Articles

Essay

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Contents

Editors' Introduction

After a brief hiatus in January 2021, we are now back with a stronger issue than ever. Our Volume 11 falls into two thematic sections, one on the politics of Chinese identities, the other on art and collections.

There is perhaps no topic in Chinese studies at present that is more important than the question of Chinese identity, how it relates to China in the narrow sense of the PRC on the one hand and to alternative identity categories such as East-Asian or the Sinophone (to mention but two of a range of categories) on the other, and how it is variously mobilised and rejected in the context of a dynamic geo-political context. The question is of particular pertinence in the context of the surge of racism against Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian communities since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK and across the world. We alert you to our call for papers on Chinese Identity in an Age of Anti-Asian Racism and #StopAsianHate with a deadline of 15 August.

The four articles engaging with the question of identity in this issue address the problematic in different timeframes and with different conceptualisations. Two of them (Yan Wu et.al. and Yeh) were originally presented at the conference "Remapping the Cultural and Linguistic Landscape of the Chinese in Britain", held at the University of Westminster in February 2020.

Dalton Rawcliffe's paper analyses the effect of transnational Maoism on Britain's ethnic Chinese populace in the 1960s. Strategically promoted by the PRC government to Chinese populations abroad, Maoism gained traction with members of Britain's Chinese community who faced inequality and discrimination under British rule. The experience of anti-Chinese racism had long contributed to the popularity of communist ideology among British Chinese communities whose welfare had largely been ignored by the British government in the UK and Hong Kong. Rawcliffe highlights the role that films, in particular, played in what we would now refer to as "soft power initiatives" on the part of the PRC and the Hong Kong Left and how the Hong Kong and British governments, in turn, stepped up their counterpropaganda campaign in the form of Cantonese films from Hong Kong aimed at forming a Hong Kong identity.

Over the five decades since the Hong Kong riots of 1967, China's propaganda and soft power initiatives have changed significantly. Employed both domestically and abroad, the Chinese Dream campaign has attracted wide scholarly attention since its inception. Yan Wu, Sian Rees, Richard Thomas, and Yakun Yu turn their attention to the reception of the Chinese Dream branding campaign by audiences overseas. Based on data from focus groups in Wales organised around Tu Weiming's symbolic universes as part of his concept of "cultural China", their article shows that while the Chinese Dream nation branding campaign can be broadly considered successful, there are also very significant differences in the way different individuals respond to it, depending on their own background. Most poignantly, they note that "'push' factors from host countries including racism and stereotyping often heighten feelings of alienation, isolation and nostalgia for the lost homeland. This hunger for cultural identification unconsciously drives first generation Chinese immigrants […] towards the Chinese Dream, voluntarily or inadvertently."

50 years later, Hong Kong identity is also well developed and stands at the heart of the rise of localism which has underpinned political movements in Hong Kong in the last decade. Analysing a rarely voiced position, Ling Tang presents the difficult position liberal Mainland

Chinese students faced in the complex environment of the Umbrella Movement. In a context where localist identity and political activism are predicated on a perceived dichotomy between Hong Kong and Mainland China, liberal students from the Mainland who wished to take part in the movement were met with suspicion and hostility. On the other hand, Mainland China depicted Hong Kong protesters as unemancipated British colonial subjects. Through in-depth interviews with liberal Mainland students, Tang's article gives voice to an important yet largely neglected form of liberalism that transcends both Hong Kong localism and Chinese nationalism.

Diana Yeh's article, too, engages with the question of transcending assumed demarcation lines defining communities. Significantly advancing critical thinking on "British Chinese" as a category normally defined within the boundaries of culture, language, or ethnicity, Yeh examines the recent emergence of "British East (and Southeast) Asianness" as political identity that contests borders of "Chineseness" and its policing while maintaining a Chinese hegemony. Based on two case studies revolving around two collectives in the creative and cultural industries, Yeh identifies a more radical and more integrationist approach among her respondents. She argues that "the mobilisation of 'British East and Southeast Asian' as a form of identity-based politics can be an expansive force that opens up, rather than forestalls, solidarities across racial, gendered, sexual and ableist and other forms of oppression."

The second half of this issue features three articles by Emily Williams, Avital Zuk Avina, and Angela Becher which each deal with differing aspects of art, aesthetics, and media in the contemporary PRC. Emily Williams' article focuses on the widespread phenomenon known as "Red Collecting", referring to the collecting of artefacts from Chinese Communist Party history. Williams' ethnographic research reveals that this practice is more complex than typically thought, featuring a wide range of motivations from political nostalgia and historical preservation to financial profit and entertainment, as well as types of collector items – far more diverse than the Mao badges and propaganda posters that often come to mind. Ultimately, Williams argues, Red Collecting reflects the diversity of memories held within the PRC of Mao era and revolutionary history and helps mediate between individual, social, and historical forces in contemporary China.

Zooming out from red to consider colour symbolism more broadly, Avital Zuk Avina employs the concept of "colour grammar" to show how colour in contemporary Chinese art and propaganda relies upon three metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal, and textual – to create and communicate meaning, and thus ought to be considered a "meaning component" in its own right. By examining the use of colour in a number of propaganda posters, Avina argues for the centrality of colour-dependent meaning-making in Chinese visual culture and proposes a new methodology for "reading" the grammar of colour.

The final research article in this issue is the winner of the 2020 BACS Early Career Researcher Prize, Angela Becher, whose article "The Digital Illusion: Chinese New Media Artists Exploring the Phenomenology of Space" examines spatial narratives in several examples of digital media artwork. These works, which encompass an augmented reality app, mixed reality performance, 3D animation film, and Second Life project, use techniques such as movement and stillness, perspective and proportion to map out the "complex and multilayered nature of cities today". By giving form to new and altered types of spatial subjectivity, they not only compel us to consider how urban environments are mediated by the "virtuality" of digital media technologies, but also invite us to contemplate how our own experiences of living and being within the city are shaped by the illusions that all media offer. Many congratulations once again to Dr Becher!

This volume concludes with a short essay by Jin Xu, who presents us with an elegy to Nanguan Mosque, charting the rise and fall of a Chinese Muslim cultural icon from the 1980s to today.

We hope you enjoy reading this July 2021 issue of BJoCS! It would not have come about without the excellent work by our copy editor Tom Marling who has been supporting the journal for the last two years. We are immensely grateful for all he has done for us and wish him all the very best in his career as he now leaves us to concentrate fully on his main professional work. Thanks are also due to Mariane Bignotto who has once again produced the pdfs for the issue with great diligence and care.

Gerda Wielander, Heather Inwood, and Gregory Scott

Turning Over a New Leaf: The British Government, the Cultural Revolution, and the Ethnic Chinese Community in Britain, 1967–1968

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Abstract

This article seeks to explain the transnational development of Maoism in the attempt to legitimise the Cultural Revolution and the 1967 Hong Kong Riots to Britain's ethnic Chinese populace. Based primarily on a survey of ethnic Chinese in Britain undertaken by the Hong Kong government in 1967, both the British and Hong Kong governments were forced to respond to the transnational expansion of Maoism, transmitted by the People's Republic of China and embraced by certain members of Britain's Chinese community who faced inequality and discrimination under British rule. This Maoist agitation in turn forced Britain to commit to the welfare of its Chinese community and foster the idea of a Hong Kong identity that was distinctive from Maoism.

Keywords: British Chinese, Cultural Revolution, Maoism, transnationalism, Hong Kong

The British Chinese community is one of the oldest Chinese communities of Western Europe, dating as far back as the early nineteenth century. The vast majority of ethnic Chinese who made Britain their home originated from Hong Kong and were often understood to be apolitical, devoted overwhelmingly to the pursuit of money. However, the late 1960s created agitation and unrest for Britain's ethnic Chinese population due to events transpiring in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Britain's crown colony of Hong Kong. In May 1966, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution with the goal to renew Chinese communism and create a continuous revolution. Millions were persecuted over ten years of the Cultural Revolution, which had a deep cultural impact on overseas ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese. The impact on Britain was made particularly visible when a small segment of the British New Left embraced Maoism in the early 1960s and when pro-communists in the British colony of Hong Kong staged widespread demonstrations against colonial rule during the leftist 1967 Hong Kong Riots (hereinafter the "1967 Riots"). The unrest in Hong Kong spread to Britain's Chinese community, where a Maoist movement emerged in sympathy with the Hong Kong leftists. Maoism proved to be a dynamic political philosophy that was adaptable to the national, political, and cultural interests of different ethnic groups living in Britain, including recent immigrants of Chinese origin.

This article seeks to elaborate on the British and Hong Kong governments' response to the transnational spread of Maoism in Britain's ethnic Chinese community as a result of the 1967 Riots and the Cultural Revolution. Based on the results of a survey of ethnic Chinese in Britain undertaken by the Hong Kong government, I argue that the 1967 Riots had a profound impact upon Britain's ethnic Chinese community. Until late 1967, pro-Beijing Maoist organisations and the PRC's embassy in Portland Place, London, had been more successful in influencing some the ethnic Chinese in Britain through the transmission and distribution of Maoist propaganda. In an attempt to head off further unrest, in 1968 the British and Hong Kong governments reorganised the Liaison Office in London and launched a more proactive programme that helped turn the tide

in the propaganda war against Maoism. The first section of the article contextualises the 1967 Riots as a transnational event that not only influenced Britain's ethnic Chinese, but also provided a framework for both the British and Hong Kong governments in countering Maoist propaganda efforts. The second section discusses the Hong Kong government's survey of Britain's ethnic Chinese populace regarding the reasons for Maoism's success within the community and ways to win over their political approval. This unique survey discovered that certain ethnic Chinese who lived in Britain became radicalised due to the prejudice of the host society, but a more important factor was revealed to be the effectiveness of the Maoist propaganda in impacting and influencing British Chinese. The final section of the paper examines how the British and Hong Kong governments responded to and countered pro-Red Guard sentiments by committing to the welfare of Britain's ethnic Chinese and fostering the idea of a unique Hong Kong identity that was distinct from Chinese communism. In the end, the British and Hong Kong governments were able to neutralise the Maoist influence upon Britain's ethnic Chinese populace.

Studies of Chinese migration tend to take a sharply critical approach to understanding racial discourse in twentieth-century Britain, focusing principally on the social and economic integration of ethnic Chinese from late-eighteenth to twentieth-century British society (Ramdin, 1999; Parker, 2005; Luk, 2008). The first permanent Chinese settlement in Britain occurred with the recruitment of Chinese seafarers by the East India Company due to the need to replace British sailors throughout the French Revolutionary Wars (1791–1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). These Chinese were predominately Cantonese and settled in the port cities of London, Liverpool, and Cardiff. By 1880, the first Chinatowns were established in London's Limehouse Causeway and Liverpool's Pitt Street with the increase in migration of ethnic Chinese from the British colonies of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. However, the Chinese community in Britain would remain small, with their population a little over three thousand (Luk, 2008: 46–47). Although the number of Chinese would increase in the 1910s and 1920s due to Britain's recruitment of Chinese labourers throughout the First World War, there numbers would sharply decline in the 1930s to less than six thousand due to a combination of economic woes caused by the Great Depression, restrictive immigration legislation, and integration into the British population (Seed, 2006: 65–66). In the immediate post-war period, Britain's need for skilled labourers from the Commonwealth was met with a significant expansion of the Chinese population in Britain (Parker, 2005: 62–63). By 1967, it was estimated by the Hong Kong government that the ethnic Chinese population living across Britain's major cities was roughly 50,000–65,000. Over 80 percent arrived directly from Hong Kong, with most employed in the restaurant business (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 15). Many of the Hong Kong Chinese migrants in Britain did not intend to stay in Britain, but merely to work and raise enough funds for their families back home in Hong Kong. It should be noted that unlike Britain's former colonies in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong had a large number of "stateless aliens," mostly people who arrived after 1949 from nearby Guangdong province that had sought refuge in the British colony. Thus, Britain's ethnic Chinese were not a homogeneous group and, therefore, this article's use of the term ethnic Chinese refers to migrants from both Hong Kong and the Chinese refugees who fled mainland China to Hong Kong in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War.

Throughout this period the Chinese in Britain frequently experienced racist pressures by local Britons. Perceived as cheap labourers, particularly among British seamen, the Chinese community were viewed as an economic threat that often drew a hostile response, expressed in racist terms. The establishment of Britain's first Chinatown in Limehouse, London, in the 1880s gave rise to the antipathy and anxiety of the so-called "Yellow Peril" and the stereotype that the Chinese were a corrupt people whose vices included seducing young women, smoking opium, and gambling. The immense popularity of Sax Rohmer's novel The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu (1913) and the subsequent film adaptations throughout the twentieth century did very little to alleviate the discrimination ethnic Chinese faced in British society (Seed, 2006).

Scholars have acknowledged the significance of Hong Kong as not only a centre of Chinese migration to Britain, but an important transnational economic network of family remittance (Ng, 1968; Watson, 1975; Shang, 1984). While these are comprehensive in understanding the socioeconomic position of ethnic Chinese in Britain, this paper examines the impact Cold War dynamics and imperial decline had upon Britain's ethnic Chinese populace. In doing so, it demonstrates that political events impacting the PRC and Hong Kong were transnational and had an impact upon the ethnic Chinese in Britain. Specifically, this paper looks at the role that propaganda related to the Cultural Revolution and the 1967 Riots had upon Britain's Chinese community.

Benton's article (2005), later reproduced in The Chinese in Britain, 1800–Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity (2008), elaborates on the transnational role and impact Maoism had upon Britain's ethnic Chinese community during and prior to the Cultural Revolution. Both works note that the 1967 Riots were the impetus for the radicalisation of certain members of Britain's ethnic Chinese community and acknowledge the legacy of the communist East River Column (Dongjiang zongdui 东江纵队), which fought during the Second World War and left a long tail of support in Hong Kong. Likewise, Benton acknowledges discrimination and poverty faced in Britain made for fertile ground for pro-Red Guard sentiment among certain British Chinese (Benton, 2005: 334–335). However, in light of newly available archival sources from the Hong Kong Public Records Office, Benton and Gomez's work needs to be critically approached and revised in order to further elaborate on the effectiveness of Maoist propaganda upon the ethnic Chinese in Britain. Equally it is important to gain further insight in the British and Hong Kong government's response to quell the Red Guard agitation in Britain's ethnic Chinese community.

The Impact of the 1967 Riots

Until the late 1960s, the Hong Kong government contributed very little to the colony's social welfare and resisted the introduction of political and social reforms. This was due in part to fear of retaliation from the PRC, but also to fear of disrupting Hong Kong's laissez-faire economy. Furthermore, the colonial authorities lacked the political mechanisms capable of integrating the population and mediating social conflicts. This caused many people, specifically those from the New Territories, to view the government as a distant menace to be blamed for the importation of cheap rice and driving farmers from the land (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 248; Cheung, 2009: 4–5). This mistrust of the Hong Kong government was also evidenced among the ethnic Chinese who found employment in Britain. The Hong Kong government was represented by an office in London (the Hong Kong Government Office, or HKGO) that was established at the end of the Second World War to help aid in the colony's post-war rehabilitation. By 1955, this role changed when the Colonial Secretariat transferred the role of promoting trade and industry to the HKGO as it was considered more appropriate for the Hong Kong government to handle such responsibility. Until the aftermath of the 1967 Riots, officials of the HKGO rarely impinged on the lives of Britain's ethnic Chinese and in instead promoted a policy of self-help (TNA, FCO 40/247, August 7, 1969).

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, the relationship between Britain and the PRC has been defined as a "continuous process of contestation and cooperation" (Mark, 2017: 4). Britain took the initiative in 1950 to recognise the newly founded PRC in the hopes of developing trade and retaining Hong Kong as a British colony. Despite the early British recognition, Anglo-Chinese relations remained strained due to Britain's refusal to denounce the Nationalist government in Taiwan and simultaneously recognise the PRC as the legitimate China to the United Nations (Tang, 1992: 76–81; Mark, 2017: 189). Negotiations came to an abrupt end due to the Korean War (1950–1953) and would not resume until the Geneva Convention of 1954 when Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Premier Zhou Enlai agreed to exchange chargés d'affaires. Prior to

this agreement, the nations merely recognised each other through representatives to Britain's legation in Beijing, established in 1861, and by the New China News Agency (Xinhua tongxunshe 新华通讯社) in London, established in 1947 (Mark, 2017: 55). For the next decade, Britain and the PRC would remain merely at semi-diplomatic relations due to the status of Taiwan and the United Nations seat. However, the United States escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1965 inflamed Anglo-Chinese relations. During the Vietnam War, Prime Minister Harold Wilson carefully maintained a balance between the Anglo-American alliance and averting a third world war. While Wilson did not commit British combat troops to South Vietnam, he publicly supported the American war effort in Southeast Asia. This public display of support infuriated the Chinese. In turn, Beijing's propaganda intensified its attacks not only on Britain, but also on Hong Kong, for it was labelled a base for American aggression against Vietnam due to the amount of visiting American warships on shore leave (Hughes, 2009: 58–63; Mark, 2017: 80–87). While the Vietnam War had done much to inflame Anglo-Chinese relations, the launch of the PRC's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966 brought about an all-time low in diplomatic relations between Britain and the PRC.

The anti-imperial and anti-capitalist nature of the Cultural Revolution and its stated goal to radically transform Chinese society (Wu, 2014: 1–2) made it a matter of time until the revolution impacted British-ruled Hong Kong. Following a labour strike on May 7, 1967, Beijing's state newspaper People's Daily (Renmin Ribao 人民日报) encouraged Hong Kong Leftists to mobilise all pro-communist and PRC owned businesses to take part in the riots against the Hong Kong government (Man and Lun, 2014: 256). Excessive violence reigned in Hong Kong for the next seven months as the leftists and Hong Kong police clashed in the streets and attempted to win the propaganda battle for the hearts and minds of the people. With the British authorities committed to a firm stand against the leftists, Premier Zhou Enlai ordered the leftists to gradually wind down and brought about an end of the riots in December 1967 (Ma, 2003: 162–163).

Propaganda became the key form of warfare between the leftists and the Hong Kong government throughout the 1967 Riots, and Governor David Trench determined as early as May 1967 that a policy of firm action was needed against the communist press if Hong Kong was to remain in British hands (TNA, FCO 21/191, May 15, 1967). The leftist press continuously produced material that not only denounced British imperial rule, but also tried to legitimise the Cultural Revolution to the people of Hong Kong. Furthermore, Mao's Little Red Book, images of Mao, and revolutionary songs were freely distributed by the leftists (Cheung, 2009: 45–50). It was estimated by Hong Kong's Special Branch that the leading left-wing newspapers, including Wen Wei Po (文汇报), Ta Kung Pao (大公报), and the New Evening Post, had a daily circulation of 352,000 in July 1967 (TNA, FCO 40/114, October 26, 1967). While initially hesitate, London eventually approved the Hong Kong government request to ban the leftist press from publishing and ordered right-wing newspapers to distribute pro-colonial material as additional form of countermeasure (TNA, FCO 40/11, August 31, 1967).

As will be discussed later on, the left-wing newspapers also played an important role in Britain as they provided the only Chinese language-based media to inform Britain's ethnic Chinese community on news of Hong Kong (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 26). This not only provided a pro-communist viewpoint, but further reveals the British and Hong Kong government's' negligence and neglect towards the ethnic Chinese, setting the precedent for Red Guard chauvinism in Britain's Chinatowns in support of Hong Kong's leftist demonstrations and pro-Maoist sentiments. Yet the lessons learned from riots were exported to Britain, and the British and Hong Kong governments were forced to turn over a new leaf and reform their policy towards Britain's ethnic Chinese community in order to stem pro-Red Guard sentiments and provide media outlets representing a colonial viewpoint. Thus, Britain's ethnic Chinese populace were not only connected to Hong Kong in terms of homeland ties and family remittance, but also by events

that transpired in the British colony and how that information was presented. Thus, the wave of social and political unrest of Hong Kong in 1967 was a transnational event that had deep impact on Britain's ethnic Chinese community.

Maoism in Britain's Ethnic Chinese Community

The array of literature surrounding Maoism and the Cultural Revolution's impact upon Britain has tended to focus on the British Left and local Britons' fascination with the PRC as being economically and culturally driven. Economically, the British Left promoted trade relations with the PRC as a solution for Britain's economic woes. Culturally, the British Left's solidarity with the PRC was motivated by its sympathy for the Chinese people who had suffered for a century under imperialism, foreign invasions, and natural calamities. This resulted in the formation of several British-based Maoist organisations such as the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), whose members were mostly white students (Widgery, 1976; Smith and Worley, 2014, 2017). Tom Buchanan elaborated on the phenomenon of Maoism in Britain during the Cultural Revolution and convincingly demonstrated that the British Left often took a naïve and guilty view of the PRC and the revolution, which led intellectuals of the Left to form the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU) (Buchanan, 2012: 189–199). While there is an extensive historiography surrounding the British Left, this article details the impact Maoism and the Leftist Riots had upon Britain's ethnic Chinese populace throughout the period of the Cultural Revolution.

During the 1967 Riots, members of the Kung Ho Association, a pro-left Chinese association based in London, took to the streets to protest against British imperialism in Hong Kong. They carried a portrait of Mao Zedong while chanting revolutionary songs and quotations from the Cultural Revolution. Since the outbreak of the 1967 Riots, the Kung Ho Association's headquarters in London had become an important centre for the distribution of left-wing Hong Kong newspapers, including Wen Wei Po, Ta Kung Pao, and the New Evening Post, to Britain's ethnic Chinese community. These left-wing Hong Kong newspapers were quite popular and did much to inform the ethnic Chinese about the 1967 Riots, albeit from leftist point of view, due in part to a lack of right-wing publications on the matter. Indeed, it was not until August of 1967 that the British and Hong Kong government made any efforts to inform the Chinese community of the events that transpired in Hong Kong during the leftist riots (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 22–23, 79). Pro-left Chinese associations, such as the members of the Chinese Mutual Aid Worker's Club, performed Cultural Revolution model operas across cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, and Edinburgh. Furthermore, young leftist Chinese workers collected money for the All-Circle Struggle Committee (Gang ying pohai douzheng weiyuanhui 港英迫害斗争委员会), the primary Leftist organisation in Hong Kong, in order to support the fight against the British colonial government and spread Beijing's propaganda (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 249–250). These demonstrations were minor when compared to the 1967 Riots and it should be noted that most ethnic Chinese in Britain remained neutral or at the most sympathetic to the leftist cause in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, the British government wondered how and why elements of the Chinese community, who had escaped the chaos of communist China, demonstrated in support of the Hong Kong leftists. A more pressing concern was the discontent expressed by Britain's Chinese community towards the Hong Kong government and the overall social environment of the colony. The British government tasked the Hong Kong government to survey how and why certain members of Britain's Chinese community had become pro-communist and to find a solution to this problem. The results of the survey indicated a combination of factors involving the poor treatment of ethnic Chinese faced in Britain, criticism towards the Hong Kong government, and the ability of the Communists to win over certain members of the Chinese population.

In the month that the 1967 Riots concluded, Colonial Secretary W. V. Dickinson instructed Administrative Officer David Lai to come to Britain and determine how and why communism had influenced the ethnic Chinese community. Lai, who was well known for his review of illegal gambling in Hong Kong (Bray, 2001: 187), was also tasked to examine the organisation of the Chinese Liaison Office in London which was established under the HKGO in 1962 with the purpose to assist the people of Hong Kong to integrate into British society. Lai left Hong Kong on December 13, 1967 and operated from an office in London until April 16, 1968. In order to complete his mission and to gain a better understanding of the situations faced by ethnic Chinese in Britain, Lai organised several meetings with the heads of the Liaison Office, Ministry of Defence, Special Branch, and various local government authorities such as the regional police forces. Lai surveyed ethnic Chinese, mainly restaurant owners and workers across Britain's major cities such as London, Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, and Cambridge to assess their level of sympathy for Chinese communism. Finally, he met and discussed with the people of Hong Kong the impact the 1967 Riots had upon them, their family, and their future aspirations (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 3–6). His study revealed to the British and Hong Kong governments the need to commit time and resources to the issues faced by the ethnic Chinese community.

Lai's report identified the poor relationship between the Liaison Office and the ethnic Chinese community as key factor as to why Maoism was able to take root in Britain's Chinese community. Since its establishment, the Liaison Office was single-handedly operated by Liaison Officer H. T. Woo on a part-time basis. Victor Chann joined the office only in 1965 as a full-time assistant (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 7). These two positions had the colossal tasks of assisting and corresponding with those who contacted the Liaison Office, paying occasional visits to employment centres outside London, and replying to letters from ethnic Chinese who enquired about matters such as passport renewal and extension of work permits (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 70–71). It is clear the Liaison Office was by no means a completely satisfactory vessel to render services due to the shortage of staff and its fixed location in London. The major concern with the Liaison Office was that it operated on a basis to assist those who asked, which meant the office did not play an active role with ethnic Chinese and as such remained virtually unknown to the Chinese communities across Britain. Up to 1966, the common complaint to the Liaison Office was delays in granting permission for wives and children to join their husbands in Britain (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 10), yet it is clear the British government did not seek to address the many social needs ethnic Chinese faced in Britain.

Like many other ethnic minority communities, the ethnic Chinese in Britain experienced discrimination by both the state and in everyday life, which worsened for ethnic Chinese in the 1960s when the government passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962. This act removed the automatic right of citizenship for Commonwealth citizens and regulated the flow of migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (Home Office, 1969: 3). The act had a significant impact on the Hong Kong Chinese who had lost the right of abode in Britain. Under the new law, they could only enter Britain with an employment voucher for a specific job obtained for them by their future employer. This resulted in the further concentration of ethnic Chinese labourers in the catering business through systems of chain migration, word of mouth, and family connections (Parker, 1999: 65–66). Furthermore, Lai's report found numerous forms of discrimination ethnic Chinese faced in 1967, which included exploitation in gambling clubs, with the average daily loss per person at roughly £200–300; bullying and racist name-calling towards ethnic Chinese students by both their peers and teachers; violence towards Hong Kong Chinese men who married "Englishwomen"; and the language barrier many ethnic Chinese faced in Britain (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 30–32).

The language barrier was an especially difficult issue as most ethnic Chinese who migrated had Cantonese as their first language, with many never having learned English at all.

Many felt helpless, as they were unable to effectively communicate in English and get access to essential services (Ng, 1968: 89; Watson, 1975: 124–125; Parker, 1995: 120–121; Benton and Gomez, 2008: 329–331). The language barriers between ethnic Chinese and local Britons often led to violent confrontations. For example, in 1963 a fight occurred between six Chinese staff and several British customers of a Chinese restaurant in St. Helens, Lancashire, due to poor communication and the latter refusing to pay. This resulted in the death of one British youth and the arrest of six Chinese staff members (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 25–33).

It should be noted that the anti-Chinese racialism had long contributed to the popularity of communist ideology amongst Britain's Chinese community. In Liverpool and London during and after the First World War, ethnic Chinese seafarers entered left-wing politics and established trade unions to cope with the antagonism of British sailors and to fight for better welfare (Ng, 1968: 52–55; Shang, 1984: 10). As Benton and Gomez note, these early Chinese trade unions "played an important role in shaping the Chinese community, nurturing its political consciousness, and sharpening its focus on China, the diaspora, and Chinese migrant labour worldwide" (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 263). While trade unions declined after the Second World War due to post-war Chinese migrants' entry into the catering industry, radical trade union leaders formed new Chinese associations that took a pro-leftist stance. Two such associations emerged from the original Liverpool-based Chinese trade unions and that included the Kung Ho Association and the Tai Ping Club. The Kung Ho Association was established in London in 1947 under Samuel Chinque (Sam Chen) a proud communist and former leader of Liverpool Chinese Seamen's Union. The Tai Ping Club was formed in Liverpool in 1948 with membership predominantly from the village of Tai Po in the Hong Kong New Territories. Both groups were organised to aid Chinese workers in their dealing with discrimination from British society and to improve their welfare. Furthermore, both groups proclaimed their support of Beijing after 1949 and openly criticised the Hong Kong government for their treatment of the ethnic Chinese populace (Ng, 1968: 55–56; Shang, 1984: 37; Benton and Gomez. 2008: 246). While these two associations did not hide their support of the PRC, both proved to be more readily and willing to aid members of Britain's Chinese community who had faced discrimination. This in turn revealed that the pro-leftist organisations were more willing and readily available to aid the ethnic Chinese than either the British or Hong Kong governments. Finally, Lai's survey found that while many ethnic Chinese did not firmly support communism, there was a deep sense of patriotism due to recent developments in China. One Chinese credited the Chinese Community Party (CCP) for the better treatment of Chinese in Britain: "if China had not become a powerful nation Bold Street in Liverpool would probably still be out of bounds to Chinese" (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 19–20). Thus, further credit was given to the CCP for the better treatment of post-war Chinese migrants to Britain.

Overall, it was clear that the British and Hong Kong governments were uninvolved in the well-being of Britain's Chinese community prior to 1967. The Liaison Office was undoubtedly too understaffed and underfunded to aid those who even knew about the office. The annual budget of the office was £5,000, which included a monthly honorarium of £20 for Administrative Officer Woo. The level of financial commitment reflected Britain's casual approach to the Liaison Office (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 11–14). Finally, the British and Hong Kong governments had done little to inform Britain's Chinese community on events in Hong Kong. Instead, the only Chinese language media available was of a left-wing viewpoint, which in turn reinforced an unfavourable view of both the British and Hong Kong governments (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 25–27).

It has been well known that the PRC attempted to export the Maoist ideology and the values of the Cultural Revolution across Asia, Africa, and Latin America to varying degrees. The Chinese embassy throughout these regions played a leading role in propagating pro-Red Guard sentiments (Cheng, 2006). The Hong Kong government found the methods used by the communists to influence the British Chinese population included film shows, distribution of

propaganda publications, establishment of small social clubs throughout the major cities, and the appointment of contacts to facilitate communication and implementation of plans. The Chinese embassy in London had a hand in the distribution of Maoist material, staging demonstrations in support of Mao Zedong Thought, brawled with the police, and had some level of network among certain members of the ethnic Chinese community throughout 1967 (Mark, 2017: 125–134; HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 20–23). However, Lai reported there was no evidence to support the claim by some Chinese restauranteurs that communication between the embassy of the PRC and the British Chinese community was unified around a central committee, which in turn established numerous sub-committees throughout Britain in order to indoctrinate ethnic Chinese into the Maoist ideology (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 24–25).

Soon, it was made apparent that the Chinese embassy took every measure possible to help solve the problems faced by ethnic Chinese and was far more effective than the Liaison Office. One such case that demonstrated the effectiveness of the Chinese embassy was its handling in acquiring the repatriation payments for a Hong Kong sailor who was dismissed from a Norwegian ship in 1966. In this case, the sailor approached the Liaison Office for aid, but the approach was unsuccessful. The sailor then requested to be taken to the Chinese embassy. The embassy was quick to contact the shipping company and the Norwegian consulate and successfully accommodated the dismissed sailor in a hotel and was refunded his air ticket to Hong Kong by the Norwegian government (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 20–21). This example clearly demonstrated that the Chinese embassy was far more effective than the Liaison Office in settling issues faced by ethnic Chinese. More importantly, such successful cases provided the ethnic Chinese in Britain a positive image of the PRC and created a belief that the Chinese government was far more concerned with the well-being of the Chinese community than the British or Hong Kong governments. Although this case may not have been enough to convince certain ethnic Chinese community to become pro-Maoists, it might have revealed to some that the PRC was not as malevolent as was once believed.

An important cultural medium used by both sides of the Cold War was that of film. Propaganda had always been central to the operation of the CCP. The PRC was well-known for using films to promote mass campaigns to legitimise the state and the policies of leaders to sway both domestic and international opinion. Film became an important propaganda tool that had a lasting impact on the Red Guard generation of the PRC. Prior to 1966, most films produced in the PRC were based either on the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War or the suffering of Chinese society prior to 1949 (Yang, 2016: 49–58). However, Chinese propaganda and films shifted their focus in 1966 to the Cultural Revolution, which emphasised tearing down the "Four Olds" of Chinese culture (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas) in order to radically transform China's society. The most famous Cultural Revolution films, such as The Legend of the Red Lantern (Hong deng ji 红灯记) and The Red Detachment of Women (Hongse niangzi jun 红色娘子军), based on the model operas (yangbanxi 样板戏), were largely attributed to Mao's wife, Jiang Qing (Laikwan, 2017: 9–18). In Britain, the Chinese embassy played Cultural Revolution films on a weekly basis, which were most welcomed by the ethnic Chinese in Britain, be they communist sympathisers or not. The reason for this was that most ethnic Chinese had little to no civic centres or activities for leisure that were given in the Chinese language. The Hong Kong government quickly found out that the Chinese embassy had for years been distributing, free of charge, films of a propaganda nature to those in Britain willing to attend the weekly film showing in most major British cities (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 21–22). These films had free admission, though a voluntary donation was accepted. Both the British and Hong Kong governments believed that the donation from attendees was enough to cover the cost of operations and that the Chinese embassy was able to supply film reels free of charge (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 21–22). It was clear that the Cultural Revolution films were played to Britain's ethnic Chinese population with the clear intention of spreading Maoist and Cultural Revolution propaganda and

to justify the rule of the PRC. While many ethnic Chinese did not become ardent supporters of Maoism, the Chinese embassy screenings remained popular due to the Cantonese language spoken in the films.

Lai's report discovered that propaganda publications were one of the most important mediums through which communist influence was exerted on the Chinese population of Britain, specifically over the 1967 Riots. It was revealed that the daily circulation of left-wing Hong Kong newspapers was estimated to be roughly 4,500 copies, nearly three times the daily circulation of right-wing Hong Kong newspapers in Britain's Chinese community. In London, members of the association travelled to Chinese restaurants, particularly those in the West End, to sell recent editions of Ta Kung Pao, Wen Wei Po, and the Evening News. Furthermore, these newspapers were supplemented by information bulletins published and distributed for free by the Chinese embassy in London. These bulletins were compiled on the basis of radio announcements and newspapers in Beijing and contained reprints of Hong Kong-based left-wing news (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 22–23). In a similar fashion to the state-press in the PRC, the left-wing newspapers in Britain followed a specific guideline for launching political campaigns through editorials and leading articles in order to influence the ethnic Chinese populace (Brady, 2008: 1). This signifies the strength of the Chinese press and its financial capabilities to be able to have such wide audience subscription not only in Hong Kong, but also in Britain.

Finally, another important institution the Maoists used to spread their ideology to the ethnic Chinese was the many Chinese clubs and recreational facilities across Britain's major cities. In his book, The Chinese in London, Ng argues that the Chinese associations throughout London and the rest of Britain were apolitical, with the exception of one pro-communist club, and were primarily concerned with mutual aid, cultural, and recreational activities (Ng, 1968: 47–49). This statement, however, does not take into consideration that since 1949 both Beijing and Taipei began competing for the loyalty of Chinese abroad. Despite the fall of the mainland to the CCP, the Guomindang government of Taiwan continued to support pro-Taiwan associations in Britain, including the Overseas Chinese Association (Yingguo huaqiao xiehui 英国华侨协会) and the Sun Yat-sen Society in the United Kingdom (Yingguo Zhongshan xiehui 英国中山协会). While Beijing only considered ethnic Chinese who did not assume foreign nationality as Overseas Chinese, many pro-communist associations leaned towards the PRC. The Kung Ho Association, based in London, was openly supportive of the CCP regime after 1949. The Workers' Club adopted a pro-Maoist stance in the 1960s and displayed Maoist propaganda over its headquarters in Liverpool and Manchester. In addition, leftist organisations such as the Tai Ping Club, founded in London in 1948, and Liverpool's Wah-shing Club explicitly supported Beijing throughout the 1967 Riots. Furthermore, these two organisations banned gambling and screened Chinese propaganda films to their community members and staged demonstrations against British imperialism in Hong Kong (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 243–246). David Lai's report for the Hong Kong government found these Chinese associations remained popular among ethnic Chinese workers and students who were mostly not Maoists or pro-communists as these were locations for the Chinese to meet community members who spoke the same language and to learn the latest news about Hong Kong and the PRC (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 23–24). While the level of support the PRC and the Chinese embassy provided to these leftist associations remains unknown, it was nonetheless comparable to the ability of the PRC to support, direct, and mobilise pro-Red Guard sentiments through communist-controlled organisations such as leftist bookshops, banks, and cinemas throughout the 1967 Riots (Tsang, 2007: 176). On a final note, throughout his stay in London, Lai was able to gain access to the Kung Ho Association under the guise of being a Hong Kong student and was allowed entry due to his Chinese ethnicity. Lai found the association filled with reading materials on the PRC and the Cultural Revolution and noted that half of the premise was used for table-tennis and the other half used for reading and dining, offering food at prices significantly lower than the average London Chinese restaurant. Lai reported that while he felt the Kung Ho

Association was not well run, the group's political affiliation and financial support from the PRC was clear from the amount of propaganda material held and distributed from its headquarters to the surrounding Chinese community (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 23–24).

These examples clearly demonstrate that the PRC maintained a transnational network with the ethnic Chinese in Britain through the Chinese embassy in order to legitimise the PRC regime and the Cultural Revolution. The Cold War powers struggled to propagate and legitimise their ideology on the global stage through cultural, economic, military, and political means in order to gain support from nations and peoples alike. The PRC was heavily involved in exporting Maoism and the Cultural Revolution ideology throughout the world, specifically in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, in defiance of both the Americans and the Soviets (Cheng, 2006). Britain was an important target for the export of Cultural Revolution values due to its ethnic Chinese population and also due to the historical nature of British imperialism towards China and its control over Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government report found that the Chinese propaganda attempted to legitimise the Cultural Revolution and denounce British imperialism. From 1945 onward, the Cold War produced a violent imposition on the world that produced wars and displacements and created new and imagined identities designed to connect or distance the Chinese from the competing ideologies of capitalism and communism. Across the globe, borders were redrawn from anti-colonial and anti-communist projects that superseded transnational ties for the strategic transmission of Cold War ideologies (Eschen, 2013: 452–453). Therefore, it was inevitable that a conflict in Hong Kong would have an impact on the ethnic Chinese population living in Britain in 1967, and it was inevitable that the British government would react to counter the Maoist influence on the ethnic Chinese community.

