

TOURISM MEDIA DYNAMICS: NARRATIVES OF THE NATION-STATE

BY

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## ABSTRACT

With the premise that the tourism promotional video “China, Forever” provides a crucial access to understanding how tourism engages in a wider circle of socio-culture formation, this dissertation research approaches tourism by examining communicative practices initiated by “China, Forever”. In doing so, it seeks to reveal two dialogues – firstly, between the discursive construction of tourism representational language and China’s nation-state ideology; secondly, between interpretations from overseas Chinese audiences and nation-state narratives delivered via the tourism media.

In analyzing the first dialogue, this dissertation reveals that the pursuit of collective and monolithic national imagery has caused a representational violence – one that is committed by the nation-state ideology operated through the organization of tourism language. The very representational coercion itself, however, signifies the nature of tourism media as a vehicle mediating the global gaze and China’s self-representation; illuminating the fact that China’s nation-state building is only to be understood as deeply-grounded in the complexity of postcolonial politics. Furthermore, in a dialectic view, such finding consolidates the nature of “China, Forever” as a cultural product that actively exists as a component in the overall social fabric, co-creating a wider circle of culture politics together with other genres of media products; thus, calling for a more comprehensive understanding of tourism media at large.

In the second approach, this dissertation seeks to understand how the tourism video “China, Forever” mediates the relationship between tourism narratives of the nation-state and overseas Chinese individuals; thus bridging together tourism media and

ongoing life experiences of the audiences chosen. The analysis reveals that audiences' interpretations heavily concentrate on resisting and fragmenting the hegemonic nation-state language in "China, Forever". While some interviewees seek to decentralize the nation-state perspective from aspects of aesthetics, representational style, and representational subjects in "China, Forever" by incorporating their individual memories and past experiences, to some others, the over-polished glorification of China in the mediated tourism discourse is only coercive to China's social realities experienced by the individual interviewees - the disheartening contrasts of poverty and affluence as well as other social inequalities. From the perspective of the audience group, the Chinese scholars and students at the University of Illinois interviewed for this dissertation research constitute a cohort of exiled audiences for the tourism video "China, Forever". The audiences subject themselves to voluntary interpellation, a process in which they find themselves defending, negotiating, and resisting the nation-state representation of China – even though they are not its intended audience and have had no input into its production. Nevertheless, such process is one of identification, in which viewers articulate a subject position from which to speak of their own experiences, dilemmas and desires. The usefulness of tourism media discourse in mediating the nation-state narratives and the individual experience is amplified.

*To: My Grandmother 贾琳*

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONCEPTUALIZING MASS MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN TOURISM STUDIES

Communicative practices, especially those revolving around the media, have been identified as of central importance in tourism activities (Dann, 1996; Cronin, 2000; Santos, 2004, 2006); nevertheless, events along the nexus between media discourse and the sphere of tourism have remained under-theorized. Within the extant tourism literature, the inquiry of the nexus of tourism and media has primarily been examined from two main approaches. The first approach focuses on the connection between destination marketing/branding and the use of tourism media. Within this approach, much of the discussion is linked to the industry/economic impact produced by promotional destination images, travel writings, and communicative efficacy of tourism websites. Specifically, it centers on the empirical connection between media effects and tourism destination awareness among potential tourists (Gammack, 2005). For example, Mercille's (2005) study examined how movie images of Tibet have largely informed American audiences' perceptions of the destination, therefore propelling/impeding their motivation to travel to Tibet. Not surprisingly, this approach is primarily located in an empirical, experimental, and quantitative framework. The second approach considers tourism media products as part of a wider sphere of social discourse. Mostly from a deconstructionist perspective, this approach seeks to unpack various social forces – colonialism, racism, nationalism, and so forth - in determining the construction of tourism representations. Between the two approaches, the first one has largely dominated and shaped the inquiry of tourism representations and media; leading to the under-representation and under-exploration of a variety of ongoing socio-cultural events

encompassed by the dynamics of tourism and media communication. Thus, this chapter is devoted to proposing and discussing two main problems the extant tourism literature has largely failed to attend to; from there, it discusses how this dissertation research seeks to contribute to the tourism literature by gathering empirical evidence to examine and contextualize these problems from theoretical perspectives.

At the outset, the first missing component in the existing inquiry of tourism and media communication is the voice of audiences. While some tourism studies have approached media receivers to test the marketing effectiveness of tourism media messages, audiences are primarily treated as simple and experimental targeted subjects through whom commercial messages are operated on. Therefore, a sophisticated picture on how audiences – as human beings, with intelligence and complex human agency - engage in the events of tourism media communication in various and subtle ways is largely absent. Furthermore, within the available tourism studies of media receivers, the attention has predominantly focused on tourists and potential tourists, who are likely to create economic benefits for the tourism industry. Excluded are, therefore, the unintended audiences – those may not be lying at the heart of the economic concerns of the media product, who nevertheless participate in building the landscape of tourism media consumption and negotiation.

Secondly, both approaches, while preoccupied by the entity of tourism media discourse, fail to consider it as a form of popular modern media that contributes to the formation of our socio-cultural life at large. It is often assumed that the examination of tourism media has to be directly associated with the condition of tourism – both constructing destination marketing materials from the perspective of stakeholders and viewing tourism media from the eyes of tourists - to be rendered as significant and contributive to the tourism literature. In reality,

however, consuming tourism media products is a part of our overall mediated cultural experience; the images, sounds, and spectacles in tourism media help produce the fabric of everyday life, shaping political views and social behaviors, and providing the materials out of which people forge their identities (Kellner, 1995). Only when tourism media is re-embedded within the terrain of immediate and pervasive aspects of contemporary life, can a fuller investigation of tourism communication dynamics as both constitutive and constituted of larger social and political dynamics be performed and achieved. From this perspective, the investigation of audiences' interpretations of tourism media messages provides a crucial access to examine how tourism media engages in ongoing ideological struggles and socio-political realities.

## 1.2 RESEARCH GOALS AND STRUCTURE

### 1.2.1 Introduction

In order to address the two above-mentioned problems that have been largely ignored by the tourism literature, this study incorporates Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model to examine the communicative dynamics revolving around the tourism promotional video "China, Forever". In brief, Hall's structural conception of media communication serves to illuminate two critical phases in tourism media. Firstly, it examines dialogues between media construction and ideological agenda – how media cultural products draw topics, events, personnel, and images from a variety of sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural structure. Secondly, it reveals audiences' engagements with media messages by drawing onto the exercise of human agency, the viewing context, and ongoing socio-political struggles.

The employment of Hall's model enables this dissertation research to contribute to the current tourism media literature in two primary ways. To begin with, this dissertation study strives to delineate a comprehensive account of audiences' negotiations in response to the ideological statement delivered from the representational language of "China, Forever". Thus, from the particular perspective of the audience, this study is designed to address a dynamic and plural landscape involved in tourism media communication. Furthermore, by situating "China, Forever" in China's historical and current socio-cultural struggles, as well as audiences' interpretations in immediate and lived social contexts, it seeks to analyze how tourism media texts and individuals' discursive interpretations interact with various socio-structural forces; therefore, illuminating the contribution of tourism media communication to a wider fabric of socio-cultural dialogues. The following discussion will provide a brief introduction of the video "China, Forever"; followed by a discussion regarding this dissertation's research goals and focus.

### 1.2.2 Tourism Video "China, Forever"

The tourism video "China, Forever" was produced by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) in 2003. The title "China, Forever" is not only the name for the video, but also the slogan for China's new implementation for its global tourism promotion since 2003 (Li, 2003). According to the former Director of CNTA He Guangwei, the video was expected to communicate Chinese culture to a global audience; assisting China in achieving the overall brand image of a healthy, safe and environmentally friendly destination (Qian & Tan, 2003). As the first official promotional video for China's tourism, the making of the video was regarded a "grand project" by both CNTA and Chinese news media (Qian & Tan, 2003). The shooting of the video took place in more than 20 provinces, aiming to cover a wide variety of Chinese natural and cultural landscapes, in order to capture the essence of Chinese traditional and modern

culture (Wang, 2003). More importantly, the video aspires to present a promising Chinese society full of economic vitality and orderly social structure, as well as the great hospitality that Chinese people display to foreign tourists (Wang, 2003).

Unlike the traditional format of television commercials, this 8-minute-long video is not designed to be a mini drama with a story plot and identified characters. The video does not contain any verbal language; instead, the melody of a traditional Chinese Tibetan folklore song “Kangding Qingge” reverberates throughout the whole video. With different musical instruments used at different parts, as well as different lengths of rhythms and pitches of tones used, the video creates a variety of musicality features with rises and falls, bearing sometimes resemblance to Suzhou Tanci, a musically performed narrative genre popular in Suzhou and the nearby area. Other times, it bears striking resemblance to the effect of a Western symphony. Moreover, the musicality and visual effects are quite dialectical, with one assisting the other to create a compelling and cohesive presentation; combined, they deliver social and cultural messages through created themes and patterns. More importantly, the construction of “China, Forever” is intimately linked to the aesthetic enterprise at work. To be sure, within a limited representational space devoid of linguistic means, the visual image is the main narrative mechanism in the tourism representation. In other words, the visual language – comprised of both aesthetics and represented subjects – functions as an institution that appropriates visual signs as possibilities for expressing meaning and triggering imagination. Thus, in a further disentangling of the narrative medium in “China, Forever”, the visual and the musical interplay with each other; co-creating emotive effects in the filmic language.

Since the inception of the video, it has been shown at a variety of international media events. Therefore, the video’s social-cultural meanings have been translated, interpreted,

negotiated and socialized through various social agencies and mediated discursive spaces. In the 2003 the video was shown in Paris at the China-France Culture Year Festival (Sun, 2003), as well as at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Tourism Organization Conference in Beijing; in 2006 it was broadcasted by CNN (Sun, 2003) -- interestingly, the video has never been formally broadcasted in China. When the Chinese media was busily engaged in promoting the festive ambience of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, CNTA also envisioned this sports event as a great platform and opportunity to promote China's national image and, as a result elevating its inbound international tourism (Wang, 2003). The video "China, Forever" was therefore linked to the website of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Moreover, it is also located at CNTA's website, as well as many other Internet communication forums, such as Youtube and some personal blogs.

Moreover, based on this 8-minute-long video, CNTA has worked with other tourism institutions and commercial enterprises, selecting images and combining them into commercial videos of shorter versions. In 2004, CNTA's Los Angeles branch, which cooperated with a local company named "Lianhe Ziyuan Guoji" (United Resource International), remade a tourism commercial of about 1-minute-length based on "China, Forever", and played it in between movies at Los Angeles local movie theaters during the summer time (Li, 2003). According to the news, July and August time are usually the golden period for the movie industry, considering that the size of audiences often increases remarkably during the time period. Thus, playing this tourism commercial in the movie theater was considered as a novel and creative marketing method, which was expected to achieve significant business impact.

At this stage, I would be remiss if I do not acknowledge the committee's initial comments regarding contextual information about the video. I should note that I greatly appreciate and respect the committee's suggestions on seeking additional contextual information regarding the

video's production. After what proved to be an intensive online search in both Chinese and English, I was unable to locate any further information regarding the production, the director, or the production crew of "China, Forever". Also, I've sent several emails in both Chinese and English to CNTA's New York and Los Angeles branches inquiring about the video; unfortunately, to date, no response was received. I also faxed two letters to CNTA's Beijing headquarters, in the hope of identifying the director's contact information. The requests, however, also ended with no reply.

### 1.2.3 Research Goals

As above-mentioned, tourism inquiry has largely failed to situate the examination of tourism media within a wider sphere of ideological dialogues. Seeking to illuminate tourism media's engagements in a wider circle of social dialogues, this dissertation research approaches the tourism video "China, Forever" by questioning how China's nation-state ideology shapes the representation and interpretation in "China, Forever". In specific, the first step of this dissertation research is designed to examine how representational language in "China, Forever" is discursively constructed to compose collective, coherent, heroic, and monolithic nation-state narratives. In specific, it seeks to critically deconstruct the socio-cultural symbols, messages, and implications that have been woven into the nation-state language situated within the tourism media discourse "China, Forever", in particular relation to China's historical struggles, current socio-cultural realities, and post-colonial global power dynamics. Thus, it not only investigates the question of *how* the tourism video "China, Forever" is encoded, but also *why* it is so.

In the second step of the analysis, this dissertation research is designed to reveal the dynamics between the encoded messages in "China, Forever" and audiences' interpretations. Specifically, it attends to the unintended audience – the overseas Chinese individuals – to locate

the inquiry. Exile audiences, though not spoken to, are nevertheless spoken about in the tourism media production. As such, the communicative encounter between the overseas Chinese individuals and “China, Forever” compels this study to approach the investigation beyond the traditional framework, which focuses on the commercial impact of tourism media, to a larger socio-cultural sphere – including diasporic individuals’ negotiation of ongoing socio-political realities, the entanglement between collective and individual identity, and so forth. Therefore, with the recognition of the audiences’ subjectivity and power for providing contesting and oppositional interpretations, the second step of this dissertation research seeks to examine how individual audiences choose to understand, interpret, and negotiate China’s nation-state narratives delivered from the tourism video “China, Forever”. In doing so, it attempts to delineate a complex and sophisticated account of communicative dynamics constituted by “China, Forever”, as a social space where individual subjectivities are formed and encoded socio-cultural meanings are contested. Moreover, by situating individual interpretations in immediate and pervasive aspects of socio-cultural life, this dissertation illuminates the varied roles played by the tourism video “China, Forever” in forming broader social fabric.

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter Two provides an analysis of literature review from the related perspectives, seeking to provide a further explanation of the theoretical background of this research. Following that, Chapter Three focuses on the methodological approach employed by this dissertation research. Chapter Four examines the encoded messages in “China, Forever”; while Chapter Five addresses individual interviewees’ interpretations of the tourism video. Finally, Chapter Six attempts to combine and contextualize the findings and provide further problematization and theorization.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 TOURISM MEDIA: AN OVERVIEW**

In the sphere of tourism research, a wide range of genres of media products have been examined, including brochures (Adams, 1984; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006), postcards (Albers & James, 1988), movies (Beeton, 2005; Schofield, 1996), photographs (Caton & Santos, 2008), and travel writing (Santos, 2006; Huggan, 2001) with, however, insufficient discussion regarding tourism promotional videos. Moreover, the common assumption held by the investigation of tourism and media is that contemporary tourists are composed of increasingly globally informed and media-savvy individuals, whom are influenced by the construction and reinforcement of particular images or narratives of tourism destinations (MacCannell, 1976). In Chapter One, it has been introduced that the inquiry of tourism media could be generalized into two main categories. The first approach predominantly focuses on the connection between destination marketing and the use of media. In specific, it centers on issues of the tourist's motivations and expectations formed by pre-exposure to media, destination awareness through media representation, destination branding that are supported by compelling propositions and images, and so forth (Gammack, 2005). In brief, underlying such approach is the belief that tourism is primarily an economic activity, thus media products are created and circulated in order to enhance the productivity of such economic behavior. In the second approach, tourism media products are considered as a part of the social discourse structured in the institutions of society, which are themselves cultural phenomenon that are written of various social powers. Following this path, some tourism scholars have employed a

political economy framework, assuming that patterns of the production of tourism media representations are fundamental to understanding inequalities of power, profit and ideology (Fenton, 2007). With that in mind, tourism scholars focus on issues of ownership and control of the tourism media product, seeking to unpack the ideological powers underlying tourism media.

While both approaches have made significant contribution, they fail to situate the encoding and decoding of tourism media products in the overall sphere of public media; therefore, tourism discourse is not connected to other facets of social life. A variety of cultural-political roles that tourism media are engaged in are thus significantly ignored. To be sure, tourism media products have only been partially studied, for it is assumed that tourism media only emerge, produce effects, and create interactions with tourists or potential tourists--tourism media representations have to be directly associated with the condition of tourism to be understood. However, in reality, consuming tourism media products are often a part of our immediate everyday cultural experience. Indeed, just as Botton (2003) states, "it's when we're sitting at home before we actually travel, looking through the brochure that we enjoy travel at its purest and perhaps even best form" (p.19). Hence, the ideal settings in which, either tourists gaze at representational images of a tourism spot or potential tourists feel motivated to travel after watching a tourism commercial, are only part of a range of possibilities for the consumption of tourism media products. As such, there are an infinite amount of circumstances, purposes, and attitudes involved in the decoding of tourism media products. Imagine the substantial differences involved in watching the same Chinese tourism television commercial: an American teenager who has only read about China from Amy Tan's books, an old couple seeking entertainment and adventure, and a Chinese international student who gazes at television images with complex feelings. As an inherent experience in the comprehensive socio-cultural life, interpreting tourism

media is not necessarily associated with direct pursuits of tourism motivations and behaviors. Indeed, tourism media products are a situated component in the social dynamics of public cultural communication, which participates in bringing out the mediating role of everyday thoughts, conversation and activities to bridge the private and public spheres (Livingstone, 2005). That is, the substance of media communication analysis should be rooted in the needs, goals, conflicts, and accomplishments of ordinary people attempting to make sense of the media in relation to their own lives and experiences (Fenton, 2007). Therefore, the fact that tourism media products have only been studied in the context of tourism, with the implicit assumption that the audience is only composed of tourists or potential tourists, is an unsophisticated reading of tourism discourse. As a result, important questions, including how the production and interpretation of tourism media representations interplay with other cultural issues in our contemporary society, how the exposure to tourism media products has become a part of our immediate cultural experience, and how interpretations of tourism media products mediate narratives of memory and identity, remain to be further investigated and understood.

## 2.2 TOURISM AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NATION

The concept of the nation has been called upon and activated across a range of cultural, social, and meaning- making forms and practices (Evans 1999). Benedict Anderson argues that nations are best viewed as particular ways of imagining bonds of human solidarity (Anderson 1983). According to him, due to the intangibility and conceptuality of nation, central to the concept of the nation is the idea of imagination. Appadurai further explains, “to imagine is not an idle, mundane, and individual mental activity resembling fantasizing or daydreaming” (1986, p.7). Rather, in its collective form, imagination creates images of neighborhood and nationhood,

of their social morals and cultural values. Under such construction, the idea of nation often embodies a moral force allowing it to supersede temporal and spatial limits, creating powerful and often pathological allegiances to a cultural ideal (Duara, 1995). Both arguments have highlighted the symbolic meaning of nation - one that is devoid of substantial and concrete entity. In other words, the meaning of nation could only be fictional, for the assumption - every nation is the sovereign subject of history, which has existed along a continuity of time to realize its historical destiny in a modern future – is only imagined (Duara, 1995).

While such approach to the concept of nation is still subject to debate, practices of cultural representations are underscored as the necessary medium through which meanings of nation emerge in people's consciousness (Hall, 1996). Precisely because the collective project of representations enables the imagination of the nation to become vivid and concrete, the importance of unpacking these maneuvered representations continues to rise. To investigate the meanings and forms of representations is important, as Hall reminds us that “representations are an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (2002, p.15). Things by themselves rarely have any single, fixed and unchanging meaning; and therefore, it is by the uses of things, as well as what people say, think, and feel about them – how people represent them- that people give meanings to them (Hall,1997). Furthermore, as Foucault would argue, it is exactly through the discursive construction of representation, knowledge and meanings are created and circulated. The representational language of the nation-state is thus a necessary manipulation of power, performed and re-performed in various media channels, embedded in a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters.

The central question is thus not whether the nation is fundamentally real or fictional -

physically existing or purely imagined - entity. Instead, lying at the heart of this dissertation research is the inquiry of ways in which particular ideas that the nation of China has been conceptualized in symbolic forms, historically produced cultural practices, social customs, and visual aesthetics – all condensed and take forms of the tourism visual language. Furthermore, just like all forms of representations, when narratives of nation are created by heterogeneous social groups instead of the homogeneous state regime, they become sites of struggles and contestations (Duara, 1995). Different social actors mobilize particular representations of nation or community against other representations and, while doing so, appropriate dispersed meanings and pasts as their own. As such, representations produce a set of subject positions, which are constituted neither primordially nor monolithically but within a network of changing and often conflicting representations. Therefore, the so-called social totality, if there is any, coexists historically with other representations, including competing visions of the nation. Interestingly, the very fact that individuals and groups simultaneously recognize themselves in and respond to different ideological representations of the nation suggests a critical power within society that is potentially resistant to totalizing ideologies. Representations of the nation are therefore ambivalent and contested, while they interplay with other facets of the individual identities, creating subverting or supportive roles for the representational effects.

Media representations of tourism, including those of tourism brochures, postcards, TV commercials, travel writing, are often regarded as a form of soft media; which, as opposed to hard news, eschews discussion of politics and public policy without creating ideological tension among audiences (Leheny, 1995). Under the disguise of commercial purpose and aesthetic appeals, tourism representations are in fact not immune to the influence of various structural powers and ideologies (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). To be sure, tourism actively participates in

on-going socio-cultural dialogues and is thus necessarily saturated with dominating opinions and cultural prejudices (Santos, 2004). Indeed, with the assistance of mass media, tourism has become a crucial component in the construction and circulation of social knowledge, which powerfully shapes our ways of seeing and thinking (Aitchison & Reeves, 1998). In particular, the ideology of nation-state is ubiquitous and mighty in the language of tourism (Palmer, 1999); strategically employing the means of tourism representation to assert state unity, sovereignty, and independence within the international state system (Fitzgerald, 1995). Indeed, the underpinning idea of nation building has almost become the second nature of tourism representation, considering that cultural sentiments and symbols at travel destinations are an infinite supply of tangible and intangible materials molded for constructing the nation. As a result, tourism representations create an acute awareness of the foundation upon which the general picture of nation rests (Palmer, 1999).

### 2.3 THE INQUIRY OF TOURISM: CHINA AND THE REPRESENTATION OF NATION

The idea of tourism, which involves a strong component of mass leisure activity as it is understood in the Western world after the industrial revolution, kept reconfiguring its meaning throughout different historical period in China. Prior to Mao's era, the concept of tourism was recognized as an aristocratic activity; many intellectuals engaged with metaphors of exiling and mobility to compose poems. The development of tourism in China was almost entirely suppressed in Mao's era (Sofield & Li, 1998). If there was any, it was associated with certain political intentions, such as the "da chuanlian" (the big gathering) during the early part of the Cultural Revolution, of which Mao called for "Red Guards" (mostly revolutionary students and young individuals) all over the nation to meet him in Beijing; a movement to gather his own

political power. In the post-Mao era, the central preoccupation with developmentalism, especially in terms of economic achievement, seems to have announced a big victory (Dirlik, 1996).

Grounded in such social background, the revival of Chinese tourism is widely regarded as an inherent component contributing to, as well as an emerging consequence of China's contemporary modernization project. In 1986, the Chinese central government declared tourism to be a comprehensive economic activity, the ideal of which was to gain foreign capital and increase the domestic needs for consumption, thus transitioning tourism into being primarily focused on economic gains (Zhang, 1995). As a result, the tendency to quantify modernization achievements using the economy as a measurement has become the monotonous and universal language in the media discourse of China. Thus, representations and narratives in tourism are much separated from contemporary culture production, causing a lack of systematic and critical observation of Chinese tourism representations. As such, in-depth analysis of socio-cultural dynamics created by tourism developments in China is limited to a few anthropological works. Timothy Oakes (1995 & 1998), for example, examines issues of modernity and ethnicity in the social mappings of tourism in two southwest provinces, Guizhou and Yunnan. Meanwhile, a few feminist anthropologists have shown their concerns for gender oppression in China's tourism development (e.g., Schein, 1997). While these studies have highlighted the social tension and conflicts in China's tourism, many fail to capture the profound complexity entangled in the overall social circumstance of China. Rey Chow (1993) argues that contemporary China studies are infused with Western cultural imperialism, manifested by their geographically deterministic and hence culturally essentialist discourse. In tourism studies, another mode of cultural imperialism pervades - the tendency of generalizing Chinese socio-cultural phenomenon into

certain Western modes of knowledge construction.

As for the global representation of China's tourism development, the language is largely shaped by China's self-positioning in relation to various strands of socio-political forces, including post-colonialism, global capitalism, globalization, etc. In particular, tourism representations of China are regarded as providing a critical way to communicate to the globe without creating ideological tensions; especially against the overall backdrop of Western media, where understandings of China is still pervaded by the remnant cold-war ideology with emphasis on the irreconcilable political and military conflicts between China and the Western world. According to Dorogi (2001), the description of China in mainstream Western media is primarily based on a missionary purpose with imposed cultural, economic, and political standards; thus, Chinese domestic circumstances violating Western principles of democracy and human rights have become chronicle themes, occupying the center space of Western mainstream media. While China's national image has been largely at the mercy of Western media (Peng, 2004), such reductionist depiction of China bespeaks Western domination as a form of covert post-colonialism, in the emotional overtone of which China is sometimes reduced to an evil communist regime and other times a threatening rival with a soaring economy to the Western hegemony. This tendency to focus on the negative aspects of China--negative as it is determined by the Western standard--is often a source of headache and indignation for the Chinese living in Western countries. Regardless, we are reminded that communication nowadays is "not a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism" (Jameson, 1987, p68), for globalized and transnational exchanges of cultural products have initiated a complex variegated process of accommodation, appropriation and resistance (Yang, 2002). Xu (2007), for example, proposes the concept of "sinascape" (p.19) to argue that the Chinese film industry has formed a hybrid

transnational cultural space, allowing representations of China to be revealed in heterogeneous and contested ways on a global scale. China's tourism representations are, in a way, also a part of this cultural landscape that resists the homogeneous interpretation of China from the Western political regime.

Nevertheless, even within this cultural space, representations of China have been dancing with chains. Severe constraints are revealed, as the representations are usually linked to the presence and admittedly limited influence of a small number of highly visible Chinese producers, writers, directors, and on-screen talent. More often than not, certain associations of the country with symbols of pigtails, concubines, chopsticks, Mao caps, the Great Wall and pandas have to be made to be regarded as Chinese (Peng, 2004). Worse yet, compared to movies, China's tourism representations are further constrained to the framework of nation-state. The presumption that those specific images and narratives of China are to be viewed by the global audience has intensified an acute awareness of China as a unitary political community in the construction of tourism representations. Admittedly, Chinese tourism representations have been deeply politicized, seeking to mobilize a range of social discourses to enforce the uniformity and conformity narrative to the state-endorsed structure (Nyiri, 2005). Consider for example the selection and representation of Chinese tourism scenic spots in promotional materials; the very process of which reveals a landscape where the conception of nation is displayed. Concerns of what definitive features should be possessed by selective tourism sites, what collective memory needs to be invoked, and how they enable China to be seen as a modern nation that is bonded by coherent history and distinctive ethnic consciousness are crucial to the construction and interpretation, and are ultimately a matter of power struggles.

To such an extent, China's tourism representations can be regarded as an effective

medium to probe into state authoritative attitudes and principles of primary social issues, including ethnicity, modernity, teleology of history, etc. However, as it was previously pointed out, the preponderate economic and management interests and issues of China's tourism have dominated the field, resulting in little systematic investigation and knowledge regarding China's tourism representations circulated on the global stage. It is in response to this observation that this dissertation seeks to deconstruct the narrative, style, aesthetic, and the dialectic between textuality and historicity of tourism representation from analyzing the video "China, Forever", a quintessential piece of China's self-construction in the sphere of tourism.

#### 2.4 MEDIA AND THE ENCODING-DECODING

As a communication medium, the media are "not merely appurtenances to society but crucial determinants to the social fabric" (Carey, 1967, p. 270-271). In particular, media studies have been transformed from a mere component in the background of social theorizing to one in the forefront (Carey, 2009). Indeed, media communication produces fundamental social bonds, through the integrated relations of symbols and structures of which, social life and culture are created, maintained, and transformed - "of all things communication is the most wonderful" (Dewey, 1939, p.385).

Hall's encoding-decoding model is an innovative breakthrough that provides a holistic approach to examine mass mediated communication. In specific, it considers the dynamics of media communication as structured activities, which are composed of interdependent steps--the production of media messages (encoding), the transmission of information, and the interpretation from the audience (decoding). Moreover, it emphasizes that ideology is infused with each step of communication. Media construct cultural representations by drawing on topics, treatments,

agendas, events, personnel, and images of the audience from a variety of ideological sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure. Due to its contextual reference and positioning in different discursive fields of meaning and association, the coded signs not only intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture but also take on additional and more active ideological dimension. Thus, the institutions that produce the messages do have the power to set agendas and to define issues (Morley, 1995). The entire process of encoding-decoding is full of ideological practices, which are indeed situated in a network of power relations and human conditions (Hall, 1980).

Regarding the step of decoding, it proposes that the text is always polysemic and open to multiple possible interpretations from different individual audiences, while the message is considered neither as unilateral nor a disparate sign that can be read in a random way. Thus, no reading is absolute with a total closure, and there always exist possibilities of alternative, negotiated and oppositional readings (Morley, 1992). Thus, each reading is a particular phenomenon, which needs to be treated with specific and nuanced cultural explanation. In Neale's (1997) words, "what has to be identified is the use to which a particular text is put, its function within a particular conjuncture, in particular institutional spaces, and in relation to particular audiences" (p.39-40). That is, both the encoded and decoded texts have their own cultural conditions of existence; the two sides form a dynamic process, which enrich the expressions and understandings of each other. As such, by incorporating the audience's subjectivity, the socio-cultural circumstance of reading and the contested individual ideologies into the investigation of mass-mediated communication process, Hall's analysis forms a significant departure from the early Frankfurt school's ideological determinism. In doing so, it reveals that there is a great deal of structural differences of relation and position between the

source and receiver, causing asymmetry between the encoded and decoded. Hall's encoding-decoding model is thus a procedure aimed at opening up a space in which receiving media messages could begin to be understood as a complex cultural practice full of dialogical negotiations and contestations, rather than as a singular occurrence whose meaning can be determined once and for all in the abstract (Ang, 2001). Meanwhile, considering the background of Hall's proposition, especially of American communication research tradition which has been firmly grounded in the utilitarianist and empiricist thinking with overt prioritization of the relationship between communication effect and function (Carey, 1989), the model has called for a reconsideration of media communication as a contested cultural site, where the "effect" alone is not adequate to describe interactive and dialogic relationships situated in the communication process.

Nevertheless, a critical reading reveals a number of problematic features with the encoding-decoding model. As Carey (2009) reminds us, any attempt to construct a structural model of communication automatically submits itself to the risk of reductionism. To be sure, "a dominating model of social experience must oversimplify cultural transactions, which always contain elements of collaboration, of dialogue, of ritualized sharing or interaction"; thus, it underestimates "the individual and communal and the interactive dimensions of power" (Carey, 2009, p.vii). The operation and justification of power in the process of decoding, for example, is one significant problem which Hall's model cannot fully account for. Hall once attended to the reason of class struggle to explain the social inequalities embedded in the communication dynamics; so to speak, audiences of difference social classes initiate differentiated patterns of readings of media products. This argument is however disputed by Morley's (1980) empirical findings in his ethnographic media study, which in fact reveals that sociological factors of class

and race alone can not fully explain patterns of resistance and negotiation in the encoding-decoding process. It is against this background Carey (1989) reasserts that investigation of communicative practices must be repositioned in human practices of social relations and subjectivities, for the rich intelligence embodied in communication and culture should not be entirely subordinated to structural forces. Thus, interestingly, it seems that a culturalist view has been employed by Carey to revise Hall's structuralist positioning, attempting to provide a new way to examine cultural struggles involved in the encoding-decoding process. In particular, the argument that communication is essentially a matter of human existence expressed through a variety of symbolic forms is reinforced; propelling us to rethink as how this commonplace human activity enables the most mundane aspects of human experience into grounds of wonderment. As it is suggested, the investigation of and encoding-decoding must "...press forward with a form of cultural studies that does not reduce...social conflict to class conflict, consent to compliance, action to reproduction or communication to coercion" (Carey, 2009, p.83). While such argument has effectively incorporated a humanistic layer into the interpretation of the encoding-decoding process, the idea of "human practices of relations and subjectivities" however remains ambiguous. It thus requires the provision of more contextualized and nuanced analysis as to how human practices are involved in the negotiation and reconstruction of meanings in the media communicative process.

