The People’s Republic of Capitalism:
The Making of the New Middle Class in Post-Socialist China, 1978-Present

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Program in Literature in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

My dissertation, “The People’s Republic of Capitalism: The Making of the New Middle Class in Post-Socialist China, 1978-Present,” draws on a range of visual cultural forms – cinema, documentary, and fashion – to track the cultural dimension of the emergence of the new middle class subject in China’s encounter with global capitalism. Through cultural studies methodologies and critical theoretical practices, I explore the massive reorganization of national subjectivity that has accompanied the economic reforms since 1978. How, I ask, has the middle class replaced the proletariat as the dominant subject of Chinese history? What are the competing social forces that contribute to the making of the new middle class subject, and how do they operate? By considering these questions in terms of the cultural cultivation of new sensibilities as much as identities, I trace China’s changing social formations through the realm of cultural productions. This project is organized into three parts, each of which attends to a particular constellation of middle class subjectivities and ideologies. In Part I (Introduction and Chapter 1), I explore how the Chinese middle class subject is shaped by historical, political-economic, and cultural forces. I show that the new social actor is structurally dependent on the national and transnational bourgeoisie and the post-socialist party-state. In Part II (Chapters 2-5), I focus on the relationship among fashion,
media, and Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist eras. By engaging with films such as Xie Tieli’s *Never Forget* (1964), Huang Zumo’s *Romance on Lushan* (1980), Qi Xingia’s *Red Dress is in Fashion* (1984), and Jia Zhangke’s *The World* (2004) and *Useless* (2007), I suggest that the representation of fashion and consumption in Chinese cinema, documentary, and new media is a privileged site for deciphering otherwise imperceptible meanings of class, ideology, and history in the formation of the Chinese middle class subject. In Part III (Chapter 6), I attend to the repressed underside of Chinese consumer culture: rubbish. This project reorients our understanding of socialist and post-socialist China, seeing them as underpinned by the contradictions emblematized in the Chinese middle class.
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I have had the good fortune to pursue my doctoral studies in the Graduate Program in Literature at Duke. I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my superb dissertation committee – Rey Chow, Michael Hardt, Fredric Jameson, Robyn Wiegman, and Leo Ching – for their profound intellectual inspiration, guidance, support, and generosity over the years. I would also like to thank the members of my dissertation writing group, including Gerry Canavan, Lisa Klarr, and Timothy Wright, and my good friends Hongsheng Jiang, Koonyong Kim, and Simon Milnes, and others for providing a vigorous intellectual community over the years. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, with my love.
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Introduction

My project engages with the profound transformations of Chinese culture and society as a result of China’s economic reforms. During the socialist era (1949-1976), the proletariat – an alliance of workers, peasants and soldiers collectively engaged in continuous revolution and class struggle – was presented as the dominant subject of Chinese history and culture. During the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, the words “bourgeoisie” and “petty bourgeoisie” had very negative connotations, owing to their association with imperialist and capitalistic exploitation. In the 1980s, the intellectuals were called upon by the post-socialist party-state to be the vanguard of China’s capitalistic modernization and promote “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” By the 2000s, the new social hierarchy featured a super-rich business elite allied to the ruling Communist Party, a vast and impoverished migrant labor force, and in-between, an economically empowered and aspirant middle class. A curious anomaly in the communist regime, the Chinese middle class – the bourgeoisie (“zichanjieji”) (資产阶级), petty bourgeoisie (“xiaozichanjieji” or “xiaozi”) (小资产阶级/小資), middle-propertied class or middle class (“zhongchanjieji”) (中产阶级), and its many variations, such as middle (“zhongjian”) (中間), middle-range (“zhongdeng”) (中等), and class (“jieji”) (階級), stratum (“jieceng”) (阶层), group (“qunti”) (群体), and its evasion, the modestly prosperous or well-to-do (“xiaokang”) (小康) – had just emerged onto the social scene
and was reshaping China in radically new ways. As a symbol of China’s rise in the 21st century, the Chinese middle class embodied overwhelmingly positive connotations: modernity, upward mobility, education, professionalization, leisure, cultural taste, and a tacit sense that the long-cherished desire to become like the U.S. was close to being realized.¹

However, the emergence of this new social subject is beset by contradictions. These tensions are vividly articulated in the cultural scene, where fiction writers, film directors, documentary makers, fashion designers, television and radio presenters, newspaper columnists, and bloggers and “weibo” (the Chinese twitter) enthusiasts debate on China’s future. Indeed, cultural production has played a pivotal role in social change in China since the May Fourth movement in 1919. Before the founding of the

¹ For the representation of the rise of the new Chinese middle class in the U.S. media, see the TV documentaries including Michael Murphy’s China Rises (2006) (especially Episode 1 “Getting Rich” and Episode 2 “City of Dreams”), Sue Williams’ Young and Restless in China (2008), Ted Koppel’s People’s Republic of Capitalism (2009), and Jonathan Lewis’ China From the Inside (2006). For the purpose of my research, China Rises and Young and Restless in China are more useful. For the media in Japan, see NHK’s TV documentary, 激流中国, especially the episode about the rich and the migrant worker (富人与农民工). For the media in Hong Kong, see RTHK’s TV documentary, Zhong chan xin yi dai (The New Generation of the Middle Class) (中產新一代) (2003) – including 適逢其時, 消費浪潮, 力爭上游, 成龍成鳳, 金錢以外. Also, see Hong Kong magazine Yazhou Zhoukan (亞洲周刊) (Issue: February 11-17, 2002 – about the “zhongchan jieji” [middle class]; and another issue about the “xiaozi” [petty bourgeoisie] [Website: http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/main.cfm]). For media in mainland China, see, for example, Sanlian shenhua shoukan (Sanlian Life Weekly) (三联生活周刊) (Website: http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/).
People’s Republic of China (PRC), the creation of left-wing and nationalist literature and film was crucial to the anti-imperialist and anti-feudalist movements. During the Mao Zedong era, the making of revolutionary subjectivity and consciousness was of paramount importance to socialist hegemony. During the post-socialist era, cultural issues were again the focal concerns about the economic reforms and opening up. For example, in the state discourse, Deng Xiaoping promoted “socialism with Chinese characteristics” in 1982. Jiang Zemin’s “three represents” theory (e.g. the Chinese Communist Party represents the future direction of advanced Chinese culture) and Hu Jintao’s “harmonious society” (i.e. neo-Confucianism as a state ideology) were promoted in the National Congress in 2002 and 2007 respectively. In the intellectual discourse, the writing of scar literature by the intellectuals victimized during the Cultural Revolution and root-searching literature, the intellectual celebration of “wenhuare” (culture fever), and the mourning of the backwardness of Chinese civilization (such as the Heshang [River Elegy] documentary in 1989) in the 1980s, testified to the fact that culture is a crucial site of economic, political, and social contestations. The ideological battleground was extended to the realms of mass and popular culture in the 1990s and 2000s. This phenomenon can also be observed in the social and cultural discourses about the sixth generation of Chinese cinema and the new documentary movement, Hollywood-style commercial cinema, TV melodrama, website, internet literature, popular girls’ fiction, fashion show and women’s fashion magazines, and so on.
There is a rich Western tradition of thought on the relationship between culture and social formations, with acute attention to the emergence and the reproduction of social classes. Much of this work has its roots in classical sociology (Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim), which has been foundational to its elaboration by the Frankfurt School thinkers (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer), British cultural studies (Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall), the sociology of everyday life (Pierre Bourdieu), and postmodern literary studies (Fredric Jameson). These trajectories of analysis and research have established the priority of studying the relationship among political and economic forces, social formations, and cultural forms. My project will draw on the strength of this intellectual tradition, but also challenge and reinvest its concepts to take account of a Chinese historical experience markedly different from the development of Western bourgeois society. Four distinctive influences that have been significant in China are absent in the West: (1) traditional Chinese thought and culture, such as Confucianism, which remains a fertile source of ideas and vocabulary in social and intellectual debates; (2) a century of semi-colonial and semi-feudal history (1840-1949); (3) the legacy of socialist modernity – thirty years of intense egalitarianism and political mobilization during the socialist era (1949-1976); and (4) a period of fast and eclectic exposure to Western culture since the economic reforms in 1978.
My project is called “The People’s Republic of Capitalism: The Making of the New Middle Class in Post-Socialist China, 1978-Present.” It draws on a range of Chinese visual culture – cinema, documentary, and fashion – to track the cultural dimension of the emergence of the new middle class subject in China’s encounter with global capitalism. Through cultural studies methodologies and critical theoretical practices, I explore the massive reorganization of national subjectivity that has accompanied the economic reforms since 1978. How, I ask, has the middle class replaced the proletariat as the dominant subject of Chinese history? What are the competing social forces that contribute to the making of the new middle class subject, and how do these forces operate and function? By considering these questions in terms of the cultural cultivation of new sensibilities as much as identities, I trace China’s changing social formations through the realm of cultural productions.

The project is organized into three parts, each of which attends to a particular constellation of middle class subjectivities and ideologies. Rejecting the idea that the new middle class is an independent, autonomous, and self-determining class, the first part of the project explores how the Chinese middle class subject is shaped by historical, political-economic, and cultural forces within the context of the transnational
partnership between the U.S. and China, or what the notorious conservative historian Niall Ferguson calls “Chimerica” – the shifting configurations of China and America – during the past three decades. By engaging with a range with cultural texts, including political essays, archival document, intellectual debates, fictions, and cinemas, I explain that the Chinese middle class is structurally dependent on the national and transnational bourgeoisie and the post-socialist party-state. Appropriating the title of Nikolai Ostrovsky’s socialist realist novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (钢铁是怎样炼成的) (1936) produced in the Soviet Union, I inquire how the Chinese middle class is actively

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*I have begun planning for a second manuscript project, “The Cultures of U.S.-China Transnationalism,” which will theorize and historicize the transpacific cultural exchange between the U.S. and China from Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 to China’s global rise in 2012. Engaging with the changing representation of the U.S. in contemporary Chinese culture, this project will involve an examination of a variety of cultural materials, including the Cultural Revolution historical archives and model operas from the 1960s, as well as autobiographies, memoirs, TV melodramas, lifestyle magazines, and self-help books from the 1990s and 2000s. This project will explore the cultural dynamics of the most important economic and political international relation in the twenty-first century.*

*I Indeed, it is impossible to comprehend China’s radical economic reforms and opening up, and the subsequent emergence of the new Chinese middle class, without an active engagement with gender politics. In fact, gender is crucial to the ideology of China’s changing political economy. For example, the orthodox narrative portrays China’s capitalistic modernization as a story of freedom: repressed by the shackles of Maoism’s class struggle and continuous revolution, women’s natural femininity was then liberated by the forces of global capital. Gender is also central to the radical changes in China’s class structure and hierarchy. For example, socialist art depicted the proletariat and the revolutionaries in a strong and masculinized way, and the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie – the professional-managerial class, the intellectual class, and the counter-revolutionaries, in a weak, soft, and feminized way. In contrast, post-socialist art feminized manual labor (e.g. migrant workers) and masculinized mental labor (e.g. the CEOs of transnational business company).*
tempered (小資是怎样炼成的) by the forces of global capital and the post-socialist party-state.

By engaging with cinema, documentary, fashion shows, commercial advertisements and art exhibitions, the second part of the project uses fashion – understood as consumer commodity and artistic production – to address Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist periods. I examine the relationship between ready-to-wear, haute couture, media, consumption, history, and memory. With acute attention to films such as Xie Tieli’s Never Forget (1964), Huang Zumo’s Romance on Lushan (1980), Qi Xingjia’s Red Dress is in Fashion (1984), and Jia Zhangke’s Useless (2007), I suggest that the representation of fashion and consumption in Chinese cinema, documentary, and new media is a privileged site for deciphering otherwise imperceptible meanings of class, ideology, and history in the formation of the Chinese middle class subject.4 The third part of the project attends to the repressed underside of consumer culture: rubbish. This project reorients our understanding of socialist and

4 Indeed, it is impossible to appreciate the middle-class discourse of fashion and feminized consumption without a serious interrogation of culture, ideology, and class. For example, young women’s consumption of fashion should be considered as a specific construct rooted in the ideology of the new middle class. I describe how the culture of the new Chinese middle class is simultaneously concealed and revealed in fashion and consumption.
post-socialist China, seeing them as underpinned by the contradictions emblematized in the Chinese middle class.

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I would like to draw my reader’s attention to the Chinese middle class and its relation to other social classes in contemporary China. I use the discussion among Wang Dan (王丹), Li Minqi (李民骐), and Wang Chaohua (王超华) to illustrate my point: that the Chinese middle class (or what Marxists call the petty bourgeoisie) is structurally dependent on the national and transnational bourgeoisie and the post-socialist party-state. In March 1999, Wang Dan, Li Minqi, and Wang Chaohua, the former student participants of the June fourth Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, spoke in a forum called “A Dialogue on the Future of China.” They shared their views about the radical economic, political, social, and cultural transformations of post-socialist China.⁵ The moderator Leo Ou-fan Lee (李欧梵) asked them to respond to the question of whether it is “realistic to pin most hopes for the future of democracy in China on an emerging

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middle class.” Their responses allow us to have a glimpse of the complex social structure of contemporary China.

In the beginning, Wang Dan identified the Chinese middle class as what I call the “bureaucratic bourgeoisie.” He said: “[The social scientist] He Qinglian has shown the way state properties were divided up by these people. They secretly acquired assets through their power, then cut their official connections, took off their red hats and changed the property into their own private firms” (325-6). Since their political position is closely intertwined with their economic and material interests, Wang Dan reasoned that this stratum is highly invested in maintaining the existing social order and will not move in the democratic direction. While Li Minqi agreed with Wang Dan’s claim that the bureaucratic bourgeoisie will not provide any substantial contribution to the democratic movement in China, he was hesitant to accept Wang Dan’s definition of the middle class. He asked if such a concept should be used to refer to the private capitalistic class, or the professionals and intellectuals, within the Chinese context (326).