The British Response to Maoist Agitation

David Lai's report revealed that both the British and Hong Kong governments needed to radically change their policy toward governing ethnic Chinese living and working in Britain. The first recommendation was to address the major issues the Liaison Office faced: it desperately needed not only funds, but a reorganisation to better establish extensive and thorough contact with the Chinese community. The Liaison Office needed to counter the influence of the Chinese embassy, which, according to the report, showed a greater readiness to aid Chinese migrants in Britain, especially among the Hong Kong Chinese youth (HKPRO, NT 1/2120/62c). Moreover, the report identified that the British and Hong Kong governments needed to show that they were committed to the well-being of the Chinese communities and project a positive image of the British. The Liaison Office was recommended to increase its staff to include a full-time officer, who needed to be ethnic Chinese and bilingual in both English and Cantonese languages. This position was given the title of Director of Chinese Affairs and reported to the Colonial Secretariat. It was recommended that five full-time supporting staff members be hired, including four liaison officers and one social welfare officer. Furthermore, regional Liaison Offices would need to be established outside London, specifically in Liverpool and Edinburgh. These two cities were chosen because Liverpool was home to the second largest ethnic Chinese populace, aside from London, and Edinburgh was deemed a city nearly free from all Maoist influence and that Chinese community there would be more likely to give strong support to a regional office and in turn show support to the Hong Kong government (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 55–57). The additional offices in turn significantly increased the annual budget of operating the Liaison Office from £5,000 in 1967 to roughly £48,000 in 1968 (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 8–9). Finally, the Liaison Office was to cultivate leadership in the Chinese communities and facilitate the work of the office with an Advisory Committee comprising leading Chinese chosen from the main city centres. The committee was to meet at least twice a year to discuss matters concerning the Chinese community and establish an amenity fund to aid those in desperate need (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 57). Accordingly, the Liaison Office was to be expanded in order to better establish and address the concerns of Britain's ethnic Chinese community and to stem the opportunity for those to be

influenced by the Chinese embassy. However, this strategy came at the risk of influencing Britain's Chinatowns too much and in turn offending the Chinese embassy and sparking a reaction. The 1967 Riots had only just concluded a few months prior to the Hong Kong government's recommendation, yet it was deemed a necessary action to unify the British Chinese communities (HKPRO, CR 9/5215/56).

Another important task for the Hong Kong government and the Liaison Office was to wage an undeclared propaganda struggle against the Chinese embassy. The Hong Kong government was to regularly send Britain popular Cantonese films and news reels about Hong Kong to be shown to the Chinese community. These films were to be available free of charge and were to be organised by a Film Committee, under the Liaison Office, which aided in creating leadership among the Chinese community. This was in clear opposition of the Chinese embassy, which, as mentioned before did regular screenings of Maoist and Cultural Revolution films. As well, the Liaison Office ensured the films screened by the Film Committee delivered entertainment as well as propaganda to convince the viewers of the benefits of capitalism and the chaos brought on by the Cultural Revolution (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 57–58). The distribution of Hong Kong films also helped develop a Hong Kong identity, which will be examined later on. Furthermore, news media outlets had to be reformed in order to counter the communist propaganda and better inform and connect to the British Chinese community. To accomplish this task, the Information Section of the Liaison Office was to be strengthened with two information officers who were bilingual in both written and spoken English and Cantonese. This new office was instructed to counter the Chinese embassy-supported press in 1968 which led to the publication of the Hong Kong News Digest, a conservative paper mailed to Hong Kong Chinese throughout Britain and Europe, designed to inform from the colonial viewpoint on matters surrounding Hong Kong. The paper was distributed free of charge across Britain as both the British and Hong Kong governments deemed it necessary to provide free newspapers to counter the communist press, which were much more widely accessible to ethnic Chinese. Moreover, the British and Hong Kong governments subsidised non-communist Chinese newspapers in Britain to direct and increase sales of the right-press. The Overseas Chinese Daily (Wah Kiu Yat Po 华人日报), a pro-British Hong Kong press, was given special attention as the British government appointed sub-agents in all major British city centres to promote the sale of the newspaper. The Hong Kong government subsidised the Overseas Chinese Daily HK$0.10 for each copy and lowered freight charges (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 59–62). Additionally, Lai recommended a list of contacts who had been cleared and approved by the Ministry of Defence. It appears Lai's contacts were meant to be recruited or at the least meant to keep in touch with Britain's Special Branch. This list included thirty-six ethnic Chinese, originally from either Hong Kong or China who were mostly restaurant owners across Britain's major cities. Interestingly, all thirty-six men had long-standing connections and were well respected amongst the Chinese community and had neutral-right to anti-communist political inclinations (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 84–91). Therefore, Lai organised officials from both the British and Hong Kong governments together to address the needs of the ethnic Chinese community and eliminate Maoist sympathisers.

Despite the many changes made by the British and Hong Kong governments, for some Chinese migrants, the habits of independence and avoidance of authority were too ingrained. However, for the vast majority of ethnic Chinese, the change in strategy by the British to the commitment to Chinese migrant welfare stymied the influence of communism through effective counterpropaganda and the promotion of a Hong Kong identity. It was already deemed by the Hong Kong government in 1968 that the so-called "Battle of Portland Place," a clash between Chinese embassy staff members and British police, had reduced the popularity of the Chinese embassy amongst Britain's Chinese community as there was a significant decline in attendance for the PRC's National Day celebration on October 1, 1967 (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 19). The increase in funding and support across Britain by the Liaison Office was also believed to have

contributed to the decline in support for the Chinese embassy. Over the next few years, the Liaison Office had met most of the objectives set up in David Lai's report to the Hong Kong government. Officials from the office promoted the interests of the Hong Kong Chinese to Whitehall, provided recordings of English-language lessons, and aided in services including immigration, work permits, renewal of passports, and mediating disputes (HKPRO, CR 9/5215/56). In so doing, the Liaison Office was able to establish contact and show support to the Chinese community and minimise the possibility of Britain's ethnic Chinese from being influenced by the Chinese embassy.

In the aftermath of the 1967 Riots, the Hong Kong government banned all communist films from being screened and severely limited the printing capabilities of the leftist press (Zhou, 2002: 185–188). In Britain, the effort of the British government was to block the communist films as best as possible in the hopes of eliminating the propaganda films. In their efforts, both the Hong Kong government and the Liaison Office secured film venues for its supporters and in 1970 showed 262 films with an average audience of 40 in restaurants and 400 in hired halls. Furthermore, the conservative paper Hong Kong News Digest was distributed to 19,000 subscribers in Britain's Chinatowns and several hundred copies were mailed to ethnic Chinese in mainland Europe and to seafarers. As well, the Liaison Office widely distributed news pamphlets answering Chinese migrant questions and fed the colonial viewpoint on the development of Hong Kong (HKPRO, CR 9/5215/56).

Although the British cannot claim to have won all the hearts and minds of the Hong Kong Chinese, it can be said the British did more than just counter the Maoist propaganda, but also helped perpetuate the Hong Kong identity. The birth of Hong Kong identity has often been dated to the year prior to David Lai's report, in the wake of the 1967 Riots. The films and newspapers the British released to its ethnic Chinese community not only renewed public confidence in the British and Hong Kong governments, but also celebrated Hong Kong's free market, stability, and security as positives of British rule and capitalism. These were contrasted to what the Cultural Revolution had brought to Hong Kong: chaos and instability. While Lai's report found that many ethnic Chinese, including the young and old, were dissatisfied and frustrated with the Hong Kong government, they nonetheless treasured their home of Hong Kong and the better living conditions provided by British society (HKPRO, HAD 2/90/62: 19–34). To the Chinese community, one of the most important initiatives by the British and Hong Kong governments was its support for Chinese schools in Britain by providing textbooks and lessons in Cantonese (Home Office, 1985: 7–11). While this project too was meant to influence Hong Kong Chinese to serve the British interest, in a minor way, it alleviated some of the racial discrimination ethnic Chinese faced and fostered the Hong Kong identity. In so doing, the British and Hong Kong governments catered to the Chinese community's specific Cantonese language, in a way the Chinese embassy would have never done, and aided in the preservation of the Cantonese identity, which in turn fostered the Hong Kong identity.

Conclusion

This article adds to the historiography surrounding the transnational nature of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution which had a significant impact on the ethnic Chinese community living in Britain in the late 1960s. With the 1967 Riots breaking out in Hong Kong, certain ethnic Chinese in Britain became radicalised and even came to embrace Mao Zedong Thought. The Hong Kong government quickly set out to find out how and why the ethnic Chinese of Britain might support Maoism when many had previously escaped persecution by the PRC and fled to the safety of British Hong Kong. The survey of Britain's Chinese community was unique in that it identified a combination of anti-Chinese prejudice in Britain and effectiveness of Maoist propaganda that

caused certain ethnic Chinese to show support or at the least sympathy towards the communists. Unfortunately, neither the British nor Hong Kong governments did much to resolve the racist discrimination many ethnic Chinese faced. But they did reform the Liaison Office to better support this community and provided an effective counterpropaganda campaign to challenge the Maoist propaganda. The report discovered that the Liaison Office was underfunded, largely unknown to the Chinese community, and not nearly as effective in handling matters as the Chinese embassy in London. Furthermore, the propaganda distributed from the Chinese embassy, including film and newspapers, had been extensive and largely unchallenged by either the British or Hong Kong governments. It was from the survey of ethnic Chinese living throughout Britain that the Hong Kong government was able to adapt a strategy to counter the spread of Maoism in the Chinese community. The Liaison Office was finally better funded and staffed in order to help and advocate for the needs of ethnic Chinese. Moreover, both the British and Hong Kong governments funded extensive propaganda material to share the news on Hong Kong from a colonial viewpoint and to better distribute right-wing newspapers as an antidote to the left-wing and pro-Communist newspapers. Yet, above all, it was Britain's effort to foster the Hong Kong identity, built on the benefits of capitalism and security over the chaos of the PRC and the Cultural Revolution, that provided the best challenge to Maoism in Britain's Chinese population. Through their efforts, the British were able to stem the radicalisation and commit to the needs of its ethnic Chinese community.

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Branding the Chinese Dream: Reception of China's Public Diplomacy in Britain's "Cultural China"

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Abstract

Over four decades, China's transformed propaganda system has embraced public diplomacy to dispel its perceived "threat." The most recent strategy has been the branding of the Chinese Dream narrative. Although there has been some academic focus on China's nation branding, little has been written about its reception by overseas audiences. Accordingly, this article draws on focus-group data and employs Tu Wei-ming's "cultural China" framework in exploring how the Chinese Dream is received and interpreted in the United Kingdom. This article contributes to understandings of nation branding by recognising how Chinese diaspora communities and British intellectual and professional elites engage with and promote brand values. It argues that the socio-cultural aspect of branding is important for China's identity and that using the Chinese Dream as a branding narrative is successful when it focuses on cultural and economic messaging but divides opinion when political ideology is used.

Keywords: Cultural China, Chinese Dream, public diplomacy, nation branding, cultural congruency, soft power communication

Introduction

This article examines the reception of China's changing public diplomacy within the framework of "cultural China" (Tu 1994 [1991]), using the recent Chinese Dream (Zhongguo meng 中国梦) nation-branding campaign as a case study. With its increasing economic, political, and military strength, China has been perceived as an exemplary model of progress by some developing countries, but also as a challenge to the interests of the United States, Asia-Pacific security, and human rights worldwide. In combating the "China threat" discourse, the Chinese Dream has been used as a discursive power strategy in mediating China's rise in the global community in recent years. Whilst there is a growing body of literature on China's use of soft power (see Li, 2009, among others), there is limited scholarship evaluating China's nation-branding activities, and the subsequent reaction of various audiences (He et al., 2020). This article aims to bridge the gap in the current literature by analysing data from focus groups conducted in the United Kingdom.

Over the past four decades, China's public diplomacy has aimed to dispel the widespread perception of a "China threat" (Ji and Zhou, 2010). The "harmonious world" proposed by President Hu Jintao in 2004 was China's first attempt to implement Confucian-style domestic policies, promoting unanimity simultaneous with China's growing global prominence. As Geis and Holt (2009) argue, the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao government employed early Chinese philosophy such as Confucianism to promote indirect, low-profile actions. When power was transferred to President Xi Jinping, Chinese foreign policy began to stress China's global standing and called

for a "new type of great-power relationship" with the US (Calmes and Myers, 2013), maintaining Confucian elements and adopting Western branding practices to build empathy with overseas audiences.

President Xi's key brand slogan is the Chinese Dream. First articulated in 2012, the Chinese Dream discourse reflects Communist Party of China (CPC) initiatives to rebrand its political propaganda as soft-power communication in both domestic and external contexts. Economically, the Chinese Dream aims to sustain China's prosperity while curbing challenges associated with urbanisation, welfare reform, and environmental degradation (Kuhn, 2014). Politically, it aims to "rejuvenate" China into a modern, democratic socialist country that is culturally "advanced" and militarily strong (State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2015). On an individual level, the Chinese Dream promises to improve education, employment, income, social security, medical care, housing, the environment, and personal career development (Kuhn, 2014). Nevertheless, these individual aspirations can only be fulfilled when the Chinese state achieves its global significance. As the state media instructs, "only when the country is doing well, can the nation and people do well" (China Daily, 2014).

Through its emphasis on Confucian cultural values, the Chinese Dream also aims to reach overseas audiences, which include ethnic Chinese populations outside China (often referred to as "overseas Chinese") and "China sympathizers." Both demographics constitute a significant part of "cultural China."

"Cultural China," according to Tu Wei-ming (1994 [1991]), consists of "three symbolic universes." The first symbolic universe of geographical and political entities consists of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The second symbolic universe of global ethnic and cultural communities consists of the Chinese diaspora worldwide. The third symbolic universe of intellectual and linguistic communities consists of intellectual elites whose professional activities contribute to global understanding of and engagement with China. The latter two groups constitute the target audience for China's nation-branding efforts worldwide.

Chinese overseas are highly valued "unofficial ambassadors" (Xi, 2014: 66) in China's public diplomacy campaigns, and Xi has called for the Chinese cultural brand to be endorsed by all its people: "No matter where a Chinese is, they always bear the distinctive brand of the Chinese culture, which is the common heritage of all the sons and daughters of China" (Xi, 2014: 70).The target non-Chinese audience of intellectual communities comprising literary, academic, business, and other elites is addressed in subtle ways in the political rhetoric. Research on Xi's lunar new year speeches (Wu, Thomas, and Yu, 2021), streamed worldwide since 2014, reveals that Xi delivers them to "comrades, friends, ladies and gentlemen." While "comrades" is a popular greeting among CPC members, "friends" indicates a feeling of respect and affection and "ladies and gentlemen" is conventionally used when addressing non-Chinese business, political, and intellectual elites, aiming to reach China sympathisers worldwide.

Examining the reception of this messaging in the complex context of ethnicity, politics, and culture is a necessary element of nation-branding success, but remains underexplored (Gertner, 2011; Hassan and Mahrous, 2019; He et al., 2020). While audiences overseas are clearly an important part of China's public diplomacy campaigns, their impact on and efficacy with these intended audiences is less clear at present. The aim of this study is to address this gap in the current literature and to examine the reception of China's changing public diplomacy in the UK's "cultural China" via the case study of the Chinese Dream nation-branding practice.

The article is structured as follows: In the first part we contextualise the research by reviewing literature on China's changing communication strategies, from external propaganda to branding, as well as offering a critique of the relevance of "cultural China" in the Chinese state's

public diplomacy. We follow this with an explanation of our research design, the rationale of our data-collection and data-analysis techniques, before presenting our findings based on the thematic analysis of focus-group interview data. The article concludes with a critical evaluation into the effectiveness of the Chinese Dream in soft-power communication, contributing to scholarly debates concerning nation branding in public diplomacy.

From External Propaganda to Branding China

After establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949, the CPC adopted a Soviet-style propaganda model. State communications activity aimed "to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and thereby behaviour" (Kenez, 1985: 4). Isolated from Western democracies, state communication aimed at a public overseas was categorised as "external propaganda" (duiwai xuanchuan 对外宣传), which adopted a defensive stance involving rebutting unfavourable reports about China, publicising government statements, and improving global awareness of China (CPC Central External Propaganda Research Office, 1998).

After reforms in the late 1970s, the CPC's control of media relaxed as China's creative industries became subject to marketisation, differentiation, and de-ideologisation (Lieberthal, 2004; Lynch, 1999; Yang and Calhoun, 2007; Zhao, 1998). The reduced state control of media, the end of the Cold War, and China's membership in the World Trade Organization and other international organisations had an influence on external propaganda. Furthermore, from the mid-1990s the internet created new dynamics among the state, media, and domestic and international publics, and further increased China's capability to modernise its external propaganda and engage with global communities.

In 1983, the Division of Public Diplomacy (now the Office of Public Diplomacy) was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, indicating the CPC's adoption of marketing strategies to address unwanted Chinese stereotypes and negative associations (Loo and Davies, 2006) and to maintain its "all-important name brand," leading to significant changes in "the content and meaning of the Party's activities" (Brady, 2008: 3). The following year, China International Cultural Communication Centre (CICCC) declared itself a cultural bridge between China and the world. Although old methods of ideological control, including censorship by government bodies and voluntary self-censorship practiced by media organisations, are still used, new methods such as political public relations and mass persuasion have become dominant in using the market to set social norms and justify control (Brady, 2008: 3). Various examples of new forms of diplomacy have been recorded in scholarly studies, including the adoption and sophistication of the government spokesperson system (Chen, 2011); China's expanding international media network globally (Zhang, 2021); student and scholarly exchange programs (Polumbaum, 2011); the establishment of the Confucius Institute programme (He et al., 2020); and non-state actors' entanglement with the state's national interests (Tang and Li, 2011).

China's soft-power work and brand promotion is not unusual in the world; several studies have focused on place branding in recent years (Anholt, 2002; Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Wu, 2016). Nation branding has been conceptualised as key to cultural and political diplomacy (He et al., 2020; Hurn, 2016) and the branding of places and nations is now a specific discipline (Wu, 2016) covering the construction and reconstruction of regional identity (Jones et al., 2009), with the usual aim of targeting foreign stakeholders for tourism and marketing purposes (Merkelsen and Rasmussen, 2016; Hassan and Mahrous, 2019). Politically, nation-branding campaigns use marketing techniques to project the brand equity of a nation (Hurn, 2016) and build positive meanings and associations (Anholt, 2010), but message consistency is often difficult to achieve due to the multidimensional nature of places and stakeholders (Gross et al.,

2009; Kemp et al., 2012). Instead of focusing on propagandistic image reproduction, success in nation branding often depends on relationship building (Wu, 2016) and co-creation between users and influencers (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013), in which communications, events, and slogans help to evoke a sense of identity, ownership, and belonging (Barr, 2012). According to Wu (2016), reciprocal commitment is at the heart of these relationships. This mirrors how modern brands are conceived as constructivist amalgamations of different interactive activities, in which actors inside and outside of organisations contribute to real-time brand production and representation (Rees, 2020). Whilst relationship building and trustworthiness in nation branding are often a part of the process of attracting foreign visitors, they are less scrutinised as a tool for soft power and public diplomacy, as is the reception of nation-branding messages (Anholt, 2007). Similarly, nation-states have been reconceptualised as being in flux and deterritorialised, with supra-national cultures existing outside state borders, contributing to the state as a "global-national imaginary" (Yang 2015), so the interpretations and actions of the "cultural China" becomes an important element of nation branding.

Despite the challenges associated with its human rights record (d'Hooghe, 2005; Kurlantzick, 2007; Nye, 2012), China has successfully used place-branding techniques to gain global recognition via soft-power mega-events like the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the promotion of its World Natural Heritage sites (Nakano and Zhu, 2020; Wang and Yuan, 2020), and advertisements and cultural exchanges (Barr, 2012; Cull, 2008; Servaes, 2012). China's cultural values include centuries of heritage, encapsulated, for example, in Confucianism, Taoism, and other aspects of ancient Chinese wisdom (Loo and Davies, 2006). China's soft power resources are often associated with cultural heritage maintained beyond its border in the diaspora experience and cultural-exchange activities, with media globalisation enabling supra-national forms of identity to develop outside state-defined territories (Yang, 2015: 6). Such cultural elements, which include cinema, literature, acupuncture, traditional medicine, cuisine, martial arts, and painting and calligraphy, are popular overseas and help connect the China brand to positive cultural associations (d'Hooghe, 2005). It is possible, therefore, to see how overseas audiences might promote or resist China's nation-brand construction, as part of this interactive global process.

China's Public Diplomacy in Cultural China

Considering the branding strategies used by China to reach publics overseas, Tu's conceptualisation of cultural China offers a critical framework for this research. In the case of the UK, Tu's second and the third symbolic universes are the target destinations of China's public diplomacy, that is, the Chinese diasporic community and the international community of publics whose professional or personal ties link them closely to the Chinese state.

The 2011 UK census shows that 0.7 percent of the overall population identified themselves as "ethnic Chinese" (ONS, 2013). The number of non-UK-born residents who reported China as their country of birth was 170,000, accounting for 0.27 percent of the overall population (ONS, 2013). Terminologies such as "Chinese diaspora," "Chinese migration," and "Chinese overseas" could mistakenly imply "a monolithic entity," while overlooking the greater diversity of experience (Benton and Gomes, 2011; Miles, 2020). Early immigrants from British colonies in Asia – mainly seamen, peasants, and craftsmen – formed early settlements in London and other major cities, while more recent immigrants from mainland China are mostly students-turned-highly-skilled-professionals (Benton and Gomes, 2011; Ding, 2007). Differences in countries of origin, migration patterns, history, economic status, and the diaspora institutions belonged to means that the contemporary British Chinese community is neither homogenous nor monolithic (Benton and Gomes, 2011: 10).

Despite the differences within the community, British Chinese in general fare well in terms of education, economics, health, and well-being compared with other ethnic groups in the

UK, which, to a degree, contributes to the problem of racial discrimination against this demographic. Ethnic Chinese in the UK suffer from different forms of racial discrimination and their experiences of racism often remain unseen or overlooked. Racist abuse ranges from "racism name-calling to damage to property and businesses, arson, physical attacks sometimes involving hospitalisation and murder" (Adamson et al., 2009). Discriminatory practices also create problems and penalties for ethnic Chinese accessing employment outside their enclave economies, including lower rates of pay (Pang, 1996; Mok and Platt, 2020).

The Chinese state has proactively engaged its ethnic overseas communities since reform and opening up in the late 1970s. The CPC has developed five policies to this end since 1978, including "attracting migrant remittances and investment," "launching cultural and educational exchange programs," "establishing government or nongovernment diaspora institutions," "implementing friendly exist/entry laws and regulations," and "developing international broadcasting towards diasporic populations" (Ding, 2015: 233). During the Xi administration, three further policies were adopted to strengthen engagement with ethnic Chinese overseas: "indigenising international communication to improve China's national image; jump-starting immigration reform to win the minds and hearts of overseas Chinese; and strengthening education exchange to shape the diasporic identity of overseas Chinese" (Ding, 2015: 231).

The rapid development of digital media and communications technologies since the 1990s has further transformed China's public diplomacy targeted at ethnic Chinese overseas. From a top-down perspective, foreign policy is now not only conducted officially but also via "a globally accessible media system" (Riley, 2014: 231). In the past three decades, China has encouraged its state-controlled media to "go global" and although they chiefly report global issues from China's perspective (Chang and Lin, 2014), they have also emotionally appealed to ethnic Chinese overseas, emphasising bonds between mainland China and the diaspora, who have been enlisted for nation building and branding (Miles, 2020: 251). Since 1983, China Central Television (CCTV) has connected ethnic Chinese globally at "an annual diasporic moment," celebrating the lunar new year and focusing on mainland China as the "ancestral nation" (zuguo 祖国) (Miles, 2020: 250). Sun Wanning (2006: 12) warns that state-controlled Chinese-language media create new dynamics around the sense of belonging where Chinese migrants are often "positioned uneasily in relation to the nation-building projects of both the country of origin and the destination."

This uneasiness felt by overseas Chinese in the country of destination has been aggravated by the fast-changing digital technologies in recent years. Where the internet has created sophisticated communication networks transcending national boundaries, more actors, including the general public, now enter the realm of public diplomacy to construct their own narratives.

From the bottom up, the use of media, including letters, telephones, videotapes, broadcasting, cinema, and digital media shape the cultural identities of diasporas in their host countries (Dayan, 1998). The "push" factor discourses from the host society (such as racial discrimination, unconscious bias, glass ceilings in career development, etc.) are accompanied with "pull" factors towards "home," creating further tensions between minority and host communities. In the case of the Chinese overseas diaspora, Chinese-language media usage contributes to a "global Chinese village," which impacts on Chinese transnational imagination (Sun, 2002). The use of Chinese-language websites, news groups, online magazines, and web forums offers "a common cultural repertoire" and develops a transnational Chinese cultural sphere (Yang, 2003: 486) or even a "Cyber Greater China" (Wu, 2007). The availability of mobile communication and social media platforms further connects overseas Chinese to home within a multidimensional space where meaning making practice bleeds across public, semi-public, and private spheres (Wu and Wall, 2019b).

Some researchers (Liu, 2005; Liu and van Dongen, 2016; Nyíri, 1999; Nyíri, 2001) suggest that Beijing has played an increasingly important role in shaping the structure and identity of Chinese overseas. Nyíri (1999: 68), for example, observes "a pan-Chinese identity" projected by new immigrants to Hungary from mainland China, and a form of "deterritorialised nationalism" based on the "official nation-state ideology" (Nyíri, 1999: 122). Hong Liu (2005) observes that new Chinese nationalism overseas revives notions of the country's economic prosperity, cultural regeneration, and national unification.

While it is possible to point to significant literature regarding Chinese diaspora and public diplomacy, there is little research that examines cultural China's "third symbolic universe" (Tu 1994 [1991]) which consists of non-Chinese-language writings and professional activities that shape the global perception of China. Empirical evidence suggests that ties between the UK and China have been strengthened in the past decades. The growing academic interest in China-related studies in the UK, the increased number of scholar and student exchange programs, frequent interactions between British businesses and Chinese businesses constitute a possible "third symbolic universe" of cultural China. In the higher education (HE) sector, there are at least 44 UK universities offering Chinese studies degree programmes and at least 21 UK universities have a Chinese studies research centre, attracting between 1,200 and 1,400 students annually (British Association for Chinese Studies, 2020). Mainland China contributes 12 percent of the overall UK higher education international student body (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2019). In terms of international student mobility, the number of UK students travelling to China has grown steadily, reaching 2.8 percent of the total number of students studying abroad in 2017–2018 (Universities UK, 2019). Meanwhile, the UK has been the largest EU investor in China and the bilateral trade in goods and services covers almost every economic sector. The British Chamber of Commerce in China (2020) reports that UK imports from China reached £49 billion in 2019, and UK exports to China reached £31.4 billion. Collaborations and interactions between the two nations evidently create professional and personal ties between the two peoples, which opens the possibility of the "third symbolic universe" of cultural China in the UK.

Research Methods

Building on Tu's (1994 [1991]) "cultural China" framework, we explore in this article how the Chinese Dream is received and interpreted in the UK. We contribute to understandings of nation branding by recognising how Chinese diaspora communities and British intellectual and professional elites engage with and promote brand values. Drawing from focus group data, we answer the following research questions: How is the Chinese Dream narrative received and interpreted? How are the nation-branding strategies evaluated in relation to changing Chinese identity?

Three focus group interviews were carried out in Wales in March 2018. Participants were selected according to Tu's articulation of the second and third symbolic universes. Five first-generation, "new" immigrants from mainland China made up Group A; five ethnic Chinese from other Greater China regions (including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and one second-generation immigrant from the UK) made up Group B, while Group C consisted of five non-Chinese Sinophiles with links to mainland China via professional (past work experience in China and/or current professional links to China) or personal (marriage) ties. All of the Sinophile participants had visited China, and two had lived in China on a short-term basis. Based on the preferences of the participants, the Group A interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the Group B interview was conducted in a mixture of Mandarin Chinese and English, and the Group C interview was conducted in English. Demographic details of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants

Gender		Number
	Female	8
	Male	7
Age		
	20–29	4
	30–39	6
	40–49	3
	50–59	2
Employment status		
	Employed	9
	Self-employed	3
	Other (student/retired/voluntary worker)	3
Years living in the UK		
	0–10	6
	10–20	3
	20–30	1
	Born in the UK	5
Country or region of origin		
	Mainland China	5
	Hong Kong	2
	Taiwan	1
	Malaysian	1
	UK	4
	US	1
	European Union	1
UK nationality		
	UK residents	7
	UK nationality (including dual nationalities)	8

Focus group interviews explore "a specific set of issues" and the group is "focused' on some kind "of collective activity" (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999: 7). This research required participants to have some background knowledge of China and accordingly "qualitative sampling" (Kuzel, 1992) instead of "statistical representativeness" was crucial to developing a structured sample. A well-designed focus group encourages participants to exchange viewpoints, delivering a balance between a structured meeting and a conversation (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999; Agar and MacDonald, 1995). The selection of participants, the size of the group, and the organisation of participants into groups is arranged to maximise the participation of focus group members. Focus groups offer a more "natural environment" versus individual interviews, since, as in real life, participants influence and are influenced by others (Krueger and Casey, 2000: 11). Participants were also chosen based on the "most likely" principle (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Wu and Wall, 2019a), and included only those with sufficient knowledge of China and experience of the Chinese Dream as public diplomacy. Their UK residential status also ensured freedom of speech without censorship or retribution.

We applied a thematic analysis to focus group transcripts to identify pertinent themes. Five organising themes emerged from the contexts of economy, politics, culture, branding, and the Chinese identity. In this article, we focus on two of them – branding and the Chinese identity.

Under the branding theme, we developed three further basic themes (codes) comprising the comparison between the American Dream and the Chinese Dream; successful practices of branding China in the Chinese Dream; and political controls as public diplomacy deficits. Similarly, under the Chinese identity theme, three basic themes (codes) were developed. They include ethnic Chinese are prescribed into the Chinese Dream; positive impacts of the association with the Chinese Dream; and negative impacts of the association with Mainland China (see Table 2).

Table 2. Thematic analysis of focus group interviews about the perception of and responses to the Chinese Dream branding campaigns

Organising theme	Basic themes (codes)
"The Chinese Dream is a good concept … Everybody has a dream" Branding the Chinese rise as the Chinese Dream is successful	The American Dream vs. the Chinese Dream
	Successful practices of branding China in the Chinese Dream
	Political control as public diplomacy deficits
"We can see both sides of a coin" The complex identity and cultural affinity in Cultural China	Ethnic Chinese are prescribed into the Chinese Dream
	Positive impacts of the association with the Chinese Dream
	Negative impacts of the association with mainland China

In general, the Chinese Dream has been regarded as a successful branding practice that takes more control of the country internally, while conveying important international messages externally (Hurn, 2016). The Chinese Dream is regarded as a comprehensive strategy imbued with patriotic elements focusing on a particular type of "Chineseness," hence it triggers mixed and complex reactions among overseas audiences.

Findings and Analysis

When asked if they had heard of the Chinese Dream, all participants responded that they had, with ten of them answering that they were "familiar" with the concept from a variety of information sources.

Only three of the participants had first-hand experience of propaganda messaging in the shape of patriotic murals and songs during their visit to China, but all of the participants knew about the Chinese Dream from a mediated experience drawing on a sophisticated network of information. Media coverage from British and Chinese news outlets, including the BBC, The Times (of London), China Daily, People's Daily, and CCTV, were regarded as providing official albeit often diverging interpretations of the Chinese Dream. Digital and social media platforms including expat blogs, Weibo, and WeChat (a Chinese multi-purpose messaging and social media app), were used more widely, frequently, and intimately as a source of information. Person-to-

person communication with family or friends in both countries constituted another information source. However, much of the interpersonal communication took place within the existing social media networks. The identification of information sources for the Chinese Dream reiterates the scholarly argument that media and communication technologies have built a transnational culture sphere within which the sense of belonging is a contested area (Sun, 2002; Yang, 2003; Wu, 2007; Wu and Wall 2019a; Wu and Wall 2019b).

Branding the Chinese Rise as the Chinese Dream is Successful

The American Dream vs. the Chinese Dream

Branding China's global rise within the concept of the Chinese Dream is regarded as a successful brand association (Anholt, 2010). As one respondent suggested, the Chinese Dream is "good" since "everybody has a dream" (B3).

Associations between the Chinese Dream and the American Dream were immediately noted by the non-Chinese Sinophile Group C, but not by the two ethnically Chinese groups. The brand association with the American Dream appealed to the non-Chinese group, who liked the idea that China might be supporting the development of individual success and wealth through its economic policies. C1, a female professional whose career is closely tied to China, said:

> I'm familiar with the idea of the American dream, so when I heard about the Chinese dream, I thought, oh, this must be a Chinese version of that. The American dream of fulfilling individuals' aspirations was very much within a free-market economy … So my perception of it was, well, China's undergone this amazing opening-up and economic growth ... Now we see a new sort of Chinese middle class … these are the new rich and I would see these people as representing the Chinese dream. (C1)

C5, a US citizen residing in the UK, believed that the difference between the two dreams is that "collectivism" is important in China and "individualism" is more common in the American Dream. Also, governments are different in terms of the ways they direct personal lives:

> The American Dream is very much about leaving me alone to do what I want so I can become as wealthy as possible on my own work. The point of the government is basically to ensure that we're all kind of on a level playing field and not killing each other. (C5)

Real-estate entrepreneur C2 believed that the promotion of the Chinese Dream demonstrates China's commitment to working with other countries. Such a branding practice may not be China's first choice, but one born out of necessity: "if you want to work on a global scale with partners, does China want to work together [with other countries] to educate each other to get the best global views?" C2 also pointed out that the Belt and Road Initiative [1] – as part of the Chinese Dream – has been engaging people globally and bringing economic benefits: "This is a big investment scheme and I like the win-win approach in business that China talks about" (C2).

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[1] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, also known as One Belt, One Road Initiative) was introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 in projecting China's ambition to construct a global economic collaboration and international trade network. BRI comprises a land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and an oceangoing "Maritime Silk Road." As of March 2020, 138 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America had signed a "BRI Memorandum of Understanding" with China. See the Xinhua Silk Road Information Service website, available at: https://en.imsilkroad.com/.

China's "reaching out" to the West was perceived positively by C1, who believed there is "great enrichment to be heard about [sic]" from China. She felt that the West's dominant worldview should be challenged, and that it needs to understand other countries. "Instead of reacting to it by saying 'I don't like it,' or 'I'm scared of it,' or 'I don't want to know,'" she claimed, if you "reach out, and you try to understand, it changes everything … you're not stuck just in your own cultural bubble" (C1).

Although all respondents from Group C agreed that limited press freedom, human rights protections, and political transparency are apparent soft power deficits, the Chinese Dream communication softened them all to a degree, thus supporting nation-branding objectives to minimise unwanted stereotypes (Loo and Davies, 2006):

> C3: … as they were saying, the best-run countries are often run by benevolent
> dictators …
> C2: There's not that many of them around.
> C3: You've only seen Singapore as an example. I mean, if the Chinese Dream
> is fulfilled as stated, that includes democracy; then, there's reasonable hope.

Branding China with the Chinese Dream: successful practices

While the positive reception of the Chinese Dream in Group C largely relies on a cultural affinity to the American Dream, the two Chinese groups demonstrate a deeper understanding of the changed perception of China and the Chinese in the West based on personal knowledge and experiences, thus demonstrating the co-creation of nation branding (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). British-Chinese voluntary worker B1, originally from Hong Kong, believed that the Chinese Dream "is a strategic planning for the Chinese nation's future":

> The purpose of the Chinese Dream is to project hope for everyone. If we don't
> have hope in our heart, we see China as weak and deprived, and nothing's
> good about China. The whole Chinese nation will lose its belief. The CPC is
> creating a vision for everyone – not only for people in China, but for anyone
> who have the Chinese blood in his/her body. The CPC believes that once the
> vision is there, it can guide everyone to work towards that goal.

This belief that the state/CPC is guiding an individuals' life choices for the collective good was echoed more strongly by Group A:

> The Chinese Dream makes you aware that you don't have to sacrifice anything
> because you are part of the Chinese Dream. Your small dream is a part of the
> bigger dream …(A1)

Other Group A members pointed out that by projecting the Chinese Dream, the CPC is "frank and honest" in acknowledging problems such as environmental pollution and corruption:

> I'm surprised by Chinese media's reporting of the Chinese Dream. I didn't
> expect that the official media could be so blunt in addressing many issues from
> a critical point of view. (A2)

Some respondents from Group B believed the branding of the Chinese Dream is successful because it depoliticises China's ambition of global dominance and addresses individual advancement and aspiration. This common belief in self-cultivation and personal improvement has its roots in Confucianism and makes the Chinese Dream brand resonate with the wider ethnic Chinese community.

> B3: I rather like these three characters: Zhong, guo, meng [中国梦]. Because it's about a dream, you don't link it to politics, economy, or other objectives …
> B4: It doesn't sound aggressive …
> B3: That's right. Everybody has a dream. It's good to have a dream.

Nevertheless, B4 – a dual citizen of Hong Kong and the UK – was cautious about the relationship between the individual and the state:

> The translation of this concept is confusing. Sometimes it was translated into the Chinese Dream, but other times China's Dream. We wonder what exactly the meaning and connotations of the Zhongguo meng [sic]. How does the Chinese leadership define it?

Branding the Chinese Dream: political control as public diplomacy deficit

Focus group participants also identified the ineffectiveness of China's soft power branding. Political issues resulting from the one-party policy was cited by several Group C participants as the main soft power deficit:

> C4: British and Chinese media all have their own sides, and they all have their own propaganda on issues. It's just unfortunately in China, the paper itself is owned by the state. It is state-run … You're never going to get the alternative view or negative view or even an individual view of this whole idea. It's always going to be what the party is dictating or what the party saying in many respects.
> C1: [Nodding in agreement] It's already tainted because it's party politics.

C2 expressed similar views but concluded that it was too early to conclude that the branding of the Chinese Dream is a failure. Nevertheless, he imagined that it would be "interesting" to observe how the Chinese Dream values communicate to people in a democratic British context.

> I cannot see any viewpoints that differ from [the official reporting of the Chinese Dream by] the Chinese media. It's all about positive energy and zero negative energy or voice of resistance. There's no press freedom. (C2)

Similar views were shared among the non-mainland ethnic Chinese Group B. The lack of press freedom and transparency was highlighted by B4, who disliked the idea that Facebook is blocked in China. B1 lamented the lack of alternative political viewpoints in the Chinese media, thereby not exhibiting the reciprocal commitment at the heart of successful nation branding (Wu, 2016). Group B members also expressed concerns about the expansion of China's soft power:

> B2: I feel [China's soft power] is too aggressive … It's the extension of China's political influence. We need to prevent China's influence upon us …
> B3: The invasion of China's soft power.
> B2: That's right.

No such concerns regarding the political aspects of the Chinese Dream were apparent within Group A, made up of first-generation immigrants from mainland China.

The Complex Identity and Cultural Affinity in Cultural China

Ethnic Chinese are prescribed into the Chinese Dream

Despite their different perceptions of Chinese politics, members from Group A and Group B used "we" as a collective pronoun when referring to ethnic Chinese as a distinct demographic in the British society. The use of the in-group pronoun "we" conveys an intention to create commonality, cohesion, and solidarity, yet it is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive (Pennycook, 1994). Non-Chinese people living in Britain therefore are referred to as waiguoren (外国人) or gweilo (鬼佬), showing a sense of alienation. Group C members, with close familial or professional connections to China, show a strong sense of adaptability in selectively identifying with Chinese values and believe that this gives them added insight, with C2 claiming that "all of us have an idea about China, and so we can see both sides."

Ethnic Chinese are prescribed into the Chinese Dream – voluntarily or inadvertently Group A and Group B demonstrate that bicultural identity is about self-projection, but also about external perception (Miramontez, Benet-Martinez, and Nguyen, 2008), that is, how Chinese are perceived in mainstream British society. Accordingly, the "push" factors from host countries, including racism and stereotyping, often heighten feelings of alienation, isolation, and nostalgia for the lost homeland. This hunger for cultural identification unconsciously drives first generation Chinese immigrants in Group A towards the Chinese Dream, voluntarily or inadvertently.

