investigation, after which trade sanction may be enforced.

China was put on the PWL for the first time in 1988. In response, China established the “Anti- Pornography and Illegal Publications Office” in 1989, only to see itself on the list again in that year. The purpose of the U.S. was made clear: to help China embark on a legal reform. The People’s Republic of China Copyright Law went into effect in 1990, but its content was deemed incompatible with the Berne Convention. When China became a Priority Foreign Country and was threatened with trade sanction in 1991, it reacted with a threat of retaliatory trade sanction. The trade sanction was called off at the last minute. In 1992, China’s Berne-compatible regulation went into effect, and in the same year it became a signatory to Berne Convention and Universal Copyright Convention, which marked the successful extension and harmonization of China’s legal framework to the domain of intellectual property. Before long, China was found ineffective in the enforcement of these regulations and was Priority Foreign Country in both 1994 and 1996 (Wang, 2003). Given TRIPs (The Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights)’ emphasis on the enforcement of intellectual property protection, China’s accession to WTO in 2001 has subjected itself to

further policing in this area.

1.2 Intellectual Property under Critique

By the time China declares its commitment to self-empowerment through autonomous innovation that, in its turn, is braced by intellectual property as a legal instrument, intellectual property as a legal concept and as legal practice had come under increasing critique in the West by scholars of a variety of disciplines. This remarkable wealth of critical work has deepened our understanding of the nature, origin, internal structure and practical operation of intellectual property as a distinct legal category. For example, Martha Woodmansee's seminal work exposes the founding myth – crystallized in the construction of the author figure – of copyright, which would later lend legitimacy to intellectual property claims to various forms of “original expressions.” According to Woodmansee (1994, p.15), the modern notion of “author” as “the sole creator of unique ‘works’ the originality of which warrants their protection under laws of intellectual property known as ‘copyrights’ or ‘author’s rights’” is itself a relatively recent invention. More specifically, the writer, theretofore conceived as just one among the many divisions of labor in the production process of a book, did not acquire its modern, privileged status as the “ingenious author” until the series of literary interventions, initiated by Edward Young and elaborated by “an emerging profession of writers” from Herder and Goethe to Coleridge and Wordsworth, that effected a radical reconceptualization of writing (Woodmansee, 1994, p. 16). Legal anthropologist Rosemary Coombe (1998) points out that intellectual property law is essentially corporate-backed, state-sanctioned practice of fixation that violates the intrinsically social nature of signs. Film scholar Pang Laikwan (2005), on the other hand, acknowledges the indispensability of “mimesis,” or “copying,”

for human society, and finds intellectual property anti-social and, indeed, disingenuous: insofar as intellectual production is inevitably social, i.e. mimetic to some extent, to grant copyright is to control future mimesis and therefore constitutes exercising double standard. Considering the situation in the U.S., Constitution specialist Lawrence Lessig (2004) observes that the ever-widening scope and the ever-stretching duration of intellectual property rights protection since the 1970s have significantly shrunk the “public domain” and therefore endangered what he sees as the American founding spirit of creativity, and communication scholar Kembrew McLeod finds the stronghold of intellectual property law threatening the freedom of expression in the United States.

Apart from charges of being culturally anti-social, intellectual property has also been found guilty of economic and technological monopoly. Political Economist Christopher May (2000), for instance, finds the notion of intellectual property conceptually and morally dubious. According to May, knowledge is fundamentally different from physical materials: Although its production involves scarce resources, knowledge itself is not scarce, to the effect that it can be simultaneously shared by infinite number of people without depriving the originator of the original. For this reason, May argues, to grant property rights on knowledge is to produce artificial and unnecessary scarcity. Legal scholar James Boyle (1998), on the other hand, saw the notion of intellectual property – essentially a privatization of information – as a response to the compulsory private-public distinction demanded by the modern liberal state, even though it may not be a perfect one. For him, the problem with intellectual property law in its current incarnation is that it allows the rights owner to monopolize the benefits of the privatized information, which spells vicious distributional consequences in international

as well as domestic contexts.

While all these critics take issue with certain injustice wrought by intellectual property as a legal category, they part ways regarding what is to be done in order to restore justice. Schemes of reform, such as Creative Commons (Lessig) and Collective Intellectual Property (Shiva, 1997), are proposed to reduce the tension between intellectual property and other socially valuable but legally underrepresented interests. In a more radical mode, some critics, such as Coombe and May, demand or else imply a demand for total dismantling of intellectual property as a legal category.

1.3 A Conquest or a Retreat?

If China's historic experience—most recently its socialist experience—has proved that the IPR regime to which it was subscribing is altogether unnecessary for technological innovations and economic growth, contemporary critics have shown how it is economically, culturally, and morally unproductive or even counterproductive. Then, why does China give up what seems to be a better approach only to embrace the problematic IPR regime? How does one make sense of this policy turn? To approach this question, one could study how China's propaganda fosters popular identification by portraying IPR as a technically necessary and morally superior instrument which China can tame to serve in its struggle for economic survival and cultural dignity. One could investigate the transformation at the central government level in response to the U.S.'s push of IPR in the 1980s and '90s, to understand how IPR regime came to assume the hegemonic position among the national leadership. One could scrutinize the growth of domestic interests in such an IPR regime, or, conversely, one could look at resisting forces, if there were any, and examine the subsequent disappearance, dissolution, or

defeat of such resistance. Little indeed is known about these topics and much could be learned from such research. Yet one might as well zoom out the lens a little bit to check out the broader social, historical context. There, one would probably notice that, within the evolving superstructure of postsocialist China, the rise of IPR regime in the early 2000s is anything but unusual. In fact, the time frame of the development of the policy turn that led up to Hu's spectacular ceremony well coincided with that of privatization, which began to sweep through China since the early-1990s. Over this period, or what can be called a long decade of privatization, thousands of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) of various sectors were transformed into private-owned businesses in one way or another, giving rise to massive layoffs, horrid labor condition in both SOEs and private enterprises, and growing socio-economic inequality that have since become the norm. At the culmination of that decade, when private property right was recognized by the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 2004 with little resistance, the ground of legitimacy for the IPR regime was already cleared. That the rise of IPR regime in China was met with little if any public contestation may have to do with the tide of privatization: In the midst of the social devastation of and struggles against SOE "restructuring" (i.e. privatization), the switch to IPR regime was hardly visible as an issue. But in light of the smooth amendment of the Constitution to grant recognition to private property right, one is tempted to imagine that the IPR issue, even if made public at the time, would raise few eyebrows. If these instances of privatization constitute a reversal of the industrial nationalization that took place in China between 1949 and 1952, they are also related to the agricultural decollectivization since 1978 that overturned the collectivization of peasants from 1930s through 1950s. From this perspective, then,

China's turn to IPR regime was not so much as a unique event as an exemplary instance; it was a singular event that is nonetheless a particular instantiation of the postsocialist structural transformation.

1.4 Waning of Socialism as Postsocialist Sentiment

What does it mean to see the rise of IPR regime in China as a byproduct of the retreat or waning of Chinese socialism in general? It is not to deny that the policy turn represents a positive conquest for some. However, it implies that the main reason for China's switch to IPR was that the vast majority no longer had a strong preference for socialism, of which the socialist intellectual production system was an integral part. Because the socialist system was deserted, IPR regime, as the pick of strongly interested parties, easily stepped in. All would have been very different had the vast majority voiced a strong preference for socialism. By waning of socialism, then, I refer to hypothetical states of popular sentiment about Chinese socialism that can range from dwindling confidence or enthusiasm, growing indifference, apathy, resentment in respect to Chinese socialism, to positive interest in alternative system. As such, "waning of socialism" is not supposed to be a measurement of popular loyalty to socialist system although loyalty can be an aspect to a subject's sentiment.

In this conjuncture, socialism is understood as a social, historical totality consisting of a distinctly socialist mode of production and a superstructure. Key features of a socialist mode of production includes, for example, public ownership of means of production, planned social production, and democratic participation. But socialism is nonetheless a social ideal about what constitutes a good life--for individuals as well as humans beings in general. Symbolic expressions of socialist ideals and mode of

production make up the socialist superstructure. Of course, socialism in actuality is never a cluster of concepts but a complex historical process constantly in making. In contemporary terms, the process, like any others, is one haunted by “otherness” or the “restless negative.” Antagonisms arise from time to time and contradictions abound. As much as socialism is often identified with entities in the singular, such as the government, the state, the people, the experience of socialism is as varied as the “otherness” that has populated the process.

A few studies that have explored the sentiment or subjective dimension of the socialist experience. For example, Wang Hui suggests that the fall of Chinese socialism calls for critical attention to the gap between the social subject's economic (objective) position and subjective position. Ci Jiwei (1994) proposes to explain the transformation in terms of the dialectic of utopianism (stoicism) and hedonism as social ethos. Without trying to explain the historical trend, Wang Ban (2004)'s analysis of contemporary cultural texts highlights a particular set of experiences and feelings of Chinese socialism for “illuminations from the past.” Anthropological work has been done on particular demographic segments' experience of and reflection on their socialist experience. Pickowicz (1994) found “postsocialist” sentiments among peasants well before the official shift away from socialism. More recently, Gail Hershatter (2011) has explored rural women's experience under socialism, asking: “Did women have a Chinese revolution?”

Drawing inspirations from legal anthropology scholarship exemplified by such works as The Common Place of Law: Stories of Everyday Life and Bridging Divides: The Channel Tunnel and English Legal Identity in the New Europe, where the researchers

build deep engagement with people in an effort to understand their relationship to laws and norms in their lived social contexts, the present study will focus on Chinese intellectuals' discourses about right. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means “something to which one has a just claim,” “something that one may properly claim as due,” or “the cause of truth or justice.” As such, right may be codified by laws or moral authorities but it is also intimately related to the ideas of “justice,” “propriety,” and “truth”—the relative invariables on whose basis social subjects shape their world outlook. An undoing of certain rights, then, means the undoing of related ideas about justice, propriety, and truth, and related feelings of passion, interest, and desire. With an anthropological orientation, I will take an eclectic approach to methods to examine and engage with the subjecthood and world outlook expressed in or refracted through the works of intellectuals, especially Chinese intellectuals, with a focus on the notions of right in such discursive constellations.

“Right” and “intellectual” seem to have certain structural affinity. This is because the relative positions that “intellectuals” and “right” respectively occupy relative to the particular and the universal structurally correspond to one another. What this means is that right, as an articulation between the particular and the universal, is nothing other than a function of intellectualizing, which, in its turn, is precisely the act of mediating between the particular and the universal. If “intellectual” defined as one who uses symbols would refer to human beings in general, social division of labor forces a split within it, to the effect that intellectual capacity is more cultivated in some but not others, and a selected few are paid to perform as “the intellectuals,” hence the emergence of “intellectuals” as a meaningful sociological category. Given the structural affinity between “right” and

“intellectual,” the social distribution of intellectuality has structural consequences on the distribution of rights. In a society with highly developed education and even distribution of access to universal symbols, all citizens would have the potential capacity to make and/or contest laws or become intellectuals in the sociological sense of the word; otherwise, when only few citizens have access to universal symbols, rights tend to be reside in a selected few, as are structurally privileged relative to those whose access is limited. Insofar as this structural capacity does not determine the intellectual’s position in the mode of production as a political economic system, intellectuals are not a class in the sociological sense. However, intellectuals are a class, and a structurally privileged one, in the symbolic universe. To borrow Fredric Jameson (2011)’s metaphor of “infection” for the process of ideas assuming bodies, intellectuals are structural agents of such infections.

The Chinese revolution would have been impossible without intellectuals, who awaken the nation and mobilized the people through words and images carried by universal media. But at the same time, by virtue of their extraordinary infectious capacity, these intellectuals also embody the structural and historical inequality. They were the agent of revolution but they were also to be revolutionized themselves. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, when the urgency of national survival was giving way to that of nation building, when the guiding question shifted from “How to survive?” to “How to live?”, the once tightly unified minds broke loose. While some intellectuals insist that it is now time for them to resume the education of the mass, that is, to carry on the “enlightenment” project that was “interrupted” by the revolution, revolutionaries believed that revolution must go on, “enlightenment” was backpedaling, and that intellectuals should be subjected to the education by the mass. While cultural

policy vacillated between unbridled openness and strict control, individual intellectuals rose and fell on account of the “infection” they spread. Although experiments aiming at redistributing cultural and symbolic capital was carried out, higher education remained a highly exclusive venue for cultural and symbolic capital; in order to cultivate socialist-minded intellectuals, higher education was for some time denied to individuals from backgrounds that were considered historically privileged or politically pernicious and was made accessible to the few selected based on criteria of political correctness. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was intended to be and probably was a moment when many non-intellectuals “came to language,” however, has come to be remembered—in the words of many intellectuals—as a moment of trauma, cruelty, and, for some, the origin of profound mistrust and resentment of socialism in general. According to Joel Andreas (2009), such sentiment contributed to the confluence of old cultural elite and new cultural elite and their subsequent consolidation into a conservative political power. For reasons that are structural as well as historical, it is no accident that Chinese intellectuals have been more vocal and visible in communicating ideas and imaginaries that more or less reflect their own experience of socialism, and their memory have arguably become the memory of Chinese socialism that is remembered home and abroad; after all, spread “infection” is what intellectuals do. But this partiality as a structural bias holds tremendous consequences and should be acknowledged. My concern is not that all intellectuals had the same experience or held any uniform sentiment because of their education and social occupation or that their expressed sentiment should be discredited; as this study will show, their experiences are diverse and reflections varied. My point is, on the one hand, that intellectuals' experience and sentiment are necessarily partial and

should not be taken as more than that, and, on the other hand, can non-intellectuals speak? If so, when and how?

There is no easy answer to these questions. The primary data of this study, including discourses drawn from different moments of postsocialism, when education remains more or less a privilege, bears witness to an inequality that is historical as well as structural: With words, images, and other universal media, intellectuals produce representations of themselves and others, while manual laborers are often objects of representation and sometimes props of ventriloquism. By examining and engaging with intellectual constellations, that is, incidental groupings gathered around a novel, a film project, a political theoretical, or an industry, and paying close attention to what they think is right, I hope to achieve a better understanding of the popular sentiment about socialism. By listening closely to the ways in which they “say” (sometimes say without saying) what they think is right, I want to highlight the partiality of discourses by intellectuals, and, ultimately, the absence of voices by non-intellectuals and manual laborers. This absence is the void of democracy.

Starting out with the goal to understand China's switch to the IPR regime, this project looks to the past with an eye on the future. Living “the end of history” in the wake of the demise of communist states since the 1990s, it is easy to forget that, less than a century ago, revolutions had taken place on this planet where revolutionary laws were made, spreading new ideas of right, justice, propriety, and truth, and spawning passions, interests, and desires for egalitarian societies of historically unprecedented scale. But older ideas and feelings persist and do not easily give in. Sometimes, they emerge as if entirely new. In the context of the People's Republic of China, by the time the transition

toward public ownership of means of production was implemented in 1950s, a large bureaucracy characterized by steep hierarchies was already emerging, threatening a leap backward into a pre-revolution state. After Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, which aimed to defeat the conservative elements engendered by a stabilized bureaucracy and to move forward the revolution, the older system of rights was reinstated. In a sense, the ceremony rehearsed at the National Science and Technology Congress with which this Introduction opened was a new culmination of that system of rights. In particular, when the two top-award recipients were each awarded ¥5 million for their contribution, a peculiar contract between the state and its intellectuals—mediated in this case by the promise of extraordinary amount of money—was underscored, echoing an earlier one which Deng Xiaoping initiated in 1978. Much of what is happening would have seemed impossible less than forty years back. This unpredictability must be taken as liberating as it can be depressing. As a whole, the chapters of this dissertation constitute a reflection on—and at times dialogue with—some Chinese intellectual consciousness over these decades.

1.5 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 attempts a re-reading of Soul and Flesh, a controversial novel published in 1980, at the dawn of the post-Mao period. Whereas the novel used to be understood as primarily a story of a “rightist” intellectual's physical labor education under Mao's socialist program, or, indeed, as an affirmation of such program informed by the Marxist dialectical materialist doctrine, I will argue that that interpretation was based on a truncated, partial image of the protagonist. Drawing upon theorizing of affect by Spinoza and of friendship by Derrida, I will reconstruct the affective dimension of the protagonist

and show how it artfully intimates a postsocialist political economic agenda that is radically opposed to Maoist socialism. Equally instructive, however, is how the critiques of the novel (mis)recognized the novel as a leftist or even ultra-leftist work.

Chapter 2 focuses on Jia Zhangke, a Chinese film director whose works, spanning from mid-1990s to the present, consistently reflect a highly self-conscious commitment to the ordinary people. I will show how, as Jia became a world-renowned director, a tension emerges between his objective “distance” from the ordinary people and his continued subjective commitment to them, and precipitates recognizable shifts in the form and content of his films. While Jia attempts to negotiate and mediate between the ordinary and the elite, the question is whether or how he can continue to inhabit such a space of tension, on the one hand, and where trenchant intellectual critique like his will lead, on the other.

Chapter 3 and 4 turn to the so-called “creative industry,” a largely intellectual property rights-based economic development strategy/policy that has become extremely popular across the globe in the past decade. Not incidentally, by systemically subsuming the once relatively independent sector of cultural industry into the orbit of capitalist market economy, it also poses new questions for the cultural studies enterprise, a more or less leftist intellectual constellation traditionally focusing on the transformative potential of culture in capitalist societies. Chapter 3 samples a few theoretical writings by Western cultural studies scholars that take various positions on the strategy, which as a whole reflects the drift of leftist intellectuals of the West under the forces of neoliberal globalization. Whereas the question of relations of production is oblivious to various positions, I offer Mao Zedong’s political economy as a supplementary alternative because

it highlights this lost dimension to the notion of “creative industry.”

Since its official debut in mainland China in 2005 on an international conference in Beijing, that is, a few months before China's official embrace of “intellectual property rights,” “creative industry” is quickly taking root in China. Based on my fieldwork in 2007-8, Chapter 4 is a pilot report on how “creative industry” is localized in the city of Chongqing. In particular, it examines the world outlook of local intellectuals who are involved in “creative industry” as they talk about their understanding of what they do and why they do it.

With the development of mass education and information technology, the gaps between mental laborer and physical laborer are closing. What this means is that all laborers are highly educated and yet both are intensely exploited. In a few developed societies, proletarianization of intellectuals is already an everyday reality. How will this affect the future articulation of rights and democracy? I conclude the dissertation with some observations and questions.

CHAPTER 2

A POSTSOCIALIST FRIENDSHIP: THE AFFECTIVE PURSUIT

OF SOUL AND FLESH

2.1 Introduction

This chapter proposes a new interpretation of Soul and Flesh (Zhang), a novel published in 1980 in the People's Republic of China. Against the widely accepted reading of the novel as an affirmation of such program informed by the Marxist dialectical materialist doctrine, I will argue that that interpretation was based on a truncated, partial image of the protagonist. Drawing upon theorizing of affect by Spinoza and of friendship by Derrida, I will reconstruct the affective dimension of the protagonist and show how it intimates a postsocialist agenda that is radically opposed to Maoist socialism. In what follows, I will first provide a summary of the novel and present the previous interpretations, before presenting my analysis and discussing its implications.

2.2 Soul and Flesh: The Novel

Soul and Flesh is a short, 20,000-character novel. In the words of the protagonist, it shows what a middle-aged man sees when he “looks back on his life.” Xu Lingjun, the protagonist, is a male intellectual born in the late 1930s in a wealthy yet unhappy family in Shanghai. Deserted by his father, Xu became an orphan when his depressed mother soon died. Growing up in the socialist China, he became a teacher in 1950s. When the Party Secretary of the school tried to fulfill the “rightist” quota, Xu was labeled a rightist due to his family background and was sent to a farm in a remote province for labor education. Now, in 1979, the recently rehabilitated Xu is confronted with an urgent choice: His father, who had abandoned Xu and his mother in the 1940s and now

remorseful of his deed, has come from the States to rescue Xu from China. To leave or to stay, the decision has to be made fast, because the relaxed political atmosphere was seen as a transient opening whose future remains unpredictable. The urgency of decision making imposes a tight economy on Xu's thoughts and recollections as he reaches for a solid decision by balancing out his past and future, memory and desire.

Xu Lingjun had not expected to see father again.

Located on the seventh floor of this classy hotel, this is a meticulously furnished living room. Outside the window is only an empty blue sky with scattered strokes of white cloud. And yet there, at the farm on the Yellow Earth Plateau, the other side of the window are green and yellow fields, widely open and yet full of substance. Being here is like being on the clouds, making him feel wobbly. That, plus the green smoke from father's pipe wafting in the room, makes every before him like a hallucination. But, that tobacco with Indian chief's portrait which father still uses, and that mildly sweet coffee aroma which he often smelled at a child, are olfactory proof that this is reality, not a dream.

Skillfully and economically, these opening paragraphs perform a number of tasks.