Concurring with Wang Dan’s definition, Wang Chaohua also identified the Chinese middle class as the bureaucratic capitalists who converted public property to private wealth. She added to the discussion by pointing out the distinction between the bourgeois class whose members own capital or have direct control of the means of production, and the professionals and intellectuals who perform mental labor. She
pointed out that “the historic bourgeoisie of early modern Europe is not the same kind of force as the middle-income class in America today, buying cars and houses” (326). If the bureaucratic bourgeoisie’s investment in their material interests prevents them from embracing democracy, similarly, it is unlikely that the private capitalistic class will become a devoured supporter of liberal democracy. Perceptively, Li Minqi underlined the contradictory character of the private capitalistic class’ relation to the bureaucratic capitalistic class. On the one hand, the private capitalistic class opposes the bureaucratic capitalistic class and seeks to share in political power. On the other hand, the private capitalistic class is hesitant to oppose the bureaucratic capitalistic class because the private bourgeoisie needs the existing political dictatorship to exploit labor, create surplus value, and generate profits in the production and exchange processes (326-7). Wang Chaohua replied by emphasizing the fact that the local private entrepreneurs’ ideology has not been fully constituted yet (327). But Li Minqi intervened by indicating that even if the latter is imbued with a coherent set of ideologies and is transformed from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself, still, it is implausible that the Chinese democratic movement will be led or carried out by members of this class. Li Minqi explained: “Historically, it has not been unusual for clearly defined private property to coexist with political dictatorship, so even a very moderate hope for a progressive middle class in China might prove unrealistic” (327). In other words, there is no causal and direct relationship among capitalism, the middle class (or the private entrepreneur),
and democracy. It is possible for capitalism and the middle class to coexist with political dictatorship.

To be sure, Wang Dan, Li Minqi, and Wang Chaohua maintained conflicting perspectives with regards to the democratic potential of the Chinese middle class. The liberal Wang Dan believed in the ideology of the free market and thought that the bureaucratic bourgeoisie does not have any significant democratic potential. The new left and critical intellectual Li Minqi pointed out the limitation of the free market ideology and added that the private bourgeoisie will not be the primary agent of the democratic movement either. Wang Chaohua brought up the professional-managerial class, generally called the middle class, who performs mental labor rather than manual labor. But she did not express her view concerning the democratic potential of this class.

To what extent can their divergent viewpoints be reconciled? Following the Marxist tradition, the theoretical model I propose is as follows: There are two major contending classes – the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the proletariat – that exist in hierarchal and antagonistic relations with each other. The bourgeoisie can be subdivided into the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the private bourgeoisie. The private bourgeoisie can be subdivided into the transnational bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie, which is not a class but a class-fraction, is structurally dependent on
the private bourgeoisie, including the transnational and national bourgeoisie, and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. There are two kinds of petty bourgeoisie in post-socialist China: the old petty bourgeoisie (the shop-keeper) and the new petty bourgeoisie (the white collar worker). The middle-income class that Wang Chaohua brought up belongs to the latter.

Let’s focus on the bourgeoisie first. Roughly speaking, there are two kinds of bourgeoisie: the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the private bourgeoisie. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie refers to those governmental officials who have political power in the post-socialist party-state system. It is said that they, through undemocratic means, convert the collectively owned properties (公有) to state owned assets (国有), and then to private possessions (私有). So Wang Dan is right to feel pessimistic that this class will not be interested in democratizing and decentralizing its economic and political power to the people. The private bourgeoisie – comprising of the national and the transnational bourgeoisie – is not part of the ruling class and does not have political power. This class makes money by exploiting labor. To do this, it needs the help from the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. So Li Minqi is correct to reason that this class, similarly, is not likely to support liberal democracy. Such a view can also be confirmed by Cheng Xiaonong (程晓农), who said that “In today’s China, there are two kinds of middle class: the bureaucrats within the communist party, and those who do business with the communist party.
Once the latter group of people has become wealthy, what they want to do first is to join the party, and second, to become officials within the party and wear the ‘red hats.’”

According to Cheng, these businessmen, who collaborate with the party, are not interested in promoting democracy and freedom.

Now, we can proceed to an analysis of the petty bourgeoisie. In post-socialist China, roughly speaking, there are two kinds of petty bourgeoisie: the old petty bourgeoisie and the new petty bourgeoisie. The old petty bourgeoisie have some control over the means of production. In some cases, it relies on family labor; and in other cases, it hires a few laborers to help out due to the small size of its business. Indeed, the figure of the shop-keeper is the personification of the old petty bourgeoisie. In post-socialist China, the figure of the “getihu” (个体户) – the individual unit – emerged onto the social scene in the 1980s. It referred to individual businessmen and self-employed shop-owners in the early stage of China’s economic reforms. Contemporary Chinese films, such as Zhang Liang’s *Yamaha yudang* (张良: 雅马哈鱼档) (1984), Xu Tongjun’s *Zhenzhen de fawu* (珍珍的发屋) (1987), Wang Binglin’s *Erzi kaidian* (王秉林: 二子开店) (1987), Chen Peisi and Ding Xuan’s *Yelia kaigeting* (Father and Son Open a Bar) (陈佩斯, 丁暄: 爷俩开歌厅) (1992), Zhang Liang’s *Nvjie* (张良: 女人街), Huo Jianqi’s *Shenghuoxiu* (Life Show) (霍建起: 生活秀) (2002), Feng Gong’s *Xinji chibuliao redoufu* (Eat Hot Tofu Slowly) (冯巩: 心急吃不了热豆腐) (2005), articulated and gave expressions to the
lived experience of the “getihu.” While some “getihu” managed to make some money to become “wanyuanhu” (万元户) – the ten-thousand yuan unit – a strange phenomenon called “the reversal of brain and body” (脑体倒挂) occurred in China in the 1980s. This phrase referred to the fact that with the same input of labor power, what one could earn through manual labor exceeded what one could earn through mental labor. I would like to quote one of the popular sayings at that time: “Repairing the brain [i.e. being a brain surgeon] is not as good as shaving the head [i.e. being a barber] (or, holding a scalpel is not as good as holding a shaving blade). Researching on nuclear bombs is not as good as selling tea-leaves eggs” (修大脑的不如剃头的 (拿手术刀的不如拿剃头刀的), 搞导弹的不如卖茶叶蛋的). This popular saying testified to the widespread “xiahai” (下海) – leaving the work-unit and entering the business world – sentiment in the 1980s.

At this point, it is worthwhile to ask what the relationship between the old petty bourgeoisie – the “getihu” – and the bourgeoisie can be. It can be expected that the old petty bourgeoisie would like to climb up the social ladder to become the (national) bourgeoisie. The old petty bourgeoisie is interested in expanding its business and obtaining more control of capital and the means of production. (True, it is possible that individual members of the old petty bourgeoisie may rise to become the private bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, due to the demand of scientific knowledge and technological skills in the global capitalistic and financial economy, it is unlikely that the old petty bourgeoisie can become the reserve army of the bourgeoisie or the ruling class. In other
words, it cannot be the dominant subject of Chinese history in global capitalism.) Critical of the monopoly of the transnational bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, the old petty bourgeoisie may demand the post-socialist party-state to intervene in the market, so that small- and medium-sized enterprises (中小企业) can survive amidst the fierce competitions with the big enterprises.

During her conversation with Li Minqi and Wang Dan, Wang Chaohua brought up the question of “the American middle-income class who buy cars and houses.” What are we going to do with the middle-income class, or simply the middle class? In fact, the latter is a concept of bourgeois sociology (though the word “class” is used). This discourse sees social structure and hierarchy as independent, non-relational, and non-antagonistic, which is different from the Marxist view of social class. For Marxism, class is not defined by consumption, but by production and one’s structural position in relation to capital. According to Marxism, class is relational and, in times of crisis, antagonistic. Now, we can focus on the new petty bourgeoisie, which is commonly called the white collar, the professional-managerial class, or most commonly, the middle class. In the following, I use the “new petty bourgeoisie” and the “middle class” interchangeably. For the sake of consistency (and database searchability), I will mostly use the middle class to describe my subject of investigation. However, it does not mean that my work has deviated from the principles and spirits of cultural Marxism. Unlike
the bourgeoisie (and to some extent, the old petty bourgeoisie), the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) does not own capital, or have direct control over the means of production. The middle class is part of the salaried class. It sells its own labor power in the market in exchange for wages. It is in this sense that the middle class is similar to the working class. In fact, it is the working class. But unlike the industrialized working class, the middle class does not perform manual or physical labor, but intellectual and mental labor. In post-socialist China, the middle class encompasses the white collar, the professional-managerial class, including the intellectual. The figure of the white collar (白领) worker is the representative figure of the middle class. Such a subject entered the social scene in the 1990s. After Deng Xiaoping had travelled to southern China to give his neoliberal blessings to the country in 1992, the middle class expanded rapidly. After China had become an official member of the World Trade Organization in the late 2000 and early 2001, the middle class flourished. The middle class is structurally dependent on the post-socialist party-state and global capital.

Our next question is: what is the relationship between the middle class – including the professionals and the intellectuals – and the bourgeoisie – including the private bourgeoisie and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie? In some ways, the Chinese middle class can be considered as the comprador figure – a particular stratum of the colonized population who serve the colonizer – in the metropole or colony in the age of
imperialism and empire. Indeed, the middle class is not a stable, self-determining, and autonomous class, but a class-fraction whose existence is structurally dependent on the private bourgeoisie (including the national bourgeoisie and the transnational bourgeoisie) and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Its parasitical existence explains why the Chinese middle class is a weak and unstable social formation. If transnational capital withdraws from China, the Chinese middle class is going to shrink considerably. (Indeed, this was already the case for the Japanese middle class since the economic crisis in the country in 1991. The sociological theorization of the “M-shape” society and the “downward-sliding society” (下流社会) in the Japanese academy can testify to it.) Moreover, if the post-socialist party-state makes any drastic changes to the country’s economic, political, and social policies, such as inflating the prices of residential real estate, or changing the exchange rates between the Chinese (RMB) and the U.S. (dollars)

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While the comprador class refers to refer to a particular stratum of the colonized population in the age of imperialism, it is debatable how it is useful to articulate the Chinese petty bourgeoisie’s structural dependence on transnational capital and the bureaucratic post-socialist party-state within the context of global capitalism.

Two problems: First, with the rise of the joint ventures between transnational and national companies (it is a legal requirement for non-local companies to establish local business partnerships if the former would like to start business in China), it is doubtful if the national bourgeoisie as a class really exists independently, and if it is the case, to what extent it has a strong presence in transnational economic trade. Second, the word “dependence” is not specific enough. The new petty bourgeoisie is structurally dependent on transnational capital and bureaucratic party-state power. But it is possible to counter my argument by asking which class is not dependent on the transnational capital and bureaucratic party-state.
currencies, the Chinese middle class will reduce in size noticeably. In short, this middle class realizes its historicity in times of crisis.

We can continue to do more theoretical work to explore the making of the Chinese middle class subjectivity. In an endnote in the second version of “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1937), Walter Benjamin makes the distinction between the ideologies of the petty bourgeoisie and proletariat in Germany. He calls the former the psychology of the compact petty-bourgeois mass and the latter the consciousness of the proletarian class.

The petty bourgeoisie is not a class; it is in fact only a mass. And the greater the pressure acting on it between the two antagonistic classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the more compact it becomes. In this mass the emotional element described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor. But for that very reason this compact mass forms the antithesis of the proletarian cadre, which obeys a collective ratio. In the petty-bourgeois mass, the reactive moment described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor. But precisely for that reason this compact mass with its unmediated reactions forms the antithesis of the proletarian cadre, whose actions are mediated by a task, however momentarily. Demonstrations by the compact mass thus always have a panicked quality – whether they give vent to war fever, hatred of Jews, or the instinct for self-preservation. (129)⁸

Following Benjamin, the Chinese middle class can also be considered as a reactive class, rather than a self-affirming one. It reacts to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and to capital and labor. The subjectivity of the Chinese middle class is constituted through a process of dis-identification, rather than identification. It dis-identifies from what it is not in order to be or become what it is. The subjectivity of the Chinese middle class is constructed by means of dis-identifying itself from the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and the transnational and national bourgeoisie, and from the proletariat.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes proposes that French national identity can be considered as a “neither/nor” social formation during the Cold War era – that France was neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R., neither capitalism nor communism, and neither individualism nor collectivism.9 Barthes’ idea can be appropriated to articulate the negative impulse in the construction of Chinese middle class subjectivity. The latter is neither the bourgeoisie – the private bourgeoisie and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie – nor the proletariat. Its identity is not constituted by what it is, but by what it is not. The middle class is not a class – not a class-in-itself or class-for-itself – but a class-fraction, or a mass. In fact, we can push Barthes’ idea further to say that the negative impulse is also embedded in China’s capitalistic turn. In post-socialism, the People’s Republic of China

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is a “neither/nor” formation: neither socialism nor capitalism, but what Deng Xiaoping called “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” In response, David Harvey calls it “neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics” in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. It can also be “The People’s Republic of Capitalism.”

Here, it is useful to compare the historical formation of the old petty bourgeoisie and the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) in the U.S. and China. Roughly speaking, in the U.S., the old petty bourgeoisie and the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) came into being in the mid-19th and the mid-20th centuries respectively – almost 100 years apart. In the U.S., the rise of the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) also witnessed the fall of the old petty bourgeoisie. However, in the PRC, the emergence of the old petty bourgeoisie and the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) took place in the 1980s and the 1990s respectively – more or less at the same time. This is an example of compressed and accelerated modernity in global capitalism. However, we should not conclude that such a phenomenon is distinctively Chinese. The co-emergence of the old petty bourgeoisie and the new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) can also be observed in East Asia’s “four little dragons” economies – Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea – in the 1970s and the 1980s. The co-emergence of the old and new petty bourgeoisie (the middle class) should be attributed to the condition of global capitalism and post-modernity in East Asia.
In *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (1995), Kristin Ross argues that the new professional-managerial class can be read as an allegory of the class, racial, and national politics of in the post-WWII France. On the class level, the professional-managerial class, or the “jeune cadre” in Jacques Tati’s films, for example, has a limited extent of power – this stratum manages labor while also being an employee. On the racial and national level, the new professional-managerial class allegorizes the changing geopolitical configurations with which France was confronted in the post WWII era. While dominating Algeria, France was dominated by the U.S. Although Kristin Ross deals primarily with the French “jeune cadre,” her argument can be appropriated to describe the historical situation of the Chinese middle class in the context of global capitalism. To be sure, the Chinese middle class manages labor and enjoys some of the privileges of the boss while still being an employee punching a time clock. Both dominating and dominated, a technician and victim of the process of capital accumulation, its position is laden with tensions. Indeed, the Chinese middle class can be interpreted as representative of China’s changing political economy and class hierarchy. Its role as a dominated agent of capitalistic domination mirrors the class and national situations of post-socialist China. From the class perspective, the Chinese middle class can be considered as a comprador class in that it helps the private bourgeoisie and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie to exploit the Chinese working class for
profit. From the national perspective, China is beginning to compete with the U.S. and Europe for natural resources in Africa (e.g. China has been competing for oil in Sudan, Algeria, Angola, and Nigeria during the past ten years). Exploiting the working class in its own country and the third-world, and entering in close collaboration with the most advanced and wealthy nations in global capitalism, the contradiction of China’s capitalistic modernization can be located in the mediating role of the Chinese middle class.