Moreover, the encoding and decoding process of media messages is built on the problematic assumption that language operates in a strictly referential function (Suleiman & Crosman, 1980). In other words, the medium of language in communication is concerned with correspondences and representations of the real world, whose function is not only to express and assert but also represent realities. In fact, however, language not only provides a transporting

passage for media communication, but constitutes forms of actions and interactions which shape communicative events. As Silverstein (1976) reinforces, communicative languages both create the context for interpretation and build participants' relationships in the event of communication. This observation reminds us that the genre, style, aesthetics, and social context of both media representations and individual interpretations are integral components of communicative practices. More importantly, it indicates that incongruence and differences emerged in between the encoded and decoded are partly determined by the nature of language rather than issues of power and ideology.

Meanwhile, in Hall's encoding-decoding model, contents and meanings of communicated messages are under-analyzed (Spitulnik, 1993). That is, while Hall's approach has focused on the operational steps of mass media communication, it fails to connect the social meanings of the mediated messages to a broader social agenda. In fact, precisely because of the various meanings that media messages carry with themselves, media provide powerful materials out of which many people construct their deepest sense of identity and prevalent view of the world. Thus, Hall's insufficient articulation of meanings in communicative practices needs to be regarded as one primary concern and call to complement the encoding-decoding model. Specifically, it requires that the investigation of media move its analysis beyond the individual sender-receiver dyad, and instead consider how media forms are situated within broader social frameworks; instigating new cultural discussions (Spitulnik, 1993). Left up in the air, is not the question of whether the audience have the power to negotiate or not, but rather the challenges of--i.e. how audiences make sense of the encoded messages in their linguistic/visual/musical forms, how the media structures people's position, and what social-cultural implications are produced in the interrelationships between the media and audience.

Regardless of the problems with Hall's encoding-decoding model, its innovative proposition has allowed us to grasp a relatively full view of media communicative dynamics in the public sphere. As a result, it has enabled multiple ways of examining mass-mediated cultural experiences. One type of approach, for example, focuses on the ideology of cultural texts and the ways that texts legitimize and reproduce dominant forms of oppression. Another type of approach investigates how audiences' varied interpretations both legitimate and contest concurrently established culture and society (Kellner & Durham, 2001). Thus, as a closer reading of media texts reveals a wealth of meanings, values, and messages, conjoining production of text and audience reveals a complex landscape of how culture and media actually operate in everyday life.

## 2.5 REPRESENTATION, IDEOLOGY, AND VISUALITY

The encoding-decoding communication model touches directly upon the problem of representation, since the main operational sphere of communicative practices deal with representation. Simply put, things by themselves rarely suggest any single or fixed meaning; it is through what people say, think, and feel about them--that is, how people make representations--that meanings are conveyed, organized, and regulated by participants (Hall, 1997). In the encoding-decoding process of communication, representation is the linkage through which power and knowledge become interdependent. To be sure, as socially-constituted products, encoded representations are undergirded by ideological factors such as class, gender, race, sexuality and a myriad of social categories. Thus, representations are laden with meanings, ideological powers, and biases. Through such operation of ideologies in knowledge construction, the transformation of discourses and the transformation of subjects-for-action take place in mass-

mediated communicative practices (Hall, 1981). More often than not, representations produce values of dominant social groups, therefore serving to naturalize, idealize, and legitimize the existing society with its institutions and values; representations enable “forms of power to transform into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, truth, consciousness, and discourse” (Foucault, 1977, p.208). Generated in specific apparatuses of ideological production, media representations have their specific way of working. With this understanding, to unpack the discursive texts and imageries in representations requires an engagement in historically specific socio-cultural analysis of particular contexts and forces.

Among all formats of representations, visual images, especially moving images in movies and TV screens, are a special genre that carries important and enduring cultural concerns (Pink, 2001; Rose, 2001). The visual medium manages to signify the immediacy and efficacy of a form of communication that is beyond words and the linearity of verbal writing (Chow, 1995). Moreover, one important aspect that sets visual representations apart from other forms of representations is that the field of visibility has become one central, if contested, terrain of modern critical thought (Heywood & Sandywell, 1999). Indeed, distinguished from its pre-modern predecessors, the modern era is characterized by the sense of vision (Jay, 1992). Ever since the nineteenth century, the world has been displayed as an orderly and endless exhibition (Mitchell, 1989). The invention of printing announced the beginning of the tradition that privileges the visual, which has been reinforced by the numerous following technological inventions promoting visual communication, such as cinema, television, and internet. Modernity has been thus considered as resolutely ocularcentric, considering the intricate connection between the visual representation as a mechanism of seeing and order in modern experience (Mitchell, 1989). Throughout the modern period, human beings often find themselves

confronting the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of modern era. In revealing the intricate connections between visuality and Chinese modernity, Chow (1995) argues that the nature of visual images provoke an intriguing and profound sense of self-consciousness out of cultural participants. In other words, this sense of self-consciousness in activities of decoding and interpreting is grouped together with concepts of knowledge and identity under the rubric of the critical condition of modernity (Heywood & Sandywell, 1999). So to speak, the constant and incessant socio-cultural transformations involved in the subject of modernity have created new knowledge, beliefs, and cultural systems, which in turn demand new ways of seeing and visioning with self-reflexivity (Heywood & Sandywell, 1999). Precisely because of this unique identity that visuality occupies in the ongoing history of modernity, the concept of visuality has presented itself as a radical discursive site, thus urging cultural scholars to interpret its figural, rhetorical, and ideological entailments (Jay, 1992) to illuminate forms of social life and changes in human relations.

While specific visual genres of museums and art galleries are still bound to specific locales, film/TV/video have become primary instruments for making the visuality our immediate everyday experience (Chow, 1995). Specifically, composed of moving images, the representational language of film is “a quintessentially phenomenological medium...it has a unique capacity to evoke human experience, what it feels like to actually be-in-the world” (Barbash & Taylor, 1997, p. 74-75). With assistance from direct visual effects, images through the medium of movie, TV, and video intensify the conveyance of emotion, feeling, and knowledge (Pink, 2001). In particular, moving images on the screen constitute pictorial information held together within an encompassing and authoritative voice of the unseen narrator (Jhala, 1993), thus creating the transparent effect of a new medium that seemingly communicates

without mediation (Chow, 1995). Moreover, specific visual medium, such as television or cinema, offer technologically and institutionally discrete forms of cultural framing and expression (Williams, 2003). That is, whereas the appearance of television and film itself must be considered a technologically synthetic response to a system of emergent social, political, and economic factors (Silverstone, 2003), such communicative forms have also partly defined the rhetoric and textualization of visual representations. Thus, to investigate the cultural meanings of visual representations, it is necessary to foreground the representational images into the institutional forms out of which they are produced, and to consider such technological institutional formation as a coherent part of the determining characteristics of visual messages.

While there is no easy and conclusive statement that can be made regarding the distinctiveness and novelty of TV/cinema as social institutions, one defining feature of modern technologized communication lies in its directness and closeness to the ordinariness of everyday life (Williams, 2003). “Moving images on the TV screen or in the cinema operate at the interface between the elite and the popular, the commercial and the public, the state and the citizen” (Silverstone, 2003, p.iv). At the same time, neither TV nor cinema can be reduced to pure technological media forces; they do not emerge from a process of research and development untarnished by social expectations or political and economic interests. As it was aforementioned, movie and television have formed critical ideological spaces in our social life, through the construction of visual representations by which, various strands of socio-cultural powers are affirmed, challenged, or contested. To such an extent, visuality has become “the law of knowledge and the universal form of epistemological coercion in the late modernity” (Chow, 1995, P.10). Visual representations in modern mass-mediated communication are, thus, not a matter of seeing and being seen, for there is no simple way of disentangling the social discourse

from the visual culture (Heywood & Sandywell, 1999). Such philosophy requires an analytic attitude towards visual images as a socio-historical realm of interpretative practices that are grounded in the context of meaningful human actions (Davey, 1999). Moreover, in relation to the encoding-decoding mass-mediated communicative process, visual representations are in the incessant process of circulation and thus, vision is to be owned, used, shared, and disseminated by different social groups and individuals (Chow, 1995). As such, to investigate dialogical achievements involves the fusion of horizons surrounding the visual representation, producer and viewer.

## 2.6 AUDIENCE, MEDIA, AND TRANSNATIONAL VIEWING

As it was previously discussed, Hall's encoding-decoding model departs from the previous literature by actively positioning audiences in the communication dynamics--audiences interpret, negotiate, and reject the media messages that they consume. Instead of being an undifferentiated mass of individuals, media audiences are socially organized individuals in a number of overlapping subgroups and subcultures, each with its own history and cultural traditions (Morley, 1980). Indeed, communication research must at some point engage the audience, for only by understanding how the audience makes sense of media can we grasp the meaning of how a cultural form or text actually functions within the larger culture (Radway, 1986; Gibson, 2000). How we see ourselves and our social relations matters because it enters into and informs our actions and practices.

The concept of audience is not, however, a transparent one. According to the political economy approach proposed by the Frankfurt School, the cultural industry has neatly segmented the audience market, while every cultural product has a specific-targeted crowd. Accordingly, to

address an audience is to create a message that accounts for the character of a specific group of people who are imagined as the receivers. Influenced by this thinking, media cultural studies have been predominantly concentrating on examining the mainstream audience, while the unintended or the not-targeted audience is "...studiously avoided by the driving ideology that feeds the filmic exercise" (Jhala, 1993, p.209). Indeed, the whole audience is rather comprised of hierarchically arranged viewer groups. Consider, for example, in studying the audience for traditional ethnographic films, Jhala (1993) proposes that the audience can range from movie sponsors to anthropological researchers, and college students alike. The above stated groups are primarily targeted audiences, with each approaching ethnographic documentary films from different perspectives--sponsors have an important role in determining the purpose and content of films, especially in terms of what is desired to be viewed and what is not, while researchers and fellow students build further interpretations of films based on their observations. We must remember, however, that those "indigenous" people, who are usually the real protagonists of ethnographic films, are often left out in the discussion of the audience. As the above illustrates, inherently embedded in the hierarchical structure of viewership is the issue of power; in the dynamics of which, the mainstream audience are entitled to speak out their opinions, while the unintended audience are marginalized and silenced. The recognition of the salience of the unintended audience thus becomes urgent, considering what has been historically *unknown*. Despite the fact that the unintended audience may not be lying at the heart of the economic or cultural concern of media product, they nevertheless speak of humanistic concerns associated with their socio-political positioning in interpreting visual media messages, for they are also entitled to know about the world and to partake in its resources (Chow, 1995). Moreover, as a part of the profound impact that modern technology cast on contemporary social life, the reality

of bumping into the unintended message is becoming more and more unavoidable in our everyday life (Taussig, 1993). Indeed, the intended audience is only a fraction of the affected crowd and, thus, cultural messages have more powerful impact despite the lack of intended pursuit (Jhala, 1993).

The importance to study audiences that are not directly addressed by cultural products is evident. As summarized by Jhala (1993), it entails two-folds of critical meanings. Firstly, speaking from the position of audience, the unintended encounter destabilizes an individual's view of the world by initiating inward reassessment and reflection. Secondly, those who are excluded in the construction of media messages provide unique and unanticipated interpretations, thus in turn dismantling the centrality of the original meaning and framing of media. As such, the unintended encounter is rather a vital and mutual destabilization between the relationship of audience and media product--one that poses further questions regarding the socially constructed roles of media production and audience viewership and which, on a further level, illuminate issues of ideology, knowledge construction, power, and individuals as social-cultural beings. As it was introduced in the previous chapter, this dissertation has chosen to focus on Chinese scholars and students in the U.S. as the studied audience for the promotional tourism video. While this choice of audience may seem surprising to some, considering that this tourism promotion is explicitly produced to target Western audiences, the surprise itself indicates how taken-for-granted it is to investigate the dominant mainstream audience in tourism communication. To be sure, considering that tourism promotional materials have often been reduced to commercial messages, audiences who don't carry significant or direct economic benefits are often rendered as irrelevant in tourism studies. Thus, if tourism is truly positioned as a critical social discourse in the overall fabric of social life--one that goes beyond the mere

ramification as an economic component--then there is a need for a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of meanings produced by tourism media products, including interpretations given by the audience excluded from social scenes. Therefore, to delineate the communicative encounter between tourism media and audiences on the margin, the meanings of which have been habitually ignored in tourism media studies, is one important purpose of this study.

Moreover, this choice of audience is not only situated in the conceptual construct of unintended encounter, but also in the theoretical ramification of transnationalism. To be sure, interpretations from the overseas Chinese audience of this video compose a transnational engagement with Chinese tourism cultural discourse. The social force of transnationalism need to be counted as one viewing condition to understand cultural meanings emerged in this communication process. The idea of transnationalism is firstly proposed by Appadurai (1986 & 1990), arguing that as an intimate dimension of globalization, transnationalism creates a deterritorialized cultural landscape that is devoid of rigid national boundaries. This argument is contested by later discussions, which point out that transnational forces in fact create sophisticated and complex mappings, which dissolve national borders in some cases while consolidating in others (Xu, 2007). In the case of China, Yang (2002) notes that Chinese mass media operates to dis-embed social relations out of original local contexts and re-embed them in different contexts across spans of time-space. From this perspective, the video "China, Forever" is a transnational media product--one that displaces original social relations formed between the video and audience with a re-embedding in the overseas circumstance. Transnationalism thus mediates the relationship between the audience of Chinese internationals and the tourism media product, provoking intriguing critical and individualized interpretations. Thus, a nuanced

reflection on self and nation constitutes an important construct in such transnational viewership.

## 2.7 REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA: A HISTORY OF STRUGGLES WITH MODERNITY

The idea that all cultural products are necessarily related to certain historical context and dominant social struggles is one commonly-held view by contemporary cultural scholars. Thus, to enable cultural messages produced by the tourism video “China, Forever” to be understood in an open and comprehensive way, the following discussion delineates a historical and social context of China’s self-representations in its modern history. However, I’ve realized that it is not possible to exhaustively address all important issues regarding determining social forces in China’s modern history within a limited length of discussion. With that in mind, I focus on socio-cultural representations of China emerged in its explorations of modernity, considering that struggles with modernity have been the defining power underpinning China’s construction of self-representations, located at the center in the inquiry of the Chinese self (Duara, 1995). The canon of modernity is, however, of great magnitude and complexity, demanding interpretations to go beyond the view of modernity as a mere consequence of the linear and universal historical progress--a product of Euro-American capitalism (Shih, 2001). In fact, China’s many ways of conceptualizing, imagining, and striving for modernity ever since the mid 1800’s have always been entangled with a network of competing social forces, including capitalism, socialism, colonialism, the nation-state, globalization, and so forth (Dirlik, 2002). Giddens (1990) states that “modernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be overcome” (p.40). Hereby it is not the literal interpretation of mysteriousness in modernity that is called attention to, but rather the implication that modernity is an enduring power which is situated in the fabric of social life. In contemporary China, modernity as both a

social condition and a question for identity has been profoundly translated into everyday cultural production; based on changing structural conditions which are the product of dialectical interactions between complex constituents seeking to define Chinese modern culture (Dirlik, 2002). Thus, to confront the current problem of modernity through a connection to history is meaningful, for the study of the past is to ultimately make a contribution to understanding the struggles of the present. Specifically, it is argued that China's explorative expressions of the modern self have been significantly shaped by the struggle between the enforced Western capitalist modernity and China's search for its own alternative discourse of modernity; it is through interactions with the modern West, and in the imagination and construction of modernity, that China defines and redefines its past, present, and future.

It is widely regarded that China's fiasco in defeating the British troops in the Opium War (1840-1842) marked the beginning of China's modern history (Zhao, 1998). The war signaled China's first confrontation with modernity--a forced encounter as a consequence of colonial conquering, modernity was thus associated with sensations of violence, humiliation, inferiority, and rediscovery in China's collective social memory. Moreover, those powerful modern Western weapons and Galleons have not only led to an era of entirely different characterization of senses, but more importantly, a struggle against the simple deceiving equation of modernity with that of an intrinsically Western quality. Notably, an imposed knowledge construction and circulation, rather than the pure colonial military power, was more penetrating in enforcing the entanglement of modernity and colonialism in China. To a great extent, the reading and self-internalizing of the philosophical foundation of Western colonialism and modernity--the Enlightenment discourse, in particular social Darwinism--has reinforced the Eurocentric interpretation of modernity in China's modern history. In specific, the Enlightenment discourse assumes that history develops

along a linear progress. In Hegel's (1956) words, the Western nations have already acquired a "mature individuality" (p.91), while the rest of the world are either like Africa, which is "innocent land of childhood" (p.140), or like China, which has a "mindless unhistorical history" (p.140). Modernity is therefore inherently Western and explicitly superior to other phases of social development. According to this logic, the coming of the modern era means that China is compelled into history based on its proximity to the ideal of progress informed by the teleology.

Such approach to history and modernity has determined a constant state of drawing comparisons between the Chinese self and the West in the nation's struggles with modernity. Waves and waves of social revolutions, intellectual movements, and cultural debates have taken place around the central notion of modernity; among which, some believed that only by means of radical denouncing of China's tradition and adoption of Western capitalist social models can modernity be eventually achieved in China, while others questioned and critiqued the Eurocentric view of modernity, proposing alternative modes. The May Fourth movement clearly serves as an illustration that the master narrative of modernity and progress has been forcibly written into the representation of Chinese self. Moreover, the Chinese struggles with modernity display more sophisticated features than a consolidation of Eurocentric understandings of modernity. Mao's socialist revolution, for example, formed one of the most debatable and drastic paths attempting to build China's alternative modernity (Dirlik, 1996). To be sure, given that modernity was often deemed as an essential consequence of European capitalist development, modernization has therefore often been simplistically understood as the process of becoming capitalist (Wang & Karl, 1998). Mao's incorporation of Marxism into China's modernity discourse, despite having received overwhelming denunciation in the post-socialist period (1976-now), signified an attempt to break through the imposing hegemonic capitalist modernity

construction. However, Mao's implementation of Marxism was at the same time disastrous. In achieving his ideological envision, Mao on one hand centralized power to establish a modern nation-state system while on the other, he launched the Cultural Revolution to destroy that same system. He employed the nationalization of the economy to subsume society under the state goal of modernization, which deprived individuals of all political and economic autonomy; while he was at the same time horrified by the use of state mechanisms to suppress the autonomy and active agency of the masses (Wang & Karl, 1998). He represented himself as a modern democratic leader for the Chinese people; ironically, he also self-constructed as a living God for people to worship. This argument that Mao's modernity discourse is intrinsically anti-modern is still largely subject to debate, for scholars such as Dirlik contend that the nature of modernity is ambivalent and thus, to evaluate Mao based on Euro-American standards of democracy and social models only reifies Western domination in the notion of modernity. In relation to this discussion, the debate assists us to see the innate complexity of China's struggles with modernity during Mao's period (1954-1976), while China's self-representations were necessarily built upon those historical controversies.

Mao's representations of China were also based on contrastive constructions of China's sublime socialist beliefs and decadent Western capitalist social realities. To Mao, the socialist revolution was a victory announcing all the suffering that China endured in a century's attempts of Western colonialism. In a way, it was a revenge, for socialism was praised as a more advanced form of modernist ideology devoid of social inequalities. Mao's cultural representation of China in relation to the West was hence instilled with a strong sentiment of Chinese heroism and a contempt for the Western capitalist world. At its essence, however, such approach once again drew against the West as the ultimate frame of reference in constructing China's modern self.

While the May Fourth movement openly claimed China's inferiority and called for a Westernized modernist reform, Maoist socialist revolution self-eulogized China's socialist revolution by radically condemning Western modernity--in both ways, the antithetical relationship between China and the West existed at the center of struggles. Thus, ironically and most importantly, Maoist Marxism has never been the salvation for China--to be entirely emancipated from the oppressing memory of being dominated and conquered--instead, it only reified the humiliation and hatred harbored in China's uneasy path to modernity. Indeed, flowing underneath Mao's symbolic and imaginative victory of socialism was an ethos of unresolved self-inferiority and deep-seated eagerness to reinvent history.

The post-socialist period (1976-now) is characterized by Chinese experiences with global capitalism. Market, consumption, and media, all conceived in global and national terms, have announced the triumph of the ideology of consumerism (Dirlik & Zhang, 1997). At least viewed from such a superficial façade, capitalism has proclaimed victory over Mao's socialist revolution and the social realities of contemporary China. The irony is that as it is perceived nowadays, the socialist history, rather than signaling a Chinese modernity, underscores an alienness and remoteness of China from modernity. Despite, Dirlik (1996) argues that the meaning of such victory is not clear in terms of politics and historiography, as he admits that understandings of modernity have been significantly reduced into an essentialized logic of developmentalism in China. Contemporary politics of modernity in China have positioned modernization mainly as a capitalist economic developmental process. If anything, the ideology of developmentalism argues that good future will come if the nation only resigns its fate to the promises of technology and capital (Dirlik, 2002). To be sure, if there is a causal relationship between modernity as a material condition and a certain socio-cultural expression, then a diligent development of a

capitalist free-market economy will enable China to achieve modernity; thus, being finally equal to the Western world. Suddenly, it seems that China's struggle with modernity has only gone back to the original path where modernity was understood as historical progress to Westernization, and Mao's revolutionary pursuit of a socialist departure from a Western capitalist modernity was only an evanescent nightmare in history.

However, to claim that China has gone back to the chaos of early 20<sup>th</sup> century is undermining the complexity of China's experience with global modernity in the post-socialist period. That is, while the reification of Western material modernity as the yardstick for China's own development is admittedly a pervasive ideology, the integration into global capitalism has also registered China's engagements with modernity into increasing changes and fragmentations; calling into question the very possibility of a coherent narrative of modernity and China's past, present, and future. In response, a number of critical cultural scholars, such as Lu (1997) and Dirlik & Zhang (1997), have suggested that China is now in the phase of postmodernity. Importantly, China's postmodern condition is an inherent component of its ongoing modernity discourse. In contemporary China, while modernity remains to be an incomplete project, the society consists of multiple layers of temporalities: the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern coexist in the same time and space, which has made the Chinese situation paradoxically more postmodern (Lu, 1997). Thus, interestingly, Chinese postmodernity is emerging from many seemingly controversial and chaotic social phenomena: the rapid developments of urban construction and social change, the pastiche of foreign and local cultural materials in transnational communication, social incongruities and class inequalities, contingency and indeterminacy of identities, and together with the resurgence of long-denied superstitious practices.

This requires a careful reconsideration of China's reconstruction of self in such social context. While encounters with the West and modernity continue to be powerful social forces in shaping China's self-representations, they have taken on unprecedented multitude and contested paths. To be sure, the penetration of global capitalism in China, along with China's active participation, has enabled the Chinese to encounter a world of difference, unevenness, inequality, and hierarchy, often delineated in terms of nation-state borders (Dirlik & Zhang, 1997). This situation has caused, on one hand, a surging nationalism that can be captured from many social incidents. One most illustrative example is the recent 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, creating and reconfirming the collective ethos that only through demonstrating Chinese economic achievements to the West can China finally redeem its history. On the other hand, precisely because in the third world context the postmodern has never meant a complete ending of the modern, the postmodern is productively linked up with the postcolonial in China (Liao, 1997). Thus, to continue to confront struggles of unequal global power distribution remains significant in China's fashioning of self. How China responds to such post-colonialism in the postmodern condition forms an intriguing lens to examine contemporary Chinese cultural products.

The above discussion of China's explorations of modernity, while conceived in complicated and conflicting ways, provides an intriguing ground to examine China's contemporary cultural representation of history and current engagement with modernity. It is embedded in such socio-cultural circumstance that the tourism video "China, Forever" is produced, circulated, and viewed by Chinese as well as global audiences. In the analysis of "China, Forever", I will further discuss how the interpretation of China's modernity, tradition, and encounter with the West lies at the center of this tourism representation; a piece that both reveals and forms its social positioning in constructing the representational language. Also, this

social context has formed a significant component of the background where individual audiences come into being--their understanding of China, history, modernization, etc. Thus, the analysis of decoded interpretations from overseas Chinese individuals will draw on relations to the Chinese social condition discussed above.

The above has delineated a literature review which is central to this dissertation research. The purpose of bringing the extant literature from a variety of perspectives is to illuminate socio-cultural meanings which emerge from interpreting the encoded and decoded messages of the tourism media product “China, Forever”. The analysis of “China, Forever” will seek to incorporate critical issues discussed in the literature review to promote the understanding of discursive roles played by China's tourism media representation in the global power dynamics, as well as the individual worlds of overseas Chinese participants.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive view of the methodological approach employed by this dissertation research. Considering the novelty of this dissertation project in the field of tourism, where the research agenda is still predominantly characterized by pragmatic principles situated in the post-positivist paradigm (Riley & Love, 2000), this study seeks to adapt methodological frameworks that have been widely and critically used in media and anthropological inquiries to further the understanding of the socio-cultural meanings that emerge from mass mediated tourism communicative practices. In specific, it firstly employs Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the encoded messages in the promotional tourism video “China, Forever”; and secondly, an audience ethnographic approach to interrogate the interviewees’ interpretations of the same video. To do so, this chapter explains the theoretical rationale for choosing the two methodological frameworks. Furthermore, it analyzes the execution of empirical procedures with the two types of analysis by situating them in the particular context of this dissertation research. Thus, by incorporating these two methodological approaches to examine the dynamics of tourism communicative practices, it seeks to enrich the practices of qualitative inquiry in tourism research at both theoretical and empirical levels.

#### **3.2 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE ENCODED MESSAGES**

##### **3.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis: An Overview**

This dissertation research approaches the promotional tourism video “China, Forever” as a discursive media construction, embedded in a network of social relations and cultural practices. Thus, the overall goal in examining the encoded messages in “China, Forever” is to investigate the tourism video as discursive performances within a wider social formation. To do so, this dissertation employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the methodological framework for analysis.

The program of CDA is founded upon the idea that the analysis of discourse opens a window to social problems because social problems are largely constituted in discourse (Parker, 1990). Specifically, social problems are couched in public and private discourses that both shape the definition of these problems, as well as at times inhibit productive social change. CDA, therefore, involves seeking an understanding of the power dynamics embedded in social and cultural practices by identifying the relationship between particular communicative practices and the larger social contexts in which they are produced, circulated, and consumed. As a methodological framework, CDA espouses a constructionist epistemological position, which asserts that knowledge is socially constructed, contextually embedded, and changes over time and space. In specific, CDA is premised upon the proposition that power relations in society are discursive; that discourse constitutes society and culture; that discourse is ideological and historical; that the link between text and society is mediated; that discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; and, finally, that discourse is a form of social action. As such, CDA is characterized by the purpose of de-constructing ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of semiotic data, be they written, spoken or visual (Wodak, 2004). It involves unpacking the content of a specific text in order to understand the way meaning is being constructed (Fairclough, 2003). CDA, however, employs a variety of specific methodological

approaches. Therefore, considering that CDA is not a specific “method” nor does it have a definitive set of procedures (Rose, 2001), any explicit method in discourse studies, humanities and/or social sciences may be used. The method(s) of choice, however, must prove adequate and relevant when it comes to facilitating insights into the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance.

### 3.2.2 Implementation of the Critical Discourse Analysis

To preserve the discursive complexity of “China, Forever”, this dissertation research employs a tripartite method to examine the encoded messages: semiotic, ideological, and contextual. On a semiotic level, the interplays among visual and audio practices are considered. This is done by treating each visual and audio practice in the video as a “totality - marking the patterned relationships in its content, connecting these to [other] parallel and contrasting structures” (Albers & James, 1988, p.147). In specific, particular attention is given to the intertextuality, visual composition, use of color, symbolic resonance, and so forth. While intertextuality can be described as how the video image relates to a particular sound, historical image, cultural reference or contemporary imagination; the visual composition, use of color and symbolic resonance compose the basic structuring elements and their interrelations of the image (Rose, 2001). As such, this first step of analysis allows comprehending the basic iconological perception of the video’s visuality. Moreover, each scene is analyzed and the following questions are asked: What is exactly going on in this scene? Who or what is the subject of the scene? What does the subject look like? What is the subject doing? Next, the underlying structures that link the elements within each individual scene together are considered. This involves considering the underlying structures that link the elements within individual scenes together and then comparing and contrasting the findings looking for recurring patterns that facilitate interpretation of the

underlying meanings. On an ideological level, the analysis considers the conventions and codes that underlie “China, Forever” and give it its fundamental coherence. This is done by asking: How does “China, Forever” argue for particular notions of difference? How does “China, Forever” work to persuade or to produce “effects of truth”? And, how does “China, Forever” claim authority and/or naturalize its constructions? Thirdly, on a contextual level, the surrounding discursive formations that function to situate and lend meaning to the discursive performance of “China, Forever” are considered. In addition, the analysis also involves reading for what is missing in the video. As Rose (2001) reminds us, absences can be as productive as explicit naming, while invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility. As such, the analysis seeks to read with great care for detail and depth, with the assumption that the efficacy of discourse often resides in what is true, natural, self-contradictory, and in what is not shown. Moreover, while these three levels of analysis assist the interpretive effort, each one is not discussed as necessarily distinct but with interconnections. To be sure, “the ideological is made possible by the semiotic, and both are always positioned within the contextual” (Baym, 2000, p. 320). Therefore, through the interconnection of the semiotic, ideological, and contextual, “China, Forever” is available for critical examination.

### 3.2.3 Reading “China, Forever”: Subjectivity and Reflexivity

In addressing the questions for each analytical stage, it must be acknowledged that my own subjectivity is deeply entrenched in the readings of encoded messages in “China, Forever”. To be sure, the project of viewing and interpreting visual imageries is a dynamic process, in which I have developed distinctive and specific relationships with visual representations – “our reading of a visual image, and our feelings about it, are at every moment the result of how we experience the complex fields this orchestration creates, partly dependent upon who we are and

what we bring to the reading” (MacDougall, 1995, p. 223). While Hall’s model focuses on the direct dynamics between the audience and media, the interpretative situation in this dissertation research involves my role as a third party. In other words, in order to analyze messages projected from the media, encoded messages always have to travel through certain communicative passages to be comprehended; the interpretations of encoded messages appear in certain forms of knowledge representation created by the interpreter and therefore inevitably involve the interpreter’s own subjectivity. In response, this dissertation takes the belief that knowledge is not a matter of getting a true or objective picture of reality, but one that requires an open statement and embracing of the subjective self-positions in the construction of the analytical knowledge of the video “China, Forever”. In particular, this epistemological positioning is crucial to tourism studies, for as multiple tourism scholars have spoken elsewhere, “the situated and contextualized researcher is still unusual in tourism research and those studies which incorporate the researcher into the text constitute only a small body of work” (Morgan & Pritchard, 2006, p.35). That is, the post-positivist mode has been privileged as the dominant research paradigm, whereas the notion of subjectivity as an equal and inherent part of the tourism experience and the research process has been insufficiently recognized.