Through the third-person singular perspective, they give the reader intimate access of the protagonist's mental as well as physical activities. They make clear that, after all these years of separation, Xu retains certain memory of living with the father. However, this memory as well as the milieu that gives rise to it seem to be in a precarious state, as the son finds his thought slip away from the immediate present of the father-son reunion to the distant Yellow Earth Plateau. The relation between "soul" and "flesh," the relation between the mind and the body of an individual and the relation between individuals as embodied "soul" and "flesh," that is, the root problem of the entire novel, is thus introduced.

The question of the relation between soul and flesh, as raised in this novel, is most

conspicuous at the individual and the inter-subjective levels. But this question is also hinted at at a broader social level, namely as a allegory of the question of the relation between manual laborer and mental laborer. At the individual level, soul signifies the mental (including the cognitive and the affective) dimension of existence while flesh signifies the physical dimension of existence. And their relation could move between one of disjoint and one of integration. At the inter-subjective level, the relation vacillates between estrangement and intimacy. At the broader social level, the relation can move between one of hostility and friendship. These different levels are interrelated and any level can have significant bearings on the others. At each level, the experience of separation of soul and flesh in disjoint, antipathy, or hostility is felt to be unsettling, painful, and are to be avoided, while integrated individuality, intimacy and friendship are the ideal relations to which the soul and flesh aspire.

In terms of Xu's own experience, his childhood memory is characterized by a forced split of soul and flesh: he never gets the amount of attention he desired from his parents, who are a couple suffering from arranged marriage. The state is fixed by the Communist Party until Xu became a “rightist” only to fill the school's quota and subsequently sent to labor education. In this sense, the present offer of rescue promises a family reunion where Xu's would can be healed. However, the rescue also threatens to put to an end the union which Xu has developed over the years, a union that is bound to China.

During the reunion with his father, Xu frequently finds himself suffering from where he physically is, as these places tend to break apart his well-integrated soul and flesh: “the set-up of the hotel suite and father's clothes make him feel an unnamable

pressure” (p. 139); “he finds himself unused to urban life” (p. 154); when barely touched dishes get removed at the restaurant, “his stomach grunts in protest—in his place, people bring an aluminum lunchbox to take leftovers home” (p. 143); while he thought he could relive his childhood memory at the dance hall, when he saw “in the soft, milky light, man-like women and woman-like men roam around him like ghosts,” he “felt uncomfortable and, just like a spectator is suddenly forced to act on the stage, unable to perform” (p. 143); he “realized father also belongs to this strange, incomprehensible world. Physical resemblance cannot erase spiritual division. He stares at father the way father stares at him, but neither can see through the other's retina to reach what lies at the depth of the eyes“ (p. 144);

While Xu fails to reach mutual-recognition with father, the future of the newly reunited family comes into question. As the same time, a thread that has been running in parallel to the reunion, a thread that is hinted at by the “there,” “the Red Earth Plateau,” and “my place,” coheres into a conspicuous thematization of self-development and self-recognition. For many critics, as will be discussed below, it is this thread that will account for Xu's absent-mindedness, his resentment of this “strange and incomprehensible world,” and his rejection of father's rescue. On numerous occasions, Xu attributes his own development to labor: through manual laboring, he gains physical strength, confidence, and self-recognition; he became friends with farmers in the process of laboring; his diligent wife gives him a family life he has always wanted. Laboring seems to be the transformative force that, through its operation at individual, inter-subjective, and social levels, has brought an ideal resolution to the questions of soul and flesh. While such a thematization can be readily recognized as a rehearsal of the Marxist doctrine, at

times, the narrative suggests a highly nuanced understanding of the challenge of this doctrine when it is brought to bear on an individual. Summarizing the way in which physical laboring transformed his taste and horizon by substituting new notions of real for older ones, Xu notes how in that process old memories are annulled and new recognition is solidified:

Through extended manual labor, through incessant transformation of substances between man and nature, he gradually acquired a fixed habitus. The habitus persistently molds him in its own fashion. In the long run, the past fades into a vague dream, or someone else's story told in books. His memory is also severed by this fixed habitus and the distinctly different lifestyle. Life in big cities became illusory; only the present is real. In the end, he became someone suited for this land and for land alone: He became a real herdsman. (151)

Eventually, Xu “discovered the real locus of the division between him and father:” “He, the veritable heir to the prominent family and on whom wealthy tycoons and their wife had lavished praises, has become a bona fide laborer! And the whole process between those two ends is nothing other than plain and yet bitter-sweet laboring” (p. 148)!

At the end of the novel, Xu returned to the remote farm. In sharp contrast to the father-son reunion in the opening scene, awaiting Xu was a heart-warming community:

He can finally see the school. A few persons are standing at his door, looking toward this wagon on the road. In the soft darkness of the dusk, Xiuzhi's white apron looks like the clear light of a star. Quickly, more and more people are gathered there, and finally, they saw it is him and ran toward the road. Running in the front is a small girl in red, she is like a fire, bursting forth toward him, closer, and closer, and closer.....

2.3 The Debate on the Meaning of the Novel

What the synopsis above captures—the main plot and the protagonist's rational thematization in the vein of Marxist doctrine of labor—is no more than a part—albeit a significant part—of the novel; in addition to the progression of the main plot and the

testimonial, as I will show, there exists an affective dimension to the protagonist that is largely independent of labor as thematized therein. At this point, I will dwell a little more on the partial image because it was this partial image that informed the controversy over the novel. In the midst of the controversy, the affective dimension which I seek to highlight was simply invisible. Seen as an image without substance—if it is seen at all, it failed to register in the various appraisals of the novel as the critics conveniently subsumed it under other privileged thematization.

Ding Ling (1981), the preeminent writer, issued her appraisal of Soul and Flesh in an article entitled “An Ode to the Patriots.” In this article, Ding Ling sets up a contrast between “revolutionist” and “many people”: “Adversities and persecutions could annihilate people, physically or mentally, but the revolutionist tend to be fortified in stead of annihilated by such negativity. Ding Ling elaborates: “Their (the revolutionists') heroic integrity is unlimited, they are full of faith in the future, they are filled with passions for the people. They are attuned to burgeoning new life; they care for the young sprout and for that reason become vigorous themselves. They are always devoted to their work and other people, and often earn the masses' praise. Such warmth nurtures their resolution even more.” Faith, passion, care, and vital exchange—if Ding Ling already touches upon an affect dimension, the affect is limited to a familiar range of a supposedly impregnable hero. What about hesitance, loneliness, doubt, or reclusiveness? These sentiments belong to “some other people,” who “lose their faith, lost their original beautiful aura and character; some of whom went mad, got sick, became disheartened; some of whom become cynical, vulgar and timid, obsessed with protecting themselves and their loves; some of whom became so bitter, depressed, and sad. They cannot see

even when standing right before a brand new condition. They have lost their love for the people, for socialism, and for the nation, and are trapped in their narrow prejudices” (2). In other words, Ding Ling posits a practically exclusive correlation between “the revolutionist” and the “positive” affect, on the one hand, and “some other people” and the “negative” affect. No mixing seems to be allowed between these two, and Ding Ling does not discuss any third group. Due to such binarism, Ding Ling's treatment of the affect only naturalizes and generalizes stereotypical image of “the revolutionist” and “the weakling.” An opportunity to fully engage with the affect of Xu, who is neither straightforwardly “revolutionist” nor a “weakling,” thus slipped away. When examining Xu more closely, Ding Ling chose to echo the novel by focusing on the labor theme to fit him in the image of “the revolutionist”: “In laboring, in the great nature, in dealings with the plain, pristine laboring mass, his grudge, abandonment, sorrow, and despair about his life are healed and replaced by a love for life, living, nature and the mass. He regains courage, confidence, he becomes a strongman”(p. 3).

Ding Ling's appraisal was consistent with her own political stance. A well-known writer since 1930s, she was a close friend of Mao in Yan'an and was a top official of cultural affair. When struck down in late 1950s as a rightist, instead of staying in Beijing on account of her seniority, she asked to be sent to work on a farm in remote Northern China and was subsequently prisoned for years. Having survived through all these uncalled-for turmoils, Ding Ling refused to join the scar literature in denouncing Maoist socialism and remained faithful in the Maoist socialist project. In faithfully mirroring Xu's analysis and thematization of his own experience, Ding Ling's commentary aimed to affirm and elevate the revolutionary spirit and commitment, and to challenge the nihilistic

ethos prevalent in the scar literature. Wittingly or not, however, her appraisal suppressed the affective complexity of Xu, who, in fact, may neither want nor deserve the “revolutionist” pedestal.

Ding Ling's effort to erect a revolution-spirited intellectual hero was not shared by other critics. Zeng Zhennan (1981), while largely in approval of Xu for the “extraordinary depth and breadth and stability of his mind” that sustained him through the ordeal, nonetheless notes that the ordeal was uncalled-for. More critics issued angry, devastating criticism of Xu. Tang Ben (1981)'s stance, for example, is diametrically opposed to Ding Ling; entitled “A Confused Human Being”, his commentary practically screams: “Xu does not make sense!” Rather than seeking redemption of the adversities, Tang insists that the adversities should be condemned and rejected. He asks: “For a young intellectual to perform the humiliating labor education, is it a repression and damage, or a nurturing and cultivation? ...What is labor?” It is not that Tang has no idea about labor; rather, he is demanding a more nuanced analysis and appraisal of labor. In particular, his is an indictment that Xu's labor education has violated a particular conception of proper laboring: “To poeticize the heavy physical labor shouldered by a young 'rightist' on a farm, to sing praises for rather than objectively describe and analyze and even utter the will for transformation, it is a severe distortion of life!” In his version of socialist society, “there is division of labor, everyone must work to one's capacity. Intellectuals are laborers, they are the creators of spiritual wealth. To put an intellectual on a farm, deprive his right of mental labor, make him a disciplined physical labor, is this a social progress or a regression? Is it something to be justified or condemned” (p. 57)? Focusing on condemning Xu's physical labor as unjust by using the nature and condition of physical

laboring as the exclusive rule of justice, Tang leaves no room for engaging with the fact that Xu has positive feelings about performing physical labor . Then, Tang gives himself no choice but declaring Xu as a “confused human being” and that his love for nature is a symptom of one who “has lost his angles and personality to the erosion of adversities and become numbed” (p. 56)!

Taking this total attack on Xu's consciousness one step further, Sun Shunlun & Chen Tongfang (1981) call Xu “a deformed soul.” “Being sent down for labor education,” Sun & Chen surmised: “must be no less than a fatal strike on Xu, and must have made his soul perverted under humiliating and lonely condition” (74). Although there is no evidence whatsoever to that effect, they went on to argue that Xu's love for nature is a psychologically regressive state and Xu was being homogenized by the backward Yellow Earth Plateau when he found himself amused by fellow herdsmen's “simple purity,” until “[h]e became a person who has lost any political sensitivity and consciousness.....as his fate has tortured him into an ignorant, undiscerning person” (p. 75). Xu's feelings of discomfort in Beijing and his refusal to go to the US were then impelled by “instinctual resentment” and “blind exclusivity,” which were symptoms of his “tiny mental and lived worlds” (p. 75). “In general,” they summarizes: “Xu's soul is perverted, his sentiments parochial and unrefined, and his judgment regressive and ridiculous. He cannot see or represent anything in a normal or objective way and cannot adapt to life beyond his own small world” (p. 75).

Underneath and beyond the contention over the appraisal of Xu's twenty years of physical laboring, the unannounced stake is the legacy of the intellectual policy of Mao's socialist China. As far as Xu's physical laboring was portrayed as an unjust

imposition under Mao's socialist China, Xu's professed positive assessment of his manual laboring can be and has been seen as an affirmation of not only Marxist doctrine of labor but also Mao's intellectual policy. Thus, the debate on Xu's merit was in fact a displaced debate on Mao's legacy: What is good of it? What is to be retained or revived? And what is to be abolished? As the controversy reflects, Mao's legacy on intellectual policy was still a provocative, contentious issue at the time of the publication of SF. Under Mao's path of continued revolution under socialism, which prioritized in relative terms socialist politics over economics, revolutionary mass democracy over production while recognizing the importance of the latter, the cultural elite had been subjected to devastating criticism, and class-leveling reform aiming at flattening the mental-manual labor hierarchy had been implemented in educational and industrial systems across the country. Intellectuals were expected to educate themselves to become laborers with socialist consciousness and thus strictly equal, if not inferior, to manual laborers, all striving to contribute to the building of the communist country. As a result of the aggressive implementation of the class-leveling project, the three major social divisions that had been opening up - between industrial worker and peasant, the urban and the rural, and mental and manual labor - were narrowed. By the time of the publication of Soul and Flesh in 1980, however, a new social order was gradually taking shape in the place of Maoist China. The Cultural Revolution and its cultural radicalism had come to an end with Mao's death and the arrest of the radical leaders. College entrance exam, which had been replaced by a mass recommendation system, was reinstated in 1977. In March 1978, Deng announced a new, depoliticized definition of what it means to be an intellectual under socialism in an uncharacteristically long speech on the opening

ceremony of the national science congress. In less than two months, the publication of an article titled “Practice is the Only Criterion for Truth” would inaugurate what would come to be called the first mental liberation (第一次思想解放). Economic liberalization closely followed. Deng announced Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone in 1979.

Read in this context of political shift, it is understandable how Soul and Flesh sparked a passionate resonance in Ding Ling's while triggering anger or even fear in Tang Ben's, who seized it as nothing less than a potential political battle between those who find Maoist cultural radicalism justified and redeemed by the figure of the protagonist and those who abhor the intellectual policy so much that they cannot accept the mere possibility of that redemption. Having prescribed Xu as demented, Sun & Chen address their verdict to “us”:

Life under twenty years of abnormal policy turns a precious intellectual of 1950s into an unrefined, ignorant, numbed person—this is a social as well as personal tragedy of an abnormal historical period...This reminds us how, during the 'Cultural Revolution,' some scientists, writers, and professors have to put aside their career to feed pigs, grow vegetables, clean restroom. These painful experiences, we still vividly remember. The losses that our project has suffered from such product of ultra-leftist lines have not yet be recovered. Why (are we) beautifying and promoting Xu's tragedy and the like?”

Driven by their respective political agenda, these interpretations were more interested in hijacking Soul and Flesh for their respective purposes than elucidating the full intricacy of Xu and ended up limiting and distorting its political message. As mentioned earlier, the gloomy moments of Xu's affective life were excluded from Ding Ling's stereotypical image of the revolutionist hero; and yet Tang, and Sun & Chen, could not handle Xu's appreciation of his physical laboring. In result, Xu is summed up as either an omnipotent, impregnable revolutionist hero, or a “confused,” “alienated” human being “who knows neither why he suffers nor what makes his own fate” and whose

emotions, be it proud, confidence, relief, or happiness, are dismissed as symptoms of confusion, alienation, and hallucination. Now, more than thirty years later, when the political field of force has deprived the novel of its urgency, maybe we have the space and vocabulary to achieve a different reading. In what follows, I will try to demonstrate that, as much as the critics have flattened Xu into a one-dimensional being, that is, an absolute hero for emulation or a target for attack, Xu's affective life defies such flattening. In terms of the narrative, it precedes the laboring and operates on a logic independent from the rational theme of laboring. Ultimately, it also intimates a political orientation that is at odds with Maoist socialism but in deep affinity with the political vision of Deng Xiaoping, the designer general of China's open and reform.

2.4 Friendship, Affect, and Soul and Flesh Re-read

In Politics of Friendship, Derrida (2006) accomplishes a thorough deconstruction of the concept of “friendship” through a characteristically careful examination of the tenets on friendship espoused by a long list of thinkers, such as Aristotle, Cicero, Montaigne, Nietzsche, etc. In his signature gestures, he takes these thinkers' well-known doctrines on friendship and turns them into open-ended yet precisely angled questions that, in interrogating their classical meanings, call for new imaginations and practices. For example, in response to Aristotle's notion that one cannot have too many friends, Derrida asks:

How many are there? How many of us will there be?
(Yes, in small numbers, as Aristotle would characteristically insist, friends must be few in number, otherwise they could not be the friends of this friend.)
In small numbers, but what is a small number? Where does it begin and end? At one? At one plus one? One plus one man? One plus one woman? Or none whatsoever? Do you mean to say that it begins with all men and all women, with anyone? And does democracy counts? (p. x)

The underlying premise of such operation is that friendship is a fundamental site of experience of self-other relationships. As such, friendship becomes a political concept that renders untenable the common boundary between the private and the public, the sentimental and the political; “friendship” can no longer be contained within the interpersonal sphere of sentiment but blends into the public arena of politics. Indeed, as Derrida seems to suggest, our mode of friendship implicitly delimits our imagination of democracy: The form and substance of the democracy we can have depends on our understanding of friendship, because “[d]emocracy has seldom represented itself without the possibility of at least that which always resembles – if one is willing to nudge the accent of this word – the possibility of fraternization” (p. viii), and by rethinking friendship, Derrida “would seek to think, interpret, and implement another politics, another democracy” (p. 104). Friendship thus conceived is an allegory of democracy: When hearing “friendship,” one might as well think of democracy also. For example, the question of the number of friends one can have is crucial to the extent of democracy. Through similar moves, Derrida teases out lessons from Cicero, Montaigne, and Nietzsche. Those most germane to this chapter can be briefly summarized thus: (1) When friendship is named, cited, and desired as such, as Derrida reminds us, the claim to friendship may have been driven by a narcissism, a hope for a narcissistic future. Calling friendship narcissistic, Derrida's point is not to moralize friendship or to deny the possibility of altruist friendship but to highlight the self-other tension inherent to the experience of friendship as such; (2) Nietzsche had observed:

Yes, there are friends, but it is error and deception regarding yourself that led them to you; and they must have learned how to keep silent in order to remain your friend; for such human relationships almost always depends upon the fact that two or three things are never said or even so much as touched upon: if these

little boulders do start to roll, however, friendship follows after them and shatters. (cited in p. 89)

Detecting here another manifestation of the self-other boundary in friendship, Derrida notes that “friendship is preserved by silence”; (3) Derrida's analysis of all the above structural “limits” of friendship leads up to his confrontation with Carl Schmidt's conception of the political as a powerful concept. As Derrida shows, while Schmidt's concept is manifestly predicated on the ability to think of the public enemy, it is nonetheless reliant on a tacit “fraternalization” that is no less exclusionary than the “enemy mentality.” Politicized as such, friendship is not an innocent or benign structure in the political sense, that is, as long as friendship requires enemy as its structural other.

In drawing political philosophical insights from the seemingly mundane affective experience, Derrida's approach was anticipated by Baruch Spinoza, whose thoughts on the passions of fear and hope “form the backdrop to his consideration on political institutions” (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999) and whose systematic writing on joy, sorrow, desire, etc., has become an inspiration for contemporary affect study. For our purpose, Spinoza's analysis of affect are illuminating for two reasons. First, it affords an apt complement to Derrida by helping us understand the operation of affect on the individual level. Second, by positing affect in theoretical terms, it allows us to comprehend the affective motions under question with greater precision. Defined as “confused ideas 'by which the mind affirms of its Body, or of some part of it, a greater or lessor force of existing than before, which, when it is given, determines the Mind to think of this rather than that’” (Gatens & Lloyd, p. 27), affect for Spinoza occupies a crucial place in the motion of the individual's mind. Insofar as it can, Spinoza maintains, the Mind “strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body's power of acting...i.e....those it loves.”

The self-interested mind, however, is not self-sufficient due to its dependence upon some prior images for its capacity of imagination, as it is

aided by what posits the existence of a thing, and on the other hand, is restrained by what excludes the existence of a thing. ...Therefore, the images of things that posit the existence of a thing loved aid the mind's striving to imagine the thing loved, i.e. ... affect the Mind with Joy. On the other hand, those which exclude the existence of a thing loved, restrain the same striving of the Mind, i.e. ... affect the mind with sadness. Therefore, he who imagines that what he loves is destroyed is saddened. (cited in Gatens & Lloyd, 27-28)

“There merges here an associative logic which could be just as appropriately described as a logic of emotion, and especially of desire, as it can be described as a logic of imagination,” Gatens & Lloyd observe: “The conjoint operations of imagination and emotion are not to be dismissed as mere distortions of reason. The interactions of imagination with the central emotions - desire, joy and sadness - yield systematic variations in intensity of attachment and aversion. These fluctuations are different from the ordered relations between clear and distinct ideas of reason; but they have nonetheless an order of their own which lends itself to rational investigation” (p. 26).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to ascertain whether or not Spinoza's writing on affects actually informed the writing of Soul and Flesh, which is not entirely impossible. However, it is obvious how Spinoza sheds new light on Xu's soul-and-flesh problem. We have discussed earlier how the problem of the relationship of soul and flesh can be understood as a key to the structure and meaning of the narrative. Now, in light of Spinoza's systematic treatment of affect, especially his definition of affect of a kind of modulator of non-rational dynamics, we may better grasp Xu's affective motions. Notably, we can recall that Xu's consciousness as far as it is presented in the narrative started out from the affect of sorrow. In accordance with Spinoza, we may posit that Xu's

mind has all the more need to strive “in so far as it can,” to hold on to images that posit things that it loves so as to increase the individual's power of action. To begin with, the young Xu loved and wanted his parent's love, and the image that posits that love for him is that of “caress,” an image that first appears in Xu's only recollection of his childhood:

He (Xu) had not received much caress from mother, who touched Mah Jiong way more than his hair; he had not received much teaching from father, whose face is always sullen, frustrated, bored, and who then fights with mother to no end...Eleven at the time, he already vaguely understood this much: Mother needs father's tenderness, and yet father needs to get rid of this quirky wife most. Neither of them needs him! He is but the product of the arranged marriage between an America-educated boy and the daughter of a landlord. (p. 140)

The scarcity of motherly touch or caress and fatherly teaching, both signs of parental attention and affection and both involving mindful and bodily presence, restrains Xu's mind and was the source of young Xu's sorrow. This scarcity is a debt the parents owe to Xu, and with father's abandonment and mother's death, Xu continues to bear the sorrow. The Communist Party, it seems, was not of much help in this respect. The debt is paid back on an unexpected occasion by an unlikely candidate. On the cold, damp night of the event, Xu woke up in the midst of a group of “rag-like” people sleeping in a mud hut. In search of a dry and warm place, he found the horse stable. Noticing an unoccupied section of stable, he climbed in and laid down, “just like the new born Jesus.” The narrative continues:

In came the moonlight at an angle, drawing a diagonal on the wall, splitting light from shadow. As if worshiping at the moon, the cattle hang their heads low by the stable. Suddenly he felt extremely sad, as the scenario as a whole perfectly symbolizes his lonely situation: People have deserted him, leaving him with the cattle.