However, the structural dependency of the Chinese middle class (class) and China (nation) is only one part of the contradiction. The other side of the contradiction is that China is becoming more powerful. Here, a curious contradiction can be observed: In terms of geopolitical economy, China is structurally dependent on the U.S., but at the same time China is gaining power over the U.S.\(^{10}\) In his essay, “China’s Rise in Global Economy,” Raymond Lotta writes:

The dynamics of China’s rise is complex and contradictory, characterized by both dependency and growing economic strength. China is dependent on foreign capital and foreign markets. But China has also emerged as world economic power, a center of world manufacturing. It has accumulated vast foreign reserves, and gained considerable financial leverage – increasingly over the

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\(^{10}\) I want to thank Simon Milnes for pointing out that what is at stake is the way in which China makes use of the U.S.-led global financial system, and in turn, the impact of China on the U.S. is really the impact of China on the rest of the world.
dollar. It is more aggressively seeking markets in the third world and exporting capital beyond its borders. Stepping back, what seems to be guiding the Chinese ruling class is a long-term, strategic, and competitive orientation to diversify and fortify a domestically rotted industrial base, to extend the country’s international economic and financial reach, and to strengthen military capabilities but to do so without provoking direct showdowns with US imperialism. (33)

While Lotta has offered a powerful diagnosis from the perspective of political economy, what is our cultural studies response to such geopolitical and economic reconfigurations? For those of us working in the field of modern Chinese humanities, we need to ask to what extent area studies, and other theoretical discourses, such as Marxist theory, gender and sexuality studies, and postcolonial and ethnic studies, can offer useful conceptual frameworks and analytical tools to capture the global rise of China, the middle class, and consumer culture in the early 21st century.

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The organization of the dissertation is as follows:
Part I: Middle Class Subjectivity

Introduction: The Objective Dimension of the Chinese Petty Bourgeoisie

Chapter 1: The Subjective Dimension of the Chinese Petty Bourgeoisie

Part II: Fashion and Consumer Culture

Chapter 2: Fashion as Consumer Commodity (1960s)

Chapter 3: Fashion as Consumer Commodity (1980s)

Chapter 4: Fashion as Consumer Commodity (2000s)

Chapter 5: Fashion as Art (2000s)

Part III: The Repressed Underside of Fashion and Consumption

Chapter 6: Rubbish

Appendix: A Brief History of Fashion in the Late 1970s and Early 1980s

Part I: Middle Class Subjectivity

While the Introduction focuses on the objective, political-economic, and material dimensions of the formation of the Chinese middle class subjectivity, Chapter 1 investigates the subjective, cultural, and ideological dimensions of such a formation. Focusing on how the Chinese habituate themselves to the discursive middle-class
subject position, I show that they learn to express their sensibility by familiarizing themselves with contemporary popular culture, such as music, cinema, television, fashion, and fiction, produced in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the U.S., Japan, and China. This chapter is called “Learning to Love Again: The Libidinal and the Political in Huang Zumo’s Film Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980).” It engages with Huang Zumo’s film Romance on Lushan (黄祖模：庐山恋) (1980) to address the culture of sentiment in contemporary China. I examine how the Chinese petty bourgeoisie’s (小资产阶级) subjection to capitalistic modernization is shown through the acquisition of a new kind of sensibility – romantic love. Articulating the changing relationship between the political and the libidinal from the Cultural Revolution to the post-Cultural Revolution periods, I argue that the film is as much about politics as it is about romantic love and

11 For example, the mainland Chinese were used to listening to revolutionary songs like “We Are the Successors of Communism” (我們是共產主義的接班人), “We the Workers Have Power” (咱們工人有力量), and “Glory to the Red Sun” (紅太陽頌). In contrast, the popular music from Taiwan, such as Teresa Teng’s (邓丽君) “The Moon Represents my Heart” (月亮代表我的心), “Tianmimi” (甜蜜蜜), and “When Will You Return?” (何时君再来), decidedly different in terms of content and form from its Chinese counterpart, provided a new way for the young generation in China to express themselves. What was particularly attractive about Teresa Teng’s music was that it conveyed personal feelings like love, nostalgia, sadness, sorrow, and other feminized sentiments, amidst the backdrop of the all-too-familiar motifs of the heroism of the proletariat and the evils of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism in Mao’s China. It is in this context that we can appreciate why Teresa Teng – the “Little Deng” (小邓) – was so popular in mainland China. The popular saying is this: “By day Deng Xiaoping rules; by night Deng Lijun (Teresa Teng) rules.” Similarly, according to Jia Zhangke, Taiwanese new wave cinema, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s film, Boys From Fengkuei (侯孝贤: 风柜来的人) (1983), stressing on the “I” (individual experience), was distinctly different from the Cultural Revolution model operas, which emphasized the “we” (collective experience).
fashionable clothes. I show that the cinematic representation of love and fashion – all seemingly to be apolitical – is profoundly political and is imbued with political ideologies. In other words, politics is not the background of the story, but the foreground of it. The love story is political through and through. Focusing on the libidinal, the first reading focuses on the representation of romantic love. Focusing on the political, the second reading emphasizes how romantic love allegorizes politics in post-socialist China.12

Part II: Fashion and Consumer Culture

While the first part of my project (introduction and chapter 1) investigates the competing forces – historical, political-economic, and cultural – that contribute to the making of the Chinese middle class subjectivity, the second part (chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5) uses fashion as an anchoring point to provide a critique of Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist context. Indeed, the word “fashion” has several meanings. In English, fashion can mean clothes (服裝, 時裝): ready-to-wear is often regarded as

12 In fact, there is a sequel to Huang Zumo’s Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980). It is called Love (or Romance) on Lushan Mountain 2010, or Love is the Last Word (庐山恋 2010) (2010), produced in commemoration of the release of Romance on Lushan Mountain thirty years ago. The film was directed by Zhang Yu (张瑜), who played the role of Zhou Yun (周筠) in Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980). The middle-aged Zhang Yu also played the role of Zhou Yun’s mother in Love is the Last Word.
consumer commodity and haute couture is often appreciated as high art or avant-garde art. Fashion can also be perceived as a temporal register, as in trend and à la mode (時尚, 時髦, 流行). By using the quote “clothing is a form of memory; it is also a historical scroll that one wears on one’s body” (服裝是一種記憶, 也是一個穿在身上的歷史畫卷)\(^\text{13}\) as a point of departure, the following chapters attend to the complexly mediated relationship between fashion and consumption, class and ideology, and history and memory, within the contexts of Chinese socialism and post-socialism.

At this point, let me introduce the Chinese concept of “zhuang” (裝) to enrich the discussion of fashion and consumer culture. Indeed, the Chinese word “zhuang” – as a subject or an object (a thing) and a verb (an action) – has multiple meanings. First, it has to do with the surface, such as packaging (“baozhuang”) (包裝), decoration, adornment, and ornament (“zhuangshi”) (裝飾), and renovation (“zhuangxiu”) (裝修). “Zhuang” can be combined with “fu” (uniform) (服) and “shi” (time) (時) to refer to clothes (“fuzhuang”) (服裝) and fashion (“shizhuang”) (時裝). For example, during the socialist period, Chinese people wore the “zhongshanzhuang” (中山裝) that is the Mao suit or the Sun Yat-sen uniform. Some of them wore “junzhuang” (military uniform) (軍裝) too. Moreover, “zhuang” can be combined with “hua” (化) to mean makeup, as in

\(^\text{13}\) The quote is from [走过三十年“穿”出美丽新时代](http://news.cctv.com/china/20081212/109536.shtml)

“huazhuang” (化装). The act of putting on or applying makeup is “shangzhuang” (上装) and the act of removing make-up is “xiezhuang” (卸装). In addition, “zhuang” can be combined with “xiang” to mean “zhuangxiang” (mannerism) (装相) – mannerism is also about surface and façade. Fashion is definitely a form of “zhuang.” Second, “zhuang” can mean to pack, to load, to stuff inside, to install, and to constitute the core, as in “zhuangzai” (装载), “zhuangxie” (装卸), “zhuangzhi” (装置), and “anzhuang” (安装). For our purpose, “zhuang” can be creatively appropriated to refer to the act of constituting middle class subjectivity (through fashion and consumption, for instance). Third, “zhuang” can mean to act, to pose, to simulate, to pretend, to fake, to feign, to mask, to conceal, to disguise, and to camouflage, as in “zhuangban” (装扮), “zhuangzuo” (装作), “jiazhuang” (假装), “weizhuang” (偽装), “zhuangmuzuoyang” (装模作樣), and “zhuangqiangzuoshi” (装腔作勢). In other words, “zhuang” is about ideology (falsehood). But at the same time, “zhuang” has the implication of fantasy. “Zhuang” can then be interpreted as what Fredric Jameson calls “the dialectic of ideology and utopian impulse” in mass and popular culture (e.g. fashion and cinema).

My work contributes to the current conversations about fashion, consumption, media cultures, and socialist and post-socialist China by showing how stories about fashion and consumption reveal the politics of class, class consciousness, ideology, and the mode of production. Following the interpretive strategies that Fredric Jameson
proposes in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), I consider fashion (and stories about fashion) as a socially symbolic act. It is through the representation of fashion and consumption in Chinese visual culture, such as cinema, documentary, and new digital media, that the otherwise imperceptible politics of class, ideology, history, and memory is registered, worked out, and reconciled.\(^\text{14}\)

The organization of the second part of the dissertation is as follows: Chapters 2, 3 and 4 examine the complex relationship among fashion (ready-to-wear), consumption, and history. The emphasis is placed on the politics of Chinese history in the 1960s (chapter 2), the 1980s (chapter 3), and the 2000s (chapter 4). Chapter 5 explores the mediations between fashion (haute couture), consumption, and memory in the 2000s.

\(^\text{14}\) The way I present my arguments in these chapters is consistent with the three levels of interpretation proposed by Fredric Jameson in Part III of the “On Interpretation” chapter in *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell UP, 1981). According to Jameson, the first level is political history. When he uses the word “history,” he means the chronicle-like sequence of happenings and punctual events in time. The second level is the social, and the smallest unit of class langue is ideologeme. The third level is the mode of production. Jameson produces the concept of the ideology of form to study the mode of production. He considers form as sediment content, carrying with it latent ideological message which is not the same as the manifest message. “[Formal] specification and description can, in a given […] text, be transformed into the detection of a host of distinct [formal] messages – some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory, but all together projecting a formal conjuncture through which the ‘conjuncture’ of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be detected and allegorically articulated” (99).
Chapter 2 is called “Wearing Class Struggle, Putting on Ideology: Fashion, Consumption, and History in Xie Tieli’s Film Never Forget (1964).” In this chapter, I examine the representation of the consumption of a good-quality suit (毛料子制服/料子服) in Xie Tieli’s film Never Forget (谢铁骊:千万不要忘记) (1964). I show that the filmic representation of fashion consumption reveals the historical contradictions with which Chinese socialism was confronted at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

Chapter 3, “Mao’s Children are Wearing Fashion!” continues the conversation on fashion, consumption, and history. The first part of this chapter looks at the representation of the red dress (紅裙子) in Qi Xingjia’s film Red Dress is in Fashion (齊興家:街上流行紅裙子) (1984). I show how fashion and consumption unravel the historical contradictions of China’s economic reforms and opening up in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The second part of the chapter engages with the feminist debate and discussion about femininity in woman’s fashion. According to the revisionist narrative, since Chinese women were asked to wear the masculinized clothes of the workers, peasants, and soldiers in the socialist era, Maoism denied their natural femininity, turning them into masculine or genderless beings. In the post-socialist period, however, Chinese women were encouraged to express their femininity and develop their

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15 Lu Xiaoya’s film The Girl in Red (陆小雅: 红衣少女) (1984), an adaptation of Tie Ning’s story, “A Red Shirt without Buttons” (铁凝: 没有钮扣的红衬衫), also articulates similar problems.
consciousness as gendered beings through fashion and make-up. I will confront the revisionist argument by showing its contradictions and limitations.

Chapter 4 follows the previous chapters’ engagement with fashion and cinema to address Chinese consumer culture in the post-socialist period. In “Class, Gender, Fantasy, and Globalization in Jia Zhangke’s Film Shiije (The World) (贾樟柯:世界) (2004),” I explore the complexly mediated relationships among fashion and consumption, class, in particular the migrant worker, and ideology, as well as politics and history. By analyzing the representation of class, gender, fashion, consumption, and global capitalism in the film, I argue that the representation of the woman migrant worker, dressed in lavish and extravagant costumes and performing exotic dances for the tourists in Beijing’s World Park, can also be considered as a productive site for deciphering the contradictions of China’s rise on the global stage in the early 21st century. Such representation enables us to see that the world is located at the disjuncture between fantasy and reality.