In conducting the critical discourse analysis, I seek to hold onto the self-awareness that my own understanding constitutes a source of knowledge construction, which is practiced within the individual systems of my perspectives on China’s tourism discourse, the socio-cultural context of the video’s appearance, etc. By situating “China, Forever” in the postcolonial global context as well as China’s contemporary social realities, I strive to deconstruct the video’s visual construction through my discursive writings. I believe that a deconstructive approach in the form of critical discourse analysis brings to light of alternative layers of significance by emphasizing

the inconsistencies and unspoken assumptions in the tourism discourse “China, Forever”; therefore, enabling socio-cultural meanings encoded in images of the enclosure and representations of the stable to surface to the discussion.

To further analyze my subjectivity, it is necessary to reflect on my own approaches to “China, Forever”; approaches that have changed over time. My first encounter with the video, as it is later elaborated upon in Chapter 5, was through an introduction facilitated by another Chinese graduate student (May) when I was studying at Purdue University. May played the video for her undergraduate students; the class reaction, however, hardly matched May’s expectation. From May’s frustration with the class reaction, I learned that the video “China, Forever” was indeed circulated under complex gazes from both Western and Chinese audiences - the reading of which therefore must be related to a broader level of power struggles both within tourism and at-large social discourse. As I moved onto my Ph.D studies, my reading of postcolonialism in extant tourism literature inspired me to write an article regarding “China, Forever” and its self-orientalist approach to the nation of China; the article was later published in a major tourism journal. According to my literature review, the understanding of orientalism in the tourism field still largely dwelled on Said’s definition of orientalism as a form of Western (post) colonialist ideology. The purpose of the article was then to use “China, Forever” to illustrate that discursive practices of orientalism were a rather complex phenomenon in tourism – in this case, China voluntarily chose to submit to orientalist stereotypes to, however, seek self-empowerment. Furthermore, after my preliminary exams, I gradually came to the realization that self-orientalism was not the only layer of construction in the video; in fact, the self-orientalist approach was an integrated component in composing the overall nation-state narrative in the tourism video. In particular, my exposure to literature on China’s modern history – the very fact

that China's struggle with the modern occupies a central place in China's modern history – inspired me to examine the video's representation of modernization and tradition as important components in building the overall nation-state narratives.

The above is a brief recount of my subjective approaches to the tourism video at different stages. Undoubtedly, there are limitations with my views; I fully embrace the acknowledgement that I still have tremendous room to grow and develop further thoughts and interpretation regarding the video. As Denzin (1997) states, this modesty has less to do with some sort of false humility than with the basic acknowledgement that every research practice unavoidably takes place in a particular historical and social situation, and is therefore in principle partial in nature.

### 3.3 INTERPRETATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY: FRAMEWORK FOR DECODING MESSAGES

#### 3.3.1 An Ethnography-Oriented Approach

In order to develop a comprehensive and adequate methodological approach and place Hall's encoding-decoding model into practice, interpretative ethnography was employed as an audience centered approach. As Murphy (1999) argues, the adoption of ethnographic techniques is first of all driven by a desire to find alternatives to traditional social science research on media effects (e.g., surveys, experimental research). In response, to capture the multidimensionality and complexity of audience activity the use of qualitative methods – and thus a move towards the ethnographic – is desperately called for (Ang, 1991). The purpose of media ethnography, as stated by Morley (1986) in his book "The Nationwide Audience", is to "differentially read and make sense of messages which have been transmitted, and act on those meanings within the context of the rest of their situation and experience" (p.11).

With this in mind, this dissertation research seeks to employ audience ethnography to examine individual Chinese audiences' interpretations of the promotional tourism video "China, Forever". In doing so, it incorporates underpinning philosophies of ethnographic principles to conduct a tourism discourse investigation. However, due to many practical constraints, the scope of implementation in this dissertation project is smaller than traditional ethnographic inquiry. Thus, the following analysis is situated in the structure of revealing similarities – at the macro level – between the approach employed and traditional ethnographic approach; as well as differences between the two methods, primarily about micro and specific implementations.

Firstly, this study addresses the ethnographic belief that the purpose of research is to provide "a rich descriptive and interpretative account of lives and values of those subjected to the investigation" (Morley & Silverstone, 1991, p.149-150). In doing so, it approaches audiences' interpretations of the tourism video "China, Forever" as particular cultural practices committed by overseas Chinese interviewees. Thus, following the fundamental ethnographic assumption that individual members of a society have the ability to exercise agency and construct their own sense of being-in-the-world, this dissertation research believes that by investigating how Chinese audiences make meaning of the video "China, Forever", a window is opened to understand the socio-cultural world that Chinese interviewees are situated in. As such, it echoes the necessary emphasis in ethnography on tracing particular instances of sense-making in lived experience (Inglis, 1993). Furthermore, by diving into varied individual accounts, this dissertation research attempts to capture the discrepancies, controversies, and pluralities in individuals' descriptions, in order to reveal the social dialogues mediated by the legacies of tourism discourse and most specifically, the tourism promotional video "China, Forever". In doing so, it confirms the idea that ethnography is not only a subject but also an instrument in a continuous process of critical

engagement with our own being-in-the-world, beyond the taking for granted of what already exists (Loon, 2001).

Secondly, this dissertation research shares the ethnographic conception that cultural meanings are always in the process of being constructed and interpreted (Loon, 2001). Instead of assuming that cultural meanings exist in static and essentialist forms, the ethnography focuses on the dynamics of life events. As such, a clear and elaborated account of the social context becomes particularly important to grasp meanings from emerging life stories. In the process of conducting personal interviews for this dissertation research, a series of unexpected political incidents took place, which created an immediate impact on global Chinese communities (a detailed account of this event is provided later on in Chapter 5). It was clear that this emergent political drop formed a particular and intensive social context for individual Chinese audiences to ponder, negotiate and provide interpretations of the tourism video “China, Forever”; attaching an emergent exterior socio-political struggle to individuals’ decoding of tourism discourse. As such, this dissertation research seeks to capture the emergent inter-relationships between the individual interviewees, the political incidents, and the nation-state narratives in tourism video “China, Forever”. Moreover, by investigating how interpreting and negotiating tourism discourse allows individuals to negotiate socio-political realities, this study contributes to understanding tourism media, such as the promotional video “China, Forever”, as cultural form and its close relationship to everyday social and cultural life.

Thirdly, despite that ethnography inquiry does generally privilege the sense of experience and factuality, it also acknowledges forces from abstraction, theory, and structure. To be sure, ethnography is not just composed of amassed details, “an ensemble of stories” (Inglis, 1993, p.xi). Instead, as Loon (2001) suggests, ethnography approaches the structures of domination

with a more historically embedded logic of life experiences, thus enabling the researchers to take into account the situatedness of subjectivity, the moments of active agency, as well as the social structure. In this dissertation research, it seeks to illuminate individual interviewees' narratives by relating the descriptive examples to structural forces. In doing so, the analysis attempts to identify underpinning cultural themes of interview narratives, by navigating narratives from a multiplicity of experiences, simultaneous events, sensations, defenses, refutations, and emotions. Specifically, structural factors such as race and class, as well as various social struggles caused by unequal economic developments are highlighted in the analysis. As such, the dissertation analysis aims to constitute a sphere in which social theories and tourism discourse are properly placed in relation to dynamic life experiences.

Fourthly, this dissertation research concurs with the ethnographic approach to the epistemological stance of subjectivity. In ethnography, the notion of subjectivity refers to the putative agent who is held practically and morally responsible for the words and actions from the participants/investigators (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). As Foucault (1975) articulates, subjectivity is not only the agent of the individualized self, but it is also mediated by a variety of other social structures and cultural contexts. As a result, subjectivity enables each one to acceptably reflect on his or her individual experience, personally describe it, and communicate opinions about it. Ethnography requires researchers to be sensitive to the subjectivities lurking behind the interview participants, for they transform the individuals from either a repository of information and opinions, or wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge. It is, therefore, a false conception to assume that interviewees' utterances provide transparent and immediate passageways into their experiences and selves, for interviews do not have the capability to capture all *the* respondents' voices, tell all *their* stories and produce accurate

accounts of *their* lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003); an interview account is just one story among an infinite number of possible stories (Denzin, 1997). And this “one story” resides in “a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p.3). Therefore, this dissertation research approaches the individual interview as a circumstance, within which the interviewees' subjectivities are fleshed out, rationally and emotionally, in correspondence to the give-and-take of the interview process, the interview's research purpose, and the surrounding social contexts. Furthermore, the analysis of interviewees' interpretations in Chapter 5 is drawn in particular relation to each individual interviewee's life experiences, as well as other socio-cultural factors delineated or implied within the interview narratives.

On the other hand, the ethnographer's subjectivity plays an equally important role, for each interview is a concerted effort; a dynamic relationship between the investigator and the interviewee. Ultimately, ethnography is about transformation - ethnography researchers have the final, if unfair, decision to package, select, and transform the collected knowledge into meaningful patterns for readers. The subjectivity and positionality of the investigator is thus powerful, as Clifford (1983) puts it, “the ethnographer ultimately departs, taking away texts for later interpretation. Ethnographer's experiences become narratives, meaningful occurrences, or examples” (p. 131).

Thus, this dissertation research seeks to trace every step of interviews thoroughly and minutely, with critical reflection on each choice and decision that is made, so that readers are able to see what is lost and correspondingly what is gained. Nevertheless, I am fully aware of the politics of representation in producing textual analysis, as well as inevitable limitations that an open acknowledgment of subjectivity cannot entirely eradicate. To be sure, the concept of

representation refers to the relationship between signs and referents, as signs stand in for referents in symbolic practices. Considering that ethnographic writing is itself an inter-subjective, spatially, and temporally contingent enterprise (Quinn, 2005), crucial to the notion of representation in ethnographic writing is that of presence (Loon, 2001). Indeed, the essence of representation is the process of returning to presence. Ironically and unfortunately, while every writing engenders a trace, it can never bring itself to full presence (Derrida, 1978). In ethnography, the event is always doubled – its taking place as unfolding is re-enacted in the taking place as inscription. Therefore, the writing of ethnographic analysis is referred to the practice of inscription.

However, since all knowledge has to be finally represented and constructed by its finder to reach the readers, the inherent problem with representation does not just belong to ethnography and cannot be totally solved by it. For ethnographers, what can be done is, however, to reduce the discrepancy between the represented and representation. In doing so, this dissertation research concurs with the belief that the affirmation of reflexivity is a constructive and creative turning; the analytical writing of interviews is performed with my critical self-reflections. In specific, the analysis in Chapter 5 seeks to highlight questions of how ethnographic texts are fashioned, constructed and projected, what rhetorical strategies are used to appear persuasive, and how their authority is authenticated drawing onto the recognition of my subjectivity. Furthermore, my identity as an inside member of the studied community and its influence on my subjective approach to the interviewees is disclosed and analyzed.

### 3.3.2 Implementation of the Interviews

The above has delineated a few major similar philosophical principles that this dissertation's investigation of the audiences' interpretations of the promotional tourism video

“China, Forever” has adopted from ethnography inquiry. In doing so, it reveals that an ethnographic approach provides a logical and meaningful way for this dissertation to examine the proposed research questions. Meanwhile, this dissertation’s approach also differs from traditional audience ethnography, primarily from the scope of implementation and more importantly, the investigator’s insider identity in relation to the group studied.

### 3.3.2.1 Recruiting and prior-interview communication

While the term ethnography is reserved for a holistic and long-term participant observation based on deep immersion in the study participants' concrete and on-going lives, this study is of a smaller scale due to practical constraints. In specific, I interviewed 20 Chinese study participants in total for this dissertation project. I met five of the interviewees (Jing, Feng, Nali, Jie, and Ting) in a variety of classes that I was taking during the spring and fall semesters of 2008. Among them, Nali and Jie showed strong interest after I presented this research proposal in class and volunteered to participate in the interview. With the remaining three interviewees, I invited them to participate after meeting them in class; all of them immediately kindly agreed. Before the interview, I sent out emails to the interviewees, which included a brief description of the research project with interview guidelines. In those emails, I emphasized that my purpose was not to look for a “right-or-wrong” answer but rather that all possible responses were encouraged and appreciated.

Another important place for me to meet and recruit Chinese students was Giuliani’s coffee shop on the Green Street. Before the business was permanently closed in January 2009, I studied there regularly. During that time, I noticed that there were also other Chinese students who frequently visited the coffee shop; in a way, we were all members of this virtual community formed within the coffee shop (a further contextualized description is provided in Chapter 5).

Because of such convenience, I met four interviewees in the coffee shop (Yu, Lian, Ge, and Bai). Before I took the initiative to talk to them, we were familiar strangers to each other – being aware of each other’s existence without having any actual interactions. I approached them with a brief introduction of myself and the research proposal. All of them showed interest and two interviews were conducted immediately upon the first meeting.

In a third approach, I printed out advertising posters calling for interview participation. The posters contained a brief introduction of the research, the location, as well as my contact information, in both English and Chinese. Later, I posted them on the bulletin board at the Grainger’s engineering library and Espresso Royale coffee shop located in the Krannert Art Museum. Through this route, I met three more interviewees (Ying, Cui, and Jian).

A fourth approach to recruit Chinese interviewees was attributed to the help of my friends Pei and Guang. Both Pei and Guang once studied at the University of Illinois and then left for other academic institutions. After I talked to them, they agreed to send group emails to their Chinese friends at the University of Illinois to announce the study and request participation. I wrote an email draft including a brief introduction of the research, specific guidelines of the interview, as well as my email contact; later, they forwarded this email to their connections. Initially, I didn’t have high expectations for a good response rate; simply because graduate students were usually engaged in busy schedules and the fact that the people Pei and Guang contacted did not know me. Surprisingly, I received emails from four Chinese students (Tian, Jia, Kai, and Fang) who agreed to be interviewed. Before the official interviews started, I asked this group of interviewees about their incentives for participation. Interestingly enough, all of them stated that the operation of the interview – watching a Chinese tourism video and discussing its visual representation of China – appeared interesting.

Finally, the remaining four interviewees were recommended by other interviewees who had already participated in the study. Many times after the interviews, the interviewee asked me if I needed more people to participate in this study. At first, I took their suggestion as granted; I thought their offer to help was an impulsive act which illustrated the natural bondage formed between me and them after a long and engaged talk. After a while, I started to realize that there were multiple reasons in some cases. For example, when Yu recommended Wen to me, he stressed Wen's academic background – a master's degree in sociology as well as currently enrolled in law school (further analysis is provided later in Chapter 5). Yu then explained that Wen's understanding of society would add some profound narratives to the interview. I realized that "being profound" was exactly what Yu sought to be in the interview; his recommendation of Wen in fact reflected his own approach to the interview. Moreover, Hui's recommendation of Mo, was largely premised on Hui's desire to prove that there were others who reacted to the nationalistic language in the tourism video "China, Forever" the same way as he did. Thus, reasons for interviewees to recommend other possible interview candidates varied in each case; nevertheless, I considered their recommendation as a general sign that the interview had left them with a positive impression. In total, twelve interviewees recommended fourteen candidates; I contacted all of them and acquired five interviewees (Hui, Mo, Zhen, Wen, Liang).

### 3.3.2.2 The interviewees: A cohort of diasporic Chinese individuals

The majority of the interviewees (17 of them) were graduate students from a variety of majors at the University of Illinois; in addition, two interviewees were MBA students, while one was studying in the Law School. Meanwhile, considering the large population of engineering students at the University of Illinois, many of the students interviewed came from engineering and natural sciences. Eleven of them were males, while the other nine interviewees were

females. All of them were within the age span between the 20's to early 30's. Furthermore, all interviewees have been living in the U.S for at least three years, with one interviewee having been studying at the University of Illinois for ten years. In addition, all interviewees were ethnically Han. Geographically, they came from a range of different places in China: Zhejiang (4), Guangdong (3), Jiangsu (3), Anhui (2), Tianjin (2), Fujian (2), Beijing (2), Shanghai (1), and Yunnan (1). A brief review of China's socio-demographics reveals that most of their hometowns are located in relatively more populated and developed regions along China's east coast. One possible reason for this is that China's socio-economic developments between the east coast and other regions are quite uneven; people from more developed places may have better and more opportunities to go abroad and to enroll in higher education. This, however, doesn't suggest that the interviewees' opinions and memories of China are largely homogeneous. In fact, as the analysis illustrates in Chapter 5, varied background forces composed of class differences, the divide between urban and country, and various other social hierarchies are deeply engrained in their interpretations of the video "China, Forever".

In analyzing the social context of decoding the tourism video "China, Forever" by overseas Chinese audiences, I am confronted with the question of how, on the one hand, to engage critically with theorizations of mobility, exile, identity and how, on the other hand, to make such theorization useful in explaining the politics of tourism media communication. My first struggle comes from giving an accurate name to this group of Chinese individuals who have been interviewed for this study. Increasing tension has arisen in the academic examination of the Chinese diaspora, with most of the debate concentrating on whether the global Chinese diaspora is a coherent part of the Chinese identity. Tu Weiming, as a Chinese scholar living in the U.S, proposes the "cultural China" model--a symbolic universe "that both encompasses and

transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries” to challenge the claims of political leadership (in Beijing, Taipei, Hong Kong, or Singapore) in their ultimate authority to define Chinese identity (Tu, 1994). The narratives of cultural China, however, reveal an ongoing preoccupation with the framework of center-periphery, implying the projection of a new, alternative center, a de-centered center (Ang, 1998). As a Chinese descendant born in Indonesia, Ang (2001) argues that there are many different kinds of Chinese identities formed by mainland and diasporic Chinese communities at various levels. For Rey Chow (1998), a Chinese female who grew up in the British colony of Hong Kong, the problem of Chinese identity can not be simply resolved by ways of pluralizing and hence, the question is to productively place Chineseness under erasure. There is no consensus about being Chinese; and, in Rey Chow’s words, the very project of studying Chinese identity can’t escape the tendency of essentialism because being Chinese involves many different socio-cultural conditions when global diasporic Chinese communities are incorporated in the discussion.

With this in mind, I hesitate to use the term “overseas Chinese” to represent the interviewed participants for this project, as those Chinese individuals are only a small fraction under the encompassing concept of “overseas Chinese”. While it is true that “overseas Chinese in the U.S” enables one to reduce the geographical scope, the term also invokes multiple flowing images: the Chinese laborers from south China who came to this country between late 1800’s and early 1900’s, building railways, laundry shops, restaurants, and Chinatowns all over the country; people like my own relatives who left the mainland to Taiwan in 1940’s and then went from Taiwan to the U.S. in 1970’s, as well as the young Chinese restaurant waiter whom I recently met and who was smuggled into the U.S. in the hope of a better life and as a lot of young people did in his hometown village after high school. Sun (2001) states that narratives of

social changes in contemporary China are inevitably linked to motifs of departure, arrival, and return; in fact, such motifs have always been situated in the shaping and reconfiguring of global Chinese communities, both as history and current social reality. The community of overseas Chinese in the U.S. therefore consists of many imbricated historical layers, with substantial differences in terms of socio-cultural background, class, age, education, and political-ideological positioning between the Chinese individuals that were interviewed in this study and other Chinese groups under the overarching concept of “overseas Chinese in the U.S”.

On the other hand, however, to study these new-coming Chinese individuals who arrived in the U.S. mainly for the purpose of high education does carry significant meanings to understand the ongoing process of Chinese diaspora. The fact is, ever since the 1980’s, going to the West for further education has been a notable social event in China, especially among intellectuals and middle-class families. Not incidentally, “the West” in the Chinese imagination is often synonymous with the United States. The trend has continued unabated; the Chinese individuals interviewed for this dissertation research are certainly embedded in this larger crowd. According to the statistics provided by the Chinese government in the year of 2000, currently more than 30% of engineers in the U.S. come from China (Chen, 2004), while about 20 to 30% of the faculty members at top-ranking American academic institutions are of Chinese origins (Zhuang, 2000). These numbers indicate that the Chinese community in the U.S. has undergone a dramatic profile change at multiple levels. While the financial means have been shifted from traditional labor-intensive jobs sheltered by Chinatowns to middle-class professions, the origins of the population have also changed from those mostly from Canton and Fujian to places all over China (Ong et al., 1994). Thus, the Chinese community in the U.S. has significantly expanded and been renewed by new members; in many ways, to study this group of Chinese scholars and

intellectuals lies at the center of identifying socio-political meanings in the new dynamics of Chinese diaspora.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I started to approach Chinese graduate students and scholars at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It's interesting to note that out of so many possibilities somehow we all have ended up in this particular university to pursue a further academic career. Every year I see many new Chinese students flocking into the UIUC campus; they pour into the restaurants and coffee shops on Green Street, into the libraries, and into the labs at engineering and science buildings. I see them greeting each other excitedly in Mandarin, and I feel their curiosity as well as nervousness in this new and different environment. Meanwhile, many Chinese students leave the campus to continue chasing their American dream, becoming software engineers in California or faculty members in other academic institutions. Arriving and leaving--mobility is the perennial theme of Chinese diaspora. In this process, this university has become a temporary cohort--a community--that bonds these individuals from all over China together. For a long time, studies on communities, especially those from an ethnographic approach, have been the most prominent way to understand social realities (Brunt, 2001). It is assumed that communities are microcosms of human culture and thus, to study parts will lead to amounting to a series of monographs. Following this conception, the university forms a site to reveal a slice of the cultural life of Chinese individuals, so that comprehending the socio-cultural realities of contemporary Chinese diaspora on a larger scope can become possible. To clarify, it's not my intention to claim that the Chinese population at the University of Illinois is any more representative than other places in the United States. Justifying the representativeness of sample is a central concern of the quantitative mode of research; to the qualitative approach, however, every single participant carries specific and unique meaning.

While those Chinese students and scholars at the University of Illinois may only be a small part of the overall diasporic Chinese in the U.S., they actively engage in creating on-going socio-political dynamics, therefore contributing to the understanding of the systematic evidence. The above states my thoughts, concerns, and theoretical justifications for choosing and naming the Chinese interviewees for this dissertation project through a connection to the literature review. Based on this, the interviewee group will be referred to as “overseas Chinese students and scholars”, for they are encompassed under this general social category; more specifically, considering the socio-geographical context, they are Chinese students and scholars at the University of Illinois.

Hall (1990) argues that when both people and images are mobile and displaced, there is a profound discontinuity--of language, culture, social beliefs, and so on--shared by all diasporas. More precisely, I believe that the discontinuity exists together with the continuity in the cultural experience of being away from the motherland. It is a process of being disembedded and then reembedded in a different socio-cultural context, meaning that negotiations of “here and there” and “now and then” have become a life-long project for the diasporic individuals. This dilemma is illustrated by Pan’s (1990) riveting reflection from the behalf of the overseas Chinese in the U.K in her book “Sons of Yellow Emperor”:

...each time they visit it, they ask themselves, 'Why are we here? Why do we keep going back?' Why must they return to this cruel, tormented, corrupt, hopeless place as though they still needed it? Could they never achieve immunity? And yet had China meant nothing to them, any other place thereafter would have meant less, and they would carry no pole within themselves, and they would not even guess what they had missed. (p.285)

Pan's writing is a somewhat dismal account; it however signifies an enduring sense of struggle that lies at the heart of such negotiation. Structuring one's self-positioning in relation to the past and present is not an easy or absolute project, as no conventional form of culture can easily interpolate individual subjectivities. Indeed, far from being eternally fixed in past events, overseas individuals are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Just as a lot of diasporic literature suggests, such narratives are often characterized by emotional sentiments of nostalgia, loneliness, and alienation.

"It is always a question of how social position plus particular discourse position produce specific readings", stated Morley (1991, p.134). Following this conception, the overseas cultural condition as an overall social context must be considered in analyzing the interviewees' interpretations of the tourism media "China, Forever". As Gibson (2000) argues, to account for the interview context is to consider "how the wider structures of economic, political, and cultural power are configured and organized at a particular historical moment" (p.258), as well as to understand how the wide social structure "...is reproduced within, and perhaps even transformed by, the practices of everyday life" (p.258). To clarify, however, while this general social context of being abroad is conducive to the cultural orientation of the interviewed individuals, their lived realities should not be understood in a totalistic and over-determined manner. Every individual necessarily faces different questions, problems, struggles--and that's the beauty of ethnographic approach, as it allows us to view society from an individual lens. In particular, owing to modern communication technology and global developments of capitalism where transnational communication is becoming increasingly convenient that both images and people are constantly mobile, the idea of "living abroad" no longer means an odyssey for many Chinese. Thus, the condition of diaspora is becoming more sophisticated, meaning that leaving is not necessarily the

antithesis of staying, and that the motherland and the new world are no longer separated; requiring us to consider this layer of socio-cultural reality into the analysis.

Life experiences for my generation of Chinese have been largely situated in China's modernization project in the post-socialism period. Ever since we were young, we were told to embrace China's modernization as a progressive means for developing the society, culture, and nation. We grew up with lots of numbers – China's annual GDP growth, China's annual growth of export products, numbers of newly built highways each year, numbers of gold medals China achieved in every Olympic Games, as well as numbers of “hope primary schools” donated to poor and remote villages, and so forth. Lots of the numbers are material symbols of economic growth - numbers that never fail to indicate the rapidness of China's improvement of material life. On one hand, we have been witnessing the unprecedented rise of China's national power in creating the new global structure. On the other hand, the Chinese people have also been enduring drastic and frantic socio-cultural changes, unequal re-distribution of material wealth and social status among different classes, along with many other ambivalent consequences of China's modernization. We have doubts, frustrations, disagreements, as well as hopes for the Chinese nation and people.

During the years of Mao's ruling, China's self-isolation was associated with a rather mysterious and generalized perception of the Western world – the Western advanced capitalist development, material wealth, democracy, together with its decadent social corruption, largely informed China's imagination of the West. Thus, when the post-Mao China first enacted the “open-door” policy in the early 1980's, going overseas for higher education seemed a luring choice for many. However, as China becomes deeply entrenched and participates in global capitalism, going to the Western world no longer contains a strong heroic tone as it used to be.

While it was of a much smaller scale when the trend firstly started, it is now significantly more prevalent. Still, many reasons have contributed to the perception that studying in premier Western academic institutions is a privileged option for a small proportion of the Chinese population. One either has to excel in the fierce competition in China's elitist educational system; or, have sufficient financial support from one's family. Issues of knowledge capitals and class lines have been written into individuals' endeavors. Moreover, unresolved dilemmas in China's modernization –entangled questions resulting from the homogenizing force of a developing capitalist economy, struggles with the Western power in China's modern history, and issues of who the Chinese are and who they want to be – continue to play a significant role in the life experience of Chinese students. In fact, under the personal choice of going abroad, the assumption lingers that the Western world offers a more advantageous space for the individual's development. Thus, we are often caught in self-debates and negotiations between the nation and the individual. On one hand, it is inevitable that one will take pleasure in China's gaining of international recognition and power, especially when the Western conservative political power still generates tremendous ideological animosity against China. Deep inside, however, we wonder if the rising nationalism caused by China's modernization developments only contributes to totalitarian and arbitrary purposes, and if catching up with the West in terms of numeric index of material growth is all this modernization about.

### 3.3.2.3 Interviews: A general view and procedures of implementation

I received IRB approval for this dissertation research on February 17<sup>th</sup> in 2008. The first interview for this study took place on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2008; the remaining 14 interviews occurred between March and June 2008. The interviews came to a temporary stop, as I had to focus on preparing for my preliminary exam in the summer. During the oral defense for my preliminary

exam, the consensus of reaching a total number of twenty interviewees was made; also, the possibility of doing follow-up interviews with previous interviewees was discussed. Thus, after my preliminary exam, I conducted five more interviews with five more interviewees. Moreover, I also sent out follow-up interview invitations to all interviewees involved in the project, which resulted in twelve follow-up interviews. Three interviewees did not reply to the follow-up interview invitation; two interviewees were in China at the time when I sent out the invitation, while the other three had graduated and left the University of Illinois. In brief, a total of 32 personal interviews were conducted with 20 interviewees within the time period of February to December in 2008. For the first-time interviews, the time length usually lasted for one and a half hours to two and half hours long. In addition, for follow-up interviews, the general time length was shorter, ranging from forty-five minutes to one hour in length.

The interview context posed another critical component. According to Briggs (1986), context can refer to many aspects of epistemologies of the situation in which an interview is conducted, from the physical setting, to the larger social-cultural milieu, to the ages, genders, etc. While the socio-demographic background of the interviewees was introduced previously (please see above), further explanation of other components of the interview context – the choice of language, the design of interview question, and many others – is contained in the following analysis. In terms of the physical setting, all interviews took place in the former Giuliani's coffee shop on Green Street. It used to be a popular place on campus where students and faculties engaged in multiple social activities – studying, reading, chatting, hanging out, playing board games, etc. I chose the coffee shop as the interview location because of a two-fold reason. Firstly, its central location on campus provided convenient ways for access and trafficking. Secondly, its friendly environment created a casual and easy ambience for the interview. On the

macro level context, a series of socio-political incidents happened both inside of and outside of China from March to April 2008, which have bestowed an external facet of contextual circumstances. The specific analysis of this layer of context is given in Chapter 5.

All interviews were carried out in Mandarin Chinese. After the interview, the collected narratives/dialogue were firstly transcribed in Chinese and then translated into English. When preparing for the first interview, I listed a number of possible aspects to direct the interview questions. All the thoughts were framed in English, for it was the most convenient language. However, as the interview proceeded, the interviewee soon dropped English, asking: “How about we speak Chinese instead? Speaking English makes me feel like I am talking in the classroom.” From this comment, I realized that the interviewee already had a preconception for the verbal style of the interview - more casual and informal than academic conversations in class. Moreover, I also agreed that speaking our native tongue in the interview appeared as a sign of intimacy that naturally bonded our common past life experiences, drawing a closer relationship between the interviewees and I. As such, it changed my original positioning of the interview, which was stricken by a more rigid academic tone, to one that involved more flexible and personal space. Moreover, I don’t consider the adjustment of language as a compromise of academic goal. Instead, I believe that creating a more culturally comfortable environment for interviewees has lead to positive consequences for the interview, which encourages the interviewees to discuss the encoded messages in the video from a more personal and introverted perspective.

Meanwhile, along with the adjustment of the choice of language, the other important factor that experienced changes throughout the process was the style and content of the interview question list. I was faced with two sets of choices before interviews - the open-ended interview

format, or the structured format with a list of interview questions. My biggest concern for open-ended interview format was related to the nature of the tourism video. To be sure, the video was composed of plentiful sensational visual images and hence can create a wide variety of random topics that interviewees would touch on; one could easily dwell on a certain image for the entire time being, or the desire to travel to that destination. Thus, considering the time limitation for each interview, I was afraid that an open-ended format would not allow me to achieve comparable outcomes with thematic patterns across different interviews. Meanwhile, I wanted to assert some form of control but not follow a fully structured flow, in order to balance my influence and the interviewees' freedom and creativity in interpreting the tourism video. I was fully aware that the purpose of interviewing was to "open seams" rather than "suturing"; a more flexible format would encourage the participants to speak freely of their opinions, allowing me to comprehend complex situations involving human thoughts (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Based on this principle, I tried to direct the interview revolve around the following general aspects: the structure of representation in the tourism video, the style of representation, the projected images of China's tradition and modernity, as well as the displaced context of viewing. There were no fixed word-by-word questions. Meanwhile, I arranged variances in determining the sequence, style, and wording of interview questions for each interviewee, in the hope to capture and address the particularities and complexities of each interview account.