He begins to cry. The narrow stable constrains his body, just like life is repressing him from all directions. Father deserted him, then mother died. Uncle took away all her belongings, except him. Later he moved to school dorm and continued school on People's Assistantship. The Communist Party took him in, Communist's school educated him. In the open atmosphere of the 50s, despite

his eccentric, sensitive and taciturn personality developed in a deformed family, he slowly reached out into the larger collective. Like all high school students, he had a beautiful dream about the future. The dream came true when he graduated. He walked into the classroom in the blue uniform, with notebook and chalk. He was making a living of his own. But, just because the school's Party Secretary had to fulfill the rightist quota, he was pushed away to his father. As if class is passed from generation to generation through blood kinship, he now becomes a member of capitalist class. First, capitalists deserted him, leaving with him "capital" only on his resume. Then, people deserted him, but giving him a "rightist" hat. He becomes a man deserted by everyone, exiled to this remote camp for labor education.

Having eaten up all the hays before it, a horse moved to him, reaching the full extent of the harness. Its mouth is now beside his head, he feels a warm air blowing on his face. He sees a brown horse searching for rice grains near his head. Soon the brown horse notices him too. Not scared, it turned to smell him with its wet nose and rub his face with its soft lips. This caressing made his heart trembling. Holding the long, bony horse head, he suddenly burst into uncontrollable crying, his tears smearing on the brown mane. Then he knelt in the stable and scooped all the rice grains before the brown horse.

Alas, father, where were you then? (p. 145-146)

Narrated here is a critical comment. Waking up in an intolerable condition in which the crowd, the "rag-like" people continue to sleep, Xu recognizes his bodily loneliness and the self-insufficiency of the mind. As the last paragraph cited above suggests, at the depth of sorrow, Xu probably thought of his father. But the same paragraph also suggests, at the end of the event of the night, the father was released from Xu's mind. This was made possible by the big brown horse, whose trusting, attentive, warm physical "caressing" more than fulfilled Xu's theretofore life-long yearning. Along with the "uncontrollable tears," Xu's father and his sorrow were discharged. Having gained a new image of love, Xu's mind and body are liberated.

As if whatever had happened on the farm before this eventful night belonged to time immemorial, this moment also coincides with the beginning of Xu's memory of his day-to-day life on the farm, which acquires at this instant a coherent, chronological framework. In this newly inaugurated temporality of survival, the big brown horse, as the

image that affords power and intensity to Xu's mind and body by positing the thing Xu loves, promises to return time and again. As such, the big brown horse constitutes a “primary friend” for Xu--primary, according to Derrida, “because it is the first to present itself according to logic and rank, primary according to sense and hierarchy, primary because all other friendship is determined with reference to it, if only in the gap of the drift or the failure.” As Derrida noted: “primary friendship” marks a peculiar relationship with time: it is always located within a specific time; it takes time and gives it a chronological form:

Primary friendship does not work without time, certainly, it never presents itself outside time: there is no friend without time - that is, without that which puts confidence, and no confidence which does not measure up to some chronology, to the trial of a sensible duration of time. The fidelity, faith, 'fidence', credence, the credit of this engagement, could not possibly be a-chronic... Engagement in friendship takes time, it gives time, for it carries beyond the present moment and keeps memory as much as it anticipates. It takes and gives time, for it survives the living present.

Indeed, this night was the first instance where the narrative of Xu's life on the farm achieves a coherent form and flows in a chronological order—previously, as we can recall, there are only bits and pieces that pop up here and there when Xu slides into absent-mindedness. Also, from this point on, the mood of the narrative (issued from Xu's perspective) takes a sharp turn, from that of sorrow and isolation to one of joy and outreach to others. The first extended portrayal of his laboring scene, which comes shortly after the stable scene quoted above, is one of joyful sensory and emotional plenitude. Now a herdsman of able body and soulful resource, Xu is fully in contact with nature. In this section by which Tang Ben calls him “a man who has lost his angles and personality to the erosion of adversity and become numbed,” Xu details how the wind touches him, the smell of water and his own sweat, and how the horses playfully interact

with one another.

With confidence and prowess, Xu fights against elements but also gleefully discovers his fellow herdsmen, who only at this point begin to populate the novel. In some ways, they are just like the brown horse. Not only are they “simple, pristine and joyful,” for a rightist like Xu, they are also safe to be with, because they do not closely follow the official line—their understanding of the anti-rightist movement was that “1957 was the year where bookies were messed with”—and they don't care much about it. Indeed, they even sheltered Xu from an impending mass criticism. This act of defiance against the official line left an indelible mark in Xu: “That day, he always remembered as an extremely special tenderness, remains in his memory so deeply” (152). In other words, Xu's heart is touched. Recalling Derrida and Nietzsche, in this touching scene of the birth and growth of interpersonal friendship Xu has unveiled its political core, or what must remain a fraternal secret for it is one of those “two or three things” which must never be mentioned: Mao's intellectual policy (and those in support of it) is the public enemy of Xu's burgeoning fraternity, the constitutive other against which the fraternity derives its identity. After this founding event, there will be many more vital exchanges between Xu and his fellows. Later on, for example, they will call Xu “brother,” and will want to entrust to this intellectual the education/future of their children and grandchildren.

But the culmination of such friendship is Li Xiuzhi, Xu's wife. A refugee of famine, Xiuzhi was a postal bride for a driver on the farm. But she arrived on the farm only to learn that her husband-to-be had died three days before in an accident. Just like rightist status makes Lingjun an undesirable marriage candidate, her “skinny body left all

single men on the farm uninterested.” They got married only because Xiuzhi was decidedly unwilling to go back home and Xu jokingly said “Yes” to a willing go-between. In contrast to that of Xu's parents, this marriage will be a comic version of “arranged” marriage.

This marriage, which Zeng Zhennan (1981) called the “most beautiful literary love story in the past few years” and which Tang Ben (1981) sneered as “barbaric” is actually a marriage of friendship. Xu's sense of intimacy with Xiuzhi is not the fruit of romance or courtship but his (mis)recognition of Xiuzhi in the image of the big brown horse:

Suddenly, he thought of the brown horse; a bitter sweetness swept through his heart. He felt he had known her all along, he had been waiting for her all these years.....She halted the needle work, her instinct tells her: This is someone she can entrust her life with. Without the slightest bit of strangeness, she rested her hand on his hunched back. (158)

As mentioned earlier, Soul and Flesh is written in the third-person singular from the perspective of Xu, the male protagonist, and the narrative is carefully controlled such that it is from Xu's point of view that the reader accesses the narrated world. The narrated world, in its turn, seems to be informed by a Kantian episteme: While Xu has a sensitive grasp of his own interiority, his access to the outside world remains limited to the manifest surface. In this regard, the paragraph quoted above marks a breakthrough in claiming access to the interiority of an other, in this case, the content of Xiuzhi's instinct. This newly asserted communicability may serve to justify the marriage, but it also allows Xu to effect an articulation of an alternative political economy by reading or translating Xiuzhi.

If the big brown horse has afforded physical touch and the fellow herdsmen have

provided political protection, Xiuzhi would provide both and even more. Based on the analysis above, this means that Xiuzhi's friendship will bring most joy for Xu and at the same time will exhibit a most consistent a postsocialist quality. Two notions of “postsocialism” have been in circulation. Arif Dirlik (1989) uses the term in his critical appraisal of Deng's “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” As such, post-socialism in Dirlik refers to a political economic regime—Deng's China, in this case—that is neither classical socialism nor capitalism but somewhere in-between and bearing continuity with both. This concept received further development in Zhang Xudong (2008), who uses it in a more expansive way and in conjunction with “postmodernism,” to describe the complexity of the contemporary Chinese public space. On one level, postsocialism refers to structures of feeling, memory, discursive practices, and critical potential that can be seen as socialist legacy, all of which are situated in and interact with postmodernism as a larger world-historical framework. On another level, however, it could also be said that postsocialism designates the historical moment and condition in China, under which postmodernism could thrive. In either case, postsocialism in Zhang emphasizes the remaining continuities with official, classical socialism. In contrast, Pickowicz (1994)'s notion of “postsocialism” emphasizes the centrifugal aspect of cultural and political sentiments and expressions voiced under and after official socialism, such as alienation, estrangement, discontent, etc. Whereas Zhang directs our attention to the after-life of official socialism, Pickowicz's main point is that the end of official socialism was foreshadowed well before the latter's official ending. In the case of Soul and Flesh, I mainly use post-socialist in Pickowicz's sense of the term.

The confluence of Xu's joy and postsocialism (or post-Maoism) in the character of

Xiuzhi would suggest, among other things, Xu's joy as dependent upon a subversion of Maoist socialism. To avoid this association, Xiuzhi's expressions of friendship, ranging from her day-to-day practice of production, moral judgment, view on labor, exchange, and property rights, are presented from what can be called a "natural position." It is "natural" because, as Xu notes repeatedly, these ideas are not inculcated through any education or political movement, including but not limited to Xu's influence. This "purely natural" position, coupled with Xiuzhi's "poor peasant" status, which carries significant political clout during socialist China, would prove to be a good protection in case of political challenge.

Speaking of Xiuzhi's sense of justice, Xu notices, "She always keeps the pristine reason of peasant. 'Rightist' or not, this concept never entered her petite head. All she knows is that he is a good person, a down-to-earth person, and that's enough.", and "She often tells other women: 'My husband knows nothing but hard working. Messing with a folk like him is a sin, and will be punished even in after-life!'" (p. 162) Xu draws a distinction between "loving money" and "greed" through delineating the character of Xiuzhi: She "loves money," "even just five hundred bucks made her very happy," but she is not greedy for she only loves money earned through her labor. She often teaches their 7-year-old daughter: "It only makes sense to spend money that you earned by yourself. When I buy salt, I know the money came from my selling chicken eggs; when I buy peppers, I know this money came from my cutting rice; when I buy books for you, I know the money is from my processing grains,..." Xu approvingly comments on Xiuzhi's economic ethics as both natural and proper: "She has no abstract theory, no erudite philosophical argument, and yet these pristine, clear, and solid discourses, already make

the youngest member of this family aware: laboring is noble; the reward of labor only can give people joyful; wealth derived from exploitation or dependency is a shame!” (162)

It is impossible to miss, however, that the laboring Xiuzhi performs and privileges is small, individual-based household production, rather than collective production. On this farm, where “the leaders are weak at enforcing what is correct and half-hearted at implementing what is wrong,” Xiuzhi's “repressed vitality” blossoms: “Although the pressure to 'cut capitalist tail' exists, Xiuzhi thrives like a vigorous grass springing out of the crevices between stone planks.” She single-handedly builds a wall with materials appropriated from the farm. Just like what happens with the insanely prolific woman in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the poultry she raises “rapidly reproduce, like a magic.” Known as the “Commander General of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force”--because of the animals she raises, Xiuzhi is the very image of productivity and prosperity:

Everything comes out of Xiuzhi. When she comes home from work, chickens, ducks, geese, and pigeons come along with her. Qingqing is on her back, the poultry grouping around her feet, pigeons standing over her shoulder, woods burning in the stove, water boiling in pots. She had not learned operations management, but she is like the Buddha with a thousand arms, taking care of everything with calm, order, and thoroughness. (p. 160)

While enjoying this “familial warmth which he had never tasted,” Xu fully recognizes the political economic significance of Xiuzhi's production: “Xiuzhi has the ability to reverse the law of social development, when others call for a transition to communism, she has completed a recoup of natural economy versus commodity economy,” and their marriage “reinforces his affection for this land, making him more aware of the simplicity, purity, and propriety of a labor-centered way of life. And this is the joyful satisfaction that he had pursued many years ago“ (p. 160-161).

Thus, through Xiuzhi, a woman of natural goodness, a vision of good life and one

that is qualitatively different from socialism is completed. In this image of good life is also the end of Xu's affective pursuit. From the brown horse, fellow herdsmen, to Xiuzhi, the trajectory Xu's affective life draws a circle of fraternization around himself. For Xu, the radius of the circle is his safe and joyous survival which is secured by these friends' warmth, protection, and productivity. No matter what a chance event it was to begin with, Xiuzhi's marriage with Xu, a "happy ending," has become the "most intense association." Xu did not turn down his billionaire father's offer for patriotic or socialist reason but for the good, petite producer life that Xiuzhi most clearly embodies and promises.

2. 5. Epilogue

Based on my reading, Soul and Flesh can be capitulated thus: On the space of a remote farm, it stages the psycho-social survival of a man in the form of a revenge of the politics of nature. Populated by horses, illiterate farmers and peasant-refuges, this space is apparently one of nature but is not devoid of politics. Indeed, its most political feature is precisely the apparent absence of socialism, the political proper of the time. In the form of a circle of friendship, this politics of nature gravitates toward the male protagonist, an intellectual member who is the spokesperson of this politics by giving articulation to it.

In contrast to previous critiques of the political message of Soul and Flesh, the present reading suggests that the political message consists in an equivocation: on the one hand is a rational, objectivist message emphasizing on labor, on the other is an affective pursuit for personal joy and power; the former affirms the Marxist dialectical materialist doctrine, while the latter subverts and undermines the Maoist socialist program informed by that doctrine.

If the present reading seems plausible, Soul and Flesh deserves more critical

attention for its technique of equivocation. While giving lip services to such esteemed socialist categories as labor, manual labor, and manual laborer, this novel, narrated through the perspective of the male protagonist, does not hesitate to appropriate them for the articulation for an alternative politics. The most profound irony of all, perhaps, is that the esteemed poor peasant would be the one who subverts Mao's socialist collective economy by subscribing, in effect, to Locke instead of Marx for authority in moral judgment.

Perhaps a more productive question would be: How did Soul and Flesh get misrecognized for a socialist realist novel when it is postsocialist in nature? One reason, as suggested earlier, is the respective political agenda held by its critics at the time. Another reason may have to do with the respective vocabulary available to the author on the one hand and the critics on the other. While the author artfully weaves together a rich imagery (such as caress) echoing erudite contemporary western philosophers (e.g. Sartre, Anzieu, Levinas), the critics relied on an impoverished critical vocabulary. Commenting on the backwardness of conceptual and theoretical work in the realm of political struggle during the Cultural Revolution, Battelheim (1978) noted how the critical language used was inherited from the 1920s and inadequate to comprehend the evolving political scene. In this regard, the misrecognition of Xu's soul and flesh was only part of a larger problematic. At stake is the imagination of an up-to-date socialist (literary) critique.

In conclusion of this chapter, I would like to return to Xu's friends, the silent mass operating on “natural principles” of economics and justice. Xiuzhi, in particular, can be seen as a female counterpart to the “heroes” of Xiaodong Village whose blood-contract for de-collectivization has become the symbol of popular will in the official narrative of

open and reform as a fulfillment of popular will. Xu would be the conscientious intellectual of the emerging depoliticized period. For his friends, who are more “physical” than intellectual, Xu serves the function of a good intellectual: He is the benign and grateful human friend of the horses; for the fellow herdsmen, he is the bookie who can teach their children and give them a future; for Xiuzhi, he is an intellectual husband, who sees and appreciates her work and value as just, proper, and right. However, now that the founding secret of this friendship has been breached, and the constitutive other has faded away, this “most intense association” is itself in danger. As Deng's postsocialist reform deepens after early 1990s, the friendship between the intellectual and the peasant built on their harmonious unity in small production economy would soon be gone. If reality can be used as illustration here, Zhang Xianliang, the author of Soul and Flesh, was appointed to the CCPCC (The National Committee of the Chinese People's Politics Consultative Conference) soon after the publication of the novel. In 1986, he asserts in a public letter that capitalism is an inexorable stage of historical development and calls for the rehabilitation of capitalism. After Deng's announcement of deepening open and reform as national political economic orientation, Zhang promptly resigned as a state-sponsored writer, established his own company, and is now regarded the wealthiest writer in China. Meanwhile, the countryside has become the space of the immobile rural population, such as the elderly and the young, as millions of able-bodied peasants who have been “liberated” from the countryside have become migrant workers struggling in the cities.

CHAPTER 3

CRITIQUE OF AN INTELLECTUAL FASHION:

USELESS AND JIA ZHANGKE'S EMERGING IMPASS

3.1 Introduction: A Choreographed Encounter/non-encounter

A fictional moment is staged at the center of Useless (2007), Jia Zhangke's second documentary feature. In this shot of almost 1 minute, a white car on a dark, broken road slowly drives toward and passes the camera; as the camera turns and the car exits the frame, we see a man standing across the road; the camera pauses on him as he takes a distended stare in the direction of the van and then walks into the depth of the picture. But, as will be discussed below, the question is not so much that the shot is choreographed as that it seems superfluous or “useless” in terms of the syntax of the film. Why does Jia fabricate this shot of uncharacteristically condensed temporality in which Ma Ke, a Canton-based fashion designer and entrepreneur, now driving her SUV, is momentarily brought into a close proximity to a nameless coalmine worker by a road in Fenyang, Shanxi, who may or may not see her but stares on nonetheless?

Allow me to elaborate the shot before we move on: In the preceding scenes, the narrative revolved around Ma Ke, a Mainland Chinese fashion designer and entrepreneur, as the camera took the audience into the spaces of production, circulation, and consumption of Ma Ke's ready-to-wear clothing and her artistic, anti-fashion clothing, including a garment factory, Ma Ke's own studio, brand-name clothing store, and Paris Fall/Winter 2005 Fashion Week. While observational footage in direct cinema style accounts for the majority of this part of the film, Jia also interviews Ma Ke on her views of her own enterprises, first in her studio in Zhuhai, Canton, and later in Ma Ke's car

during a road trip in Fenyang, a coalmine city in Shanxi Province. In the second interview, while the camera shows from inside the running car the depth of an idyllic, hilly countryside unfolding along a smooth modern road, Ma Ke confides how she often goes to the countryside (xiangxia) to find creative inspirations. The film then cuts to an external wide shot from the side of a dirt road. Against the backdrop of a grim sky and on the broken dirt road, a white car comes from afar toward the camera. As the car slowly gets closer, the camera pans leftward to follow the car. The panning comes to a halt when the camera's point-of-view becomes perpendicular to the road. When the car, once filling the entire frame, exits the frame, a short man with a slightly hunched back is revealed on the other side of the road. In the next 14 seconds, the camera dwells on him as he motionlessly and silently gazes in the direction of the vanishing car, his face without expression, mouth slightly open, a white plastic bag hanging below his draped-on coat. Eventually, he turns and slowly walks away into the backdrop of barren mountains characteristic of Northern China. In the subsequent scenes, the camera follows the man and thereby brings the audience into various spaces in a coalmine town in Shanxi Province, such as tailor shops, a coalmine worker's home, a coalmine shower room, motorbike rides, a local market, etc., where the people relate to clothing in ways that often contradict and deflate Ma Ke's assertions.

But what exactly happens in the choreographed shot highlighted here? What does the coalmine worker see? Does Ma Ke see him? Is it supposed to be a scene of encounter or mere passing? What indeed is the intention for this scene of encounter/non-encounter? These are the questions this chapter wishes to tackle.