Chapter 5, “Dirty Fashion,” engages with the relationship between haute couture, consumption, and memory. The first part of the chapter introduces a young and aspiring fashion designer Ma Ke (馬可), and her latest fashion line Wuyong (Useless) (無用) (2007). I explain how Ma Ke rebels against the loss of the emotional relationship
between the maker and the user of clothing commodities in the age of industrialized mass production and consumption. To help the apparel recover its lost memory, Ma Ke buries the fashion she designs under soil for some time. When the garment is unearthed, she reasons, it will find itself imbued with the imprint of the time and space of its soil. Presented at Paris Fashion Week in February 2007, Ma Ke’s haute couture *Useless* was meant to be a critique of consumer culture. The second part of the chapter uses Jia Zhangke’s digital-video documentary *Useless* (2007), a dialogue with Ma Ke’s design and fashion show, to further explore how consumption contributes to the erasure of memory. I show that Jia Zhangke brings a new level of complexity to the artist’s anti-consumption gesture through the medium of film. In particular, the director uses the cinematic technique of montage to comment on Ma Ke’s fashion. While Jia Zhangke agrees with Ma Ke’s fashion philosophy but thinks her couture is not able to fulfill the objective she sets out to achieve in the first place, I show how the director uses the image to recover the loss of the sense of time in consumption.

**Part III: The Repressed Underside of Consumer Culture**

Continuing the conversations about fashion, consumption, and temporality, Chapter 6 attends to the repressed underside of Chinese consumer culture. I focus on one particular aspect of such a totalizing process: disposal and rubbish (i.e. what comes
after consumption). I ask how the representation of rubbish and the scavenger in Wang Jiuliang’s documentary *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (王久良: 垃圾围城) (2011) can be treated as a productive site for political thinking. With reference to the theories of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, and Fredric Jameson, I approach the figuration of rubbish from different angles – as the repressed and the possibility of its return in the form of the uncanny, as the abject, and as the dialectic of ideology and utopian impulse. Finally, I invoke Walter Benjamin’s writing about history – the angel of history, constellation and dialectical image – to contemplate the temporality of rubbish in relation to the global rise of China, the Chinese middle class, and consumer culture.

The Appendix, entitled “Snapshots: A Very Brief History of Chinese Fashion in the Late 1970s and Early 1980s,” offers a powerpoint-like presentation of the key moments of the Chinese fashion discourse in the beginning of the country’s economic reforms. This part enriches and deepens our understanding of the variety of fashion commodities (e.g. Pierre Cardin’s visit to China in 1979, “toad-eyed sunglasses,”

16 For example, rubbish is produced by Chinese consumer culture as much as the proletariat is produced by the capitalistic mode of production. Similar to the multitude, rubbish is inherently collective. Since rubbish is not countable, it is not possible to speak of one or two or three rubbish(es), only a pile of rubbish. Rubbish is also intrinsically equal and democratic. It is not possible to say an obsolete plastic bag is more rubbish than industrial waste; and similarly, it is not possible to say that an old-fashioned iPod is less rubbish than the leftover of last night’s dinner. Instead, they are equally rubbish.
“panda-eyed sunglasses,” and bell-bottomed trousers) presented to the young Chinese generation after the end of the Cultural Revolution.
Chapter 1
Learning to Love Again: The Libidinal and the Political in Huang Zumo’s Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980)

In this chapter, my objective is to examine the specific ways in which sentiment, in particular romantic love, is constitutive of the making of new class relations in post-socialist China. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1972), Michael Foucault writes: “We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history.” By taking Foucault’s thought-provoking statement as a point of departure, this chapter proposes that through the study of the politics, history, and culture of sentiment, we will obtain a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the workings of global capitalism and class formations in post-socialist China.

My research on economic and class sentiment in post-socialist China has been inspired by recent works on the history of sentiment in the making of racialized power relations in (post-) colonial studies. The works on compassionate imperialism, or what

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1 This chapter focuses on romantic love. But it is possible to examine how other kinds of sentiments, such as sympathy, compassion, pity, benevolence, tolerance, humanitarianism, humiliation, nostalgia, and melancholy are historically constitutive of the transformations of China’s class relations and ideologies.
Ann Stoler calls “affective states,” or what Amit Rai calls “the rule of sympathy,” tries to connect the study of sentiment to the study of racialized power relations in colonial empires. For instance, sympathy, which seemed to be a politically disengaged entity, helps secure imperial rule in an active way. Although the nineteenth century Europeans’ sympathy for the empire’s downtrodden subjects began with a humanitarian and anti-colonial intention, their sympathy ended up re-inscribing and reinforcing the unequal racialized power relations they set out to denounce in the first place. In other words, “sympathy conferred distance, required the inequalities of position, and bolstered social hierarchies.” Sympathy could not work without abolishing the distance between the subject and the object. Inspired by recent feminist scholarship on the sentimental politics of race, my work investigates how sentiment is integral to the founding and the funding of unequal class relations and social hierarchies in post-socialist China.

My work examines how the gendered, sexualized, and sentimental politics of class hierarchies and social inequalities are historically constituted through the interlocking systems of the mode of production on the one hand, and the culture, history and politics of gendered and sexualized sentiments on the other. My work also looks at how the production, circulation, distribution, and exchange of sentiment can consolidate and subvert the class categories of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, and the proletariat. Indeed, what interests me is the sentimental construction of class subjectivities in post-socialist China. By considering sentiment as an ideological construct, my work suggests that the ways in which the Chinese class subjects feel in their everyday lives are not self-determining or autonomous, but instead, they are actively produced, modified, and reworked by the complex technologies of global capitalism and post-socialist governmentality. Different class subjects have been trained and educated by global capital and the post-socialist party-state to feel, desire, imagine, dream, and fantasize in a way not immune from ideologies.

During the past twenty years, inspired by Michel Foucault’s provocative statement, “sexuality is an especially dense transfer point for relations of power,” students of (post-)colonial studies have tried to prove that “sexuality is indeed a dense transfer point of relations of imperial power.” They manage to show that it is through the troubled space of sex and sexuality that the racialized colonial relations are constantly
reworked and re-made. This kind of research attends to the connection between the sexual, intimate, and carnal relationship on the one hand, and the complex and intricate technologies of the racialized colonial power on the other. However, such a theoretical move forecloses and excludes the study of other domains of the sentimental that are not necessarily or directly related to the sexual as such. Recently, students of (post-)colonial studies have started to interrogate how the sentimental can produce and reproduce the racialized categories of the colonizer and the colonized. They have begun to examine how different kinds of imperial sentiments can at some times sustain, and at other times undermine, racialized colonial power. They argue that “sentiment is a dense transfer point of relations of racialized imperial power.” My work will draw on the strengths of their analyses, but will go beyond their observation by suggesting that “sentiment is a dense transfer point for the construction of class relations in post-socialist China.” In this chapter, by focusing on the representation of “aiqing” (爱情) (romantic love) in contemporary Chinese cinema, I argue that “romantic love is a dense transfer point for the making of class relations and ideological formations in post-socialist China.” In the 1980s, the petty bourgeoisie’s subjection to modernization is shown through the acquisition of a new kind of sensibility – romantic love.
My contribution to the study of sentiment, class, and ideology can be presented in this way:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michel Foucault</th>
<th>Sexuality is a dense transfer point for relations of power</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postcolonial Theories and Foucault</td>
<td>Sexuality is a dense transfer point for racial relations of imperial power</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Directions in Postcolonial Theories</td>
<td>Sentiment is a dense transfer point for racial relations of imperial power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking the Post-Socialist Through the Post-Colonial</td>
<td>Sentiment is a dense transfer point for the construction of class relations in post-socialist China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking through Love</td>
<td>Love is a dense transfer point for the transformation of class relations and ideologies in post-socialist China</td>
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In this chapter, I engage with Huang Zumo’s film *Lushanlian* (Romance on Lushan Mountain) (黄祖模: 庐山恋) (1980) to examine the changing representation of romantic love and its complex relationship to class and ideology in post-socialist China in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Diverging from the literature and film produced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which were populated with images of proletarian heroism, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* features the love story between the

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3 The title Romance on Lushan Mountain has been translated in different ways. For example, it has been translated as Love on Lushan Mountain. And “Lushan Mountain” has also been translated as “Lu Mountain,” or “Mountain Lushan,” or “Mt. Lushan.” Also, there is a remake of Romance on Lushan Mountain recently. The 2010 version of Romance on Lushan Mountain, produced in commemoration of its release 30 years ago, was directed by Zhang Yu (张瑜), who played the role of Zhou Yun (周筠) in Romance on Lushan Mountain (1980). In Lushanlian 2010 (Love is the Last Word) (庐山恋 2010), the middle-aged Zhang Yu played the role of Zhou Yun’s mother.
handsome and promising young man Geng Hua (耿桦) and the pretty and fashionably-dressed Zhou Yun on Lushan Mountain in China’s Jiangxi Province. Indeed, Romance on Lushan Mountain is a petty bourgeois (小资) (rather than a proletarian) story, not only because the main characters belong to the intellectual and professional class (i.e. the petty bourgeoisie), but also because the story deals with “petty” and “trivial” things like forbidden love and petty bourgeois sensibility (小资情调), and “superficial” things like fashionable clothes, rather than serious political narratives such as class struggle, socialist construction, national liberation, and international solidarity. To be sure, Romance on Lushan Mountain is primarily concerned with consumption, desire, pleasure, and play. It is about consumption and leisure, rather than production and labor. The actor Guo Kaimin (郭凯敏), who played the role of Geng Hua, is correct to characterize Romance on Lushan Mountain as a film about the natural scenery of Lushan Mountain (风光片), a film about romantic love (爱情片), and a film about fashion (服装片).

Indeed, when the audience was watching Romance on Lushan Mountain, they were consuming, at least visually, the beautiful landscape of the mountain. In many ways, the film can be seen as a travel guide or magazine. It presents to the viewer a number of famous scenic spots and tourist attractions on the mountain, such as the “Bailudongshuyuan”/“The White Deer Cave Academy” (白鹿洞书院), “Huajing”/“Flower Path” (花径), “Yubeiting”/“Imperial Pavilion” (御碑亭), “Xianrendong”/“Immortals

When the audience was watching Romance on Lushan Mountain, they were also consuming the love story between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun. In order to feel and appreciate how striking the representation of romantic love was in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we need to understand the political background against which the Romeo-and-Juliet-like love story (with a happy ending though) surfaced. In contrast to the pre-socialist and pre-revolutionary periods (such as the May fourth cultural movement), in which the romantic love between individuals were pitted against the subordination of women in oppressive feudal families, romantic love was radically critiqued during the most intense periods of the Cultural Revolution. At that time, stories in literature and
cinema were mostly concerned with revolutionary class politics and ideological critique. Stories about romantic love – especially those that dealt with love for love’s sake without any relationship to revolutionary politics – were sometimes regarded as (petty) bourgeois and counter-revolutionary, and were rarely found. Even when romantic love appeared in the narrative, often times it was subsumed, transferred, or in the language of Freudian psychoanalysis, sublimated, by the political discourse of class oppression, political struggle, and world revolution. Other times it was redirected toward what Jacques Lacan calls “the big Other” – Chairman Mao, the Communist Party, the nation, the people, and the masses. It could also be channeled toward the proletarian subject such as the workers, the peasants, and the military soldiers. It is in this sense that Cultural Revolution literature and film were characterized by the sublimation of love by politics.

But the situation began to change after the end of the Cultural Revolution. In Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China (2004), Chris Berry pursues the meticulous job of counting the number of Chinese films that presented romantic love in the post-Cultural Revolution period. According to Berry’s statistics: 0 out of 15 Chinese films produced in 1976 and 1977 featured love; 2 out of 11 films produced in 1978 presented love; 5 out of 14 films produced in 1979 showcased love; and 16 out of 23 films produced in 1980, and 15 out of 18 films produced in 1981, displayed love. The post-revolutionary historical
moment witnessed the de-sublimation of love in Chinese cultural productions. Zhang Jie’s novel Love Cannot Be Forgotten (张洁: 爱,是不能忘记的) is a prominent example. Zhang Qi and Li Yalin’s film Bei Aiqing Yiwang de jiaoluo (The Corner Forgotten by Love) (张其 / 李亚林: 被爱情遗忘的角落) (1981) is another noticeable one.

When the audience was watching the film, they were also consuming, visually, the fashionable clothes that Zhou Yun and Geng Hua wear when they tour around the mountain. It is said that the fashionably dressed Zhou Yun appears in as many as 43 outfits in the course of the film! To feel the visual provocation of Romance on Lushan Mountain, we need to understand the historical circumstance against which Zhou Yun’s fashionable clothes was portrayed. It has been noted that fashion, such as women’s bell-bottomed trousers, high-heel shoes, lipstick, make-up, even long hair, was radically critiqued during the most turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. Sometimes, it was denounced as the expression of personal taste and lifestyle – petty bourgeois sensibility (小资产阶级情调). Sometimes, it was linked to counter-revolution. As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter explain in Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s (1988):

4 The fashion specialists of the film were Jin Jitai (金吉泰) and Ding Shulan (丁淑兰).
5 Fredric Jameson has briefly articulated the changing understanding of class during the course of Maoist socialism. In the third section (Digression on Maoism) in his essay, entitled “Periodizing the Sixties” (1984), he writes: “Most paradoxical and fascinating of all, however, is the unexpected and unpredictable sequel to the Sino-Soviet split itself: the new Chinese rhetoric, intent on castigating the Soviet bureaucracy as revisionistic
With the onset of the Cultural Revolution, everyone began to wear army-style green as a sign of revolutionary zeal [...] a woman’s coiffure was thought to and ‘bourgeois,’ will have the curious effect of evacuating the class content of these slogans. There is then an inevitable terminological slippage and displacement: the new binary opposite to the term “bourgeois” will no longer be “proletarian” but rather “revolutionary,” and the new qualifications for political judgments of this kind are no longer made in terms of class or party affiliation but rather in terms of personal life – your relationship to special privileges, to middle-class luxuries and dachas and managerial incomes and other perks [...] But it is important to understand how for western militants what began to emerge from this at first merely tactical and rhetorical shift was a whole new political space, a space which will come to be articulated by the slogan, “the personal is the political,” and into which – in one of the most stunning and unforeseeable of historical turns – the women’s movement will triumphantly move at the end of the decade, building a Yan’an of a new and unpredictable kind.” What is profound about Jameson’s dialectical thinking is that he manages to see the spiral-like historical movement on a global scale. Rather than give definite answers to conclude that it is good or bad, Jameson considers that what is good (i.e. class and ideological analysis) turns out to be bad (i.e. the slippage of class understanding in Maoist socialism), and through a dialectical reversal, what is bad turns out to be good (i.e. that such a slippage opens up a new political space – the personal is political – for the feminist movement.) For the latter, it is as if the message was instantly faxed or emailed by the Chinese red guards to the West in their support of the feminist social movements in the late 1960s and 1970s!