Each interview started with self-introductions on both sides. The process also involved some small chatting about each other's life experiences – how many years that the investigator/interviewee had been living in the U.S, which university the investigator/interviewee graduated from, etc. After watching the tourism video, the interviewee was asked a general question: "do you like the video", "is there anything particular that catches your eyes", and

“what is your general impression of this tourism video”. Interestingly enough, answers to these general questions were often an important indicator for interviewees’ overall attitude and self-positioning towards the video. These general questions enabled me to identify a focus and customize the subsequent questions by attending to each interviewee’s unique characteristics. Moreover, it also helped me to transit naturally to the next part of the interviews. For instance, if the interviewee has indicated their fondness in their previous comment, I would make the remark “you surely like this video”. Hearing that, the interviewee would often give further elaborations on the reasons that he or she enjoyed and connected with the tourism video.

The formulation of all interview questions was implicated with my subjectivity. I have to agree that at some points in almost every protracted interview, the interviewer is tempted to take the role of educator or propagandist rather than that of sympathetic listener and thus, interview questions are sometimes imposed with the interviewer’s frame of reference. A typical example during the interview was with Wen (analysis in Chapter 5). She made a remark: “I don’t care if China’s tradition all dies. That doesn’t have anything to do with me. At least it’s still on TV! Hahaha...” I was astonished by the ignorance in her comment; something within me felt quite offended. I struggled to not immediately give a speech about the relationship between modernity and tradition and the need for a more sophisticated way/approach. Nevertheless, when I reviewed the entire interview, I realized I was quite bothered by this comment in the later part of the interview, and couldn’t stop coming back to the same topic to challenge her previous comment. In hindsight, I came to the understanding that this incident posed a challenge - to not turn the interview into an educational event with my own arguments and viewpoints.

Moreover, during the interviews, sometimes both the interviewee and I would go on a somewhat distracted track to discuss things that were not exactly related to the interview

question or topic. However, I believed that those conversations formed an important source to identify related contexts to understand the interviewee's subjectivity; the exhaustiveness of inquiry should not be sacrificed for the freeness of form. For instance, when I was interviewing Jie (detailed analysis in Chapter 5), she mentioned that she grew up in Shanghai as a child of the "sent-down youth". We then chatted a little bit about the hardship with that experience – moving between the city and the countryside in China, while often having to negotiate with rejections from both sides. I was very sympathetic to her childhood story and the feeling of identity marginalization, for I had lots of childhood friends who were also "sent-down youth". As I later reflected on this conversation, I realized that this information was very helpful in understanding her comment for the representation of China's modernization in the tourism video "China, Forever". More related examples are located in the analysis in Chapter 5.

All interviews were tape recorded to help me transcribe the interviews afterwards. In the process of transcribing, I kept reminding myself to stick to the principle of maximizing the details in interviews, attending to the aspects of whom, what, how, and when of the interviews. I believed that obtaining thorough details in the transcription would contribute to better understanding of the overall context, the flow of logic, and the underlying interpretations. This stage of listening to the reordered tapes was indeed interesting and illuminating. While listening to the interviews, I would often come to realizations, such as, "had I addressed the question in this way, the interviewee would probably have better understanding of the question better", or "I should have stayed longer on this question to get more information", and so on. Based on that, I made corrections while incorporating my reflections into the following interviews.

Moreover, compared to the first-time interviews, the follow-up interviews were relatively shorter. Before each follow-up interview, I carefully read through the previous transcript to

identify main themes, with particular attention paid to places that revealed interviewee's self-contradictions and inconsistencies; for I believe that contradictions often poke at valuable cultural phenomenon and psychological dynamics that are too implicit to be consciously captured. I took notes and highlighted the comments that I found needed to be further discussed. In the follow-up interview, I primarily sought to confirm with the interviewee the comments that they made based on my reading of the interview transcript; meanwhile, to further explain and add evidences to their previous remarks was another main task that was aimed at in the follow-up interview.

#### 3.3.2.4 Advantages and disadvantages of the insider membership

The biggest difference between this dissertation research and traditional ethnographic inquiry is located in the positioning of the investigator in relation to the studied group. In ethnography, studies are usually situated in a context that the researcher enters the studied community as an outsider, who then tries to make sense of a culture that is distinctively different than and sometimes even threatening to the mainstream, middle-class, and normative society. As such, writing of otherness has always been evident in the anthropological ethnography, with otherness as a point of difference from which researchers and readers may begin to understand the fundamental unity of human being. Certainly, recent movements of post-structuralist ethnography (Murphy, 1999) suggests ethnographers replace the traditional preoccupation with cultural differences with a de-centered mode of observing and narrating lived cultural activities. Compared to traditional ethnographic approaches, this current study does not involve a salient outsider-insider relationship between the studied community and my role as the investigator. My own identity as a Chinese overseas student at the University of Illinois has automatically assigned me a membership pass to the studied community, even though the interviewee and I

may not belong to each other's immediate world. Phaedra Pezzullo (2000) notes that any ethnographical work is simultaneously an auto-ethnography because the researcher exists in the scene that he/she investigates. Similar to her, I take a journey together with my interviewees as we share analogous life experiences; questions that concern them as well as interfere with my life. My positionality as an inside member of the studied group has afforded me critical insights as well disadvantages of the research event.

To begin with, it endowed me with a relatively full grip of “communicative competence” (Briggs, 1986) in the interview. Accordingly, interviews are complicated speech events, which rely on a certain capacity of communicative competence in between the interviewer and interviewees; the referential power underlying the use of language often plays deciding roles of meanings. However, for researchers who usually come from a different social-linguistic environment with a communicative system where words and expressions are often associated with different cultural implications, failure to comprehend this communicative competence becomes communicative blunders (Briggs,1986). Fortunately, in this dissertation research, there is no need for me to go through the painstaking process of acquiring interviewees’ speaking style to obtain communicative competence. Thus, the narrative discourse collected from the interview contained many shared understandings of cultural references, insights, anticipations, and communicative norms.

Certainly, whereas this indicates that less divergence and dissonance emerged in the process of representing and understanding meanings with less necessity to onerously unpack each cultural reference, it is not to say that possible communicative blunders do not exist at all. Varied linguistic styles associated with different genders, academic majors, family background, length of time being overseas, and so forth, have all played into the interviews. For example,

when I first started the interview with interviewees that I met in class, who were mostly majoring in social science and humanity related disciplines, a simple question could often result in a long response with rich narratives and examples. I felt that my role was more one that served to quickly navigate through the answers to capture new interesting questions, and to lead the interview to directions that included a variety of questions. It was relatively smooth and effortless. With students from a natural science and engineering background, however, I had the impression that their linguistic style tended to be significantly more concise, specific, and conclusive. With that perception, I tried to readapt the way in which interview questions were formulated and presented; from a more specific and practical perspective. At first, I felt the conclusiveness in their answers was a headache. For example, a number of the interviewees provided a numeric score based on a quantitative scale to respond the first question of “what’s your general impression of the video”. After a while, I realized that numbers were a natural part of their communicative language; maybe what I could have done was to ask them to describe the criteria of the scale to elicit more thoughts.

Apart from the use of language, my role as an insider member of the investigated Chinese community has partly contributed to the inward nature of the interview. To be sure, the discussion in the interview has alluded to introverted and covert characteristics in between two members of the same community. One prominent example was the “us-them” rhetoric that penetrated the interviews. In some specific contexts, especially issues regarding the relationship between China and the West, the interviewees often used the word “us” to refer to China and the Chinese, while the word “them” was used to denote the Western world. A distinction between China and the West was indeed premised upon. Since I was presumed to be a legitimate member of the Chinese community, I was then taken-for-granted by the interviewees as a joint member to

co-construct of this “us-them” rhetoric. As such, lots of feelings and thoughts the interviewees revealed to me may not be able to be conveyed or expressed in another interview context composed of a different interviewer-interviewee relationship. In this sense, being an insider member afforded me an advantage point, allowing me to get access to one sphere of the research event that was less likely to be revealed and examined.

On the other hand, my insider role inevitably entailed drawbacks. Now as I am reflecting on this with hindsight, I become acutely aware that my identification with this group of individuals may have led me to particular ways of asking, seeing and hearing during this interview process. Prior to the interview, I may have already developed certain preconceptions of individual interviewees – their social positionings, cultural backgrounds, certain patterns of approach that they would take in addressing particular questions. Moreover, there may have been a tendency for me to romanticize their voices and subjectivities, especially regarding those stories that echoed my own life experiences, the literature I had in mind, or thoughts and emotions pointing at our common life status. Therefore, the process of interviewing may have involved a relational side of me – listening for a relational self, hence prioritizing certain issues in interviewees' accounts. Thus, in writing the analysis in Chapter 5, I seek to highlight my impulsive thoughts, feelings, struggles, and other subjective activities as they happened during the interviews by situating them in specific contexts. In doing so, I aim to reveal my role in shaping the interviews to the readers.

At the same time, however, the label of “community insider” must not be understood in an arbitrary manner. Even within their own society, researchers find they hardly ever deal with people that have exactly the same culture as they themselves have (Maso, 2001). Just as Briggs (1986) pointed out, “we must look at each interview as a particular cultural encounter” (p.4). In

the interviews for this dissertation research, there was a unique relationship between each interviewee and me. I felt naturally closer to some individual interviewees because of more similar life experiences; meanwhile, more distant from some other interviewees. As such, there is a hybrid understanding of my role; the purpose of comparing the two sides was not to draw an essentialized dividing line, but to illuminate the complex possibilities situated in the interviews.

### 3.3.3 Writing the Interview Analysis

To begin with, I'd like to give a brief introduction of Morley's (1986) approach in his ethnographic analysis of audiences and the domestic consumption of TV. In his interpretative work, Morley chooses to foreground the pattern of differences in viewing habits that are articulated within the factor of gender. The wives tend to watch television less attentively, at the same time that they are doing housework; the husbands, in contrast, state a clear preference for viewing attentively. In doing so, Morley emphasizes the structure of domestic power relations as constitutive for the viewing differences concerned. The problem with Morley's approach lies in, however, that gender is treated as a self-evident pre-given factor as the independent variable to explain differences (Ang, 1991). Thus, ironically, Morley's empiricist account fails to significantly move beyond the traditional 'uses and gratifications' research, where structural factors are explained as constituting separate and discrete types of experience. Missing is, therefore, how and why differentiations along structural lines take the very forms as they do (Ang, 1991).

Ang's (1991) criticism of Morley's work has been extremely intriguing in helping me to situate the interview analysis into an appropriate interpretative ethnographic framework. I seek to avoid the mistake of securing the interview analysis to certain static structural or cultural factors. Instead, to fulfill the ethnographic goal which centers on contextualizing communicative

circumstances as the primary method to investigate cultural meanings and tourism discourse, the analysis in Chapter 5 aims to focus on how and why differentiated interpretations take place – what specific encoded message is contested or confirmed, what individual perspectives are brought in, what contributes to understand the specific discursive encounter between the individual interviewee and the tourism media, what personal emotions and psychological activities are involved, what exterior social forces are engaged, and finally what collective cultural patterns can be comprehended from the interviewees’ interpretations to understand the mediated role performed by the tourism media discourse, and more specifically “China, Forever”. In particular, the analysis of interview narratives in Chapter 5 revolves around three main themes. The identification of themes is used, for the purpose of “sorting out structures of signification and determining their social ground and import” (Geertz, 1995, p.73). Themes are approached as “conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). The following discussion will be devoted to reflect on how decisions were made to identify themes by grouping different interviewees’ stories from the interview data.

During my first reading of the interview transcripts, I took notes of each interviewee’s narrative accounts – those that were surprising to me, taken-for-granted by the interviewees, self-controversial within the narrative structure, etc. My main aim was to glean insights about how each interviewee understood the tourism video in relation to himself/herself. In my second reading, I looked for common patterns across the interview narratives. A number interviewees’ (Hui, Feng, Yu, etc.) description of their personal memories of home and the past first came into my mind. I realized that they have constituted challenges for the nation-state narratives in “China, Forever”, primarily from the perspective of individuals’ life experiences. I refused to

throw them away just because they seemed trivial and meticulous, or the fact that many of them were not even directly addressed by confronting the tourism video. I considered their construction of an individualized account of China as a more subtle strategy to destabilize the tourism discourse and more specifically the video's hegemonic nation-state representation. Shortly after, I realized that the resistance of the nation-state language could in fact be seen as developing along a scale of attitudes. Tian's and Jie's angry denial of the video's polished tourism narratives by incorporating their observations of China's unequal social realities indeed elevated the resistance to a sharper and more critical level. Upon such observation, I made the decision to group those interview narratives together under this common theme of the interviewees' challenging interpretations of the nation-state language in the tourism video. Moreover, when reviewing Jing's transcript, I realized her refusal to critique the nation-state ideology despite of her full awareness has set her response as an outlier to the group. I thought her exceptional attitude was intriguing, therefore deciding to place her account in the end of this theme, for the purpose of giving a light and subtle twist to the overall investigation. Many compliments have been given to Hall's encoding-decoding model, in the regard that it allows communication research to engage in individual subjectivities and thus revealing plural and diversified voices. In this case, I considered that by incorporating Jing's approach to the tourism video not only captured the internal plurality within the audiences' interpretations but more importantly, it casts a more sophisticated and complex light to the relationship between the individual and tourism discourse. As such, it revealed that tourism promotional communication is indeed profoundly shaped by the fine-grained interrelationships between meaning, feeling, and choice (Hall, 1986); no conclusion should be drawn from any taken-for-granted manner.

The second decision – one that specifically focused on interviews that happened during the breakout of a political turmoil from the rest – was made when I was doing the interviews. As I reflected on the interviews occurring during this particular time period, the evident fusion between the individual and the nation-state narratives formed a sharp contrast to responses analyzed in the first theme. Undoubtedly, the interviews collected from this time period were significantly influenced by exterior socio-political forces; the overall political environment intertwined with the individual engagement, forming a unique social context. When the turmoil first broke out, I found myself being caught in the unsettled political battles. I pondered on my own self-positioning; I felt, at times, insuppressibly angry and frustrated with the social realities. While I have been exposed to in-depth social theories about tourism, nationalism, post-colonialism, and power, all theoretical education seemed to have fallen short when the involvement came down to the individual level. Moreover, after the interview with Hui, I realized that the ongoing political struggles formed a parallel dialogue for individuals to interpret the tourism video “China, Forever”; for in both cases, negotiations between the nation and the individual occupied the central place. As such, the unexpected political event endowed an anthropological spirit to this dissertation research – cultural meanings are deeply entrenched in lived and dynamic life experiences.

When I was doing the interviews, I was particularly stricken by Wen’s comments regarding the representation of China’s tradition-modernization in the tourism video. Her simple equation of tradition with backwardness and modernization with advancement was shockingly arbitrary. In reviewing the transcript, I realized that in fact many surprising comments revolved around the common theme of “tradition-modernization”. While Yu’s account was a clear nostalgic response to China’s rapid social changes, Nali’s story of Chinatown was poignant – the

experience of marginalization during diaspora was incorporated to justify the hegemonic nation-state representation of modernity. As such, I decided to group these narratives together to reveal individuals' interpretations of the specific representational component of modernization and tradition. In hindsight, I came to the realization that China's engagement in capitalist modernization was indeed a powerful imprint on this generation of overseas Chinese, illustrated by many deeply-seated personal ethos captured from the individuals' interpretations: shame, nostalgia, etc. Thus, interestingly, the nation's unresolved struggle with modernity and tradition was situated in the tourism video "China, Forever", whereas the Chinese individuals' struggles with the same subject were located in their interpretations of the tourism video. It is in this perspective that the communicative fabric of tourism was seen as participating in a higher level of social dialogues and complexities.

While the above has introduced how groupings of interview narratives were formed and categorized into three main themes, it is also important to note a set of specific analytical techniques focusing on the underpinning linguistic pattern of interview narratives have been employed. To begin with, each interviewee was given a pseudo name in writing the analysis. Furthermore, I believe that the body of discourse produced out of interviews – composed of specific codes, signs, and symbols – has provided a discursive space, allowing me to delve into the cultural, social, and political meanings situated within the space. The analysis thus sought to examine the repetition of key words, phrases and uses of metaphors situated in the interview data. In doing so, it investigated how words are used for reasoning, creating actions and interactions, as well as the consequences for using words. For example, in Feng's description, the word "cold" has been repeatedly used to describe the tourism video. I realized that the meaning of the word had nothing to do with the physical temperature, but referring to the video's aloof

representation, indicating the failure to embrace the warm and lived Chinese life. Thus, the word “cold” functioned as a symbol that signified Feng’s disapproval of the nation-state narratives in the tourism video. More similar examples can be found in Chapter 5, such as Tian’s metaphorical use of the word “tourist”, Yu’s repetitive referrals to the “systematic”, etc. Moreover, I considered the interviewee’s speech style as another important indicator of their self-positionings in reading the video “China, Forever”. Hui’s long speech about Tibet, for instance, appeared as an educational speech – to some extent, it almost felt propagandist. The intense information regarding Tibet’s history and political struggles contained in Hui’s speech as well as the coherent way that the speech was delivered revealed itself as an effort to convince me of the truth and value of his thoughts. Thus, Hui’s particular speech style has denoted another layer of meaning to the speech content. More examples, descriptions and detailed analysis can be located in Chapter 5.

In summary, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive view of the methodological approach employed by this dissertation research. In doing so, it has discussed the theoretical rationale for choosing the two specific methodological frameworks to investigate the research questions. Moreover, it delineated a brief literature review on the underpinning philosophical principles of the two methodological frameworks, illuminating their approaches to the construction of knowledge and investigation of culture. Furthermore, it analyzed the execution of empirical procedures with the two types of analysis by situating them in the particular context of this dissertation research. Finally, the performing of both methodological inquiries was addressed with my subjectivity as well as acknowledgement of limitations.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ENCODED - “CHINA, FOREVER”

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism promotional video “China, Forever” attempts to deliver a grand image of the nation of China. To discursively construct this narrative, the central theme of the video focuses on presenting the greatness of the nation; specifically composed of China's vast spatial scope, long history, cheerful people, unrivaled urban developments, and other signified icons. As such, the representation's rhetoric style is underpinned by an explicit celebratory tone in portraying the society and people of China. In doing so, “China, Forever” is characterized by an inevitable sense of heroism, resembling an epic story -- a rising China that emerges from the glorious ancient history into the bright modernized present. Undoubtedly, far from being a critical reflection of China’s socio-cultural realities, the tourism video must be considered as a form of social imagination driven by China's, if not entirely imposed, nation-state ideology. Thus, this short tourism video has not only created a China with self-glorifying aura, but more importantly, a modern nation with coherent history, distinctive ethnic consciousness and state sovereignty.

Considering the tourism video “China, Forever” as a whole, it can be roughly divided into three parts: the beginning (ends at the time of 2:53), the transition (ends at 6:07), and the ending. The following analysis focuses on unpacking the construction of China’s national image in “China, Forever” by delineating the encoded meanings and inter-relationships between different parts of the video. To conduct the investigation, multiple critical theoretical perspectives are incorporated into the discursive reading of the tourism video, including self-orientalism, modernization developmentalism, and so-forth. In doing so, this dissertation seeks to

illuminate the dynamics of tourism discourse in relation to the politics of China's national identity and global power exchanges.

## 4.2 SELF-ORIENTALISM AND REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA

### 4.2.1 The Oriental China: Perspectives of Feminity and Ethnicity

To fully understand the encoded messages in “China, Forever”, the tourism video needs to be interpreted in a wider socio-cultural context. That is, as Chow (1995) reminds us, the production of images is never the production of pure objects but of relations, not of one culture but of values between cultures. In “China, Forever”, the idea of being revealed and examined on the global stage is intensified -- lurking behind the flowing images of Chinese figures and landscapes is the power exchanges. In other words, the viewing background can be linked to a wider discussion of postcolonial politics. In specific, the deconstructive movement of colonialism has long ago established the idea of seeing as a form of power and being seen as a form of powerless, for traditionally those who represent the Third-world nations are Euro-Americans and thus, the central question is to constitute cultures as objects for exhibition. Against this background, “China, Forever” can be read as a cultural product seeking to empower the Chinese self by challenging the traditional Western ownership of cultural representations. The visual construction of a grand and powerful Chinese nation must therefore be regarded as a major consequence of ongoing politics in the postcolonial power struggles. In this process of producing empowering narratives, however, self-orientalism and self-alienation are employed as logical tools for China to create collective imagination and promote its own identity in this particular piece of tourism representation.

Orientalism is an imperialist epistemology, which assumes that differences between Western and Eastern civilizations are ontological (Said, 1978). This essentialist boundary has not only created hierarchical binary oppositions, but also defined that the West carries moral, intellectual and cultural superiority over non-Western civilizations (Said, 1978). In the post-colonial era, the power exercised by the Western world has taken on a textual attitude (Costa, 1997), meaning that the body of writing and representing – the discourse – has been the major subject and medium of power practices. According to Hall (1999), the postcolonial is

...not the end of colonization. It is after a certain kind of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation -- in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it -- it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new. (p.230)

Thus, to represent the “Orient” is in some ways to construct or invent it, and thus to eventually exercise power over it from an assumed authority of knowledge. Through the orientalist lens of representation, the West is civilized, masculine, advanced, normative, rational, etc; while in contrast, the East is feminine, primitive, mysterious, exotic, irrational, etc (Said,1978).

In a close analysis of “China, Forever”, however, orientalism is now experienced as a deliberate choice in constructing national images of China. To begin with, the overall narrative structure of the video follows a linear time-space development – China progresses from the ancient past to the modern present. In the first half of the video, which focuses on China's traditional past, a changeless, primitive, nostalgic, mythical and feminized China that speaks to the Western orientalist imagination is revealed. In specific, the quintessential impression of a native oriental nation is created by both subjects represented and aesthetics employed.

The dark-red, grand, and heavy door of the Forbidden City, a symbol that embodies the separation between China and the rest of the world, slowly opens. China, as if she has always been waiting behind this door, now invites to be viewed. This opening scene of the video can also be interpreted as signaling the ending of China's long history of waiting -- to be discovered, enacted, and join in as a part of the global world. On one hand, the waiting symbolizes the long history that China has endured, thus legitimizing China's pride on the strength of historiography. On the other hand, precisely because this waiting has lasted for so long, once this door is opened, she becomes extremely conscious about identity differences. Thus, the long waiting has triggered an anxious eagerness to prove her uniqueness. As a result, it seems only natural to exaggerate the cultural differences with the West in order to render the fantasy of an original Chinese nation tenable. In doing so, an inevitable self-orientalist approach is invoked and reinforced. It is as if the more indisputable the Western gaze will be, the stronger the insistence on the Chinese cultural self-containment must be.

China's orientalism can be first of all contextualized in the video's explicit emphasis on a strong feminine tone in representing the nation. In "China, Forever", Chinese women are symbolic narrators, whose images organize the narrative structure and facilitate transitions between different scenes. Immediately after the opening scene, several shots of natural landscapes flash by and then, a Chinese girl occupies the screen (at 05:16). The camera takes a long shot: she is young, slender, wearing a dark blue qipao dress, holding a bright red umbrella, walking slowly through a long and narrow alley -- the architecture that is emblematic of the region of the southeast bank of Yangtze River. The red color of the umbrella stands out against the dark and grayish background. She walks slowly towards the camera with a mysterious smile. In the following scene, the same girl slowly walks over a small stone bridge surrounded by

traditional Chinese buildings and a river flowing underneath. While the setting of the picture is in a brighter colored tone, the image is reminiscent of a traditional Chinese painting: a figurative sensibility condensed into the literal composition of one young woman, a bridge, a river, an old man standing on a small boat flowing down the river. In addition, the music also casts an emotional tone in harmony with the image. With its extremely soft and gentle rhythm from guzheng -- a Chinese plucked-string musical instrument -- it lends a feminine tone to the whole combination. The young woman and the alley along with the old buildings and the river become cosmic China. As it reveals, the message of mysterious femininity implied in the image echoes the perennial theme in Said's orientalism. Indeed, as women's physical characteristics and behaviors constitute significant readings in the video, images of Chinese women have been in fact powerfully woven into the discursive representation in "China, Forever".

It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated (Bhabha, 1994). In the case of "China, Forever", while the colonial desire has been transferred in a reversed way, the logic of presenting Otherness to convince and conquer remains similar. In addition to the femininity introduced above, this Otherness is also constituted by exotic and otherworldly representations of ethnic Chinese in the tourism video. This is not only manifested by the significant frequency of their appearances, but also the visual cliché associated with the representational style. Repeated are images of ethnic men and women dancing and singing in traditional and distinctive ways. Moreover, their appearances are most often associated with wild, natural and rural sceneries and old ethnic architectures; waterfalls, streams and green mountains frame carefree, smiling ethnic Chinese boys and girls as if they are as innocent as the nature that surrounds them. Compared to the camerawork used to portray Chinese females described above, representations of ethnic minorities seek to emphasize China's dazzling ethnic

variety. In doing so, variances of ethnic appearances are highlighted – unconventional dress styles, elaborated hairdos, festival ceremonies, and many others. As such, their indigenous and colorful clothes full of decorations have become a necessary and coherent component of identification. However, precisely because of such preoccupied focus on the ethnic variety and quantity, the video denies lived identities belonging to those minority groups. Thus, they are, in a way, nameless and faceless. This alienated representation enables ethnic Chinese to be separated from normal Han Chinese (the major ethnic group in China). More over, as the tourism video circulates, those images of Chinese minorities are then perceived as a part of the larger Other - the Chinese people -in the eyes of Western audiences; complying with orientalist desire for experiencing a plural and colorful China.

Meanwhile, such self-orientalist positioning of Chinese ethnic minorities is also intertwined with the national narratives of China as a multiculturalist multiethnic society. Officially known as a nation with 56 ethnic groups -- in fact, there are a lot more than this number as recent anthropological studies reveal -- the “primitive” character of ethnic minorities has been interpreted as a critical and “authentic” component of traditional Chinese culture (Barabantseva, 2004). To such an extent, they are considered as “reservoirs of the extant authenticity of Chinese history” (Schein, 1997, p.22), whose romanticized indigenous nature has been recurrently depicted as the genuine bearer of the traditional multicultural Chinese character (Barabantseva, 2004). Thus, not surprisingly, Chinese ethnic minorities are portrayed as a multicultural entity encompassing diverse cultures, faiths and traditions, consolidating a common and united Chinese nation in the tourism video “China, Forever”. Undoubtedly, to delineate this national image, it produces ostensible symptoms of self-orientalization: infantilizing, trivializing and reducing. Rey Chow (1993) argues that Chinese modernity is simultaneously an object of

longing and a symbol of lacking. In “China, Forever”, the museumfication of Chinese ethnic minorities signifies the lacking - China’s changeless and authentic tradition, which has been fragmented and destabilized by the nation's modernization developments - thus turning into a longing to restore the past through constructing representational images. The irony is formed, considering that China's modernization is predominantly Han's possession, while in this process, however, images of ethnic minorities have been targeted and fixated as a part of the nation's tradition. As such, embedded in the overall project of creating a multiethnic national image, there is another layer of power relationship -- one that lies between the majority and minority Chinese. Thus, the ethnic minorities have not only become the alienated Other in the gaze of Western audiences, but within the collective Chinese imagination of the national self.

In summary, an analysis of the representational images of Chinese women and ethnic minorities reveals that the tourism video “China, Forever” is underpinned by an essentialized self-orientalist approach. In doing so, differences of both Chinese women and ethnic minorities are exaggerated and caricatured – to a great extent, they have become symbols of a distant and alienated Chinese self. Moreover, it is important to understand that the construction of such alienation is to create and affirm the emotional insistence on a Chinese national essence. Thus, nationalism and orientalism perpetuate each other, co-creating representations of China in the tourism video “China, Forever”.

#### 4.2.2 Self-orientalism: Tourism Representation and Chinese movies

Baudrillard (1983) states that “the real is not only what can be reproduced, but which is always already reproduced -- the hyperreal” (p.146). In fact, this “always already reproduced” political reality has become the backbone of Chinese cultural production, from which the tourism representation in “China, Forever” draws vital sustenance. In specific, many images in the first

half -- for instance, the shot in which the camera peeks through multi-layered greenish bamboo leaves at an old man fishing on a small and thin boat flowing on the peaceful water (at 1:42) -- appear familiar to the visual portrayal of China in Ang Lee's movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon". In fact, Ang Lee's capturing of China could be traced to even earlier representations in Hong Kong martial art movies in the 1960's and 1970's. To a great extent, filmic representations have formed communicative dialogues, challenging and reconfiguring imagination of China in each other.

Each visual product, however, has its own condition of production. The mission of "Crouching Tiger" was to create popular imagination of China among Western audiences, while movies directed by China's Fifth Generation -- "Yellow Earth", for example -- was to redefine the center and periphery of China in aesthetic and ideological negotiations. In essence, they have all been more or less charged with self-orientalization. In particular, being the earliest cultural products that broke China's long-held silence in 1980's, movies made by the Fifth Generation enabled the West to visually identify China in quintessential orientalist styles -- mysterious mountains surrounded by mist and clouds, endless barren yellow plateau, and Chinese girls dressed in red and holding red lanterns; reifying the nation into a particular mode of changeless, fixed, and mythical representation.

The aesthetic styles and symbols in exploring rural landscape and people, especially in the movie "Yellow Earth", are now employed in the tourism video "China, Forever". In the movie, distinctive visual representations of China are created by exploring its rural brutality, utilizing unexpected shooting angles, highlighting the abnormally high level of the horizon, and thus creating images with radically disproportionate composition that are often divided by the unyielding presence of the barren hills and the Yellow River (Zhang, 1997). Thus, Chinese

landscapes are effortlessly grandeur and boundless, endowed by the camera with a transcending power in the camera. In such highlighted capturing of landscape, human figures appear physically disproportionally tiny, while human stories are subordinated to the power of the nature. Interestingly enough, this way of approaching human and nature are translated into “China, Forever”, especially in the image that happens at 3:55, a Chinese man herding sheep in the sunset appears on the screen. With a distant shot, this picture features two distinctive visual contrasts. The first contrast comes from the disproportional composition – diminutive figures of the man and sheep against the expansive sky and vast land. Moreover, the second provocative contrast is formed by the tones of color used - the sky at dawn that is filled with brilliant splashes of warm golden yellow over the darkly shadowed figures. Under such dramatic contrastive visual representation, this image is endowed with a poetic sensibility – one that fuses human and nature together.

In “Yellow Earth”, the barren and stark northwest plateau of China chosen as the background was primarily because that the harsh environment clearly manifested the subjugation of human life to the vast permanence of the land and its stubborn tenacity (Chow, 1995). In the movie's interpretation, if there is any grand master narrative about China, then it should be the intricate relationships between Chinese peasants and the farming land, which has always occupied the realistic center for the life of the majority of Chinese people -- to harvest gains from nature, and to battle against nature when there is flooding or drought. Hereby, this Chinese farmer waves the whip, herding the sheep, in the ravishingly glorious sunset in “China, Forever”; the meaningful relationship between man and nature has once again become the source of imagination in the tourism representation. Has this story of China ever been changed? Has time ever been changed? Can we, however, without such an image, still coherently imagine China?