3.2 Jia Zhangke's Aesthetics and Politics: Staring at the Real

3.2. 1 The Real and the Ordinary

A leading figure among the so-called Sixth Generation directors, Jia achieved international renown through cinematic work addressing contemporary China. While his subject material has significant overlap with that of the Fourth and the Fifth Generations, Jia distinguishes himself by a consistently non-sentimental, anti-dramatic aesthetic, which has prompted critics to compare his work with Neorealism. Jia's realism has also been contrasted with socialist realism and dubbed as postsocialist realism, a realism that purportedly presents “raw reality stripped of ideology” and has the power of creating “an impression of confrontation with reality” (McGrath, 2007). Detecting an emerging documentary imperative among Urban Generation filmmakers since the close of the 1980s, Chris Berry (2007) considers Jia's cinematic temporality as exemplary of Deleuze's concept of “time-image” in contrast to the “movement-image” approach exemplified by the Hollywood style, where the diegetic time is the net product of various manipulations, Jia's cinema exhibits time in a “distended” form.

The “distended” form of temporality reflects Jia's aesthetic approach of distended focusing or staring (关注/凝视), through which he aims to reach out to his subject and capture “the real.” Since his first film, he has located in this approach his major distinction from other contemporary Chinese directors. A few determinations for this approach can be identified in “My Focus,” an article published in 1997 that can be retroactively seen as Jia's manifesto. The article opens with a question he was frequently asked about his first film, Xiaoshao Going Home: Why did he spend 7 minutes, a tenth of the entire film, simply following Xiaoshan, the migrant worker protagonist, walking? Jia's answer was two-fold. First, he understands that such question was raised at a time of

media technology-induced attention deficit, as “channel flipping has changed people's audio-visual habit,” who are “too easily making instinctual choices” and getting “used to second-by-second shuffling” (p. 17). Thus, he wrote: “I know, to them, the 7 minutes are equal to 28 commercials or two music videos or ... I don't want to calculate furthermore; it is the way of measurement in this trade, it is their way. For me, if there is a chance for me to talk with someone, I'd rather say something real/truthful in my own way” (用我的方式说一些实话) (p. 17). Secondly, Jia sees the question as one directed to the role of art and artist in contemporary society. For him, the artists (of the trade) quite

single-mindedly cater [to the audience], depriving themselves of dignity. Nobody talks about “the condition of art and our coping strategy” anymore, art has become the the artists' laughing stock. Many appear to have found a way out—which is to quickly move away from art. They have turned creation into operation. (p. 18)

What is lost in this pragmatic metamorphoses of art, Jia argues, is precisely “the real.” For him, to engage with the real involves a concentrated, steadfast effort to “confront the real,” to “genuinely communicate with people,” and not to “escape” or “dodge:”

All of a sudden, simply sentimental expression has become an artistic fad. Painting, music, and film have all stopped at the emotional surface and hardly delve down to the level of affect. In the more than 1,000 shots of a new-generation film, the author is concerned not with an individual being (生命个体) but purely his ego; what the motley audio-visual elements are woven into is nothing other than narcissism. Many works are like self-fondling, their scattered viewpoints actually refusing to genuinely communicate with people. The artists' visions are no longer sharp, and are lacking in focus. Many people do not have the strength to stare at their own real feelings, because that requires the confrontation with humanity. Some films' fast rhythm has nothing to do with passion, but only represents the way they escape the real. Thus, once the younger filmmakers like us take hold of the camera, we first examine whether we are genuine and focused. In *Xiaoshan Going Home*, our camera is no longer rootlessly floating. I will confront the real, although the real include the weaknesses or even the disgusting in the depth of humanity. I will quietly stare,

allow myself to be interrupted by the next shot only. We are not even like Hou Xiaoxian, who tilts the camera after staring, to have the distant mountains and waters dissolve his sorrow. We have the strength to look on, because—I do not avoid. (p. 18)

Whether or not there is certain truth to be located in the “surface of emotion” or narcissism might be disputable, what is important here is where and how Jia locates “the real” for his own artistic creation. From the first half of his answer as to why he spends 7 minutes, or one tenth of his film, following a migrant work's walk, we have learned that he was using the film as an occasion to “say something real/truthful in his own way.” The rest of his answer goes:

Thus, I decided to have the camera follow the jobless migrant worker, walking on the street at the end of one year which is also the beginning of the next year. It is in those days of transition between the old and the new, we accompany the deprecate Xiaoshan through the camera, wandering Beijing's coldness. The long 7 minutes were not so much a focused stare as a test about focusing. Today, when people's aural and visual organs have got used to shuffling second-by-second, would there still be anyone who can patiently stare, with us, at the ultimate end of the camera—at those people who are or are not like us. (p. 17)

While “focusing” and “stare” will prove to be an enduring component of Jia's technique of “the real,” the image of the migrant worker has foreshadowed the ordinary people as Jia's subject of “the real.” Subsequent to the critical moment in this article, Jia writes passionately:

Not sure when it all started, there is always something that excites me to no end. The flood of passengers on the street of dusk, and the white steam rising from food stands at dawn; they both make me feel the existence of something real. Life, whether stretched out or twisted, fluctuates before [my] eyes. Life drains away unnoticed. When they pass by, I smell the sweat from their bodies and mine. When our breathes fuse into one, we reach communication. Different faces bear identical experiences, I prefer to see the acne on the dust-covered faces of migrant workers, because their naturally open youth does not need “pampering.” I prefer to listen to the sound they make when they eat, because that [food] is their honest harvest. Everything [about them] naturally exists, we only need to stare at it, to

feel it. (p. 19)

Why this passionate embrace of migrant workers in Beijing, and such defense of their “uncivilized” manners in the name of “the natural?” Moreover, what makes them the privileged bearer of the real? Is it because Jia, born in Fenyang, Shanxi, in 1970, grew up in this township until he left for a vocational art school in a city only as a compromise with his father, who hates to see his son's life “drain away” in the township? In numerous articles and interviews, Jia frequently refers to individuals or experiences in the township as having deep imprints on his attitude toward the world; these references express a genuine affection and admiration for these individuals. A most notable example is “nanny,” a childhood neighbor, who looks after Jia and his sister when their parents cannot be home. “Nanny” was a widow with three children. She single-handedly brought them up with money earned from a small food stand by the long-distance bus station. When Jia's parents are away and the kids go to her home, she teaches them paper-cutting, tells them classical legend story, and feeds them like her own. Jia admires her immensely:

“Nanny” is very tidy; her attire and household are always neat. She is also very self-respected; she does not easily ask for help. I remember she always told me: One must be loyal to friend, be kind to everyone, be pious to parents, and be brave when things happen. With her, these ethics are not some abstract concepts but some substantive and concrete daily principles; they are a kindness that is rooted in her humanity. She cannot read much, did not receive much education, but in her I felt a deep kind of cultivation, a cultivation not from books but received from a secular customs passed down from generation to generation—I feel this is in fact a kind of culture. (p. 47)

Jia compares the culture embodied in “nanny” and the instrumental culture promoted through contemporary education:

I always feel that culture and knowledge are not entirely the same. Some people are indeed well read, they seem to be very knowledgeable, but such knowledge only increases his distinction from people around him, it does not improve his basic attitude as a human being. In the eyes of such people, knowledge is just like

money, it is a practical currency. It is precisely in this sense that I felt I see in “nanny” more cultural dignity than in those so-called intellectuals. (p. 47)

Dignity, a quality Jia highly values, is also seen in his friends in the township. In a note on his second film, Pickpocket, Jia wrote: “Self respect, passion, and deep-seated cultivation, these are the touching nature of my township friends” (p. 27). However, there is a somewhat dark tone to Jia's image of the contemporary township youth, which is captured in a line quoted earlier: “Life drains away unnoticed.” Again, in several instances, Jia painfully notes the losses—loss of innocence, dream, youth, future, etc—his township peers (friends, classmates, cousin) suffer. As an intellectual who still has a future to pursue his dreams, Jia's voice is not guilty or condescending but compassionate, because he suffers from the loss himself. Thus, on a speech to Peking University students, we hear Jia talking about his cousin whom he grew up with and who later became a coalmine worker, and how they used to be very close but now have little to talk about:

The two of us were once very close. We became gradually distanced when he left home to work in a coalmine when he was 18 or 19; but I know his heart is pent up with all these feelings. Now everytime we go back home, we are very silent, very estranged, and very strange, only occasionally looking at each other with a smile. When thinking of this film [Still Life], I thought of his face. Each time I see his face, [which does] not say anything, I know why I have been making this kind of film, why in the last ten years I did not want to move the camera away from faces of this kind. (p. 183)

An elaboration on “faces of this kind” can be found in Jia's article on his own reaction to Platform when watching this film three years after its production. This film draws on Jia's real life experience as a performer in a troupe in the 1980s, it evokes his reminiscence of adolescent days and friends. Getting into college makes him one of the few successful ones in his class. He initially felt proud of himself that his perseverance paid off, he reached his ideal. “But, when I grew older, I suddenly discovered that in fact

to give up one's ideal is harder than to persist.” He goes on:

All those who dropped out had a reason [to do so], such as the father has passed away and the family needs a man to work; or the family can no longer support [the student], and [the student] no longer wants to spend the parents' money. Everyone had a concrete reason and gave up their ideal in order to bear a responsibility in life, a responsibility for someone else. In such circumstances, the so-called persevering ones like us, actually give up much less than they do, because they bear the extremely mundane, dull life. They know what the result of giving up would be, but they gave up. For life in a township, today is the same as tomorrow, last year is the same as this year. At this point, life to them holds no more miracles, no more possibility; what is left is only a mundane life [trapped] in a struggle with time. Understanding this made a huge difference on my view of people and things. I started to really feel, really come close to those so-called losers, those so-called ordinary people. I feel I can see they have a strength in them, and this strength is what sustains the society. (p. 83)

With these notes, we can better understand the unswervingly compassionate stare at the protagonists in Jia's films—the rural to urban migrant workers in Xiaoshan Going Home and The World, the pickpocket in Pickpocket, the small troupe in Platform, the prodigal son in Unknown Pleasures, etc. Unlike the subjects of other Sixth-Generation directors, whose protagonists have included a single mother of disabled child, a homosexual, a drug addict, etc., Jia's subjects are not so much inhabitants of social margins as bearers of historical debris. From a social-historical perspective, the former are contemporaneous with the contemporary society, while the latter inhabit a life world that is being superseded by the tempo of the postsocialist China. In this debris are Xiaoshan's village friendship network which he lost in the city of Beijing; the conventional moral economy of Xiao Wu that is rendered obsolete by his surroundings; the hope and passion of the troupe members that have dissipated in the liberalizing years, not to mention towns immersed under the water of the Three Gorge Dam or the Soviet-style factories and communities demolished for urban real estate development in the age of neoliberalism.

But the ordinary persevere. And it is their dignity, their strength, and their deep-seated cultivation that Jia wants to bring to light. In the ordinary folks, Jia's aesthetic and ethic, affect and rational ideal converge, and this convergence makes the ordinary the real.

3.2.2 The Intellectuals

It is perhaps no surprise that the imagery of culture in Jia's films is distinct from that in other Chinese directors. While Chen Kaige has been preoccupied with cultural modernization from a modernist elite point-of-view, Zhang Yimou has been a magician of national culture, and most Sixth-Generation directors associate themselves with urban subcultures and countercultures like rock music, drugs, homosexuality, etc., Jia Zhangke has refrained from all three positions. Rather than celebrate elite culture, mythologize certain indigenous culture, or indulge in contemporary urban marginality, Jia pays close attention to the condition of popular culture among ordinary people: from disco, karaoke, local opera, modeling, theme park, etc., all set in the contexts of their popular consumption and dispersion.

In the landscape of the township of the ordinary, there is simply little space for the elite. Intellectual characters barely exist in Jia's early films, and when they do, they are cast in a somewhat negative light. We may recall, Wang Dongfang, a college student and the only intellectual character in Xiaoshan Going Home, is migrant worker Xiaoshan's friend; they came from the same village and now both live in Beijing. On Xiaoshan's request, Wang promises to help him buy some books for Xiaoshan's sibling but then fails to show up for the appointment. Although this episode was only one of the minor events depicted in the film, the fact that this betrayal takes place in Jia's serious-minded debut

must be registered as significant.

Jia's critique of intellectuals, as reflected in his published writings, may be classified into two types. First, probably as a necessity for an emerging director at a time of self-definition, Jia was particularly critical of the cinematic style of some Chinese filmmakers; that is, as a new-comer, he had to identify himself in significant contrast to certain significant others. Thus, while he credits the influence of Chen Kaige's Yellow Earth with inspiring his dream to make films, he rejects the Fifth Generation's grand gesture to represent the generation, their penchant for legend (传奇) and tendency to poeticize and valorize their own experience; the Sixth Generation directors, in contrast, have the merit of not “monopolizing discursive power,” but run the risk of solipsism (p. 29-31). Secondly, in a broader sense and as would befit his populist commitment, Jia genuinely resents forms of elitism. In an article titled “The age of amateur film is coming again,” he rejects the professionalist pretense of the Chinese filmmakers as reflections of fossilized, prejudiced mindset. Professing that “I've always resented the uncalled-for sense of professional privilege” and that “in contrast (to professionalism), amateurism holds equality and justice, and concern for life and sympathy for the ordinary people,” he argues: “Who can say that from the crowds lingering in pirated VCD stores will not emerge China's Quentin Tarantino's someday?” (p. 35) If such populism and anti-elitism inform a mistrust of intellectuals that seems to inform Jia's films, this mistrust gradually shifts into an implicit, nascent form of social critique in Still Life, a film set in a township on the Yangtze River that was being relocated due to the Three Gorge Dam project. The ordinary, more precisely the ordinary in migration, remains the focus of the film, but a glimpse of the local elite was offered. And, what a sight revealed: A party of some local

elite is about to begin, and as the host, a local bureaucrat, presses a button on a remote control in his hand, the lights trimming a newly built highway in the far background came on, turning the sight of the public project into a spectacular background to this elite party!

East, Jia's first documentary feature, marks a new beginning in this sense, as the protagonist, Liu Xiaodong, is a world-renowned contemporary Chinese painter whose work also features predominantly ordinary people set in ordinary scenes. Chen Danqing (2009) describes the extent of the affinity between Liu's paintings and Jia's films thus: "I would say: Liu Xiaodong was like a Jia Zhangke in the painting arena, and, later, Jia Zhangke is a Liu Xiaodong in the film arena" (p. 10). In retrospect, East, in featuring Liu Xiaodong painting construction workers on the Yangtze River and sex workers in Bangkok, prompts a question that had been latent in Jia's work up to this point. The question has to do with the division of labor between populist intellectuals like Liu and Jia and their subjects. For our purpose, the question can be formulated thus: How does Jia negotiate his own position as an intellectual in relation to his subject—the ordinary people inhabiting an imminently superseded world?

3.2.3 Aesthetics vs Politics: Recording Without Representing

Initially, the question of division of labor between Jia and his ordinary subjects was latent for a few reasons. We have already discussed at length his determinations of the ordinary as the real. Affectively, ethically, and aesthetically, he sympathizes with them. This intense sympathy prompts him to reach out to them and also enables him to consciously develop a set of techniques to respectfully reach them in their spontaneous state. Protagonists of most of his fiction films to date are played by non-professionals; he keeps lighting to minimum and eschews detailed scripts in favor of dynamic sketches that

encourage on-site improvisation, such that the actors participate in the shooting largely as themselves. The distance between Jia and the ordinary folks, and that between the folks-as-actors and the folks-as-themselves are thus kept to a bare minimum.

In non-intrusive, faithful, respectful recording of the ordinary folks in their own milieu, Jia manages to have avoided, both subjectively and objectively, the potential of objectifying his subjects,. Thus, he came close to what Trinh T. Minh-ha had called “speaking nearby” (as different from, say, “speaking for” or “speaking about”) (Chen, 1982, Ruby, 1981) as an approach intended to overcome the fissure between the subject and the object of representation in the so-called “crisis of representation” that has swept through all academic or non-academic practices that have a vested interest in representation of certain “others.” In an interview, Trinh defines “speaking nearby” as

a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition — these are forms of indirectness well understood by anyone in tune with poetic language. Every element constructed in a film refers to the world around it, while having at the same time a life of its own. And this life is precisely what is lacking when one uses word, image, or sound just as an instrument of thought. To say therefore that one prefers not to speak about but rather to speak nearby, is a great challenge. Because actually, this is not just a technique or a statement to be made verbally. It is an attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world. (Chen, 1982, p.87)

However, as much as Jia rejected “representing (others)” on his part, to the extent that his work draws upon, appropriates, mimics the experiences of ordinary people, he cannot but represent his subjects in one way or another, even though it may not in fact or in effect objectify them. Objectification, if only a theoretical possibility when Jia started his career, when sometimes most people in the crew were volunteers, became more and

more of a real possibility as Jia's career became more and more successful. As early as 1998, that is, before the gleaming of major awards and honors that include having three entries in the annual top-ten films list of the prestigious journal of Cahiers du Cinema, a Golden Lion award at Venice International Film Festival, and numerous other awards, Jia already came under the shadow of success:

Success has created for me some [new] conditions, but at the same time also brought some temptations...For example, with the cash award, now I can take cab when I go out, I don't have to fight to get on the bus anymore. In such conditions, even if you try to squeeze yourself into the bus, your entire mentality is no longer the same, the feelings you had in the past would be gone. It would become a contrived act. In other words, in the process of pursuing success, you may unwittingly lose bit by bit your foundation—when thinking of this, sometimes I am really scared.” (p. 69)

We may recall how Jia invokes in his manifesto of 1997 an unqualified “real” that is associated with “the ordinary” to which he confidently identifies, and declares that he “will confront the real,” that he “has the strength to look on” because he does “not avoid” (p. 18-19). In 2002, his scope of the “real” would be redefined:

The so-called real created by documentary techniques may very well conceal the real hidden inside the order of reality (现实秩序). Dialect, non-professional actors, real-life settings, synchronized audio recordings or even long shots do not represent the real themselves. Someone could produce a perfect hallucinatory drug with all the above elements and have you lost in a ghost-tale world.

In fact, the real of film does not exist in any specific, partial moment; the real only exists at the structural connections, it is the precise reason and unassailable cause for the initiation, the extension, the turn, and the closure (起承转合), it is the order of reality that remains convincing even after the narrative is unraveled.

For me, all documentary techniques are in order for the depiction of the real world of my inner experience. We can hardly ever get close to the real itself, and the meaning of film is not just to reach the level of the real. I am after the sense of real more than the real in film, because I feel that the sense of real belongs to the aesthetic dimension, whereas the real stops within the sociological domain. Just like in my film, it is an individual's existential crisis that cuts through the social issues; after all, I am a director, not a sociologist. (p. 101)

Still poised to reach out to a certain real, Jia's vision here has become opaque, the tone more tentative, “the real” qualified. In Jia's almost defensive statement of his pursuit of “the sense of real” and “the real world” of his “inner experience,” isn't it acknowledged therein an implicit distance between Jia and his subjects, that is precisely, as he calls it, sociological? At the same time, maybe it is the “inner sense of real” that continues to prevent a helpless drift toward the “self-fondling,” narcissistic position?

After 2002, Jia's films are no longer set exclusively in townships. In 2006, as mentioned above, Liu Xiaodong became the first intellectual/elite protagonist in Jia's first documentary feature. Far from gone, the ordinary now shares Jia's focus with the elite. But townships or other places the ordinary inhabits will have been shrunk to blocs that, along with blocs made of other places, make up Jia's filmed space. “After The World, I became more and more inclined to a bloc-structure, presenting several groups of different people in one film or spanning across different localities.....” acknowledges Jia in a populist tone reminiscent of his celebration of the coming of the age of amateur film:

As I see it, a unified, closed traditional narrative, such as a complete drama featuring a man and a woman and running through the space of 90 minutes, is now inadequate to present what I have felt to be the complexity and variety of human life in reality. Today, we tend to have the opportunity to simultaneously live multiple human relationships that are not related to one another, or move between different spaces. We constitute our new experiential world through comparing and consulting different life, different human relationship, and different places. Maybe this is brought about by the Internet, satellite TV, and convenient communications. In China, the closed age for people to be aware of only one reality has ended. (p. 231)

Thus, Liu Xiaodong brings together in East the Three Gorges and Bangkok, and Still Life features “in the same region, the stories of two unrelated individuals” (p. 231). But, as part of the “initiation, extension, turning, and closure” that determines the filmic

real for Jia, when and how should such pluralization of space and subject be articulated is an important question. Specifically, how will this pluralization of space and subject relate to Jia's overall approach to the real and, in particular, his commitment to the ordinary? It is in this juncture that Useless provides an answer that is as intriguing as it is exciting.

3.3 Useless: Between The Intellectuals And The Ordinary

Billed as the second piece of a projected “Trilogy on Artists” intended to “introduce the artist's work and advanced thought to the public” as “Chinese intellectuals are again marginalized and the public has lost interest in intellectual elite” at a time of “whole-hearted consumerism,” Useless is the latest documentary work by Jia thus far (p. 230). Produced within a year after East and Still Life, it further develops many newly found stylistic features, especially a bloc-structure comprising pluralization of space and subject, which are blended with other documentary techniques. As the shot list suggests, Useless can be divided into Act I, an act of intellectual elite, and Act II, an act of ordinary people, with each act further divided into spaces of production, spaces of exchange, spaces of meaning and consumption, thus making up each act as a system of clothing. The symmetrical character of the two acts heightens the intelligibility of the contrast and opposition between them. On the other hand, the comprehensive character of each act highlights difference and contradiction within each of them.