> Many waiguoren have never been to China and know nothing about the real China. … Even if one of us has done anything they don't like, this small issue could be magnified as "all Chinese are like this." (A2)

Race-based and ethnicity-based discriminations are felt by Group B members, too. Perceived physical differences (e.g., skin colour, hair texture, eye shape) and cultural practices (e.g., ancestor worship, lion dancing, Chinese herbal medicine) put ethnic Chinese in a marginalised position in the British society – they are simultaneously exoticized and trivialised. Guo (2009) concludes that such discrimination is based on "real and alleged differences [that] are claimed to be incompatible with the cultural and social fabric of the traditional" Western society. B1 used the phrase "the Chinese face" when expressing her sense of isolation as a result of which British Chinese communities are "pushed" into associations with the Chinese state:

> When other people see us, they don't know if we are third generation or fourth generation immigrants? Or students from mainland China? Or from Japan? Or from Malaysia? Or from other Asian countries? They see us and assume that we are Chinese … It's not an easy life for us as ethnic minorities. If China is doing well, we would receive more respect and less challenges. (B1)

Despite the previous disagreement with Chinese politics, a cultural affinity intensified by the use of global Chinese-language media (in particular entertainment TV shows) brought Group B close to the culture of China.

> Most [of us] haven't lived in China. … We are growing further and further from the "mother culture." … There's the soft side of the Chinese Dream. That TV show Sing! China is very popular overseas. That is the execution of the Chinese Dream. (B3)

Digitalisation has transformed global communications and created a "home" media and cultural environment for the diaspora. As Sun (2002) argues, Chinese-language media usage among diaspora contributes to a "global Chinese village" and reshapes Chinese transnational imagination. Language maintenance within the British Chinese community functions as a "pull" factor and exposes the community to cultural products (as well as ideologies embedded in them) produced in Mandarin or other Chinese dialects.

Positive impact of association with the Chinese Dream

Being associated with the Chinese Dream was regarded as positive by Group A participants. Predominantly, the group believed that economic prosperity and cultural appeals are more effective than political slogans in drawing people closer to China:

> I saw progress and development in China, which boosts up the confidence in overseas Chinese. … We see more and more Chinese students and Chinese delegations in the UK, and more and more communication in the areas of economic and cultural exchanges. (A3)

A4 emphasises the importance of culture in building connections between generations and empathy between ethnic communities and wider British society:

> My children would never ask me about the Chinese Dream, but they are interested in the Chinese culture. … More and more of my British friends want to know about China and the Chinese culture. I feel that the culture is easier to be accepted than big external propaganda slogans. (A4)

China's economic development and political progress was also observed by Group C. C3 praised the soaring development in city infrastructure and C4 recalled living in China during the 2003 SARS crisis, adding that China has improved in terms of information transparency, public health, and environmental protection.

It is evident that the benefits of associations with the Chinese Dream seem largely dependent on an individual's profession. Those working in translation, education, or international trade detect a more positive influence than, for example, medical doctors. A5, a PhD degree holder working in the UK, said that the close UK–China collaboration "increased my employability." Similar views were expressed by other Groups A and B members:

> Some small businesses see opportunities in the One Belt, One Road initiative. … Some people even do not want to accept the fact that Chinese economy is powerful, they subconsciously know that China offers them opportunities. (B5)

> The EU is no longer reliable, and the UK needs an external force to spur [its economy]. A series of bilateral activities show that China and the UK have been working closely together. My business … has been getting better and better since 2012 [and] we have been offering services to official delegation visits, business cooperation, and cultural exchanges. (A1)

Negative impact of association with mainland China

Although China's economic strength was regarded as positive, it casts a negative impact on the perception of Chinese in the UK. A1, for example, commented that the extravagant lifestyles of

some wealthy Chinese wrongly suggest that all Chinese are "rich and arrogant." B3, a first-generation immigrant from Taiwan, asserted that news coverage of "rich Chinese" makes ordinary Chinese living overseas targets for "robbery and theft" (B3).

China's "soft power deficits," such as the political issues emanating from the one-party system, were discussed by Group B in particular as impacting negatively on their personal lives. B1, originally from Hong Kong, was concerned about the political situation in Hong Kong and consequent conflictual viewpoints among members of the local Chinese community. She blamed the "wall" (that is, the "Great Firewall of China" [2]) for creating political conflicts and tensions:

> There are differences between the inside and outside. The wall created that obviously. … I have never been to a Chinese university, but I believe that if they urge the students to learn about politics every day, then it is brainwashing. (B1)

But the most scathing criticism came from B3 – originally from Taiwan – who argued that the Confucius Institute aims to extend political control in the guise of cultural communication, leading to a misrepresentation of Chinese culture that only invites criticism and resistance. B2 and B1 interjected with their support:

> B3: Germany has been resisting the Confucius Institute.
> B2: So has the US.
> B3: Their intention is to force them [the Confucius Institute] to leave.
> B2: Because they felt that the Confucius Institutes are extensions of Chinese politics. Otherwise, why did they spend so much money on it?
> B3: In the running of the Confucius Institute, it is supposed to be that a mainland Chinese university works with an overseas university. But the control is in China? The local teachers have no way to control. … In my view, the Chinese Dream proposed by Xi Jinping does not only mean to unite mainland China; it also aims to control Chinese overseas. And it does not stop there, his ambition is to control the whole world. It serves his personal interest. I noted that recently Xi has changed the regulations on his presidential term of office. Isn't it changing his role back to the old emperor? He even changed the Constitution. China has many welfare problems. For example, food security, air pollution, water pollution … These are the important issues. How could you ignore these home issues while aiming to influence the external …
> B1: It's like a sick person – even the organs are failing but still put on a pretty face with beautiful makeup. To maintain that "face," there're prices paid.

Such statements offer further insights into the conflicted perspectives towards China's branding projects within the diverse British Chinese community, rooted in the complex political relations between China and other political entities in cultural China. As Rawnsley (2012, 2014) observes, Taiwan's political values appeal to the liberal-democratic West, yet its lack of formal diplomatic relations with major global powers constrains its exercise of soft power. China, despite its lack of democratic value, possesses and exercises more soft power capital due to the legitimacy built upon international recognition. Constrained by the lack of political recognition in the global community, Taiwan has competed against China for the legitimacy of representing authentic Chinese culture. It is evident that this politically driven endeavour has shaped Taiwanese immigrants' resistance to the Chinese Dream branding.

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[2] The Great Firewall of China refers to a set of legislative measures and technological tools used by the Chinese government in blocking access to foreign websites and apps in China.

Conclusion

This article has appraised the reception of the Chinese Dream branding as perceived by selected demographics representing different subgroups in "cultural China" (Tu, 1994), thus responding to the call for more evaluation into the effectiveness of nation branding (Hassan and Mahrous 2019, He, et al. 2020). In analysing the themes generated from the focus groups, we synthesise the following key points in answer to our research questions.

Firstly, the reception of the Chinese Dream as nation branding is largely successful thanks to the cultural affinity maintained in cultural China. However, the interpretation of the Chinese Dream narrative is anything but unanimous. Our research participants responded positively to the use of "dream" and "culture" in soft power communication, indicating that cultural China might engage and promote China's brand values through a sense of belonging and the kind of reciprocal nation-branding commitment as conceptualised by Wu (2016). On the other hand, the interpretation of the Chinese Dream varied across the groups in our study. Our findings resonate to some degree with the argument that first-generation immigrants from mainland China benefit more from China's increasing strength and show a stronger emotional bond with, and political endorsement of, their "home" country (Nyíri, 1999, 2001). By contrast, non-mainland ethnic Chinese identify with the economic and cultural values to a certain degree, but express resistance to the Chinese Dream's political values. In particular, participants with familial, emotional, and cultural attachments to Hong Kong and Taiwan show various levels of resistance to the Chinese Dream concept. Members from the non-Chinese groups uphold the mainstream sociocultural values of British society, while demonstrating both endorsement and vigilance towards the objectives in the Chinese Dream branding. In sum, the Chinese Dream as public diplomacy builds empathy with the intended overseas audiences, but the reception of this nation branding exercise is characterised by contradiction, complexity, and conflicting perspectives.

Secondly, our analysis of nation branding strategies in relation to the changing Chinese identity is based upon the understanding that these strategies are about self-projection as well as external perception. Our original approach assesses nation branding within the theoretical framework of cultural China (Tu, 1994 [1991]). We extended Tu's articulation of the second symbolic universe of cultural China (Chinese diaspora in the UK) and drew data from the third symbolic universe (the cultural sphere consisting of non-Chinese professional writing and activities related to China). We argue that Chinese identity, has undergone profound transformation due to China's rise as a global power. Different subgroups within "cultural China" experience different impacts resulting from China's rise.

Positive impacts of China's rise are closely connected to the sociopolitical status of the ethnic Chinese diaspora in the UK. Various forms of racial discrimination based on physical or alleged differences between ethnic Chinese and mainstream society cause alienation and estrangement among ethnic Chinese, pushing them towards China's nation-branding projects for cultural identification. On the other hand, "pull" factors such as language maintenance, cultural affinity, and economic opportunities further enhance the attractiveness of the Chinese Dream brand and have potential to improve immigrants' social status in host societies. Torn between push and pull, our data confirms that Chinese immigrants are often "positioned uneasily in relation to the nation-building projects of both the country of origin and the destination" (Sun, 2006: 12). Negative impacts of China's rise on Chinese identity are centred around conflictual political interests among subgroups within cultural China. As we observe, the Chinese Dream as nation branding divides opinion when it focuses on political ideology. The findings highlight the incongruency of values or even competing interests among subgroups in endorsing certain nation branding projects while resisting others. The "practical arrangement of statesmanship" (Rawnsley, 2014: 173) grants the CPC-led China state soft power capital, but this precondition does not remove agency from other competing actors such as Taiwan. The escalating military and political

tensions between China and other actors (in particular, Taiwan and Hong Kong) will inevitably lead to intensified nation branding competition.

Finally, the data shows that nation-branding efficiency largely depends on accessible global media and communications. Digital communication technologies have created a "global Chinese village" (Sun, 2002) and have facilitated the dissemination of cultural values in nation branding orchestrated by China. The respondents' knowledge of the Chinese Dream comes from a variety of sources including Chinese and British media reporting, person-to-person communication via digital messaging, and a range of commercial or citizen media on social media platforms including expat blogs, Weibo, and WeChat. Ethnic Chinese respondents also use Chinese-language entertainment programmes to maintain linguistic and cultural affinity. This non-official messaging facilitates the dissemination of Chinese cultural values via a symbolic interactionist process (Zhang, 2006) in which nation states and other actors participate in continuous meaning-making and negotiation with others. The digital environment also enables the possibility of co-creation by relevant stakeholders (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Nevertheless, the cultural communication's co-creation potential in Chinese Dream branding is not yet fully realised. If overseas audiences are to engage in China's national image management, then it is important that they can relate to the brand and the foci of its messages, aligning with the supra-national cultures existing outside the geographic state borders (Yang, 2015).

Despite its limited empirical data and restricted sampling, this study has provided some significant insights. Further research will need to include a larger sample size from different parts of the UK and other parts of the world. Since completing this article, the world has witnessed the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the passing of the National Security Law in Hong Kong, and the escalation of cross-Taiwan Straits tensions. Cultural China will continue to be a tenet in any future research around Chinese nation branding projects (such as mask diplomacy and vaccine diplomacy), but it cannot be analysed without taking into account the political changes in the People's Republic of China, Greater China, and worldwide.

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Guarding the Space In-between: The Quandary of Being a Liberal Mainland Student Migrant in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Based on eight in-depth interviews, this article analyses the quandary faced by liberal mainland Chinese student migrants in Hong Kong. On the one hand, the liberal pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong are deeply intertwined with the rise of localism, which is based on a dichotomy between Hong Kong and mainland China. On the other hand, a rising, development-centric nationalism in mainland China reduces Hong Kong protesters to unemancipated British colonial subjects. However, in the context of this "double marginalisation," liberal Mainland students guard a form of liberalism that transcends both Hong Kong localism and Chinese nationalism. They debunk the stereotype of mainland Chinese students being apolitical and therefore provide an alternative definition of being Chinese. They challenge the view that mainland Chinese can only be emancipated outside mainland China to destabilise a Fukuyamian linear interpretation of history. They use four tactics to cope with double marginalisation: understanding localists, befriending expatriates, assuming professionalism, and becoming apolitical.

Keywords: Hong Kong, China, liberalism, student migration, Hong Kong–Mainland conflict, gangpiao

> Who am I? Do you mean where I'm from? What I one day might become? What I do? What I've done? What I dream? Do you mean . . . what you see or what I've seen? What I fear or what I dream? Do you mean who I love? Do you mean who I've lost? Who am I? I guess who I am is exactly the same as who you are. Not better than, not less than. Because there is no one who has been or will ever be exactly the same as either you or me.
> – *from the television series Sense8*

Introduction

By the time I had finished writing this article, it had been almost two years since the June 2019 commencement of the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong. The extradition bill was withdrawn in October 2019, but the protests and arrests continued until the COVID-19 pandemic prohibited, or rather legitimised the prohibition, of mass gatherings. On June 30, 2020, the National Security Law (NSL) was passed. As protestors, including those who were born in mainland China, face imprisonment for sabotaging national security, discussing certain topics risks breaking the newly promogulated law. For this reason, no discussion of the NSL and the anti-extradition bill protests is included in this article.

What I do discuss has now become history: the pre-NSL era. Even though very little time has passed since I conducted my research, my respondents may now have different attitudes, feelings, and strategies as liberal Mainlanders in Hong Kong who participated in pro-democracy

protests. They would have, very likely, rejected my interview requests if the new law had been passed before I conducted my research. However, this has not invalidated my research: the more reticent, silent, and invisible they become, the more meaningful it is to record their voices.

This article discusses the quandaries of liberal mainland Chinese student migrants living in Hong Kong at a time of demonstrations and politically charged everyday interactions. My aim is to provide a more nuanced representation of this social group and challenge both the stereotype of the apolitical mainland Chinese student and the notion that mainland Chinese cannot nurture liberal values, except through the liberalism of a liberal society outside mainland China. Liberalism in this article refers to the belief in diversity, plurality, and heterogeneity without hierarchy.

Arguably the best-known representative of a liberal Mainlander in Hong Kong is Li Ming, [1] a lecturer at the Education University of Hong Kong and a key opinion leader. Li Ming is best known for her siding with the "yellow" (or "pro-democracy") protesters in Hong Kong, [2] and for her outspokenness about being sexually harassed in a church as part of the global #MeToo movement. She is commonly portrayed as having been "enlightened" by Hong Kong's liberal education, after which she decided to join the Hong Kong protests in pursuit of democracy and equality (Apple Daily, 2017; Leung, 2019; Steel and Li, 2019). For instance, the New York Times described her as "a Shanghai native, [who] moved to Hong Kong in 2008 to study sociology and then stayed, she said, because she enjoyed its freedom of speech and other civil liberties that are absent in her increasingly authoritarian homeland" (Steel and Li, 2019). In this type of media coverage, Li Ming is portrayed as understanding Hong Kongers' discrimination, if not racism, against mainland Chinese, due to her Shanghainese origin.

Such media representation reinforces the assumed dichotomy between authoritarian, illiberal China and the democratic liberal West. It implies that colonisation brought modernisation to former colonies like Hong Kong and Shanghai, that risk justifying domination, exploitation, and violence in the name of modernisation. In this narrative, those places left behind, like the rest of China, must catch up with Hong Kong and Shanghai, which were first liberated by the West. However, Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong (2015) point out that the hatred against mainland Chinese is different from intra-China discrimination, exemplified by discrimination on the part of Shanghainese towards people from other, "less developed," areas:

> Hong Kong racism is extraordinary in surpassing the conventional form of racism and going beyond the racism of the Shanghai colonial modernity, because a discourse of vermin is being used against a well-intermixed and culturally proximate people. These otherized people are regarded by localists as more than just innately inferior, underdeveloped humans; they are scarcely seen as human at all. (Sautman and Yan, 2015: 24)

The authors poignantly summarise racism against mainland Chinese in Hong Kong as "yellow-red peril," a combination of yellow peril inherited from the imperial West and the red peril represented by illiberal socialist China. In other words, such racism is justified by a Fukuyamian linear view of history in the context of a lingering Cold War.

I do not intend to engage more with media representations of liberal Mainland student migrants. Instead, I will use the multi-faceted lived experiences of my interviewees to argue

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[1] East Asian names in this article follow the convention of family name followed by given name.
[2] The coloured symbol originates from the 2014 Umbrella Movement where yellow umbrella and yellow ribbon became the symbols of the protest.

against any narratives that reinforce the dichotomy between localist Hong Konger versus nationalist Mainlander, or a liberal Hong Kong/West versus an illiberal China. I intend to show that these liberal Mainlanders were not "liberated" in Hong Kong, as portrayed by some neo-Orientalist media and scholars (Vukovich, 2012, 2019), because they experienced liberalism as they grew up in mainland China. These students are also not opportunistic "flexible citizens" (Ong, 1999) who benefit from civil society in metropolises. Rather, I argue that they actively engage with the local community to preserve and guard the social values that they had already come to uphold before migrating to Hong Kong.

Chinese Student Migrants and Political Participation

Most existing research on discrimination against and exclusion of Mainland immigrants, as well as their resistance and resilience, focuses on lower-middle-class women, often with limited education, who are married to lower-class Hong Kong men and reside in Hong Kong on the basis of the one-way permit scheme (Law and Lee, 2006; Ng et al., 2015; Wong, 1998; Yu et al., 2014). Student migrants from mainland China, even though they share the same place of birth as well as some cultural characteristics like not speaking Cantonese, belong to a different category for immigration purposes. Different from the one-way permit scheme, which is designed for family reunion, Mainland student migrants are recruited to Hong Kong universities as potential professional labour. Mainland Chinese were first admitted to Hong Kong universities in 1998 and three years later the government permitted them to stay and work upon securing a job, subject to a set of rigid conditions (Gov.hk, 2001; UGC, n.d.). [3] Since early 2000, internationalisation and the integration with the Pearl River Delta have become the primary objectives of Hong Kong tertiary education (UGC, 2010). The government eased quota limitations for self-funded programmes, mainly consisting of associate degrees and taught master's degrees, targeting non-local students, of which more than 70 percent came from the mainland (Gov.hk, 2012; UGC, 2010). In 2008, the government further launched the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates (IANG) to grant these students an unconditional one-year stay in the city, and if they managed to find a job, the visa would be extended until they accumulated seven years of the legitimate right of abode time to apply for permanent Hong Kong citizenship. It is said that from 2003 to 2015, 159,000 Mainland immigrants came to Hong Kong and around 80,000 ended up settling in the city (Wong, 2018).

Other than the student visa, in chronological order, the Hong Kong government put forth the Admission of Talents Scheme after the handover in 1997, the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme in 2001, the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talent and Professionals in 2003, and the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme in 2006. The government launched these schemes and expanded the recruitment of Mainland students to attract and cultivate professional and high-end labour who were familiar with China to better serve Hong Kong as the economic hub to link China with the world. [4] Vivian Chan et al. (2013) have written about the aspirations and struggles Mainland workers have faced. They concluded that being mainland Chinese was both a stepping stone and a stumbling block, as familiarity with mainland China provided individuals with advantages in the workplace but Mainland identity also incurred social exclusion and discrimination (Chan, Chan, and Chong, 2013: 39). To distinguish from the Mainland immigrants on one-way permits, students and professional immigrants call themselves gangpiao 港漂 (Hong Kong drifters) (Ip, 2020). This article focuses on gangpiao who settled down in the city during and after their bachelor's and master's degrees.

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[3] The conditions include possessing expertise that local candidates do not have and a job contract of more than a year.

[4] In comparison to the IANG scheme, conditions are much stricter for overseas Chinese students to stay in other developed countries and areas.

For Mainland Chinese student migrants, studying in Hong Kong represents a liminal choice between domestic and international study. Students are attracted to Hong Kong for its cosmopolitan and modern lifestyle, but mostly refrain from deep engagement with politics, or rather dissident politics, due to a perception that it will endanger their safety (Ip, 2020; Peng, 2016; Xu, 2015). Fong (2011) observes that overseas Chinese students in other liberal-democratic developed countries often defend China, especially on sensitive and controversial political topics abroad, but boast about their overseas cosmopolitan lifestyle when back in China. In other words, they desire a cosmopolitan economic lifestyle and wish to become flexible citizens (Ong, 1999) but distance themselves from political civil society activities against the Chinese state. Facilitated by the development of information and communications technology (ICT) and especially social media (Martin, 2014; Peng, 2016), the dichotomy between economic engagement and political disengagement might lead to a superficial integration into the host society where strong emotional bonds and political views are still tied to and shaped by mainland China. In short, the cosmopolitanism that these Chinese migrant students acquire is perceived to be compromised, that is, an enjoying of superficial materialistic and cultural benefits that is deprived of political engagement in guarding shared universal values.

In the context of Hong Kong, Ip (2020) found that a very small number of gangpiao have participated in pro-democracy civic gatherings. They, however, still refrain from identifying with Hong Kong and instead refer to themselves through the framework of "local internationalism," which refers to "caring about one's living environment and community without allegiance to any rigid local or national identity" (Ip, 2020: 270). While Vivian Chan et al. (2013) discuss the marginalised conditions Mainland professionals face without focusing on political dimensions, Ip (2020) touches on political tensions without engaging deeply with the conflict of identity between Hong Kong and the Mainland. My article fills this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the identity conflicts faced by mainland Chinese who have participated in pro-democracy demonstrations.

My Research Respondents: Liberalism beyond the Cold War Dichotomy

Liberalism is an ideology that contains seven political concepts that interact at its core: liberty, rationality, individuality, progress, sociability, general interest, and limited and accountable power (Freeden, 2015). "The Liberal does not meet opinions which he conceives to be false with toleration, as though they did not matter. He meets them with justice, and exacts for them a fair hearing as though they mattered just as much as his own" (Hobhouse, 1964: 63). Hobhouse enthusiastically argued that at "the heart of Liberalism is the understanding that progress is not a matter of mechanical contrivance, but of the liberation of living spiritual energy" (73). Although liberalism as guiding ethics has metamorphosed into different political forms across the globe (Freeden, 2015), its core is the pursuit of liberty and respect for divergent opinions. Arguably, Fukuyama's "end of history" discourse (Fukuyama, 1992) has tightly linked liberalism with the expansion of the liberal-democratic capitalist system. However, democracy in liberalism should be understood rather as an ontological calibration based on communicative action (Habermas, 1984), which no existing representative democratic system has yet achieved (Freeden, 2015). In other words, the universalism that underpins liberalism ought not to be constrained by a certain political model, as Fukuyama (1992) advocates. If liberalism celebrates diversity without hierarchy, it would be false to consider actions in pursuit of liberalism as defending one political model over others. Instead, liberals defend liberalism's core values in any political system. Although mainland China is known for its authoritarian governance, this does not mean it does not comprise elements of liberalism or public calls for liberalism, manifested, for example, by the "new left" and the public intelligentsia after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident (Vukovich, 2019).

Some scholars argue that the tension between Hong Kong and China is a remnant of the Cold War and representative of the ways in which the socialism–capitalism divide that defined the Cold War has morphed into a different dichotomy that juxtaposes authoritarianism and liberalism (Dai, 2018; Li, 2008, 2015; Sun, 2009, 2011). Hong Kong-based scholar Vukovich (2012, 2019) argues that knowledge produced in and by the liberal West is inevitably neo-Orientalist, assuming that mainland Chinese are blinded and brainwashed by the repressive illiberal state, waiting for civilisational enlightenment through the "free" flow of information from liberal-democratic areas. In other words, for Vukovich, neo-Orientalist knowledge about China fundamentally serves to help the capitalist West win the Cold War. Here the West refers not only to the developed states of Europe and the US, but also Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other nations considered to be part of the capitalist side in the Cold War in Asia. Xu's (2015) findings confirm such assumptions, since her research respondents only gained access to Mainland-prohibited information in Hong Kong. This research, in contrast, aims to break such a neo-Orientalist knowledge paradigm.

This article focuses on liberal mainland Chinese student migrants who came to Hong Kong for university education between 2011 to 2018. I focus on students who came for tertiary education with Mainland passports. I chose this period because it was after 2011 that the conflict between the Mainland and Hong Kong intensified. For the purposes of this research, I identified students' liberalism based on their actions. I approached individuals who had participated in demonstrations that appealed for democracy, liberty, and diversity. These activities included the June 4 Tiananmen Anniversary Vigil, the Umbrella Movement, and the annual Pride parade.

I adopted the qualitative research method of semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducting eight interviews based on snowball sampling in December 2018. Six of the interviewees were recent graduates staying in Hong Kong at the time of the interview and two were in their final year of undergraduate study. Six had come to Hong Kong for a bachelors' degree and two had come for a master's degree. The interviews lasted from one to two hours and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, then verbatim transcribed and coded (that is, thematically sorted and grouped). All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Through these interviews I aimed to answer the following questions. How did these students participate in Hong Kong demonstrations and what were the consequences for them, if any? How did they navigate the rising tension between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and what were their experiences and tactics in the process? How did they define and guard their liberal values when caught between the two sides?

The interviews were broadly structured around the process of their migration to Hong Kong, their experiences of being a Mainland student in Hong Kong, their experience when taking part in political demonstrations, and their reactions toward anti-Mainland sentiments in Hong Kong. This approach was informed by Babbie (2012), allowing my research respondents to narrate their life trajectories, motivations, and reasonings, and provided space for them to focus on life events that they found particularly important or transformative. Demographic information on my informants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

Name	Age	Year of Arrival in Hong Kong	Hometown
Sophie	27	2016	Kunming
Lily	25	2015	Guangzhou
Lucy	22	2014	Fuzhou
Jodie	25	2014	Guilin
Tom	24	2012	Guiyang
Jerry	25	2013	Fuzhou
Betty	23	2017	Fuzhou
Mary	24	2012	Wenzhou

In the following sections, I show how my research respondents debunk the dichotomy constructed by localist Hong Kongers and nationalist Mainlanders, who are both influenced by the aforementioned Cold War mentality.

"I Was Who I Am"

Most of my interviewees believed that they had been critical of the Chinese government and that they had access to information banned in China before arriving in Hong Kong. Some of them developed liberal attitudes through their family education. Sophie came to Hong Kong for a master's in business administration. She inherited her critical distance to the Chinese government from her parents, who owned a family business in Wuhan:

> Since I was young, all I was hearing from them were complaints about the government. For every little profit that we made, we had to share some with the local government. If we did not give them bribes, they would come to us and warn us that we broke some rules. . . . My parents hated them and told me stories about the Tiananmen incident since I was a kid. . . . They also told me that they wanted me to go abroad so that I can escape such a system. (Sophie, aged 27)

Lily, who came to Hong Kong for a master's degree in management, echoed Sophie's view:

> My father is a cadre in Guangzhou. I think he is just an honest man. I grew up witnessing how much he struggled in the guanxi network in China. Once he even received a death threat from his competitor. He told my mother and me that he would not be home for dinner that day. We were really scared. We could not sleep until he came back early morning the following day. All he told us was, "There was no way to solve it" and "China is what it is." (Lily, aged 25)

Both families seem to be negatively affected by the guanxi system (enduring interpersonal relationships for instrumental purposes), understood as the norm for conducting business in China (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank, 2002; Wank, 1996, 2000). Seen by some as a product of lack of legal institutions for business (Guthrie, 1998), guanxi involves practices such as the intensive exchange of gifts and favours that can turn into bribery and corruption (Wank, 1996, 2000). Many overseas Chinese students loathed guanxi practices in China and considered their host societies to be free

from such practices (Fong, 2011: 176-179). Underneath their aversion to guanxi is the longing for a mature legal system that regulates power and makes it limited and accountable, a core value of liberalism (Freeden, 2015). In other words, liberalism was part of Sophie and Lily's value system before they came to Hong Kong.

Similar but more articulate, Lucy, a 22-year-old final year bachelor's student in politics, whose words are quoted in the title of this section, said, "I despise it when people tell me that Hong Kong has transformed me. I was who I am before I came to Hong Kong." Lucy did not come to Hong Kong to be "liberated." It was because of her belief in liberalism that she chose Hong Kong for her studies.

> My high school in Fujian province is famous for being liberal. Our history teacher taught us about Tiananmen. Every year, we commemorated June 4. . . . The school kept an eye open and an eye closed . . . I was very into the Model United Nations (MUN) [5] back then. And we MUNers always had heated discussions about politics in our spare time. . . . During my last year in high school, I came to Hong Kong to visit a [fellow] MUNer. He studied politics in a university. I was satisfied with the lectures that I sat in on. The lecturers all seemed rather open-minded. I was aware that I would not have such a liberal atmosphere in mainland China. (Lucy, aged 22)

In a different vein, Jodie and Tom became liberal because of their gender awareness and queerness. Jodie came to Hong Kong for a joint bachelor's degree in engineering, [6] and Tom came to study literature. Tom called himself a "sinful son," referring to Pai Hsien-yung's novel Crystal Boys, where the male protagonist is expelled from school and shunned by his family for his same-sex relationship. Tom used the novel as a metaphor for his choice to leave mainland China. Kam (2020) has linked coming out with going abroad and argues that queer Chinese students can justify their sexuality as a form of becoming cosmopolitan. For Tom, this cosmopolitanism goes beyond social distinction and cultural capital (Igarashi, 2014) as is the case of most gangpiao (Ip, 2020; Xu, 2015), as he also participated in the Umbrella Movement "to guard the values that have attracted me to the city."

Jodie, a self-identified lesbian, was an activist before coming to Hong Kong. Between 2012 to 2014, she participated in the Vagina Monologues in Guangzhou and travelled around Guangdong province for participatory theatre. The crew she was a part of collected stories from rural women and turned these into material for local theatre performances. Starting from gender issues, she also participated in human rights camps and volunteered in animal rescue centres. In other words, she had been a veteran activist before coming to Hong Kong.

Lucy took to the streets as soon as she arrived in Hong Kong in 2014. "There wasn't a better time for a liberal like me than that time, right? After commemorating June 4 for so long, now I could finally experience something real." Three other interviewees decided to join the Umbrella Movement after the police used tear gas for the first time on September 28, 2014. Some may not have had a clear political identity at this point, yet they were mobilised to take to the streets because of the injustice they saw in police brutality and the election system. Two interviewees came to Hong Kong for Pride parades before they commenced their studies there.

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[5] The MUN is an educational simulation of the United Nations, in which students represent different countries in activities.

[6] She spent two years in a university in mainland China and two years in Hong Kong.

Growing Anti-Mainlandisation

Liberalism cultivated during their life in mainland China brought these students to the streets of Hong Kong, only to encounter illiberal anti-Mainlander exclusion and discrimination as a result of a policy of Mainlandisation which had emerged, and was increasingly perceived as threat, after the handover in 1997. [7]

> Mainlandisation refers to the HKSAR government's policy of making Hong Kong politically more dependent on and similar to Beijing, economically more reliant on the Mainland's support, socially more patriotic toward the motherland, and legally more reliant on the interpretation of the Basic Law by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. It is the dependency psyche of the HKSAR administration that has triggered Hong Kong's swift convergence with the motherland in multi-faceted aspects. (Lo, 2008: 42–43)

The handover took place on July 1 and the annual pro-democracy Hong Kong marches symbolically claim this date for their demonstrations. In 2003, the July 1 march brought half a million people to the streets to protest the implementation of the proposed anti-subversion Article 23 of the Hong Kong Basic Law, which was seen as an attack on freedom of speech along with other rights in Hong Kong. The bill to enact Article 23 was withdrawn after the mass demonstration.

Meanwhile, it is widely acknowledged that the basis of Hong Kong identity has shifted from socioeconomic superiority over mainland China (1960s–2000s) to an intra-ethnic racialising strategy of othering Mainlanders (2000s–present) (Fong, 2017; Ma and Tsang, 2010; Yew and Kwong, 2014). The perceived incompatibility of Hong Kong and Mainland identities intensified in 2011 and 2012, after the emergence of localist political parties in Hong Kong (Kwong, 2016). During these two years, Hong Kong cultural studies scholar Chan Wan-kan (2011) published The Hong Kong City-State Theory, which paved the theoretical foundation for localism. Chan promotes the incompatibility of Hong Kong and Mainland identities and confines Hong Kong identity to one's birthplace and a political anti-Mainland agenda. Inspired and justified by this narrowly defined localism, a series of anti-Mainlandisation campaigns unfolded.

In early 2012, users of the Hong Kong online group Golden Forum raised HK$100,000 to run an image on the front page of the tabloid newspaper Apple Daily: a locust looking over the Hong Kong skyline from Lion Rock Mountain, a metaphor for mainland Chinese taking over Hong Kong. The event officially marked mainland Chinese as locusts, and paved the way for waves of racism against mainland Chinese (Sautman and Yan, 2015). The fear of Mainlandisation at the heart of localist identity poses a serious challenge to claims of a liberal and inclusive agenda on the part of localism. Mainland Chinese student migrants are seen as the embodiment of Mainlandisation, and Hong Kong universities are fertile ground for localism. In a survey of 331 students from seven universities in Hong Kong in 2016, 36 percent of respondents supported the localist camp, ranking it first among all available political options (Zeng and Pang, 2016). Liberal demonstrations were fuelled by illiberal discrimination in which gangpiao were identified with mainland China in the perceptions of localists.

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[7] Colloquially in Cantonese, Mainlandisation is commonly referred to as *chek fa* 赤化, which means the process of "becoming redder," as the colour red is commonly used in communist regimes. This, once again, perpetuates the Cold War mentality.

Double Marginalisation

The quandary of being doubly marginalised is shared by all diasporas to some extent, that is, a sense of being an outlier in both the host and the home society. The predicament particular to the liberal Mainland students is that the two identities are being torn apart. It is exactly because of the commonalities that Hong Kong and mainland China share that the boundaries between them need to be drawn so brutally, in the effort to make a distinction.

Both Lucy and Jodie came to Hong Kong for their studies in 2014, right at the beginning of the Umbrella Movement. First-year bachelor's students usually attend two large scale orientation events, known as o-camps (orientation camps), organised by their dormitory halls and departments for integration. Each o-camp lasts from three days to a week. Other than these two o-camps, Mainland students participate in another o-camp, organised by the association for Mainland students. Each university in Hong Kong has an association for Mainland students, supported by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government (LOCPG). Some gangpiao believe that their political activities are put under surveillance by LOCPG through these student associations (Ip, 2020: 263-264).

Lucy skipped some days of the o-camp for Mainland students to join the Umbrella Movement. She actively posted on her WeChat and Weibo accounts, both popular social media in mainland China, to report about the Umbrella Movement. She received many negative and aggressive comments from the Mainland students she had just met in Hong Kong. "They posted, 'are your parents aware that you are an idiot?'" Her fellow Mainland peers did not want to communicate or listen. They only wished to unleash their anger and demonstrate their power against Lucy, backed by nationalism against Hong Kong.

However, Lucy wrote a page-long message to engage in a discussion with these Mainland students, whom she had just met at the beginning of her university life. "I was trying to tell them that I participate in the Umbrella Movement for the values I believe in. I agree with universal values like liberty and freedom. And I support democracy. It might be confusing because the event is portrayed as supporting the independence of Hong Kong in the Mainland media. By posting photos from the front line, I wanted to show them the information that they cannot get by just watching the news." However, this only led to social exclusion from the group of people that she was supposed to identify with. "At the time, I had no friends at all. When I walked in corridors at the university, I didn't dare to raise my eyes from my [mobile phone] screen because I didn't want to have eye contact with anyone."

When I asked if she made any Hong Kong friends, she sneered "not a friend but Facebook friends." Sadly, the social exclusion of Mainland migrants by Hong Kongers is felt by almost all student migrants, no matter what political stance a Mainland student takes (Ip, 2020; Xu, 2015). Lucy went to the Umbrella Movement with a few liberal high school friends from Fujian. However, as they were scattered across different universities in Hong Kong, she ended up being all alone in her university.

During the Umbrella Movement, a video of a Mandarin-speaking woman being harassed by protesters went viral. The woman tried to support the protesters only to end up having her words interrupted before she could finish. Instead of listening to her, the protesters around her sang birthday songs, perceived to be a peaceful way to interrupt any unwelcome speech (dhkchannel, 2015).

"I posted the video on my Facebook page," Lucy said, "but it was as if nobody noticed. I have a couple of local friends on Facebook. I know that they are protesters too. But they just treated me like [I didn't exist] . . . I also commented on their posts when they mocked Mandarin

or mainland Chinese . . . but again they just replied with an emoji or simply ignored me." Were it not for this type of social exclusion, Mainland student migrants in Hong Kong might not need to depend so much on ICT to maintain connections back in mainland China to alleviate their loneliness, as Peng (2016) has observed.

All the interviewees shared the same observation, neatly captured by Lucy, "Mainland students ended up just hanging out with each other, just like the locals. No one needs to communicate with others who are different or have different ideas." The people trapped in between find nowhere to belong and hence experience double marginalisation.

Jodie shared similar experiences but was even more pessimistic. She said in the interview that the Hong Kong experience had made her realise that "being mainland Chinese is an unbearable sin." As soon as Jodie came to Hong Kong, she enrolled in an o-camp that advocated LGBT rights. The o-camp was organised by an inter-university LGBT student association. Even though Jodie shared the same political agenda and sexuality with her Hong Kong peers in the association, their similarities did not seem to overcome their differences:

> In the camp, all Mainland students were put in one dorm while I was assigned with some local students in another. You know, I couldn't understand Cantonese back then. I felt rather embarrassed just for being there. When the "928 incident" [during the Umbrella Movement] [8] broke out, some of the local students got so emotional that they even burst into tears. The local students in the camp rushed to Central. [9] I understood and decided to go with them! However, as soon as we got there, my dorm-mates abandoned me. I couldn't find anyone I knew and ended up being there just by myself. (Jodie, aged 25)

"Locusts" and "Dogs"

Jodie's Hong Konger peers would include her in activism activities such as asking people to sign petitions in support of LGBT rights, but would leave her out in casual social gatherings. Jodie could not recall all names of her Hong Konger peers and believed that they could not remember hers. She could be considered a comrade, but not a friend with whom these peers shared daily life. Relations with students from the Mainland were also difficult.

> To be honest, I was a bit afraid of the Mainland students in my university. Many would really call local students "dogs" on WeChat. They posted about how backward Hong Kong is . . . for not having mobile payment . . . I knew we would not have much to discuss, so I just intentionally distance myself from them. (Jodie, aged 25)

In 2012, Peking University professor Kong Qingdong provocatively expressed that "many Hong Kong people are like dogs," responding to an online video of a Mainland child being scolded by Hong Kongers for eating on a subway train (Sina.com, 2012). Kong asserted that "Hong Kong people worship the West like dogs worship their owners" and concluded that Hong Kong people were still imprisoned by colonialism. It is beyond the scope of this article to dissect the colonial history of Hong Kong (Carroll, 2007) and its contemporary dilemma of being trapped in both colonialism and post-colonialism (Chu, 2016, 2019). Scholars have shown very well how

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[8] Referring to the aforementioned date of September 28, 2014, when the Hong Kong police used tear gas for the first time against protesters.