Apart from this image, more evidences of aesthetics symbols and styles that are characteristic of the “Yellow Earth” and other the Fifth Generation movies can be captured in “China, Forever”. For example, another typical scene appears when the video moves to the image of Shanbei peasants performing drum beating and Yangge dancing (2:38). The tone of color takes on a dramatically striking red sensation. Red drums, red scarves, flowing red flags, red patterns on men and women’s clothing, red door, and many others -- the screen is filled with the red flames. The color of red, while indicating liveliness and festivity, is now reified as a native Chinese color, whose ritual meanings have been infinitely exaggerated. Not surprisingly, such representation of China's folklore culture with an intensive use of red is often found as a major component in the Fifth Generation's representations of China.

What is ironic here is that in the original context of Chinese culture politics, the semiotic visual system in the Fifth Generation's movies, while seeming to invoke various orientalist sentiments to portray a changeless and mythical China, was actually established to resist the rigidity of political platitudes and party doctrines. In doing so, the movies created an unspeakable distance from China’s traditional socio-political center, through exploring China’s rural and remote landscapes of China and capitalizing on its cryptic magnitude and stubborn silence. As such, the filmic representations deconstructed the sense of Chineseness as an essence dwelling on China’s center by self-othering China through images of unfamiliar histories, identities, and livelihoods that persist peripherally in space and time (Chow, 1995). However, this visual approach is now employed in the government’s own tourism discourse “China, Forever” as an inherent component to build national narratives and a collective imagination. The images that were set to break away from the official bureaucratized discourse of socialist realism are now incorporated in an allegorical space that forms the national imagination of self.

In the twisted cultural context of tourism media, constructing self-orientalist images of China inspired by Fifth Generation's movies constitute new essentialized signification and new centers in the master narrative of the nation. As it reveals, the cultural production in China's tourism discourse can be related to a wider circle of cultural communication, in particular the global success of Chinese movies. In a way, those pre-existing movie images have already somewhat confined the ways that China shall be represented, causing a continual recycling of China in these quintessential self-orientalist images. As such, it reinforces the observation that to fit in and appear appealing to the Western imagination remains the main condition of China's tourism culture promotion. Thus, in the process of constructing the tourism discourse, such condition reinforces an account that promotes China's national image by valorizing cultural differences vis-à-vis the West and further, the convergence of differences in to homogeneity through techniques of visual representation (Dirlik, 2002). Whereas Said set out to reveal how orientalism and its powerful representations have harmfully stifled and prevented "Orientals" from representing themselves in an accurate manner, a complete victory over orientalism proves to be rather utopian, for it has already become a form of self-inscribed knowledge.

As such, the tourism video "China, Forever" and other associated Chinese cultural products require us to take such a condition into the observation of postcolonialism and China's identity politics. In fact, this condition has rather become a predicament when the national culture is considered as a kind of value-writing vis-à-vis the West. In other words, considering that the history of Western imperialism relegates Chinese culture to the place of the Other, whose value is inferior in relation to the West, the task of China has become reinventing the used-to-be inferior national culture as primary (Chow, 1995). In this process, orientalist images are employed to create China's national essence. In this regard, rather

than condemning self-orientalism and its cultural manifestation with a high moral ground, it requires a sophisticated view to contextualize and examine China's reconstruction of self.

#### 4.3 HISTORY, MODERNITY, AND REPRESENTATION OF CHINA

##### 4.3.1 Modernization and Tradition: A Dichotomous Representation

The postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated an intimate connection between colonialism and modernity which is not only historical but structural – modernity from the beginning has been parasitic on the colonized, and that modernity is incomprehensible without reference to the Eurocentric colonialism (Dirlik, 2002). In other words, the building of modern knowledge is a colonial process in which EuroAmericans conquer the world, re-name places, re-arrange economies and societies, and many other deeds that have re-conceptualized the world. Modernity is thus constructed as a fate of humankind – in particular, the fate of European civilizations – rather than the conjunction of a particular history and prevailing globalized capitalist power. Such colonialist thinking has certainly inflicted on the non-European colonies' understanding of their own tradition, history, and modernity.

Situated within such interlinked space of modernity and colonialism, China's struggle with modernity has led to a prominent perception that posits tradition and modernization in a dichotomous and discontinuous fashion. To simply put, both tradition and modernization have become temporalized and spatialized experiences; while tradition is particularly Chinese and historical, modernity is universally Western and contemporary. This positioning has been translated into popular imaginations of China's modern self. In particular, stereotypical representational symbols of modernity, especially those that have been endorsed and circulated

as visual signs of modernity in Western media products, have penetrated Chinese cultural products to portray the modernization project that nation is relentlessly devoted to.

The submission to a hegemonic visual modernity is one major characteristic in “China, Forever”. As the video moves to its second half which focuses on China’s modern scenes (6:08-7:18), the screen is occupied by repeating urban scenes: glistening tall buildings, busy highways, clouds flowing over skyscrapers, luxurious modern hotels, and so forth. To match the visual development, the background music gradually progresses into a stronger and more masculine tone. While the same melody remains as in the first half, it is now played by modern orchestral instruments to create a symphonic effect. Moreover, the previous serene and leisurely lifestyle is now superseded by a fast-paced urban alternative. The Chinese girl wearing a tentative smile in the traditional body-hugging dress in the first part of the video has disappeared; replaced, are girls walking fast on busy streets with straightforward cheerful facial expressions. Not surprisingly, scenes of young people clubbing in the disco, golfing, shopping, and an upscale dining experience also appear in this part of the video. All these symbols are reminiscent of the cliché of cosmopolitan lifestyle which Hollywood has been recycling. Everything is emblematically and intensively urban; leading to the impression that being dazzlingly urban is the only symbolic purpose that modern China exists for. In fact, apart from a few iconic architectures of Beijing and Shanghai, such as the Shanghai Oriental Pearl Tower and Pudong Airport, it is hard to exactly name the architectures and regions represented. So generic are the shots that they can be New York, Sydney, Tokyo or any other modern cosmopolitan center in the world. Acquiring a modern identity, as such, means to look up to the West and, in particular, to at least adopt ostensible material symbols on the surface, such as the unbridled enthusiasm for urbanism. The distinctiveness of China – the cultural differences of which are represented with a

degree of inevitableness in the first part – is now blurred; China begins to take on a homogeneous modern look. But, isn't that exactly the effect expected to be achieved? How can China prove to be modern, redeem the history of being invaded and dominated by the West, without proving that the Chinese can do exactly the same?

In Dai Jinhua's article "Imagined Nostalgia" (1997), a vivid description about China's ongoing urbanization is revealed:

A fascinating picture typical of Chinese cities in the 1990s is the ubiquitous construction site, similar to images depicting postwar reconstruction: Amid the airborne dust, the towering cranes, and the chorus of the humming concrete mixers, a new city emerges. (p.146)

In Dai's (1997) account, the modernization experience takes the image of "an endlessly encroaching greedy monster" (p.146), which is characterized by a strong sense of restlessness and destructiveness. Thus, because of this explosively transforming nature of modernization, the exact direction that China is led to remains an uncertain question. While Dai's narrative is a retrospect of China in the 1990's, the urbanized modernization developments have only been more intensive and expansive in the years since then. Compared to Dai's account, the representation in "China, Forever", however, reveals an oppositional characterization of modernization. In the tourism video, modernity is portrayed as an already achieved fact – it is at once definitive, self-assured, bright, and glamorous. Interestingly, through such a comparison, one comes to the realization that the projection of modernization in "China, Forever" is similarly an act of performing, where symbols of endless urban skyscrapers and highways serve as essentially actors and actresses performing under the stage light, thus becoming very detached from realities.

In fact, as it was briefly mentioned in the literature review, the experiences of modernization have never been equal and even for the Chinese. In movies made by director Jia Zhangke (one of China's Sixth Generation movie producers), images of glamorous urban sites with are often juxtaposed to poor and silent figures of Chinese countrymen as migrant labors in the cities. Everything about their appearances – their filthy-looking clothes, unintelligible accent, stoic facial expressions, and “backward” lifestyles – signifies unpleasant and uncongenial disturbances to the attempt of building coherent and splendid narratives of Chinese modernization. Under such contrastive representation, the promise of salvation given by modernization seems absurd, turning into, if not entirely, a source of oppression. We are reminded that those real, poor, silent, and “contemptible” Chinese migrant labors co-exist with the incredibly magnificent modern urban scenes. The irony is that China's urban constructions have always been built by those countryside folks who have to bear all sorts of harsh physical conditions and economic exploitations. Whose modernity is this? It seems that modernity is paradoxical, not only to the migrant labors but to China as a whole – proximate yet unattainable. The more magnificent the grand narratives of modernization look from the exterior, the more dramatic social inequalities and injustice are woven in the interior. The absolute positive tone of modernity represented in “China, Forever”, however, leaves no room within the discursive space for questioning or leaving contested interpretations. It is exactly this grand and unproblematic national narrative of modernization is being ridiculed.

The conception that modernity is flawless, solid, and pure is further intensified when modernization is placed side by side with the first part of “China, Forever”. Not a single trace of modernity could be identified in the representation that focuses on the traditional component of China. Repeated images of flourishing green plants, farmlands, and people farming and fishing,

have been woven into the idea of an agrarian and idyllic China. To highlight the representational effect, the background music also serves to arouse a delicate feeling of history; it is as if the same folklore melody has been reverberating over the same land since the beginning of time. Thus, infused with an elite aesthetic loftiness, China lives in a romantic tale with uncorrupted origin: there is no exposure to the modern time, no pollution from the massive manufacturing, and no vestige of Western civilization.

As a result, both the “traditional” and “modern” facets of China have become self-contained concepts in “China, Forever”, as both are specifically situated in temporal and spatial frameworks – the traditional China is devoid of any modern vestige, while the modern China is vacant of tradition. In other words, the more distinctive China’s “Oriental” past is, the more ubiquitous the modern present needs to be. Underlying such dichotomous representation, it is the implicit positioning which proposes that China’s tradition and modernization are incompatible and mutually excluding, creating the impression that the modern world denies the existence of a traditional China. In this way, the representation in “China, Forever” has automatically submitted itself to a homogeneously defined Eurocentric modernity discourse, failing to provide an alternative and hybrid interpretation. The fact is that it is possible for modernity to not exist as the consequence in a Westernized social condition, while at the same time there are possibilities for synergies and compatibilities between the Chinese tradition and modernity. Consider for example the words by the May Fourth Chinese scholar Liang Shuming (1883):

it is not that the Chinese are walking on the same path as the  
Westerners...but if they are walking on different paths in different directions, then  
no matter how far the Chinese walk, they will never end up where the Westerners  
are! (p.6)

Rather than leading the discussion toward a contemplation of whether there is or should be such a thing as a distinctive Chinese modernity, I find it more interesting to deliberate on the reasons that have enforced such an ubiquitous yet powerful way of representing modernity in “China, Forever”. While it could be certainly attributed to China’s desire to demonstrate its ability to commit to the modernization construction that the West has historically assumed supremacy on, it is also profoundly determined by the nature of modernity. The question is: how can the Chinese imagine modernity in different ways if the idea of modernity is essentially Eurocentric product? It seems that the discussion has to be taken back to the entanglement of modernity and colonialism as Dirlik (2002) points out. That is, throughout the historical process of colonial conquering and postcolonial wars of textual representation, modernity has already been inscribed with Western images in an unprecedented manner. Even the notion of history itself, as Nicholas Dirks (1990) puts it succinctly, is “a sign of the modern” (p.25). Thus, as long as China continues to be obsessed with the deception that only through the access to modernity can the ultimate self-empowerment be obtained, it will be trapped in the oscillation between choices of an uncontaminated tradition or modernity – a constraining boundary that Chinese tourism representations are currently unable to surpass.

#### 4.3.2 The Linear Progression of Time: Modernization as China’s Destiny

Interestingly, while the video does not explicitly speak of time, the structure that governs the narrative orchestration is formed by a logical flow of time. Under such representational effect, an analysis of “China, Forever” delineates another layer of relationship between China’s tradition and modernization: a roughly linear and progressive development. In the beginning, time stays – China is ancient, historical, and timeless; in the ending, time changes – China is modern, busy, and undergoing fast developments. Both visual signs and musical effects have

played important roles in signifying the passage of time. Time stays, when the Chinese landscape is assigned to an enduring expression of emptiness and vastness. It appears as if China's natural landscapes and ancient architectures are the only owners of history and witnesses of time. Time moves, as the previously empty landscapes are now occupied by moving human figures; implying that the ownership of time and space has been shifted to the Chinese people. It is Chinese people who have created something even more grand and magnificent than history – the modern present. The tension between nature and presence of human figures serves to highlight the movement of time.

To dilute the tension between the representations of tradition and modernity, the middle part in “China, Forever” (2:54-6:07) attempts to pave a smooth transition by employing a variety of folk elements. The camera reveals images of a Chinese girl sitting in front of a Hutong (a traditional valley-style residential area that used to be common and popular in Beijing) making dragonfly kites, a grandfather and granddaughter doing folk paintings, chefs cooking traditional Chinese food in a modern hotel, and so forth. Thus, by relying on representations of either traditional cultural practices in modern settings or modern practices in traditional environments, all scenes are devoted to constructing the perception that China's tradition and modernity harmoniously collapse into each other. In fact, however, the more symbols of tradition and modernity are employed in the same context to justify their co-existences, the more intensified their symbolic meanings are and thus, the more dichotomized they seem to be. The ending scene of the transitional part (6:05) shows an image of a Beijing opera performer in traditional costume, who, instead of performing on the opera stage, dances in the interior of a glittering glassy modern building. As such, the whole scene is characterized by stark visual contrast: the bright pinkish and yellowish costume and the dramatic make-up in opposition to the grayish

shining modern architectural design. Every symbol about the performer signifies an irreversible identification with the tradition, while everything in the background is intensely modern. Who is displaced here -- the traditional opera performer or the modern architecture? As such, tradition and modernity are simultaneously juxtaposed to each other and framed together in a rigid and mechanic manner, invoking a hint of surrealism. Thus, the tension between the two ends is now even further dramatized instead of being smoothed out. As such, on the overall level, the transitional part coherently contributes to the linear, progressive, and dichotomized temporal-spatial development of the representational structure in “China, Forever”.

As a result of such representational structure, the impression is created that China has a destiny, which is to emerge out of an immemorial past and glide into a majestic modern present. Thus, while Chinese tradition is celebrated in the video, more emphatically, pervaded in the ambience is the explicit desire to display and prove China’s current possession of modernity. Sublimed is the modern present, revealing “China, Forever” to be a eulogy of the modernization narrative. Such narrative structure is conducive to the Enlightenment belief of history, nation, and modernity by reiterating a taken-for-granted conception of modernity as a more advanced and prioritized form of human development. Thus, politics of post-colonialism has taken a subtle twist here, which is no longer based on flourishing mythical “Oriental” symbols, but by actively embracing the hegemony of Bourgeois modernization as an ideology of progress as well as an inevitable fate for the Chinese.

Both Dirlik (2002) and Chakrabarty (2000) argue that the Third-world countries’ common and fanatic obsession with the materializing progress and modernization is a symptom of colonialism heritage. It is through the notion of development that capitalism continues to be endowed with an unhistorical universality, therefore providing the Western domination with

ideological legitimization. More specifically, the modernization paradigm is underpinned by the profound psychology of “not yet”. Many years ago, the colonized were convinced that they were *not yet* civilized enough to rule themselves; nowadays, the same group of population take faith in that the good future is *yet to* come if only they resign to the fate of golden promises of free market economy and capital. If anything, modernization is the ultimate salvation and redemption for all the inequalities endured for the once dominated and colonized. Thus, instead of harping insistently on the now as the temporal horizon of action, the national narrative of China focuses on the progress and future. In “China, Forever”, this psyche becomes evident when we consider the progressive structure in the representation, which approaches modernization with a commending undertone and an insuppressible eagerness.

Moreover, this “not yet” sentiment can be further contextualized in the ending of “China, Forever”. In the closing part (7:20-8:16), many Chinese figures from the previous part reappear in the camera, cheerfully smiling and waving goodbye to the audience. The design of the closing of “China, Forever” therefore reminds viewers of a theatrical play, where actors and actresses get onto the stage when the play is over and thank to audiences and receive applauses. At that particular moment, audiences are often placed in the interplay between fiction and reality, invoking a strange consciousness of which one realizes that the play has come to an end while the real life goes on by seeing the actors standing under the stage light holding each other's hand. In “China, Forever”, when the starting scene of Chinese peasants drumming at the bank of Yellow River recurs on the screen, it also signifies a closing. In common scenarios, the result of the drama is usually the most aspired component, the question then becomes: what is the result of the story that “China, Forever” attempts to tell? If a result has to be defined for this tourism video, then right before the closing, the camera dwells on images of modernization; in other

words, it is the result of modernization that China has *yet* been waiting for in this journey. Moreover, considering that the tourism video progresses based on a rough flow of time, the ending part hints at the idea of China's future. What comes after modernization? We don't know the answer. But from the impression created by the video, China's future will only be limitlessly bright and promising, as it is determined by the progressive developments of modernization -- the better is *yet* to come.

#### 4.4 REVERIES OF CHINA: THE REINVENTION

In stressing the contemporaneity of the modern and the tradition, Dean Tipps (1973) argues that history is nothing but a product of the present. The view is shared by many others -- despite the fact that the present may seem to be absent, it is always an implicit yet integral component in the construction of the past. Thus, the important is not the time of the story but the time of telling the story. In this sense, the tourism representation "China, Forever" is a heroic reinvention of China's past and present in restoring the master representation of the nation.

In reinterpreting China's tradition, landscape symbols that are often associated with China's heroic history are repeatedly featured. The video starts (0:07-0:24) with the Great Wall rising in the serene sunrise with a golden tone of color, long shots of the giant Buddha sculpture, a distant view of Potala Palace standing on the top of the hill, the flowing Yellow River strong, masculine and lively. Those scenes are time-transcending and compelling, suggesting that the great hero China has conquered all adversities in history. Thus, the promotion of a concrete and continuous entity in such representational language; in so doing, China has enacted the ultimate heroic scenario -- to outlast history. The irony is that, however, when restoring historicity to those national symbols, one will clearly see that the absolute historical grandness that are given

to in “China, Forever” is actually contested and even denied in different historical periods. The Forbidden City, for example, which once symbolized the decadent ruling of Qing Dynasty, was denounced for its feudalistic backwardness in both Republican and Socialist revolutions. In doing so, collapsed are not only specific historical symbols, but also the heroic narrative of China. As such, it confirms the idea that the representation of history is always a reconfiguration from the present perspective. Moreover, in relation to the previous discussion of self-orientalism, in order to acquire an appealing visual essence of “Chineseness”, the first part of “China, Forever” has fashioned a self-orientalist image through exaggerating and dramatizing tradition in forms of excessive rituals and customs. From this perspective, the representation of China's tradition in the tourism video resembles an enforced register of non-EuroAmerican cultural elements into a nation which has in fact already been shaped by the legacy of a Eurocentric modernity. The observation of “China, Forever” thus reveals that even the reassertion of Chinese traditions has to articulate to the Western imagination and resonate with Western demands of global capitalism. Considering that the notion of tradition has already been fragmented and destabilized by ongoing social, cultural and economic changes, the re-creation bespeaks of an ideological maneuvering. If anything, China's history is the real victim in the tourism video's construction of the legendary epic of China.

Furthermore, evidences of a victorious statement can also be found in the scenes that are purposefully omitted and/or in the tourism representation “China, Forever”. While the video must not be understood as a strict reflection of China's historical developments, in addition that there is an inevitable sense of fictionalized imagination infused with the representation, the video does attempt to convince audiences that those representations appear on the screen are socio-historical realities of China. Thus, when reflecting on the logical progression of time

development in the video, China's history displays a clear rupture. That is, the social memory of China's modern revolutions, which is in fact a significant construct in a wider historical perception of China, has been entirely erased in the tourism video. In doing so, it presupposes an unbroken narrative of modernization from the beginning to the present, as if committing to the modernization has been China's self-fulfilling prophecy. Admittedly, there are multiple reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, as it was discussed previously in the literature review, China's revolutionary experience signifies the nation's past struggles, thus presenting a challenge in justifying the coherence of the current capitalist modernization in connection to the history. To date, meanings of China's modern revolutions -- especially Mao's socialist movement -- remain ambiguous in various ways. Thus, maneuvering this piece of history into the glorious construction of China's national image constitutes an intimidating task -- one that submits the nation's capitalist modernization reform to a risky discussion. Secondly, the context of tourism media has also played a role in shaping the video's positioning. Lingering over the production of "China, Forever" is the consciousness of the gaze from the Western world, causing the video to turn to a collective amnesia to seek popularity without creating any unnecessary ideological accusations. For both reasons, the China that appears in the tourism video must be approached as projected from the present framework of modernization as a heroic salvation. Thus, the victory of modernization over revolution represents the culmination of China's a century and a half of struggle for modernity; suppressing different phases in the transformations of Chinese society and of its global context that need to be distinguished structurally.

A past forgotten is a possible space erased from which to view the present critically (Dirlik, 1996). As "China, Forever" reveals, such forgetting has clear utilities in China's contemporary cultural production -- in particular, the construction of national image in tourism

discourse. Overall, “China, Forever” proves to be a tourism representation that functions as an important medium in which cultural politics and power struggles are articulated. As such, an examination of “China, Forever” contributes to further our understanding of tourism representations, which not only create knowledge but also construct new realities of destinations and hosts (Santos, 2006). In forging sensational destination image through constructing pervasive tourism promotional materials (Picard & Wood, 1997), “China, Forever” attempts to build a coherently heroic national image of China. In doing so, it constitutes an ongoing effort to consciously construct a mesmerizing mirror of the modern West while at the same time relentlessly fabricating an oriental mythology. The tourism video thus proves to be a collision of multiple critical issues that are central to the imagination of China -- modernity, tradition, postcolonialism, and so forth. As such, the entertaining and recreational façade of tourism representation is deconstructed, while the nature of “China, Forever” as an ideological claim is delineated.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DECODED – AUDIENCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is devoted to examining Chinese individual interviewees' interpretations of representational images of China encoded in the tourism video "China, Forever". In specific, the first part of the analysis seeks to discuss how individual interpretations destabilize and challenge the video's underpinning nation-state ideology. The second part of the analysis aims to highlight how unexpected political turmoil motivates the interviewees to readjust their approaches to "China, Forever" by reinterpreting its nation-state narratives. Finally, the third part of the analysis specifically devotes its attention to the central theme of tradition-modernity to investigate the encoding-decoding dynamics. In doing so, the tourism video "China, Forever" is naturally established as the common nexus for the three parts of the analysis. Furthermore, in examining interviewees' narratives, I seek to particularly attend to the inter-relationships between the individual Chinese audiences and their varied approaches to the nation-state narratives in "China, Forever", for the purpose of illuminating cultural meanings situated in the interplays between encoded and decoded messages.

If one of Morley's main contributions in his pioneering book "The Nationwide Audience" (1980) was to re-embed mundane and empirical activities of watching TV into a wide social fabric of everyday cultural life (Ang, 1991), then this dissertation research – particularly the analysis in this chapter - seeks to re-integrate the viewing of tourism media in relation to a broader scope of socio-cultural discourse. To be sure, while many have revealed the intricate relationships between the language of tourism (construction of tourism destinations, media

images, etc.) and the building of nation-state (e.g. see Palmer, 1999; Franklin, 2004), this dissertation aims to explore how such naturalized relationship in the particular tourism media “China, Forever” are received and negotiated by overseas Chinese audiences. In doing so, it focuses on audiences’ readings of the representational style, the specific representational components, as well as the emerging socio-political context attached to the tourism video. As such, it seeks to reveal that at the individual level, each viewing of the tourism video “China, Forever” is situated in a specific discursive encounter, where lived social realities have been translated into individuals’ interpretations, therefore co-creating cultural meanings in the practices of decoding. Furthermore, the audiences’ interpretations enable the tourism media product to engage in a wider social realm – the communicative fabric produced out of “China, Forever” is indeed deeply entrenched in a variety of critical social dialogues.

## 5.2 INDIVIDUAL INTERPRETATIONS: DESTABILIZATION OF THE NATION-STATE

I was firstly introduced to the tourism video “China, Forever” in 2006, during the time when I was a Master’s student in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Purdue University. On a late Wednesday afternoon, when I was studying by myself in the TA office at the basement of Stone Hall, my officemate May, who was a Chinese Ph.D student in the same program, came into the office. May has been a friendly and passionate talker, whose superfluent and sometimes earsplitting Beijngnese Mandarin was often found penetrating every corner of the office. However, that day, I noticed that she was unusually quiet; something alarming and tense was hanging in the air. I asked her what she was upset about, and she responded that she showed a tourism video, named “China, Forever”, to an undergraduate tourism class that she was lecturing. However, far from being excited and amazed with the visual

beauty of China, the American students' responses were quite lukewarm and indifferent; in fact, the only scene that the students were attracted to was that of baby pandas rolling around on the grass. May seemed very stricken by the big contrast between her expectation and the reality of how this video was perceived by American students. From May's disappointment, it was easy to identify a personal pride that she took in this Chinese tourism video. She then made a comment in a mocking tone that was almost bitter: "those silly Americans...they don't understand anything about China". Hearing this, I immediately realized that May had explicitly turned to an "insider-outsider" framework to justify the lack of appreciation for this video; so to speak, American viewers as outsiders didn't share the same bond between Chinese audiences and this tourism media product. Naturally, May's reaction has aroused my curiosity to watch and subsequently to study this tourism video. Moreover, the incident has also developed a presupposed assumption within my mind -- it was natural for Chinese audiences as insiders to feel connected to the representations of China in the video. For, after all, was there any other framework more common and convenient than the logic of "insider-outsider" for the diasporic individuals to examine themselves and the country they left behind?

This impression, however, was soon challenged by interviews with Chinese individuals in this dissertation research. To be sure, the constructed national narratives in the video "China, Forever" were destabilized and contested by individual interviewees' personal interpretations. As the following narratives shall illustrate, the video's imposed nation-state ideological episteme has formed a hurdle lying in between "China, Forever" and Chinese individuals who decoded the video from lenses of personal life experiences and memories.

Surrounded by the warm and silky light at Giuliani's coffee shop, I was sitting in front of Feng, a Chinese girl I met in a psychology class. Feng had a very candid and straightforward

way of communication in both class discussion and the interviews. Later, I also got to know that Feng was one of the very few Chinese interviewees that did not come from the urban side of China. The interview soon proceeded to the stage of video-viewing after a small chat in the beginning. In the video, when the image of a Chinese girl holding a red umbrella walking through a long dark valley appeared on the screen, she murmured, “Oh, maybe it was shot in my home village. These rainy valleys look familiar”. Thus, later in the interview I asked her if she was impressed by any particular scene in the video. She responded: “Ninghai (a small town in Zhejiang province) has a lot of old, long, and winding valleys. I used to walk through them everyday. I remember hearing raindrops dripping from the roof when it rains constantly in the spring”.

I thought it was a nostalgic moment invoked from watching this video. But then she continued, “The video image looks too clean and too unreal to be the valleys in my hometown – this is a stage, not a Chinese valley that has been there for hundreds of years”. I felt that the word “clean” needed to be clarified, “Clean as opposed to dirty? Are you actually referring to the meaning of ‘immaculate’?” She nodded:

Yes, it is too beautiful. I’m not saying that my home village is not beautiful. I can stay in the valley all day long just to watch the raindrops; and I can walk in valleys where roads are paved by pretty grey stone bricks over and over again.

But this sentimental feeling is just not in the video. The video image is like trying too hard to imitate Chen Yifei’s paintings. It’s so static and cold.

As Feng’s narrative indicated, while the video attempted to mold a quotidian and mundane yet comforting image of Chinese village life into a part of the institutionalized and noble narrative of the nation, feelings of personal identification were dispelled, even though the site of the video

image and Feng's hometown overlapped with one another. As such, Feng's interpretation of the video has posed a stark contrast with May's personal response. In fact, Feng was the first interviewee who disagreed with the nation-state positioning of China in the video. In hindsight, I realized that this interview was a liberating moment for myself from holding onto the hegemonic belief that an insider status would force an intimate association between Chinese audiences and "China, Forever".

In creating a self-portrait as a triumphal nation marching through time, the tourism video has asserted the nation China with a distant and aloof positioning. Thus, unfortunately, while the purpose was to attract tourists by claiming a collective China with shared memories, this ideological undertone has actually become a barrier for individual Chinese audiences to invoke emotional belongingness from the representations in "China, Forever".

Lian and I both found Giuliani's coffee shop on the Green Street a pleasant place to study in. I used to go there almost every day before it closed for business; interestingly enough, I saw her there all the time too. Before long, I realized that Giuliani's had, in different ways, become a small community of shared space for many students who worked on campus -- one greeted the same faces with eye contact and smiles everyday. In this small community, I often wondered if Lian was Chinese, and maybe she was thinking of the same thing about me. One often finds oneself in a strangely interesting position, where to seek identification and companionship from fellows with similar socio-cultural backgrounds has become a natural instinct under the condition of exiling and traveling. As such, I was motivated to approach Lian and conduct a personal interview.

Coming from Hefei (the capital city of Anhui province), Lian was in the MBA program at the University of Illinois. In the interview, my first question was if there was anything particular in the video that has caught her eyes. She responded:

I saw the Yellow Mountain in the video. It is in my home province. I've also been to Hongcun (a historical village, a world heritage site by the Yellow Mountain), which was in the video. Also, in the first part of the video there were people picking tealeaves, and I've done that when I was in China. I feel that a lot of scenes are familiar, and that I could imagine myself in any of those pictures. Yet, I can't specifically relate myself to any particular scene.

Lian's description led me to ponder if her loss was partly a result of the aggressive geographical scope that this video attempted to cover. However, I immediately realized that my suspicion was wrong, as Lian commented in the later part of the interview: "Those images of China are great but they are just not endearing to me. It is a feeling that I can't articulate well".

This feeling that Lian was unable to articulate pointed at a conscious dilemma; a rational logic demanded one to feel connected to the representation of China in the tourism video, whereas one's spontaneous perception revealed the opposite sensibility. On one hand, this chasm - between one's rationale reasoning and impulsive feeling- reinforced the observation that in order to construct grandeur national images, portrayals of China from a humanistic lens have been assiduously avoided in the tourism video "China, Forever". On the other hand, in a creative way, the appearance of such chasm enabled the state-constructed totalized representation of China to be deconstructed into multi-layered individual narratives.

I found it fascinating to listen to overseas Chinese interviewees recounting images of China that they held in heart. Not surprisingly, those images are often originated from mundane

contexts. In the interview with Feng, she made a comment on Chinese aesthetics, “the beauty of Chinese aesthetics relies on its ‘yanhuo de renqing wei’ (I found this term hard to be translated precisely, for there was no exact equivalent description in English. The translation that I considered as approximate and appropriate was: intricate and sympathetic humanism in everyday life)”. Feng was not an art student and I was not sure if the use of the term “aesthetics” here was academically correct. Regardless, I found her description very creative and refreshing. Feng continued:

This feeling could have been well instilled into the representations in this tourism video. For example, if the scene of an old Chinese village is desirable, the camera can approach the village by capturing the flowing movements of village people – those who are chatting by the well, who are pulling water from the well, and who are carrying water through the valley. Then, as an audience, you would naturally want to be a part of their life, and to know what people are talking and laughing about. The pictures don’t have to look perfect, but it is those warm moments of life that makes China meaningful and beautiful.