Act I unfolds with a distended study of a garment factory, which the last shot of this scene reveals it to be the site of production of Exception, which is followed by a brief visit to a space of exchange—the flagship store of Exception in Guangzhou. Ma Ke is a thoughtful, creative fashion artist and entrepreneur who thrives on challenging ideas. In

1996, she and a friend established their own studio on the recognition that “China is the biggest exporter of clothing and yet does not have its own brand.” By the time of the making of this film, she had become an award-winning designer with her own brand-name (“Exception”) and chain-stores. In the mean time, she has come to harbor a critical stance from clothing as a manufacturing industry and from the fashion establishment. The new, avant-garde clothing line called “Useless” represents her endeavor to fully express herself, which she claims she cannot do with her commercial, ready-to-wear clothing. In spite of the centrality of Ma Ke to this act, this centrality is a contextualized one.

By this sequencing, then, Ma Ke emerges not so much a primary locus of production as one of meaning and consumption of clothing. “What hand-made objects transmit is affection,” Ma Ke maintains: “This transmission is not to be found in industrial settings. The reason is simple: There is no relationship between any manufactured product, its producer, and its end-user. You'd never know who has made the piece of clothing you are wearing.” As a clothing industrialist, Ma Ke's critique of manufacture is surprising in its radicality. If its implication is to be put to practice, it would bring an end to industrial capitalism and would amount to self-destruction for Ma Ke. Ma Ke is speaking in sincerity and on the basis of her understanding of clothing and its consumption; she has developed Useless as a radical, critical endeavor. However, a close examination of the act as a whole suggests ways in which Ma Ke's critique, cast in general terms, is marred by a number of misrecognitions. Each and every assertion that makes up the critique, indeed, is confronted with its own criticism in Jia's documentary. To begin with, we see in the first few scenes of the film that streamline-produced clothing involves sophisticated hand work organized on an expansive Taylorist scale;

manufactured clothing is actually hand-made at every stage. Second, the scene of “Friends of LV” negates the claim that there is no relationship between manufactured product, its producer, and its consumer. Third, at the fashion show, Ma Ke receives full credit for clothing that she only partially makes. (A further critique may be discerned in the second act: Dajie and her husband are avid consumers of mass produced, popular clothing and accessories; a gift of manufactured clothing can be an expression of deep affection between them.)

I have noted how the isomorphic character of the two acts facilitates comprehension of the opposition between an intellectual elite and ordinary people. However, the two acts, or the worlds inhabited by the subjects, are also bridged by a common visual element: sand. For Ma Ke, who experiments with burying and excavating clothing for her Useless series, sand is a visual motif that registers time and the transformative power of nature over time:

Objects with history are always attractive. I therefore conceived this idea a few years back: I'd make a number of pieces of clothing and bury them, leaving them to undergo change over time. I have been thinking whether I (as a designer) could interact with nature in some way. I mean, to surrender some control to nature, instead of me having the total control. I thus lay the ground based on my idea, and let nature do the rest of it. Then, when I excavate the clothings, they would have recorded the time and the site of their burial, and all the impressions left on them by the elements. I've always believed objects have memories.

The use of sand and its association with time as duration, together with the desire to surrender some creative control, make a clear anti-fashion statement on Ma Ke's part: against the frantic rhythm and anthropocentric mode of fashion, she proposes a more meditative, enduring, and humble notion of clothing. Of course, Ma Ke's anti-fashion gestures go even further: In line with the meditative mode, she has her models stand motionless on translucent boxes that are lit up on the inside and invites the audience to

roam around these statute-like fashion sculptures, thus formally inverting the conventional division of labor in a fashion show. Critical and creative as Useless may be, it remains a formal intervention, and as part of it sand remains a fundamentally aestheticized element, and time and chance are allowed to play a limited role in the process. In the preproduction for the fashion show, we hear Ma Ke insist on a particular type of sand, see her carefully dropping sand on clothing, and watch mud-like make-up being brushed on models' face.

In contrast to the aestheticized natural element in Ma Ke's artistic exploitation is the sand of Fenyang. Framed in a long shot, the first shot of Fenyang, cut immediately after Ma Ke's fashion show, shows a truck almost struggling in a whirlwind of yellow sand. The following shot shows in the distance a couple riding on a bike in a sand-saturated space. Later, the sequence of the bathing coalminers depicts a group of able-bodied male workers trying with all their might to wash off coal dirt from their faces, noses, hair, and bodies. They soap their bodies, scrub their faces, almost pull their hair, while sounds of coughing echo in this closed space. While the dusty landscape of Fenyang might remind us of Ma Ke's clean, idyllic studio space, these dirty, workers' bodies recall the clean, white, soft Parisian female bodies donning Ma Ke's fashion. Panning across a pile of coalminers' work clothes, the final shots in the bathing sequence throw into question Ma Ke's—or any—aestheticizing of dirt for their grounds of possibility.

As workers on the production line, handicraft workers in the studio, self-employed seamstresses and tailors, the ordinary people are found around clothing as clothing makers under different modes of production situated in distant places. The

respective space of the two acts thus register distinct historical temporalities: the clothing workers in the first act, by being peripheries of a manufacturing industry, belong to a modern temporality, whereas the self-employed seamstresses and tailors of the second act belong to a historical past whose continued existence is under threat. Ironically, these endangered clothing-makers seem to embody the very ideal mode of production that is implicitly anticipated in Ma Ke's critique: Their customers know them in person; while money is involved in their exchange, its importance tends to be mitigated by personal ties; indeed, the production process is thoroughly immersed in a space of dense interpersonal interactions. (To the extent that Ma Ke enlists nature as a co-producer for "Useless," the experience of the coalminers would suggest in contrast that laboring process participates in the making of clothing.) Nevertheless, Jia suggests that this mode of production is imminently precarious. For example, the second seamstress closes her shop in anticipation of the birth of her baby, and the tailor is being driven into relocation due to a town development project. The theme of opposition between Ma Ke as a representative of mass-production and the small clothing makers is patently visible in the case of Dajie's husband, who gave up tailorship as a vocation in the face of fierce competition from mass-produced clothing. Now, the couple are happy consumers of mass-produced objects including clothing, which Ma Ke denounces as incapable of relaying affection.

Ma Ke, a self-critical intellectual and industrial elite, is thus in full-scale crisis. Her avant-garde, anti-fashion design is revealed as creative only in a superficial way; her association of mass-production with waning affect is countered by popular experiences; the mode of production she pictures as a utopia actually exists and yet is being

endangered by mass-production clothing like her own. "Exception" is no exception, and "Useless" might be useless indeed. In view of Jia's critical stance toward intellectuals as I suggested earlier, it seems that Useless articulates a critique with unprecedented focus and clarity. If we can read Ma Ke allegorically, the critique can be cast in even broader terms, in which Jia himself may be implicated: Chinese intellectuals have become an urban elite; narcissistically obsessed with their own internal world, they take life in the ivory tower for reality; yet, in spite of their ignorance of reality and the resulted feebleness of their theoretical fabrications, they continue to enjoy privilege and expropriate the surplus generated by mass production.

The critique of Ma Ke, however, does not exhaust the critical potential of the film. One could say that the ordinary has also come under critical scrutiny in Useless: As much as mass produced clothes serve to mediate the genuine affection between Da Jie and her husband, they also deprived him of his career as a tailor. What is to be made of this contradiction?

With Useless, Jia presents a screen space in which discrete worlds that are mapped in a critically informed way face each other and in which contradiction becomes visible and critique becomes imminently possible. Trenchant as it would be, it must be noted that the critique has not yet taken place as such in reality: Thus far, it remains unuttered as it remains in the minds that recognize the poignant contradiction, which presupposes a comprehension of both worlds. We must emphasize that the critique intimated by Jia is precarious in many ways. First and foremost, insofar as the critique of Ma Ke is largely enabled by the existence of the seamstresses and the tailor as evidence, that the latter are being driven out of business and converted into consumers of mass

production means that the evidence is disappearing, that a time may come when such a critique may become impossible. Secondly, to the extent that this critique also depends on Jia as the witness, it would not have been possible when and if he is already assimilated into--or, to borrow Zhang Yingjin (2007)'s words, swept into--the urban elite. In this sense, that this critique came only from Jia rather than “the ordinary” themselves is a problem to be addressed.

3.4 The Truth of the Choreography?

In this connection, we can raise the opening questions once again: Why does Jia choreograph the scene? Or, what is the real that he aims to show in this enacted non-/encounter? What does the coalminer see? What was he looking at/for? What did Ma Ke see? A possibility is that Jia intends to express his desire for a certain kind of contact between Ma Ke (the intellectuals) and the coalminer (the ordinary), perhaps a contact that would be different from what has given rise to *Ma Ke Useless*. Of course, it is not sure who else in the scene shares this desire or, even if everyone desires it, how it could take place. Would it end up like the home scene between Jia and his cousin, where they smile at each other, yet are unable to say much? As Ma Ke drives on, the coalminer stares on. Why? What does he see?

I believe it is somewhere along these lines when Anthony Rayns asks Jia in an interview about his intentions for the structure of *Useless*. When Jia's answer offers a purely aesthetic consideration as explanation, Rayns pushes further from a different angle but also in a more explicit way: “Extended episodes in this film depict the underdeveloped regions and focus on the everyday life and health of the workers. Do you realize there is a dialectical relationship between these episodes and the subject of the

film?” (p. 233). In his answer, Jia limits his intention/intervention to the level of juxtaposition, thus refraining from any side-taking or escalating. The non-/encounter scene was thus bypassed, and the intention behind the scene would remain indecidable. Only Jia's comments at the end of this interview betray a certain thematization of the film: “.....Apart from being an expression of our minds, clothes have become as if markers of stratification. But, when we are naked, class difference does not exist, there is only the beauty of human being and the equality of corporeality.”

3.5 After Useless

Thus far, I have argued that Jia Zhangke's aesthetics of “recording without representing,” based on seeing the ordinary folks as the affective real, has been put to unprecedented test by the character of Ma Ke, the protagonist of Useless, due to the complexity of her relations to “the ordinary folks.” Previously accommodated by a diegetic space of autonomy, its adequacy is called into question by the adventure into and juxtaposition with the world of Ma Ke.

On the one hand, Jia's sustained populist impulse enables a certain kind of political critique. On the other hand, Jia refrains from giving a name to that potential analysis or critique. The contradiction between Jia's populist commitment and political ambivalence becomes pronounced in Useless and remains unresolved. His subsequent feature length dracumentary, 24 City, ventures further into the mainstream of social issues of contemporary China, while delivering an ambivalent message. Set in Chengdu, the film draws its name from a large real estate development project. The location of the project used to be a state-owned defense industry enterprise that was relocated from the Northeast in the 1960s due to international tensions; with the real estate development

fever, the enterprise is now again relocated. Jia describes his vision thus:

If the film touches on a pressing concern of most urban ordinary folks in contemporary China, it is coupled with a move toward the disappearance of the ordinary folks at the same time: In contrast to his penchant for non-professional actors, Jia deploys well-known professional actors to play the most prominent ordinary folks in this film. Or, in bringing some of the most famous actors into the roles of ordinary folks, is he tacitly making a more forceful return to the ordinary?



Figure 2.1 Ma Ke's car approaching



Figure 2.2 coalminer staring at the passing car

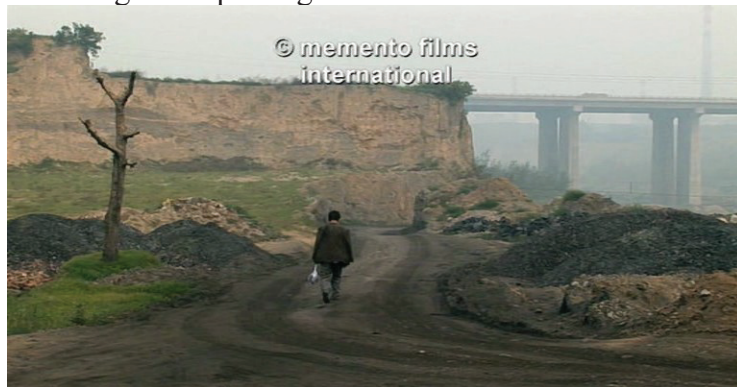


Figure 2.3 coalminer walking away into the background

Act	Scene	Shot Sequence	
Act I Ma Ke	I. Garment factory	#1-6 Production line (internal) #7 “Guang Dong” (day, external) #8-15 Production line (internal) #16-20 Canteen (day, internal) #21 Locked Gate to the Dorm (day, external) #22-26 Canteen (day, internal) #27-36 Clinic (internal) #37 (internal) monitor #38 (night, external) #39-45 (internal) Production line; ends with “Exception” tag	
	II. Exception	#46 (external, day) outside view	
	flagship store	#47-48 (internal, day) inside view	
	III. Ma Ke studio	#49-51 (internal, day) mannequins #52-53 (internal, day) Ma Ke and her dogs #54 (internal, day) a piece of “Useless” #55-56 (internal, day) working on “Useless” #57-59 (internal day) interview Ma Ke	
	IV. “Friends of LV”	#60-61 (external, day) Door and sign #62-63 (internal) “Friends of LV” chatting #64-66 (external day) “Prada,” child, and “Dior”	
V. Ma Ke Studio	#67 (external, day) outside view of the studio		

		#68-71 (internal, day) interview with Ma Ke	
	VI. Paris Fashion Week Production	#72-74 (internal) #75-86 (internal) setting up the stadium #87 (external, day) Ma Ke in transportation #88-99 (internal) preparing “Useless” #100 (internal) big stage curtain #101-111 models	
	VII. Fashion Show	#112 (stadium) audience arriving #113-114 (backstage) models preparing #115 (stadium) audience #116-124 (stadium) fashion presentation #125-127 Ma Ke “signing” the presentation #128 (stadium) audience #129 (stadium) model standing	
Act II	VIII. Fenyang	# 130-133 (day, external) Sand, dirt #134 (day, road) Car, external #135-136 (day, road) Interview in car #137 (day) Roadside	
Multitudes	Sewing and Needle Work Shop 1	#138 (day) follow coalminer walking #139-44 (day, seamstress shop 1) seamstress working and coalminer making payment #145 external view of shop #146-147 seamstress and her son	
	Coalmine	#148 workers standing, coalminer walking by	
	Sewing and	#149-153 idling	

Needle Work Shop 2	#154-159 brother-in-law and sister bicker	
Market Place	#160-162 kid clothing	
Sewing and Needle Work Shop 1	#163-164 seamstress 1 not home	
Coalmine	#165 seamstress 1 hanging out with friends	
Street	#166 two seamstresses reckoning,	
Sewing and Needle Work Shop 2	#167 seamstress 2 working on a baby clothing	
Sewing and Needle Work Shop 1	#168-170 Dajie picking up pants	
Dajie's Home	#171 (day) internal view #172-175 interview #176-179 son #180 clothes on clothing-line	
Coalmine	#181 work entrance #182-191 bathing #192-193 clothes close-up	
Dajie and Husband's Motorbike Ride	#194 day, road	
Coalmine Workers	#195-199 day, workers standing, close-ups	
Youths Motorbike	#200-201 day "I'll kill you!", flailing shirt	

	Ride		
	Sewing and Needle Work Shop 3	#202-210 tailor receiving customers, working	

Table 2.1 Shot list of Useless

CHAPTER 4

MAOIST POLITICAL ECONOMY, OR, FOR AN-OTHER POLITICS OF CREATIVE INDUSTRY

4.1 Introduction

If we could imagine a popularity contest for economic policies, creative industry (hereafter CI) will emerge as a promising contestant for the early 21st century. Since its first appearance in British Labor Party's policy in 1998, CI has taken little more than a decade to become a favorite of governments of all levels in countries across the globe. At the same time, a growing literature on CI has been produced by scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines, such as cultural studies, geography, urban planning, sociology, management, and economics. A significant portion of this literature is empirical studies of CI initiatives or aspects of CI situated in specific locations. Many of these studies serve well as reality check against the grand claims of the "CI proposition," examining its level of truthfulness, the replicability of success stories, as the proposition gets grafted onto real places. Such studies offer valuable insight into the operations of the CI proposition.

Questions directed at a more general level are also raised. What is the referent of CI? What makes it so popular? What is the message of CI - where is it sending us, economically, politically, philosophically, and so on? These questions are of particular concerns to intellectuals with progressive orientation, as they also translate into questions of practice: If, as some suggest, CI is a cover of global neoliberalism, what exactly does that mean? What can a progressive intellectual do about or within it?

A first question that any attempt to theorize creative industries must confront is that of definition. While many have found the concept of CI "fuzzy," it remains up to the

theorist to decide how to grapple with it. For some, the name of CI is seen as sufficiently self-explanatory and nonproblematic, even if the supposed referent is a bit problematic insofar as its content tends to vary from place to place (as a result of adaptations) and time to time (as a result of technological advancement). For some others, the name itself is found problematic; it immediately prompts the question: "Which industry is not creative? If all industry is creative, then what meaningful difference could a term like 'creative industry' mark and what good could it serve? No matter what it is made to mean, in order for it to have any referent at all, certain industry (understood as systematic labor) will have to be excluded." As a logical consequence, creative industry cannot but be understood as a sinister fiction. Underlying such apparently insignificant divergence is a potential division between uncritical and critical outlooks on CI.

These two stances feed into and overlap with the broader division between the optimists versus the pessimists on creative industry. While both may see the less-than-perfect correspondence between the name and the referent, the mismatch signifies for the optimists a series of contingent openings that not only reflects but also propels the progression of history. For the pessimists, the mismatch-by-necessity betrays the inherent arbitrariness and ideological nature of the project. Against the invoked form of public and public interest, the market, which is assumed to be the driving force, is judged, while the state as an interest mediator is also assigned a varying role.

In what follows, I will engage with four selected samples of the more theoretical type of commentaries. All drawn from well-known scholars, each sample represents a particular position on the pessimist/optimist, state/market grid. Apart from being representative in themselves, these samples when placed next to one another tend to

illuminate each other. As it will become clear, a limitation to these samples is that, all drawn from the experience of advanced capitalist economies, the political positions and possibilities they consider are also limited to available options seen from within these economies as particular historical formations. As an intervention into this debate, then, this chapter concludes with an introduction to Mao Zedong's political economic thoughts as a potential source of inspiration.

4.2 Politics of Creative Industries

4.2.1 Nicolas Garnham

Writing in the context of the UK state policy, Nicholas Garnham (2005) closely observed the emergence of the creative industry as the result of a shift in state arts and media policy discourse away from a cultural industries approach toward an information society approach. Garnham's critique is articulated at three levels: the term of “creative industries,” its use (or abuse) by the involved parties, and its cultural consequences. First, the term “creative industries,” drawing “its political and ideological power from the prestige and economic importance attached to the concepts of innovation, information, information workers and the impact of information and communication technologies drawn from information society theory” (p. 15), “serves a specific rhetorical purpose within policy discourse” (p. 16). Specifically, “[i]t serves as a slogan, as a shorthand reference to, and thus mobilizes unreflectively, a range of supporting theoretical and political positions. This lack of reflexivity is essential to its ideological power. It disguises the very real contradictions and empirical weaknesses of the theoretical analyses it mobilizes, and by so doing helps to mobilizes a very disparate and often potentially antagonistic coalition of interests around a given policy thrust” (p. 16).

Garnham dutifully offers brief recapitulations of some of the most important theoretical positions, such as Daniel Bell's theory of post-industrialism, Schumpeter's theory of innovation, information economics, theories of post-Fordism, etc. In lieu of a critical, in-depth engagement with these positions, Garnham tries to “set the record straight” on each of these positions by either dispelling commonly held myths or spelling out the essential, pertinent truth in pithy summaries at the end of each section. However, no analysis of “the real contradictions and empirical weaknesses” of these theoretical positions is offered; rather, these positions seem mutually complementary enough that they tend to support and reinforce one another. The supposedly conceptual critique, then, dovetails into the practical. Here Garnham argues that the use of the term “creative industries” “sustains the unjustified claim of the cultural sector as a key economic growth sector within the global economy and creates a coalition of disparate interests around the extension of intellectual property rights” (p. 15), and his critique is more substantive. 1. “creative industries” has become a kind of “go-to” term with which certain strategic purpose can be achieved. For example, without this term and its legitimation to include the computer software sector, the size and growth of the sector as reflected by the 2001 Creative Industries Mapping Project would have been impossible. 2. This inclusion of “creative industries,” Garnham observed, “enabled the major publishing and media conglomerates to construct an alliance with cultural workers, and with small-scale cultural entrepreneurs, around a strengthening of copyright protection” (p. 26) 3. It also enabled “the cultural sector to use arguments for the public support of the training of 'creative workers' originally developed for the ICT industry” (p. 26). To the extent that these uses and abuses tend to erode public interests in the near future or in the long run,

they lend themselves to a broader political critique. “In the final analysis,” Garnham argues, “creative industries” “legitimizes a return to an artist-centered, supply side defense of state cultural subsidies that is in contradiction to the other major aim of cultural policy - wider access” (p. 15).