[9] Central is the business and administrative centre of Hong Kong. The Umbrella Movement protests started in Central and the neighbouring Admiralty district.

the discrimination against mainland Chinese is linked with colonialism and Cold War legacies (Sautman and Yan, 2015; Vukovich, 2012, 2019). In diversified pro-democratic demonstrations, some protesters have indeed used the flag of British Hong Kong, a symbol of Hong Kong's colonial legacy, to provoke the government (Lin, 2019). This symbolic act is often perceived by the Mainland state and media as evidence of uncritical colonial nostalgia and the influence of "foreign evil forces." Certainly, these actions are not free from ideological tensions. However, to reduce the heterogeneity of political thought on display in pro-democratic demonstrations to a single position – Hong Kong independence – as narrated by major Mainland media platforms (He, 2014; Ling et al., 2016) is just a way to further provoke nationalism against all Hong Kong protesters.

In fact, many interviewees rejected Hong Kong independence. As Sophie articulated: "I am not pro-Hong Kong independence. I think it is stupid. I just wished that a part of China could maintain its difference. But there seems to be no space for communication. Whatever I say to my fellow Mainland friends would be considered a betrayal to my home country."

At the same time, scholars in China have been promoting the Mainland political-economic model as a superior post-colonial alternative to the Western liberal-democratic model, justified by its track record of economic development (Zhang, 2012). Scholar Zhang Weiwei (2012) claims that China is developing a civilisational state model which redefines human rights, governance, and democracy. In short, he advocates for a civilisation dependent on visible material development – individuals enjoying better material living standards and attributing material abundance to the state. Under such logic, effective mobile payment infrastructure, as mentioned by Jodie, is taken as the embodiment of the success of China. Any place without access to such technologies is considered inferior and backwards. In his books and public talks, Zhang included many anecdotes of western Europeans being shocked and fascinated by the living standards in Chinese metropolises. In his mind, the West, as well as Hong Kong, is simply unaware of China's development. In this development-centrism, once China's economy surpasses the West, the tables are turned, and Hong Kong and the West must learn from China.

In these discourses, mainland Chinese are deemed "locusts" by localists backed up by their illiberal, "pro-democracy" claims, while Hong Kongers are deemed "dogs" by Chinese nationalists backed up by their development-centric ideology. Both locusts and dogs are used to dehumanise the Other as uncivilised or not civilised enough to think freely. My interviewees are trapped in this position of double marginalisation exactly because they are guarding the space between two increasingly rigid and antagonistic political stances that share something fundamental in common: both nationalism and localism are based on distinction and hierarchy and a linear perception of history that justifies subversion and domination.

Coping with Double Marginalisation

My interviewees revealed four strategies or coping mechanisms to deal with double marginalisation. The first strategy was to align entirely with the localists and to show understanding or even support for discrimination against mainland Chinese.

> Populism was just a bad strategy to fight for democracy but after all, it had a
> positive effect in anti-authoritarianism . . . I agree with the localists. . . . If
> [discrimination] is an efficient strategy against mainland China, I think it is
> okay. (Jerry, aged 25)

Jerry studied politics in his bachelor's and seemed very firm in his political stance. I asked Jerry whether he would identify himself as Chinese. He replied, "Why would I? Isn't it troublesome?" Perhaps to Jerry, an individual's national identity is unrelated to their birthplace.

However, as localism assigns birthplace as a critical and rigid component of the Hong Konger identity, a total denial of mainland Chineseness would entail a highly tactical presentation of self to cover the stigma of one's Mainland background (Goffman, 1990).

> I am sorry to be Chinese . . . I felt ashamed when I went abroad with my Chinese passport. I cover my mainland Chinese passport with a passport case so that travellers around me would not notice that I am from mainland China. . . . Sometimes when I use WeChat in Hong Kong, I will hide my screen from people surrounding me because I don't want them to know that I am using a Mainland app. (Jodie, aged 25)

Jodie was not a native Cantonese speaker, so I asked how she dealt with the language and accent issue. "Yes, my Cantonese is flawed," she replied. She tried to speak as little as possible in movements and only used short sentences in everyday conversation to pass as a local.

The second discernible strategy was to escape the Mainland–Hong Kong conflict by joining the community of international students, who are usually exchange students from other countries. Majoring in English literature, Mary participated in the Umbrella Movement and Pride parade with international students and considered herself an expatriate in Hong Kong. Expatriate usually refers to middle- or upper-middle-class white international migrants from developed countries who come to Hong Kong for high-end jobs. Mary spoke proficient American English, had a German boyfriend, and only socialised with predominantly white friends. Mary found her comfort zone with international students to distance herself from the Hong Kong–Mainland conflict.

The third approach was to claim a professional distance toward the Mainland–Hong Kong conflict. Two interviewees said in retrospect that joining demonstrations did not amount to participation but was simply academic observation. As one of them put it, "There is a time during lunch when my local classmates started to address Mainlanders as locusts. I was angry at the beginning, but then I calmed myself down. I am trained as a sociologist. My task was to understand how these local people came to this stage." However, adopting such professional distance may result in further suspicion. One interviewee expressed her frustration that after three months of working voluntarily for an NGO in Hong Kong, she overheard local staff commenting that she only joined to write an academic article.

The last tactic is to break away from engaging in politics altogether, which echoes Xu's (2015) findings. "I felt bored seeking the meaning of life by participating in politics. I want to focus on life itself," Lucy said. She claimed that she got emotionally exhausted by politics after staying in Hong Kong for two years. Her exchange year in France in 2016 transformed her. "Perhaps you won't believe it," Lucy said, "but people [in France] could spend their entire afternoon lying under the sun in a park or just having coffee… I felt that this is the meaning of life." Another two interviewees turned to economic pragmatism. As one of them put it, "After all this [for her it was not only the demonstrations but also political arguments with people around her], I felt really tired. Now I think politics is useless. I just want to earn money now... I don't discuss politics with anyone now, really, [but] just a few people who I knew would understand me."

Conclusion

This article has examined the double marginalisation which traps Mainland student migrants in Hong Kong between two social identities and two places of belonging. While the pro-democracy liberal movements in Hong Kong are deeply intertwined with the rise of localism, based on the Hong Kong–Mainland dichotomy, the anti-Mainland sentiment of the demonstrations means that my interviewees participate in demonstrations alone and without solidarity. The rising patriotic

and nationalistic sentiment in mainland China reduces Hong Kong protesters to unemancipated British colonial subjects, while a discourse of the mainland Chinese model as a better alternative to the liberal Western model is also growing (Zhang, 2012). This has pushed my liberal interviewees to further distance themselves from other Mainland students, as development-centric nationalism increasingly defines the meaning of being Chinese. In the last section of the article, I listed four tactics that my interviewees individually adopted to deal with their double marginalisation: understanding localists, befriending expatriates, assuming professionalism, and becoming apolitical.

In this article, I tell stories of a few liberal Mainland students, but the quandary involves many more people and larger groups, not confined to Hong Kong and China. What they are guarding is a grey area that makes invisible the universality of liberalism that goes beyond the Cold War arena, and which includes the freedom of expression, the freedom to be queer, etc. Liberalism in this article refers to the belief in diversity, plurality, and heterogeneity without hierarchy. There is not a single idea, identity, or ideology that is superior to the other, and therefore must dominate and subsume the other. The elevated tension following the anti-extradition bill protests and the NSL would only have further marginalised anyone who wishes to stay in-between, not to mention risking daunting political consequences and ruthless cyberbullying. What I related above have become stories of the past in Hong Kong. However, as such voices are rendered more silent, there exists even more need to cast light on those who persist to guard transregional liberalism and who contest both localism and nationalism. It is in such in-between zones that we see possibilities of co-existence that go beyond domination, power, and conversion. Regardless of how faint their power is and how limited in number they are, these Mainland liberal migrants, too, define what is Hong Kong and what is China.

Acknowledgments

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Becoming "British East Asian and Southeast Asian": Anti-racism, Chineseness, and Political Love in the Creative and Cultural Industries

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Abstract

This article advances work on the "British Chinese" by reconfiguring the boundaries of the field and expanding it beyond the cultural and linguistic transformations of an "ethnic community." To do so, I examine recent political mobilisation of a pan-East and Southeast Asian identity in the creative and cultural industries and situate it within wider anti-racist organising in Britain. First, I examine the birthing of "British East and Southeast Asianness" as an emphatically political identity that contests racialised notions of "the Chinese" as a passive "model minority" and articulates a repositioning as agents of change. Second, I examine the crafting of a political community by members of two collectives in which this identity emerges as a contestation of the borders of "Chineseness" and its policing, while maintaining a Chinese hegemony. Third, I identify distinct political repertoires of anti-racism within this "community," a more radical and a more integrationist approach, which highlights the challenges of political mobilisation, and which are shaped by a continued abject status. Finally, I explore the role of political love and care as a means of mobilisation, through which a radical politics of affirmation and refusal is crafted. In doing so, I re-envision the political horizons of the so-called "British Chinese," while shedding light on the current complexities, transformations, and solidarities of communities within and beyond Chineseness.

Keywords: British Chinese, British East Asian, British Southeast Asian, political community, anti-racism, Chineseness, identity, model minority, political love, care

Introduction

The last few decades have seen a significant increase in the Chinese population in Britain and the formation of new communities. Yet it remains the case that the complexity of "Chineseness" in Britain has not been adequately captured in research. While earlier studies mainly focused on the Hong Kong Chinese, much recent work examines newer migrations from mainland China, leaving more established generations of Chinese relatively obscured, and contributing to the construction of the diversity of this so-called "community" as a present phenomenon rather than a longstanding fact. Part of the work of documenting and conceptualising the remapping of the Chinese in Britain must therefore involve reflecting the complexity of more established as well as newer communities and examining how these are transforming.[1]

This article attempts to do this by focusing on the political communities of so-called "British Chinese" in the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) which transcend "Chineseness."

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[1] This paper was first presented at the "Remapping the Cultural and Linguistic Landscape of the Chinese in Britain" conference, University of Westminster, February 15, 2020.

Specifically, it examines the mobilisation of the category "British East and Southeast Asian" as a political identity among a group of cultural leaders now associated with the non-profit organisation BEATS (British East Asians [2] in the Theatre and on Screen), some of whom were also former members of the collective BEAA (British East Asian Artists). Through different forms of advocacy in the screen and stage industries, BEAA and BEATS have brought together "Chinese" cultural workers of a range of backgrounds (such as British, Singaporean, Malaysian, etc.) with others of different "Asian" ethnicities (such as Vietnamese, Korean, Indonesian, Japanese, etc.).

By examining the emergence of new "British East and Southeast Asian" identities, this article foregrounds the formation of political (as opposed to cultural and linguistic) communities among the "British Chinese." In doing so, it highlights the complexity of the category "Chinese" that existed prior to the new migrations, and the negotiation of identities, borders, and belongings of "the British Chinese," both within and beyond "Chineseness." First, I examine the weaponisation of "British East and Southeast Asianness" by participants as an emphatically political identity, which contests racialised notions of "the Chinese" as a passive and submissive "model minority" and repositions members as political actors and agents of change. Second, I examine the crafting of a political community, in which a pan-Asian identity emerges as a direct contestation of the borders of "Chineseness" and its policing, while nonetheless maintaining a Chinese hegemony. [3] Third, I identify distinct political repertoires of anti-racism within this stage and screen "community," a more radical approach and a more integrationist approach, [4] which are reflective of wider East and Southeast Asian groups. This highlights the challenges of political mobilisation and ideological contestations within the community, which are shaped by the continued abject status of East and Southeast Asians in British society. In the final section, I interrogate past and present theorisations on the role of political love and care as a means of mobilisation and countering this abject status. I argue that participants can be seen to be crafting both a radical politics of affirmation and refusal through their deployment of love and care. This article advances work on the "British Chinese" by reconfiguring the boundaries of the field beyond a narrowly culturalist focus on transformations of an "ethnic community" to include important politicised dynamics of pan-Asian political solidarity and locates them within wider anti-racist organising among racially minoritised groups in Britain.

The move towards British East and Southeast Asian identity in the CCIs since the 2000s is part of the legacy of the fragmentation of a "Black" political identity in the 1980s and its appropriation in policy during the 1990s (Yeh, 2018). Yet the particular articulation of pan-Asian political mobilisation by BEAA/BEATS can also be situated in relation to broader anti-racist movements emerging from the global economic and political crisis of the ensuing decade, from the 2008 economic crash and politics of austerity to an increasingly hostile environment, securitisation, everyday bordering, and "mainstreaming of the far right" (Mondon and Winter, 2020). As Bassel and Emejulu (2017) point out, such developments have led to new forms of political organising and resistance, not least by minoritised women of colour.

This article contributes to a range of recent work that sheds light on these anti-racist mobilisations among Britain's Black and Asian communities and other racially minoritised

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[2] As detailed below, the term "British East Asian" has been used in the stage and screen industries in a problematic way to include Southeast Asia.
[3] In this article, for brevity, I use the term "pan-Asian" unless otherwise specified, to refer to pan-"East and Southeast Asian" identity, as used in the field, while mindful of ongoing debates around "Asianness" and that some constructions of "pan-Asianness" in the East and Southeast Asian community also include South Asia.
[4] While these repertoires are analytically distinct, groups and individuals may occupy various positionings along this continuum at different times.

groups, including those that focus on the work of women (Bassel and Emejulu, 2017) and on work specifically in the CCIs (Saha, 2013; Vrikki and Malik, 2019). In the context of the latter, austerity policies led to a 30 percent reduction to the central Arts Council budget in 2010 (Harvie, 2015), and there has been an entrenchment of what Littler (2018) has called "a postracial neoliberal meritocracy" across the sector. This has seen a growth of diversity discourses accompanied by rising racial inequalities and persistent representational violence. Orientalising tropes, for example, continue to appear across the media, such as in the "Blind Banker" episode of the BBC television series Sherlock (2010) and BBC Radio 4's Fu Manchu in Edinburgh (2010). In 2011, Art Council England's cuts led to Britain's only revenue-funded "British East Asian" theatre company – the controversially named Yellow Earth Theatre (therefore, recently renamed the New Earth Theatre) – losing its funding.

However, thus far there has been little examination of the role of Britain's Chinese communities in anti-racist work. As Bassel and Emejulu (2017) suggest, the construction of political space in Europe and specific dominant imagery of the activist as white and male disavows the political agency of racially minoritised groups – especially women. In the case of East and Southeast Asians, this is aggravated by the racialised construction of "the Chinese" (and sometimes by extension, other East and Southeast Asians, who are often mistaken or conflated as Chinese) as an apolitical model minority (Yeh, 2014, 2018), as has previously been the case with South Asians (Parmar, 1982; Huq, 1996). However, there has also been a lack of engagement among scholars working on British Chinese communities with questions of politics, activism, or anti-racism, mirroring the split, shaped by colonial legacies, between British sociological work on "race," focusing on African Caribbeans, and anthropological accounts of "ethnicity," focusing on Asians (Alexander, 2002).

Parker (2003) and Parker and Song's (2006, 2007, 2009) work provides an important exception. They examined changing identifications among young British Chinese via websites, exploring negotiations and contestations around constructions of British Chinese identity and its borders. Significantly, they also highlighted a nascent civil society by examining the political mobilisation of Chinese communities across generations in response to the deaths of the fifty-eight young would-be migrants in Dover in 2000, as well as against the scapegoating surrounding the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001, in which the Chinese catering trade was identified as a possible source of the outbreak (Parker and Song, 2007). They also document protests against cultural institutions, when, for example, in 2002, the British Chinese Online website ran a campaign challenging the erasure of the opium trade from a British Library exhibition. Beyond a few exceptions such as these, the history of East and Southeast Asian anti-racist activism largely remains unwritten and this article contributes to the documentation of these uncharted stories. In doing so, it is significant in reinscribing East and Southeast Asians, and particularly women (most of BEATS' members identify as women) as political agents, as opposed to silent, passive subjects.

The context of BEATS' mobilisation of a pan-Asian identity – and its significance –takes place in the context of demographic change. East and Southeast Asians form one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the UK (ONS, 2011), and represent the largest ethnic group among international students in the UK (HESA 2019/20. Amid the global rise of China, new claims of British Chinese identification by recent migrants, especially from mainland China, are altering meanings of British Chineseness and producing new hierarchies of visibility. In the CCIs, these hierarchies are constructed in relation to capital, as well as longstanding conceptions of authenticity, measured in proximity to "China," and thus risk rendering longstanding British Chinese populations invisible (Yeh, 2018). It is imperative that academic work is not complicit in this. Knowles and Burrows (2017: 90), for example, argue that "Chinese London is now primarily about new migrants instead of the settled UK-born," as China-born migrants in London form two-thirds of the ethnic Chinese population (according to the 2011 Census) and as Chinese capital reshapes the city. Yet acknowledging instead a multiplicity of "Chinese Londons," at times

overlapping, enables a perspective that engages rather than erases the complexity of "the Chinese." The work of BEAA/BEATS may not be noteworthy in terms of capital or numbers of members, but in organising protests against key national cultural institutions, they are significant in crafting a new visible identity that is challenging the abject place of the Chinese and wider East and Southeast Asian communities in British society.

In the US, Asian American mobilisation has a recognised history, but in Britain there has been little comparative research on pan-Asian organising. Benton and Gomez (2008) have suggested that there has been little evidence of pan-ethnic formations among British Chinese youth. More recently, I have discussed the emergence of pan-ethnic racial identities among young Chinese in Britain through the formation of "British Chinese" or the problematically named "Oriental" nightlife parties scattered across urban Britain, which bring together youth of a range of ethnicities including Japanese, Korean, Singaporean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Taiwanese (Yeh, 2014a, 2014b). Barber (2015) notes similar pan-ethnic identifications among British Vietnamese youth. In these works, the formation of pan-Asian identifications has led to new social and cultural politics, which enable the re-imagining of ethnicised and racialised subjects. Yet, in line with South Asian Desi nights examined by Kim (2016), these new formations can conform to individualist, neoliberal models of identity – consumerist, aspirational, heteronormative, and inward-looking – rather than leading to any anti-racist mobilisation.

In this article, I focus on the perspectives of founder members of BEAA and BEATS, launched in 2012 and 2018, respectively. Composed of cultural workers in their thirties to fifties, the collectives demonstrate the significance of broader-based alliances among so-called "British Chinese" and their active engagements in direct forms of anti-racist mobilisation in tackling structural inequalities in the CCIs. Members are also active in other political networks focusing, for example, on migrants' rights, transracial adoption, environmentalism, LGBT/queer rights, and pro-democracy campaigning, which inform their politics and work within the CCIs. BEATS includes three key members (Lucy Sheen, Daniel York Loh, and Jennifer Lim) of the former BEAA, who are arguably among the central architects of a pan-Asian political project in the CCIs, having led a high-profile public protest against the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2012, under a self-consciously politicised British East (and Southeast) Asian identity (detailed below). Of these, Loh and Sheen also run the British East/Southeast Asian (BESEA) Actors and Artists Discussion Forum on Facebook, set up in 2015, which at the time of writing has 3,700 members. Through these channels, these leaders have had a significant impact on a wider community of East and Southeast Asians in the CCIs, especially a younger generation, as well as success in driving forward the position of the East and Southeast Asians in Britain more widely in terms of representational politics in the CCIs.

My analysis draws on a series of interviews and focus groups with some of the most active members of BEATS as well as insights from informal conversations as an observer and of participant in the group, as well as cultural events and performances. As a peripheral member of the group and an academic (as opposed to working on stage or in the screen industry), I see myself as a "partner in struggle," my stance rendering explicit the political stakes of my work (Kondo, 2014: 22). In documenting and analysing these new expressions of political subjectivity, I contribute to a repositioning of British East and Southeast Asians as political actors and agents of change. By refusing the "taken-for-grantedness" of community, I highlight the collective negotiations and labour involved in mobilising as a political community. Focusing particularly on pan-Asian mobilisation contributes to reconceptualising the field of British Chinese studies by highlighting its inseparability from work on wider community formations, and by introducing a dynamic of politicisation to the literature, which sheds light on the complexities, transformations and political solidarities of Britain's "Chinese" communities.

The Birth of a Political Identity

In the little existing work on a pan-Asian identity in the UK, which also focuses on some members of BEAA but has emerged in theatre studies, "British East (and Southeast) Asian identity" has conceptualised as an artistic affiliation, giving rise to "creative" and "aesthetic" differences, but not one that is rooted in political activism and that articulates ideological contestation (Rogers, 2015; Thorpe, 2018). By contrast, I want to suggest BEAA/BEATS' mobilisation as expressing an explicitly political subjectivity, which contests racialised notions of the model minority in tackling structural inequalities in the CCIs and carves out a distinctive politics that at times separates members from the wider stage and screen community. As I discuss in this section, this subjectivity is shaped by wider racial politics in Britain as well as connected to transatlantic and global imaginings of "Asian" community, which are infused by a dynamics of love.

The formation of "British East and Southeast Asian" communities is in part a necessary response to a precarious position within wider anti-racist movements shaped by colonial legacies (Yeh, 2018). As Lucy Sheen, who has been acting since the mid-1980s, recalled:

> When I was a student, there was South Africa, Palestine, marches against NF [National Front]. In the seventies, it didn't matter what colour you were. I embraced "Black" in sense of "non-white," but when that changed it became even more problematic. We couldn't call ourselves "Asian" so where do you align yourself? We had nowhere to align ourselves.

Under the new ethnicised regime, announced by the term "BAME" (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), communities have competed against one another for funding. In this divisive context, some BEATS members narrated their exclusion from wider anti-racist organisation due to racialised constructions as a model minority. As Joy Muhammad said,

> It's sometimes even difficult to classify yourself as BAME because you have other communities saying, "you don't deserve to identify as BAME because you're not deprived enough."

The BEATS network was seen a necessary response to similar marginalisation within anti-racist networks in the CCIs, which, according to another participant, "were meant to be super, super inclusive, but weren't," and tended to overlook East and Southeast Asian experiences. While the term "British East (and Southeast) Asian" has been in circulation at least since the early 2000s, in participants' narratives, a turning point in its "weaponisation" was sparked in 2012, when the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) staged a production of the Chinese play, The Orphan of Zhao, known as the "Chinese Hamlet" and set in China. By casting white actors in all the major roles, the RSC endorsed "Yellowface" practices. The only three East Asians cast were in minor roles, namely as two maids and a dog. In response, a group of actors led by Lucy Sheen, Paul Hyu, Daniel York Loh, Jennifer Lim, and others swiftly mobilised under the name of "British East Asian Artists" and organised a protest. It was a significant moment, highlighting the injustice of dehumanisation and erasure and a refusal to accept it, sparking several similar protests. Notably, it was a specifically a pan-Asian identity that was mobilised, with support from East and Southeast Asians globally, particularly Asian Americans, with whom a sense of community was already emerging. Singapore-born Lim, who had appeared in a production of Wild Swans in London the year before, described her first experience of being in a full pan-Asian cast, alongside actors of Asian American, Japanese, Indonesian, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong heritage as a "very wonderful and empowering experience":

> I'd never worked with a full Asian cast before, it was my first one. I can't tell you, I've never felt this way before. We hung out so much and on the last

> day . . . I was close to tears thinking I'm never going to see some of them again. We were like family. It's going to make me cry in a minute [laughs]. But it was such a seminal experience in my life.

The way in which Lim talks about this emergent pan-Asian community in a language of love – both intimate and familial – is significant, as expanded upon below. However, as with Asian American leaders in the US, of both past and present generations (Espiritu, 1992; Nakano, 2013), Lim sees the significance of pan-Asian organisation as lying in its capacity "as a strong political term" to garner greater "bargaining power." This raises the perennial question of how to create a politics of difference, which is discussed next.

A Politics of Difference

When discussing the mobilisation of a pan-Asian identity, Muhammad stated, "it's for us to collaborate and make a stand that 'we're not the same, but we are going through the same kind of shit right now and we're not going to take it anymore.'" In doing so, she articulates the struggle, as Hall (1988: 28) describes, of "how to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities." In the US, research on Asian American mobilisation has conceptualised the relationship between ethnic and pan-ethnic organising in three ways: first, where pan-ethnic mobilisations supersede ethnic identifications; second, as situational where pan-ethnicities and single-ethnicities are mobilised according to context; and third, as interlocking, where they mutually affect each other (Nakano, 2013). These, it is argued, are necessary as leaders attempt to navigate differences within a diverse population. This also appears to apply to BEATS. As Sheen stated, "we're advocating for the wider society to see us in our diversity, in our uniqueness as well as our overall groupness, and not to omit us." The way in which this takes place is shaped by both specific conceptions of "Chineseness" circulating in the dominant discourse as well as the overall hegemony of Chineseness over other East and Southeast Asian identities in Britain.

Contesting Chineseness

As in my previous research among young people in the nightlife economy (Yeh 2014a, 2014b), a pan-Asian identity is embraced by BEATS members as an inclusive category to encompass complicated mixed heritages or cultural influences in response to narrow conceptions of Chineseness and the policing of its authenticity. Recalling the mobilisation in response to The Orphan of Zhao, Sheen, a transracial Hong Kong-born adoptee, recalled:

> We all wanted it to be pan-Asian. Because up until that point it had been incredibly Chinese-centric and particularly Hong Kong Chinese-centric within the theatrical world.

Despite her place of birth and appearance, Sheen felt excluded, due to particular demands around ethnic authenticity: "I don't naturally speak Cantonese or Mandarin. Yes, I was born in Hong Kong, but I was raised here. So, in that narrow definition, I am not 'authentically' Chinese." Loh, of "mixed" Singapore Chinese and English heritage, recounted similar experiences of the policing of Chineseness among both "Chinese" and "white" people:

> I've spent a lifetime of Chinese people saying to me, "Oh but you're not really Chinese." I find that fundamentally offensive . . . but the ethnic authenticity thing is also about white people maintaining their power . . . "that's how you'll have to prove yourself to me."

For Mingyu Lin, a pan-Asian identity was also embraced as a means of side-stepping the violence of misrecognition and the exhausting work of explaining one's identity:

> Every time I say "I'm Chinese," they say, "Oh you're from China," or they say, "Oh, but I thought you said you were from Singapore," and I have to say "yes, the two can correlate."

Yet central to concerns over Chineseness – particularly in the context of the Hong Kong protests of 2019–2020, over Beijing's plans for an extradition bill, and its human rights record – were versions propagated by the People's Republic of China. As Lim articulated:

> If you're talking about nationality, you should be including the Tibetans, the Huis, and the Uyghurs, but they are not being included. And by dint of association with the state of China, suddenly its foisted on you to be responsible for what this state is perpetrating on a global level.

While these narratives testify to the embrace of a pan-Asian identity as a means of contesting the borders of "Chineseness," for Muhammad, it also makes space for a heritage across East and Southeast Asian borders:

> I describe myself as a mixed Asian-Sussex girl. But if you want to break it down more, Malay-"Chindian." If you want to break it down even more, Malay-Indonesian-Tamil-Hakka and raised with British and Malay culture but embracing the other two ethnicities.

The lack of public understanding of the complexity of "East and Southeast Asia" however has led her to use "JM Arrow" as a pen name instead:

> If I was going to write a piece about being East Asian and my name is Joy Muhammad people aren't going to think "East Asian," they're going to think, "Er, OK, is it someone pretending to be East Asian? Is it someone who's appropriating it?" It's easier to use a "Western" pen name – which means that . . . I have to hide the very identity that I'm proud of.

Nonetheless, in her creative work, Muhammad, like other BEATS members, draws on her complicated positioning to explode simplistic identity categories. In Do My Eyes Look Small in This? (2020), Muhammad provides insight into the intersectional nature of her experiences as a "British female bisexual feminist of mixed Asian and religious heritage." [5] The monologue is performed by Peyvand Sadeghian, an actor who describes herself in her Twitter profile as a "Cockney-Chinese-Persian mishmash." While putting on her makeup and hijab, the young woman talks about her everyday experiences of racism as a mixed Chinese Muslim bisexual woman:

> When the 9/11 attacks happened, I knew people of my religion were going to get the blame. Now with the Covid-19 crisis it's people of my race. I can only think, "Here I go again" . . .
> I remember the first time I wore a hijab. Someone went up to me and asked, "Excuse me, why are you wearing a headscarf? You're Chinese." . . .
> I've been kicked out of gay venues for looking too feminine and straight and just not white enough, because apparently us Asians are too geeky for

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[5] See https://www.omnibus-clapham.org/oto-we-r-not-virus/.

pretentious – sorry "cool" – venues. I was accused of being a DVD seller at one gay bar.

For these cultural workers, then, a pan-Asian identity creates a more expansive category than "Chineseness" that makes space for their unruly "Chinese" heritages while also allowing them to disassociate from the Chinese state. That questions of Chineseness are central to deliberations over pan-Asian identity signals its hegemony within the group, despite efforts made by members to craft an inclusive political community, as discussed next.

The hegemony of Chineseness

Due to colonial histories, "Chinese" and "British Chinese" have been hegemonic other "East and Southeast Asian identities" (Yeh, 2014, 2018). This is reflected in the problematic use of the term "British East Asian" in the arts to include – while also arguably rendering invisible – Southeast Asia (Yeh, 2018). [6] The dominance of East Asian, and specifically Chinese and Japanese, interests and experiences in mobilisations of pan-Asian identities is well documented in the US (Nakano, 2013), where, as in the UK, it reflects the relative positions of power of East Asian by comparison to Southeast Asian groups. This hegemony is evident in BEATS in its very naming. When founding the network, a member of Southeast Asian heritage proposed the name S/EAN to stand for "Southeast /East Asian Network," but eventually the group settled on BEATS (British East Asians in Theatre and on Screen), capitalising on the growing currency of the term "British East Asian" in the stage industry. In conversation with this member, they said:

I'm someone who's always had to contend with being painted . . . as just being Chinese because there's no way to interpret who I am anyway, so it's better than being called "Chinese." It's not the same as being called Southeast Asian but I accept it as progress. But I know a lot of people who come from Southeast Asia probably feel a dissatisfaction.

This response is shaped by the common experience of the violence of misrecognition, whereby, due to the dominance of Chineseness in the British imagination, "anyone looking East Asian" is assumed to be "Chinese" (Barber, 2015). For this participant, "British East Asianness" provides an expanded category that lessens this violence, while sustaining another – the East over Southeast Asian hierarchy.[7]

Since its launch in 2018, BEATS' film screenings have included works by a range of East and Southeast Asian filmmakers, and the collective has supported its members' plays – Loh's Forgotten (2018), about Chinese labourers in the First World War, and Tuyen Do's Summer Rolls (2019), dubbed the first British Vietnamese play. Its advocacy work tackles issues that either affect East and Southeast Asians universally, such as the use of "Yellowface" in the English National Opera's 2020 production of Madame Butterfly, or is framed in that manner. [8] While

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[6] For example, David Tse states that "East Asia" is defined as "the area east of Pakistan and west of the Americas," although arguably this is due to practical reasons of economy of expression, rather than any ideological intention to exclude (Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association, and Nottingham Playhouse, 2001: 57).

[7] Over the past few years – and especially among the newer formations of pan-Asian political community emerging in the Covid-19 era, the term British East and Southeast Asian is increasingly taking precedence. Indeed, BEATS' own consideration of a name change to BESEAn (British East and Southeast Asian Network) to promote greater emphasis on Southeast Asian experience was stalled due to another collective laying claim to this name.

[8] Its first campaign, for example, was a protest against the children's television channel CBBC's plans to create a children's sitcom *Living With The Lams* about a Chinese family running a restaurant in Manchester, with almost all of the episodes authored by "non-East Asian" (rather than non-Chinese)

much of its work reflects a greater engagement with East- over Southeast Asian-related cultural productions, this partially arises from its responsiveness to instances of injustice in national cultural institutions, which reproduces local and global hierarchies in the economy of East and Southeast Asians and their diasporas.

Despite efforts to recruit new members to redress the imbalance, the continued ethnic Chinese dominance of the group is a source of frustration for members. As one interviewee put it:

> The thing that worries me about the pan-Asian thing is actually those people especially from the more marginal countries, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, come way, way down and then that perpetuates the Chinese dominance, and then, I'm like "Ah, we're even unequal in our own little bubble of things."

The work of BEATS' members outside the collective tackles pan-Asian representation more successfully. Programmes such as Moongate Productions' "WeRNotVirus" (2020), a festival of works responding to COVID-19-related anti-Asian racial violence, for example, brought together cultural workers of Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean (and including mixed) heritages. Members also play a key role in supporting new generations of East and Southeast Asian artists. For example, Sheen and Loh have directed monologues for the "British East & South East Asian (BESEA) Graduate Digital Showcase" (2020) produced by Adrian Tang, which included graduates of Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Malay, Filipino, Korean, Singaporean, and Uyghur-Uzbek descent.

Literatures on anti-racist organising often highlight the challenges of crafting a politics of difference across "internal frontlines" of ethnicity (Hall, 2000: 17). Here, while the hegemony of "Chineseness" within BEATS continues, members actively seek to challenge it, though more research is still required on the extent to which workers of other East and Southeast Asian backgrounds feel represented by the collective. What is clear however is that more significant fault-lines within this stage and screen community lie elsewhere – and that is in divisions over political orientation, as discussed next.

Between Radical and Integrationist Politics

In this section, I argue that an overarching tension within the British East and Southeast Asian screen and stage community lies in a division between more radical and integrationist politics. These are marked by different political strategies, with BEATS members constructing themselves in opposition to those whom they perceive to be seeking a collaborative, model minority relationship with establishment culture to achieve what are viewed as limited, if not assimilatory, forms of representation. This tension, I suggest, highlights what I identify as a disavowal of racism against the Chinese (and at times, East and Southeast Asians more widely), as a consequence of racialising constructions as a model minority. Its internalisation, I argue, along with a broader incorporation of epistemologies of whiteness, works to defuse radical political agency. This

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writers. Subsequent campaigns include objections to the flying in on taxpayers' money of Asian American actors to the British stage in Arts Council-funded Hampstead Theatre's *King of Hell's Palace* (2019) (set in China) and Theatre Royal Bath's *Wild Goose Dreams* (2019) (set in South Korea), which have contested the erasure of opportunities for specifically *British* East and Southeast Asians regardless of specific ethnicity. (For BEATS, the "Britishness" articulated here is emphatically not determined by citizenship rights, but choice of place to live and work, although its use is vociferously contested those who are unaware of this.)

signals the importance of a politics of love and care as a means of sustaining more radical attempts to achieve racial justice.

According to BEATS members, the building of pan-Asian solidarity was critical during the Orphan of Zhao protests of 2012, due to the disappointing response from British-based ethnic Chinese. As Lim recounted, "if you only canvas for support from the [British] Chinese community . . . you'll get fuck all." British East and Southeast Asian identity is therefore constructed as emphatically political in direct contrast to both stereotypes and experiences of British Chinese peers as apolitical. This is evident in participants' continual emphasis on the need to "make a stand," and highlighted in Loh's reclamation on his Twitter profile of his labelling as a "militant" and an "#Angryethnic," within and beyond East and Southeast Asian communities, for his role in speaking out. Significantly, the pan-Asian identification enables participants to challenge racialised constructions of the Chinese as a quiet, submissive model minority: in Loh's words, "East Asians are known in the industry as being quite small in number but feisty as fuck [laughs]. I think everyone knows you don't mess with British East Asians." While constructed in opposition to "Chineseness," this pan-Asian identity is not, however, "anti-Chinese" so much as defined in opposition to apolitical, assimilatory, or culturalist constructions – and politically regressive model minority expressions – of both British Chineseness and British East and Southeast Asianness, as discussed next.

"Playing the model minority, the yellow face"

As with the mobilisation of the category of Asian American in the US, the claiming of a pan-Asian identity has emerged as a rejection of the racist, colonialist term "Oriental," which, as BEATS member Lim articulated, "carries with it so many connotations, of being mythical, of being not quite real, and exotic." BEATS members are similarly critical of the embrace by their peers of the term "Yellow." Despite the fact that, as Sheen argues, the label was "made up mostly to belittle and denigrate a whole race of people . . . [and] constructed to make [us] feel less than human," it was institutionalised in the British cultural landscape when the Yellow Earth Theatre was set up in 1993.

Representations of East and Southeast Asians on the British stage and screen are rare (Rogers, 2020), and it is Orientalising practices that limit those representations to a handful of tropes, of what Loh calls "little Yellow people": women as submissive and sexualised "Madame Butterflies" and men as tyrants or triad members, or emasculated and weak. Contestations of Othering forms of representation, however, are problematised because, as Sheen said, there are many "who are willing to play the model minority, the yellow face" or to "play foreigners." That, as Loh points out, "there's quite an easy living to be made doing it" underlines how the livelihoods of racialised cultural workers hinge on a self-Othering as ethnicity becomes commodified (hooks, 1992; Saha, 2013), making it a common rationale for taking up such work, and resulting in an unwillingness to challenge it.

Another BEATS member described actors rehearsing for a play:

They bring up things like, "Oh, it's very Orientalist to walk across the stage [like that], we don't like it, we should do something about it." But then the director comes in and everyone's suddenly quiet. In front of me, they're huge activists. In front of white directors, they will throw British East Asians under the bus.

Being on the frontline, members of BEATS recognise the very real fear of the repercussions of speaking out – that of being blacklisted – but this can aggravate rather than assuage frustrations over a lack of mobilisation. As Loh, one of the most outspoken critics said, "I've really risked my

whole career at times. It was quite intimidating at times and people just take that, and just don't bother." What is deemed particularly pernicious is that objections around misrepresentation can be directed at other East and Southeast Asians but not the white establishment. Loh recounts recent criticism within the community of representations of Singapore by Anchuli King, a 24-year-old Thai Australian New Yorker, who wrote White Pearl (2019), staged in London:

> You'll call out Anchuli but you wouldn't say boo to Lucy Kirkwood, you wouldn't say boo to Michael Boyd. . . . You would crawl over broken glass to act in Lucy Kirkwood's crap representations of China with those crap Chinese accents. You'd absolutely kill to be in that . . .

As he commented, "All that angst and anger and wrath that they should reserve for [the white establishment]. They actually give to you." With respect to the Asian American experience, Matsuda (2010: 561), has written about "displaced anger" as "a victim's mentality; the tragic symptom of a community so devoid of self-respect that it brings its anger home." In this context, "playing the model minority, the yellow face" is not limited to an actor's life but can be seen as a metaphor for wider political orientation in the world. That is, maintaining the status quo not only by not speaking out, but by overvaluing, embracing, and even protecting whiteness, even as it compromises one's own humanity.

However, we need to understand how this occurs not simply in the context of a very real need for artistic and economic survival or the abject status of East and Southeast Asians in Britain but also in the context of our post-racial condition. Goldberg (2015) has theorised post-racial discourses – the denial of racism – as precisely one of the powerful ways in which racism reproduces itself. This is evident in narratives reported by BEATS members. Lim describes participants in one theatre workshop asking,

> Why do we want to talk about issues? Why don't we do something universal? Why do we have to talk about identity? Why can't we just . . . play universal parts?

In pitching "identity issues" – in other words racial/ethnic identity against what constitutes the "universal" – participants reproduce discourses in which whiteness is understood as an unmarked, neutral position – the universal – rather than a specific and actively sustained position of power (Lipsitz, 1998). As a result, they believe they can play the "universal," that these parts and stories are open to them (if only they stop talking about their identity). In this way, they further reproduce colour blind discourses that disavow racism while simultaneously negating the possibility that "Chinese" or "Asian" stories can be "universal."