* One of the prominent examples for the critique of fashion, class, sensibility, and ideology during the most intense period of the Cultural Revolution is the story of Wang Guangmei, the wife of a top-ranking official in the Communist Party Liu Shaoqi. In an official trip to Indonesia in the mid-1960s, Wang Guangmei wore a Chinese qipao to represent the PRC. Some fractions of the red guards denounced her fashion presentation as an expression petty-bourgeois sensibility. While class and its culture had been mistaken as an expression of personal taste and lifestyle (rather than one’s social relation to capital and the means of production), how fashion might potentially bring undesirable, even harmful, consequences to socialist revolution was not adequately explained. A sound and convincing explanation of why and how was the case was lacking. In addition, it remained to be discussed if the red guards focused on the qipao as such to argue that it was an expression of petty bourgeois sensibility, or if they used her qipao (as a means) to critique Wang Guangmei’s class background (as the end).
indicate her politics, and groups of Red Guards chopped off the braids of women on the street, accusing them of politically incorrect attitudes. In such an environment, interest in fashion and adornment was regarded as bourgeois and counter-revolutionary. (42)

On the contrary, during the economic reforms and opening up period, the politics of fashion was reversed. Interestingly enough, fashion became a symbol of the success of the country’s modernization project. The fact that Chinese women (and men) were able to wear fashionable clothes was indicative of the accomplishment of socialist modernization and developmentalism. Fashion became the marker of the success of the economic policies initiated by the government.

This chapter is entitled “Learning to Love Again.” My objective is to trace the changing relationship between the libidinal (e.g. love) and the political from the Cultural Revolution to the post-Cultural Revolution periods. According to the revisionist narrative, Cultural Revolution literature and film were characterized by the sublimation of love by politics. Love dared not speak its name. On the contrary, the cultural productions in the post-revolutionary period were marked by the de-sublimation of love. Their argument is true to a certain extent. Entitled “The De-sublimation of Love,” the first part of the chapter attends to the progress of love – from sublimation in the

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revolutionary period to de-sublimation in the post-revolutionary period. In particular, I examine the representation of romantic love in Huang Zumo’s film *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (1980). Emphasis is placed on the representation of the first kiss in the history of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) cinema. Entitled “The De-sublimation of Politics,” the second part of the chapter examines the problems of the revisionist argument. It argues that the de-sublimation of love in the post-revolutionary period is ideological in that such a process is accompanied by the sublimation of politics as such. The latter is the repressed underside of the sublimation of love. In other words, libidinalization turns out to be de-politicization. In this part, I challenge the revisionist argument, not by going back to the time when love is sublimated by politics, but by de-sublimating politics, by re-politicizing the depoliticized, and by bringing the political back to the libidinal, in a forward-looking and future-oriented manner. More specifically, I argue that *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is as much about politics as it is about romantic love and fashionable clothes. I go further to suggest that love, which seems to be incompatible with politics, or even appears to be apolitical (or non-political or anti-political) as such, is, in fact, profoundly political. It is political through and through. In short, the love story presented in *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is loaded with political ideologies. Focusing on the libidinal, the first reading of the film examines the representation of love and the first kiss onscreen. Articulating the political, the second interpretation stages and thematizes how love allegorizes politics. Adding to the
contextual discussions provided by Chris Berry in *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China* (2004), and the film synopsis and summaries offered by Juanjuan Wu in *Chinese Fashion* (2009), Xuelin Zhou in *Young Rebels in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (2007), and Yomi Braester in *Witness Against History* (2003), I bring a historically grounded and theoretically informed analysis to the existing academic discussions of *Romance on Lushan Mountain*. In particular, I show the mediations between love, ideology, and politics.

**The De-sublimation of Love**

Zhou Yun: Do you still remember that English phrase?  
Geng Hua: I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland.  
Zhou Yun: You are so clever!  
Zhou Yun and Geng Hua (in unison): I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [They hear the echoes of their voices.] I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [They hear the echoes of their voices again.]  
Geng Hua: You are really like a fairy that has come to life!  
Zhou Yun: On my side there’s also a cute Confucius!

Huang Zumo’s film *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (1980) is a fairy-tale-like love story between Zhou Yun (周筠) and Geng Hua (耿桦). Zhou Yun, played by the Chinese
actress Zhang Yu (张瑜), is a young and attractive Chinese-American woman.\(^8\) She used to study architecture when she was in college. Although she grows up in the U.S., she identifies with her cultural and ethnic roots and loves China, which she considers to be her motherland (祖国), dearly. As the diplomatic ties between the U.S. and China were established after President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, the diasporic and overseas Chinese were welcome to return to China to help reconstruct the country in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. It is on this occasion that Zhou Yun has a chance to visit China, a country on which she has never set foot. Her father Zhou Zhenwu (周振武) was a former military commander in the Nationalist Party. After the end of the civil war in 1949, he had to flee to the U.S. and later worked in a U.S. university. Although he is living in the U.S., Zhou Zhenwu has been fascinated with traditional Chinese culture and history and longs to go back to China one day. Due to political reasons, he has been denied reunion with his motherland. Since her father is fond of Lushan Mountain (庐山)\(^9\), Zhou Yun decides to visit this scenic mountain on her own when she is in China. It is on

\(^8\) When the Chinese actress Zhang Yu played the role of the Chinese-American character Zhou Yun in Romance on Lushan Mountain in 1980, Zhang Yu herself had never been to the U.S. before. She did not know what Chinese-Americans were like. But after the success of Romance on Lushan Mountain and other movies, Zhang Yu moved to the U.S. and became Chinese-American. Ironically, when she became was a Chinese-American officially, she played the role of the Chinese in the films.

\(^9\) In fact, the correct Chinese-English translation of 庐山 (Lu Shan) should be Lu Mountain, not Lushan Mountain. To translate 庐山 as Lushan Mountain is to name it as Lu Mountain Mountain (庐山山脉).
this occasion that she meets Geng Hua on the mountain. Love at first sight. They fall in love passionately.¹⁰

Geng Hua, whom Zhou Yun calls “Confucius” (孔夫子), is a good-looking young man. He loves to read, draw, and learn English. While “Geng” (耿) can mean “to be loyal and devoted” and “Hua” (桦) can refer to “China” (华), Geng Hua is a patriotic young man and loves his country. He has great ambitions to contribute to the country’s modernization and development. He aspires to become an architect and help build the new China. Although Geng Hua’s father is a military commander in the Chinese Communist Party, he has been wrongly labeled as a rightist during the Cultural Revolution and is now under political surveillance. Therefore, Geng Hua has been denied entrance to the university.¹¹ Since his mother (Geng Mother) is unwell, Geng Hua brings her to Lushan Mountain to rest so that she can recover from her illness more

¹⁰ Some parts of the love story are not completely convincing. Contemporary responses to the film can be categorized in two ways. First, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun’s love relationship lacks solid foundation. Given the differences in their cultural backgrounds and upbringings, it has yet to be explained how their love for China and the richness of Chinese history and culture is sufficient to bring these two individuals together. Second, it is not convincing to see that Geng Hua, the son of a victim of the Cultural Revolution, chooses to fall in love with and marry the daughter of a former military commander in the Nationalist Party. Also, at that time, it was not common for a Chinese to start a love relationship with someone overseas.

¹¹ The representation of the Cultural Revolution in terms of class origin (唯成份论) contradicts with Mao Zedong’s emphasis on political performance rather than class origin (有成份论, 不唯成份论, 重在政治表现).
quickly.\textsuperscript{12} He has got some spare time to tour around the mountain. He gets along well with Zhou Yun and spends a good amount of time with her. As he has been reported to be hanging out with an attractive and fashionable Chinese-American girl (the undertone is that Zhou Yun may be a spy from the U.S.), Geng Hua has been asked to have a “talk” with the party members. Zhou Yun is heart-broken. She has no choice but to leave Geng Hua, otherwise she will bring more troubles to him. Sadly, their intense encounter has come to an end. The first part of the story ends with separation.

The second part of the story begins five years later – after the end of the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{13} Zhou Yun has another opportunity to return to China and she visits Lushan Mountain again. Nostalgic for her previous experience (obviously, she is still in love with Geng Hua), she asks around about Geng Hua. By then, Geng Hua has already been a graduate student in the school of architecture at Tsinghua University, which is one of the most prestigious institutions for studying science and technology. It is such a

\textsuperscript{12} This is telling of the class background of Geng Hua’s family. Since Geng Hua has been denied entrance to the university during the Cultural Revolution (and since he manages to get into Tsinghua university by the end of the Cultural Revolution), and since he has the privilege to take his mother to Lushan Mountain to rest while she is ill, Geng Hua’s family belongs to the bureaucratic class within the communist party. Accused of going the capitalistic road, this class was radically critiqued during the Cultural Revolution.

\textsuperscript{13} The end of the Cultural Revolution was marked by the death of Mao Zedong, and the prosecution of the Maoist “Gang of Four” (四人帮) – Jiang Qing (江青), Zhang Chunqiao (张春桥), Yao Wenyuan (姚文元), and Wang Hongwen (王洪文).
coincidence that Geng Hua has just come to Lushan Mountain to attend an academic conference. In the end, they manage to see each other. They are very thrilled to be able to see each other. This time, they fall in love ardently.

In a Chinese TV program called “Narrating the Past Events of Cinema,” Guo Kaimin, who played the role of Geng Hua in Romance on Lushan Mountain, speaks of how romantic love was imagined and expressed in cinematic terms in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Slow motion had already appeared at that time. The formula is this: you chase and I run. Once you see the characters running, it is a hint that they are already in love. Then you will see an empty shot. You will also see a shot in which they throw their clothes and shoes up in the air. When they run toward each other, there will be a cut. Afterward, you will see the couple embrace each other. This was the cinematic convention at that time.

This is exactly what happens in the sequence that takes place at the Longgouhu Lake (龙沟湖)\(^{14}\). Nostalgia for her passionate encounter with Geng Hua a few years ago, Zhou Yun fantasizes that Geng Hua can be by her side. Her dream comes true! All of a sudden, someone appears in the far end of the lake. It is Geng Hua! Zhou Yun is so excited that she jumps up and screams, with all her strength, “Geng Hua! Geng Hua!”

\(^{14}\) The Chinese-English translation should be “Longgou Lake,” not “Longgouhu Lake.” To translate it as “Longgouhu Lake” is to call it “龙沟湖湖” (Longgou Lake Lake)!
Fortunately, Geng Hua can see her. Since they are located at the far opposite ends of the lake, they begin to run toward each other. Then, a triple screen is presented onscreen: Zhou Yun is shown to be running from left to right; Geng Hua is running from right to left; and the lake is in the middle screen. Next, blurry images of flowers are portrayed, which can be interpreted as the sensation of dizziness. Their hearts are pounding. Afterward, Zhou Yun throws her clothes and shoes up in the air. Geng Hua does the same thing too. Then Zhou Yun and Geng Hua jump into the lake and start to swim toward each other. Zhou Yun does the strokes alone, so does Geng Hua. The shots are then repeated several times. Eventually, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun are re-untied in the water.

To be sure, the film has been fondly remembered for presenting the first kiss in the history of the PRC cinema. In the same TV program, “Narrating the Past Events of Cinema,” Guo Kaimin explains to the audience the cinematic formula of love in the late 1970s and early 1980s: “The common practice to show the love between a man and a woman is to present them holding hands. If a director shows them hug, it is already very daring!” But what the director Huang Zumo has done, Guo Kaimin adds, is that “he goes beyond the limitation of holding hands and hugging by presenting a kiss onscreen.” Specifically: The director shows the open-minded Zhou Yun gives the shy Geng Hua a peck on his cheek. Confucius has lost his first kiss! (According to Guo
Kaimin, originally the director had shot a scene in which Zhou Yun kisses Geng Hua on the lips. But this scene did not pass the government censorship. In the final version of Romance on Lushan Mountain, the kiss was cut. What the audience could see was that Zhou Yun offers Geng Hua a peck on his cheek.

In order to show how scandalous the kiss was in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s, let me provide some background information. The Chinese magazine Mass Cinema (大众电影) used the poster of the British film The Slipper and the Rose: The Story of Cinderella (水晶鞋和玫瑰花) (1976) as the back cover of its publication in 1979 (the fifth issue). The back cover presented the passionate kiss between Cinderella and the prince. Such a representation unsettled Wen Yingjie (问英杰) in China’s Xinjiang Province. Wen, rather displeased, wrote a letter to the editorial board to express his dissatisfaction. Let me quote some parts of his “Letter to the Editors.”

Dear editors of Mass Cinema,

After looking at the back cover of your magazine in 1979 (the fifth issue), I have become furious. It is hard to believe that this kind of thing can possibly happen in Chairman Mao’s socialist country – one that has gone through the baptism of the Cultural Revolution. You have become so corrupted that it is impossible to distinguish between your magazine and other bourgeois magazines. What a pity! I cannot help but ask: What are you doing?

I have not watched The Slipper and the Rose: The Story of Cinderella, so I cannot tell if the film is a fragrant flower or a poisonous weed. But since the film was advertised in your magazine, it must serve some progressive functions. It is
deduced that the film should have some educational benefits for the nine hundred million Chinese people. However, what you have chosen to publish on the back cover is the kiss between Cinderella and the prince. Why?

Chairman Mao has taught us to appropriate western ideas for Chinese use. Do you think that the most important and urgent tasks in socialist China is a hug and a kiss? As you have prominently displayed such a kiss, what is your intention? What are you trying to promote? Do you think we need this kind of propaganda to advertise the political missions of the communist party? Do you think nine hundred million Chinese people need this kind of inspiration to launch the new long march? […] What kinds of possibilities are you trying to show to the young people of our country? Do you have any conscience for the Chinese people and nation? Comrades, don’t think that western fart should necessarily smell more fragrant!