Feng’s comment was in fact quite representative of the personal responses from many Chinese interviewees. In addition to Feng’s discursive analysis, other exemplary narratives were ubiquitous in other interviewees’ narratives, which could not be all included due to the length limitation for the dissertation. However, as an interesting observation, when piecing together these seemingly meticulous and trivial individual accounts, which were situated in a variety of geographic and socio-cultural contexts, a movie of China composed of lived dialogues between Chinese individuals and the nation emerged from the landscape.

Yu was an engineering Ph.D student from Beijing, who also happened to be a frequent visitor to Giuliani's. His description revealed an interesting vignette that echoed many Chinese city folks' life experiences:

My family didn't move out of the old Hutong until I was 13 years old. I remember growing up in the Hutong, I saw new constructions taking place around my home everyday. Almost every time I looked up to the sky above the Hutong, I saw the surrounding skyscrapers growing taller, while the empty space in the sky become smaller. In those moments, I felt that I've grown into the Beijing city, while simultaneously that Beijing has grown into me. I don't, however, expect the video to include these things that I saw from my eyes.

Hui's recollection of China was particularly embodied in sensational symbols of food. As a Guangzhou native, Hui joked that he has been turned into a "hungry ghost" after coming to the U.S for his doctoral study in Mathematics. He said:

Hunger and memories of food keep haunting me. I miss so much of Guangzhou's food stands, which you can find everywhere by the street— the smell, food variety, etc. Don't laugh at me, but I sometimes dream of beef noodle and char-grilled squid. Everything is so irreplaceably gratifying and homey. It's different than eating in the Chinese luxurious hotel restaurants which you see in the video.

As the above delineated, it was located in the most quotidian and minute sinews of daily life that something persisting and inescapable resided in the relationship between the Chinese individuals and the nation. However, preoccupied with the purpose of displaying the nation's nobility and grandness, the representation in "China, Forever" discerned individual aspects, therefore excluding individual audiences' roles in co-creating China. As such, this study reveals

a layer of insider-outsider relationship situated within the communication dynamics of encoding-decoding, not however between the Western and Chinese audiences, but between the tourism video and the Chinese audiences.

I got to know Tian through a common friend of ours who studied at Purdue University. Tian was in the Ph.D program in the Computer Science Department. In the interview, Tian used the metaphor “tourist” to denote his self-positioning as an outsider to the representation of China in “China, Forever”. He said: “I’m no different from a foreign tourist when seeing images of the Great Wall and Forbidden City in the video. They look solemn and historical. But that’s it”. Furthermore, Tian explained: “I guess China will always need Potala Palace or the Great Wall to look like China, but I don’t need them to be myself - to be a Chinese”.

By positioning himself as an outsider to the video representations, Tian’s account delineated a conscious separation between the individual self and the video’s nation-state episteme; forming a paradoxical situation - one finds oneself becoming the stranger to one’s own country. Moreover, in a mockery tone, Tian’s last comment taunted the unbridgeable distance between the appearance of the China and the idea of being Chinese. As such, Tian’s narratives subverted the tourism video’s intention of creating a cohesive and collective Chinese identity.

While the above interview analysis challenges the centrality of the nation in the tourism video’s representations primarily from the perspective of individual experiences and memories, the interviewees’ perceptions of China’s ongoing engagements with modernization have also assisted to form contested interpretations for the narrative coherency in “China, Forever”. To be sure, inherent social controversies and inequalities embedded in China’s modernization developments were incorporated as a collective experience that questioned the representation construction in “China, Forever”.

In our continued interview, Tian mentioned that he was a Hangzhou native. Famous for its beautiful scenery, Hangzhou has been one of the most popular tourism destinations in China. The video “China, Forever” also contained several shots of the West Lake in Hangzhou. However, in an almost apathetic manner, Tian quietly responded: “That’s not real Hangzhou”. “What do you mean by that”? I was curious. He pondered a little bit, and then asked me:

Have you ever watched Jia Zhangke’s movies? Those are real. If you go to the Hangzhou Railway Station, you’ll see lots of peasant labors and tourists. Those peasant labors are either going to Shanghai to look for jobs or coming to Hangzhou for temporary construction jobs. Take a closer look, and you’ll see that tourists and peasant labors never sit next to each other. You can easily tell the differences by their looks. Peasant labors, both men and women, often sit on the ground and cluster together, while their kids crawl all over the place like little wild monkeys. You know how they are like - filthy dressed, numb, shy, messy, and loud. I don’t even need to describe how tourists look like here. They are city people. Some of them are even upset if they have to sit next to peasant labors.

In fact, Tian’s description invoked a typical movie picture in Jia’s movies. I didn’t know if it was Jia’s movies that helped him to notice the disparity between China’s urban and countryside and therefore raise critical questions regarding the video, or the vice versa. My own experience in China told me that the superiority of city folks was often taken-for-granted. In fact, the stereotype of Chinese peasants as despicable beings failed to recede but on the contrary has grown keener in China’s modernization developments; the peasants are often stigmatized as symbols of poverty and backwardness. When I was growing up in Nanjing and Shanghai (both are urban cities on China’s east coast), I was often told to be quiet about, and to suppress my

curiosity for, the appearance of peasants as migrant labors in the cities. As a child and a teenager, I learned from people around me that the supremacy of the industrial world was only natural. Jia's movies, however, captured the unjustified inequalities within Chinese people with humanistic observations, therefore subverting the deeply entrenched social stereotypes of humility and nobility.

At this moment, Tian's description and Jia's movie picture fused into one vivid picture in my mind, invoking an acute awareness of social injustice that exists within China's modernity. In doing so, the scene portrayed by Tian pointed sharply at the coherent, equal, and polished narratives of China in the tourism video "China, Forever". Thus, the monolithic construction of national representation not only dehumanized the meaning of Chinese identity, but also constituted a coercive source to the real yet powerless protagonists, as Tian defined, the Chinese people.

Tian's story was a mixture of both a sarcastic account of China's nation-state narratives and a compassionate note for the Chinese people whose images were absent in the video. Moreover, Tian's approach to "China, Forever" could be well related to Marxist argument of political economy. In specific, the creation of China's national image in this transnational tourism media product catered to the primary interests of the dominating class - a higher level of structural power has determined the style and content of representation in "China, Forever". However, in contrast, Jia's movies were interpreted as transcending as they focused on the "outcasts" of society, which were therefore posed as an oppositional example to debunk "China, Forever". Indeed, in constructing an imaginative image bearing resemblance to those in Jia's movies, Tian empowered his subjectivity by recourse to a new media communication dialogue – one between the audience and Jia's movies.

However, compared to Jia's movies, which focused more on compelling narratives of humanity situated in China's unequal modernization developments, Tian's response was more of an antagonist account. The later part of the interview with Tian only reinforced such fortitude; to a great extent, Tian's antithetical attitude toward the nationalist overtone in the tourism video has come to an extreme point, becoming an impenetrable wall that prohibited him from decoding the video in different ways. Hence, the ironical situation was that in order to counter one way of monolithic imposition, another monolithic attitude was invoked. Confronted by Tian's radical conviction, I couldn't stop wondering about what has enabled him to speak with such strong views. I realized that a contextualized and insightful understanding of the individual's subjectivity formation carried significant weight in the interpretation of the interview narratives.

With Jie, however, a historical and detailed analysis of her individual background allowed the findings to blossom into a fuller picture underneath her interpretations of the video. In a similar way as Tian whose narratives contested China's heroic self-image, Jie told an imagined story of a normal Chinese family who had to struggle on a daily base to negotiate the various cruel social inequalities in China's modernization process.

Jie and I met in the class of Asian American Comparative Sociology. Our shared motivation for taking the class originated from the strong awareness of social marginalization of Asians that is ubiquitous and deeply ingrained in American society. Thus, we yearned for acquiring a critical understanding of this situation, not just for the purpose of academic fulfillment, but also out of the desire to knowingly confront complex racial struggles with self-empowerment.

In fact, experiencing inequality and discrimination was never new to us. In the interview, I got to know that Jie's father was a "sent-down youth" from Shanghai. During the Cultural

Revolution, many young people in big cities were forced to leave their homes, resettle in the remote countryside, and toil in hard labor with peasants. While a lot of families were torn up, almost each family had some tragic and bitter story with this generation of “sent-down youth”. When life came back to normal after the Cultural Revolution, the government tried to bring closure to these stories by offering compensation that allowed the children of this generation to return to the cities. To these children, however, the opportunity of joining in modern city life never meant a complete disappearance of social prejudice and discrimination. I grew up with lots of children from these “sent-down youth” families, and my memory is still perpetuated with their stories. Many of them consistently felt rejected by the already excessively populated cities that regarded them as extra burdens. At a fairly young age, they already had to negotiate with the unfair baggage left by history. Indeed, they were frequently treated as targets of bullies as a result of their broken families (their parents usually had to stay in the countryside) as well as their lower economic status inevitably associated with their appearances. The “sent-down youth” and their children revealed a slice of China’s complicated contemporary social landscape, attesting to the unrest struggles that are situated underneath the façade of modernization.

Perhaps due to of her past life experience as a child of the “sent-down youth” growing up in Shanghai, Jie seemed particularly sensitive in both class and the interviews. Also, I wondered if it was the past experience that has caused her to hold a strong distaste for the utopian and heroic representation of China in the tourism video. In response to a video image where several Chinese girls smiled to the camera while walking on the streets of Shanghai, Jie laughed with an explicit sarcasm: “If you ever see girls smiling friendly at you in Shanghai, you must be having a very lucky day! Shanghainese are cold and snobbish people”. I was surprised by her straightforwardness. The image of Shanghai as a glamorous modern cosmopolis, which lots of

Shanghai took tremendous pride in, has effortlessly collapsed into ashes. Notably, in making this commentary, Jie posited a significant distance between herself and the privileged owners of the Chinese modernity.

Jie resumed:

This China is too beautiful for me to believe in it. Let me tell you a true story of China, and this is something that happens everyday. Imagine a normal family that has to deal with lots of struggles in Shanghai. Let's say that the mother is an accountant, while the father is a worker in the same small factory. Their combined income is just enough to make a living and support their child in school. Then suddenly, their old apartment is taken away by the government, because some developer has purchased the land to build new skyscrapers. What are they going to do? The compensation refunded from the government is of course not enough to buy a new apartment, but they are now forced to leave their old place. The father then attempts to invest the money in stocks, in the hope of collecting enough profits to buy a new place. The mother however doesn't agree with him, for the stock option risks all the money they have. Instead, she thinks that it's more important to save this money for their child to go to college in the future. You can imagine the damage that will be done to this family - lots of dramas. But, who cares about what those ordinary people are going through everyday? Instead, you still see these incredibly beautiful and glamorous images of China on TV all the time.

This imagined story told by Jie sounded to me like a TV drama, except that the TV drama usually provides a satisfactory solution for every character in the end. In Jie's story, however,

there was no such wishful romance; instead, the inescapable cruelty of reality loomed over the family, who found themselves placed in a helpless predicament. It was interesting to see that while this story was acknowledged to be a purely hypothetical scenario, the teller stressed its realism and trustworthiness. As such, this paradox implied that the video's heroic construction of the nation's modernization developments as the ultimate salvation for the Chinese people was deceptively unreal. Moreover, this story revealed palpable feelings mixed with rejection, depression, and painfulness, which have therefore significantly fragmented the warm, bright, and promising tones in the representations of "China, Forever". In Jie's interpretation, the national image of China was thus built upon the ignorance of normal Chinese people's struggles; a sharp consciousness of class inequality disrupted the coherent construction of "China, Forever".

If Tian's and Jie's efforts of resistance still entailed an active component of personal involvement, then Nali's response was more of a passive and cynical account in decoding "China, Forever".

Nali was a Ph.D student in Architecture. We met at the weekly research meeting of a university fellowship organization. After I presented this dissertation proposal at the research meeting, Nali volunteered to participate in the interview.

We started the interview with the question regarding her general impression for the video. She responded: "It feels like watching 'Chun Wan' again". "Chun Wan" is the short term for the show held by CCTV every New Year's night to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The show has been the most watched TV program in China ever since the 1980's. It is composed of lots of singing, dancing, and other entertaining performances. While the show often claims to be made to entertain the masses, it is also captured by intense glorification of the government and the nation. Just as I found this analogy quite interesting, Nali continued: "Those themes, such as

‘Zuguo Yijia Qin’ (we all live in the same family) and ‘Minzu Da Tuanjie’ (all ethnicities are united) in ‘Chun Wan’ have all been transferred into this video”.

After she made this comment, there was a brief moment of laughing between both of us. The amusing part came from the aphorisms that she just quoted – ‘Zuguo Yijia Qing’ and ‘Minzu Da Tuanjie’. Those were the terms that we used to hear about all the time in class, on TV, etc. However, after so many years away from that linguistic context, the sudden and unexpected appearance of those propaganda terms in our conversation was strangely amusing. Moreover, she spoke out those words in a lightly joking tone, almost resembling a mimetic parody, which therefore subverted the sacredness usually associated with those terms. The aphorisms invented to portray the greatness of the nation now appeared only to cynically ridicule its own existence.

By relating “China, Forever” to “Chun Wan”, Nali categorized Chinese cultural products composed of master narratives of the nation into one encompassing and stereotyped media genre. Nali’s jaded negativity came from such implied questions: Don’t we have enough of these? Why do we need more? More importantly, due to the pervasive pre-existence of this media genre, constructing glorified nation-state images in the tourism promotional material was viewed as taken-for-granted. In other words, instead of criticizing the underpinning nation-state power in the video, Nali’s cynical response naturalized the phenomenon. Furthermore, such observation was reinforced, as in the later part of the interview when Nali asked a question to both herself and me: “how can one represent China in a tourism video in different ways than it is now?” The irony was that while Nali’s disapproval of the video was indisputable, it however didn’t lead to an alternative imagination. As such, the genre of tourism promotional communication and the regime of nation-state were interpreted as forming a symbiotic relationship. Thus, not only has

the genre of tourism promotional communication been understood as appropriating the exertion of China's nation-state ideology, but also that the media stereotype has pre-determined the existence of nation-state in the tourism video. As a natural result, any particular scenes or sentiments that were meaningful to the individual are not meant to be identified from this show of tourism wonderland called China.

Furthermore, when reflecting on Nali's responses, one wondered about her subjectivity that allowed her to come to speak with an open parodic tone. In fact, Nali's conscious referral to those aphorisms was reminiscent of the fact that in the past, we were the ones who not only had to memorize them, but also write them into our school essays; perhaps at some point, we were socialized into believing in them. Hence, the subject being mocked here has indeed become a question: is this about China's nation-state ideology or about us as Chinese individuals as ourselves? It seems that a clear answer for this question can be identified from another story that Nali told in the interview.

In a further attempt to criticize the ideological aloofness of this tourism video, Nali lamented:

I think the problem with China's self-representation is that it has always been trapped in the mentality of praising the nation's history. I was reading a piece of news about a contest between Chinese and American high-school students yesterday. In the contest, the two groups were competing on proposing ideas to provide aid for an African country in a hypothetical situation. Americans were extremely practical, as they came up with strategies regarding how to find water, control population, and relieve AIDS, etc. But when it came to the turn of Chinese high-school students, they talked about totally non-relevant things - the

Silk Road and others that commended China as a great nation with unrivaled historicity. Then they sang and danced. It seemed that the Chinese did not have the ability to express themselves in realistic and useful terms. This contest was not even about China at all. This example showed that the Chinese have been so focused on the ideological mode of education that they have deprived the individuals of their abilities to think by themselves and in their own ways.

In Nali's criticism, the state's continuing rhetoric practices, whose main purpose is to emphasize the nation's grandness, have become a burden to its own imagination; therefore suppressing possibilities of viewing the nation in plural and sophisticated ways. As such, Nali's story echoed Chow's (1995) criticism of self-orientalism with China's contemporary movie production -- it was only through the appeal of ancientness that China appeared as the foundation of values and origin of civilization. Here, however, it was exactly this mythmaking in fabricating China's national narratives that repelled the audience.

Moreover, in Nali's story, China's nation-state ideology was clearly positioned as a source of oppression, which has not only victimized China's cultural production, but also Chinese individuals who have been culturalized into the system; implying a radical separation between the structural force and individual subjectivity. More importantly, to interpret Nali's story from Lacan's theory of the deflated self, Nali's placement of other Chinese individuals as victims -- in this case, the Chinese high school students -- has in fact reflected Nali's conception of herself. As such, the self-conception as victim has allowed Nali to escape the blame of being one who also used to enact China's nation-state ideology through various voluntary and involuntary social practices. Moreover, the role of victim signaled the impossibility to change the form of the Chinese state because, vis-à-vis the state, individuals were, precisely, powerless.

In fact, Nali's explicit cynicism constituted an act of surrendering to the symbiotic relationship between the nation-state and the tourism video "China, Forever". The irony has become, hence, while it seemed almost effortlessly for the Chinese individual audiences to mock the tourism video with the resistance of personal identification, the task of investigating the rationales and ethos underneath however remained intimidating. Zbigniew Herbert (1986) compares irony to salt: you may crunch it between your teeth and enjoy a momentary savor; but when the savor is gone, the brute facts are still there. What does one do with the brute fact once the irony is used up? To actively refute the tourism video, or to generate a voluntary passivity, the question remains: how does one deal with the abyss between the representations of China in tourism media and the conception of China in our immediate life?

The interview with Jing rendered a more complex and sophisticated view to this question. I met Jing in an art theory class. In the first interview question regarding her general impression for the video, she said: "It was beautiful. Very beautiful". I was surprised by this comment; especially after learning so much about art and aesthetics in deconstruction theories, "beautiful" has become a word neither of us dared to use imprudently. Moreover, considering previous interviewees' patterns of reactions, I was also expecting some harsh criticism from Jing.

As an intuitive response, I murmured to both her and myself: "Oh, really?!" She then tried to give some examples to explain the reasons as why visual images in the video felt aesthetically appealing to her. I sat there and listened to her words, while I couldn't stop thinking about various possibilities -- if she had perhaps misinterpreted the nature of this interview, or if I've said something misleading, or maybe she was just trying to say some flattering comments to make me happy. As I was consumed by these thoughts, I did not realize that I was wearing an unusually quiet and stoic look. Jing must have detected some hesitation from my facial

expression, as she consciously stopped her description of the video's visual beauty. After a careful thought, she said

I don't want to say bad things about this video. Why shall I? It's not that I don't agree with people like Jia Zhangke and their critical representations of China. I like them, too. But for overseas Chinese student in the U.S, there are just so many problems we are confronted with. I need something that makes me feel good and be proud of my country.

I asked Jing to clarify the "problems we are confronted with" that she meant. She made a comment in general terms, "racial exclusion and class oppression". But then she started to recall her past experience when she first came to the U.S. to study Jewish culture and religion in a Jewish college, which I found intriguing and relevant in explaining her response to the tourism video.

As the only Asian student in the entire college, who tried to bring a Chinese perspective to the Jewish diaspora in China, Jing felt that her "difference" was like a shadow following her appearance in such an environment:

The Jewish Americans were rich people, not like us, who had to live on the allowance from our graduate assistantship. I remember that I took a trip to New York City together with some Jewish students in the winter break. I had to carefully calculate the money that I could spend, while others were a lot more carefree. It was impossible for me to not feel unfairly and unjustifiably poor. Also, you would think that the Jews were supposed to be very sensitive and progressive regarding issues of racial discrimination because of their own problems. In fact, however, they only saw the suffering of the Jewish, not people

from other ethnic groups. They didn't realize that their privileged opinions of the world also caused coercion for many others. Anyway, feelings of isolation compounded with other inequalities generated from class and ethnicity haunted me - it was quite difficult, especially in the first year.

As an interesting observation, Jing recounted her past experience much as a sociological analysis, which was very rationally structured. In doing so, the narrator Jing tried to minimize the possibility for her personal emotions to blend in the talk; despite that strong words such as "unfair" and "inequality" were repeatedly used, the narrative was calmly delivered. Obviously, Jing has self-internalized the academic training in interpreting her life events. While allowing structural forces to govern the narrative organization has become a natural instinct, recollecting the past with enmeshed details and impulsive urges has become increasingly difficult. Or, maybe, a lot of things and feelings are ineffable.

More importantly, this contextualized analysis provided an explanation for Jing's previous comment that this video made her "feel good and proud". To be sure, Jing's diasporic experience – which probably contained more stories and emotive forces that were not fully included in the interview – was consciously incorporated as the shaping background in her explanation of the response. There were questions that she didn't explicitly ask, which were nevertheless implied in her interpretations, swirling in my head: aren't there enough antithetical views which substantially misinterpret, subordinate, and reject the Chinese in the Western world, when Lou Dobbs still hostilely refers to China as "that Communist country" every night on CNN, and when national policies such as Affirmative Actions remain have only engendered further racial discrimination against the Chinese? Why should the Chinese then choose to accuse such beautiful imagination of China in the video, since imagination means no harm?

In 1999, the British theater director Deborah Warner designed an art performance in London named the Angel Project. Angel actors with feathers were placed in an abandoned hotel; some with wings, some without, some gazing in the distance. As people later described to the media, being told to look out for angels led them to see angels -- to have, so to speak, angelic vision. Knowing that the angels were paid actors however didn't spoil the effect. In regard of this, Coetzee (2008) commented:

If a person were to try stripping the disguises from actors while they play a scene...showing to the audience their real looks... would not such a one spoil the whole play?... Destroy the illusion and any play is ruined.... All things are presented by shadows; yet this play is put on in no other way. (p.4)

Coetzee's comment illuminated Jing's approach to the tourism video "China, Forever". While audiences of the Angel Project refused to have their recognition of paid actors to change their appreciation of the purity of angels, Jing refused to place any political indictment on the tourism video "China, Forever" or treated it as a pure indoctrination of China's nation-state ideology, despite her full consciousness of the constructedness in the representational images. In doing so, Jing approached the tourism video as a benevolent imagination of China – one that signified something beautiful and vanished.

In fact, any political comment would seem arbitrary and futile because there is no discourse about politics that is not itself political. Such a view was reinforced by Jing's later comment in the interview, "no one can entirely escape from the constraint of one's own class positioning, and so does this video", implying that the submission to structural power was universal and inevitable. This view alone has sufficiently separated Jing's positioning from many other interviewees' approaches. Instead of regarding "China, Forever" as an exact source of

oppression or victimization, Jing approached the video as one that empowered the Chinese individuals to negotiate the adversities in the Western world. For many other Chinese interviewees, the quietism and willed obscurity of nation-state ideology could only be despicable; but for Jing, it was a voluntary choice, which complicated the overall picture of individuals' interpretations by adding a sophisticated and profound stroke. Precisely because of the voluntary nature of her choice, Jing's fondness of "China, Forever" was, in a sense, a sublime move.

In brief, the above analysis has revealed a variety of responses from Chinese individual audiences' interpretations in decoding the video "China, Forever". The video's purpose of producing grand and heroic national narratives through tourism media was explicit to all individual Chinese audiences. In response to the language of nation-state construction in "China, Forever", some chose to destabilize the national narratives by providing individual experiences and memories, suggesting a more humanistic lens of view to examine the collective experience of the nation China. Meanwhile, some other interviewees were rather radically convicted; rejecting the polished and coherent narratives by fragmenting the video with unequal and controversial social realities embedded in China's modernization project. Distinguished from those interviewees, Jing turned to personal experiences of displacement and marginalization in her individual diaspora to negotiate the encoded messages in "China, Forever". As such, to conceptualize the encoding dynamics, the Chinese individual audiences' differentiated interpretations have formed a web of cultural dialogues, while the tourism media product "China, Forever" exists in the nexus of the web and connects together dialogues between the self and the nation.

The next section of the analysis will specifically focus on individual interviews which happened during unexpected political events in spring 2008. During this time period, a broader sphere of power struggles was transferred to the lives of individual overseas Chinese in the U.S. Instead of being excluded from this social scene, their life experiences were deeply imbricated in self-negotiations of the meanings generated from political events. Thus, while the political incidents constituted a poignant social context for the Chinese individuals to decode the representation of China in the tourism video, “China, Forever” also served as an important medium that invoked particular narratives regarding the individual self and the nation.

### 5.3 DECODING IN EMERGENT POLITICAL EVENTS

#### 5.3.1 Background

The year 2008 witnessed a series of dramatic events for the Chinese people. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, several turbulent events took place in Tibet - “Tibetan riot” as it was framed in the Western media, and more politically convicted, as “an unrestrained outbreak designed by a group of Tibetan terrorists with devious political scheme” in the Chinese media. Furthermore, while the Western media sympathetically defined the event as a protest against the communist dictatorship initiated by the Tibetan people fighting for independence, the Chinese media approached it as an organized vicious attack on Han civilians. I remember when I turned on the international channel of CCTV (China Central TV) on the early morning of March 15th, a Han father appeared on the screen, sobbing for his 8-year-old son killed by Tibetan mobs during the riot. In despair, the father recalled scenes where the mobs broke into the small souvenir store that he owned in Lhasa and set the store on fire. The tragedy happened so suddenly that he had little time to save his son before the store was burnt down to ashes. In the end of the interview, the father was almost

entirely choked, who nevertheless kept asking: “Why did this happen? Why did they do this to my little boy?” A few minutes later, I switched the channel to CNN. Interestingly yet ironically, CNN was reporting exactly the same event, except that militant images of armed Chinese soldiers patrolling on the streets of Lhasa now dominated the narrative construction. Both sides assured that they sought to represent the truth; yet precisely because of so, they appeared almost as parallel parodies to each other. What is, after all, this chaos that is full of blinded hatred and fear?

To understand this event means a lot to this dissertation research. To be sure, there were four individual interviews that took place during the time of Tibetan riots and subsequent events at the Olympic torch relay. Just as these unexpected events stimulated intensive thoughts and debates regarding the particular issues of the Chinese nation and people within global Chinese communities, they have also formed an emergent social context for the interviews. So to speak, the events were not only subjects inevitably discussed by interviewees in interpreting the tourism video “China, Forever”, but have also formed exterior backdrop forces transferred to micro circumstances, shaping individual Chinese audiences’ negotiations of the national representation of China in tourism discourse. For this reason, I made the decision to separate interviews during this time (from March 14<sup>th</sup> to April 10<sup>th</sup>) from the interviews which happened prior to as well as after the events to engage in an independent analysis. Thus, following the anthropological belief that cultural meanings are formed through fluid, contingent, and lived human experiences, the following analysis seeks to investigate the interview narratives originated from this particular time period in relation to the ongoing political dynamics. To do so, it aims to engage in a contextualized analysis with detailed and historical explanation of the political incidents. Moreover, since my knowledge and understanding of the situation is the source of description,

the analysis is inevitably implicated in my own subjectivity. I do, however, attempt to avoid imposing any arbitrary explanation and justification, as I understand that the real situation is much more complex than what could be condensed into a few pages. I hope that after the analysis, a more sophisticated understanding of the power struggles underlying the individuals' interpretations of the tourism video "China, Forever" in the backdrop of the political events can be achieved.

One of the dominant features of Tibet's modern history has been the question of its legal status and the nature of its relationship with China. In fact, precisely because interpretations of the Tibetan history are so enmeshed in various layers of political-ideological struggles, it lacks clear-cut consensus even among scholars (Shakya, 1999). In other words, the current political interests sought by different parties – those entangling Western political power, the exile politics of Dalai Lama and his fellow Tibetans, and the China's nation-state discourse – continue to complicate and re-write Tibet's historical landscape. Caught in such battle, arrested is Tibet's history, in forms of "truth, fear, and some lies" (McGranahan, 2005, p.570). On one hand, Dalai's re-telling of Tibet's history has been consistently founded upon the purpose of legitimizing Tibet as a historically independent nation with a permanent population and a defined territory; ignoring, however, the very fact that concepts such as "nationhood" and "ethnicity" were Western imported ideas which didn't fully register the Tibetan's consciousness until Mao's occupation of Tibet in 1950s (Kolas, 1996). Conversely, China's portrayal has been served to justify Tibet as a historically subordinate region to China's previously existed political system, therefore imposing a straight and linear logic of history by denying the complicated disruption of modernity. In doing so, the political antithesis between the two sides has resulted an overtly simplistic and stubborn interpretation of Tibet's history without room for complexity and

responsibility, which, as framed by the London-based Tibetan historian Shakya, is a fundamental “denial of history” (Shakya, 1999, p.xxii).

More importantly, what appears as particularly relevant to the socio-political context of interviews conducted for this dissertation research is the role that the Western world plays in China’s conflict with Tibet. While much of the attention has been given to the relationship between the Tibetans and the Chinese, the discussion regarding the intrusion of Western colonial force in Tibet and especially, its impact on China’s interpretations of its modern history, has been rather under-represented. In fact, Britain was the first Western power encountered by the Tibetans. In 1903 and 1904, the British Indian troops invaded Tibet, seeking to gain a base in one of the buffer states surrounding British India. While the British colonialist power in Tibet didn’t dwindle until the WWII, CIA’s secretive involvement in Tibet in 1950–60 continued the Western interference in the already-complicated Sino-Tibet relationship (McGranahan, 2005). Precisely because of so, the Chinese perception of Tibet has always been deeply entrenched in the Chinese motif where Chinese people fighting against the Western colonialism to fully regain dignity for the entire nation. In other words, the Western appearance in Tibet is regarded as an intended separatism, much like the enforced separation that took away Hong Kong from China in 1842. As a result, in modern Chinese consciousness, the acute awareness of losing Tibet to the Western colonial power has been self-inscribed as an integrated component in China’s own semi-colonial history. While the unequal and humiliated colonial past continues to haunt China in the current post-colonial condition, reclaiming Tibet is therefore justified to restore the coherence of Chinese history - a history that has been much disturbed by the Western world.

To comment on Mao’s war in Tibet is an extremely difficult task, simply because due to it being such a politically- charged event, historicity has been turned into a victim in the process

of mapping and re-mapping global power structure. Undoubtedly, much as how he radically forced Maoist Communism on China, little about Tibet's pre-existing social system, religion, and ethnicity was respected. The price for undermining the complexity of humanity and local socio-cultural developments was huge. In today's Tibet, the Han supremacy, confrontations between tradition and modernization, as well as social inequalities of class, intertwine with each other, composing a multi-layered complex social landscape. The Tibetan people need salvation, but from whom?