Even when there is recognition of being subject to and delimited by racialization, there remains a desire to participate in that unmarked whiteness. Loh reported an actor as saying, "I think it would be great not to be defined by our race, it would be great to do a Sarah Kane play." In Lim's analysis,

> It's almost as if you've got an unconscious bias against your own narratives, and I find it quite disturbing. As if we've been indoctrinated to such an extent that we feel our own stories are not worth telling. It's better to blend in with the majority race in this country, so we should tell their story, and be part of them and be them, be white.

Lim here speaks precisely of an assimilationist desire, a fantasy of attaining whiteness, which stems from an internalisation of whiteness as an epistemological standpoint in which East and Southeast Asian lives and stories have no worth or value. While such internalised racism affects all racialised minorities, the proximity of specifically East (and at times Southeast) Asianness to whiteness – where Asians, as a model minority, have been constructed in different

contexts, from apartheid South Africa to the contemporary US, "as honorary whites" (Tuan, 1998) – creates a particular promise of achieving the privileges of whiteness, which binds us to its racial logics in a specific way. As Matsuda (2010: 559) writes, "The role of the racial middle is a critical one. It can reinforce white supremacy if the middle deludes itself into thinking it can be just like white if it tries hard enough." The post-racial deepens this fantasy. In terms of actors, as Loh suggests, "they just expect to be cast as Nina in The Seagull," despite the reality that they find it hard even to get to play East and Southeast Asian roles, as the RSC production of The Orphan of Zhao suggests. But, as Lim questions, "why would they want to do something Russian? Why don't they want to play themselves?"

In a separate discussion, another BEATS member, in recounting coming to political consciousness, highlights the different routes and the stages of the journey among the collective, rooted in historically specific and localised experiences of migration and racism:

> I didn't grow up in London – we came in the 1980s when I was about four or five. We were in a boat in the South China Sea, and we finally got picked up by a British boat, which meant we were diverted to Hong Kong. Maggie Thatcher wouldn't let us leave the boat because she didn't want any Vietnamese in the country, so we were actually left on the boat for ages until she finally relented and we were processed at [Hong Kong] and we came to the UK. The rule was, picked up by a British boat, come to UK, get picked up by a French boat, go to France, picked up by an American boat, go to America. I grew up in a shit town in the Midlands, which is a really, really racist place . . . really, really poor, and a really hard place to grow up. So, I grew up my entire life wanting to be white.

This narrative of a childhood experience as a refugee captures not only neglect but hostile rejection by both states and, then, in everyday life, by the people of those states, through which this participant makes sense of a desire for whiteness. These experiences shape their political stance now, as the above interviewee (who wished to remain anonymous) would express: "It's probably one of the reasons why I think BEATS should be so compassionate to everyone. Not so long ago, I was that person with all that internalised whitewashing and racism towards myself."
In speaking of compassion, this BEATS member points to an orientation of care, which, as a practice and discourse, has been far less visible within East and Southeast Asian than in other communities until recently. Loh, for example, speaks of "certain East Asians who are very comfortable with being the only one in the room. They like that, they want to preserve that hallowed status." Rejecting the logic of tokenistic neoliberal inclusion embraced by others, with its emphasis on individual success, BEATS members' politics is underlined by a sense of what Emejulu and Bassel (2018: 114) call "care as praxis," a radical act that requires the development of a political imagination that takes seriously the lived experiences of both close and distant others. For Loh, this must be anti-imperialist and global: "Why don't British East Asians care about the Hong Kong protests? Why don't we care about each other?" They contest the internalized racism that overvalues whiteness and in doing so erodes the collective struggle for racial justice, and instead present a radical politics that encompasses both affirmation and refusal.

A politics of affirmation and refusal

There is a long history of the mobilisation of the concept of love (and self-love, or care) (Lorde 1988) in Black, feminist, queer, and critical race writing, in which it is seen as means of constructing political communities (Nash, 2013), as a source of survival and a precondition for

love across boundaries (Anzaldúa, 2009 [1988]). For hooks (1992), "loving blackness" can be theorised as a revolutionary act of psychological and political decolonisation that breaks with white supremacist thinking. While recently concepts of care have been mobilised by government and policymakers in the deepening of neoliberal objectives, and in the UK, of dismantling the welfare state (Ward, 2015), there has also been a resurgence of an ethics of care emerging in racially marginalised communities that revives its more revolutionary roots (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018). What I hear from BEATS' members are narratives and practices that contest the self-Othering and devaluation attributed to wider community members, and which can be described as expressions of "loving Asianness" via a revaluing of the lives, humanity and worth of themselves and others. This act of love acts as a catalyst to and is a necessary precursor to a radical politics of affirmation.

This can emerge as a refusal to defer to powerful gatekeepers, as in the case of a young director who recounted the words of a white director of a Chinese-themed play: "Perhaps in the future, in a more mature world, you could direct it," which illustrates a continual deferral of the representation of racially marginalised communities to a future time (Naidoo, 2013). (The young director's response: "I'm not going to go 'Oh thank, you.' No, no, no, no, no – I can do it now.") It can also find expression as a necessary claim of wider collective worth. As Loh has said: "We have to believe our stories and our lives are worth caring about." Referring to other community members working on a serious Chinese play, who seemed to joke around on stage rather than engaging deeply with the play, he says:

> They don't realise that it's a massive story, about people's lives, people whose stories don't get told. There's a lot of people in China, a lot of brave people, a lot of people who disappear. It's important. It's important you do that, and you do that right. I don't understand how you can just piss away that humanity. . . .
> I want to do more East Asian stories, more East Asian roles. . . . I've been the only one in a white cast, and you think "yeah, I'm living the dream" in many ways, but I don't feel comfortable about it. I've only felt comfortable doing East Asian stories, good ones . . . the good ones have been nothing I've felt prouder of, and nothing I've felt more thrilled by.

Speaking of the "thrill" of Asian stories, Loh raises the issue of pleasure here, which is significant. It helps emphasise political resistance, not only as reactive – voicing the dispossessed – but as joyful and life-giving, as a form of affirmation that is generative and that can spur further collective political action. Thus, while a significant aspect of BEATS' work lies in advocacy, which are conventionally political strategies, as another BEATS member says, "there are other ways to do advocacy. That could be about sharing work, bringing people up in other ways, showcasing work." BEATS thus also works to change the economy of East and Southeast Asian representation so that there is "plenitude" and "abundance," by acting as "gate openers not keepers" by opening up channels to institutions as well as nurturing talent.

Yet, as theorists have pointed out, political love can also be exclusionary and caring for others can be an act of refusal (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018). The specific modes of "loving Asianness" in the British East and Southeast Asian community are highly contentious. While BEATS members' views are far from homogeneous, they share a belief in the necessity of "speaking truth to power" and of contesting both structural inequalities and the politically regressive neoliberal "model minority" politics that they identify in the anti-racism of others. Yet the radical nature of their politics can be alienating. In two recent works, Invisible Harmony (2020,

with Enxi Chang), and No Time for Tears (2020), [9] Loh provides an impassioned redefinition of Asians as political agents. Yet the works also excoriate fellow Asians who "don't raise the bar . . . [and] just suck it up," whether on stage or screen ("You take the profit workin' out that yello butt / You so exotic, to the white patriarch you butter up"), or beyond ("Don't care about the climate or the world or Brexit / The rubber bullets and the tear gas on the streets from your mind you edit") (Loh and Chang 2020). They are also critical of neoliberal constructions of Asianness in which communities build Asian worth through – and as – commodities: noodles, bubble tea, and Asian bodies ("You postin' up your dan dan on subtle Asian traits / Gettin' shiny headshots an' pumpin' them weights / You believe in your hype so you raisin' up a boba") (Loh and Chang 2020). While elsewhere,

> The girl and the boy in a world that's cleft
> Their fragile bodies so easily shattered
> And peppered with spray made in the West
> And pierced with bullets of rubber that crack and spatter. (Loh and Chang 2020: n.p.).

In No Time for Tears (2020: n.p.), Loh explicitly denounces model-minority politics not only for its effects on Asians but also as used against Black people.

> I've been congratulated in the past on my "community"'s [sic] quietness and politeness. The fact we're not pesky trouble-makers like those other people of colour . . .
> That we should be
> Proud
> To be so untroublesome
> But I'm not proud of that
> In fact I'm ashamed . . .
> To remain in a tract of docile employ
> Yet weaponised enacted when you chose to deploy
> Us to beat down on Black people you casually destroy
> . . .
> So fuck your model minority card. I never wanted it any way
> It didn't get me in your club.

This is an analysis that challenges the divisive ethnicised regime by connecting anti-Asian racism to other racisms ("While an antisemitic conspiracy brews / And Muslim migrant blame ensues / And Africans are homeless in the province of Guangzhou), and in opposition to a model-minority politics in which Asians only care about racism against themselves.

This, I argue, demonstrates how British East and Southeast Asian mobilisation is an identity-based politics that is not necessarily divisive but can be an expansive force that opens up possibilities of solidarity across racial and other differences, but one that is simultaneously, in Emejulu and Bassel's (2018: 115) words, "an act of refusal." As with the activists they interview, for BEATS members, caring for Others includes speaking out and acting against neoliberal and racist, as well as sexist, homophobic, ableist, and transphobic, regimes – especially (but not exclusively) when perpetuated within British East and Southeast Asian circles. I therefore suggest that in this instance of crafting political community then, the major faultlines lie not along ethnic – nor even racial – lines, but are rather constituted through particular political projects and

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[9] Both texts were made available to me as a panel speaker at events where the works were performed or shown, 'Invisible Harmony' at the Southbank Centre, London, 4 February 2020 and 'WeRNotVirus', Omnibus Theatre, London, 14 June 2020. They are cited with permission from the author.

boundaries of otherness. In adopting a more radical path, BEATS separates itself from more integrationist forms of politics that has arguably dominated the pan-Asian screen and stage community, if not Britain's Chinese communities thus far.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that "British East and Southeast Asian" mobilisation in the CCIs is significant as a new form of expanded "pan-Asian" political community, which testifies to the changing social and political dynamics of the "Chinese in Britain." Focusing on the political dimensions of constructions of "British Chinese community" within and beyond the borders of "Chineseness" is necessary to ensure that academia is not complicit in reproducing racialised stereotypes of an apolitical model minority. As a partner-in-struggle, I make the case for repositioning "Chinese" and "East and Southeast Asian" women in particular, who make up the majority of BEATS' members, but others too, as political actors and agents of change. In so doing, I contribute to the documentation of histories of East and Southeast Asian anti-racist activism that so far remain scant in the literature. As this article has shown, the weaponisation of a pan-Asian identity by BEATS marks the growth of nascent radical political energies that seek to break with integrationist politics that are viewed as defending the status quo and acquiescing to self-othering in exchange for inclusion. Instead, BEATS directly challenges the legitimacy of key cultural institutions, their structures and their practices, which is significant in a context where understandings of racism are individualised and reduced to interpersonal antagonisms, rather than seen as systemic and structural.

At the same time, this article has shown how the divisions and difficulties in mobilising demonstrate how entrenched anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism is. The lack of mobilisation occurs in a context where Chineseness and Asianness is abject – still ridiculed and denigrated as a normalised part of public life – and it is sustained by colour blind promises of equal opportunity and discourses of a post-racial meritocracy. I argue that the disavowal of racism against us is precisely one of the powerful ways in which we experience racism, in the way it works to delegitimise and contain our political agency. In a post-racial context, the denial of racism affects all racially minoritised groups. Yet in the case of the Chinese and at times East and Southeast Asians more widely, the disavowal of racism is specifically shaped by racialisation as a model minority with proximity to whiteness. Amid the allure of being included, strategies such as the downplaying of difference, endeavours to participate in "whiteness," and the valuing and protecting of the white cultural establishment are perceived to be employed within more integrationist politics. Obscuring institutional racial workings, they are underpinned by an ambivalent and simultaneous recognition and disavowal of racism, in the belief that playing the model minority provides a path to empowerment.

In this context, I have proposed that, among BEATS' members, "British East and Southeast Asian" marks a distinct political imaginary defined by a more radical approach that contests model minority integrationist approaches, in collective efforts to effect political and social change. As I have shown, a range of strategies are deployed, including challenging the legitimacy of key cultural institutions, tackling structural processes, and working against the divisive ethnicised regime, as well as engaging in a wider politics of representation. Yet this article contributes to the literatures particularly in highlighting the central role of the politics of love and care in this women-led mobilisation. This includes, in the CCIs, insisting on the value of Asian lives by advocating for Asian-led and Asian-performed stories and roles, creating autonomous "pan-Asian" spaces of production and community building, and nurturing and uplifting the work of others to create plenitude and abundance in the economy of representation. In a context of a continued abjection that is disavowed, I have argued that "loving Asianness" as a radical revaluing of Asian lives, humanity and worth becomes life-giving, a necessary source of

building capacity to resist, of galvanising political movement and as a shared basis for developing a politics of affirmation and refusal of all forms of oppression.

Significantly, this demonstrates that the mobilisation of "British East and Southeast Asian" as a form of identity-based politics can be an expansive force that opens up, rather than forestalls, solidarities across racial, gendered, sexual and ableist and other forms of oppression. While this article has focused on BEATS, there has been a surge of political mobilising among Britain's East and Southeast Asian communities in the Covid-19 era as a response to the anti-Asian racial violence it has sparked. This demonstrates further both the potential and challenges that a politics of love and care might have for building broader solidarities within and beyond British Chinese communities. Future research must now follow the extent to which these groups are able to craft "East and Southeast Asian" identities that build resistance across different forms of oppression and the role of love and care in thus reshaping the political horizons of these communities more widely.

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Red Collections in Contemporary China: Towards a New Research Agenda

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Abstract

"Red Collecting" is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary China. It refers to the collecting of objects from the Chinese Communist Party's history. Red Collecting has received only minimal treatment in English-language scholarly literature, much of which focuses on individual object categories (primarily propaganda posters and Chairman Mao badges) and overemphasises the importance of Cultural Revolution objects within the field. Because of this limited focus, the collectors' motivations have been similarly circumscribed, described primarily in terms of either neo-Maoist nostalgia or the pursuit of profit. This article will seek to enhance this existing literature and, in doing so, offer a series of new directions for research. It makes two main arguments. First, that the breadth of objects incorporated within the field of Red Collecting is far broader than current literature has acknowledged. In particular, the importance of revolutionary-era (pre-1949) collections, as well as regional and rural collections is highlighted. Second, it argues that collectors are driven by a much broader range of motivations, including a variety of both individual and social motivations. Significantly, it is argued that collectors' intentions and their understandings of the past do not always align; rather, very different understandings of China's recent past find expression through Red Collecting. As such, it is suggested that Red Collecting constitutes an important part of contemporary China's "red legacies," one which highlights the diversity of memories and narratives of both the Mao era and the revolutionary period.

Keywords: Red Collecting, Red relics, Chairman Mao badge, propaganda poster, Cultural Revolution, Red era, revolutionary era, Red legacies

Spend any time in China today and it will be clear that legacies of the Mao era remain omnipresent. From Mao Zedong's portrait on Tian'anmen rostrum and the currency, to the periodic revival of "red songs," the appearance of Cultural Revolution-era restaurants, and the continued influence of Mao-era aesthetics in art, advertising, and design, there is no doubt that the first thirty years of the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) continued to impact upon its later era of "reform and opening up" and now the "new era" (xin shidai) of Xi Jinping's leadership.

The Mao era, and the revolutionary era before it, also continue to be visible in contemporary China in the form of the art, objects, and documents of the period, which are collected, researched, and exhibited throughout China under the label of "Red relics" (hongse wenwu). The range of objects included within the field of "Red Collections" (hongse shoucang) is wide, from the Chairman Mao badges, posters, and statues that are frequently on sale at tourist sites (albeit many of which are fakes) to less visible but often more valuable: paintings and posters, stamps, coins and medals, books and other documents, and all sorts of military and daily-life objects relating to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) history after 1921.

The field of Red Collecting, which began to emerge in the 1980s but only gained its current nomenclature in the early 2000s, is surprisingly wide and has tens of thousands of committed participants and hundreds of thousands of hobbyist adherents. And yet, until now it has received only minimal treatment in English-language scholarly literature, much of which focuses on individual object categories (primarily propaganda posters or Chairman Mao badges) and overemphasises the role of Cultural Revolution-era objects within the field. Because of this limited focus, the collectors' motivations have been similarly circumscribed, described primarily in terms of neo-Maoist nostalgia or the pursuit of profit.

This article, therefore, seeks to make four main contributions to the field. Firstly, it is argued that the current literature is disproportionally focused on the Cultural Revolution, which prevents us from fully appreciating the diverse connotations of Red Collecting. For observers outside China, the spectre of the Cultural Revolution often seems to loom large. Without discounting the obvious importance of this crucial decade, it is not the only time period that influences people's memories and views of the CCP. It is argued that we need to take a more comprehensive view of the field in order to understand the legacies of the Chinese revolution in ways that go beyond the Cultural Revolution, and that continue to interact with the party-state in complex and often contradictory ways. Secondly, by expanding our understanding beyond the Cultural Revolution, this study reveals a previously unappreciated breadth to the field, particularly the extent of revolutionary-era (1921–1949) collections as well as the local or regional nature of many collections. Thirdly, this expanded temporal and geographic understanding reveals a variety of motivations driving Red Collectors, which allows us to question the dominant interpretations, which are limited to primarily profit-oriented engagement or expressions of nostalgia. Collectors, like the objects they collect, are diverse, and simple motivations cannot capture the complex actions of these individuals, who come from different family backgrounds, class positions, and geographical regions, and who have had different experiences of both the Mao and the reform eras. In particular, this article highlights a variety of individual and social motivations that suggest Red Collecting's alignment with prominent social and political trends in contemporary China. Finally, it is argued that this new understanding of Red Collecting will open up new avenues for research, which will not only add nuance to the understanding of Red Collecting as a field, but also demonstrate the plurality of contemporary understandings and interpretations of China's recent past.

My basis for making these arguments come from my ethnographic experience in the field of Red Collecting as a participant-observer over the period 2016 to 2019. My argument represents my combined reflections on the ways in which my experiences over a prolonged period of fieldwork differed from that presented within the existing literature. It is a reflection of my realisation that the field is much broader than the existing literature suggests, in terms of the time period of objects collected, the breadth of object categories, and the sheer number of participants. From that perspective, my attendance at Red Collector events (jiaoliuhui) has been particularly instructive. The article is based on observations made during my attendance at twelve Red Collector events (which frequently include markets, exhibitions, lectures, auctions, banquets, and formal ceremonies), over twenty formal interviews and collection/museum visits with collectors from eight different provinces and municipalities, as well as informal personal and WeChat conversions with dozens of collectors. In addition to these ethnographic experiences, I have also relied on the extensive publications of collectors, including catalogues, collecting association journals, and online publications. This has given me unmatched exposure to and experience of Red Collecting, allowing me to develop a more comprehensive approach to the field, which I aim to articulate in this article.

This article will begin with a brief overview of existing English-language literature on Red Collecting. It will then offer an expanded picture of the field by, firstly, offering a new typology of collections, and, secondly, developing an expanded matrix of collector motivations.

Literature Review

There has been very limited English-language literature that touches explicitly on the topic of Red relics and Red Collections, in part because the nomenclature has only emerged in Chinese in the past fifteen years. The earliest events and publications that explicitly used the term "Red Collections" (hongse shoucang) first emerged around 2006, when the first Red Collecting Association was founded in Hunan, and events, explicitly branded as "Red Collection" events, soon after began to occur in major cities like Shanghai and Beijing (Qin, 2007: 10–11). The term's significance was solidified in 2011 when the China Association of Collectors Badge Collection Committee (Zhongguo shoucangjia xiehui huizhang shoucang weiyuanhui) changed its name to the China Association of Collectors Red Collection Committee (Zhongguo shoucangjia xiehui hongse shoucang weiyuanhui) (Zhongguo hongse shoucang Editorial Department, 2011: 1).

Given the fairly recent emergence of the term, it is not surprising that there has been little English-language literature explicitly on the topic of "Red Collecting" and Red relics. However, literature on the collection and preservation of Mao-era objects began to appear as early as the 1990s, discussed typically in object categories. The earliest objects to come to academics' attention were badges, largely in the context of the revived interest in Mao (known as the "Mao fever," or Mao re) that emerged around the centenary of the leader's birth in 1993. Badges, as well as posters, remain the most well-documented Red relics, not least due to the work of a number of key individual and institutional collectors (Evans and Donald, 1999; S. Landsberger, 1995; Landsberger and van der Heijden, 2009; Schrift, 2001; Wang, 2008). A number of prominent Chinese collectors first published catalogues of their collections at this time, and the discussion that emerged in the English-language literature at the time has largely defined the ways in which the field has been subsequently discussed. Early sources tended to position collectors' motivations within the changing ideological and economic environment of the reform era: collectors were seen as either aiming to resist this transformation and as collecting to demonstrate their devotion to Mao and nostalgia for the Mao era, or as embracing the market transformation and the economic rewards that collecting now brought (Bishop, 1996; Hubbert, 2006). A second approach drew on a similar binary of devotion versus money, but tracked these changing associations over time. Red objects are interpreted as symbols of the change China has gone through: from a focus on a type of devotional politics in the Mao era to a celebration of commercialisation and money in the reform era (Benewick, 1999; Dutton, 1998, 1999; White, 1994).

Much of the early scholarship focused primarily on trying to understand the role played by these objects during the Mao era and the Cultural Revolution, an important lacuna of knowledge at that time. The discussion of reform-era collecting tended to serve, therefore, as more of an afterthought than a primary focus. For much of the early 2000s, there was little new scholarship about Mao-era collecting, with the exception of Hubbert's (2006) important article, referenced above. However, in the last ten years, a renewed interest in both the cultural history of the Mao era and its legacies in contemporary China has resulted in a resurgence of publications on the topic (see, in particular, Li and Zhang, 2016). This new research has demonstrated convincingly that part of the explanation for the continued presence of Maoist culture and aesthetics in post-Mao China is because it had a deeper meaning for its producers and audiences than our concept of "propaganda" allows (Evans, 2016; Mittler, 2012; Pang, 2017). Much of the recent work has helped explain the complex and often contradictory memories that people hold towards the Mao era, and that too has influenced how authors have written about contemporary collections.

In particular, much has recently been written about the large-scale museum cluster of Fan Jianchuan in Anren, Sichuan, and his series of museums on the "Red age" (Dutton, 2005; Ho, 2020; Ho and Li, 2015; Landsberger, 2019; Rowlands, Feuchtwang, and Zhang, 2019; Zhang, 2020). These works collectively highlight both the encyclopaedic tendencies of Fan Jianchuan as a collector, as well as the complexities of memories that surround the objects from the Mao era. It is noteworthy, however, that in addition to his well-documented "Red-era" museums, Fan also has a series of museums that focus on the Second Sino-Japanese War and the revolutionary period in China more broadly: indeed, Fan initially rose to prominence in China for these revolutionary-era relics, rather than for the Mao-era ones (Qin, 2007: 5). And yet, most of the literature continues to focus on Mao-era collections, and particularly Cultural Revolution-era collections (Coderre, 2016), despite the fact that "Cultural Revolution collections" is not a category of collecting that exists in China.

The existing English-language literature has greatly expanded our knowledge, both of how material culture functioned during the Mao era itself, and its continued impact and influence in the post-Mao period. It has highlighted the changing meaning of objects as China introduces a market economy and develops a consumerist mindset. It has highlighted the competing grassroots memories of the Mao era and particularly of the Cultural Revolution, and the ways in which they continue to find expression, despite the state's attempt to limit discussion of the decade after its official evaluation of the period, issued in 1981. These studies have made important contributions in the fields of cultural history, art history, and cultural studies. And yet, as this article will demonstrate, the field of collecting as described in the English-language literature in many ways does not resemble the field as it is actually practiced in China. I suggest that taking an ethnographic approach, based on extensive participant-observer fieldwork, can make a contribution to the literature in two main ways. Firstly, I argue that the academic focus on collections of Cultural Revolution and Mao-era material overlooks the much broader field of pre-1949 collecting, which is seen as part of Red Collecting, not as a separate field. Secondly, I argue that once we have an expanded concept of the scope of Red Collecting, we can also develop an expanded understanding of collector motivations.

Towards a Typology of Red Collections

This section aims to offer an enhanced understanding of the field of Red Collecting. It will expand the temporal span of Red relics as well as the breadth of object categories. It will also introduce new ways of understanding the organisation of collections. It seeks to do so by offering a tentative tripartite typology of Red Collections: medium/object category collections, location-based collections, and theme-based collections. This system is derived from the answers to what is always my first question to a collector: "What do you collect?" The answers come in a series of roughly aligned categories: "I collect Mao badges"; "I collect objects to do with the Jiangxi Soviet Republic"; "I collect objects to do with the revolutionary model operas"; etc. In other words, in deriving my typology, I start from the ways in which collectors themselves speak and write about their collections.

Classification is central to the activity of collecting, regardless of what is collected. The act of choosing what to collect is implicitly the act of choosing a preferred category of the physical world with which to engage. Scholars in recent years have moved away from the dominant twentieth-century view that saw things as "only real insofar as they are sensible to a human subject" (Kerr, 2016: no pagination), in order to embrace firstly the idea of object agency (Appadurai, 1986) and, more recently, object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2017), both of which highlight the more complex networks in which humans and objects engage. This has highlighted that objects act on us, just as we act on them, and has begun to envision the diverse and potentially unknowable lives of objects. And yet, despite this, collecting, as an activity that emerged in the European

context out of an Enlightenment ideal of the perfectibility of human rationality and knowledge, continues to make claims to the identity of objects through their insertion into sets (e.g., posters, badges, etc.). Collecting, then, is fundamentally the application of human categories of knowledge to material culture: in short, collecting is classification lived; experienced in three dimensions. Of course, classification is always an imperfect exercise, and this too is true of collecting. Each collection comes up against the question of boundaries: at what point does something stop being a badge and become a medal? What are the temporal boundaries that limit a collection? For example, should a contemporary representation of a revolutionary model opera still be considered a Red relic?

Just as collectors themselves have to make somewhat arbitrary decisions about the boundaries to their own collections, I too, acknowledge the necessary imprecision of my typology. There are overlaps between the collection categories as well as collectors who fit imperfectly within any category. The aim, however, is to expand understanding of both what is collected and how collections are organised, in particular, by highlighting the types of collections that have previously been largely overlooked. I set up these categories not as exact prototypes, but as examples that necessarily demonstrate the limitations of the nature of categories themselves.

Table 1: A Typology of Red Collections			
Typology category	Characteristics	Most prevalent categories	Frequency
Object category /medium	Collection defined by specific type of object. Tend to be national in scope. May or may not have temporal boundaries	Mao badges/medals, propaganda posters, paper goods/documents (including Mao's writings), stamps, coins/money, porcelain/ceramics	High, and includes many of the earliest collections
Location	Collection defined by object's proximity to a specific historical location. Typically related to the revolutionary period (1921-1949). Local in nature. Tends to have historically-determined temporal boundaries	Early Communist base areas, the Long March, the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region and Yan'an, various army campaigns from the Sino-Japanese or Civil Wars	Has become more prominent in the past 15-20 years
Theme	Collection defined by a relation to a specific event, individual, cultural object, etc. Often local in nature	Themed collections tend to be niche, and thus there are no 'typical' categories, but many of them do revolve around cultural products, such as the revolutionary model operas or famous individuals such as Lei Feng.	Fairly uncommon, although make up a portion of many larger collections.

Medium/object category

The designation of collections by object category is the most visible approach in the existing literature. It is also a type of classification frequently used by collectors themselves. There remain, for example, collecting associations dedicated exclusively to badges and (military or labour) medals (huizhang), or documents and paper (zhipin), as well as the broader Red Collecting associations. Even if individuals collect a wide variety of objects, they often organise and exhibit them in their different object categories. For example, at the Jianchuan museum cluster, object categories are a frequent theme for individual museums, including porcelain, mirrors, and badges.

The largest single category of Red relics are Mao badges, a fact that is unsurprising given that it has been estimated that up to five billion Mao badges were produced, primarily between

1966 and 1969. Qin Jie (2007: 10) estimated in 2007 that there were at least 100,000 people in China who collected Mao badges, with varying collection sizes. However, Mao badges was not the earliest object category to come to prominence: by the 1990s, CCP-issued stamps were already changing hands for high prices both within and outside China, and the price of these stamps has continued to rise ever since. For example, in 2018, a rare and pristine 1968 stamp sold at the China Guardian auction house for 13.8 million yuan (over £1.5 million) (Chen, 2018). Propaganda posters came to prominence slightly later, becoming a popular field of collectibles from the late 1990s onwards. Other popular object categories include porcelain, Mao's written works, ration coupons, and coins and paper money. There are also a series of much more niche collections, including notebooks (such as those in the collection of Wu Junlong, in Nantong), alcohol bottles (such as those of Yang Yiping, in Zaozhuang), and school and university graduation certificates (such as those of Shanghai's famed collector Zheng Jiaqing) to name just a few.

As the field of Red Collecting has expanded, a trend towards specialisation within a given object category has become increasingly common. Most badge collectors have, in addition to a general focus on Mao badges, a smaller, and more rare and valuable subsection of badges within their collection. For Ningbo collector Li Jun, for example, his broader badge collection is given greater status and recognition for its important sub-set of military and labour medals from the 1950s (Williams, 2017). Similarly, Shanghai collector Huang Miaoxin is particularly well known for his sets of badges (Huang, 2017: 38). It seems likely that as the field continues to expand and diversify, this tendency towards specialization will continue to develop.

Figure 1: A 1949 graduation certificate from the Northern University of Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu Border Region, in the collection of Zheng Jiaqing. Source: Jiaqing Shoucang Wechat platform (Zheng, 2020).

While each of these categories may sound somewhat limited in themselves, they each individually attest to Susan Stewart's (1993: 155) statement that, "To group objects in a series because they are 'the same' is to simultaneously signify their difference. In the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them." It might be suggested that part of the popularity of Mao badges is the realisation that what seems like such a simple category – badges with Chairman Mao's visage – is in fact a complex field, featuring tens of thousands of individual designs, which represent the complex factional and devotional politics of the early Cultural Revolution. This is true, too, of other object categories. Any object category, when viewed in large enough numbers can speak to historical changes over time in ways that represent more than just that object itself. Zheng Jiaqing's graduation certificate collection, for example, represents a way of tracing the development of Chinese education through the late imperial, Republican and PRC periods (Lin and Li, 2009). Through their text and design,

these certificates track political and social changes over time and speak to different ideas of the Chinese nation.

Figure 2: A 1969 set of badges depicting Mao at various stage of his life, in the collection of Huang Miaoxin. Photo by author.

Conceiving and organising a collection based on object category has long been the most prevalent type of Red Collection. These collections tend to be national in scope, and may or may not have temporal boundaries. They represent one of the cores of Red Collecting, and so it is not surprising that the English-language literature has focused on collections organised in this way. What this section has demonstrated, however, is that object-based collections go far beyond badges and posters. They include many of the categories associated with both traditional elite collecting practices (porcelain, paintings, literature, etc.) and with "folk" (minjian) collecting (cigarette packages, liquor bottles, matchboxes, etc). The basic typology of "object category" thus contains a huge variety of collectibles, from the cheap and mass produced to the rare and expensive, all of which represent different ways of imagining recent Chinese history.

Location

While Red Collecting is a nationwide field, it is also deeply local in nature. Red Collecting is strongest in the north and centre of the country: the areas that powered the CCP's rise to power. Southern China is not bereft of Red Collectors, but they are fewer in number. Many collectors also choose to focus at least part of their collection activities on topics related to their hometown or region and the special place it played in CCP history. These types of collections tend to focus on areas that were important in the pre-1949 revolutionary period. For example, the Fujian collector Hong Rongchang collects objects from the Jiangxi Soviet Republic, a main CCP base area from 1927 to 1934, when the majority of the leadership departed on the Long March (Hong, 2014). Hong, a former local party cadre and businessman, argues that the CCP's experience in the Jiangxi Soviet, which included part of Fujian, laid the foundation for the future birth of the PRC, and thus that its relics ought to be preserved (Hong, 2020).

Other collectors combine a broader focus on an object category with a particular interest in the objects from their own or another locality. The Mao badge collector Liu Jian, from Bengbu in Anhui, for example, is particularly interested in Anhui-made badges, which he displays in a free "club" (julebu) in Bengbu city (Liu, interview with author, Bengbu, May 2016). He published a catalogue of his collection in 2003, which included numerous sections of Anhui-made badges, as well as brief biographies of other local badge collectors (Liu, 2003). Similarly, badge collector Zhang Luoshou, originally from Henan, but now based largely in Hong Kong, has a sub-set of badges from Hong Kong, Macau, and Xinjiang, reflecting an interest in badge production and distribution on China's margins (Zhang, interview with author, Hong Kong, November 2017).

Figure 3: A Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region-labeled water bottle, lying on a textile with the same text. In the personal collection of Xu Haihang. Photo by author.

Most collectors who focus on a particular location still have an object category that is at the heart of their collection. However, one Shaanxi collector, Xu Haihang, takes a purely locational focus to his collection: he acquires anything that has the phrase "Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region" (Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu) on it (Xu, interview with author, Jingbian, October 2020). This CCP-run base area, straddling the borders of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia provinces, had its capital at Yan'an. It was where Mao and many other top leaders were based for much of the period from 1936 to 1947, and it has thus acquired a fundamental position in the history and mythology of the rise of the CCP. Xu has acquired over 10,000 objects from the 1930s and 1940s, including documents and document folders, paper and cloth money, medical tools, military equipment, and clothes and other textiles, as well as thousands of photographs of the time (Xu, interview with author, Beijing, September 2018). Xu lives in Jingbian, a city a few hours to the north of Yan'an, and which hosted Mao and other senior leaders for a major strategic meeting after their evacuation from Yan'an in 1947. Xu has a small exhibition hall-cum-store room in town, as well as a newly opened museum in his hometown of Zizhou (Zhou, 2019).

The revolutionary and historical legitimacy of his collection is assured by its provenance, and Xu is convinced that pre-1949 objects are the most important part of Red Collecting (Xu, interview with author, Beijing, September 2018). Despite this, the financial value of these local objects is often much lower than the nationally sought-after objects (Hong, 2020); their value is primarily emotional and historical, rather than financial.

Xu Haihang is not alone in feeling a pride in his own region: in a country as large as China, regional identities are often firmly felt, and regional contributions to the revolution are often well known within the locality. Of course, regional pride and an interest in local history are

not unique to China; an interest in local history, and particularly in the moments in which one's locality contributed to events at a national level, is common in many countries. But given the existing literature's focus on Mao-era and Cultural Revolution-era objects, as well as its frequent focus on collectors in large cities, it is important to highlight both the role of revolutionary-era collections and the role of rural collections, which have, over the past fifteen or twenty years, become an increasingly visible and valuable part of the field (Qin, 2007: 10).

Theme

The third way in which we might consider Red Collections is the focus on a particular theme. Themes can in many ways overlap with locality. For example, the Hebei collector Niu Shuangyue collects objects to do with the revolutionary opera, ballet, and film The White-Haired Girl (Bai Mao Nü), which he displays in a museum in Shijiazhuang (China Association of Collectors, 2017: 17–18). The story of The White-Haired Girl is set in Hebei province, and Niu feels, as a Hebei native, it is his responsibility to collect, preserve, and pass on this revolutionary story (Niu, personal communication, June 2018). For Niu, therefore, locality drives his choice of theme. The decision to collect these locally and historically specific types of objects is usually driven by a more specific motivation than simply collecting a generic category such as Mao badges.

Figure 4: A selection of "The East is Red"-labelled objects, from the collection of Hou Feng. Photos courtesy of Hou Feng.

A similar link between locality and theme is seen in Shaanxi collector Hou Feng's collection of objects relating to "The East is Red" (Dongfang hong), a folk song composed by northern-Shaanxi peasant singer Li Youyuan during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was written to express Li's love and gratitude to Mao and the CCP (Ba Qianxian 8, 2017). Some years ago, Hou met the grandson of the song's creator, and in listening to him talk about the song's origin, Hou developed a deep and abiding interest in it. In 1964, as part of events to commemorate the PRC's fifteenth anniversary, "The East is Red" was turned into a music and dance epic, which brought it to nationwide prominence. As such, for Hou, "The East is Red" is almost a "national song," but one that has particular significance because it originated in the CCP's revolutionary heartland. Some fifteen years ago, Hou began collecting objects that reference "The East is Red" in some way, and he has now acquired well over 1,000 objects, including porcelain and enamel wares, badges, textiles, musical instruments and recordings, and posters and prints. For Hou, keeping "The East is Red" objects in northern Shaanxi is very important. He writes that an outsider once wanted to buy his whole collection, but he refused. He considers that is does not just belong to the country, but that it is representative of Shaanbei (northern Shaanxi) folk culture, and so should stay in Yulin, where it has more meaning (Ba Qianxian 8, 2017).

Themed collections sometimes overlap with the individual's career. Fujian collector Yang Wenhai collects objects to do with the military and the police, which recalls his own personal experience in both the military and the police, and which embody, for him, the important contributions these institutions have made to China's development (Yang, 2015). Similarly, Shanghai collector Shangguan Wanping, a former paediatrician who now runs a medical supplies company, collects anything to do with medicine from the late imperial, Republican or PRC periods, with a particular focus on medical literature (Shangguan, interview with author, Shanghai, September 2017).

Themed collections clearly demonstrate that the phenomenon of collecting goes far beyond just an abstract love for Mao and a desire to remember history. They highlight that collecting is often a deeply personal process, tied to the personal narrative and self-imagination of the collector, their locality, their profession, and their desired relationship with the larger nation and its history.

This section has demonstrated the wide range of objects that are currently collected under the rubric of Red relics, going far beyond our current focus on badges and posters from the Cultural Revolution. In particular, I have highlighted the importance of revolutionary-era objects, from various historically significant localities, which are tied not to the difficulties of the Cultural Revolution, but to the historically and politically untainted period of the CCP's rise. These more directly historical collections are important to foreground given the discussion on motivations in the following section.

Collector Motivations

Early English-language literature on Red Collecting primarily presented collector motivation through the binary of nostalgia and commerce. More recent literature has already begun to expand on this framework, particularly in discussions of the prominent Sichuan collector Fan Jianchuan. He, like many collectors, has spent substantial amounts of his personal wealth developing his collection, and given that it will be at least partly donated to the state, he is unlikely to be motivated by simple speculation, although his recent reinvention as a "cultural consultant" may suggest that there are at least some commercial motivations at work (Zhang, 2020). He is undoubtedly a patriot, deeply interested in the local history of Sichuan province; but particularly in light of his own family's suffering during the Cultural Revolution, subversive, rather than nostalgic, motivations are often ascribed to him (Ho, 2020; Ho and Li, 2015). Rather than ascribing collectors' actions to singular motivations, I suggest that motivations are typically multiple and often less straightforward than might be expected. Devotion and love for Mao is commonly felt, as is an interest in the rising market value of the collected objects, but these are not necessarily oppositional views. One can love and respect Mao, whilst also feeling that these objects would be a good investment. They often sit alongside a series of other motivations: the desire to preserve these important historical objects for the nation and the next generation, an interest in collection and research as methods of connoisseurship and self-cultivation, an interest in the aesthetics of the objects, and even just the feeling that collecting is a fun hobby. In other words, there are a range of serious and frivolous, personal and societal motivations for engaging in collecting.