Comrade Editors, perhaps I sound a bit harsh. But I have even heard the proletariat say that you are shameless! Since you are equipped with knowledge, you should contemplate this carefully and not allow yourself to drift away as others do. You should not spread the poison to the people in the name of “allowing a hundred flowers blossom.” Nine hundred million Chinese people will not comply with you! Regardless of who support your guilt, you will be condemned and put on trial by nine hundred million Chinese people […] We have been educated by the party and Chairman Mao for several decades. We need to have integrity in the Chinese way. Our newspapers and magazines should not promote such ideas. Whoever endorses such ideas will be denounced and judged by nine hundred million Chinese people!

I was so angry that I wrote this letter. It may have upset you. Perhaps you think it is laughable, or that my idea belongs to the “ultra-leftist” or “gang of four” sides […] If you dare, please feel free advertise the entire letter in the “Letters to the Editor.” You have to return the debt owed to the people. What goes around comes around. If it has not come back to you, it’s not the right time yet!

Sincerely,
From Wen’s letter, we can have a sense of what the political climate was in China in the late 1970s. Indeed, the peck that Zhou Yun gives on Geng Hua’s cheek in Romance on Lushan Mountain is politically provocative in the context of post-revolutionary China.

How is the kiss portrayed onscreen? At one point, Zhou Yun and Geng Hua are

An abridged version of the letter, in Chinese, is as follows:

《大众电影》编辑部总编、编辑同志:

我看了你们编辑出版的一九七九第五期的封底影照，非常愤慨！我的心久久不能平静，万没想到在毛主席缔造的社会主义国家，经过文化大革命的洗礼，还会出现这样的事情。你们竟堕落到这种和资产阶级杂志没什么区别的程度，实在遗憾！我不禁要问：你们在干什么？？？

英国音乐童话故事片《水晶鞋和玫瑰花》，我还没有看过，无法评价它是香花还是毒草。但我想，这部影片既然能受到你们的如此鼓吹，一定有什么“进步”意义。由此可以推断，这部影片一定会有许多多多的对九亿人民有教育意义的，对实现四个现代化有好处的镜头。然而，你们没有选登，却偏偏以封底的显赫地位，选登了灰姑娘和王子拥抱接吻的镜头。这是为什么呢？

毛主席生前多次教导我们：“洋为中用”。难道我们的社会主义中国，当前最需要的是拥抱和接吻吗？你们显赫地刊登这幅影照，是什么动机？是在宣扬什么呢？难道我们党的十一届三中全会的任务，党的政治路线，搞社会主义现代化建设需要你们这样宣传吗？难道九亿人民在新长征途中需要你们给予这样的鼓舞吗？……你们准备把我国的青少年们引向何方呢？你们还有点中国人的良心吗？还有点中华民族的气味吗？同志们！不要以为洋大人放个屁都是香的！

总编、编辑同志！我说的话尖刻一点，我还亲耳听到工农兵群众骂你们无耻呢！我认为良药苦口利于病，，忠言逆耳利于行。你们都是有知识的人，有学问的人，应该好好想一想，千万不要随波逐流，借“百花齐放”之名，行放毒害人之实。那样，九亿人民不会答应的！不管谁支持你们的这种罪行，我敢肯定，他总有一天会受到九亿人民的谴责或审判的。……我们九亿人民，在党和毛主席教育下几十年了，应当有中国人的气节，我们的报刊杂志，不能鼓吹这些污七八糟的东西，谁鼓吹这些东西，谁也同样会受到九亿人民的谴责和审判！……

我在愤恨之下，一气写了此信。出言不逊，对你们一定会有一点刺激，也可能你们会觉得好笑，或是咒骂什么“极左思潮”、“四人帮那一套”等等。反正现在帽子工厂、棍子店尚未彻底关闭，我从来也不害怕什么帽子、棍子，敢做敢为，对了坚持，错了就改。你们如有胆量，请在《大众电影》读者来信栏，原文照登一下我的信，让全国九亿人民鉴别一下，那才算是“百花齐放”，有点“民主”的气味。否则，我只能认为你们做贼心虚。欠人民的帐是一定要还的，善有善报，恶有恶报，不是不报，时候未到！

致以敬礼

新疆奎屯农垦局一二九团政治处 中国共产党员 吴英杰 (略有删节)

Source: http://hi.baidu.com/tianjiaomingyue/blog/item/488a6bcbb8911e0cbf09e648.html
appreciating the beautiful landscape of a very scenic place called or “Yuyuan”/“The Cliff of Jade” (玉渊). While Geng Hua is looking at the landscape, Zhou Yun, consumed by love, is secretly looking at him. (The gaze is gendered: while the man focuses on the world, the woman, seized by passion and desire, secretly looks at and admires him.) The viewer looks at Zhou Yun who is looking at Geng Hua.

Zhou Yun: Geng Hua! Geng Hua!
   [And then she turns around and lies down on the grass.]

Zhou Yun (she whispers): Confucius, can’t you be a little more aggressive?
Geng Hua: What did you say?
   [Then, he turns around and realizes that Zhou Yun is lying on the grass waiting to be kissed.]

Geng Hua (with hesitation): I am... I am... [Then Zhou Yun gets up and quickly gives Geng Hua a peck on his cheek.]

Geng Hua (embarrassingly): Other people can see it!
Zhou Yun: Let them see it! Confucius! Nobody is around, just the two of us. The two birds are laughing at us!

While this scene features the first kiss in the history of the PRC cinema, how exactly is it constructed in cinematic language? Immediately after Zhou Yun has given Geng Hua a peck on his cheek, Geng Hua is bewildered and disoriented. From Zhou Yun’s perspective, we see a close-up shot of Geng Hua’s eyes. Then, a shot-reverse-shot allows us to see things from Geng Hua’s perspective. We see a close-up of Zhou Yun’s face. The image of her face is originally clear, then it becomes blurry, and then it becomes clearer again. Afterward, the camera moves in a circular way to show the
mental state of Geng Hua – he is still dizzy. The same sequence is repeated. In the end, the viewer can see Geng Hua and Zhou Yun together from the third-person perspective. The message is clear: they are really in love.

It is probably a good place to introduce the Chinese viewers’ response to this film. In a Chinese TV program called “The History of Cinema: The Female Star Who Presented the First Kiss in New China – Zhang Yu,” a member of the audience recalled how he/she reacted to the film when the film was first shown in China in 1980:

When the male character and the female character kissing onscreen, what I could hear in the cinema was “Aiya!” When I turned around to look at what happened, everyone had their mouths wide-open and their eyes covered with their hands.

The journalist Bryan Johnson made a comparable remark in his report in the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* on November 7, 1980.

When the timid Chinese boy [Geng Hua] evades her [Zhou Yun’s] advances, Miss Zhang [Zhou Yun’s role is played by the actress Zhang Yu] lies on her back, sweatered bosom thrust skyward, and tells the local hero to be “more aggressive.” The boyfriend gulps in surprise. The camera pans lovingly over Miss Zhang’s Lushan-like profile. And eyeglasses in the audience begin to mist over from the steam generated in the theater. By Chinese standards, this is very, very hot stuff.16

To be sure, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* can also be regarded as a self-help book that teaches the young generation to express themselves romantically. When I was discussing this film with my friends and colleagues, one of them (she was in her 50s, I think) told me that she had learned to express her romantic feelings by watching the film. “If my boyfriend is like Geng Hua and is too embarrassed to kiss me, I would follow Zhou Yun to say ‘You are so silly! Silly in a cute way!’ (你真傻！傻得可爱！) But if he is as daring as Zhou Yun to kiss me without asking me first, I would say: ‘You are so naughty!’ (你真坏!)” Cinema, and by extension, mass and popular culture, is a habitus where one learns to express one’s feelings by imitating what the actress or the actor does onscreen.

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17 In fact, in *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, when Zhou Yun kisses Geng Hua on his cheek, Geng Hua does not say “You are so silly! Silly in a cute way!” or “You are so naughty.” Rather, in a state of shock, confusion, embarrassment, and bewilderment, Geng Hua says “Other people can see it!” (让人看见了!) It is Zhou Yun who, instead, says “You are so silly! Silly in a cute way!” However, it is not in the please-kiss-me scene that she articulates this. In the first part of the story, while relaxing on the grassland, Zhou Yun says that she is too thirsty to sing a song. Then, Geng Hua rushes to the Botanical Gardens to buy some ice-lollies for her. But when he returns, the careless Geng Hua drops them onto the ground. It is in this scene that Zhou Yun laughs at Geng Hua: “You are so silly! Silly in a cute way!” My interviewee has mixed up the please-kiss-me scene and the drop-the-ice-lolly scene. Zhou Yun has never said “You are so naughty!” in the film. This is probably the creation of my interviewee when she is in love.
Romance on Lushan Mountain is also a film about the consumption of fashion. When the audience was watching the film, they were consuming, at least visually, the fashionable clothes that the main characters wear. Geng Hua is like a fashion model for the male audience. In the film, he wears a white shirt, and at another point, a blue shirt, and underneath it, an undershirt (坎肩儿、背心). He also wears a pair of loose-fitting military trousers. His shoes made of cloth (布鞋) – they are called “songjinxié” (松紧鞋) in Shanghai or “laotouxie” (老头鞋) in Beijing – are fashionable too. He also carries a military bag (军包、挎包) when he tours around the mountain. (Interestingly, Geng Hua becomes more fashionable after he has fallen in love with Zhou Yun. Perhaps it is romantic love that improves his fashion taste.) The audience was also attracted to the fashionable clothes that Zhou Yun wears in the story. From the bell-bottomed trousers (喇叭裤) – they cling so closely to her backside that one can see the shape and curve of it – to the “toad-eyed sunglasses” (蛤蟆镜) (funny enough, they were also called “panda-eyed sunglasses” [熊猫镜]), from the lipstick and the super-short skirt (超短裙) to the high-heel shoes, Zhou Yun is a fashion model for the female audience. In the story, she appears in as many as 43 outfits! (In fact, it is not uncommon for cultural critics to compare Huang Zumo’s film Romance on Lushan Mountain with Wong Kar-wai’s stylish film, Huayangnianhua (In the Mood for Love) (王家卫: 花样年华) (2000), which is also about love and fashion. In In the Mood for Love, the character Su Lizhen (or Mrs. Chan),
whose role is played by the famous Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung, appears in as many as 23 Chinese qipaos in the film. If *In the Mood for Love* is called the film of the Chinese qipao, then, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* can be appreciated as the film of fashion.) Compared to an ordinary Chinese woman who only had a few outfits in her daily life, Zhou Yun’s fashionable clothes were very appealing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I imagine that they must be more attractive than the fashionable clothes presented in *Sex and the City* (film and television) today. In an interview, Guo Kaimin explains the visual impact of Zhou Yun’s clothes when the film was first shown in China.

For Zhang Yu [the actress playing the role of Zhou Yun], she brings fashions from the West, and they are very fashionable. Why do people remember the clothes that the actress wears in *Romance on Lushan Mountain*? It’s because the visual impact – the color scheme – is so big. At that time, we did not have bell-bottomed trousers. We did not have super short skirts. By super short skirts, I mean the kind of skirts that cover the knees. Her dress – sometimes it is as short as this and sometimes it is as short as that – it is full of varieties. Do you think the audience can handle this easily? No, they can’t.¹⁸

Guo Kaimin points out how striking and provocative Zhou Yun’s super short skirt was to the Chinese audience at that time.

¹⁸ Source: “Sishuiliunian” Episode 20 “Fashion” (Part I). (《似水流年》第 20 集《时尚》（上）)
In terms of the length, the dress should be somewhere between the calf and the ankle. If the calf was revealed, this was already a bit too much. If the thigh was revealed, this was just scandalous!

In fact, Zhou Yun’s thighs are revealed (at least) twice in Romance on Lushan Mountain. In the waterfall scene, while sitting on a rock and having her feet immersed in the cold water, Zhou Yun asks Geng Hua to come closer to her. But the very shy Geng Hua, whom Zhou Yun calls Confucius – partly because he maintains strict boundaries between the sexes, is too embarrassed to do so. Zhou Yun is not only direct in approaching Geng Hua, but also daring in presenting herself in a “super-short skirt” (超短裙). In another scene, while having a swim at the lake at a place called “Shenlong Yuekong” (神龙跃空), Zhou Yun is shown to be in her swimsuit, thus revealing some parts of her thighs to the viewer. (Geng Hua is in his swimming trunks and his thighs are also revealed too.) In the late 1970s and early 1980s standard, such sexualized representations were definitely alluring, bewildering, and provocative, and quite scandalous too.

The contemporary Chinese reactions to the fashion were mixed. Generally speaking, the young generation tended to like it. It is said that some of the female viewers liked the film so much that they brought their tailors to the cinema! This way, the tailors would be able to understand what their customers would like them to make. In comparison, the older generation did not seem to be terribly fascinated by the
fashionable clothes onscreen. In any case, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* can really be regarded as the fashion film in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The film taught the young generation to love, kiss, and dress fashionably, or in short, to be suitably modern in post-revolutionary China.