The cultural industries approach, the default position from which Garnham issues his critique, refers to a particular alignment between enterprises, state, and the public. With clearly demarcated boundaries and institutional forms, the cultural industries approach in Garnham seems to be a rational entity falling under the beguiling power of the “creative industries”:

Historically there was a clear division between policy towards the arts, based broadly on principles of patronage and enlightenment and on assumptions of an inherent opposition between art and commerce, and policy towards the mass media, and therefore the provision of mass or popular culture, where the main concerns were press freedom and pluralism, defense of a national film industry, and the regulation and public service provision of broadcasting on grounds of spectrum scarcity. In these cases, policy was based largely on an economic analysis of what, it was always accepted, were large-scale economic activities, or industries, operating largely under market conditions, and on the various forms of market failure that justified regulation. (p. 16)

If Garnham is particularly invested in the cultural industries approach, it is also because it is the brain child of what Garnham calls “the political economy school of cultural industries,” an intellectual group of which he is a member. “[I]nvolved in the social democratic policy analysis of the press, film and broadcasting industries and their regulation,” “this group took and term 'industries' seriously and attempted to apply both a more detailed and nuanced Marxist economic analysis [than the Frankfurt School did] and more mainstream industrial and information economics to the analysis of the production, distribution and consumption of symbolic forms” (p. 18). And Garnham is understandably proud that its analysis “has been of particular importance throughout the

1980s and 1990s as the liberalizing, deregulatory tide hit the British media sector” (p. 19).

The shift to CI, then, involves a re-alignment of this set of relationship due to redefinition of scope, change in relative weight given to stake-holders or interest groups and instruments. In consequence, it involves redrawing the conceptual and institutional boundaries. Garnham is not particularly critical of “the shift from state to market across the whole range of public provision” that was initiated under the Thatcher government but continued through the Labor Party government; after all, those were challenging times when the political economy school proved pertinent. In contrast, Garnham seems to be particularly frustrated by “creative industries” perhaps because the political economy school has yet to be able to come to terms with the challenges brought by it. Indeed, in this article, Garnham seems to only begin to put in terms his reservations about the “creative industries” approach—that is, in terms of (potential) cost and benefit to the public. In fact, there seems to be no benefit to the public, which is implicitly defined as consumer: the strengthened intellectual property regime, the cultural sector's “greed” for power and public subsidy, the hegemony of large corporations. Or at least, Garnham is reluctant to admit to the two promised benefits, as he abruptly ends the article thus:

In Creative Britain, the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith (1998), stated that “access will be the corner stone of our cultural policy. Experience of the highest quality must be available to the widest possible audience.” Yet the problem here is that quality and excellence are open to the market test of consumer preference and access is, by definition, not a problem, since a successful creative industry has solved the access problem through the market. If it is successful, why does it need public support? If it is unsuccessful, why does it merit public support? The shift in nomenclature from 'cultural' to 'creative' industries serves to disguise these policy dilemmas and contradictions. The claims on public funds are justified not in terms of arts policy, but in terms of information society policy. The supposed pay off is not widened access or even

higher quality within the United Kingdom, but jobs and export earnings in a competitive global economy” (p. 28).

It is striking how this final paragraph of the article begins with a promise and ends with that promise broken. Embodied in the figure of the public fund, it is a promise from the state to the public that is broken. The problem with “creative industries” is not that it is having its way but that it is having it both ways - it straddles and benefits from the market and the state alike. Moreover, the state is allowing it to do so. Indeed, as the abrupt ending in the last sentence implies, as far as the British government sees it, there is no alternative to caving in to the force of the market – the competitive global economy. At this point, the truth of Garnham's lament is clear: As much as he is attached to the cultural industries approach (and the distributory justice it aims to uphold), its foundation—the field of the game to which the approach represents a superior solution--has been changed or redefined: Distribution and, in connection, distributory justice have given way to production, or indeed, generation of revenue as the top priority of the state; in other words, distributory justice has become a luxury item. What confounds Garnham, I suppose, is the role of the state caught in a waning national economy on the global market (decline of manufacture): How is the public interest to be defined? How to make sure that public interest is served? More specifically, should regulations be strengthened or relaxed? That the article ends on a note of suspension—neither confidence nor rejection—underscores Garnham's ambivalence as a political economic scholar of culture and as a state intellectual. As his numerous uses of “disguise,” “cover,” and “ideology” to describe “creative industries” would signal, he is deeply skeptical of its claims and practices; however, he never develops a sustained critique of “creative industries” in terms of the real damage it could wreck on public interest—strengthened intellectual

property regime is mentioned but only in passing. On the other hand, he seems to identify with as he perhaps cannot argue against some of the justifications for “creative industries,” i.e. the decline/failure of UK's manufacture, people's need for employment, and UK's need to be more competitive internationally; for these reasons, “creative industries” is needed or even necessary for reshaping the nation's labor power to boost the national economic production and make it more competitive. One could say that these national agenda items, in the final analysis, determine the horizon of Garnham's critical intervention and that, in the end, he fall back to a painful position of defensive retreat, a weak call for moving back to cultural industries policy approach.

Garnham, and to some extent the political economy approach of which he was a part, could not comprehend the necessity of creative industries approach apart from the mediation of the nation. Creative industries were an imperative only as a strategy for national survival on the market. Ultimately, the market emerges triumphant on Garnham's horizon,

4.2.2 Stuart Cunningham and Terry Flew

Garnham's reservations about the market in the interest of the public are not shared by Australian scholar Stuart Cunningham (2009). In his article published on Chinese Journal of Communication, in fact, there is no “public” or an alternative collective representation of people to speak of. People exist and persist as individuals, most whose experience of capitalism is told by Schumpeter: “as consumer desires aroused by endless advertising; as forcible jots up and down the social pecking order; as goals reached, shattered, altered, then reached once more as people try, try again” (p. 16). It is from the position of such individuality that Cunningham chides Toby Miller (which

we will discuss below) for being a “cultural Marxist” and proposes an approach that enables “a productive engagement with the wide range of shades of ideological color of governments, corporations, social movements and bureaucracies” (p. 15) and “a value orientation of tracking and promoting cultural and social change that embraces consumer-citizen empowerment, while not perpetuating a doctrinaire divide between the consumer and citizen aspects of such empowerment” (p. 17). Such an approach would seek to “take account of the vast preponderance of small business or small business-like entities that populate the sector in most countries, and address what we might call the 'economic subalterns' in our midst” (p. 15), a sector Cunningham defines as “running on tight margins and facing high rates of failure, in need of flexible and in many cases experimental forms of state facilitation, and which rarely figures on governments' cultural policy radar” (p. 15).

For Cunningham, the interests of the market, the state, and the individual are nearly perfectly aligned as they stand. Citing Garnham's affirmation of the marketplace as the supplier of most people's culture needs and aspirations and implicitly questioning where and how Garnham draws the line beyond which the market becomes excessive, Cunningham argues that, with the aid of computer technology, the market is functioning even more optimally in mediating demands and supplies by virtue of online shopping or involving consumers in production through what is called consumer-design or co-creation. With regard to the problem of precarious labor, i.e. precarious employment and deteriorating working condition that have come to plague what used to be privileged jobs, Cunningham advocates that it be “addressed as a current reality, neither to be celebrated nor critiqued tout court” (p. 19). More specifically, he suggests “building into cultural,

media and communications studies curricula the analytical and practical skills (including 'left' knowledge and skills about rights at work and critical knowledge of corporate citizenship of lack of it, for example, and 'right' knowledge and confidence of global 'creative class' opportunities) is a self-evidently necessary balance between critique and vocational realism” (p.21). However, this balancing act itself if necessary at all would seem disingenuous and precarious as it simply smooths over what Cunningham acknowledges as a potentially permanent condition: “[M]uch of the critique of labor conditions in the creative industries (and other knowledge-intensive services) carries a little-examined presumption that conditions in the past were clearly superior and that it should be possible to return to such conditions—if only the dynamics of global political economy could be done away with. But I don't think the toothpaste can be squeezed back into the tube, the egg unscrambled” (p. 19). Thus, there is no point of return. Move on with the time.

In what can be called a realist ethical framework, Cunningham would like to see a government policy framework that “can assist emerging, as well as established and dominant culture to thrive” (p. 16). The role of public-subsidized culture, Cunningham suggests, should be articulated to the creative industries, as a theorizer, a thread, a direct link, an educator/trainer, a urban infrastructure, an attractor, or a space-provider for the latter (p. 17).

Cunningham's defense of creative industries, or what he calls the “creative industry proposition,” on the grounds of the experiences and values of certain individuals under capitalism is perfectly consistent with Terry Flew, his colleague at Queensland University of Technology, who offers a philosophical-political defense of a market-

oriented cultural studies approach to creative industries by formulating a "new humanism" that is based on creativity, self-actualization, and life-long learning in a "new economy" of unprecedented uncertainty and volatility. To develop this "new humanism," Flew first identifies inklings of this "new humanism" in various "creativity discourses" circulated in recent decades (p. 161-164) and then defines it in contrast to the "old humanism" ("the assumption that human nature and values can be universalized, and that such an assumption provides a legitimate and necessary standpoint from which the conduct of social institutions can be judged and critiqued" (p.164)) and anti-humanism (the Marxist, psychoanalytic, and structuralist critique of humanism, on the one hand, and the neo-Foucauldian critique of humanism, on the other). While old humanism falls prey to essentialism in universalizing particular experiences and Marxist anti-humanism falls short of being radical enough as far as it remains attached to some minimum, indispensable value, neo-Foucauldian anti-humanism, or what Flew calls "new humanism," would supposedly supersede both: It is at once anti-essentialist and more radical than Marxist anti-humanism in abolishing any historical attachment (be it some vision of human emancipation). And the turn toward market as an intellectual-political practice as Flew advocates is also a turn away from anti-hegemonic (Marxist) aspirations of some cultural studies scholars and a supplement or correction to previous neo-Foucauldian cultural policy scholars like Tony Bennet, whose focus of cultural-political intervention was public cultural institutions rather than the market.

Apart from intellectual-political considerations enabled by, among other things, a critique of a truncated version of Marxism, Flew's bid is also justified by a "mundane," "ground-level" perspective that not only extensively refers to but accepts as

real certain features of the current reality, such as the “unknowability of the direction of socio-economic change,” the “complexity, uncertainty and the increasingly idiosyncratic nature of socially valued knowledge,” “it is unlikely that the future of cultural studies lies in a large-scale exercise in the training of cultural policy administrators,” and what would amount to the statement that “not everyone is interested in Marxism” (p. 172). Although there is no evidence that everyone is interested in the neo-Foucauldianism thus presented, it does not stop Flew from advancing the “new humanism” proposition:

While it is not interested in ‘saving culture’ in the tradition of British literary criticism through the training of an elite in a canon of great works, it is also not interested in the cultivation of an anti-capitalist consciousness, as the structuralist Marxists sought to promote in the 1970s and 1980s. Importantly, the new humanism is designed to impact upon the conduct of commercial enterprises, and the corporatizing public sector, and to align social consciousness and cultural awareness with enhanced economic productivity in the context of globalization and multicultural societies. (p. 167-168)

Flew does not discuss what the “designed impact” of the “new humanism” on the reality would be. On the contrary, all the distinct features of the “new humanism” or the “whole person” as incarnation of it seem to be branded by the global economy. As Flew shows in a section devoted to the discussion of the “graduate capabilities” in Australia in the past few years, the desired qualities of university graduates have been evolved in response to the perceived prominent features of the economy, such that “the capacity of higher education to train graduates for specific professional careers is being displaced by a requirement to prepare graduates for everlasting uncertainty and lifelong learning” (p. 168), valued are “graduates with a broad educational foundation and with well-developed conceptual, analytical and communication skills” and “general problem solving skills of inquiry, analysis and synthesis are essential to the building of a flexible, versatile workforce able to cope with rapidly changing technology” (p. 169).

What, then, does “new humanism” mean for the future of cultural studies, or the future in general? Other than vaguely championing “entrepreneurial humanists” and citing “more 'ethical' form of capitalist managerialism,” Flew refrains from discussing what is yet to come, as the future is supposedly radically unknown. Nonetheless, perhaps in anticipation of potential criticism, Flew ends the article by acknowledging in an (unexpectedly) dialectical fashion how the “new humanism” presents a potential “trap, a test, and a possible new opportunity” for cultural studies: In the “trap” scenario, cultural studies might lose its integrated program and become attachment to professional training, or even get subsumed into the old university disciplines from which it sprang forth in the first place (p. 173).

4. 2.3 Richard Florida

Perhaps due to the particular configuration of state, market, and the public in the U.S., where, in contrast to UK and Australia, cultural industries has always been conspicuously a market affair, the state is entirely absent in Richard Florida's (2004) account of the historical rise of creative industries and what he calls the creative class, while the market emerges as an omnipotent and yet spontaneous force that propels history forward. Consequently, in contrast to Garnham, Cunningham, and Flew, Florida's definition of creative industries is developed independently from the state or state policy in general.

Richard Florida's book-length articulation of creative industry and creative class is an example of such political imagination. According to Florida, on the one hand, there is a creative ethos - ““an ethos is the fundamental spirit or character of a culture,” and “[I]t is our commitment to creativity in its varied dimensions that forms the

underlying spirit of our age.” (p. 21) On the other hand, there has been a epochal shift in the economic mode, where “[T]he rise of spending on research, the high-tech startup company and the formal venture capital system, the systems of the creative factory and of subcontract manufacturing, and the new creative social milieu...all rose in parallel and are now converging...We are embarking on an age of pervasive creativity that permeates all sectors of the economy and society” (p. 55-56). Conceiving economic history “as a succession of new and better ways to harness creativity,” Florida names the “creative age” the fifth historical period, after agriculture, trade and specialization, industrial capitalism, organizational age (p.57-59). But the importance of creative industry is not limited to this. According to Florida, the creativity inflected ethos' governance goes beyond the economic realm and also determine the moral character - significant overlap between indicators of high-tech growth, gay-friendliness, and Bohemian lifestyle; “economic growth was occurring in places that were tolerant, diverse, and open to creativity – because these were places where creative people of all types wanted to live” (p. x) . Thus construed, creativity cannot be comprehended within the confines of economics or business but must be understood as a more totalizing, positive force touching all human experience.

To use Goux's concept, Florida created a gold out of creative industry; his positive writing has been a remarkable work of promotion, which has attracted fair amount of followers and critics. The followers celebrate and develop certain aspects to the creativity industries, such as its linkage with humanism, as we have seen above in Terry Flew. The critics, such as Toby Miller, which we will discuss in the next section,

dismiss Florida's writing as mere “hype.” What both fail to engage with is Florida's notion of “creative class” and its concomitant politics.

For Florida, class encompasses both the subjective and the objective dimensions of a person: “A class is a cluster of people who have common interests and tend to think, feel and behave similarly, but these similarities are fundamentally determined by economic function – by the kind of work they do for a living” (p. 8), and “[I]f you are a scientist or engineer, an architect or designer, a writer, artist or musician, or if you use your creativity as a key factor in your work in business, education, health care, law or some other profession, you are a member [of the creative class]” (p. ix). Within the creative class, Florida differentiates between “the core,” “the super core,” and what might called “the peripheral.” The “core” includes “people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content”; around the core, the CC also includes a broader group of creative professionals in business and finance, law, health care and related fields; the super creative core include those who produce “transferable, highly usable new forms” (p. 69). “With 38 million members, more than 30 percent of the nation's workforce,” the (U.S.) creative class as a whole is huge and powerful, as it “has shaped and will continue to shape deep and profound shifts in the ways we work, in our values and desires, and in the very fabric of our everyday lives” (p. ix). Being “the norm-setting class of our time” and “dominant in terms of wealth and income, with its members earning nearly twice as much on average as members of the other two classes” (p. 9), Florida ask the members of the creative class to see that “their economic function make them the natural – indeed the only possible –

leaders of twenty-first-century society. But being newly emergent, the CC does not yet have the awareness of itself, as a class, that is needed. For the most part, CC people persist in defining themselves by their differences...” (p. 315). Florida proposes: “It is now time for the CC to grow up. We must evolve from an amorphous group of self-directed, albeit high-achieving, individuals into a more cohesive, more responsible group,” (p. 316). Florida sets “three fundamental issues to address: (1) invest in creativity to ensure long-run economic growth, (2) overcoming the class divides that wear our social fabric and threaten economic well-being, and (3) building new forms of social cohesion in a world defined by increasing diversity and beset by growing fragmentation” (p. 318). Florida is concerned about a particular kind of divides and fragmentation which he calls “elitist”: “What is elitist – and inequitable, inefficient and even dangerous – is the persistence of a social order in which some people are considered natural creators, while others exist to serve them, carry out their ideas and tend to their personal needs. Keep creativity as the province of a select few is the real prescription for troubles of all sorts, from injustice to inefficiency” (p. 323). “To be effective, the creative class may ultimately have to invent new forms of collective action.” Florida suggests, although, he continues: “I doubt that its members could ever form a unionlike organization ... or that such entities would be effective” (p. 317).

What can we make of Florida's creative class politics? To be sure, there is a curious absence of the “capitalist” (those who exclusively hire, for a shorthand) in the analysis of creative economy and in this mapping of classes (the creative class, along side manufacture workers and service workers, are a section of the working class; “The key difference between the CC and the other classes lies in what they are primarily paid to do.

Those in the WC and the SC are primarily paid to execute according to plan, while those in the CC are primarily paid to create and have considerably more autonomy and flexibility than the other two classes to do so” (p. 8).). The omission of the capitalist makes the mapping incomplete. Nonetheless, Florida's sensitivity toward social division and fragmentation and his proposition of a class politics, even if in a compromised form, must be registered as a difference from, say Garnham's undifferentiated public, and Cunningham's and Flew's undifferentiated “individuals”.

4.2.4 Toby Miller

Florida's creative class and its politics, in fact, might be a response to Toby Miller's call (2002) for a critical focus on labor instead of celebration of "new economy," "creativity," and "consumption," which were favorite topics in cultural studies at the time. In this article, Miller issued a strong criticism of the tendency in cultural studies to unwittingly confine itself to the symbolic dimensions of social processes to the extent of being out of touch with what really happens in the material dimensions. While his colleagues indirectly affirms the new economy by celebrating consumer creativity in, for example, female fantasies enacted online or reader's ability to decode cultural texts in keeping with their own social situation. substantial shifts are happening unnoticed in material relations: loss of manufacture jobs, gentrification of urban spaces, revolutionization of the function of international agencies like IMF.

When I hear the expression ‘new economy’, I think of the transfer of labor onto me as both consumer and worker: in fast food outlets, I clean up what I have eaten; as a reviewer of research grants, I print out what has been emailed to me; as a convener of university committees, I organize meeting times and locations, and so it goes on. This wasn't the case 10 years ago, as my familiarity with plastic trays, my bill for printer cartridges and my telephone habits all attest. (p.56-57).

Miller presents the seedy side of the new economy underneath its glitzy surface: economic polarization on global scale, the condition of the third world. In the first world, creativity and culture are part of this surface, covering up the void left behind by such shift: “Creativity is also seen as a social policy answer to the dislocation caused by deindustrialization; in other words, we’ll fix the poverty and collective distress caused by closing coal mines by setting up museums that detail what life was like in those coal mines; or, we’ll establish a slavery tourism trail that will provide jobs for poor whites and blacks by attracting affluent blacks to visit their heritage.”. And the unreflected popularity of creative jobs - perhaps another surface on top of the surface?

Thus, in somewhat scattered forms and testy words, Miller can be said to have presented an alternative narrative of the emergence of creative industry:

-- as a phenomenon in developed economies, it means a new job creator, an internal solution to the waning of manufacture; it also means integrated factory - where consumption is meticulously integrated into production. The timeline parallels neoliberal policy, outsourcing of manufacture jobs, emergence of consumer society, and financialization.

-- to assure the realization of the return of capital, both domestically and internationally, intellectual property rights, in addition to and alongside older forms of private property rights, are increasingly asserted and enforced. Internally, it reinforces monopoly rights, stifles creativity. Internationally, in what can be called legal imperialism, it plunders the wealth of biological resources and traditional knowledge of traditional societies.

-- out of self-defense or in dreams of emulation, more and more traditional societies have

taken up intellectual property rights law as their own, and participating in the brave new world of creative industry.