In Table 2, I outline a matrix for collector motivations, which seeks to expand our understanding of the factors that drive collecting. I have identified four key factors or orientations (present-oriented, past-oriented, value-oriented, utility-oriented) and Table 2 shows how these factors engage with each other. As suggested above, each individual collector may be motivated by a combination of these different factors: a nostalgia for an idealised or imagined past may power the idea that these objects are valuable social tools for the education of the next generation; the historian's pursuit to document the past may also be a type of leisure and entertainment. The

matrix should be interpreted as explicating collector's motivations in the plural, not the singular. It should also be noted that a collector's motivations can change over time, based both on individual life experiences and the changing cultural, social, and political context in which they collect. There has been renewed attention to China's revolutionary history under Xi Jinping; I suggest that the present-oriented interest in the contemporary social value of these objects has become more prominent during his tenure. This means, necessarily, that such a matrix might look very different in ten or twenty years, in ways that cannot be anticipated now.

Table 2: Collector Motivation Matrix		
Characteristics of motivation	Value-oriented	Utility-oriented
Past-oriented	Love for and devotion to Mao	Historical pursuit to preserve/document the past
	Nostalgia based on childhood memories	Attempt to document (and at times promote) the history of a particular region, locality or individual
	Nostalgia for idealised imagined past	
Present-oriented	Social commentary as expression of criticism of Reform Era Changes	Entrepreneurial pursuit of profit
	Social commentary as expression of patriotism	Connoisseurial pursuit of status/recognition with the field and broader society
	Social value as 'tool' for education etc	Connoisseurial pursuit of self-cultivation through the practice of collecting
		Leisure/entertainment/hobbyist engagement

The concept of value-oriented motivations refers to the idea that the objects themselves contain a moral lesson within them. They are appreciated for representing a specific ideology, a moral standpoint, or a specific social or cultural phenomenon. Utility-oriented motivations, on the other hand, refer to the idea of the objects as offering some sort of other value (financial, social, personal, etc.) to the individual collector. These two categories of motivation are already reflected in the existing literature, in the sense that nostalgia is a value-oriented motivation, while investment is a utility-oriented one. These two categories are thus useful, but need to be expanded.

Value-oriented motivations

Devotion to Mao, nostalgia, and social commentary

A devotion to and love for Mao, coupled with nostalgia for the era of his leadership, is the most frequently mentioned motivation for collecting in the existing literature. However, my research suggests that these two ideas need to be de-coupled. Devotion to and respect and love for Mao is indeed widespread throughout the field. The most frequent explanation I receive when I ask collectors why they collect is because they worship (chongbai) or love (re'ai) Mao. There is no doubt that the cult of personality that inspired the original production of some of these objects continues to encourage their preservation and collection. A love for Mao, and respect for Mao as a great revolutionary and founder of the PRC, is undoubtedly a key motivation driving collector actions.

This is often linked in the existing literature to an expression of criticism of the reform-era changes. There are indeed examples of this: one of the most-researched collectors, Chengdu

Mao badge collector Wang Anting, clearly linked Maoist devotion with nostalgia for the Mao years. As Jennifer Hubbert (2006: 150) writes, for Wang, "The existence of the badges proved Mao's greatness and the correctness of the social and moral hierarchy of his day." In other words, there is a clear link between a nostalgia for an idealised past and a social commentary of criticism of the direction China has taken. Similarly, the Shanghai film and newspaper collector Liu Debao, who travelled to Beijing to see Chairman Mao during a Red Guard rally in 1966 and whose mother was in a women's militia during the Second Sino-Japanese War, disagrees with the broad direction of reform-era policies, and recalls fondly China's determination to find its own path to socialism during the Mao era (Liu, interview with author, Shanghai, October 2017; Berry and Chenkin, 2011). Liu clearly cherishes his childhood memories and the stories passed down in his family, sees them as embodied by the objects, and uses them as the basis for his criticism of China's present.

Figure 5: A selection from Liu Debao's film collection. Photo by author.

One of the early Chinese texts that explicitly discussed Red Collecting as a phenomenon, similarly pointed out that much of the cultural craze for Red Collecting in the 1990s came from the working classes whose emotional memory of the fairness and justice of the revolutionary and Mao eras heightened their anger at the reform era expansion of the gap between rich and poor (Qin, 2007: 12). This type of collecting is focused on the present, and views the objects as vehicles for a social critique of reform era changes. It is not surprising that many collectors who are making this type of social critique of the reform era also hold idealised views of the Mao era, and particularly of the Cultural Revolution, which is remembered as a time of honesty and mass democracy. My research suggests these collectors also tend to collect primarily Cultural Revolution-era objects, as representing the period in time just prior to the beginning of the reform era, the changes of which they disagree.

It is true, therefore, that for some love and respect for Mao is tied to disagreement with reform era policies and at times a feeling that the original course of the revolution has been abandoned. But this is not always the case. Indeed, many collectors are party members, with military or political connections to the party-state, and they often see the reform era not as a forsaking of the original mission, but as a continuation and restoration of it. Hong Rongchang, the Fujian-based collector of Jiangxi Soviet Republic objects mentioned above, is a party member and former government official, who took advantage of reform era investment opportunities, and indeed it is this money that has enabled his collecting. He sees the reform era changes as a restoration of the correct policies that helped power China's development (Wang, 2015). Hong's understanding of history very closely matches the party's own narrative: the CCP led China to victory in the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, before suffering a failure of leadership during the Cultural Revolution, and then witnessing the restoration of CCP authority

in the reform era. For collectors like Hong, therefore, collecting is also a value-laden activity, but in the form of an expression of patriotism and support for the CCP, not of criticism. For many, particularly those who collect objects from the revolutionary period rather than the Mao era, the Cultural Revolution was an aberration to overcome, and while Mao deserves love and respect, they see nothing incongruous in supporting the current policies of the CCP, and especially Xi Jinping, whilst collecting objects from the revolutionary past.

Devotion and nostalgia are, then, key motivating factors for collecting, but they are not necessarily as simple as might be assumed. In particular, we need to move away from the idea that Red Collectors are, on the whole, neo-Maoists or Cultural Revolution apologists. Love for Mao does not necessarily mean complete agreement with his rule, nor a desire to return to prior systems of social, economic, and political organisation.

Collecting for society

Collectors motivated by the value-oriented aspect of Red Collecting are often keen to demonstrate the merit of the objects and collections to contemporary society. Many collectors worry that the younger generations take the wealth and stability of Chinese society for granted and fail to understand the struggle and sacrifice that previous generations made. They see Red relics as what Denise Ho (2020: 355) has called, in another context, "object lessons": the embodiments of ideological and moral values to be inculcated into their viewers. In this sense, the objects' values have not radically changed from the Mao era, and if anything, collectors see their importance as ever growing, as China becomes more consumerist and socially stratified.

Collectors commonly couch their motivations in terms of nationalism, giving back to society, and morality. The Anhui-based Mao badge collector Liu Jian, for example, states that he collects for the nation, seeing a role for private collectors to support larger government efforts (Liu, interview with author, Bengbu, May 2016). The desire to give something back to society also inspires many of the hundreds of small museums and exhibition halls that now exist. Hebei collector Yang You, for example, has set up a Mao Zedong Memorial Hall in Gaobeidian, as well as a "folk customs museum" (minsu bowuguan) in the surrounding countryside, acts that he sees as a "public service." He is particularly keen to open further museums in the rural areas in which he grew up to educate peasants about a history that he feels is otherwise in danger of being forgotten (Yang, interview with author, Gaobeidian, February 2018).

Figure 6: Left: Liu Jian's public Mao badge display hall. Right: Yang You's Mao Zedong Memorial Hall. Photos by author.

The value of Red relics as "tools" for social education can be connected to either of the other two present-oriented values: social criticism or patriotism. For some, China's widely felt moral crisis is the result of the abandoning of Mao-era moral and spiritual values, and can only be restored through a return to them. For others, however, the belief in the moral value of the objects is linked less to criticism of government, and rather to a broader patriotism based on the idea that Chinese people themselves need to raise their civilization and quality (suzhi). For Hong Rongchang, the return should be to revolutionary objects, which he believes are the most effective carriers of "Red culture," through which the cultural confidence of the Chinese people can be cultivated. He argues that they can help people address the spiritual crisis in contemporary China, encouraging patriotism, dedication, sacrifice, and perseverance (Hong, 2020).

Value-oriented motivations for collecting tend to combine both past and present orientations. It is frequently due to an idealisation of the past – whether that is the Cultural Revolution, the revolutionary era, or simply the collector's childhood – that allows them to imbue their collection with a social value for the present. The exact nature of the objects' agency, how they will rectify current social failings or educate the next generation, is always left vague. But the feeling that these collections – and through them, the collectors themselves – have a valuable social contribution to make is a deeply-held motivating factor, and one that is underdiscussed in the current literature.

Utility-oriented collecting

Commercial motivations

As Table 2 shows, utility-oriented collecting encompasses a range of different motivating factors, relating to both China's past and present. One of these motivations is commercial, which, as discussed in the literature review above, is frequently described as a key motivation. Much early literature focused on the growing market value of Cultural Revolution-era relics in the 1980s and 1990s, and this continues to be a commonly used explanation for collectors' motivation. Julia Lovell, for example, suggests "an economic explanation for the large amounts of money that are being spent on these objects. … Buyers acquire them because they hope and expect that their value will continue to increase" (quoted in Moore, 2014: no pagination). The rising market value of these objects has been well documented, and there is no doubt that a consumerist or capitalistic mindset plays a role in involving people in the field. Indeed, the field of collecting is enabled by a huge network of traders who buy and sell objects throughout the country. But while serious collectors are all intensely aware of the market value of their objects, it is problematic to assume that they collect primarily for financial reasons. I have only ever once met a collector who listed financial speculation as his main reason for collecting (Shanxi collector, personal communication, June 2018). More frequent are reports of collectors bankrupting their families to fund their collecting, and refusing to even countenance selling their collections despite this (Ba Qianxian 8, 2017; Jingbian Eye, 2017).

More broadly, the field has always been sceptical of those who only collect for financial purposes. In 2007, Qin Jie (2007: 13) warned about the dangers of marketization, and argued that the field must foreground the historical and idealistic nature of the objects, rather than their commercial attributes. Shanghai badge collector Huang Miaoxin has expressed a similar view: that collecting based only on or for economic purposes diminishes the significance of the collection itself. He (2017: 120, author's translation) writes:

> If we only rely on economic strength [jingji shili] in order to practise collecting, then the significance of this collection has been greatly reduced. Collection depends not only on the results, but also on the collection process. This process is a kind of enjoyment, a kind of accumulation of knowledge, a

kind of exercise of moral character, a kind of purification of thought, and a
new understanding of history.

There is no doubt that commerce drives the field. But collectors are conscious that a too
overt focus on money-making threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the Communist heritage
of the objects they preserve. As such, while a collector's entrepreneurial interest may form one
facet of their motivations, my research suggests that it is rarely the driving motivation.

Connoisseurship

The quote from Huang Miaoxin above hints at another key driver of collecting: connoisseurship.
Hubbert (2006: 146) described Huang as an entrepreneur, driven by connoisseurship and profit,
but aside from this, the importance of connoisseurship to the field has been underemphasised. My
research suggestions that connoisseurship has two main angles: firstly, the pursuit of self-
cultivation through the practice of collecting; secondly, the pursuit of status and recognition
within the field and broader society. Huang's quote above speaks primarily to the former: he
describes the process of collecting as developing not just knowledge, but also a purity of mind
and moral character. Collecting is a longstanding elite pastime in China, appreciated as a method
of self-cultivation and of entering into a dialogue with China's cultural tradition, and a way of
constructing elite networks of patronage and friendship. The second element of Red Collecting
connoisseurship relates to this tradition of collecting, and we may see contemporary collecting
associations as akin to the study societies and collecting circles of the past: as ways to develop
status, social networks, and a public identity. The difference, of course, is that while collecting
has previously been an elite activity, Red Collectors come from a variety of backgrounds; and
while money and political connections certainly help, as Huang's quote shows, collections based
just on high-priced acquisitions rarely garner much praise.

Collectors are intently aware of how their collections compare to those of their peers, and
many are eager to take leadership positions in the national, provincial, and local collection
associations that exist nationwide. They enter their objects in prize competitions and association
exhibitions, and their publications often read more like a list of personal achievements than as a
discussion of historical objects: clearly, status and recognition is important within the field, and
drives collector actions.

Historical preservation

Collections driven by a combination of entrepreneurial or connoisseurly motivations are fairly
common, but so is another utility-oriented factor that has been underdiscussed in the existing
literature: the collector's desire to preserve these objects as historical relics. When Red relics are
understood primarily as mass-produced and cheap objects like Mao badges and propaganda
posters, their historicity may seem less important, but with the expanded scope of the field that
this article has argued for, it becomes clear that Red Collecting includes important historical relics
from China's past century. Many collectors worry that in China's rush to modernize, this history
will be forgotten and lost to time. The collection of Red relics as history has, I suggest, two main
facets. The first, is simply that these are historical objects that demonstrate China's recent history:
there are, then, patriotic motivations for collecting, which are often tied closely to celebrating the
role that the CCP has played in China's "road to rejuvenation." This is tied at times to the more
value-oriented desire to contribute to society and the nation, as in the example of Liu Jian,
provided above, but at other times it is a more neutral statement. Many times when I have asked
collectors why they collect or what their objects' values are, I have received the very
straightforward reply: "it's just history" (jiushi lishi), implying that this alone explains the object's
value and the point of collecting. Beijing-based military clothing collector Li Zhangdong, for
example, suggests that clothes represent history, and help us to visualise history (Li, interview

with author, Beijing, September 2017). For him there is no moral or value judgement attached to these objects; he sees no problem in collecting military clothing from Nazi Germany: it's just history. While Denise Ho detects a series of deliberate curatorial strategies in Fan Jianchuan's exhibition of objects, Fan himself insists that his job is only to collect history, and that it will be left to future generations to make judgements (Ho, 2020: 365).

The second facet of collecting as motivated by a historian's interest in the past relates to the regionality of collections mentioned earlier. Anhui-based collector Zhong Xin, for example, owns a museum dedicated to the Huaihui campaign of the Chinese Civil War, a decisive CCP victory (Wu, 2017). His museum, opened in conjunction with the local government, is located near the site of the CCP's command post during the Huaihai campaign, where important leaders such as Deng Xiaoping were based. Zhong believes deeply in the ability of objects to represent history, and for the need to preserve them so as to enable a true recounting of the past (Zhong, interview with author, Huaibei, December 2017). In particular, he is proud of the role that his region played in the CCP victory, and wants to promote it through opening free museums.

In this sense, Red Collectors can be seen as similar to the local history enthusiasts that exist around the world. As well as collecting, most committed collectors are also engaged in research and publication on their objects. They can be seen, therefore, as amateur historians, who, through their focus on the objects themselves, often manage to circumvent many of the political sensitivities encountered in writing about recent Chinese history.

Leisure/entertainment

A final type of motivation is perhaps also the simplest: collecting motivated by leisure and entertainment. While there are thousands of committed collectors, there are many more hobbyists. For example, the Ningbo-based Mao badge collector Li Jun started collecting in the early 2010s, in a period when his work and daily life was very busy and stressful (Li, interview with author, Ningbo, June 2016). He started collecting badges as a way to unwind from work. Over time, his appreciation of the badges grew from the aesthetic to the historical, and while he continues to work full-time, he is also increasingly well known as a badge collector, and he has also undertaken and published research on badge origins.

Similarly, Hangzhou-based salesman and collector Luo Zhonghua takes a light-hearted approach to his collecting:

> Personally, I think this kind of collecting is just for fun. I don't have such big ambitions for my collection. To put it more elegantly, it can help to cultivate one's temperament. If you have this hobby in your life, it will keep you in a happy mood. (Luo, interview with author, Hangzhou, July 2019, author's translation)

Luo grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and so objects from that time period are happy reminders of his childhood, regardless of the more painful associations others may have.

This section has demonstrated that collector motivations are diverse and complex. Collectors' views on history and the present do not always align; as such, neither do their motivations for collecting, nor their understanding of the contemporary significance of their collection objects.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the starting point for understanding the continued relevance of Red relics and the popularity of Red Collecting as a phenomenon must be an expanded idea of both

the scope of the field and the motivations that drive collecting. In particular, I have suggested that we ought to acknowledge that a significant portion of Red Collecting is directed towards the pre-Cultural Revolution period, and especially the revolutionary period. I argue that the field is engaging, not just with the legacies of the Cultural Revolution, but with the much longer legacies of the whole of the Chinese revolution. As such, collector motivations are not just about accepting or rejecting the direction of reform era policies from a comparative standpoint with the Cultural Revolution. Instead, the drive to collect is often tied to much larger ideas of China's historical rejuvenation and the role that the CCP played within it, and a variety of local, regional, and personal factors influence collections and their owners. For every collector that sees the value of Red relics for their embodiment of the supposed purity and incorruptibility of social life during the late Mao years, there is another who views it as preciously the opposite: the drive to restore the Chinese revolution after the aberration of the Cultural Revolution. Ultimately, collector motivations are complex and often contradictory: collectors occupy the full range of views on Mao, the reform era, and the contemporary party, from the outright critical to the baldly sycophantic. The field of Red Collecting, then, embodies the complexity of views and memories of China's recent past, and serves as a reminder that there are a range of historical touchstones with which people in China can engage, beyond just the Cultural Revolution. Finally, the field of Red Collecting demonstrates the extraordinary diversity of meanings that historical objects can embody, and reminds us, in Margaret Conkey's words, that "material objects are not, and have not been, just caught up in an ever-shifting world but are actually creating, constructing, materializing and mobilizing history, contacts and entanglements" (quoted in Gerritsen and Riello, 2015: 2). Red relics, then, are not just passive remnants from history; instead, their continued presence both reflects and enables a diverse series of engagements with the past. Contemporary politics, personal memories, and a variety of social phenomena all impact how collectors see their objects; but these objects too make meaningful their owner's engagement with the world around them. As such, Red Collecting and the continued existence of Red relics can be seen as an important aspect of China's "Red legacies," functioning as mediators between history, the individual, and contemporary Chinese society.

This essay offers a starting point for further research into a huge, important, and largely under-researched field in contemporary China. It points towards new avenues of research which can add nuance to our understanding of contemporary China's relationship with its recent past in ways that go beyond just the Cultural Revolution.

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Colour Me Revolutionary: How the Use of Colour Grammar Aids in Understanding Internal Messages in Chinese Visual Iconography

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Abstract

Colour has a long history of artistic, symbolic, religious, and mythological use in China. This article takes the idea of colour as a meaningful communicative element within Chinese society and introduces the use of visual colour grammar as a new way to identify and breakdown the use of colour in political art and propaganda posters. The use of colour has been adapted by visual linguists into its own unique visual grammar component, relaying much more information than just a symbolic transfer from sign to signifier. Meaning in political posters can be derived from regularities in use, presentation, and conventional meaning. Colour as a visual grammar component is expressed through the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This article explores how Chinese views on colour interconnect with the metafunctions of colour to look at how political posters and art of the People's Republic of China communicate meaning to its recipients. I will discuss both the approach to art as a text that can be "read" through visual grammar and present colour in the Chinese context as more than a symbol making device but as a meaning component in and of itself.

Keywords: colour grammar; Chinese art; propaganda posters; political art; visual analysis; Cultural Revolution; metafunctions of colour

Introduction

That colour has cultural and artistic meaning is a fairly universal concept. In Western society, people wear black to a funeral and know that calling someone "yellow" is an insult, meaning cowardice. Similarly, Eastern conceptions of colour encapsulate connotative values and societal usages to convey meaning. Colour has a long history of artistic, symbolic, religious, and mythological use in China. Song (2008: 66) maintains that colour is a cultural product that reflects national traditions; what is known about the Chinese cultural context is gleaned from fragmentary evidence and pieced together from ancient people's art, literature, and writings, and folk customs into a cohesive whole. Some of the earliest known colour-work items are the Yangshao pottery fragments found in archaeological digs, illustrations from Buddhist manuscripts, and embroidery (Yang, 2010).

According to Welch (2008: 219), colour in Chinese art is "not used haphazardly" and colour usages "signal or convey a variety of meanings from messages concerning status, virtue, fortune, and personality, to mood." Colour is highly symbolic, denoting rank, authority, virtues and vices, and emotions (Williams, 2006: 98). Scholarly descriptions of the use of colour in the Chinese context tend to focus on symbolism within the traditional uses of colour in Chinese art, folk customs, and ceramics (Hippisley, 1902; Reynolds, 2009). Dusenbury (2015) surveys the power of colour in ancient China, Japan, and Korea and advances the study of colour as more than an artistic device in these three societies. Colour as a component of Chinese art and political art is a widely explored area. Studies of traditional uses of colour in the Chinese context range from high society (Hippisley, 1902; Feng, 2010; The Met, 2014; Ho, 2019), folk (Song, 2008; Yang, 2010), and religious usages (Itten, 1961; Yau, 1994; Williams, 2006; Song, 2008; Welch, 2008; Feng, 2010; Karetzky, 2014) to the development of basic colour terms (Wu, 2011; Gao and Sutrop, 2014). Traditional art dictionaries include detailed notes on the meanings of the colours in different contexts, entries that explore the combinatory styles and power of the colours, and the iconographical symbolic meaning components (Eberhard, 1986; Williams, 2006; Welch, 2008).

Even well into the 20th century, colour is a well-documented signifier of information. Landsberger (2019: n.p.) notes that the use of colour in Cultural Revolution (CR) posters was an important meaning conveyer, with "the color red featured heavily; it symbolized everything revolutionary, everything good and moral"; the color black, on the other hand, "signified precisely the opposite." Moreover, "Color symbolism continued to be important in the following years, not only in visual propaganda, but in printed propaganda as well." Other explorations of colour usage include the influence of colour in the May Fourth Movement (Andrews, 1994) and the use of colour within the artistic confines of the Maoist period (Huang, 2011).

Despite the wide-ranging study of the utility of colour in the Chinese sphere, most studies adhere to descriptive, historical, or iconographical analyses of colour and there has been little or no work done on the use of colour as a grammatical mode. Therefore, this article introduces the idea of a linguistic-style colour grammar as a method of "reading" the imagery used in modern China. Utilising the three metafunctions of colour (van Leeuwen, 2011), this novel approach aims to explain colour choices in the imagery of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and to introduce a method for the analysis of imagery beyond mere description or general narratives. I argue that the use of colour in Chinese art is more than a symbolic or artistic device, but rather fulfils a (visual) grammatical role in the communicative properties of the imagery. Colour as grammar broadens imagery into a more complex mode of communication. [1]

Throughout this article I use political art, starting from the early PRC era up to the present, to explicate this form of colour parsing due to the intrinsic information transmission. Similar to Barthes' (1977) exploration of advertisement imagery, the propaganda art addressed in this article is meant to convey meaning from the leader to the led, with discrete information nodes used to encode the posters. This use of political imagery, however, is not the only use of colour as a meaning component of visual grammar, and this article only serves as a steppingstone for further exploration of the grammar of colour in Chinese studies and beyond.

First, I introduce what visual grammar is and how the language of colour functions. Next, I explore the uses of colour as meaningful components in PRC art, noting the prescriptiveness of

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[1] The term grammar refers to "any systematic account of the structure of a language [and] the patterns that it describes" (Matthews, 1997: 150) or "the principles of operation of a language, or the study and description of these principles" rather than the popular usage that generally means the "correct usage" or ways we put words together (MacLeish, 1971: 55). Therefore, a colour grammar is looking at the systematic regularities of the structure of meaning within the imagery and provides a description of these principles.

art during this time. Utilising the three metafunctions of colour, the following section explains how visual colour grammar is used in political imagery, giving exemplars and possible interpretations based on extensive research. The final section utilises the linguistic metafunctions of colour to analyse several exemplars of Chinese political art, demonstrating the use of colour as a communicative element in and of itself. The use of colour can suggest changes in attitude as well as how it functioned to serve different purposes, movements, and leaders.

Grammar and the Visual Language of Colour

Visual grammar is the idea that images parallel the construction of linguistic-style signs and signifiers and contain common meaningful components and regularities that can be formally described (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Crow, 2010). In Hyman's (2006) seminal examination of our perception and experience of art, he explores our ability to interpret visual stimuli. His discussion revolves around our ability to interpret an image's depiction, that is to say, not an interpretation of the meaning of the image but of how our brains decipher the actual medium. In the final section he addresses the idea of art from a linguistic point of view; however, he argues against the idea that physical viewing and lens interpretation of the visual image can be interpreted linguistically as a conventional sign. His study looks more at how our eye interprets the image (how do we see red) than what our culture and society use the colours for. This article takes the view that reading visual images comes down to a form of linguistic-style sign, and the messages promoted as sign-making (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The key difference is that the communicative qualities are explored as a linguistic form rather than in terms of the philosophy of art history. The parallels between the interpretation of artistic renditions and linguistic signifiers can be readily seen in images through colour, perspective and line, relative distance of the image to the reader, and eye line of the depicted character (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 6) as well as other more language based grammatical structures such as metaphor and symbols. Van Leeuwen (2011) expands on the use of colour as a grammatical mode, dubbing it "the language of colour," and it is this interpretation of colour that this article will use.

In this model of the "language of colour," colour as a visual grammar component is expressed through the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002; Halliday, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2011). The first, ideational colour, is primarily used as an identification marker and can also convey conventional meanings such as blue on a map meaning a body of water or uniform and livery colours. The second, the interpersonal, is the "colour act" that denotes meaning through association as well as a marker that "is used to do things to or for each other, e.g. to impress or intimidate through 'power dressing,' to warn against obstructions and other hazards" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 348). The interpersonal is part of the system of emotions that are attached to colours. The third metafunction, textual, is used as a marker of association, using cohesive colour schemes to tie subjects together or highlight/differentiate certain objects within an image. This can be achieved either by using the same colour over and over again to suggest a coherence in the text or through a colour coordination such as a colour scheme or the same physical characteristics like brightness or saturation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 349). Within these metafunctional categories, the physicality of colour can infuse the imagery with additional meaning, such as value, saturation, purity, and luminescence, among others (van Leeuwen, 2011: 35–39; 60–65).

In order to identify colour components as visual grammatical nodes within imagery, this article adapts Hermeren's (1969: 83) concepts of internal and external arguments. Internal arguments rely on the conventionality of meaning within the narrative as well as prominence, conspicuousness, special attention to detail, or unnatural qualities. The external argument depends on background knowledge of the artist (Hermeren, 1969: 85) or a common expressive node for a specific time period. For example, the use of the colour red changes meaning depending on the

time period and contextual markers: sometimes it can be used as an auspicious colour and other times as a colour of rebellion (Song, 2008: 71). In sum, colour's meaning can be derived from regularities in use, presentation, and conventional meanings.

This article uses the metafunctions of colour and the ideas of the "language of colour" to examine the construction of an image and the use of colour to impart meaning, i.e., how to interpret the meaning behind the use of a specific colour. By utilising the ideational, interpersonal, and textual uses of colour to look at Chinese political art, this article demonstrates how colour can be used to interpret imagery on an individual basis as well as a tool for analysis to look at political shifts across time. In order to identify and interpret colour in this capacity, background knowledge of the cultural significances of colour are key. Clear, conventional uses of colour exist in Chinese society and documented in scholarly works; many of these fall into the three metafunctional categories: they are telling the viewer who someone is, conveying power and emotion, or tying themes together. Early on in Communist China, the use of art and standards of meaning were identified as important components of political communication, leading to a new visual grammar and meaningful colour in Communist China.

Meaningful Colour in Communist China

Starting with the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, art was classified as a political tool in the new Communist China. [2] Following the condemnation of "art for art's sake," artistic expression was defined as "for the people" and subsumed into political communication tools for the Party (Peking Review, 1966a, 1966b). As a result, not only were the themes and subject matter confined by propaganda aims, even the component parts of the images were highly politicised (Donald, 2014), including the colour palette. Colour remained an important communicative device in propaganda posters of the PRC. While the colour palette varies by era and even movement, the basic informational nodes start to be developed, with warm tones for positive characters and negative characters in cool or grey tones (Yang, 2010; Donald, 2014).
Art guidebooks in the PRC were a particularly valuable source of information for profession
al and amateur artists alike. Through these small and inexpensive booklets, artists could learn the current political connotations of different motifs and colours as well as basic artistic instruction. Many of the guidebooks have politically acceptable models of poster art that artists could copy to produce local imagery quickly and without political backlash. One such example, entitled Rural Art Manual (Nongcun meishu shouce 农村美术手册) (1975), provides particularly thorough information for aspiring artists. The guidebook contains a six-page introduction to the use of colour. The very first lines clearly outline that the use of colour is to serve a political purpose, especially through the emphasis of the theme, the creation of the proletarian heroic figure, and the enhancement of artistic appeal. Interspersed among definitions and artistic technique tutorials are political messages and methods for using colour to communicate certain information (pp. 67–68).

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[2] For the contents and impact of the Yan'an talks see Judd, 1985; King, 2010.

Figure 1: Spring Breeze in Yangliu (1975) (Chunfeng Yangliu 春风杨). Artist: Zhou Shuqiao 周树桥.

According to the guidebook, the use of colour was to be matched to the thematic needs of the piece; colour variety was selected under certain conditions and could even be removed in order to better serve the proletarian-heroic form of the artwork (p. 68). The use of colour is then explicated through a concrete example of Spring Breeze in Yangliu (1975) (Chunfeng Yangliu 春风杨柳), included in the colour plate section of the book (Figure 1). The book explains that colour is used to show the sun entering the room and warm and lively colour tones to draw attention to the kind and caring mood between the "vigorous" workers, peasants, and sent-down youths and the lower-middle-class peasants. This section also explicates how to differentiate conflicting characters using colour: positive characters have warm-toned skin and negative characters use cool grey colours. This exaggeration method elevates the heroic actors while exposing the insidious and repulsive spirit of the enemy (p. 69). The explicitness of the explanation highlights the way that colour was a communicative tool in China and the necessity to conform to these boundaries was important to the artist's political survival.

The Three Metafunctions: Colour in Chinese Political Art

In order to explicate the grammatical use of colour within the Chinese context, I will explore each of the three metafunctions of colour in turn. The example images were chosen as illustrative pieces that have clear and defined use of colour as well as present typical depictions and palettes of each movement they are representing. The typicality of the images is assessed based on extensive archival surveys of both the online archive at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) and field research conducted at the Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center. Similar to the leitmotif, colour marks out identity, emotion, and thematic orientation throughout the modern Chinese period. In addition to these individual roles, temporal changes are an important and valuable use of this type of marker and I will point this out as needed throughout the discussion below.

Ideational

The use of colour as an identifying marker within China and Chinese art has been one of the most important and consistently used forms of colour well into the 20th century. The idea of marking identity through colour has a long-standing tradition in China: in imperial China, clothing colours

were given strict hierarchies, with red and yellow only being worn by the highest ranks and forbidden to the masses. Han dynasty officials wore dyed silk ribbons, showing their relative rank within the court. Jade beads of varying hues adorning the official headgear were also used to denote rank and later the court robes themselves were coloured to identify rank (Williams, 2006: 98–99; Welch, 2008: 219–220). Beyond the court, merchants and street hawkers wore specific colours to signify their trade (Welch, 2008: 220). In addition, different reigns were associated with different colours and cardinal directions, such as brown for the Song dynasty, green for the Ming, and yellow for the Qing (Yau, 1994; Williams, 2006: 100; Song, 2008: 70). This use of colour identity extended into the PRC era and this makes it an ideal method of tracing identification, exploring in-group and out-group dynamics, and looking at chronological changes in ideational colour usage. In Maoist China, the "red" classes were part of the ideational metafunctional marker of those who belonged to the People. [3] Yellow was also associated with the in-group, but not as frequently or demonstratively as red. By using this metafunction of colour, we can take a closer look at who is marked out by this colour, how the red classes progress over time, or compare the in-groups of the Mao era to that of, say, the contemporary era.

In China, Red was traditionally considered a "life-giving" colour and theatrical protagonists had their faces painted red as an identity marker to signify inner qualities such as holiness and dignity, and to signify brave warriors and generals that had an inner yang strength (Eberhard, 1986: 248; Williams, 2006: 100; Welch, 2008: 222). This positively connotative colour was later appropriated to identify the People. It could be argued that the Mao era was associated with the colour red in a similar way to the dynastic reign colours, combining the folk uses of the auspicious colour with the dynastic thematic uses to implement a new and meaningful coloured era that had clear positive associations. This is similar to the appropriation of red in Soviet art, which transformed what was originally a religious meaning into a marker of the proletarian hero (Bonnell, 1999). This deliberate use of a previously known colour aided in the masses' instant comprehension: by seeing the colour in a new context they were able to parse the meaning using their internal lexicon. Early images from the PRC use the ideational colour of red frequently, but it is by no means uniform. It is not until the visual grammar of the PRC becomes more defined and standardised that the use of red becomes ubiquitous.

This use of red to identify specific characters and their innate qualities straddles the ideational and interpersonal (this aspect will be further explored below). Furthermore, red and yellow "were the preserve of nobility and were forbidden to commoners" (Welch, 2008: 219). By commandeering a previously forbidden colour, the CCP was able to demystify and overthrow the elite of society in one stroke. This is a similar strategy to the use of calligraphy in the big character posters of the CR, where the use of the old art for the new movement deposed the enemy from their high status. While red was the most commonly used ideational colour for the in-group, particularly in the Mao era, yellow was also used. According to Welch (2008: 222), "yellow was so strongly associated with sovereignty that it was restricted to the emperor." Yinghong Cheng (2015: 169) traces the meaning of yellow as an identification marker for the Chinese race, quoting an interview with a "professor of aesthetics" claiming that:

> Since ancient times the color yellow has been associated with the Chinese. The Chinese originated on the yellow soil plateau, hunting, gathering, farming, proliferating, becoming sons and grandsons of hua xia on this soil. It is the yellow soil that gives us food, feeds sons and daughters of hua xia, generates the yellow-skinned Chinese, and forms a culture of 5,000 years.

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[3] Note that "the People" with the capital "P" is the translation of *renmin (dazhong)* 人民(大众), used by Schoenhals (2007) to differentiate the idea of the proletarian classes (also known as the red classes) as the "in-group," as opposed to people with a lower case "p" that is used as a general reference to human beings.

It is through this connection to yellow that the authors continue on to the association of yellow as an identity marker associated with the Chinese people and that can be perceived on such items as the flag and emblems of the PRC, the Party itself, the People's Liberation Army, the Communist Youth League, and the Young Pioneers. Zheng Liansong, the original designer of the PRC flag, explained that he used yellow as the colour for the stars on the flag, "because the Chinese nation is a yellow race" (Wu and Lansdowne, 2015: 169). The backgrounds of images often utilise this yellow ideational meaning to surround the characters with an unrealistic but meaningful colour. Writing on red (such as the red rosettes) is usually in yellow as well.

*Figure 2: Long Live the Victory of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers Army! (1951) (Chaoxian renminjun Zhongguo renmin zhiyuanjun shengli wansui!*朝鲜人民军中国人民志愿军胜利万岁!)*. Designers: Zhang Ding* 张仃; *Dong Xiwen* 董希文; *Li Ruinian* 李瑞年; *Hua Tianyou* 滑间友; *Li Keran* 李可染; *Li Kushan* 李苦禅; *Tian Shiguang* 田世光; *Huang Jun* 黄均; *Zou Peizhu* 邹佩珠; *Wu Guanzhong* 吴冠中*. 1951 Call no.: BG E16/268 (IISH collection).*

People who had performed especially meritoriously were awarded red rosettes, Red Guards wore red armbands, and positive characters were shown in warm-toned imagery. These markers of identity are reflected in the imagery of propaganda posters from the very beginning of the PRC, coming to a peak during the CR. Figure 2, Long Live the Victory of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers Army!, shows an early use of this type of highlight-item imagery, where the main characters are not enveloped in fully red clothing, but rather with small red items that stand out from the rest of the scene. This poster is from just after the establishment of the PRC (1949–1951) and shows the use of highlighting items to identify characters and endorse characteristics. Soldiers are shown performing exemplarily in their duties (an interpersonal use of condoning the behaviour) and marking them as People. The image depicts a Korean and a Chinese soldier in victory over the American forces in the Korean war. Both soldiers wear rosettes, which also marks the Korean soldiers as part of the in-group promoted by the Party. The red rosette is a consistent item worn throughout the Maoist and early post-Mao period, showing a chronological consistency that both aids in identity within the imagery, but also shows how new movements and periods kept a well-known identity marker. These rosettes do not

vary in any of the physical properties of the colouration, and this shows the importance of the colour to the identifying marker. They are never shown in a different colour, meaning that the rosette itself is not the connotative part, but rather the red rosette is the important marker. Continuity of this type of red highlight item can be seen in Figure 1 from the 1970s, where the exemplary youths continue to wear these rosettes. In addition, red stars, Mao badges, and Young Pioneer scarves all served as ideational identity markers.

In addition to highlight items, red- and pink-hued clothing were also used to demarcate the members of the People. After the foundational period of the PRC, the CCP turned its attention to economic policies and the next period of art focuses on the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958–1966). Socialist realism had taken hold of the art realm and many of the images show the rosy optimism that was typical of this period. Despite the apparent realism of the images, red is still used often. Women wear pink and red, and most protagonists have red highlight items, similar to the earlier images. Figure 3 shows a typical image of this red identity marker. Like many of the women of this period, the subject wears a pink patterned overshirt and a red undershirt, a subtle yet effective tie into what she represents. Further strengthening this idea of red and pink for female members of the People, Berry (2012) traces the use of the colour red in the yangbanxi 样板戏 (model works from the CR) noting that red is not as common a colour as one might have thought. However, there is a notable character that wears red: the young female or apprentice character. According to Berry (2012) and Welch (2008), the ancient Chinese tradition of a female wearing red suggests a meaning attached either to virginal or bridal red (Welch, 2008: 221; Berry, 2012: 238–39). The primary characters to wear red clothing are the young women within the images, usually wearing a red or pink shirt.

Figure 3. The Bumper Cotton Harvest Makes Our Hearts Bloom (1958) (Mianhua fengshou xinhua kai 棉花丰收心花开*). Designer: Xie Mulian* 谢幕连. *1958, September. Call no.: BG E40/40 (IISH collection).*

Perhaps the most well-known era for the use of red in its imagery is that of the CR. An important contributing factor to red as an ideational colour category is the artistic concept called "red, bright, and shining" (hong, guang, liang 红光亮) that was predominant during the CR. As part of this concept, images portraying positive characters used a red tone to indicate identity both through obvious red items, skin tones, and an inner glow emanating from the characters. This resembles the face paint of the operatic theatre; the complexions of the leaders and red classes all taking on a red hue. In full-colour gouache or oil painting-based posters, the colour is more subdued, presented as a rosiness or ruddiness. In woodblock-style imagery, the red categories are either marked by an identity item outlined above or are filled in with a bright and pure scarlet red that is the same hue used for the items. The early part of this movement was awash in red that serves as all three metafunctions of colour. Figure 4 shows an example from the Mao cult imagery that depicts a socialist realist image with Mao in the centre, red skin tones, Mao badges, red and pink clothing, and the red flags in the background. It is noteworthy that the red and pink clothing on young women shows a continuity across movements and highlights the transformation of a traditional use of red to the modern use in the posters.