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19 According to a newspaper article called “My Views Regarding Several Films with Love Themes” (“对几部爱情题材影片的意见”), a member in the Shanghai Film Company (上海市电影公司) said: “Fashion and props should be used according the development of the plot. The change of clothes was too frequent – the actress wears a new set of fashionable clothes in every scene, and she has her clothes changed continuously during the course of her trip. This is not logical or necessary. Such a choice weakens people’s appreciation of the film. It is a shame that the actress becomes the fashion model for an advertisement. Also, the fashions were designed in China, but not imported from the U.S.” I am interested in the critic’s observation of the lack of logic in Zhou Yun’s constant change of clothes. Indeed, the representation of Zhou Yun in 43 outfits may undercut the realism of the story. First of all, why does she choose to be formally dressed (e.g. she wears a pair of proper shoes) to go up Lushan Mountain? Second, how is it realistically possible that Zhou Yun can wear one dress at one spot of the mountain, and another dress at another spot, and then a third one in the third spot – all within the same day? To be sure, she does not bring a suitcase to go up the hill. So the viewers may wonder where her fancy clothes come from. Third, it is puzzling that she can store 43 outfits in her hotel room. Given the size of her wardrobe, it is hard to conceive how she can possibly keep those outfits in that hotel room. In the beginning of the film, she arrives at Lushan Mountain with one suitcase. By the end of the film, when she is about to leave the hotel, the same suitcase is placed close to the door of her hotel room. It makes sense to assume that it is the only suitcase she has got. How is it possible she can store 43 outfits in that suitcase? Is it not too small?
Admittedly, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is about love, the first kiss, and fashionable clothes. But it can be about other wonderful things too. Here, I am thinking of sex, which is probably the unconscious of the story. In the second half of the story, after Geng Hua and Zhou Yun manage to see each other at the two opposite sides of Longgouhu Lake, they run toward each other as fast as they can. Afterward, they take off their clothes and shoes, throw them up in the air, and jump into the lake, and eventually, embrace each other passionately in the water. While this sequence can be interpreted as an expression of ardent love, it can also be read as a sexual adventure – to me, the lake is like the bed. To be sure, the act of taking take off one’s clothes and shoes before diving into the water is symbolic: one has to take off one’s clothes and shoes before jumping onto the bed. Swimming (especially when two persons swim toward each other) is like a sexual activity. The movement of their bodies is suggestive: when one pushes, the other one pulls, and vice versa. They also embrace each other (or cuddle) in the lake (or in the bed) after swimming (or after sex). Also, immediately after the swimming-in-the-lake (or sex-in-the-bed) scene, Zhou Yun dries her hair in front of the mirror. She has just had a shower after swimming. Zhou Yun asks Geng Hua if he’d like to have a smoke after swimming (or sex). This scene is also loaded with a sexual undertone – isn’t it what one does after sex? Who knows? Perhaps this film also taught the young generation how to have sex and pleasure in post-revolutionary China.

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20 In fact, the hint of sex is already present earlier in the film. For example, in the
In the second part of the story, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun are so much in love that they decide to get married. These Chinese children need to talk to their parents and ask for their permission first. As Zhou Yun is afraid that Geng Hua’s parents may not like her, she gives Geng Hua a picture of her family and asks him to show it to his parents. At the meantime, Zhou Yun sends a telegram to the U.S. to ask for her parents’ approval. The melodramatic moment finally arrives: it turns out that Geng Feng (Geng Hua’s father) and Zhou Zhenwu (Zhou Yun’s father) have known each other for decades. When they were young, they served in the military army together. But one day, Geng Feng and Zhou Zhenwu decided to part ways on Lushan Mountain because they were beginning of the story, Zhou Yun tries to take a picture of the famous Zhenliu Stone (枕流石). But it turns out that Geng Hua is studying on that rock when Zhou Yun takes the snapshot. She cannot have the perfect picture. Zhou Yun says: “[Last time] you entered the frame of my picture.” (“上次是你闯进我的镜头”) While this scene can be taken to mean that Geng Hua has accidentally entered Zhou Yun’s life, it can also imply sexual penetration. In addition, together after they have seen the sunrise during the second day of their travel, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun take a picture together. Zhou Yun says: “This time I pulled you into the frame of my picture!” (“这次是我把你拉入镜头”). If the camera is the symbol of the woman’s sexualized body, if the photo-taking activity, a metaphor of sex, is filled with images of push and pull, with the man enters the frame of the picture and the woman pulls him to enter the frame, then, the photograph is not only a souvenir of love, but also a souvenir of sex.
in support of different political ideologies. Eventually they served in opposing parties: Zhou Zhenwu remained a firm believer of the Nationalist Party, but the perceptive Geng Feng realized that there was no hope for the Nationalist Party, and so he joined the Communist Party instead. By the end of the civil war, the Chinese Communist Party defeated the Nationalist Party, resulting in the founding of the PRC. Zhou Zhenwu had no choice but to flee to the U.S. (rather than Taiwan). During his stay in the U.S., he remained a passionate devotee of Chinese culture and history, although he did not agree with the political ideologies of the PRC. In the film, his nostalgia for his motherland is shown by the Chinese “Zhonghuapai” (中华牌) cigarettes he smokes. In his telegram reply, Zhou Zhenwu tells his daughter the truth, emphasizing that it is unlikely for Geng Feng to agree to their marriage. This is the shock of reality: Zhou Yun is completely devastated by the news. She decides to leave China the next day. When she is about to depart, Geng Hua and his parents come to visit her in the hotel. They come to deliver the good news to her. After thinking about their child’s love relationship, Geng Feng and Geng Mother have come to the conclusion that they should allow Geng Hua to marry Zhou Yun. Their reasoning is that they should not allow the conflict of political ideologies to influence the future generation. The film ends with the taking of the family picture.

21 In his telegram reply, Zhou Zhenwu says it is not likely that Geng Feng will agree to their marriage (“他是不会同意的”). Zhou Zhenwu does not say if he agrees to the marriage. It is as if he does not have much power to decide. The final decision is made by Geng Feng, or communist party that is the victor of the civil war.
photo. The marriage between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun is also the union of the Geng’s family and the Zhou’s family. It is also the coming together of the communist and the nationalist parties in the name of love. If the Communist Party is the thesis and the Nationalist Party is the antithesis, then love is the synthesis. Love – whether it is the romantic love between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun, or one’s love toward his or her motherland, culture, and history – turns out to be a powerful force that reconciles and settles the conflicts of political ideologies. In this sense, love is de-politicization.

In the November 7, 1980 article in the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, Bryan Johnson wrote about the contemporary Chinese reactions to *Romance on Lushan Mountain*.

Significantly, when I asked a Chinese acquaintance what he liked most about the film, he commented on the beauty of the photography and the lack of politics. “It was,” he said, “just entertaining, with no big messages. And it makes people want to visit Lushan [Mountain].”

Is *Romance on Lushan Mountain* really devoid of politics? Disagreeing with the journalist’s Chinese acquaintance, I suggest that the film is profoundly political. While the political films produced during the Cultural Revolution are imbued with the

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ideologies of class struggle, continuous revolution, and socialist modernity, *Romance in Lushan Mountain* is political in a different way: it is loaded with the ideology of de-politicization. The film celebrates economic modernization and the development of the forces (rather than the relations) of production.

In a film review “Walking Slowly in the World of Cinema,” a Chinese critic called Lao Miao (老苗) wrote:

> On the surface, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is a film about love. In fact it is not as simple as this. Above the love story there is an interpellation, a hailing that, in the name of patriotism, tries to unite all the forces (including the opposing forces in the past) to build a modern and industrialized China. (September 1981)

Liao Miao points out that the film is not simply a love story. Something is going on in the name of patriotism. But he does not explain what that something else is. In what follows, I suggest that this love story is primarily about politics and ideology. While I agree with Lao Miao to consider the film to be political, I will point out the specific ways in which romantic love is closely connected to politics. I want to suggest that *love is* what Wang Hui calls “depoliticized politics.”
The (De-)Sublimation of Politics

In the second part of Romance on Lushan Mountain, after Geng Hua and Zhou Yun have drunk the water from the Well of Wisdom (聪明泉) to confirm their love for each other will not change, they come across a strange-looking sculpture called “the protector of the Buddhist doctrines.”

Geng Hua: What kind of god is this?
Zhou Yun: The god of love!
Geng Hua: There is no such kind of god of love!
Zhou Yun: Then what kind of god do you think it is?
Geng Hua: Oh! It’s written here. It is the Protector of the Buddhist doctrines.
Zhou Yun: In my opinion, this is the Protector of Love.
Geng Hua: The Protector of Love?
Zhou Yun: Yes!
Geng Hua: No! It’s written here. It is the Protector of the Buddhist Doctrines.
Zhou Yun: You! You have drunk the Water of Wisdom in vain!
Geng Hua: Yes?
Zhou Yun: To us, he may be the Protector of Love!
Geng Hua: Oh! (Then he laughed loudly.)
Zhou Yun: Look at you! Let’s take a picture here.
Geng Hua: OK!
[Then he sets up the photo-taking equipment]
Zhou Yun: Smile!
[Then Geng Hua and Zhou Yun take a picture with the protector of the Protector of Love.]

The sculpture is called “Hufalishi” (“the protector of the Buddhist doctrines”) (护法力士). While the word “fa” (法) means law or doctrine, or shall we say, politics, the sculpture can be called “the protector of politics.” The sculpture is a symbol of politics.
But Zhou Yun insists calling the sculpture “the protector of love” (护爱力士). What she does de-politicizes the sculpture and turns it into a symbol of love. In fact, the renaming of the sculpture can be interpreted as the changing ideologies of the PRC: from a socialist country that emphasizes continuous revolution, class struggle, political debates, and ideological critique, hence politicization, to a post-socialist one that stresses on love, hence libidinalization. It is a form of internalization or privatization. Importantly, the de-sublimation of love is not free from ideologies: It is accompanied by the sublimation of politics as such. The sublimation of politics is a constitutive repressed underside of the de-sublimation of love. In the process of the de-sublimation of love, politics is sublimated, displaced, erased, and channeled to somewhere else. It controls or contains revolutionary politics in the post-revolutionary period. When confronted with libidinalization as de-politicization, what needs to be done is to re-politicize the libidinal and bring politics back to love. My starting point is to show that the love story between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun is political through and through.

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To be sure, Romance on Lushan Mountain can be seen as a love story between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun. However, if we expand our interpretive horizon to include the parents of Geng Hua and Zhou Yun in our analysis, the film can be seen as a family
melodrama. The latter has a political overtone: the characters symbolize different political and economic forces. In the story, Geng Feng is a military commander in the Chinese Communist Party. Wearing a Mao suit, Geng Feng is the personification of socialist China. He changes over the course of the narrative. His transformation is shown through visual objects, such as a mirror, a photograph, and a magnifying glass. Geng Feng first appears in the middle of the story. Sitting in a fancy car, he, together with his wife, goes up Lushan Mountain to meet with his son. Geng Feng asks his wife whether it sounds dramatic that their son has fallen in love with someone whose father is a former nationalist commander. Then, Geng Feng looks at himself in the mirror – it is a signal that he has to confront his own political view. In the later parts of the story, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun are so much in love that they want to get married. Asking his parents for approval for the marriage, Geng Hua shows his father a photograph of Zhou Yun’s family. Geng Feng uses a magnifying glass to look at the picture. This is the shock of reality: Geng Feng realizes that Geng Hua would like to marry the daughter of Zhou Zhenwu who is his former political opponent!

[In the living room]
Geng Feng: This is Zhou Yun’s father?
Geng Hua: Yes.
Geng Feng: Is he called Zhou Zhenwu?
Geng Hua: Yes.
Geng Feng: Let me talk about this with your mother privately. Is it ok?
[In the study room. Geng Feng is smoking.]
Geng Feng: Your son has given me a very big problem.
Geng Mother: That difficult!
Geng Feng: It’s not easier than giving a military signal or solving a scientific problem.

[Geng Feng’s flashback]
Geng Feng: So we parted ways like this. We fought in the battlefield for over 20 years. This bullet in my body is a souvenir from him. There are so many girls in the world. Why does he have to love his [Zhou Zhenwu’s] daughter?
Geng Mother: Indeed. Through marriage, foes for twenty years become relatives. This is rare!

After thinking about it overnight, finally, Geng Feng changes his mind. (But the narrative does not explain how he manages to change his mind so easily and quickly.) He allows Geng Hua to marry Zhou Yun. He also invites Zhou Zhenwu to return to China and participate in the country’s modernization projects. In the hotel, Geng Feng says to Zhou Yun:

Child, forgive me. For young people like you, some problems are easy to solve. But for those of us old people who have fought in battle with hatred for half of our lives, it is not as easy as reading newspapers or singing a song. We have to think about it and struggle with it in our hearts. But we are good old people. We will be enlightened. Write a letter to your father. Tell him in order to actualize the motherland’s four modernizations project, we need the unification of our country and the solidarity of the people in the nation. Geng Feng welcomes him to return.

It is in this sense that Romance on Lushan Mountain can be seen as a bildung – a story of the growing up, education, formation, and experience of Geng Feng. In contrast to Geng Hua and Zhou Yun who do not change much during the course of the story
(throughout the story, they remain passionately in love with each other), Geng Feng is the only figure that changes. He changes his mind to allow his son to marry his former political opponent’s daughter. If we can accept that Geng Feng represents socialist China, then, the change of Geng Feng can be seen as the radical transformation of socialist China after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

If Geng Feng is the personification of socialist China, then, *Geng Hua is the embodiment of post-socialist China*. When we adopt this point of view, then, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is more about the changing relationship between father and son, and less about the romantic love between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun. The change in the father-and-son relationship has political implications: it signifies the PRC’s radical transformation – from “socialism” to “post-socialism,” or “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The clue to Geng Hua being the symbol of post-socialist China can be located in the “Flowers Lane” (花径) scene. In the woods, Geng Hua practices speaking the English phrase “I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland.” He repeats the phrase several times. The Chinese-American Zhou Yun, hiding behind the trees, corrects his pronunciation and helps him articulate the phrase more accurately.

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21 In fact, this is quite similar to the characterization of He Jingfu (何荆夫) in Dai Houying’s (戴厚英) humanistic novel (人道主义小说), *Ren, A Ren* (人,啊人!) (1980).
Geng Hua: (in English) I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [He says it twice. Then we hear the echoes of Geng Hua’s voice from nature].

Zhou Yun: (in Chinese) I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. (Then she switches to English) No. [Zhou Yun hides behind a tree so that Geng Hua cannot see her.]

Geng Hua: (in English) I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [He says it twice.]

[Zhou Yun interrupts and pronounces the phrase correctly in American English for him.]

Zhou Yun: I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [Then we hear the echo of Zhou Yun’s voice from nature.]

[Geng Hua is puzzled. Where does the voice come from? He looks around. But he does not find anyone in the woods. He continues with his English practice.]

In fact, if we listen to Geng Hua’s pronunciation carefully, the way he pronounces “love” is not completely accurate – the way he articulates it is somewhat between “love” and “learn.” Such “mispronunciation” is symbolic: Geng Hua is learning how to love. He is learning how to love Zhou Yun romantically. As Zhou Yun teaches Geng Hua to pronounce the phrase accurately, she is also teaching him how to love properly. (At that moment, Geng Hua is not the Confucius teacher but the student.)