4.3 State, market, and Maoist political economy

So far, I have offered a snapshot of a series of positions that are more or less explicitly theorized on “creative industries.” In Garnham, we catch a glimpse of a moment of intellectual-political crisis prompted by an impending redefinition of the relationship between the state, the market, and the public, and between production and distribution as policy priorities but also social-historical forces in tension. In contrast to this moment of intellectual-political unsettlement, Cunningham's and Flew's respective analysis assumes a supposedly “realist,” “mundane,” “ground-level” perspective and suggests there is no problem; the interests of the market, the state, and the public are perfectly or nearly perfectly aligned in the new economy, everything is just fine. While Cunningham finds additional legitimacy in Schumpeter, Flew locates an overarching philosophical-political justification in a particular interpretation of Foucault's notion of “governmentality.” At the risk of “disciplining” the public-funded intellectuals, Cunningham and Flew suggest that they can find their place in the new economy as educators of “cultural brokers,” rather than cultural policy makers or, even less, counter-hegemonic trouble makers. Florida promotes creative industries in two ways, and possibly to two different audiences: While trying to sell creative industries to policy makers as a consultant, he attempts to awaken and spread “creative class consciousness” among creative class members, directing attention to social division, fragmentation, and the underprivileged. Invoking metaphors such as “covers” and “surfaces” to describe creative economy, Miller (2002) anticipates Garnham (2005)'s sense of illusion toward

the market. Without the latter's attachment to or faith in the state and its power of regulating market failure, however, Miller offers a most devastating and arguably insightful debunking of creative economy. Instead of allowing themselves to be seduced by and indulge on the surface effects of creative economy as a part of the neoliberal global economy, he urges the cultural studies scholars to expand their horizon, to participate in alternative cultural-political models and to reach out to global subaltern as the other.

It would be interesting to follow up on what have become of all these different positions, but this much is what I have learned so far: In the dialogues on his tours and meetings, Florida has come to face some of the problems which his euphemistic formulation of the creative class failed to consider, such as issues of exploitation and precarious labor. With his lofty image of the creative class under reality check, how would Florida reconsider his creative class politics? Would the capitalist class come finally into the picture? Would he arrive at a more concrete and perhaps sharper view? And, will he be able to continue to uphold two promotions as he had been? No clear answers to these questions can be found in Florida's update in 2005. Florida's promotion of creative-class consciousness certainly did not fare well with Miller, who in his recent commentary (2010) makes no mention of it and calls Florida's writing "rhetoric" and "hype." On the other hand, Miller's own critique, in spite of or precisely because of its insight, has yet to be assimilated into wider intellectual works.

Is there an approach to creative industries that does not play into the agenda of the neoliberal globalization? Could there be a creative economy that is as radical as practical? Can we imagine an approach to creative industries in which "creativity" is not

limited to the realm of forces of production embedded within a capitalist set of relations of production? In what follows, I will introduce Mao's political economy, or what can be called a revolutionary managerialism, for the inspiration of an alternative option. On the surface, "revolutionary managerialism" might seem a contradiction in terms. However, it is indeed what actually existing socialism (or socialism that has actually existed) must practice on a day-to-day basis. It is based on the understanding that, far from the end of revolution, the socialist society is just a transition period between capitalism and communism. The task under socialism is to liberate, against persisting and emerging counter-revolutionary forces, the seeds of socialist mode of production and socialist consciousness that were emerging but repressed under capitalism, so as to create conditions for the transition into communism. This historical process, which Mao calls "continued revolution," involves the organization of state affairs in view of the revolutionary goal, that is, a managerialism not severed from but integral to the revolutionary transition process. Specifically, the socialist managerialism involves rebuilding property ownership system and re-organizing production and distribution system, on the one hand, and producing and promoting socialist consciousness, on the other. Together, they create the economic condition for the transition toward common property ownership and the political condition for the transition toward communism. While the goals are clear, there exists no ready answer as to how to move toward them. Charting a historical formation that had never existed on such scale, the leaders of the socialist states had to invent the wheels while charting the new terrain called socialism. Experiments and innovations were the rule rather than exception.

Materials that allow us a glimpse at Mao's thoughts on the political economy of socialist state can be found in a volume edited in late 1990s. Entitled Mao's Speeches and Notes on Socialist Political Economy (1998), this volume brings together Mao's scattered notes and speeches on Socialist Political Economy, a Soviet Union textbook. As a summary of the experiences of and reflections on Soviet political economy, the textbook was a major source of reference for the other socialist states, including China. Mao read the book several times. As we will discuss later, Mao finds himself in disagreement with the Soviet approach on some important issues but nonetheless found highly significant.

In the late 1950s, when Mao read the Soviet textbook, the transformation of the ownership of means of production in the countryside was still a significant issue.

Industrial means of production that was previously privately owned had been bought out by the state and became state owned; the production and consumption of industrial goods was coordinated by centralized planning. In the countryside, peasants were working in collectives but the means of production belonged to each household. The continued existence of private ownership of means of production in the country side was not only becoming an anomaly, but also perpetuated the existence of a market place outside of state planning, which, in its turn, may give rise to private accumulation, growing inequality, and indeed the revival of capitalism. Mao notes his disagreement with Stalin, who refused to sell tractors to such collectives in order to curb their political economic influence. Mao finds it unfortunate that Stalin “does not trust the peasants.” It is not that Mao finds Chinese peasants already free of interests in private property. On the contrary, he knows that many are deeply interested and warned against pushing them too much. Knowing where the country must be going toward, he nonetheless tries to understand

where the peasants came from. Then, instead of guarding against the peasants' deep-seated propensity for private property, Mao advocates expansion of production to elevate the objective living standard of all, on the one hand, and educational campaign to raise socialist awareness, on the other.

Indeed, a major object of critique for Mao is the economist bias of the Soviet program. Specifically, the economist bias has to do with emphasizing in a one-sided fashion the objective side of the socialist period. In Mao's view, in ignoring the people's subjective agency, such bias leads to exaggerations of the power of machine, market, economic productivity, etc.:

Stalin is first to have written a socialist political economy. Many points in this book are very useful for us. The more I read, the more interested I am. But, this book of his discusses economic relations to the exclusion of the primacy of politics and mass movement....His economics is cold, sad, and ghostly. [It does] not talk about thoughts of bourgeois legal rights or analyze bourgeois legal rights--which are to be abolished, how to implement it, which are to be restricted, and how. The educational organizing is also bourgeois fashioned. He [Stalin] used to say technology determines everything, which renders objects visible at the cost of human being; then he said the cadres is the determining factor, which renders cadres visible at the cost of the masses. Of the way he talks about socialist economics, the advantage is that he raises the questions, the drawback is that his framework is too restricted: He wants to solidify the socialist order instead of continued revolution. Like an expecting mother, socialist society contains sprouts of communism, but how can it transition into communism without communist movement? Stalin could not see this dialectics.... (p. 42-43)

The paragraph above bears witness to Mao's emerging but ultimately decisive divergence from Stalin's Soviet model in exploring the path of transition from socialism to communism (Meisner, 1999). As Mao notes, the point of divergence can be located in whether or not one "sees" things dialectically. First of all, we may notice that Mao sees the goal not in "solidifying" the socialist order but in "moving" forward toward communism. Human beings are Irreducible to the determination of things. All human

beings and things play a part and relate to each other dialectically in this broader dialectical historical process. The revolutionary leader in the capacity of revolutionary manager must be a dialectical technician constantly mapping, measuring, and on that basis transforming the field of forces in service of a general movement toward communism. Thus, in contrast to Stalin, who exclusively relies on the development of forces of production, Mao lays particular emphasis on the transformation of relations of production. Against hierarchical organization that emerged with the expansion of bureaucracy, Mao upheld the Anshan model; noticing the private propensity of intellectuals, dubbed “expert but not red,” Mao advocated “red expert” and, more broadly, socialist education of intellectuals; as mentioned earlier, while concerned about the peasant's conservative consciousness, Mao would only want to transform it with an understanding of and sympathy for its historical rationality. Now, numerous accounts of an egalitarian, cohesive work place culture of the period can be found. It is the same concern for a communist revolution, that Mao launched/invented the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Looking from Mao's political economy, or what I have termed revolutionary managerialism, the so-called “creative industries” have far from reached their “creative” potential. Yes, innovation in technology may raise forces of production and yield products in greater quantity and/or quality, generating greater potential utility. Yes, innovation may increase the competitiveness of a firm, a city, a region, or a country. But who will be able to appropriate the greater lot of utility? Does not the emphasis on cutthroat competitiveness and intellectual property rights drive the bourgeois legal rights of private ownership ever deeper? Or, how else do we explain the concomitant

proliferation of “planned obsolescence”--the twine phenomenon of “creative industries” in the industrial sector? Does the “creative industries” in its current incarnation necessarily bring about a more humane world? Far from it. In the name of “incentives for innovation,” the new fetishism of intellectual property rights has legitimized corporate plundering of the wealth in traditional societies and the public domain alike, giving rise to greater corporate accumulation while driving traditional, small business into bankruptcy or slavish dependency on large corporates. As nations and populations are plunged into an economic field of polarizing forces, gaps of income and wealth grow wider and wider within and without the state border alike. For “creative industries” to deserve its name, it needs to be supplemented by a revolution in the relations of production. From the dialectical view that informs Mao's political economy, the present, as much as any other moment in human's history, is a point in transitional movement, and some seeds are already sown: When employment became more and more precarious, maybe it is time that we demand a shorter workday or longer weekend? When more and more people struggle on the verge of subsistence, maybe it is time that we reexamine and redefine the rights? When more and more people produce and share knowledge for free, are we not closer to shared property rights? Those who chart and seize the space of this moment-in-transition toward the common good, I would call Marxist-Maoist cultural technicians.

CHAPTER 5
VIEWS ON CREATIVE INDUSTRY:
NOTES FROM CHONGQING

5.1 Introduction: Two Takes

5.1.1 Take One: Comparability and Timefulness

In “Some thoughts on comparability and the space-time problem,” Harry Harootunian (2005) engages with the problem of the spatial dominant which Fredric Jameson (2003) raised two years before in “The end of temporality.” As part of his interest in a cognitive mapping of modernism and postmodernism as cultural expressions of differential modes of capitalism, Jameson proposes that the spatial dominant as manifested in contemporary thought (in which “time has become a nonperson and people stopped writing about it”) can be understood as an expression of the existential unevenness which, in its turn, is a structural effect of late capitalism, and he went on to elucidate the proposition and critically engage with a number of high-culture and popular-culture texts (p. 695). Being a good poststructuralist Marxist, Jameson concludes his insightful essay on a note of optimism on account of the absolute nature of negativity: “[a] tendency is by definition never fully reached or it would already have folded back into actuality itself.”, and “the historical tendency of late capitalism—what we have called the reduction to the present and the reduction to the body-- is in any case unreliable; human beings cannot revert to the immediacy of the animal kingdom (assuming indeed the animals themselves enjoy such phenomenological immediacy” (p. 717).

Without necessarily subscribing to Jameson's periodization, Harootunian

nonetheless concurs with Jameson on the recession or withdrawal of temporality from contemporary thought. Taking seriously what is at stake—according to Jameson, “Time governs the realm of interiority, in which both subjectivity and logic, the private and the epistemological, self-consciousness and desire, are to be found” (p. 697), Harootunian traces the paths through which time has become spatialized, or indeed, how timelessness was produced and reproduced, in various academic divisions of labor in and in response to the West, such as area studies, history, hermeneutical social sciences, postcolonial theory, and the more recent cultural studies. In order to restore the togetherness of time and space to contemporary representations, Harootunian advocates the restoration of timefulness to the practice of comparison. This is to reverse the tendency of spatializing time that, according to Harootunian, was inaugurated by Max Weber in his projection of the past of Europe onto the rest of the world, a heritage whose transmission has rarely been disrupted. For a comparability of timefulness, Harootunian recommends a such concepts as “contemporary non-contemporaneity” (Bloch), “chronotope” (Bakhtin), and “social space” (Lefebvre) as guidance. He concludes the essay thus:

If, in any event, our strategies of comparison are to have any utility at all, they must be embedded in specific temporal and spatial forms, in which social space is lived and experienced to write its own history everywhere, perhaps as a history of dissonant rhythms, as a continuing and never completed conjuration of the past in the present. (p. 52)

While Harootunian's point is well taken, I cannot but wonder whether or to what extent comparison based on spatialized time is retractable independent of its

epistemological ground. As Harootunian himself sympathetically acknowledges for numerous times, those living outside the West are forced to “live comparatively;” one might want to add, for that matter, the third world within the West probably also live comparatively. Thus, it seems, abstract comparison is likely to persist for as long as systematic unevenness exists. But still, the notion of comparison of timefulness provides a counterpoint to abstract, spatial-dominant comparisons that too often dictate development agenda.

5.1.2 Take Two: What about Nanaimo?

What can smaller cities expect to achieve in terms of the creative class proposition as an economic development policy? “[A]re such strategies appropriate for seriously distressed cities like Detroit or smaller and more isolated places like Nanaimo , British Columbia?” By raising these questions, Sands & Reese (2008) foregrounds a few issues with much of the existing literature on creative industry: Spatially, the creative industry discourse has focused on metropolitan regions and large central cities; on the other hand, its universalizing rhetoric implies that “any and all communities have the potential to realize or at least enhance their creative resources and move up a few places in the rankings of cities provided by Florida” (p. 9). Sands & Reese's study of small and midsized cities in Canada, and of Nanaimo—a small city “luckily” located between Vancouver and Victoria—in particular, thus provides a conscious corrective to the universalist pretense and the large-city bias of creative industry discourse.

The instance of Detroit, which was mentioned but not discussed, would have pointed to a different set of questions, that is, questions about the relationship between creative industry as economic development strategy and the history of the particular city.

The optimistic theories have managed to elide the actual history that may weigh on the future of concrete places; the pessimists, while acknowledging the issue, have not offered clear policy alternatives. Meanwhile, empirical studies, many of which focus on global cities that are already more or less established as national/regional/global cultural/creative centers, tend to perpetuate the “winner takes it all” logic that is implicit to the creative industry proposition by ignoring places that prove less amenable. By limiting their attention to the surface-present of places, such studies tend to reproduce what Jameson (2003) and Harootunian (2005) have called “the disappearance of time,” a dis-ease they identified in “the spatial turn.”

In one of the few exceptions to this oblivion to history, Mark Jayne (2004) studies the challenges facing creative industry development in an English historic industrial city and shows how the city's creative industry initiatives have failed largely because they failed to transform the local working class culture—upheld by an economic and class infrastructure with little middle class presence and interests—that is characterized by “parochialism” and “inertia.” “The working classes and working-class spaces and places are in a continuous process of trying to halt losses, rather than trading up and accruing added cultural value;” there is little “progressive championing of post-industrial activity, and little willingness to represent or support the cultural practices of alternative lifestyles such as lesbian and gay, ethnic, youth and other social groups;” and “the promotion of identities and lifestyles associated with post-industrial economy are considered pretentious, yuppyish or a threat to political, economic or social continuity” (p. 200, 201). Thus, the creative industry initiatives, such as a Design Quarter and a Cultural Quarter, fail to generate a middle-class creative community complete with cultural producers,

cultural intermediaries, financial and legal professionals, etc., that would lead to a sustainable creative industrial ecology.

Likewise, with few exceptions like Rossiter (2005), the historical dimension is barely visible in the growing literature on creative industries in China (Hui, 2006; Kemp, 2006; Su, 2006; Hartley & Montgomery, 2009). In the interest of making "creativity" relevant, they tend to focus on articulating the present with certain future while ignoring the past. As a result of the spatial bias, these studies tend to uncritically promote a homogeneous image of the global cities, where Beijing and Shanghai become virtually interchangeable with New York and Berlin.

Exactly how does creative industry fit into a predominantly manufacture economic landscape? Indeed, how does creative industry get inscribed into a postsocialist space like contemporary China? In this chapter, it is along these lines that I explore the ways in which creative industry is received by the cultural elite of Chongqing, a predominantly manufacture city in Southwest China.

5.2 Chongqing: From Heavy Industry to Creative Industry

5.2.1 Chongqing: An Industrial History

Originally a waterway transport hub and one of the first hinterland treaty port opened to British and Japanese colonial powers in late 19th century, Chongqing was quickly industrialized during the Sino-Japanese War, when the KMT government relocated from Nanjing to Chongqing, making the latter the Wartime capital of China. As the KMT central government moved to Chongqing, the major industrial forces which had been developing on the coastal area followed. During the War, in the urban area of Chongqing concentrated one third of China's industry at the time. Leading cultural

institutions, media organs, and intellectual figures also came from Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai, catapulting the landlocked city into the global cosmopolitan circuit. With the end of the War in 1945 and the return of the KMT government to Nanjing and that of the elite institutions to their native cities, Chongqing fell into oblivion.

Chongqing's status as a heavy-industry center was further strengthened in the 1960s. China's fallout with the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War made it particularly keen on protecting and developing its burgeoning industrial sector. Rather than keeping these in coastal areas and thus exposing them to the military reach of the U.S. military power, the Communist central government decided to move them to the safer hinterland. As part of this massive industrial migration, Chongqing received the lion's share of military industry. Notably, cultural and media institutions were not part of this migration. During the socialist period, of course, "culture" was construed altogether differently: As an integral part of socialist nation building, its production was highly centralized. A corollary is, the spatial co-ordinate of culture was national rather than regional. As a result, Chongqing probably had not felt a need for a cultural identity until after 1997, when Chongqing became the fourth municipality of the country and the only hinterland city with such a status. Under the socialist ethos, Chongqing neither had the need nor the space for a cultural identity of its own. Since the Open and Reform Era, however, with the increasing deepening of marketizing processes, Chongqing has felt a growing desire for a distinct identity. In particular, Chongqing has been frequently compared with Chengdu, a nearby metropolitan city and the provincial capital of Sichuan. In a most popular version, comparison is drawn between the dialects of the two cities. Both belonging to Southern Mandarin, the two dialects are slightly different in

certain vowels and syllables. Specifically, the comparison under discussion turns on their differing pronunciation of "a:" while the Chongqing version tends to be short, the Chengdu version sounds flat and has a drool. As the comparison would have it, the Chengdu version is gendered as feminine (or effeminate) and timid, while the Chongqing version masculine and straightforward. It should not be surprising that by association, the real message of the comparison is that unlike the tough but manly Chongqingese, the Chengdu folks are somewhat invertebrate. A more recent, popular comparison has it that while Chongqing is always more keen on culinary invention, Chengdu tends to excel at stylizing and marketing extant cuisine. While the second comparison apparently concerns the two cities' comparative advantages in food industry - a culturally and also economically prominent sector, it also conveys a deeper truth: In terms of their respective position within the broader division of labor, Chongqing's role is that of a material producer, while Chengdu would be a marketer or broker.

In both comparisons, Chongqing is made the masculine and Chengdu the feminine. However, if the tone of the first comparison trumpets Chongqing as clearly superior, that of the second comparison is less confident, as one could detect a note of lament of Chongqing's deficiency in packaging and marketing in spite of its material creativity. In a way, this may have been a reflection of a growing self-doubt of Chongqing, namely, that Chongqing is culturally deficient in comparison to peer cities. Thus, one would increasingly hear from Chongqing residents the lament that the city is a "cultural desert." Since 1980s, though, a number of writings have attempted to uncover the deeper cultural resources and historical heritages of the city that have been overshadowed by its manufacture industrial ethos. Still, international travelers to China

are not likely to remember much of Chongqing: With neither the kind of natural beauty that makes famous places like Guilin, Jiuzhai Gou, and Lijiang, nor the distinct cultural character possessed by Beijing, Suzhou, or Tibet, Chongqing's place on the tourist map is mostly a passway: It is little more than the starting point of the Three Gorge cruise down the Yangtze River. Indeed, a remark that has become familiar to me is that Chongqing “has no culture.” While the implied comparativist gaze is never as neutral as it might appear to be, i.e. it must be informed of some specific conception of “culture,” the remark nonetheless captures, among others, the city's likely place in the contemporary national, and increasingly global, division of labor.

The cementing of Chongqing's status as a manufacturing center has also derived its force from market changes outside the region. The continuous growth of labor cost in coastal China has driven the manual labor-intensive industry into the hinterland. With its access to cheap, hinterland labor on the one hand, and favorable policies, on the other, Chongqing has become a new center within the “world factory,” poised to produce what Shenzhen did over the past two decades. Meanwhile, just as coastal cities are trying to advance from “Made in China” to “Created in China,” the call to “Created in China” has not missed Chongqing. Between the call of creative industry and the mandate of manufacture, Chongqing is confronted with a potential contradiction between the imperative of industrial production and that of postindustrial creation.

5.2.2 Toward a City of Creative Industry: Creative Industry Initiatives in Chongqing (2006-2008)

The creative industry proposition made its first high-profile debut in Mainland China on an international conference in Beijing, 2005 (Hartley & Deane, 2006). Soon

enough, creative industry initiatives began to emerge as a part of the policy package promoted by provincial and municipal governments. In Chongqing, a “Creative Industry Leadership Office” (hereafter “CILO”) was established under the Municipal Economic Committee to oversee the development of creative economies in the municipality, a organizational frame mirroring that of Shanghai. In 2006, it published the first document, a sort of sectoral mapping, to promote awareness among government officers, businesses, professionals, and investors. Subsequently, the State-owned Cultural Asset Management Company (hereafter “SoCAMC”), a company established in 2005, would be involved in projects where state-owned cultural asset is involved.