Another common method for utilising colour as an identifying marker during the CR was the flooding of the black outline of a character with a scarlet infill; this was also used when no actor was shown in the image, but rather a disembodied limb or weapon striking at the enemy. The ideational marker of red is used to make it clear that the subject is a member of the People, even if no other marker, such as clothing, is available. In Figure 5, the People are metonymically represented by the oversized fist punching down on the enemy. The infill of scarlet red makes the recognition of who the hand denotes unquestionable: a representative of the People. There is no way that a contemporary audience could have interpreted this as, for example, an image showing an oppressor beating down on the underdog. The colour coding does not allow for this divergence of interpretation and is therefore incredibly important to the meaning and interpretation.

Whether it is the red hues of an identity-marking item, or the red of the woodblock, the physical properties are extremely consistent, particularly the value, saturation, purity, and luminosity. The physicality of the colour in the full-colour images is more diffuse; however, the tone leans more toward high luminosity and luminescence to parallel the red, bright, and shining characteristic. Later, as the CR becomes more subdued and especially as the "Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages" campaign was in full swing, the colours gravitate to a less intense form of the red colouration, though it does not go fully back to pre-CR levels until after Mao's death in 1976.

Figure 4: Chairman Mao with Women's Militia Members (1965) (Mao zhuxi he nüminbing zai yiqi 毛主席和女民兵在一起). *Designer: Wang Dejuan* 王德娟. *1965, November. Call no.: BG E15/148 (Landsberger collection).*

During the era of modernisation from 1977 to 1989, the official state-funded imagery starts a slow transition from the flood of red to a more subdued use, and eventually to almost no red used as an ideational colour. Under Hua Guofeng, whose brief reign left little time for true change in imagery, there is a general continued use of red, similar to the GLF period, with occasional CR-esque imagery attacking the Gang of Four. The rosettes, red skin tones, and red flooding are still used in this era, a technique that more or less disappears in later imagery unless they are specific references to the Mao era. This end of an era of the use of ideational red has potential overlap with the third metafunction of colour, the textual. The seeming ability to visually differentiate Maoist with the post-Maoist era specifically by colour theme lends to this idea that

the textual element of the imagery bestows a cohesiveness to the Mao era that the later decades were moving away from.

Figure 5: Great Meeting to Struggle against the Counterrevolutionary Revisionist Elements Wei Hu, Wang Qian, and Wang Daren (ca. 1967) (Douzheng fangeming xiuzheng zhuyi fenzi Wei Hu, Wang Qian, Wang Daren 斗争反革命修正主义分子卫沍、王谦、王大任大会). *Designer unknown. Call no.: PC-1967-010 (Private collection).*

In the post-Mao era, ideational colour transitions from the political propaganda sphere of influence to the contemporary art scene of political pop and magical and cynical realism. Artists such as Yue Minjun and Zhang Xiaogang utilise this common red ideational colour to comment on society rather than to convey political messages. The uses may be different, but the function of identification is similar. Both artists utilise the ideational red in different ways; Yue Minjun in self-portraiture and Zhang Xiaogang in his surreal "Bloodline" imagery. Yue notes in an interview that, "in many of my works we can trace influences of the origin of propaganda painting, which emphasises the influence of the Cultural Revolution in my memory. For example, there are rows of heads that appear one after another, that undoubtedly offered transcendence in my past" (Cué, 2017). Undoubtedly, the colour palette has a similar influence in his art. Zhang Xiaogang's

Bloodline paintings "engage with the notion of identity within the Chinese culture of collectivism" (Saatchi Gallery, 2020).

While warm tones of red and yellow conventionally mark the People, cool and dark colours of blue/green, black, and white are ideationally used as markers of the lower strata of society and, within the confines of the PRC, the inimical characters (Yang and Gentz, 2014). According to Eberhard (1986: 43), blue/green colouration of the face is a traditional Chinese identifier of a ghost or a bad character, and Welch (2008: 223) pinpoints that a green face within the theatrical identifiers was used to denote demons and green robes were the marker of a beggar character. Black and white are by and large associated with a more negative character identification, such as informers, witches, and treacherous or mischievous characters (Welch, 2008: 222–23). In the PRC, these cooler and darker colours were used almost exclusively to identify enemies. This type of identifying inimical colouration can be seen in Figures 2 and 5, the former in the blue colouration of Douglas MacArthur and the latter in the black and white of the miniscule enemies beneath the fist. According to Donald (2014: 663) the enemy clothes in political art are white, symbolising death and imperialism. This colouration also marks Japanese and Nationalist troops in propaganda and are therefore conventionally known markers of the inimical form. The conventionality of marking enemies with dark colours was noted in the guidebook quoted earlier and shows how deep-rooted the association was by 1975. After the collapse of the Gang of Four, the visualisation of enemies disappears in favour of positive messaging.

This type of social cue that indicates the in-group and out-group dynamic has a multi-faceted role to play in the art of both the Maoist period and beyond. First, it can be used to analyse the art itself, which characters are shown to be the collectively acceptable protagonists, the idealised citizen through a consistent ideational colour. Second, it can be looked at as the social integration of the artist within the cultural sphere of the PRC. In the Maoist period, like the Stalinist period, this took the form of strict adherence to the state's prescribed art style and the need to publicly declare allegiances. According to Barmé (1999), Socialization with a capital "S" was the new censor in Communist China, tying the artists themselves into a specific social dynamic that was acceptable within a highly Socialized sphere where the artist's loyalty was assumed and only negative examples could single one out (Barmé, 1999: 16). Third, it can be used to compare chronological pieces and new art movements to see how they use the colour grammar of the past to inscribe new critiques. Fourth, it can be used for a cross-sectional analysis of similarly motivated imagery, such as that of the Soviet Union and Maoist China to look at how the colours are used within the Socialist colour grammar rather than the area-centric role.

Interpersonal

The interpersonal colour metafunction encompasses connotative meaning, emotional value, and correlative significance. In the imperial court, the importance of colour dressing went beyond identification to an expression of power (Yau, 1994). In addition, colour in China has an emotional value that may differ from the ways that the West traditionally views "colour emotions." Yang (2010: 3) maintains that each colour contains several connections that signify to the audience various emotions or perceptions. Warm tones such as red pull people in or make things stand out, while cool blue colours push people away or make things go into the background. This last point is important with regards to the use of warm colours for protagonists and cool colours for antagonists—this naturally makes the viewer feel closer to the People and further from the "enemy."

Yang (2010) lists three basic emotional ties that the general public associates with each colour in Chinese society. For example, red signifies enthusiasm, prosperity, and health; yellow connotes brightness, loyalty, and gentility, and black can variously indicate depth, mystery,

bewilderment, sadness, and terror. As an extension of the colour emotions, rituals adopt colours as part of their meaning to correlate the emotional core with the ritualistic goals. One example of correlative significance are the colour associations made with weddings and funerals (Welch, 2008: 222; Williams, 2006: 98), with the tendency for young women to wear red clothes (Welch, 2008: 221; Berry, 2012: 238–9), which emphasises a value judgement (chasteness, purity) with regard to these women. White is associated with death and mourning, and the connection between the two was so effective that the colour of the moon on the emperor's clothing was switched to pale blue to avoid an inauspicious connection (Welch, 2008: 222).

According to Eberhard (1986: 248) the ancient usage of red continued through to the PRC with "the presentation of communism as the 'rule of the Reds' . . . and of the 'Red Guards' as the shock troops of revolutionary unrest." Cushing and Tompkins (2007: 14) add that red in general represents socialism and revolution—the "red sun" represented Mao and Mao Zedong Thought; and Yang and Gentz (2014: 115) state, "red is obviously the dominant colour representing anything related to the Communist party and communist cause, socialism and revolution." Red in PRC artwork is expressed through tone and items associated with proper behaviour that has the connotative signification of revolution and admiration. In many posters a red highlight has a dual purpose of an ideational and an interpersonal indicator of celebration and honouring of successful citizens (Cushing and Tompkins, 2007: 14; Yang and Gentz, 2014: 115).

The ritualised Red Guard gatherings at Tiananmen Square were highly "coloured" and items were used to reinforce the ritualistic feeling of the public display. According to Gaunt (1999: 34–36) public displays, like these mass gatherings, are visually imposing demonstrations of agitation and integration propaganda designed to both intimidate the enemy and bring the in-group together. The ritualistic colouration of the red items with the standardised Red Guard uniform makes the display inherently and immediately understandable and instantly differentiated to images of similar gatherings for jubilation.

Figure 6: Celebrate a Festival with Jubilation (1983) (Huandu jiajie 欢度佳节). Designer: Wei Zhigang 魏志刚. 1983, August. Call no.: BG E13/363 (Landsberger collection).

In later posters, such as those from the 1980s–2000s, the emotive quality of the colours tends towards either nostalgia or patriotism and good citizenship. Posters that refer to Mao, anniversaries, history, and so on use the exaggerated warm tones of the Maoist period and generally appear overtly red. Patriotic imagery also uses red and warm tones, but generally not to the intensity of the Maoist or nostalgic imagery, at least until the Xi Jinping era. Figure 6 shows the use of nostalgic interpersonal colour; the colouration reminds one of the images from the CR, with a flooding of warm tones, light shining from unnatural angles, red clothing of the children, and floral arrangements. Yet the emotion is one of nostalgia for a bygone era: happiness and jubilation are central to the image, not revolution.

The emotional and correlative significance of colour in political imagery aids in understanding how contemporary people would have interpreted the underlying values of what was being communicated to them by the propagandist. The knowledge that a red rosette was not only identifying an in-group person but also giving that person's behaviour a stamp of approval would be instantly recognisable and internalised. In a retrospective analysis, this information on how images were permeated with emotionally connotative colours allows us to utilise the well-known colour keys to more accurately interpret what an image "was saying" and more definitively "know" how to decipher political communication. Knowing that red equalled revolution and positive qualities and dark, cool colours were equated to malevolence makes us, the reader, more in tune with the contemporary propagandists' messages and gives us the ability to look back and analyse not only individual images or sets of images, but use them as a lens to gauge the mood and historical place of these pieces of important communicative power.

Textual

Textual traditions of colour utilise colour combinations, colour schemes, and conventional highlight colours to communicate a cohesion and unity of meaning across multiple pieces. While red and black as a colour theme can be seen in earlier (pre-CR) images, it was the CR period where this theme flourished. Yang (2016: 2) states that "the change to the red-art style of the cultural revolution and the violent and militaristic themes is a sudden shift that gives the readers some impression of the mood of the time." Jiang (2017: 237) adds that the colour choices of the CR propaganda posters were used more as a way of visually intensifying an effect and denote obvious revolutionary markers and political orientation. As a textual metafunction, the use of red therefore transforms into a colour scheme and marks the imagery as part of the revolutionary theme. This is further accentuated by the use of the ideational and interpersonal colour categories to denote class stance, with red denoting the People and black the inimical classes. Red, black, and white imagery in the woodblock style are almost exclusively about Red Guards and revolution during the CR (Figure 5, above), while red-dominated gouache imagery is reserved for Mao-cult posters (Figure 4, above). The "red, bright, and shining" colour concept also applies to warm colours in general and, therefore, "light and bright colour schemes highlight positive events [and] values," while "anything related to the enemy is dark, usually dark blue, green, brown or black" (Yang and Gentz, 2014: 115). While this use of black and white with a red highlight may be due to limited resources or the speed of printing, the colour choices are still consistent. The colours could easily have been black and white with a yellow highlight (since yellow is also seen as a positive ideational colour), but this is not the case after the establishment of the PRC.

Figure 7: Everybody Plants Trees and Creates Forests to Change the Appearance of Mountains and Rivers (1966) (Quanmin zhishu zaolin gaizao shanhe mianmao 全民植树造林改造山河面貌). *Designer: Sun Wenchao* 孙文超. *Call no.: BG E37/296 (Landsberger collection).*

Another important colour scheme of the Maoist period is the more naturalistic (but still bright) colouration used to depict agriculture, industry, and the positive effects of CCP rule. This conforms with the Maoist conception of romantic socialist realism that depicts utopic and rosy images to inspire the audience. Images of bumper harvests or other productivity-based activities, such as in Figure 7, are generally shown with bright blue skies, perfectly green and yellow crops, and happy and healthy people. Note the bright colours, luminous faces, and generally rich hues of the Figure 7; this is repeated over and over again throughout this thematic style.

This optimistic colouration continues after the Maoist period, while the revolutionary red, black, and white does not. This means that the textual colour scheme of the Maoist period is clearly differentiated and not associated with later regimes' propaganda imagery. Instead, the richly saturated and luminescent colouration of the positive socialist realism transitions to other positive themes, such as economic advancement, celebrations, and even the discotheque. Economic innovation and scientific education are both textual categories that fit into this scheme well into the present day. Figure 8 shows this bright and cheery colouration extending from the textual elements of the agriculture and industry from the previous periods into more modern material. The hands holding the beaker have a similar rosiness or underlying red tone as previous imagery without being unrealistically red, and the bright rainbow hues at the top of the image highlight all the positive uses of this scientific integrity. Even the shipping crates on the dock are by and large coloured red. Similarly, advances in society and culture are also highlighted by this type of colouration. Bridging the gap between highly coloured and red-tinted imagery, the couple in Figure 9 dance the night away in a newly approved discotheque. According to Landsberger (2019: n.p.), "disco was a huge craze in the 1980s. The poster shows that it is accepted and should no longer be condemned as a form of Western decadence." The warm tones of the image show the interpersonal condonement of the action, while the bright and happy hues make the category part of the advancement category. Even the woman is wearing the identifying "red" in her trousers, a subtle yet clear connector to the connotation between women, appropriate behaviour, and red. Though there are red tonalities in this image, the saturation and tone of the red is varied and not solely the revolutionary scarlet of previous decades. This shows the adaptation of colour grammar

over time, this is not a "revolutionary" textual image, but it is a positive advancement image that depicts behaviour condoned by the propagandist.
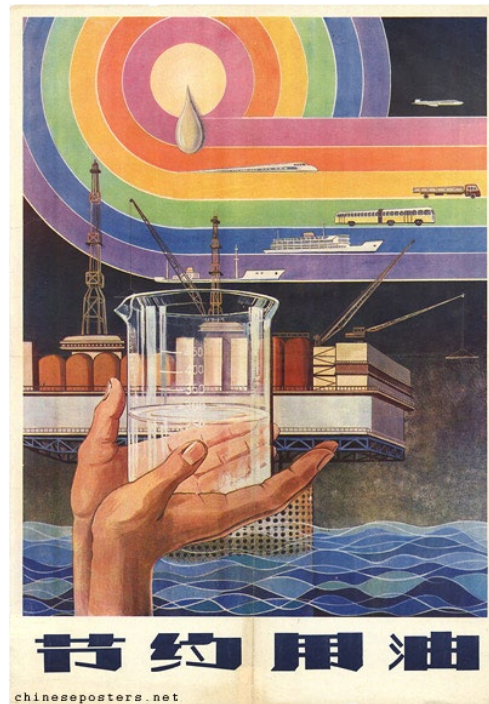

Figure 8: Economize on Oil (1980s?–1990s?) (Jieyue yong you 节约用油). *Designer unknown. Call no.: BG E37/61 (Landsberger collection).*
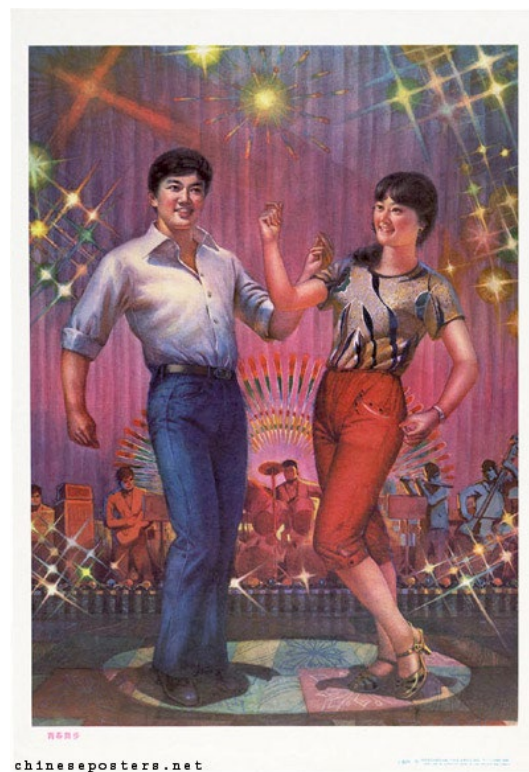

Figure 9: Youthful Dance Steps (1986) (Qingchun wubu 青春舞步). *Designer: Wang Bingkun* 王炳 坤. *1986, April. Call no.: BG E13/441 (Landsberger collection).*

The textual element of the colour metafunctions allows the reader to categorise and analyse political imagery based on the knowledge that it fits into specific overarching themes and messages. In the past, distinguishing between revolutionary posters and those of economic messages was a key skill to deciphering what the Party was telling the People. The fitting of colour schemes into specific categories helps to more readily understand how these messages fit into the grand scheme of Party communication and as researchers how to more easily identify units of analysis.

Colour Analysis Based on the Three Metafunctions

Colour grammar facilitates a more accurate method of image description and analysis of posters. While propaganda and the propagandist have definite messages that they are communicating, it can be difficult to "prove" what that information is. This level of analysis is one method to "know" what is being said and give a more concrete way of presenting this knowledge. The following examples utilise all three metafunctions together to explicate how they may be used to look more closely at political art. The final example here looks at political pop to show how the methodology can be extended beyond political propaganda.

Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Zedong to Wage the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the End—Revolution is No Crime, to Rebel is Justified (Figure 10), is from the early period of the CR (1966–1969) and represents a typical image of this period. In the poster, four Red Guard models are ideationally marked by the red colouring of their skin, their red armbands, and their Little Red Books. The masses are further signified as part of the in-group with similarly red skin tones and items, and are portrayed as marching within a sea of red flags. The clothing is the military green hue that was common during this period and marks the identity of the wearers. The interpersonal connection is made through both the revolutionary zeal of the image and the message that is emphasized at the top of the page through the slogan that directly connects the idea of "red" to revolution: "Hold high the great red banner of Mao Zedong." The emotive qualities of this piece communicate to the People the incredible revolutionary sentiment of following Mao's thoughts and the colour red is highly associated to this idea. It also mirrors the coloured public display described by Gaunt (1999), showing the mass gathering of Red Guards and the agitation and integration propaganda intended by these spectacles. The textual metafunction of the poster classifies this image into that of the "revolutionary" theme through red colouring with yellow highlights and white and black details. This combination of the three metafunctions allows us to clearly identify the positive characters, what is being condoned, and where this message fits into the overall propagandist machine. In comparison to other images, such as Figures 2 and 6, colour analysis can show colours in a militaristic setting (Figure 2) being adapted into the CR narrative despite the absence of a military conflict or the continuity of the black, white, and red imagery of the textual theme and how these images were supporting the same message during the same period.

Figure 10: Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Zedong to Wage the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the End—Revolution is No Crime, to Rebel is Justified (1966–1967) (Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi ba wuchan jieji wenhua dageming jinxing daodi— geming wuzui, zaofan youli 高举毛泽东思想伟大红旗把无产阶级文化大革命进行到底—革命无罪，造反 有理*). Designer: Revolutionary Rebel Command of the Shanghai Publishing System* 上海出版系统 革命司令部*; Revolutionary Rebel Committee of the Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House* 上海人民美术出版社革命造反委员会*. Call no.: BG E13/764 (Landsberger collection).*

The Deng Xiaoping era represents a period of artistic experimentation in both style and colour—imagery is still richly coloured, though not limited to the rosy tones of the previous decades nor the strictly socialist-realist stylisation. Figure 11 shows the transitionary style of the 1980s. Rather than a distinctly red skin tone, the child is merely rosy cheeked, more similar to pre-Mao colouration. His space suit is a ruddy red, the spaceship has red highlights, and even the dog and cat wear red-toned ribbons. This shows a continuity of ideational colour as a marker even into the 1980s, though this iteration is substantially subtler. The interpersonal colouration indicates advancement and development through clean sharp colours, the dynamic movement of the spaceship, and dreamscape-like quality. This is a child engaging with the modern and the novel. The imaginary background of the moon and bright blue sky seem to place this image into a textual theme similar to the images of economic, agricultural, and societal imagery of the previous decades (Figures 7, 8, and 9), particularly the bright blues and greens that lend a feeling of optimism and opportunity. Similar to Yang's (2016) statement that the reds of the CR give the reader a sense of the feeling of that time, the positive colouration here gives you a sense of the sentiments of this era: expectation, innovation, and advancement.

Figure 11: Bringing His Playmates to the Stars (1980) (Ba xiao huoban songshang xingqiu 把小伙伴送上星球). Designer: Shi Shiming 史士明. 1980, June. Call no.: BG E15/478 (Landsberger collection).

Figure 12: Great Criticism – Coca Cola (1994) by Wang Guangyi. Tate Museum Online. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/political-pop.

The final example (Figure 12) is from Wang Guangyi's "Great Criticism" series. He uses the three metafunctions of colour to turn the political propaganda of the CR on its head—

ideational in the yellow and red identifying the characters, interpersonal in the emotive revolution and nostalgia qualities, and textual to tie the imagery into a specific category. Wang further taps into this interpersonal use of colour by juxtaposing the red of revolution and the brand red of Coca-Cola to subvert the ideals of a Socialist China and the recent wholesale adoption of capitalism in China. This is an example of Barmé's (1999: 99) remark that the red of revolution and the glittering gold of capitalism in 1990s China combined into a grey anomie that cloaked the country in ideological and cultural dysfunction. By utilising this colour combination and co-opting colours of the past and present, Wang makes his criticism even more poignant and the ironic use of the metafunctions of colour help us instantly understand his point.

Conclusion

Colour is an important factor to think about when interpreting imagery, not only from an artistic and symbolic point of view, but from an intrinsically grammatical angle as well. This article has argued that colour fulfils a visual grammatical role that communicates information through the "metafunctions of colour." It first looked at colour as a key element of the grammatical form of artistic expression. It then explored the meaning of cultural uses of colour within the modern Chinese sphere. Combining these two approaches, it then looked at how the metafunctions of colour present themselves within propaganda and political imagery separately, and then all three together in several exemplars. In this way, the use of colour grammar as a tool for reading imagery and understanding some of the more in-depth meanings of the communicative art style of propaganda were explored. Colour grammar, by itself or paired with other visual grammatical modes (such as symbols, metaphors, metonymy, deixis, and so on), is an invaluable tool to not only take a closer look at political imagery, but imagery in general. In addition, it lends a degree of validity and potential quantifiable results to a usually qualitative and subjective area of study. The use of colour to grammatically "read" an image will hopefully be a useful method of analysis for Chinese studies as well as broader fields including East Asian studies and other visual studies from around the world.

This type of analysis adds to the existing scholarship in visual linguistics, Chinese studies, and art history. It takes a concept that has been exclusively used in Western art analyses and broadens its utility by adapting its characteristics to better serve a new area of study. Previously, authors such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stated that these methods were solely based on a Eurocentric study of art and that interpretation for other areas would need to be adapted in order to allow for both cultural differences and different ways of conveying meaning through art. This article attempts to start this journey of adjustment so as to allow for not only cross-cultural knowledge sharing but also comparative research using similar tools. In addition, by using these methods of interpretation, a deeper and more intensive study can be advanced of the Chinese propaganda scene by looking at the meaning behind the imagery with demonstrable results, rather than the general descriptive and historical narrative that is the norm. This method of interpretation can be coupled with other visual grammar elements to map out the grammar of how propagandist and the audience were communicating with each other. It also lends to other artistic studies, not just Chinese or propaganda studies including other East Asian studies, comparative ideological based imagery (communist based, fascist based, authoritarian based), advertisement, religious imagery, counter-culture and political movement art, and much more.

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The Digital Illusion: Chinese New Media Artists Exploring the Phenomenology of Space

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Abstract

This article examines how Chinese new media artists negotiate the symbolic nature of urban space via 3D-modelled simulations and augmented and mixed reality. Via semiotic and media analysis, the article scrutinises the ontology of these media in their deployment of spatial parameters such as proportion, perspective, stasis, and motion to create spatial narratives. The article contrasts the imaginary of architecture and space in the independent 3D animation Mist by Zhang Xiaotao and the Second Life project RMB City by Cao Fei against the implementation of video art in the mixed-reality performance Wearable Urban Routine by Zhu Xiaowen and the augmented-reality app Statue of Democracy & Tank Man by artist collective 4 Gentlemen. In all of the discussed works, the use of the digital medium serves to create a temporary illusion whereby the ephemeral experience of a virtual world can help inform the role of the human in actual, physical space which adopts particular importance in the context of a radically transforming country. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on the interlinkages between Chinese art, architecture, and the city and on the use of technology in Chinese cultural production.

Keywords: Chinese contemporary art, urban space, architecture, digital media, 3D animation, augmented reality, embodiment

Introduction

In contemporary China, artists have, for many years now, set their eyes on the city as subject matter. The negotiation of urban space has become a highly important subject in the wake of China's reform and opening up process which engendered redevelopment projects throughout the country that led to the destruction of thousands of square kilometres of vernacular space for the sake of modernization or "urban renewal" (chengshi gengxin 城市更新). Moreover, the expansion of cities (chengshi kuozhang 城市扩张) led to the devouring of farmland and turned large parts of the country into construction sites which displaced millions of residents who had to leave profitable building plots. The result of this process has been a complete refashioning of the Chinese landscape, with some cities having become nearly unrecognizable and featuring the most iconic landmarks of modernity. Numerous Chinese artists have reflected on this extraordinary urban transformation via more traditional media, including photography, video art, and installations, including Song Dong 宋冬 (b. 1966), Yin Xiuzhen 尹秀珍 (b. 1963), Zhan Wang 展望 (b. 1962) and the Gao Brothers 高氏兄弟 (高兟 b. 1956, 高强 b. 1962), to name just a few. In such works rubble and debris tend to feature prominently, serving as trope that expresses the large-scale destruction. In this article I will examine four artworks from the realm of new media which investigate the configuration of urban space and its implication for the human body and mind. I use "new media" to denote media art in which the work is either created, stored, and presented by way of digital technologies or which includes a digitally produced component. I moreover address new media artworks in light of the notion of the "virtual" and how virtual representation or recreation of space can serve as an instance in the remediation of the role of the human in factual

and physical urban space. Amidst the various strands of scholarly debate on "virtuality" (which range from debates on the illusionistic spaces created in ceiling frescoes (Grau, 2003) to the immersive virtual realities (VR) of today that "convince . . . the participant that . . . [they are] actually in another place by substituting the primary sensory input with data" (Heim, 1998: 221), I choose in this article to use the "virtual" as that which "create[s] a synthetic view of reality" (Damer and Hinrichs, 2014: 18) by means of digital technology and which serves to create temporary spatial simulations and illusions.

The visually most climactic element of the dramatic urban transformation that has taken place in China since the reform and opening up period was initiated is arguably the emergence of the super-tall skyscraper in China, whose symbolic nature is explored in Zhang Xiaotao's 张小涛 animation Mist 迷雾, as well as in Cao Fei's 曹斐 Second Life spectacle RMB City (Renmin chengzhai 人民城寨). Meanwhile, artist collective 4 Gentlemen negotiate the loss of meaning in physical space in Beijing through their reification of the past through augmented reality (AR). I also decided to include Zhu Xiaowen's 朱晓闻 performance in the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, given the relevance of the work to the questions at hand and led by the desire to avoid a culturalist, ethnographic perspective that fails to acknowledge the transnational nature of technology as well as of artistic production today. This article aims, therefore, to gain insights into the wider implications of the relationship between mediality, performativity, and urban space. These works will be examined in light of the role of the virtual in negotiating the hegemonic forces of physical space. It will be examined whether virtuality, as Michael Heim suggests, can somehow "dissolve the constraints of the anchored world [in order to] . . . lift anchor" (Heim, 1993: 136) and whether the destabilization of meaning in virtual climes can alter our understanding of the meaning of factual, physical space. Moreover, it will be analysed how movement through virtual time and space can impact the formation of cultural identities in real life. The works examined here clearly articulate new or altered spatial subjectivities and it will be argued that they destabilise conventional semantics of factual space and instead carve out the complex and multi-layered nature of cities today. Read together, these works also provide insights into the ontology of new media and the capacity of varying instances of virtuality to remediate the real world.

Spatial Illusion in Traditional Media

Before proceeding to look at new media, however, it is useful to take a look at traditional media's representation of space to get a better understanding of the new possibilities and limitations that new media affords. The representation of space in Western art (Giedion, 1966; White, 1987; Panofsky, 1991; Gombrich, 2000) differs in many ways from traditional Chinese landscape painting, which invented intricate techniques to represent three-dimensional landscapes but also focussed largely on the creation of symbolic, illusionistic space (Sullivan, 1962; Cahill, 1982; Fong, 1992; McCausland and Hwang, 2014). These differences are – in part – due to differing understandings of the concept of space. The intellectual history of East and West has brought forth notions of space that varied according to cosmological, theological, and scientific perspectives which, moreover, resulted in debates about the absolute or relative nature of space, whether it was finite or infinite and whether it was defined by substance or void. In premodern China, there were numerous terminologies that suggested notions of space whereby "some refer to a place or location (e.g., chu [處], di [地], difang [地方], suo [所]), direction (shangxia sifang [上下四方]), temporal or spatial intervals or gaps (kong [空], jian [間]), or the cosmos (yuzhou [宇宙])" (Liu, 2016: 198). These terms denote varying instances of materiality and immateriality as well as cosmological beliefs, and the term for space in modern Chinese, kongjian 空间, interestingly emphasises both emptiness and in-betweenness. The digital media of today raise equally complex questions about the nature and definition of "space," which are further complicated by the

differentiation between virtual, augmented, and mixed realities which represent entirely new visual aesthetics (Manovich, n.d.). As has been examined by a number of scholars (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Manovich, 2002), the new technologies deployed in artistic production are ontologically not too dissimilar from the earlier forms of media upon which they are largely modelled. Attempts to create virtual, illusionistic space have a long history and for centuries did not even require digital technologies. Anamorphism, for instance, denotes the creation of an illusionistic spatial experience, drawing on geometric conceptual frameworks as well as on sensual experiences to achieve a deliberate distortion of realistic perspective. Examples include the trompe l'oeil by which a painter could achieve deceiving verisimilitude, for instance by painting a window onto a plain wall or by making something appear three-dimensional despite its two-dimensional materiality. The art theorists of the baroque period thereby attributed spiritual qualities to illusionism as they "saw geometric perspective as mediating between man and the world by revealing God's order through mathematical proportions" (Pérez Gómez, 1997: 141–147, 215). In premodern China, too, Tang (618–907 CE) and Song (Northern Song 960–1127 CE; Southern Song 1127–1279 CE) imperial tombs, for instance, were intent on creating visual illusions in relation to the afterlife by deploying horizontal spatial recessions to engender a sense of three-dimensionality. The illusionism of Buddhist murals, too, suggested "a porous boundary between human and other worlds" (Kleutghen, 2015: 28), something that is also suggested in Zhu Xiaowen's technology-enhanced performance in the contemporary city of today.

The (Im)materiality of New Media

These questions of the materiality and immateriality of space and traditional media's capacity to create spatial illusions take on renewed importance in new media art. The digital medium is often described in terms of its immateriality, a notion which is, however, controversial and extensively debated in the literature, given the rather "material" effect; as, for instance, when a human plays a chess game against a computer. Despite its ambiguous materiality, the digital medium is arguably viscerally spatial. Not only does it allow for intriguing simulations via 3D graphics in which fantastical virtual and augmented realities allow for the defiance of the constraints of the physical world, but our everyday physical involvement in the city, too, leaves digital traces, such as the GPS data tracked by our smartphones, or our use of credit cards in different venues. Even the topography of the city itself is increasingly a product of digital architectural design, such as in the case of deconstructivist architecture with its curvilinearity and fold which is the result of complex algorithmic processes. An example of such architecture in China is the National Stadium in Beijing, whose complex shape has engendered its nickname, the "Bird's Nest," and which is critically discussed in Cao Fei's virtual city in Second Life. The use of digital media in the negotiation of landscape in the realm of art can therefore be seen as an inevitable and logical response to the constantly evolving technology and information networks that are linked to the city and which already shape the semantics of landscape today.

Meanwhile, the body of scholarship on new media art defies any succinct summary as it addresses varying subjects ranging from survey examinations (Paul, 2016; Jenkins, 2006); to its philosophical implications and relationship to traditional media (Manovich, 2002; Grau, 2003); to feminist perspectives (Zobl and Drüeke, 2014; Mondloch, 2018); or the relationship of art and the network economy (Cornell and Halter, 2015). In recent years, a turn towards the post-digital or to object-based artistic practice among young artists cannot overshadow the fact that the increase in data-processing power and the speed of data transfer across networks, as well as the advancement in interactive tools, including touchscreens, wearables and VR glasses, will see continuous explorations of the affordances of new technologies in the realm of art. Academic attention has undergone parallel shifts which, in the context of China, has seen an increasing interest in the examination of digital layers in the enhancement of physical space via augmented reality (AR) (Hillenbrand, 2017) or the interrelationship of art and the Chinese internet (Holmes, 2018). The scholarly examinations that address specifically the subject of urban space in Chinese

art (Wu, 2004, 2012; Braester, 2010, 2013; Visser, 2010, 2013; Kóvskaya, 2006; Berry, 2015, Ortells-Nicolau, 2017) are growing, however, digital art usually merely features alongside analysis of more traditional media. Interesting investigations of Chinese (urban) space and its relationship to the human are often still relegated to the realm of architecture and urban studies (Li, 2008; Nanfang dushibao, 2012; Li and Yang, 2007), whereas the impact that the perusal of digital (artistic) media can have on the psychology of the mind and embodiment is mostly addressed in the realm of science (see, for instance, Stanford University, 2017). This article aims to address this gap by attempting to establish a link between the digital medium, virtuality, and embodiment in urban space. It thereby aims to contribute to the wider discourse on virtuality in Chinese culture that has also been intriguingly examined in the field of literature (Inwood, 2014; Hockx, 2015).

RMB City – Contested Meanings in Second Life

In the realm of Chinese contemporary art, it was arguably the Second Life art project RMB City by Guangzhou artist Cao Fei (b. 1978) that increased academic interest in the deployment of new media in the artistic exploration of space. One of China's most prominent media artists, Cao Fei works with 3D animation to create a re-enactment of the Chinese city in an interactive, virtual realm. It is an "urban planning" art project created in collaboration with Vitamin Creative Space that was online on the internet platform Second Life between 2007 and 2011, and which the artist herself calls a "city utopia" (Cao Fei, 2008). Second Life is a multi-user virtual environment, operated by US company Linden Lab, in which people can create, navigate, and have an impact on 3D online spaces. They operate via their online avatars, or personifications of themselves called "residents" who communicate with each other via instant messaging and form human connections through their virtual presence. Cao Fei, via her own avatar called China Tracy devised a fantastical virtual city that referenced many recognizable icons of the factual cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. These include the iconic Bank of China building in Hong Kong and the Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai's Pudong area, which was the highest building in China in the latter half of the 1990s before it was surpassed and dwarfed in the new millennium by even higher neighbouring structures. These "supertall" buildings, as they are called in architecture-speak, set out to become the tallest in the world and are the architectural embodiment of China's rise to global superpower status. In RMB City these skyscrapers don't get a favourable review but are accompanied by other architectural landmarks of an equally symbolic nature. A simulacrum of the Forbidden City in Beijing, a symbol of China's long imperial past but also of the country's centralised political power, features prominently in Cao Fei's virtual city, yet the imposing portrait of Mao Zedong that usually adorns the gate is irreverently substituted by an image of a panda bear. Meanwhile, Beijing's hypermodern "CCTV building," a folded skyscraper designed by international star architect Rem Koolhaas's firm OMA (Office of Metropolitan Architecture, Rotterdam) can be found in RMB City as well. Hailed as the reinvention of the skyscraper, it houses the eponymous state broadcaster in Beijing and is in Cao Fei's virtual city precariously hanging from an enormous crane. The CCTV building and the crane both symbolise the country's building frenzy as well as the country's aspiration to become the leading nation in the realization of pricey, unconventional, and imposing architecture often designed by star architects from around the world. In RMB City a giant shopping trolley floats in the water and is filled with nothing less than a couple of skyscrapers, which further critiques the commercialization of the city. In the case of the CCTV building, however, which was indeed built for the state's own broadcaster, criticism of the ostentatious building frenzy would unexpectedly come from the foremost representative of the state itself. In 2014 President Xi Jinping deprecated the CCTV building as "weird" (qiqi guaiguai 奇奇怪怪) and criticised it as architecture that was undesirably xenocentric and oversized ('Xi Jinping cheng "Bu yao gao qiqiguaiguai de jianzhu" huo wangmin chengzan', 2014). Cao Fei's work satirises this complex tension of the factual Chinese city, which oscillates between capitalist globalisation with its profitable alliance between

the state and property developers (regularly at the expense of the disenfranchised, who are unable to resist evictions) and the observant and unpredictable ideological conservatism of the one-party state on the other. In RMB City verisimilitude is juxtaposed with abstraction and hyperbole which further puts into question the meaning of any recognisable signifiers: a variation of the Chinese national flag, for instance, flies above the city like a magic carpet, carried by four corporeal yellow stars that seem to have cheekily escaped their place on the flag. A giant panda bear, the stereotypical symbol of Chinese national identity and arguably the cutest token of the country's soft power and zoo diplomacy floats in the sky, too, next to an imaginary oversized Ferris wheel whose rather absurd existence further destabilises any conventional meaning. The experience on Second Life resembles a game and enables a creative social interaction between avatars and their "dwelling" in the virtual realm. In RMB City all avatars can fly and teleport and experience the fantastical city from ever newer perspectives.

Not dissimilar to live action cinema, the virtual space then serves as a setting for virtual filmmaking, a process called "machinima," which can document what happens in the virtual realm. A characteristic of machinima is that it allows for participatory involvement by the online avatars, who can also direct films about themselves. Cao Fei herself describes her early ventures into this kind of filmmaking and its affective and cognitive implications:

> I was directly recording myself as I moved through Second Life, but as I'm watching myself, I'm also controlling myself; I'm simultaneously director and actor. But I enjoy exploring everything and not knowing what will happen in the next step. A lot of the process is waiting for something to happen, and I didn't try to make something fake. (Cited in Kóvskaya, 2006: 83)

Machinima hence creates a palpable document of this movement of the imagined self through a contingent virtual time and space while being directed by the real-world self. This can be viewed as an anthropology of modernity that is at once virtual and real, that negotiates the local by way of the transnational and which, too, bridges the gap between the immaterial and material. Another connection between the virtual and the real are the various real-life events that accompanied the artwork. For instance, Cao Fei presented her imaginary Chinese city at the Venice Biennale in 2007 in a physical pavilion which was the real-life counterpart of a pavilion in the virtual place. Visitors to the Venice pavilion could then attend the livestreaming of the pavilion opening in Second Life. (Leung, 2006: 32). At an event at Art Basel, Cao Fei also effectively sold a building unit in her virtual city which was purchased with real money and which linked the virtual city to the factual money economy. Moreover, numerous well-known figures of the world of contemporary art participated in various events via their avatars, including Swiss collector Uli Sigg; Jerome Sans, the former director of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing; and curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who even had the honour to be named RMB City's first mayor. Their involvement suggests that computer-generated virtual image spaces are increasingly adopting a relevance on par with that of the physical gallery and that growing attention is paid to the relevance of non-human bodies and their virtual interactions.