When I was a master's student at Purdue University, I witnessed a male Chinese student angrily screaming "liar" at the Dalai Lama when he was giving a public speech supposedly about peace and freedom in Tibet. The antithesis was more than palpable. To many Chinese individuals, the Western world's endorsement and empowerment of Dalai Lama represents a continuing threat to China's devotion to maintain an independent and free country – a desire deeply entrenched ever since the forced entry of British troops. The feeling, in a sense, signifies China's unease striving for an equal status in the global democracy. However, neither the Chinese nor the Western world sees the irony of the idea of spreading democracy here, when choosing between the Chinese government or Dalai Lama becomes the only two choices for Tibetan people. J.M Coetzee (2008), in his book "Dairy of a Bad Year", ridicules the Western ideal of democracy in this way:

It means telling people that whereas formerly they had no choice, now they have a choice. Formerly they had A and nothing but A; now they have a choice between A and B. 'Spreading freedom' means creating the conditions for people to choose freely between A and B. The spreading of freedom and the spreading of democracy go hand in hand. The ballot paper does not say: Do you want A or B

or neither? It certainly never says: Do you want A or B or no one at all? The citizen who expresses his unhappiness with the form of choice on offer by the only means open to him—not voting, or else spoiling his ballot paper—is simply not counted, that is to say, is discounted, ignored. (p.38)

Tibet's problem manifests the inherent uneven nature in the concept of modernity. In the wake of modernity, Tibet only found itself caught by bigger superpowers - China, India, and the West. Ideas of freedom, liberation, and democracy can only be super-imposed when the Tibetans' own voices continue to be ignored.

The riots abovementioned on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2008 soon spread out to other provinces surrounding Tibet. Moreover, during the Beijing Olympics torch relay in London on April 6<sup>th</sup>, outraged protesters, composed primarily of Westerners who supported the independence of Tibet and some overseas Tibetans, appeared in the Torch relay. Violent confrontations between the protesters and overseas Chinese, who went to the relay to champion China, happened during the process of relay. During the time, the media played a very important role in defining the development of the event. To be sure, in the mainstream Western media, the protests were portrayed as justified demonstrations against the Chinese communist dictatorship in Tibet. Both representational pictures and narratives have implicitly rendered heroic images of the protests with undertones of sympathy and compassion. Thus, despite that in the recent riots many innocent Han civilians were attacked and killed, the Western media kept its usual political stance in portraying the event. To many overseas Chinese, such attitude taken by the Western media was unjustifiably biased, manifesting nothing but lived practices of ongoing colonialism, especially when connecting the current situation to the history of Tibet. The purpose of holding

the Olympics to demonstrate China's sovereignty and unity, and thus to redeem the humiliated past, was now easily defeated even before the Olympics took place.

On April 7<sup>th</sup>, the relay moved to Paris, and the confrontation was escalated into a chaotic and almost comical scene. In the process, the torch was extinguished by Chinese security officials several times. In front of the city hall of Paris, the Chinese security officials extinguished the torch in order to protest against the flag from RSF: an image of Olympic symbols in five handcuffs. The flag was hanging on a window of the city hall. In the headlines of both CNN and BBC, the story of a French Tibet-independence-supporter who grabbed the torch and then hit the Chinese torch runner was eye-catching. Suddenly, the torch carried a sacred symbolic meaning to the Chinese, which no longer represented the Olympics but the nation China - suffering from contamination and damage.

Just as the torch was about to arrive San Francisco on April 9<sup>th</sup>, a Tibet independence supporter put a giant banner "One World, One Dream: Free Tibet" on the San Francisco Golden Gate bridge, where the imminent relay was supposed to run through. Thus, the Beijing Olympic campaign slogan "One World, One Dream" was borrowed as the referential context to ridicule China. In this situation, the overseas Chinese in the U.S organized a large-scale counter-protest, which has in fact overwhelmed the protesters. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, San Francisco was bathed in a sea of redness - red Chinese national flags, Chinese individuals with red China symbols on their faces and clothes, red slogans with themes supporting China and the Beijing Olympic Games. As such, Chinese nationalism was fostered to a war-like mentality.

### 5.3.2 Analysis of Interview Narratives

My first interview with Hui took place on the afternoon of March 14<sup>th</sup>. Neither of us was aware of the Tibet riot at that time. In the previous part of the analysis, Hui was briefly

introduced as the Mathematics Ph.D student from Guangzhou. Moreover, his recount of Cantonese food as a response to the representation of China in the tourism video was also analyzed. In the interview, we also discussed issues of representations of ethnicity in the video.

Hui seemed to enjoy this interview a lot, as he called this interview “chatting”. In the interview, when answering the question about his general impression of the video, Hui mentioned that the representation of China’s multi-ethnicities was impressive. In fact, he said:

You know that I’m from a big city in China, which is very globalized and modern (Guangzhou is the capital city of Canton Province). I never had a chance to be exposed to those minorities. This video made me want to visit the minority regions and experience their unique cultures. They fit into the representation of China’s tradition.

I was surprised by the level of insight that Hui had in viewing the ethnic representations in “China, Forever”. It seemed that those exotic images of Chinese ethnic minorities – a strategy often employed in tourism media - have successfully estranged themselves, luring a Han Chinese audience to craft fantasies. Moreover, to categorize the ethnic minorities as “tradition” implied the cliché stereotype that Han people attach to non-Han Chinese, similar to white Euro-Americans’ approach to the natives. Furthermore, the invisibleness of Chinese ethnic minorities in big cities was rather taken-for-granted, without any explorations of reasons behind such occurrence. In the later interviews, I found that the oblivion to China’s ethnic struggles was actually a common response from Chinese interviewees; underneath the apathy, there situated a fundamental sense of Han superiority.

The purpose of the above analysis was to provide a background as well as comparison for Hui’s narratives in the next interview. My second interview with Hui was unexpected. On April

7<sup>th</sup>, the day after the torch relay in London and the giant banner put on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, I was studying at Giuliani's coffee shop as usual. Once in the afternoon I accidentally looked up from my computer, and I saw him walking straight into the coffee shop. After we greeted each other, he immediately asked if I have read about the recent incidents with the Olympic Torch relay.

Hui looked upset and anxious. After sitting down, he said: "I wish this tourism video could be played more to the Westerners. Those Westerners don't understand anything about China". "What made you say so", I asked. He answered:

Wasn't that obvious? All they wanted to do was to attach labels – the cruel, the dictating, and the communist – to China. Whatever bad things they have in their mind. Do they even know about the history of Tibet? They should watch this video to know that we are a peace-loving, beautiful, and modern nation.

Hui had too many things eager to say that he began stuttering. Only a few days ago, his attitude towards the tourism video was somewhat nonchalant. With the emergent political incidents, however, this video has become a passionate medium for him to negotiate meanings between the individual self and nation.

Something uneasy and unrest penetrated the air; suddenly, I felt that I've gone back to the moment when the Chinese student at Purdue University shouted "liar" at the Dalai Lama. I was intrigued by the student's courage, but more embarrassed by the lack of sophistication in this response that the Chinese displayed to the world. Out of sheer intuition, I tried to debilitate Hui's antagonism, by saying: "You know that a lot of protests are just hippies and young people rebellious against Western cultural traditions. They think Tibet and Dali Lama are cool things. They didn't think that far". "But they hurt the Chinese in doing so. Haven't they done enough

things to humiliate us in wrongful ways”? Hui blurted out these comments before I could say more. Both of us grew silent after that. Hui was truthful to his feelings; no matter what, any sincere feelings were respectable. After all, who was I to instruct him to see that there existed multiple structures of power relationships encompassed by the general term “the West”, and that accusing the West in a simplistic way would also put the Chinese in an arbitrarily blinded position? I didn’t want to assume this self-righteous role, and maybe what I should have done was just to document his feelings and thought.

I also realized that if our conversation had to continue in this direction, the interview would be trapped in a lot of extremist emotions and commentaries. So, I tried to redirect the interview to a different route: “Now, do you feel that you wanted to add something new to our previous interview regarding your thoughts of the tourism video”? He answered:

Now I feel even more certain that including the representations of ethnic minorities is absolutely necessary in the tourism video, so that Westerners can see that the minorities are a part of the Chinese and they live well. The representations of Tibet are too biased in the Western media. All they know about is that Tibetan people don’t have basic human right. That’s not true”. “Have you ever been to Tibet”, I asked. “No. But I read about that before Mao liberated Tibet, they were still pretty much a society, which practiced the chattel slavery system. Even some Western Tibetologist acknowledged that Tibet was characterized by a form of institutionalized inequality before 1949 -- a serfdom, to a significant extent. If I remember correctly, in old Tibet there were a small number of farmers who subsisted as a kind of free peasantry, and perhaps an additional very few people who composed the “middle-class” families of

merchants, shopkeepers, and small traders. Lots of them were beggars. There also were slaves, usually domestic servants, who owned nothing. Their offspring were born into slavery. Also, you think that Buddhism preaches about inner peace and solace, but the Buddhist rule of Tibetan society was infused with a lot of violence and savagery, which stood in marked contrast to other religions. For hundreds of years competing, Tibetan Buddhist sects engaged in bitterly violent clashes and executions. It's very different from Han Buddhism, which pursues peace and seclusion. If you go to the Tibet museum, you'll see the human skulls that Dalai Lamas used for wine containers. I can give you even more disgusting examples. I know that Dalai Lama boasted Tibet as an unspoiled environment and a society of peace and harmony. How could that be possible? Even the most powerful country in the world, the U.S.A, is still far away from peace and harmony, no matter within or outside the country; Tibet was not a utopian where inequality and cruelty could be forbidden! There were a lot of struggles that have been suppressed by Dali. Don't get me wrong. I'm not condemning Buddhism, but you see that, any religion, when interconnected with political power, was then turned into violence and turbulence, such as Islam in the Middle East.

Regardless of whether Hui's knowledge of the history of Tibet was true or not, I was amazed by his lengthy analysis, especially when relating to his comment in the previous interview that he did not have a chance to be exposed to Chinese ethnic minorities. While Hui posited himself as a mindless outsider to the Chinese ethnic minorities - almost a Han voyeurist - in the last interview, now he seemed genuinely concerned and knowledgeable about the Tibetan people. The Tibetans, as implied by Hui's interpretations, were an integral part of the tourism

video, the nation of China, as well as his individual Chinese self. How to explain this sudden and dramatic change? Lacan once said that health was the silence of human organs; in other words, it was through the sickness and pains that we discovered the existence of ourselves. The pain inflicted by unfair representations in Western media – “but they hurt the Chinese”, as Hui personally suffered --invoked an emergent facet in Hui’s conception of both the individual and collective Chinese self. Just as meanings of broader social struggles were translated into bearings of the individual life, an abrupt awareness to construct a cohesive and unified image of China surfaced in Hui’s decoding of “China, Forever”.

Hui continued, “I want you to write this in your dissertation, so that people will read it and get to know the truth”. Hearing this, I laughed. He said:

Don’t laugh. Seriously, your research means a lot – this tourism video and the overseas Chinese. Maybe I’ve undermined tourism promotions before. But now I see that it has provided an occasion for the Westerners to see that China means well to others.

It was interesting to see that this dissertation research was consciously placed together with the tourism video “China, Forever”, both as institutionalized mediums to vocalize his opinions. I was both taken-for-granted and surprised. While it was my purpose to observe and document individual opinions of the overseas Chinese when I made the decision to do this dissertation research, I’d never thought that my interviewees would consciously take advantage of this opportunity to speak out. Hui didn’t stop narrating:

You know that the Han Chinese have contributed a lot to the developments of Tibet – education, technology, and medical care, among many others. Just think about how many Han people have died to build the railroad for Tibet! Why the

Westerners choose not to see these things? It's not that Tibet is perfect now, but we are in the process to develop it to a better place. If anything, I don't feel that the representation of a harmonious relationship between Han and ethnic minorities is exaggerated in the video. If the Chinese don't reveal it, how could then the global audiences see it?

Pondering on Hui's long narratives on Tibet's dark and cruel past as well as the more developed present under the help of the Han, I wondered about the logic behind his comments. Not to withstand that there was some historical truth to Hui's analysis, his narratives were nevertheless powerfully underpinned by the pervasive stereotype that Tibetans were backward barbarians while the Han was the savior who brought in more advanced socio-cultural systems and technologies. In doing so, little did he realize that it was exactly this taken-for-granted assumption of Han's inherent superiority which has generated unspeakable oppression for the Tibetans. The situation was thus, ironically, comparable to the relationship between China and the West – just as labels of backward, uncivilized, under-developed were static images that the orientalist Western world assigned to China, the same conceptions were what the Chinese held of Tibetans. The subjugated was at the same time the subjugator, while one layer of subjugation imprinted on another. Moreover, in the later part of the interview (not included here considering the limitation of length), Hui was particularly infuriated with the Western world's ignorance of China's socio-economic developments and improved environment on human rights. This, however, didn't impede him from practicing the same social Darwinism logic --the less civilized must be replaced by the more civilized -- on the Tibetans. Hui's analysis illuminated the inherent controversies and ambivalences embedded in the overseas Chinese individuals' negotiations of

national narratives produced by the tourism media, in particular the relationship to the nation and the individual self.

Moreover, as an overseas Chinese caught in the middle of this political chaos, Hui's interpretation of the tourism video "China, Forever" must also be read as a personal response actively enacted with the emergent confrontations of power struggles. In Hui's decoding, the heroic construction of the nation China in the tourism video was sought after and championed, which hence posed a sharp contrast with interviewees' responses analyzed in the first part of this chapter. Phlegmatic attitude, personal cynicism, and individual resistance have disappeared. Suddenly, criticizing China's nation-state ideology and the manipulation of Chinese ethnic minorities in the tourism video was interpreted as meaningless and coward, at the very time when the nation was under attack. Thus, a palpable fusion between the individual and nation could be identified from Hui's approval of China's official approach to Tibet. Furthermore, the representational tourism language in the "China, Forever" was even suggested as a weapon to defy the Western world's imposed accusation of China. The monolithic nation-state ideology perpetuated in "China, Forever", which was the very reason that many other Chinese interviewees refused to identify with, now provided a quintessential beautiful image for the Hui to rest his hope and imagination on. From a critical lens of view, however, this situation indeed meant using an arbitrary argument to oppose an equally arbitrary counterargument. The limitation was self-manifested.

On one hand, the interview with Hui demonstrated the power of exterior socio-political forces in shaping the individual subjectivity. On the other hand, Hui's decoding of the tourism video in this particular political environment imparted the complex nature of human minds. That is, despite all the nihilism that every individual may harbor to oppose certain collective

imposition, Hui's narratives illuminate a facet that exists in each of us – to seek cohesion with the nation in threatened situations. As its implication, a paradoxical relationship lies in-between of the individual self and the nation – much like that of a two-sided coin. Admittedly or not, without recognizing a certain degree of collectivity, the individual identity can only be tenuous.

In fact, Hui was not alone in readjusting his personal decoding for “China, Forever” in this political event. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, I happened to meet Feng on Green Street. The previous analysis made a brief introduction of Feng, who was the Chinese girl I met in a psychology class. Her narratives were employed to illustrate the common perception that “China, Forever” ignored humanistic perspectives to construct the national image in the tourism media.

As Feng and I greeted each other, I noticed that there was a giant Beijing Olympics pin on her backpack. I couldn't stop pulling my eyes from the pin, as it looked disproportionately large on her small backpack. During that time period, a lot of Chinese students at the University of Illinois started to wear shirts with some symbols of China - the Beijing Olympic Game, panda bears, and China's national flag, etc. I once saw a Chinese student holding two China's national flags, marching through campus with a solemn look. Wearing those symbols announced a firm and conscious personal stance. I was surprised that Feng had also joined in this group, especially considering her previous resistance of the nation-state ideology in “China, Forever”. Feng must have also noticed that I was looking at the pin; a slight awkwardness loomed over us. I said: “Wow, what a big pin. I didn't see that you were wearing it last time”. Feng's smile was almost a little bit shy: “Yes. I have had it for a long time. I got it from my friend in Beijing”.

After this short meeting, we met again in class two days later. We chatted a little bit after class and I asked her for another interview. As her first response, Feng seemed a little reluctant for another interview. I didn't realize until later that Feng was actually somewhat embarrassed by

her readjusted attitudes. While Hui took his change of self-positioning as a natural reaction and never tried to explain it, Feng seemed very aware of her re-adaptation. In addition, compared to Hui's outburst of angry comments, Feng had chosen a more inward and less confrontational strategy.

In the second interview, instead of waiting for me to ask a question, Feng said:

I know what you are going to ask me about. It is a really complicated thing. And I didn't realize its complexity until it happened. First of all, I don't like these things. I hate power, especially when those unsettled conflicts of power keep hurting people. But it is true that the Western media has wronged China without investigating the history. They are sacrificing the spirit of the Olympics to create an ideological antagonism, and I'm wearing this pin to protest against this.

"But have you realized that by doing so, you've also invoked nationalism which you disagree with in the tourism video"? I asked. "Yes, I have". She seemed rather calm:

That's why I'm saying that it's complicated. I was wrong in that nationalism can be necessary and valuable sometime. I still disapprove of overt nationalism. I knew that there were people who angrily vandalized Carrefour (a French brand super market chain) in Beijing after the torch relay in Paris. I don't think extreme behaviors like those are righteous and helpful at all.

I asked: "So what do you think of the video now"? She responded:

Still, it's not that all the social inequalities in China would magically disappear all at once. The children of migrant labors are still denied their chance to go to school in the cities, while the Chinese government keeps spending millions to invest in a video such as this. They could have totally spent this money to do something

more beneficial, to perhaps make a movie about the real life of Tibetan monks. For example, Westerners shall see that monks in Lhasa also use the newest Motorola cell phone, and crave for modernity like everybody else. Also, not all Tibetans want to be monks or even to be religious. However, for the sake of gaining more income for the family, many young Tibetans don't have other choice but to be monks, because tourism brings in a lot of monetary benefits. Why don't they disclose something like that? The real scenes of life will totally crush the Westerners' utopian conception of Tibet as an uncontaminated holy land.

"So you still don't enjoy the tourism video because its underpinning nation-state ideology suppresses real life stories", I sought confirmation from her. "I don't. But I have to admit that, at this moment, it's somewhat comforting to watch this video. It constitutes a voice".

Feng's narratives revealed a more sophisticated picture. To be sure, the emergent political situation did not turn Feng to an entirely blinded view of the imposing national construction in "China, Forever". Nevertheless, her narratives were captured by struggles in the process of repositioning her inner self in relation to the encoded messages in the video, China's unequal social realities, and the Western world. In doing so, the existence of the nation-state ideology – with all its coercion and imposition – was approached with a more tolerated point of view; for, in the end, Feng described it as "constitutes a voice". What is this voice about? Has this voice also satisfied something indescribable and deep in her heart? The assured answer is that as a Chinese individual on diaspora, such struggle will continue as an integral part of the exiling experience. The negotiation of here and there, now and then, is a life long project.

The above analysis has delineated individual interviews situated in an emergent socio-political circumstance. To incorporate the political events in the analysis is important, because no

social condition exists as a vacuum, while it is always in some social relations that cultural products – this tourism video included - are consumed, interpreted, and negotiated. For overseas Chinese individuals, being on diaspora has self-determined a forefront where the nation and the individual self formed a central relationship in defining the diasporic life experience. In this light, this emerging political situation provided a particularly intriguing context for Chinese individuals to reflect on national narratives encoded in “China, Forever”. In regard to interview narratives formed without the shaping context of the political events, the individual responses to the nation-state narratives in “China, Forever” went from disapproval and resistance to a more supported and tolerated tone.

As such, in investigating the dynamics of encoding and decoding, the analysis revealed that the conceptualization of “China, Forever” - as a particular tourism commercial and therefore the interpretative approach of which must come from a straight tourism sense -was now blurred. Indeed, as illustrated in the interview narratives, the decoding of cultural messages in “China, Forever” mediated individual Chinese to renegotiate the understandings of the Chinese self, the nation China, and practices of Western politics; which have thus engaged in wider socio-cultural dialogues and power struggles.

#### 5.4 DECODING REPRESENTATIONS OF TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION

In the previous chapter, the analysis of encoded messages in “China, Forever” revealed that representations of China’s tradition, modernity, as well as the relationship between the two parts have constituted the central theme in the narrative construction of the tourism video. In the decoding part, this theme remained to play a pivotal role in individuals’ interpretations of “China, Forever”.

To begin with, the prior analysis has discussed that the portrayal of China's tradition in the tourism video was infused with a self-orientalist overtone; in an exaggerated and dramatic style, an ancient, mythical, and changeless China was delineated. In the individual interviews, however, many Chinese interviewees strongly resisted such representation. Their rationale was rather powerful - the video approached the nation's tradition as flamboyant and superficial decorations for China's national image instead of something innate and profound, which was therefore a frivolous move. For example, in the previous analysis, Nali mentioned that the problem of China was that it has been trapped in the obsession with China's history - as if the longer the history, the more glorious and powerful the nation. In addition, Jie's response has also revealed a compelling pattern of thought in destabilizing the video's self-orientalist construction of China's tradition.

In the previous part, Jie was introduced as a Ph.D student I met in a sociology class who grew up in Shanghai as a child of the "sent-down youth". I've always felt that the appearance of Jie carried a deep sense of familiarity to me; I could easily see her being that girl in my neighborhood whom I used to go to school with everyday, or my roommate in college who shared my headache with calculus homework. Partly because of this strange familiarity we felt with each other, we have become good friends throughout the time.

In the interview, Jie held a strong antithesis towards the delivering of China's tradition in the tourism video. She said:

Chinese have always taken so much pride in the history. What is the meaning of boasting the past? They think that more respect would be paid to China after people watch this video? It's like a person - when he takes so much pleasure in

indulging in the past, something must be wrong in the present. It's pathetic. It gives you a reason to believe that China is lost in the current time.

However, a few minutes later after the interview, we started to chat about the Asian American sociology class we were taking. She then made a comment on the lack of Chinese history and literature education that was commonly found with Chinese Americans:

If I will have a child in this country, I want to raise her up with the nurturing of classical Chinese literature. If she is not able to read Chinese characters and appreciate Chinese poems or paintings, I will be very disappointed. The ability to identify with traditional Chinese culture is very important to her identity.

If this Chinese "tradition" that Jie expected her hypothetical daughter to appreciate was to be simply understood as the same with the "tradition" that she just denied in "China, Forever", then an easy conclusion could be drawn that Jie's narratives were internally self-controversial.

However, it was exactly this seeming controversy that has highlighted divergent meanings of the same words in two narration contexts; revealing the fact that it was not the constitutive body of China's tradition that has been disapproved, but rather its representational language in the tourism video - one that flirted with symbols of the Chinese tradition. In other words, Jie's favor of Chinese traditional culture, which she considered as an essential inner component of Chinese identity, didn't however turn the Chinese tradition represented in the tourism video into a more favored view. Instead, the representation was decoded as a manipulation of cultural symbols driven by the urge to show the Chinese pride.

As much as the myth making of China's past in the video "China, Forever" was resisted by many, it was also important to note that interviewees' opinions regarding the encoded messages were rather diversified. In specific, some individuals related their interpretations to the

unresolved confrontation between China's modernization and tradition, therefore justifying the video's approach.

Mo was a Ph.D student in Physics. I got to know Mo through Hui. After my interview with Hui, he recommended Mo to me: "Mo is my good friend. He is also from Guangzhou. I'm sure that he will be happy to participate in this interview". When Mo came into the coffee shop, I soon realized that I'd seen him before at the Vigil Night held by Chinese students at the University of Illinois for the Sichuan earthquake that had just happened in May. The world was small.

In the interview, Mo mentioned that because of China's intensive engagements with globalized modernization developments, something consistent about the culture and society has been severely disturbed. He framed this idea in an interesting analogy:

So, a long time ago, the Chinese interior design for homes had a systematic set of rules and styles. For example, the mirror needed to be placed in the living room, in a particular angle; more, such particular arrangement carried itself with a specific meaning. Now, if you go to a lot of middle-class Chinese homes, you'll see that things are randomly mixed. The living room can be entirely following an English style, while the bedroom has a piece of furniture from Italy and a bed from Japan. A distinctively Chinese culture system has been abandoned. That's why the representation of Chinese tradition is necessary and valuable in this tourism video, even if it's just superficial. Because without those signals of Chinese tradition, we can't see and feel our existence in a tangible way; the whole modernization in China could only be chaos. In particular, this feeling has become

stronger after coming to the U.S, where you see things are very systematically categorized.

This analogy raised by Mo could be interpreted as a personal nostalgia regarding the lost of purity and originariness in reaction to China's rapid and drastic modernization developments. Numerous academic studies have argued white Euro-Americans' lamentation of the disappearance of nativeness was a matter of colonialism, which imposed static and willful images - those that were fixated during the colonial time - to socio-political changes initiated by people who were once dominated. But, when a Chinese voluntarily joined in such lamentation together with a tourism media product that promoted a quintessential Chinese nationalism, it complicated the picture.

In particular, when relating the analysis to the absent context in Mo's narratives -China's massive history and ongoing struggles with meanings as well as methods to modernity - it hinted at complex social realities in the postcolonial and postmodern China. In the West, the social order and cultural values have been established since the industrial revolution and maintained relatively stable; "things are very systematically categorized", as Mo described. In contemporary China, however, as Arif Dirlik would argue, precisely because of China's particular history as well as the pre-existing model of modernity and pre-determined global power structure, China's engagements in modernization have been contrastively characterized by drastic changes and ambivalent transformations. Embedded in such social landscape, Mo was eager to pull things back, to restore an uncontaminated and pure image of China's past, while the representation in "China, Forever" both invoked and satisfied Mo's imagination. In this light, Mo's narratives echoed the self-orientalist role assumed by the video "China, Forever"; both the individual and the collective narratives represented yearnings for a departure that was irretrievable.

Moreover, as it was argued in the previous analysis, the representation of China's tradition and modernization was, in an almost arbitrary sense, separated from each other. As such, it made a problematic statement, for the traditional component appeared as invisible in China's modernized present. In doing so, it implied the replacement of China's tradition by modernity; to be sure, China's historical past has ceaselessly evolved into the modern time. While such logic of narration has profoundly invoked Social Darwinism in "China, Forever", similar conceptions were surprisingly prevalent in individual audiences' interpretations.

My friend Yu introduced Wen to me after my interview with him: "Wen has a Master's degree in sociology, who is now in law school at the University of Illinois. You and her must have a lot of things to talk about in the interview". Knowing about Wen's background enabled me to form a presupposed image from the stereotype of sociology students that I knew in class – progressive and critical, who denounced the monopoly of capitalism as well as the dominating Western power in the global world, and who frequently quoted Marx or Antonio Gramsci in their comments. However, just like a lot of other stereotypes, this presumption soon collapsed when the interview started. Wen seemed quite approachable and practical. To describe her general impression to the video, Wen said:

The first part of the video – the one about China's tradition – is too long. It makes Westerners feel that China is the same as it was five thousands years ago. But I guess it is what foreigners want to see which also enables the Chinese to make tourism profits. To be honest, I always feel offended by the fact that a lot of Americans, when knowing I am from China, automatically assume that I probably grew up herding ducks and playing flute on the back of buffalo. That's why the

video should show more modern sites of China, like the later part of the video does, more pictures of hotels and shopping malls.

Wen's words clearly invoked an image as a victim from the Western practices of orientalism. To be sure, threatened by the power of imposition from orientalist stereotypes, Wen interpreted the idea of "tradition" as a dragging burden to both the appearances of China and Chinese individuals. On a second thought, however, the image of a child growing up playing flute on the back of buffalo was less likely a discriminating label that Americans attached to the Chinese, but more likely one that Chinese city folks assigned to the Chinese people from the countryside; for things related to agricultural and pastoral labors habitually appeared as despicable traditions in the vocabulary of modern Chinese city people. Thus, I perceived a sense of taken-for-grantedness in Wen's employment of such image, which not only revealed the privilege that Wen naturally posited over the Chinese peasants, but more importantly, hinted at a sense of self-inferiority in her perception of Chinese tradition.

I decided to explore more of the negative connotation of "tradition" in Wen's response: "Why do you think so"? She didn't hesitate to provide her answer:

Westerners are oblivious to China's achievements of modernity. China stays as a traditional and backward country in their mind. I know that in the reality, China's economic developments are unfortunately not even. There are still parts that are not so modern; many places don't have the means to go beyond the constraints of tradition." "So, you think that tradition can only be confining?" I asked. She answered: "I think so. I prefer the cosmopolitan culture. It's modern and convenient – with subways, skyscrapers, libraries, etc. When I was learning French in college, the textbook taught us that in France, the government only

allowed the interior of traditional architectures to be modernized and renovated, while the exterior had to be preserved to the maximum extent. This is ironical, because I feel that once the inside is changed, nothing can be restored to the original state.

“So you approve of the hegemonic representation of China’s modernity in the second part of the video”? I found myself becoming a little bit upset. She slightly laughed, as if teasing me:

Yes, I do. I believe that modernization is a hegemonic globalization. It doesn’t matter to me whether those traditions disappear or not, for they have never been a part of my life. Even if they disappear in real life, they are still on TV!

After becoming a graduate student at the University of Illinois, I’d been awarded with a fellowship from a university research organization - the Human Dimension of Environmental System. In the weekly research seminar that I participated for the fellowship, people were motivated by the responsibility to preserve our shared natural and cultural environment; promoting values of the original, traditional, and natural. I often found myself caught in such conversations as the following example - the fact that the Whole Foods packages every four tomatoes into one plastic unit for sale, which has therefore caused more consumption of packaging materials, was an endeavor driven by evil capitalism at the cost of our environment. The list of problematic concepts also included modernization, urbanization, industrialization, etc. Not to create the value judgment that the research seminar’s approach was perfect and self-righteous; however, confronted by Wen’s comment – in which modernization was now embraced as a universally advanced force that should sweep China’s traditions away - I was shocked by its heartlessness.

While the arbitrariness instilled in the representations of China's tradition and modernity in "China, Forever" was still explicit, the dichotomous and polarized placement of the two concepts in Wen's narratives was alarming. In Wen's interpretations, anything associated with Chinese tradition was arbitrarily equated with backwardness and staleness – the concept of tradition not only touched on the discriminating imagination of China's countryside, but also involved those that were praised and glorified in the tourism video. Conversely, the representation of China's modernization in the tourism video, following the Euro-American visual construction of modernity, was unconditionally endorsed and championed. As such, both tradition and modernization were understood in over-simplified and tortured ways – an not entirely different from at large tourism discourse. Moreover, the transformation power of modernization was regarded as inevitable, whereas any conscious efforts of preserving tradition were interpreted as against the nature. As such, the architectural preservation policy in France was considered as no more than hypocrisy in Wen's mind, for "once the inside is changed, nothing can be restored to the original state." What has enabled Wen to view modernization and tradition in such radically antithetical ways? If it was true that modernity fed on the defeats of the past, what was there to erase? The irony was that the Enlightenment principle of social Darwinism – one that classified civilizations as biological species and prioritized the Western development of modernity as the ultimate phase of human society - which has been vehemently refuted by scholars in the postcolonial time, now appeared in Wen's decoding of the tourism video "China, Forever".

Moreover, wen's interpretation posed a sharp contrast to Mo's narratives. To be sure, the video's representation spoke to Mo of the necessity to structure a coherent Chinese cultural essence based on the nation's tradition; however, the same representation was decoded by Wen

as an eagerness to accelerate the disappearance of tradition through the enforcement of modernization. Thus, indicated by the two inchoate approaches, the monolithic story of modernity and tradition was destabilized. Moreover, while they contested and challenged each other's existence, they also coexisted with each other, therefore composing a rich repertoire of narratives illuminated by the encoding - decoding dynamics of the tourism video "China, Forever".

If Wen endorsed the hegemonic representation of modernity in the tourism video by conscious denials and self-detachments from China's tradition, Nali's approval of the video's representation of China's modernity was rooted in a deep sense of shame. This feeling of humiliation was firstly revealed by the absent historical events in the video.