By 2007, Chongqing's cultural and creative industry was ranked the 9th among the mainland Chinese cities. Of ten “major” creative industry trades, animation, software programming, and broadcasting were recognized as the three pillars. A slew of financial incentives were offered to businesses that were recognized on the map. In particular, businesses that qualify as “Creative Industry Base,” a designation awarded by CILO, would receive extra financial incentives. The number of creative industry bases grew from 9 by the end of 2007 to 17 in 2008 and 25 by the end of 2009. Government sponsored training programs were organized to familiarize government officers with intellectual property rights-related laws, policies, and issues.

The notion of creative industry was also actively promoted among artisans and the wider public. The First Municipal Cultural and Creative Industry Fair was held in June, 2007, with hundreds of booths taken mostly by painters, artisans, small publishers, and larger companies. Traditional handcrafts and paintings represented the vast majority of the fair; while cosplays were staged at the main entrance, modern incarnations of creative

industry were few and far between. A famous event that tremendously popularized the creative industry notion was the government-organized graffiti art executed on the neighborhood on a 1.08 kilometer-long road. No coincidentally, this neighborhood was located not far away from the one that was made world renowned by New York Times' lavish coverage of Wu Ping's spectacular defense of her house against all pressures. Thus, the project, conceived on a meeting on regenerating the neighborhood, was meant as an alternative in urban regeneration in the wake of the previous incident.

5.3 An Ethnographic Study

5.3.1 Research Questions, Interview questions and Data Collection

None of the above, however, tells us how exactly creative industry is received by the broader public and how they understand what it means to develop creative industry in China. To tackle the popular consciousness, which I find to be important given the critical awareness discussed in the preceding chapters, I conducted a series of interviews with people who work in trades that were defined as creative industries according to the national classification.

My goal is to understand how the creative industry proposition is received by its practitioners situated in the concrete place of this particular city. My research questions included:

- 1.1 How do they make sense of the proposition?
- 1.2 Does China's socialist legacy have any lingering effect on this reception?
- 1.3 How does the city—particularly the forces emanating from its past and present—figure in their understanding and experience of creative industry?

Interview questions were loosely structured and sometimes posed in altered forms

in order to derive relevant data from the interviewees. For example, I asked, what does creative industry mean to you? Can you imagine a creative industry system that is not mediated predominantly by the market? Can you imagine a world without intellectual property rights? Chongqing has a reputation as a “cultural desert;” what is your comment on that, and do you think Chongqing is favorable for creative industry? Since each interview lasted somewhere between one and a half hours to two hours, other questions and comments were interjected as relevant.

Interviewees came from three work units that represented three kinds of economic structures: A state-owned joint-venture animation company, a private cultural intermediary company, and an artist practicing traditional Chinese painting. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and all translation is mine unless noted otherwise.

5.3.2 Data

5.3.2.1 Views from a State-owned Joint-venture Animation Company

In Xiao's experience, the increasing import of creative industry” has made a positive difference. He is one of the two associate managers of this young company, but he is also an artist and a departmental head of a prestigious fine arts institute, and had been working in a number of different capacities in the cultural sector for years. Now with the new importance attached to creative industry, more resources have been channeled into the sector, creating conditions of novel solutions to important problems and enhancing the importance of his positions and works.

In late 2006, Xiao had a new title in addition to his existing ones; he became an Associate

Manager of an animation production company. The establishment of the company—a joint venture between the Institute, the local state-owned media group, and SOCAMC--“was a good thing,” he said. Indeed, it was just about perfect because it solves some problem for each of the parties involved. Xiao's department recruits 300-400 bachelor-degree seeking students every year and yet the market demand was much smaller. That internship and other practical training opportunities were few and far between has been a persistent problem. On the other hand, the local media group's channels has an insatiable appetite for TV content. Now, the joint venture solves both problems in one move: As the company absorbs what was surplus labor, Xiao's students are guaranteed with plenty of practical training opportunities and even some income. At the price of a portion of the production cost, which can be “effectively controlled,” the media group gets the programs and, as the majority shareholder, owns the majority rights over the by-products. With guaranteed endless provision of low-cost labor power on the one hand and media outlet on the other, the joint-venture makes a highly competitive firm in the high-cost and high-risk animation industry and promises high return in the long run. SOCAMC has every reason to be happy about this investment.

Such a deal would have been unlikely one or two years ago. A main reason was, previously, TV stations had no worries about getting animation programs for broadcasting. They were available from foreign countries and typically for free; it would not have made economic sense to invest on animation production. Foreign cartoon and anime became highly popular since 1970s, but it did not become a profitable business until 1990s, when urban youth begin to be able to afford such by-products as books, stuffed animals, game cards, etc. Things changed in 2004, when all TV stations were

required to limit foreign cartoon's air time and showing certain amount of domestic cartoon became a mandate. As more incentives were offered in the following years, thousands of anime companies came into being.

Xiao's a moderate tempered person. He is articulate. He does not differentiate CI from Cultural Industry; he tends to use them interchangeably. His multiple positions are well balanced and all seem to equally inform his understanding of the rise of CI as the opportune coincidence of several developments: First is “the people's demand (for cultural consumption), which would have been impossible when they are hungry;” Second is “the increasingly obvious connection between culture and economy;” Thirdly, “the government discovered upon studying developed Western economies that CI meets the need for economic development and industrial development;” it (the emergence of CI) also reflects artists' need for self realization: Now they care not only about producing but also the reception (of their work).” These elements in Xiao's articulation exist in a harmonious balance, and none of them were privileged in absolute terms.

Xing is the general manager of the same company. His college major was Finance and he had worked as an economy journalist at the TV station. He has an impressive grasp of the major diagnoses of China's economy, such as the insustainability of its foreign-market driven development, China's need to update its industrial structure, and the role that CI could play in this grander scenario, which, somehow, is indistinguishable from the mainstream propaganda.

While he is an avid fan of films and has an appetite for films from around the world, which in the context of contemporary China has been made possible only by audio-video piracy, he does not entertain any romantic attachment to or valorization of

piracy. For him, it is strictly a matter of cost-benefit analysis at the level of the state. And he cites U.S.'s shift of attitude toward piracy as an example. The state takes care of its people and knows what's best for them.

While I am tempted to call him a realist on ostensibly economic and political matters, Xing's thought does have a romantic or utopian aspect that he may be less aware of. This aspect was most salient when, discussing animation, Xing professes a number of times a peculiarly universalist, utopian view: "Cartoon is about imagination and about future."

If this universalist longing sits uneasily with his attachment to Chinese culture, which in his conception is coextensive with the nation-state, it came into direct contradiction with his realist, nationalist vision of economy. But the nationalist vision does not come out of nowhere. During the interview, cut-throat international competition is presented as reality and demise of national economy imminent.

It seems, international economic competition reproduces a nationalist vision that undercuts a universalist, utopian narrative which international cultural flow tends to foster and promote.

Zong is general director of creativity and also the other associate manager of the company. His office, about three times as large as that of the general manager, also doubles as his studio. A photorealistic painting in progress was on his easel at the time of the interview.

Zong has a clear and shrewd sense of the technical essence of creative industry: The power lies in the power of the media; that is where the added value flows from. But in terms of the meaning of creative industry, for Zong, it lies in the potential power of the

market to reconfigure Chinese culture.

Not surprisingly, Zong is a cultural iconoclast (anti-traditionalist). He puts Chinese culture under scathing attack: With too much burden of moral responsibility, it has become fossilized into one mode, which is didactic. “To educate via entertainment,” It is condescending, it is like “the father trying to dress up like his son and play with him”. Culture is treated as one thing, with the end result being that “The high (culture) is not high, the low (culture) is not low; the mass produced (culture) is not quite mass, and the elite (culture) is not truly elite.” It is hypocritical. It is stupid.

With its alliance with the market, creative industry would introduce an alternative system of value and recognition, which is highly significant for Zong. He speaks scornfully of the current system in which academics are uniformly measured by publications. He emphatically stated: “I believe, a truly cultivated person shall not poor, and a rich person undoubtedly has culture!” Creative industry, it seems, means an opening of radical democracy for Zong, where alternative chains of equivalence, to use Laclau & Mouffe's terms, can be established in the marketplace between culture, value, and recognition.

5.3.2.2 Views from a Private Company

The meeting was held in the meeting room of this company, which was on the second floor in a private townhouse. Located in a quiet neighborhood but close to bustling streets, the real estate was one of Chongqing's first private mansion developments built since late 1990s. The six participants included Yang the boss of the company, two employees, and two college student interns. Mei, a friend of Yang, also participated. As it happened, the meeting may feel like a typical corporate meeting

session: Yang, the boss, was the default keynote speaker; he was the one to open the conversation and the one to conclude. I, as a researcher and guest, however, was able to share Yang's privilege to initiate conversations. While the employees almost always remained silent except when specific questions were directed at them, Mei frequently spoke after Yang to share his thoughts, which were not always in agreement with Yang. The procession of the conversation, I believe, reflected the organizational culture of this company, which, in its turn, seems quite typical of Confucian settings.

Yang is a very knowledgeable and highly ambitious cultural industrial entrepreneur. In the previous year, he changed the title of the magazine he ran from Urban Yellowpage to Open China. The change, he said, was a progress. It was an attempt to more closely engage with the pulse of the time; more specifically, it is an attempt to participate in the "new transnational organizing" as a Chinese: "If globalization is a right, it does not belong to US OR Europe, but everyone. And in this global project, China has an opportunity!"

For Yang, creative industry can make a unique contribution to the building of an ideal society (愿景社会) in China; the ideal society, its public sphere and civil society, and their relationship to the state, however, are modeled on Western countries. Yang maintains that the relationship between the state and the human should not be assumed to be inherently antagonistic, and again takes the Western countries as a normative model which China should not only be measured against but emulate. He said: "The public includes every private individuals. Which is why the developed countries are also where the public space is most developed. The public and the private are not (inherently) contradictory. They are two sides of the same coin. The sovereignty should lie with the

people. When the state fails to provide for its people, the people should be able to intervene by taking matters in their own hands. It seems, Wu sees creative industry as such an opportunity for intervention from below.

But more precisely, it probably should be called an intervention from the middle. Yang harshly criticized China's society as "tiny in brain and gigantic in body," a condition largely created by blind GDP-ism, his position must be understood as that of an enlightened intellectual attempting to mediating between China and its future, between the people and the government.

When Yang more explicitly elevates the Western model to almost historical inevitability, Mei expressed his disagreement. He returned to Chongqing the year before from UK, where he pursued graduate studies for two years and became well versed in deconstructionist discourse. "I probably wouldn't put it in such absolute terms," Mei said, referring to Yang's comment. Rather than falling back to the trap of ontology, he prefers a more tentative approach to the future: "Derrida uses 'perhaps' when he talks about the future." Creative industry "has progressive aspects": "it resonates with some important trends, such as embrace of deconstruction of and redefinition of value, heterogeneity of value, etc. People's subjective agency comes into focus and is awakened. People are no longer the slavery of capital and money." Apart from Mei's claim here contradicts his earlier examples of heterogeneity of value, where deconstruction of value remains tied to the mediation of money, and leaving aside the question of validity of Mei's claims, his utopian articulation of creative industry was passionate and was also the only instance in all my interviews where "capital" or "capitalism" is mentioned. Following on the comment on people being liberated from slavery of capital and money, Mei invokes the

concept of reification and Marx and then “slides” into a comparison between “us” and “Africa” in a critique of over-emphasis on marketing, market fragmentation, and product differentiation: “As we deliberate on whether to have orange-flavored or lemon-flavored gum, there are kids dying of hunger in Africa...As we deliberate how to match shoes with clothes—as we probably have a lot of shoes—Africa may have kids who have never got to wear any shoes.” Mei almost “slipped” into a direct engagement with the problem of capitalism, only to pull back in the last minute: “But creative industry is not [about] transferring money from you to me or egalitarian distribution of wealth. It is about deconstruction of value, awakening of selfhood...Human beings' subjectivity is again emphasized, and [human beings are] no longer driven by market, capital, and money.” But why Africa? And why cannot creative industry be about egalitarian distribution of wealth? Why, of all options, is this possibility to be excluded from the radical openness? Mei's speech was as enlightening as it is problematic. But as he rescued the discussion from a dangerous slippage into revolutionary deconstruction of creative industry by recourse to an apparently all-inclusive deconstruction, Yang takes the matter back in his hand, incorporating Mei's uplifting final note into a freshly formulated ontology of creative industry. “Thus,” he concluded, “Change is the only constant.”

In the practical arena, Yang is a shrewd businessman. He has good knowledge of the governmental and party agencies, their capacities and limitations, and was able to tap into their resources, on the one hand, and occasionally outwit them through deployment of commercial tactics, on the other.

The successful promotion of the Phoenix Symbol—an emblem for the city designed by a local artist—provides a good illustration: According to Yang, it started out

difficult, because at the time there was a competing design which was commissioned by the Propaganda Department of the Municipality's (Communist) Party with an award-winning designer in Hong Kong that cost ¥3 million. “So they [the government] didn't want a competition. They blocked the Phoenix, forbidding any newspaper it has control over to report on it,” said Yang. But through the Internet, with support from the Creative Industry Association, a semi-official NGO, and by a series of focused promotional maneuvers (including naming certain high-profile entities “Phoenix,” and creating a song, an animation, and a map that highlights the Phoenix symbol), Yang and his team made the Phoenix a “household celebrity.”

5.3.2.3 Views from an Artist's Store

I spotted Yu's store from a distance; almost drowned in a plethora of small souvenir stores, the imagery of Bundled House rendered in traditional Chinese painting easily stands on out. This was in the local specialty market that is part of the Hongya Don't Tourist Street. Located on the outskirts of Chongqing's commercial center and within walking distance of the main port, and consisting of a theater, a hotel, a few bars, restaurants, and shops on narrow alleys on its multi-layered structure, Hongya Dong is a compact-sized mall housed in a localized retro-style architecture. Its main attraction is its distinct street; structured like one of the old streets that used to stretch out on the steep cliff of the hilly peninsula. The old streets, which usually consisted of bundled wooden houses and narrow, stone-paved alleys, have been quickly replaced by modern, concrete buildings since 1980 and are objects of a by-gone era. In this sense, Hongya Dong tourist street is a simulacra of the vanished wooden bundled house alley, just like the museum is a simulacra of withered factory in Toby Miller.

Painting was Luo's hobby when he was a hospital's administrative staff. He had painted landscapes and animals, both favorites of traditional Chinese painting. A painting by a friend inspired him to put a focus on the bundled house in Chongqing as his subject matter. Having lived his whole life on the peninsula, Yu grew up in and lived bundled house until 1990s, when his family moved to concrete buildings. Now that bundle house has largely disappeared as a debris of history, it became an image through which Yu can articulate his lived life as a passionate witness to the history of the peninsula. The life scenario he spoke of bears the mark of a distinct time... He spoke of a view from his bundle house with passion... These were no complaints on Yu's part. Yu made it clear that the views belonged to a past that is passed--he seems to have no intention to go back, the passionate speech virtually transported him back to a different time and place.

It is this affect of nostalgia that Yu has recognized in his local clientele. He was very happy that his paintings have been purchased by locals to decorate restaurants as far as in the US. As an artist, Yu prefers to paint in his store than at home, as he delights in interacting with others. For the same reason, he attends nations-wide exhibits every year. Being accepted by others brings him the greatest joy, a mystifying process he still tries to grasp. In this process, Yu repeatedly emphasized, money is an important but not the ultimate measure of the recognition of the other. He spoke of an instance of transaction at a nation-wide art exhibit, where a woman visited him three times to purchase six of his paintings. The transaction price was lower than he had expected, but "I was moved by her spirit. She brought her boyfriend and another friend," Yu said: "they said I deserved more than what they could afford to offer."

But it is impossible to take money out of the equation, as the interactions which

Yu thrives on are directly or indirectly mediated through money. Before Yu arrived at HDTS, he had spent a few years at two other cultural market places. He is glad that he left them for HDTS, because the latter has a much larger flow of customers. "HDTS is a government designated spot for the One-day Trip of Chongqing. There are many tourists here." But the government could have done more and done better. As an independent artist undertaking traditional Chinese painting, the governmental creative industry incentives do not apply to him, although he could benefit from them indirectly, like through HDTS, which is one of the designated creative industry bases. Yu hopes that Chongqing can learn from cities where the government plays a more active role in facilitating and/or organizing cultural exchanges. "I want my art to help promote Chongqing's culture to the world. This is the wish of my life." By "the world," Yu was referring predominantly places like US and Europe. He regrets that his foreign language skill is inadequate. To achieve his goal, Yu sees his next big step in publishing a volume on his works.

There is a kind of exchange of which Yu seemed more ambivalent: He has a student who not only studies with him but also has a store in HDTS. In fact, their stores were almost directly across from one another; they were so close that I could see the other from within Yu's store. Yu's words became hesitant at this point. It was clear that he tries not to make a bit deal out of it, but it was also clear that he did not know how exactly to make sense of it, except by acknowledging that "of course, he [the student] needs to make a living too." The code of gift (as between teacher and student), and its concomitant modes of relating, seems to be violated or at least complicated by a code of competition.

5.3.3 Findings & Discussions

5.3.3.1 The Meaning of Creative Industry

At a preliminary level, it can be noted that, depending on the relative emphasis laid on the reason(s) for creative industry as an economic development strategy, the interviewees can be divided into three groups: the economic, the humanitarian, and the pragmatic, and the others.

The vast majority of the interviewees can be considered humanitarian, as they lay more emphasis on the promise of certain humanitarian good in creative industry, whether it is pictured in the image of an “open globalization,” a future of open values, a medium for personal recognition, or a new ground for cultural development. Two interviewees give primacy to economic reasons, that is, creative industry as a catch-up strategy and as dictated by China's economic development in the face of cut-throat competition, and can be classified as economic. Two interviewees supported creative industry strategy without giving particular emphasis on any transcendent reason. Two interviewees, both of whom were employees of the private company, were not particularly enthusiastic about creative industry.

5.3.3.2 Socialist Legacy?

Socialist legacy—especially in terms of manifestation of support of or preference for socialist relations of production—was not found. The market has become a default component that is assumed, and indeed some argued it is indispensable. Xing, for example, refused to separate culture from economy and simply murmured “That cannot be” when asked whether he thinks a creative industry not predominantly mediated by the market is possible. Zong, as we have seen, locates radical democratic possibilities in the

market. While Yang is a seasoned market operator, Yu enjoys the thrill of cultural exchange mediated by money.

In hindsight, it would have been useful to push my questions a little bit. For example, I could have asked whether they could imagine a world without intellectual property rights. Although the interviewees would most likely answer “No!” and argue how such a world would be impossible—after all, under the current arrangement, all the interviewees rely on IPR for livelihood, such discussion would be helpful for making historical connections and raise awareness. Xing, of all interviewees, however, spilled his utopian longing at one point: “Life is so short. Sometimes I don't understand why the countries keep fighting one another. How great it would be, if all of us could just get along!”

5.3.3.3 The West As The World And The Future

Utopian moment like the one cited above was rare and vulnerable, as it is immediately sobered by recognition of a cruel, actual reality. Nationalistic sentiments, buttressed by certain anxiety and anger with a China perceived to be economically and culturally weak and incompetent, on the one hand, and a strong defensive impulse, were visible in a few interviewees. But a more prominent pattern is that, when comparisons are drawn between China and foreign countries, it is almost always Euro-America that is implicitly or explicitly invoked. South Korea and Japan are invoked as examples in terms of creative industry, but in a more general sense the West remains the face of the future, the direction of China.

5.3.3.4 Chongqing: The City and Creative Industry

That Chongqing has been a heavy industrial city does not represent any

insurmountable problem for the interviewees who commented on it. Perhaps because they have better knowledge of the cultural matters of the city, none of the interviewee agrees with the notion that Chongqing is a cultural desert. Some of them questioned the implicit definition of culture underlying such judgment and asserted that Chongqing has cultural assets that are different from many other cities. What is important, they argue, is to develop and exploit these cultural assets. And the underdeveloped aspects of the city actually provides more of a “blank sheet,” so to speak, for them to work on

However, there seems to be a consensus that the government has not been fully up to the task of guiding, organizing, or facilitating creativity industry development. The State-owned company, however, seems to have the least issue in this regard, while the private company and, ever more so, the individual artist still have to maneuver largely on their own.

5.4 Conclusion

The pilot study finds a veritable enthusiasm about creative industry as an economic development strategy among the elite practitioners in Chongqing. While socialist legacy can be found in the subjects and objects they work with, no trace of positive socialist legacy was found in their thoughts about creative industry.

Hypothetically, this may in part be explained by the age of the elite. Being in their 30s or 40s, these individuals lived all their adulthood under the open and reform policy and may not have experienced much of the socialist relations of production themselves. At the same time, such amnesia suggests that the memory of socialist relations of production may have been effectively cut off or diluted by other currents of thought and ideology. The status of the interviewees may also have had a significant impact on their

understanding of creative industry: In particular, the interns, and the employees that were interviewed were less enthusiastic, although they are much younger than their boss and his peers. Thus, this study of creative industry as reflected in the consciousness of its practitioners yield an image of unevenness that deserves further critical study.

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