State Illusion and Artistic Illusion

The place that Cao Fei envisions in this virtual work is not a fixed space but transforms through interactivity and community involvement. This is clearly in contrast to the factual Chinese city and its reliance on top-down developmental decisions. RMB City therefore parodies the inevitability of the real Chinese city by wittily thwarting the symbolic essence of factual landmarks, statues, and geographical markers. The National Stadium (or "Bird's Nest") in Beijing, for instance, is in Cao Fei's virtual imaginary irreverently rendered as a rusty, decrepit skeleton which is half submerged in water. The factual building, however, had only just been finished by the time RMB City was launched and became indeed the architectural embodiment of national

pride surrounding the Olympic Games in 2008. The stadium then served as ubiquitous icon on television and urban propaganda posters and was widely discussed in the field of architecture. Cao Fei's virtual imaginary of the National Stadium therefore adds a discursive layer to the ongoing debate in China on landmark architecture and the problematic relevance of Olympic architecture after the great event is over (Liu and Lin, 2012; Li et al, 2013). It is important to note that artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (b. 1957), known for stirring regular controversies, served as artistic consultant to the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron who designed the stadium as a commission by the national and city government. Consequently, Ai Weiwei helped the state create the "illusion" for the world's gaze yet later distanced himself from the stadium, arguing the building represented the "fake smile" of the Chinese Communist Party.

In another short film shot inside Second Life, entitled Live in RMB City, Cao Fei introduces us to her real-life baby's avatar, called China Sun, and discloses her critical attitude towards the modernised city which she deliberately disfigures in her virtual imaginary. In the film, the baby avatar is told: "The buildings in this city are merely incarnations of your parents, in another time and space, they reverberate with the hollow shells of despair. In your world, the buildings are crooked, like useless, manmade objects" (RMBCityHall, 2011). Moreover, in one instance in the machinima film, a mimesis of the Guggenheim Museum in New York (and indeed called "Guggenheim of RMB City"), transforms at the blink of an eye into different illusionistic shapes akin to those of a snail's shell. Mao Zedong, who is named the "People's Patron Saint" in RMB City, features prominently, too, and is rendered as floating in the sea, which not only deprives him of his axiomatic respectability but also allegorically condemns him to submergence and oblivion.

Cao Fei deploys the digital medium to literally recode the city into a surreal hotchpotch of past and present, navigated by alternative virtual identities. In an interview, Cao Fei discusses her ideas behind the project by referring to herself in the third person by her online avatar name China Tracy. When asked about her avatar, Cao explained that "China Tracy felt that since most cities within Second Life were Western in style, she wanted to represent some of her concepts about Chinese urban development in a space that incorporated Chinese aesthetics and identity, albeit in a surreal hybrid style" (Cao Fei, 2008).

Reification of Buried History: 4 Gentlemen's Augmented Reality

An ephemeral spatial alternative is also what is generated in the augmented reality art by the anonymous artistic collective 4 Gentlemen. According to their blog, 4 Gentlemen is comprised of "Chinese artists in exile" as well as American artist(s) and is linked to the New York-based artist studio of Lily and Honglei (杨熙瑛, 李宏磊). The web presence of 4 Gentlemen explains that the pseudonym "4 Gentlemen" or sijunzi 四君子 references a group of Chinese intellectuals, namely Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波 (1955–2017), Hou Dejian 侯德健 (b. 1956), Zhou Duo 周舵 (b. 1947), and Gao Xin 高新 (b. 1956) ("About 4 Gentlemen," n.d.). All four were intellectuals who had a prominent role during the protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and who jointly initiated a hunger strike prior to the violent crackdown. After June 4 they either fled abroad or suffered repeated imprisonment, such as Liu Xiaobo, who was in 2010 awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China" (Norwegian Nobel Institute, n.d.) while serving an eleven-year prison sentence for "inciting subversion of state power" (Lin, 2013).

Figure 1: 4 Gentlemen, Tiananmen SquARed and Tank Man, 2011. Computer 3D models, augmented reality application for mobile and tablets. Still courtesy of the artists.

4 Gentlemen's deployment of digital technology for the exploration of physical space is even more prominently marked by a critical engagement with the political and symbolic encumbrance of space. The artists encoded a smartphone and tablet app in order to overlay the factual landscape with dynamic information. Entitled Tiananmen SquARed the app negotiates the political symbolism of Tiananmen Square and its neighbouring Chang'an Avenue via a visualisation of the historic iconicity of the "Tank Man" image and the "Statue of Democracy" erected during the 1989 protests.

Figure 2: 4 Gentlemen, Tiananmen SquARed and Tank Man, 2011. Computer 3D models, augmented reality application for mobile and tablets. Still courtesy of the artists.

The Statue (or Goddess) of Democracy was a ten-metre high sculpture built by students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and displayed during the student-led protests on Tiananmen Square in 1989 as a monument to and embodiment of the quest for political and societal change.

The Tank Man, possibly internationally more widely known than the statue, also refers to 1989 and specifically to the day of June 5 when a hitherto unknown man positioned himself in the way of the tanks that were sent onto the square following the violent crackdown on June 4. 4 Gentlemen overlay the historical sites of the appearance of the Tank Man and the Statue of Democracy with Google geolocation software so that, when one uses the app on both Tiananmen Square and Chang'an Avenue and directs the smartphone or tablet in a particular direction, virtual sculptures of the Statue of Democracy and Tank Man appear on the screen. In coding the appearance of these sculptures onto the mobile screens of the app users, 4 Gentlemen reinscribe their own visualisation of history into factual space, which is nowadays devoid of any visible traces of this past. As they point out on their blog, their work is intended as a reminder:

Although it has been more than twenty years since [the] Tiananmen Protest took place in 1989, the authority persistently uses all means erasing [sic] the facts that Chinese people pursued democracy in this democratic and anti-corruption movement. In China, nowadays, young people are not aware [of] the courageous actions, such as "Tank Man" and erecting [the] "Statue of Democracy" facing Mao's portrait on Tiananmen . . . , [which] emerged during [the] student movement of 1989. Nonetheless, history should not be forgotten. ("Tiananmen Square Augmented Reality," 2011: n.p.)

They use the locative medium of AR as an appeal to remember which is a defiance of the heavy censorship of the protests in mainland China today. Even the mere accounting of the events of 1989, even if unaccompanied by any normative comment or political claim, is one of the most severely censored and most thoroughly banned topics from the Chinese public sphere, no matter whether in textual or visual form. Yet the photograph of the Tank Man has adopted the role of a symbolic icon of resistance that has long transgressed the borders of China. In her analysis of the legacy of Tank Man in China, Margaret Hillenbrand argues that the minimalist aesthetic of the photographic documentation could potentially be at risk of reducing political complexity into facile image narratives. However she attests that the photograph "offered to Western audiences what Slavoj Žižek . . . calls 'a moment of transparent clarity' about China after Mao and revolution" (Hillenbrand, 2017: 131). She underlines that the photograph, despite its arguably predominant appropriation for US (and international) neoliberal narratives, is still continuously remediated and repurposed by Chinese artists as well (Hillenbrand, 2017: 131).

4 Gentlemen make their political message available more widely and added Tahrir Square (Cairo, Egypt) and Occupy Wall Street (New York) as similarly politically charged spaces where the Tank Man and Goddess of Democracy could be visualised. Similar to Cao Fei's connection to art events in the physical world, 4 Gentlemen, too, included the geolocations of art events, such Saint Mark's Square during the Venice Biennale in 2011 and the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA). Not dissimilar to Cao Fei's virtual urban landscape in which symbolically charged visual icons are juxtaposed or represented in unconventional, subversive ways, 4 Gentlemen, too, use the possibilities of technology and virtuality to playfully undermine and revert the forced dissociation of factual, real landscape from its historical meaning and attached memories. They create a kind of historical archive engendered by bodily movement in space which can then performatively do "revelatory justice" to what has long since become a "public secret" in China (Hillenbrand, 2017: 153).

Digitally Enhanced Self-Discovery: Zhu Xiaowen's Mixed-Media Performance

Berlin-based media artist Zhu Xiaowen (b. 1986), on the other hand, is less concerned with the political nature of the cityscape but with its impact on body and mind of busy urbanites. She does so via a site-specific corporeal intervention, in which she includes time-based video recordings and projections. Zhu Xiaowen's Wearable Urban Routine is a series of walking performances

(and an ensuing twelve-channel video installation), which took place in the streets of Rotterdam over the course of twelve days in 2011.

Figure 3: Zhu Xiaowen, Wearable Urban Routine, 2011, twelve-channel HD video documentation. Still courtesy of the artist.

This project was supported by the Tsinghua Art and Science Media Laboratory and the V2 Institute for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam, one of the pioneers in new media and architectural research. The idea of the performance was to walk the same path through the city of Rotterdam for twelve consecutive days. During these walks, the artist wore a long and idiosyncratically shaped headset.

Figure 4: Zhu Xiaowen, Wearable Urban Routine, 2011, performance, wearable digital device. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

A camera was attached to the back of the hat in order to record Zhu Xiaowen's walk. At the front of the hat, a small projector served to project onto the path before her a recording of the walk that she had undertaken the previous day on the same circuit. This performance was inspired by kaihōgyō 回峰行, a practice of continuous walking done by a community of monks in Mount Hiei 比叡山, northeast of Kyoto 京都, as a way to reference Buddhist asceticism. Kaihōgyō is a strenuous physical exercise that is accompanied by deprivation of water, food, and rest over long periods of time. The nod to this practice also finds reflection in Zhu Xiaowen's attire, which is a long gown in white, given that the monks wear white, the traditional colour of death, which references the near-death experience that is implied in their extreme practice. The walks of these Japanese monks can last up to seven consecutive years and comprise one-hundred days of walking each year (Lobetti, 2014: 77).

Figure 5: Zhu Xiaowen, Wearable Urban Routine, 2011, performance, wearable digital device. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Zhu Xiaowen transposes the spiritual practice from the mountainous areas of Japan to the mundane realm of the European city. She does not aim to emulate the Buddhist practice of kaihōgyō as such, yet in her work she seeks to crystallise its essence and to carve out its applicability for the understanding of the role of the human in space. According to the artist, the effect of the monks' efforts is "to distance themselves from physical and materialistic desires, and to attain a heightened sense of sound and vision not perceivable to them before their activity" (Zhu Xiaowen, n.d.). This exercise can also be described as "to attain enlightenment by facing death in current life" (V2 Lab for the Unstable Media, n.d.). Zhu Xiaowen's performance, which she undertook for only one hour per day, though likely arduous as well, was burdened with less physical challenges than those faced by the Japanese monks. Zhu makes recourse instead to contemporary technology to additionally heighten the synaesthetic experience of space. She aims for what she calls "autoscophy," a psychic illusory visual experience in which one's own body is perceived in space, either from an internal perspective or as if mirrored from the outside (Zhu Xiaowen, n.d.). The use of the combined media of performative spatial intervention and video projection thereby seems adequate for Zhu's search for autoscophy, given that new media are

sometimes described as enabling the externalisation and objectification of the mind (Manovich, 2002: 57). Lev Manovich elaborates on this objectification and references early theories of cinema put forth in 1916 by Harvard Professor of Psychology Hugo Münsterberg and in 1920 by filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who both ascribed to film the capacity to reproduce, externalise, and ultimately control thinking. In the 1980s, Jaron Lanier spun that thought even further by arguing that virtual reality was not only capable of objectifying mental processes but even of allowing for a fusion with them (Manovich, 2002: 58). Zhu Xiaowen's performance is a form of VR despite the absence of the headsets, goggles, and motion-sensing gear popularly associated with VR that assists in providing an enhanced immersive experience. Her performance, however, during which she avoided any social interaction with people she encountered on the street, seems to testify to the assumption that human cognitive processes can impinge on digitally engendered realities: the video projection of previous walks helps Zhu to relive gestures and pathways. This creates a repetitiveness that offsets her meditative state, in which the mind can be closed off to the mundanity of the physical world and simultaneously opened up to a kinetic, transcendental experience of space. Zhu thereby highlights the phenomenological idea of embodiment, this sense of being in space, and transports her own sensory experience into the public sphere. On her website, the artist tellingly describes her thought processes during her performance:

> Walking is simple. Simple is difficult. Walking is difficult. I walk, trying hard to follow the same path, motion, pace and gesture every day. I walk, trying not to respond to urban noise and people's reaction. I walk, trying not to think about the fact that I am walking. The moment while I am walking, I forget who I am and realize who I really am. (Zhu Xiaowen, n.d.)

This is reminiscent of how Cao Fei describes the movement of her avatar in virtual space and the cognitive effort she makes to distinguish between the virtual experience and her real-life documentation of it. In Zhu's case, what seems an individual meditative process, can also serve to inquire into the more universal ontology of the urban landscape and the social behaviour it generates. Zhu's performance is also a reflection on the busy urbanites and their frenzy daily routine amidst countless other, assiduous city commuters. The repetitive nature of this routine is carved out through the video-projected simultaneity of identical instances of past and present. And just as Zhu Xiaowen contradictorily rearranges the deliberately ascetic practice of the mountain monks to take place in the consumption-laden space of the city, she also imbues the seemingly senseless real-life setting for the urban routine with a new spiritual value: that of meditative self-discovery.

3D Animated Anti-spectacle: Mist

Another contemporary Chinese artist who has negotiated the symbolic nature of architecture and space in his new media art is Beijing-based Zhang Xiaotao (b. 1970). A graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in Chongqing, Zhang has for many years discussed the predicaments of the socioeconomic transformation of Chinese society via representations of urban subject matters and the disappearance of physical space. Zhang became well known in the 1990s for his large-format oil paintings in which he deals with the fragility of the human in the face of death, illness, and decay, symbolised via mouldy food or ensanguined condoms. Since 2006 he created several 3D computer animations in which he translated his socially engaged urban agenda into virtual narratives. During the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, Zhang was one of seven artists who represented his country at the China pavilion curated by Wang Chunchen 王春辰. Zhang has, moreover, taken a very personal interest in China's fast-paced urban transformation as part of a group of artists who opposed a planned redevelopment project of the 798 Art District in Beijing, in which Zhang Xiaotao has held a studio since the early days of the artistic usage of the formerly industrial space. In the episodic film Mist

(2006–2008), Zhang engages with the symbolism of the Chinese skyscraper, which he transposes into the virtual realm of a 3D-modelled virtual environment. He describes an imaginary glass high-rise that climactically appears at the end of a dystopian narrative characterised by violence, social struggle, and fast-paced development. It is specifically at the apocalyptic end of the film, when the extraordinarily high glass skyscraper buries the landscape beneath rubble and dust, that – similarly to Cao Fei – Zhang maps the myriad predicaments of China's socioeconomic transition onto the built environment.

Figure 6: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist (2006–2008), 3D animation. Still referencing the factual Chongqing Steel and Iron Factory.

Figure 7: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, still of an iguana.

Zhang Xiaotao begins his sombre film by taking the spectator on an epic 3D-animated journey that tells the story of the rise and demise of an industrialising society whose population is made of ants and iguanas. Issues of labour, exploitation, and revolution are equally at stake, as is the negotiation of architecture and the ephemeral spectacle of development that accompanies the fragile human condition. The story begins in a primeval landscape of water and mountains which sees the earth erupt, thrusting out innumerable ants that, together with iguanas, populate

the hitherto lifeless and non-built-up planet. Throughout the film, the viewer follows the animals with occasional journeys through a vast scaffolding, which stands symbolically for China's building boom and the ubiquity of its construction sites.
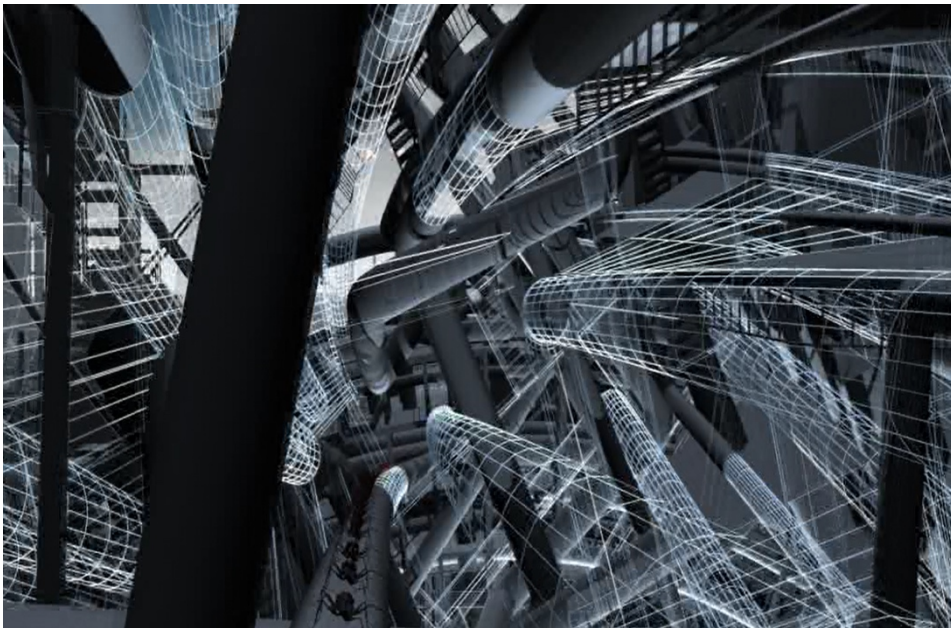

Figure 8: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, still of scaffolding.

Figure 9: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, still of the interior world inside the scaffolding.

Scaffolding as Modality of Travel through Space and Time

The scaffolding in Mist features a vast interior world of its own with seemingly endless layers of dynamic grids that create a disorienting illusion. The scaffolding is also a modality of travel through time and space, as every time the animals move through its grids they miraculously arrive in a new era where, tellingly, vast developmental stages seem to have been completed in mere seconds. The virtual camera navigates through the scaffolding in an extensive and fast-paced fly-through, and the result is a motion blur that aesthetically reflects the accelerated pace of development in China. After the animals' first trip through such a scaffolding, they arrive, it seems, at the industrial age, where the previous virgin forest has disappeared. A vast factory compound features ubiquitous cranes and bulldozers, and funnels modularly assemble as if by an invisible hand while construction workers – who tend to be migrant workers in contemporary China – are

peculiarly absent. It is unclear whether this suggests an automated city in which the primacy of (technological) progress has dislocated and uprooted the very human for which it was originally conceived. Alternatively, the workers could be symbolised by the innumerable ants who fall from lofty funnels on the construction site and die while shedding histrionic amounts of deep red blood. In any case, Zhang's frequent camera switches from the worm's eye to the bird's eye perspective underline the intimidating and metonymic height of the newly built environment as well as the insignificance and fragility of the ants.

The abstraction and painterly beauty of the animation is suffused with hints of realism, such as when a mammoth industrial building (a reference to the actual Chongqing Steel and Iron Factory in Zhang Xiaotao's home province of Sichuan) is revealed to be a death trap in which conveyor belts transport skeletons and dead animals to a deadly furnace. Inside the factory building we gain insights into the essence of the society portrayed by Zhang: productivity and development is achieved by using its very members as fuel, and the cremation process creates a death-infused mist that explains the film's seemingly innocuous title. What follows is the cathartic downfall of this system, sparked by fights between armies of skeletons which reference Pieter Bruegel the Elder's The Triumph of Death (c. 1562), a painting in which the dead "swarm from their graves to snatch the living from their daily business and pastimes" (Gibson, 2006: 147). By resuscitating the dead, Zhang chronicles Chinese history and the reference to the Chongqing factory establishes a link to socialist industrialization under Mao as well as to the political struggles and upheavals of the time.

The animals then visit a rendering of the Window of the World (Shijie zhi chuang 世界之窗) in Shenzhen – a factual entertainment park which features small-scale global landmark buildings – until a last journey through the scaffolding leads to the film's climax: the construction of a gargantuan glass skyscraper which towers over the landscape and which peaks through the clouds high up in the air.

Figure 10: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist.

The building is based on a ziggurat foundation made of stone that resembles seminal artistic representations of the Tower of Babel, but the skyscraper itself is plain, "Western" in style, and appears out of place. This brings to mind the homogenization of Chinese cities in recent years and the radical favouring of soulless icons of modernity over a preservation of China's own architectural heritage. Taiwan cultural critic Lung Ying-tai 龍應台 (b. 1952) describes this phenomenon as the "borrowism" (nalaizhuyi 拿来主义) of China's modernisation. She argues that

instead of displaying a modernity grown from vernacular culture and tradition, or "soil" (turang 土壤), China had opted for an unreflective modernization that was moreover accompanied by a lack of dialogue between the government and the people (Lung Ying-tai, 2013: 207). Just like the funnels in previous developmental stages, Zhang lets this skyscraper build itself in the blink of an eye and while glass plates still to self-assemble, masses of ants, iguanas, and skeletons simultaneously scramble towards the sky with a zeal that may again symbolise the aforementioned Chinese borrowism and craving for the world's tallest buildings. However, while the construction process is still ongoing, a threatening swarm of bats, usually an auspicious symbol in Chinese art, appears and evokes Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 horror film The Birds. The bats crash into the building in an unmistakable likeness of the terror attacks of September 11, 2011 in New York and the tower collapses dramatically, burying the entire landscape with glass shards, rubble, and dust. By now, the virtual camera floats much more slowly through the ruined space, lengthily indulging in the aesthetics of apocalyptic wreckage. Here, the debris and rubble that have come to symbolise the destruction of the vernacular Chinese city are oxymoronically imposed onto the shiny new skyscraper in a sort of vengeful urban anti-spectacle.

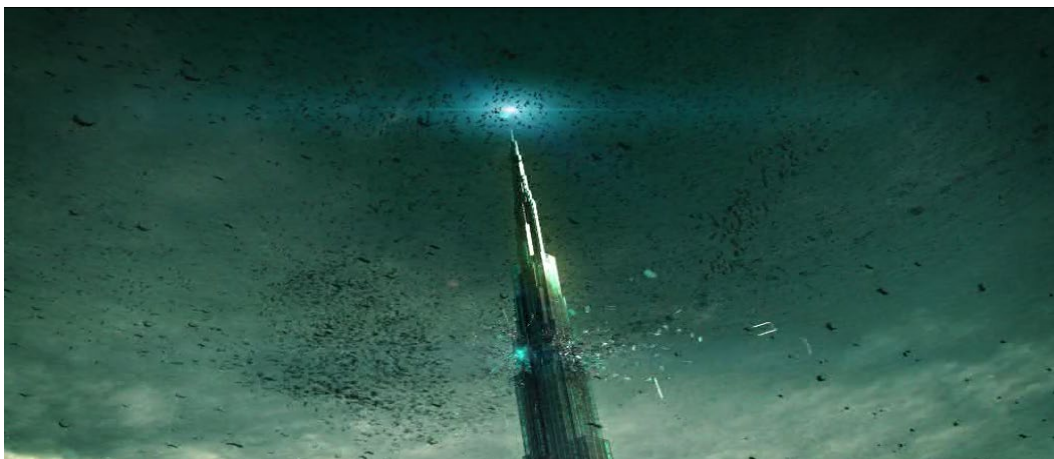*Figure 11: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, still of bats flying towards the skyscraper.*

Figure 12: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, bats fly into the skyscraper.

Figure 13: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, the skyscraper collapses while skeletons continue to climb upwards.

Figure 14: Zhang Xiaotao, Mist, still of the wreckage.

Some Deliberations: The Digital Medium, Embodiment, and Freedom

The creation of a 3D-animated parallel universe allows Zhang Xiaotao to adopt the narrative and aesthetic freedom necessary to make China's urbanization process imaginatively turn against itself. Rather than representing the vast-scale annihilation of old, vernacular architecture and space that is so characteristic of the real Chinese city, Zhang instead opts to curse the refashioned city with its spectacular skyscrapers and landmarks of capitalist modernity. In Cao Fei's riposte to the Chinese city, the freedom of the virtual lies similarly in the provision of an alternative reading of iconic buildings and symbols by rendering icons of national pride as derelict, rusting, and obsolete. 4 Gentlemen's app, too, defies the rules of the censored and "cleaned up" public place and turns it into a remediated private realm of mnemonic freedom where usually undesired motifs are stubbornly made to reappear. Zhu Xiaowen equally resists the real city and her creation of a hybrid of the real and the projected emphasises her quest for liberation of the city's distressing body politics.

In light of these artworks' critical relationship to the factual city I would like to come back to Michael Heim who, as I mentioned earlier, argues that virtuality allows for some form of

liberation. Heim contends that "the final point of a virtual world is to dissolve the constraints of the anchored world so we can lift anchor," and that while "danger and caution pervade the real (existential) world, . . . virtual reality can offer total safety, like the law of sanctuary in religious cultures" (Heim, 1993: 137). This understanding of virtuality as a liberated sphere is persuasive and the discussed works indeed seem to overcome the boundaries of certain coercions that are anchored in the physical world. (Heim, 1993: 136). All of these works therefore articulate new or altered spatial subjectivities and disavowals of the hegemonic elements of factual space. In the works of Zhang Xiaotao, 4 Gentlemen, and Cao Fei, the contestation lies in the narrative and aesthetic reversal of familiar spatial and temporal semantics. In Zhang Xiaotao's 3D animation it is the reversal of high and low, embodied in the biblical skyscraper whose exaggerated heights are razed (alongside all its sociopolitical connotations) to the insignificance of dust and shards. Zhang's skyscraper is thereby a postmodern icon, in that it aestheticizes "the mixture of opposing periods – the past, present and future – to create a miniature 'time-city'" (Jencks, 2011: 9), and hence blends in with a postmodern tradition of dramatic architectural cataclysms, such as the dynamiting of Yamasaki Minoru's 山崎實 Pruitt–Igoe complex in Saint Louis in 1972, which is considered to be the archetypal instance of postmodernity. The urban geographer David Harvey describes the Pruitt–Igoe building as "that great symbol of modernist failure," which, in his view, was doomed to failure, not because of its architectural form, but due to the social conditions it housed, which belied the utopian ideals with which the modernist project had once set out (Harvey, 1991: 116). By condemning his skyscraper to a spectacular failure, Zhang, too, deprives it of any possible utopian associations and further establishes a link with the catastrophe of 9/11. The twin World Trade Center towers were, quite ironically, realised by the same architect (Yamasaki) and some argue that their collapse was indeed the true beginning of postmodernism and the ultimate end of the grand narrative (Brown, 2005: 734). The hyperbolic height of buildings in Zhang Xiaotao's animation is moreover reminiscent of similar responses to urban development in cartoons and films of the early twentieth century in Shanghai, in which a building's height was commonly taken as a symbol of the gap between the rich and the poor (Lee, 1999: 12).

Cao Fei's RMB City, on the other hand, substitutes notions of reverence with irrelevance, and temporal notions of the new with the prematurely decrepit. This encourages the reconsideration of urban epistemologies and how we cognitively link the mediated virtual city with its real-life counterpart. The defiance of linear notions of space and time, and the subversion of the constraints of the physical city through fantastically surreal buildings that change their shape while you look at them is thereby highly symbolic. When discussing the shifting aesthetics in both architecture and art, David Joselit asserts that "objects characterized by discernible limits and relative stability lend themselves to singular meaning – almost as though well-defined forms are destined to contain a significance" (Joselit, 2013: 43). This can be applied to Cao Fei's morphing museum just as it can to the brittle animated skyscraper in Zhang Xiaotao's Mist, which never achieves a clear-cut shape as its components already begin to disintegrate during construction. The digital illusions that these artists create can therefore be seen as a vehicle to criticise architectural icons that feign grand narratives of collective identity and pride by transforming them into that which they precisely do not set out to be: inept and inconclusive urban signifiers. This destabilization of meaning in the virtual realm therefore arguably inspires a reconsideration of our interpretation of physical space. A similar surpassing of the spatio-temporal constraints of the physical world and its prescribed meaning can be seen in 4 Gentlemen's app that visualises Tank Man and the Statue of Democracy. The dichotomy of presence and absence, past and present is defiantly unravelled via the ephemeral reification of and tribute to what the artist duo underlines as heroic dissidence. In this work the projection of virtual information onto factual landscape thereby enables the utterance of the otherwise unspeakable. Jaron Lanier argues that virtual reality can take over human memory and claims that virtual reality inaugurated the age of "post-symbolic communication," by which he referred to communication without language or other symbols (cited in Manovich, 2002: 57–59). 4 Gentlemen's AR art indeed makes any

textual or verbal discourse unnecessary, yet it draws on visual symbols that still require historical knowledge on the part of the beholder. Yet in the age of big data the notion of "freedom" revolving around the virtual will be of a rather fragile nature. AR, on one hand, enables the flow of data into physical space (filling it with dynamic information) but, on the other, it technically also enables a flow in the reverse direction, that is a flow from physical space in the form of the gathering of monitoring and tracking information (Manovich, 2005: 5). Given the low threshold of tolerance Chinese authorities have when it comes to any manifestation of the events of 1989, this represents a particular risk for this AR work.

4 Gentlemen's AR apps and Zhu Xiaowen's performance are both embodied experiences in physical urban space. 4 Gentlemen's AR app thereby links the disjointed virtual and the real to synthesize a more truthful historiography. Both works are bound to specific physical locations outside the traditional gallery or museum space and therefore blur the boundaries of lived and image space. In both cases, the digital component is key to the enactment of the work and to a phenomenological experience that transcends that of habitual sensory exposure. In Zhu's Wearable Urban Routine, it is the virtual component of her performance which helps her disconnect from the real city in order to attain an analogue inner peace. In Cao Fei's RMB City, on the other hand, selfhoods are precisely constructed by way of digital avatars whose telepresence can be styled, named, and fashioned in a way that approximates one's dream identity. These identities are then performed and internalised via quasi-social interactions that require the imagined virtual city as setting.

The case studies here are intriguing examples of mediated realities and virtual fictions. Yet this analysis has also demonstrated that even ephemeral virtual illusions can have a tangible impact on identity formation in real life and our perception and interpretation of factual, physical space. This question is of global relevance in our digital age, but it attains particular importance in China, where a radical urban transformation is forcing the individual to adapt to ever changing surroundings and to decode ever new meanings of landscape. The possibilities to represent and mediate space via digital art will evolve in intriguing ways and will involve enhanced sensory bodily experiences in the future. Meanwhile, traditional media maintain their allure and their capacity to transport us to imaginary places. Ultimately, what unifies traditional and new media is the creation of an illusion. This illusion is one which, independent of the specific choice of medium, incites us to contemplate the symbolic meaning of landscape and, most importantly, our sense of being within it.

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Elegy to the Nanguan Mosque (1981–2020): The Rise and Fall of a Symbol of Hui Muslim Identity

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In the summer of 2020, the Nanguan Mosque in Yinchuan was "remodelled" by the local authority (Ma, 2020). For thirty-nine years, the overtly Islamic-style building was an iconic landmark in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Fig. 1). Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims make up more than one-third of the population of this province in Northwest China. During the remodelling, all exterior elements related to Islamic art and architecture were removed, including the two minarets, Quranic calligraphy, and the magnificent green domes of the main building. What remains is a hip-roofed, dull, and decidedly nondescript structure covered completely with dark, greyish paint (Fig. 2).

Figure 1: Yao Fuxing, the Nanguan Mosque, 1981, Yinchuan, Ningxia.

Figure 2: The Nanguan Mosque after remodelling (2020), photo by Christina Scott.

In the following short essay, I chart the history of the Nanguan Mosque as the most celebrated symbol of Hui Muslims since 1981. A masterpiece of modern architecture, it witnessed the rise and fall of Hui Muslims' freedom to openly express their unique cultural identity. Moreover, the different incarnations of the mosque represented the Chinese state's changing approaches to religions over the decades, starting with the restitution and reconstruction of religious sites in the 1980s, and the subsequent positioning of them as tourist attractions, to the most recent elimination of their religious features.

The Nanguan Mosque was built in 1981 outside the historic south gate (nanguan 南关) of Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia. At the site of its construction, there had once been a sizeable Chinese-style mosque that was knocked down by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The new mosque was designed by Yao Fuxing 姚复兴, a Hui architect trained at the prestigious Tsinghua University, who was commissioned by local Muslim communities. Upon its consecration, it became not only the first Islamic-style mosque built by Hui Muslims in the history of the People's Republic of China, but also one of the few Islamic-style mosques built in the entire history of the Hui people (Yao, 1982: 62).

Indeed, although Muslim communities migrated from West and Central Asia to China as early as the seventh century AD, Islamic-style architecture never enjoyed popularity on Chinese soil before the twentieth century. The reason for this lack of recognition has to do with building techniques. Masonry and pure brickwork, which are typical of Islamic architecture, were unusual in pre-modern China, where they were limited to a few applications (e.g., tombs, walls, and pagodas) (Steinhardt, 2008: 340). Conversely, timber-frame construction was readily available, though the technique inevitably gave rise to an ostentatious Chinese or Sinicised appearance. In the twentieth century, the creation of Islamic-style mosques became increasingly possible due to the widespread use of modern building materials: the two-story body of the Nanguan Mosque was built of steel and concrete, and the domes were fiberglass.

Over the course of Hui Muslim history, Chinese-style mosques accommodated all principal practices required by Islam, and some Hui mosques are considered among the most exquisite examples of timber construction in East Asia. Nevertheless, Chinese-style architecture was not perfectly suited to the construction of a mosque. As many scholars and Hui Muslims have pointed out, as far as architectural forms are concerned, it is difficult to tell a Chinese-style mosque apart from a Buddhist or Daoist temple. Since the communal life of the Hui people pivots around mosques, their distinct cultural identity is therefore rendered invisible where the Chinese architectural style is employed. Of course, it is worth noting that this ambiguity once provided Hui mosques with a "camouflage" of sorts to divert unwanted attentions from the dominant Han population (Yao, 1991: 118–122).

The design of the Nanguan Mosque, as Yao states, aimed to articulate the otherwise hidden cultural identity of the Hui Muslims by drawing on the rich tradition of Islamic architecture outside China. Instead of being any Arabic or Middle Eastern mosque, as many assume, the primary model studied by the architect was the Taj Mahal in India (Gan, 2018); for him, the plump domes and pointed arches of the Mughal masterpiece epitomise the beauty and elegance of Islamic architecture. Some Hui Muslims see the domes of the Nanguan Mosque as embodiments of Prophet Muhammad and the four schools of Islamic law. But as the architect confesses, it is their unique artistic qualities that concerned him the most (Yao, 1982: 60–61).

It is noteworthy that the Nanguan Mosque was not the first major work of Islamic-style architecture built in China after 1949. In 1957, the headquarters of the Chinese Islamic Institute (CII), a state-sponsored Islamic school for Muslim leaders (Imam and Mawla) of different ethnicities, adopted a form featuring a central dome surrounded by four smaller ones on the roof (Fig. 3). All of the domes are painted in deep green, which recalls the lofty dome above the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. The architect of this Islamic-style structure was Zhao Dongri 赵冬日, one of the most renowned state architects in the PRC and a chief designer of the Great Hall of the People on the Tiananmen Square.

Figure 3: Zhao Dongri (1914–2005), the Headquarters of the Chinese Islamic Institute, 1957, Beijing.

Zhao's CII headquarters might have influenced Yao's choice to use a green colour on the domes of the Nanguan Mosque. But unlike the CII headquarters, the Nanguan Mosque was intended to unequivocally look like a Hui building. It was designed by a Hui architect for Hui communities and it was marked by a synthesis of what the architect believed to be the most salient features of Islamic architecture. Upon its completion, the Nanguan Mosque was celebrated as an icon of the Hui Autonomous Region at both official and popular levels. In 1988, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the People's Bank of China issued a coin with the mosque on the reverse (Fig. 4). For decades, the beautiful mosque appeared on postcards, calendars, and myriad advertisements and publicity materials. Notably, the Nanguan Mosque also received a great number of foreign diplomats from Muslim countries in the 1980s and 1990s, thus functioning as a cultural bridge between China and the broader Islamic world during the early stage of reform and opening up.

Figure 4: Commemorative Coin for the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, 1988.

A personal story may further illustrate the fame of the Nanguan Mosque among Hui and Han people alike. As a Han Chinese brought up in Ningxia, I have always been fascinated by the cultural diversity of my hometown. In 1993, when I was in the sixth grade, I submitted a drawing of the Nanguan Mosque to a "paint your home province" contest held by China Children's Daily, the national newspaper for children in China. To my great pleasure, my work was selected for the award. It was published in the newspaper along with a brief caption written by me, which read, "[The mosque] shows a marked Islamic style and it looks majestic, grand, and graceful" (Xu, 1994: 5). This was my first ever publication – an unforgettable highlight of my childhood.

But of course, the Nanguan Mosque was prized most highly by the Hui community. Many Hui mosques constructed after 1981 imitate or refer to its design, which allow them stand out prominently from their surroundings. Thanks to the Nanguan Mosque, green-coloured domes in China went from an officially endorsed symbol of Islam to a distinct way of expressing the Hui cultural identity in public (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Sajinqiao Mosque, 1985, Xi'an, Shaanxi.

Like many famous religious sites in China, the Nanguan Mosque has undergone an increasing process of commercialization since the 1980s. Bao Jingui 保进贵 or Haji Muhammad Yunus, the Imam and head of the Nanguan Mosque, envisioned the mosque as a tourist site even from the very beginning of its reconstruction. For example, he established a tourism company, making the mosque one of the few in China where non-Muslims could visit with a ticket, and setting up a gift shop by the entrance of the mosque (Yang, 1988: 217). By the 1990s, the Nanguan Mosque had become a must-see in Yinchuan for tourists from across the country.

In the 2000s and 2010s, Bao's promotion of tourism led to some radical transformations of the Nanguan Mosque, which mirrored nationwide trends of religious development (Johnson, 2017). Two domed pavilions with flamboyant forms were attached to the main building and a gigantic gate that threatened to overshadow the mosque itself was erected. While these lavish expansions enhanced the original Islamic style of the mosque, they also reinforced the impression that the entire complex was meant to be a tourist destination. This was especially true of the replacement of the solemn deep-green colour of the domes with a kitschy bright turquoise. Relative to Yao's masterly design, these changes made the mosque look garish and tacky, an effect captured in an oil sketch painted by Zhou Qing 周青, an acclaimed professor in the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, during her visit to the mosque on the eve of its demolition (Fig. 6). Rather than sacred Islamic sites, the refurbished mosque called to mind an Islamic theme park, much like the one constructed in 2005 on the outskirts of Yinchuan, which was also recently remodelled by the local authority (Haddad-Fonda, 2016).

Figure 6: Zhou Qing, The Nanguan Mosque, 2020, oil painting.

In any event, given the exceptional political prestige and cultural significance enjoyed by the Nanguan Mosque in China over the past four decades, the utter elimination of its characteristic Islamic style is both shocking and saddening. This remodelling effectively conveys a devastating message to the Hui people, that they will no longer be allowed to openly celebrate their Islamic heritage. In a globally connected world, the Hui people, who have long been regarded by the Chinese government as model Muslims, will be forced to conceal their cultural identity again.

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