I asked Nali if she has noticed the video's omission of China's revolutionary past. She answered firmly: "No". "Why was that"? I asked. She fell into a long silence. Amitav Ghosh (1998) eloquently wrote about silence in memories of violence:

When we try to speak events of which we do not know the meaning, we must lose ourselves in the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world. This is a silence that is proof against any conceivable act of scorn or courage; it lies beyond defiance – for what means have we to defy the mere absence of meaning? (p.214)

During this time, I felt a little bit nervous in Nali's silence. I tried to grapple with possible reasons. Was her silence due to a lack of personal knowledge, or was it something truly indescribable? Considering that our past practices with telling history have been awarded based on constructing an ending with a clear border between "then" and "now" - between China's revolutionary past and its modernization present -- maybe to focus on the past in the present tense was untenable for her.

After pondering for a long while, Nali said:

If China could be compared to a person, then every person may have some severe struggles and pains in the past that she doesn't want to be reminded of. We are in the process of modernization now, but talking about the past is depressing. No one would want to reveal something bad and painful to others, so this video chooses to not include that period.

Shortly after the Cultural Revolution, literature writings recounting its atrocious damages were prevalent and popular; for this reason, they were categorized in a genre, namely the "wound literature". Hereby, Nali's analogy of China as a person with the experience of psychological pains has invoked similar ideas in the "wound literature". However, while the fictional writings encouraged people to reflect on and talk about the scar, Nali's recourse to the metaphor was rather used to justify the suppression of discussion.

More importantly, implicated in Nali's response, there was a perceptible sense of shame. China's present was in the process of modernization, which was framed by Nali in a positive undertone. However, precisely because so, China's past revolutions were interpreted as disturbing the mission of modernization, while modernization could have otherwise taken place in a tidy, linear, unbroken, and fast way. Thus, the very existence of past battles, in the form of a complicated and entangled whole, suggested a humiliating scar - that China was once threatened by the colonial dominance, that Mao led the nation down a wrong path, and many others. Thus, just like the video, Nali also chose to avert her eyes; verbalizing the revolutionary past for a Chinese individual for her was as difficult as describing this period with a comfortable and confident tone in the tourism video "China, Forever".

Meanwhile, in the post-Mao generation that Nali and I belonged to, much less personal bearings of revolutions existed compared to the previous generations. We could not, for example, like our grandparents who once joined in KMT or CCP and still take a lot of pride in winning the war against Japan, or like our parents who sometimes complained about that they were denied the opportunity to attend college in the Cultural Revolution. We were born in the time period when the whole nation has started celebrating the long-deferred embracement of modernization. Given that, Nali's suppression of the revolutionary narratives, replaced by a submission to the victory of modernization altogether with the video "China, Forever", could be understood as a natural consequence of this social condition. Just as Rofel (1999) wittingly reminds us, people come to master past events at a given historical moment as their reality.

Moreover, further evidence of shame could be found in the later interview with Nali, which was used to justify the hegemonic representation of China's modernization in the tourism video. To be sure, the existence of the Western world as spectators of China and of this particular video registered a sharp consciousness in Nali's decoding. Nali said:

Playing this video to the Westerners may be a good thing; in particular, when they see the modernization in China. It seems that Chinatown represents China here in the U.S. All features that Americans recognize of China are those from Chinatown. Whenever I have a chance, I always try to explain to the Americans that most people from Chinatown came from some small fishing villages in the southern China. Their ancestors or they themselves had to leave China because of extreme poverty and lack of resource. But, they were not representative of the current China and the essence of China. I've always avoided Chinatown as much as possible. Chinatown is so changelessly messy, filthy, and odorous. They are

cheap places. Last time when I was in Chicago with some American friends, they were looking for beers at night. At that time, many stores in downtown have stopped selling beers after 9:00 pm. The next day, a friend told me that they eventually found beer in the worst place one could imagine in Chicago – Chinatown.

“How did you feel when you heard this”? I asked. Nali answered:

I did not stand out and argue with him, because what he said was partly true. Have you ever been to the Chinatown in San Francisco? Japantown in San Francisco was just one street away from China, but you could see the dramatic contrast between the two; Japantown was so clean, neat, and organized. But I didn't feel happy hearing his words either. It felt like somebody has slapped you right in the face, yet you struggled to not fight back.

Here came another disheartened moment in the interviews. The first feeling that came into my mind was compassion for Chinese Americans in Chinatown - sensational images that readings of Chinese American literature gave me churning up with sociological theories of racial marginalization in my mind. The Chinatowns and Chinese Americans not only had to struggle to be accepted by the mainstream white American society, but they were now disparaged and excluded by the Chinese themselves, as if poverty and lack of development was a shameful disease. However, in the bottom of my heart, didn't I share with Nali the same unpleasant memories of Chinatown? Didn't the very existence of Chinatown, with its embeddedness in the Western landscape, signify the very heaviness that meant to be a Chinese living in the Western world? I realized that Nali's dilemma in her ongoing diasporic experience – her struggle between the choice of identifying and dis-identifying with the Chinatown – has created a space for her to

legitimize the hegemonic representation of China's modernization. So to speak, "China, Forever" was regarded as a redeemer of the shame burdened by China's history, even if just to demonstrate modern material symbols that the Western world has already possessed; for, ultimately, it allowed the Chinese to harbor a fantasy of equality.

In a brief summary, the representational style of the central theme in the tourism video "China, Forever" - China's tradition and modernity - was challenged by some overseas Chinese audiences. "Superficial" and "decorative" were the common words used to describe the style of representations in the video. Nevertheless, regarding the substantial meanings of China's tradition and modernization as well as the relationships between the two, little sophisticated contestation could be located in the audiences' interpretations. In fact, most audiences approached these concepts in accordance to the video's positioning; the encoded and decoded interpretations were thus found to echo each other. More interestingly, many individual audiences related their interpretations to broader social pictures. Yu, for example, incorporated his experience of China's restless social changes into his interpretation of the video's representation of China's tradition. Moreover, Nali's personal confrontation with the discriminated image of Chicago's Chinatown motivated her to endorse the video's approach to China's modernization developments in the tourism video. As such, the audiences' decoding have enriched the encoded messages in "China, Forever" by adding a variety of differentiated layers of personal contexts and interpretations; thus, cultural meanings derived from tourism communication dynamics process were shown as co-created by both the tourism media product and the audience.

In a brief review of this chapter, the first part of the analysis sought to discuss how individual interpretations destabilized and challenged the underpinning nation-state ideology

encoded in the tourism video “China, Forever”. The result revealed that Chinese interviewees’ narratives contested the nation-state narratives from a variety of perspectives – while some came straight from past memories and minute life experiences, some integrated their observations of China’s unequal socio-economic developments to challenge the imposed and monolithic national images. In the second part of the analysis, it highlighted how unexpected political turmoil motivated the interviewees to readjust their approaches to “China, Forever” and to reinterpret China’s nation-state narratives in the tourism video. Furthermore, the third part of the analysis specifically focused on the central theme of tradition-modernity to investigate the encoding-decoding dynamics. The results revealed struggles with meanings of tradition and modernity have significantly shaped Chinese interviewees’ interpretations of the nation of China and their individual Chinese selves. Many interviewees have in fact reiterated and justified the video’s self-orientalist approach to China’s tradition as well as its the hegemonic representation of modernity. Ethos of shame with China’s past and sentiments of nostalgia caused by drastic social change in China’s present were embedded in individual narratives; and ultimately accepted in tourism discourse.

Moreover, to further illuminate the politics of encoding-decoding, it is necessary to speak in power-laden terms. That is, if authority has been structurally situated in the encoded representational language of this tourism video, then interviewees’ narratives were initiated as self-empowerments for individual subjectivities in negotiating the state-imposed authority. Indeed, a more contested, performative and active set of subjectivities were at play in individual Chinese audiences’ dynamic roles. Thus, it illustrated that power was not attached externally due to priori interests, but rather produced within the process of tourism communication. In particular, as it was evidently manifested in the second part of the analysis, the Chinese

interviewees did not exist in a metaphysical sense of beings, but instead as actively creating cultural meanings in emergent political events.

Tourism is largely concerned with considerations of being, meanings and identities; despite so, much tourism research continues to lack sophistication in its attempts to trace the ways in which human meaning is created in the framework of tourism (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005). Furthermore, Jansson (2007) argues that tourism media products form the communicative fabric – a space that is at once socio-material, symbolic, and imaginative – which mediates our understanding of place and culture. In regard to both comments, this dissertation study seeks to bring tourism media and explorations of cultural meanings together; investigating interplays between the encoded and decoded messages thus seeking to illuminate the composition as well as negotiation of the tourism communicative fabric. In exposing varied individual perspectives and narratives, the tourism promotional video “China, Forever” was revealed to be a powerful medium, which mediated the overseas Chinese audiences’ negotiations of China’s nation-state images in relation to their individual Chinese selves. The following chapter will be devoted to a further theorization of the inter-relationships between tourism media and the audience in the examination of “China, Forever”, as well as socio-cultural meanings derived from such tourism communicative practices.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Many have praised the expansion of tourism development as a mighty economic industry, which has led to the internalization of industry-focused priorities and perspectives as the pervading research paradigm. In fact, forces initiated by the staggering growth of the tourism industry are necessarily multifold and complex; “tourism embodies the long and contested history of regulating appropriate and acceptable leisure...may be a fruitful and revealing field to see how societies...create and control a host of desires” (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p.9). Thus, the idea of tourism – comprised of various dynamic encounters, such as those between hosts and guests, tourism representational materials and audiences, and so forth – involves bountiful sensations, critical social-cultural messages, as well as ideological practices. The result of such inter-connected encounters is a complex social discourse of tourism - one that requires researchers to go beyond viewing tourism as a simple mode of economic consumption, but a significant dimension of modern life and a central part of understanding social organization (Franklin & Crang, 2001).

With the premise that the tourism promotional video “China, Forever” provides a crucial access to understanding how tourism engages in a wider circle of socio-culture formation, this dissertation research approaches tourism by examining communicative practices initiated by “China, Forever”. In doing so, it reveals two social dialogues – firstly, between the discursive construction of tourism representational language and China’s nation-state ideology; secondly, between interpretations from overseas Chinese audiences and nation-state narratives delivered

via the tourism media. The following analysis will further discuss how findings of these two dialogues contribute to further the literature of tourism media studies.

## 6.2 THE ENCODED: “CHINA, FOREVER” AS NATION-STATE NARRATIVES

In Palmer’s studies (1999, 2003, & 2005), tourism practices at English national heritage sites are examined in relation to the reconstruction of English national identity. Tourism images are revealed as quintessential components in the contemporary formation of English nationhood, while nationality becomes “one of the principle colorings of the tourist vision” (Horne, 1984, p.166). As such, one of Palmer’s major contributions lies in the identification of the force of commercialism in tourism – one that packages a national identity for sale. Departing from Palmer’s approach, this investigation of encoded messages in the tourism video “China, Forever” has incorporated a more complex and contested socio-cultural landscape to deconstruct the nation-state narratives of China.

To be sure, while the shaping force of commercialization is certainly considered, China’s historical struggles and the postcolonial global condition require that this investigation allude to a variety of socio-cultural dialogues to decipher the messages in “China, Forever”. To begin with, the very fact that the tourism video “China, Forever” enables China to project a particular self-image to the wider international community has determined that the tourism visual construction of China is not possible without a keen imagination of the Western gaze. Precisely because of so, tourism representations are obliged to employ images from pre-existing Western conceptions of China to seek confirmation and empowerment. As such, the orientalist ideology – those cultural imaginaries of oriental culture that have already inculcated an invisible but omnipresent nexus of absolute power and totalitarianism – is now invoked by “China, Forever”

in formulating China's national image. In other words, situated within the dynamics of globalization, orientalism is found to be useful in the tourism discourse to valorize the differences in creating a unique China. As the analysis reveals, on one hand, the first part of the video portrays a changeless, nostalgic, mythical and feminized China through selective visual rhetoric strategies and symbols of representation, speaking to the orientalist fascination; on the other hand, the second part of the video creates a modern China subjugated to the dominating Western interpretation of modernity.

However, has the self-orientalist representational strategy provided a satisfying strategy to combat the nation's memories of a dominated and oppressed past, while simultaneously getting further involved in ever-deepening global capitalism? The paradox is: whereas the reification of self-orientalism is supposed to enable China to announce a powerful and heroic national image, the very existence of self-orientalism, which lies underneath the tourism representational language, acts as a reminder of the unforgiving past – a shackle which constrains rather than relieves. The weapon of self-orientalism in composing the nation-state narratives in the tourism video “China, Forever” is therefore feeble, and its consequence is ironical. Turner once stated: “international tourism is the most complex and understudied industry impinging on the third world” (1974, p.194). In the case of “China, Forever”, the nature of tourism media as a vehicle traveling between the Western gaze and China's self-representation signifies the social condition that adds to the complexity in constructing the nation-state narratives of China. As such, a critical discourse analysis of “China, Forever” makes us ponder upon active engagements of tourism discourse in the nation's struggle in ongoing post-colonial politics.

Similar to what Palmer reveals in her studies, one unresolved problem with constructing polished and coherent narratives of the nation in “China, Forever” is the unjust representation imposed onto China’s history and culture. In the tourism video, only images considered as embodying essential features of Chineseness useful in confirming to Western perceptions, and material symbols that concur Western understanding of modernity are employed and amplified. Palmer comments that the English history has been turned into a theme park in the packaging of tourism representations, as illustrated by the legend of King Henry VIII in his transformation from Prince Charming to bloated ogre. While this example delivers a sense of comic humor due to popular Disney cartoon images, in the case of “China, Forever”, however, one can hardly have a good laugh at the staging of Chinese history and present – those that have been twisted to meet ideological and political needs. Moments of teasing and joking about the representation of China which could be easily found in media products such as “Kung Fu Panda” don’t belong to the narrative tone of “China, Forever”. As such, considering that the genre and purpose of the tourism video has determined its approach to appeal to audiences by using “truthful” images, the pursuit of collective and monolithic national imagery creates a sense of representational violence – one that is committed by the nation-state ideology operated through the organization of tourism language.

Moreover, whereas in the context of English tourism practices, the reconfiguration of history is the most problematic feature, the attempt to cast a glorified overtone in representing the nation’s modernization has made China’s current social realities another victim in this tourism video. Obviously, the embrace of capitalist development has provided a framework for the video to represent Chinese history and present; China’s nation-state narratives in “China, Forever” have therefore become a victorious announcement of modernization. Certainly, the

possession of glassy skyscrapers and extensive highways is a statement of power in constructing the national image of China – one that all nation-state narratives seek to pursue. The problem is, however, located in the obsessive reliance on images that signify the material affluence brought by modernization developments in this self-representation in the tourism video. Underlying such obsession with the material façade of modernity, there is an insuppressible eagerness to announce the victory of China's participation in capitalist modernization. This insuppressible eagerness, however, indicates that the memory of poverty and famine that such appraisal tries to defeat is equally insuppressible. In addition, the narrative structure of the tourism video, which follows a linear logic that progresses from China's traditional past to modern present, further enhances the celebratory tone for the nation's engagement in modernization. As it is stated in the analysis (please see Chapter 4), such assertive positioning to China's contemporary social reality masks doubts, uncertainties, instabilities, and contestations of the grand project of modernization. Dirlik (2001) argues that the biggest challenge for the once colonized people is to not take modernization as their guiding principle; for, the catching-up mentality only serves to reduce the meaning of modernity into an ideology of global capitalism, therefore reinforcing the Eurocentrism in the concept of modernity. Denied is, hence, the legitimacy of a heroic approach to China's modernization development in the tourism video's formulation of collective nation-state narrative. However, after 30 years of enduring efforts to integrate capitalist economic development as one firm component into China's construction of self-identity, approaching modernization from alternative perspectives seems particularly difficult; much like a person having to confront his/her long-held beliefs.

One could well argue that because the nation-state ideology is inherently governed by modernist epistemology, and since tourism language is intimately related to images of the

nationhood, there is little room for “China, Forever” to represent China with challenging and contested interpretations; for any contested image will contradict the agenda of nation-state building. On the other hand, perhaps one way to get beyond the relentless grip of modernization is to situate “China, Forever” in the postmodern socio-cultural condition. That is, China’s nation-state ideology constituted by the tourism representation represents only but one voice, which stands together with, rather than looming over, other Chinese voices - such as those in Jia Zhangke’s movies, in avant-garde Chinese visual arts, in nostalgic fictions that portrays old Shanghai, in the dairy of a young college graduate who works at China’s Wall Street in Beijing, as well as in the life struggle of a teenager girl who is forced to drop out of school to support her family. By positioning the tourism video “China, Forever” in China’s multi-layered and self-contested landscape of postmodernity, it becomes possible to comprehend the tourism video’s existence with a more sophisticated view – to understand that neither China’s past or present can be suppressed by the tourism video’s polished and monotonous narrative. In other words, accepting the fact that China’s postmodern identity is necessarily fragmented and destabilized allows us to recognize that the past memory is not to be conquered, while the modernization is not a pure tool of developmentalism. In doing so, it enables us to reflect on the tourism video’s eagerness to deliver a powerful and heroic national image with a degree of peace and tolerance; the very existence of nation-state narratives of “China, Forever” signifies the complexity of postmodern discourse. Moreover, by drawing onto China’s postmodern landscape, the communicative social role of tourism media discourse is amplified. Indeed, it illuminates how the tourism video “China, Forever” exists as a component in the overall social fabric, which actively participates in dialogues that involve nation-state building, the construction of China in the postcolonial and globalized world, and so forth. Moreover, the tourism media interacts with

other genres of media discourse – such as visual representations of China in movies – co-creating a wider circle of culture politics.

### 6.3 THE DECODED: “CHINA, FOREVER” AS MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS

Franklin and Crag (2001) argue that tourism can no longer be conceived of as merely what happens at tourism sites; in other words, the socio-cultural discourse of tourism goes beyond conventional conceptualization of travel behaviors at destinations. In the same way, the fabric of tourism media communication expands from those taking place within the business context of tourism consumption to the ones that provide mediated socio-cultural experiences. Thus, while individual audiences are involved as skilled social agents, their engagements with tourism media constitute a social sphere, where social relations are constructed while identities are formed. With this in mind, this dissertation research examines overseas Chinese audiences’ interpretations of the tourism video “China, Forever”, seeking to illuminate the dialogues between individual audiences and China’s collective nation-state image delivered from the tourism video. Morgan & Pritchard (2005) investigate how tourism souvenirs function as reflexive touchstones of memory which recreate polysensual tourism experiences, therefore fusing tourism and contemporary everyday life. In a parallel approach, this dissertation seeks to understand how the tourism video “China, Forever” mediates the relationship between tourism narratives of the nation-state and overseas Chinese individuals; thus bridging together tourism media and ongoing life experiences of the audiences chosen.

Jansson (2007) states that following the visual bias of tourism studies, most theoretical and empirical accounts of tourism and mediatization have tended to overstate the significance of more experimental and expressive segments, notably by means of excluding other groups from

the scope of discussion. This dissertation's choice of overseas Chinese audiences, therefore, is a conscious attempt to break away from the conventional approach in tourism studies. Moreover, considering that the mediated space connecting audiences and media product is necessarily personalized, social relations formed and practiced within activities of decoding "China, Forever" are located in the network composed of personal diasporic experiences, individual socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as China's nation-state ideology in tourism representation, and so forth. In other words, the discourse produced out of audiences' interpretations of the tourism video "China, Forever" can be read as encapsulated by the dialogue between Chinese individuals and the nation of China.

As the analysis of interviews reveals (see Chapter 5), much of the audiences' interpretations focus on resisting and fragmenting the hegemonic nation-state language in "China, Forever". While some interviewees seek to decentralize the nation-state perspective from aspects of aesthetics, representational style, and representational subjects in "China, Forever" by incorporating their individual memories and past experiences, to some others, the over-polished glorification of China in the mediated tourism discourse is only coercive to China's social realities experienced by the individual interviewees - the disheartening contrasts of poverty and affluence as well as other social inequalities. However, when the unexpected political turmoil happened (explained in Chapter 5), which signified the oppression of postcolonial politics to the nation China, the interviewees' readjusted their interpretations of "China, Forever"; illustrating the complexity in the nature of the relationship between diasporic individuals and the nation. The event triggered the interviewees to reexamine their self-positionings and approaches to the nation-state discursive practices in the tourism video. While the interviewees remained skeptical to the totalized account of China, the powerful and heroic

national images in “China, Forever” were approached with a tolerated and even championed lens of view. This, in turn, adds complexity to understanding the social role of the tourism media product “China, Forever”; the interpretation of tourism media discourse is subject to continuous plays of power, culture, and political struggles.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of the interview narratives centers on the theme of China’s tradition-modernization, which echoes the overall narrative structure of the tourism video. The interesting finding is that, while the infusion of nation-state ideology in “China, Forever” is disapproved of, the tourism video’s essentialized representation of China’s tradition and modernization is actively confirmed and justified by the interviewees. To some, nostalgia for a lost quintessential Chineseness in the nation’s rapid modernization developments and anxiety for a homeless future leads to the reinforcement of an orientalist imagination of China’s tradition. In reality, it is however impossible to sustain reified, holistic notions of those traditions, which have already experienced the transformations of modernity, and themselves come to serve as sites of conflict between different social interests and different visions of the modern. The interviewees’ understanding of the representation of China’s tradition is, resembling the approach of “China, Forever”, perceptibly objectified, reductionist and idealized. Meanwhile, interviewees’ support of the totalized representation of China’s modernized present in the tourism video – which escalates into the mentality of “not enough of it” in several accounts - is partly driven by the eagerness to refute the injustice of orientalist stereotyping; simultaneously grounded in a sense of shame. As such, the interviewees’ approach echoes the video’s positioning, while the humiliation the nation experienced in the past parallels the marginalized diasporic experience in the present from an individual perspective. Thus, just as the analysis of “China, Forever” reveals that the nation is still deeply entrenched in the eagerness to

defeat the past by fashioning a powerful and heroic image in tourism discourse, the individuals' accounts also indicate unrelieved struggles. Not surprisingly, compared to the tourism video's totalized approach, interviewees' interpretations of China's modernization and tradition is, to a significant extent, an equally arbitrary reflection; the coherent linear structure of video presentation is rather taken-for-granted, while profound and critical observations – those that take China's modernization to the brink of *what next*, question the paradox of self-orientalist Chinese identity in the globalized world, and so forth - fail to be addressed. Thus, narratives identified under the theme of “tradition-modernization”, where the heroic national image is to draw strength from, have indeed contested those of the first theme, in which individuals' voices refuse to be overshadowed by the nation-state narratives constructed by the tourism video. The viewing of “China, Forever” is therefore, as Hall (1981) proposes, the temporary result of a never-ending, dynamic and conflictual process in which the fine-grained interrelationships between meaning, feeling, use and choice.

Finally, from the perspective of the audience group, the Chinese scholars and students at the University of Illinois interviewed for this dissertation research constitute a cohort of exiled audiences for the tourism video “China, Forever”. The audiences subject themselves to voluntary interpellation, a process in which they find themselves defending, negotiating, and resisting the nation-state representation of China – even though they are not its intended audience and have had no input into its production. Nevertheless, such process is one of identification, in which viewers articulate a subject position from which to speak of their own experiences, dilemmas and desires. The usefulness of tourism media discourse in mediating the nation-state narratives and the individual experience is amplified. Furthermore, narratives from the unintended interpretative community as personal responses to the representational language in the tourism video “China,

Forever” delineate a contested and paradoxical discursive sphere; which not only illuminates the complex nature of human subjectivity, but is also symptomatic of the nation’s as well as the individual’s ongoing struggles with Chinese identity.

Meanwhile, the interview narratives are characterized by the interviewees’ eagerness to exert a sense of realism into the individual interpretations. In the first theme, many stories with protagonists as ordinary Chinese people struggling in the disheartening socio-cultural realities are told with an eagerness to strip away the convenient illusions caused by the national heroism in “China, Forever”. It is as if providing individualized interpretations of the tourism video has become a self-ordained task to bring evidences of “the real” in order to crack the lie of nation-state ideology. In a similar way, albeit for the oppositional purpose, the third theme also includes stories of “the real” – the real Chinatown, the real developed modern China, the real American stereotyping of the Chinese, etc. The irony is, while telling about “the real” in the first theme is to abolish nationalist heroism, in the third theme the purpose of using “the real” is to demonstrate the nation’s power from its historic tradition and modernized present. In both ways, China’s socio-cultural realities are actively sought upon by the interviewees to understand the tourism video, as Sartre would say that it is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the existentialist world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it is all about. The only exception, however, is from Jing, who refuses to take the tourism video as real - “what is real doesn’t matter here”. To be sure, it doesn’t mean that the tourism video or the idea of tourism nation is toyed around in her interpretation. Rather, Jing is able to artfully negotiate the complexity of nation-state ideology by neither vehemently denying or praising, as she discovers the parallel of China’s striving in the postcolonial world and her own struggle in the individual diaspora. Therefore, in Jing’s interpretation, meanings of the collective narrative of China in the

tourism video “China, Forever” have gone beyond the argument of what is conventionally and arbitrarily real. The lingering meaning of the nation-state ideology, however, lies in its own compelling voice in the tourism construction of China - one that exists all together with other contested and challenging voices, co-composing a complex socio-cultural landscape; therefore triggering us to ponder over its existence in relation to other critical issues.

Finally, as the analysis reveals, an ethnographic methodological approach to investigate the audiences’ decoding of “China, Forever” has provided a way to tie tourism media discourse to the rhythm of everyday life experienced by audiences. According to Morley (1980), the relations of audiences to media remain an empirical question; an ethnographic approach has, therefore, sensitized the possibility of struggles in practices of decoding the tourism media – a struggle whose outcome cannot be known in advance, for the simple reason that encounters between television and audiences are always historically specific and context-bound. In doing so, the dissertation has delivered a detailed analysis of ongoing critical and intellectual engagement with the multifarious ways in which overseas Chinese audiences constitute themselves through interpreting the collective narratives of China in the tourism video “China, Forever”. The purpose is, as in the words of Stuart Hall (1981): “I am not interested in Theory, I’m interested in going on theorizing” (p.60).

#### 6.4 “CHINA, FOREVER” AND TOURISM MEDIA DYNAMICS

Both Chapter 1 and 2 have identified a number of gaps in the areas of tourism and media research. With this in mind, this dissertation study is conducted to address gaps in the literature and contribute to the knowledge base in tourism. By viewing the encoding and decoding of tourism media product “China, Forever” as a dynamic process that involves ideology

construction and negotiation, this dissertation contributes to a further understanding of tourism media landscape.

Firstly, while tourism is recognized as central in assisting the massive task of maintaining and providing the institutional homogenization of nation formation (Franklin, 2004), there is a lack of concentrated examination as to how the nation-state ideology gains its representational force in tourism promotional materials. Thus, through a deconstructive reading of China's first official tourism promotional video "China, Forever", this dissertation provides an in-depth analysis of the tourism representational language in presenting the nation China. To be sure, in the specific context of this particular Chinese tourism media discourse, the interconnection between tourism construction and its central purpose of nation-state building is critically unpacked and discussed.

Furthermore, as it is discussed in the literature review, inquiries into Chinese tourism have predominantly focused on the business and managerial perspectives of the Chinese tourism market; as such, tourism is regarded only as a utility to promote the nation's modernization development. The problem with such research paradigm is that, as also indicated by the nation-state narrative as a victorious announcement of modernization in the tourism video "China, Forever", the complex interplays between tourism, culture, and society is significantly underplayed. Thus, by situating critical discourse analysis in a contextualized background composed of a network of socio-cultural forces and pre-existing media representations, the reading of nation-state narratives in "China, Forever" contributes to a wider discussion of Chinese culture politics. In doing so, the analysis has not only dwelled on how "China, Forever" is constructed, but also, in a reflective manner, discussed problems and unresolved dilemmas the nation experienced in presenting a collective and totalized nation-state image of China. As such,

the discursive social role of tourism media – how it is embedded in the overall social fabric and therefore placing tourism in a dialogue with a wider and more complex socio-cultural landscape - is thoroughly revealed and amplified.

Meanwhile, in order to conceptualize the tourism media as a dynamic process, there clearly needs an incorporation of encoding- decoding theory to understand the cultural dialogues communicated by “China, Forever” from a relatively holistic perspective. In examining mediated narratives of tourism souvenirs situated in the everyday life, Edward Bruner (2005) argues that post-tour settings provide new sites of cultural production and location of limitless narratives. In a parallel manner, this dissertation research argues that the examination of encoded meanings in tourism media, which is the dominant approach employed in extant tourism studies, does not fully address the expansive communicative dynamics of tourism media. Bringing the souvenir home does not mean the ending of the tourism experience; in a similar way, the displaying of tourism cultural products in media does not indicate the finale of tourism media messages. Instead, the viewing of tourism media serves to connect tourism discourse to individuals’ ongoing life experiences. With this in mind, this dissertation research incorporates overseas Chinese audiences by examining their interpretations of the nation-state representation in “China, Forever”; in doing so, a corresponding and extensive discursive sphere is revealed. As such, the encoded combines the decoded narratives together, forming the communicative fabric of the tourism video “China, Forever”. Varied patterns of re-negotiating, resisting, and reinterpreting the nation-state representation in the tourism video are illuminated, while the diasporic cultural condition as well as other individual factors have been clearly drawn as background forces for individuals to construct individual narratives.

Finally, as implications for future tourism media studies, this dissertation suggests that the complexity of tourism communicative fabrics need to be further explored and theorized. In order to do so, the mediated roles of tourism media discourse must be approached from expansive rather than exclusive ways. Moreover, instead of focusing on the targeted mainstream audience group, it is important for tourism media studies to avoid constructing a hierarchy of audiences; the multi-layered nature of tourism media audiences must be further considered and addressed. In the case of “China, Forever”, for instance, an investigation of how Western audiences interpret the representational images of China would reveal very different cultural dialogues. Moreover, while in this dissertation research, the nation-state narrative forms the central theme where encoding and decoding activities are performed, there are many other cultural themes in tourism media concerning issues of being, belonging, and identity that demand to be recognized and examined. Most importantly, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of tourism media requires us to place the subject in relation to a wider sphere of socio-political struggles; in other words, calling upon tourism scholars to envision tourism as a significant modality through which modern life is organized (Franklin & Crang, 2001).

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

### UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research  
Institutional Review Board  
528 East Green Street  
Suite 203  
Champaign, IL 61820



March 7, 2008

Carla Santos  
Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism  
104 Huff Hall  
MC-584

RE: *Tourism and Movie Interpretation 2*  
IRB Protocol Number: 08469

Dear Carla:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB Application for Exemption form for your project entitled *Tourism and Movie Interpretation 2*. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 08469 and reviewed. The research activities involving human subjects are exempt from Title 34 – Public Welfare, Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects, Subpart A – Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects per the following category:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2): This exemption applies since this research utilizes interviews with subjects who have watched a tourism movie to determine their individual understanding of the video and the sate ideologies of Chinese identity.

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. **Exempt protocols are approved for a maximum of three years.** Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated. To submit modifications to your protocol, please complete the IRB Research Amendment Form (see <http://www.irb.uiuc.edu/?q=forms-and-instructions/research-amendments.html>).

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subject research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office.

Sincerely,

Sue Keehn, Director, Institutional Review Board

c: Cheng Yan