Geng Hua is also learning how to love his motherland that is China. If “morning” can be interpreted as a new beginning, then, he is learning how to love his motherland that has a new beginning – the latter can refer to the country’s economic reforms and opening up.
In addition, rather than say the phrase in Chinese, Geng Hua says it in English, a cultural symbol of U.S.-led global finance capitalism. To be sure, during the socialist period, Chinese people did say “I love my motherland” or “we love our motherland” – in Chinese. But what is distinctive is that in this scene, Geng Hua says it in English. In other words, Geng Hua uses the old phrase and gives it a new expression and interpretation. This is similar to the case of post-socialist China. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping used the old phrase (socialism) and gave it a new interpretation (“socialism with Chinese characteristics.”). The Chinese government claimed that China needed to use capitalistic forces to build socialism, but in fact, the government used socialism to build capitalism.

This is a good moment for me to say a few words about the symbolization of the Zhou’s family. Zhou Zhenwu was a military commander in the Nationalist Party. After the defeat in the civil war, Zhou Zhenwu fled to the U.S. and settled down there. (Zhou Zhenwu fled to the U.S., but not Taiwan. If he had settled down in Taiwan, then the question of the nation would have surfaced and the question of capitalistic modernization would have become less prominent.) Because of his connections to the Nationalist Party and the U.S., Zhou Zhenwu is the representative figure of capitalism.
If Zhou Zhenwu is an old-type of U.S. capitalism, his daughter Zhou Yun is the personification of a new-stage of capitalism, namely, global capitalism (or neoliberalism). Zhou Yun is associated with different kinds of visual and “superficial” objects, such as fashion (e.g. she carries a mirror with her in her handbag) and photography. Her interest in the visual image can be related to finance economy. Also, Zhou Yun has got a very direct and forward personality. Indeed, it is Zhou Yun who pursues Geng Hua, not the other way round. Her American-style of directness resembles the predatory character of finance capital. For example, in the “Flower Lane” scene, Geng Hua is struggling with pronouncing the English phrase “I love my motherland” correctly. Although Geng Hua has not asked her for help, Zhou Yun intervenes and makes sure that he pronounces the phrase accurately. Similarly, when post-socialist China was trying to experiment with capitalism (e.g. commodity economy), the U.S. stepped in and instructed China how to promote neoliberalism – with the accompanying discourse of liberal democracy, freedom, and human rights, even though China had not invited the U.S. to intervene in the first place. In the “Yuyuan” scene, Zhou Yun tries to hint to Geng Hua that he can kiss her. She asks him directly: “Confucius, can you be a little bit more aggressive?” Similarly, the U.S. neoliberal regime demanded the Chinese government to be more forceful and vigorous in promoting capitalism. In addition, we should be cautious of the gender ideology of the representation of Zhou Yun. It is the woman figure that brings about the transformation of Geng Hua – in terms of love, she pursues him romantically;
in terms of fashion, she brings western-style clothing to the Chinese world and indirectly influences his choice of clothes too.

This brings us to a crucial point: What seems to be apolitical turns out to be the political. The love story between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun turns out to be the PRC’s love affair with global capitalism in the post-socialist context. The fact that Geng Hua falls in love with Zhou Yun to the extent that he would like to marry her can be interpreted as the fact that post-socialist China would like to take the path of capitalistic modernization for an extended period of time. In the story, Geng Hua tries to obtain permission from his father to marry Zhou Yun. In the study room, Geng Feng says to his wife: “Your son has given me a very difficult question! It is not easier than giving a signal for military assault or solving a scientific problem.” While Geng Hua has given Geng Feng a difficult question to answer, post-socialist China has given socialist China an equally difficult problem to tackle. Indeed, how is it possible for (post-)socialist China to move in the direction of capitalistic modernization? What is the ideological justification for such a move? In response, Geng Mother answers: “Indeed. Enemies for several decades are going to become relatives through marriage. This is very rare!” While it is not easy for political enemies (socialism and capitalism) to become friends, let alone become relatives through marriage, it is difficult, if not impossible, for socialist China, a country highly critical of U.S.-capitalism and imperialism before the Sino-Soviet
split, to become a close ally of U.S.-led global capitalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s.24

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We have yet to analyze Geng Mother. If we read Romance on Lushan Mountain as a love story between Geng Hua and Zhou Yun, Geng Mother is a minor character. But if we look at the story as a family melodrama, then, Geng Mother plays a more significant role in the construction of the political message. In the second half of the story, after Geng Hua has told his parents that he would like to marry Zhou Yun, Geng Feng and Geng Mother have a conversation about whether they should allow their son to marry Zhou Zhenwu’s daughter. Waiting in the living room, Geng Hua is getting slightly impatient.

[Geng Hua knocks on the door of his parents’ study room.]
Geng Hua: Mother?
Geng Mother: Give your father more time so that he can think about it carefully.
[Then Geng Mother closes the door.]
[...]
[Geng Mother opens the door.]

24 See the cover of David Harvey’s book, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005). It presents the pictures of four political figures: Ronald Reagan, Deng Xiaoping, Augusto Pinochet, and Margaret Thatcher.
Geng Hua: Mother? Has father agreed to it?
Geng Mother: He wants to speak to you.

When Geng Hua knocks on the door, it is Geng Mother who opens the door and answers him. By the end of the discussion between Geng Feng and Geng Mother, it is also Geng Mother who opens the door to tell Geng Hua that his father would like to talk to him. In other words, Geng Feng’s decision to allow Geng Hua to marry Zhou Yun is mediated by Geng Mother. Thinking in symbolic terms: if Geng Feng and Geng Hua are the personifications of socialist and post-socialist China respectively, if Zhou Yun is the personification of neoliberalism, what does Geng Mother stand for? What mediates socialist China’s decision to allow post-socialist China to take the capitalistic roads of modernization and developmentalism?

The answer can be found in the Flowers Lane (花径) scene analyzed above. In the woods, Geng Hua practices speaking the English phrase “I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland” several times. At the end of the scene, Geng Hua’s mother calls him and he has to go back home, leaving him no chance to find out who is echoing him.

Geng Hua: I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland.
Zhou Yun: I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland.
Geng Hua: I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland. [He says it twice.]
Geng Mother (disembodied voice): Geng Hua! Geng Hua!
Geng Hua: Mother! I am coming!

There is a close relationship between mother (Geng Mother), mother-nature, and motherland (homeland). In the beginning of the scene, Geng Hua says “I love my motherland” loudly. What he articulates shows that he identifies with his motherland (China). By the end of the scene, his mother, in a disembodied voice, does call on him: “Geng Hua! Geng Hua!” Geng Hua replies to her call immediately: “Mother! I am coming!” If we can agree to the interpretation that Geng Mother is a symbol of the motherland, Geng Hua’s response to his mother’s call is also his response to his motherland’s call. Such calling interpellates Geng Hua into a patriotic subject to promote “socialism with Chinese characteristics” that is the ideology of the economic reforms.

Two songs – “Fly Toward the Homeland Far Away” (飞向远方的故乡)\(^{25}\) and “Oh! Homeland!” (啊, 故乡)\(^{26}\) – in Romance on Lushan Mountain further express Geng Hua’s and Zhou Yun’s love for their motherland. They help reinforce and concretize the political message the director tries to convey to us. For example, “Fly Toward the

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\(^{25}\)The lyric is as follows: “Wild geese, wild geese, when spring comes, Fly, fly, fly toward the homeland far away! La la la la la. Wild geese, wild geese, when spring comes, Fly, fly, fly toward the homeland far away! Homeland, Homeland!”

\(^{26}\)“The lyric is as follows: When the full moon rises, when it rises, I miss my homeland so dearly. There is beautiful water and mountain. That is the place I grow up. When the festival comes, I miss my homeland dearly. It’s like being able to see the blossom of the flowers and smell the fragrance of the soil in my homeland. Oh, homeland, my dear homeland, Oh, homeland, my dear homeland, I wish I could be the clouds on the sky, to ride the wind and float toward your side.”
Homeland Far Away” is accompanied by the imagery of wild geese flying toward their homeland to invoke patriotic feeling. These birds can be interpreted as the symbols of Chinese intellectuals who were victimized during the Cultural Revolution, and the overseas Chinese, such as Zhou Yun, who desire to return home.

Geng Hua’s mother can be seen as the personification of Geng Hua’s motherland (China). She can also be interpreted as symbolizing a particular kind of China or Chinese culture, namely, pre-modern Chinese culture. Such an interpretation can be confirmed by the fact that when Geng Mother was ill during the Cultural Revolution, Geng Hua brought her to Lushan Mountain to rest. The “four olds” (四旧), including old customs, old culture (such as pre-modern Chinese culture), old habits, and old ideas, were radically critiqued during the Cultural Revolution. The Anti-Confucius campaign (批孔运动), which emerged alongside the Anti-Lin Biao campaign (批林运动), in the early 1970s testify to it.

Similar to Che Guevara’s essay “Create two, three...many Vietnams [...]” (1967), we can speak of one, two, three... many Lushan Mountains. Resembling a tourism promotion video, Romance on Lushan Mountain showcases the natural landscape and historical attractions of the mountain. Famous scenic spots, such as the “Bailudongshuyuan”/“The White Deer Cave Academy” (白鹿洞书院),
“Xianrendong”/“Immortals Cavern” (仙人洞), “Huajing”/“Flower Path” (花径), “Yubeiting”/“Imperial Pavilion” (御碑亭), “Longshouyan”/“Dragon Head Cliff” (龙首岩), “Yuezhaosonglin” (月照松林), “Zhiwuypuyuan”/“Botanical Garden” (植物园), “Longgouhu”/“The Lake of Longgou” (龙沟湖), “Donglinsi”/“East Grove Temple” (东林寺), “Congmingquan”/“The Well of Wisdom” (聪名泉), “Shenlongyuekong” (神龙跃空), “Yuyuan”/“The Cliff of Jade” (玉渊) are presented as the background against which the love story between the handsome Geng Hua and the good-looking Zhou Yun takes place. Importantly, the Lushan Mountain portrayed onscreen is primarily about pre-modern Chinese culture and history. It is shown from the perspectives of the Dongjin-Dynasty (东晋) poet Tao Yuanming (陶渊明) (365-427), the Tang-Dynasty poets Li Bai (李白) (701-762) and Bai Juyi (白居易) (772-846), the Song-Dynasty poets Lu You (陆游) (1125-1210), Su Dong-bo/Su Shi (苏东坡/苏轼) (1037-1101), Zhui Xi (朱熹) (1130-1200). Before Zhou Yun visits the mountain, her father Zhou Zhenwu explains to his daughter the legend of Zhu Xi (朱熹) on the Zhenliu Stone (枕流石), and the story of Bai Juyi in the Flower Lane (花径). During the tour, Geng Hua resembles Professor Confucius (Confucius is also a pre-modern Chinese cultural figure) in that he explains to Zhou Yun the history of the Imperial Pavilion (御碑亭): the architecture was built by the Ming-Dynasty Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋) in commemoration of his friendship with the monk Zhou Dian (周颠). He also explains the history of the ancient bridge built a thousand years ago to her. My favorite example of all is this: After they have had a swim
in the lake, Geng Hua recites a traditional Chinese poem to Zhou Yun (while both of them are in their fashionable swimming outfits!). *The Lushan Mountain presented onscreen is primarily concerned with the culture and history of pre-modern China. It features a de-politicized version of Chinese culture and history.*

In fact, what is *not* represented, namely, the politicized version of Lushan Mountain – the culture and history of modern, political, and revolutionary China, is as important as what is represented in the film. To be sure, Lushan Mountain is inseparable from the culture, history, and politics of socialist China. It is the place where Zhou Enlai and Chiang Kai-shek met, in the summer of 1933, to negotiate the formation of a united front – the alliance between the communists and the nationalists – in order to resist the expansion of Japanese imperialism and fascism in China. (Chiang Kai-shek also had a villa on Lushan Mountain.) It is also the place where the famous Lushan Conferences (庐山会议) were held during the socialist period. In July and August 1959, the first Lushan conference (八届八中全会) witnessed the fall of Peng Dehuai from political power. While the second Lushan conference (中国共产党中央委员会) was held in August 1961, the third Lushan conference (九届二中全会), held in August 1970, saw the fall of Lin Biao and Chen Boda (陈伯达) – the former editor of *Red Flag* – from political power. As we can see, Lushan Mountain is an important location for the history of socialist politics in
China. However, such politicized versions are not represented in the story. Such silence is ideological. In the language of psychoanalysis, it is a form of repression and denial.

The political allegorization of the different characters can be summarized as follows:

Geng Feng: Socialist China – Revolutionary and Politicized China
Geng Hua: Post-Socialist China – Post-Revolutionary and Depoliticized China
Geng Mother: Pre-Modern China
Zhou Zhenwu: Capitalism
Zhou Yun: Neoliberalism

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I take issue with the depoliticized representation of the mountain as pre-modern because the revival of pre-modern Chinese culture in post-modern China is not only a phenomenon of the past, but one that is still very much with us today. We can think of the spectacular opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games in summer 2008, the “coming out” party of brand new China. Against the backdrop of postmodern buildings, such as the futuristic-looking “bird-nest” and “water cube” architecture, the cultural performances in the Olympic opening ceremony were profoundly pre-modern and conservative, celebrating the feudalistic traditions of Confucian China (551-479 B.C.). To be sure, there has been an extraordinary renaissance of interests in neo-Confucianism in
the context of post-socialist China, especially since the 1990s. Confucius’ teaching, stripped of complexity and critical edge, and re-fashioned into predictable platitudes, became a political, economic, social, and cultural doctrine in China in the age of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism. It functioned as an ideology – or “soft power” – of China’s ascendancy on the global stage in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In politics, for example, Confucianism was promoted as a state ideology in the seventeenth National Congress in 2007 and was added to the constitution. In education, the post-socialist party-state funded the formation of a new intellectual discipline called “guoxue” – national learning – in Chinese universities. The politics of this discipline is conservative and backward-looking. The state’s support was extended to the establishment of the Confucius Institute in the universities outside of China. In the media, the state also sponsored Confucius’ teaching on state television, including “Yu Dan’s Insights into the Analects (Confucius’ lecture notes) on CCTV. In popular culture, the most successful novels were historical romance, such as the widely popular warrior romances by Jin Yong (Louis Cha). Chinese television also abounded with historical costume drama set in feudalistic dynasties. Chinese martial arts films, such as Ang Lee’s Wohu Canglong (Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon) (2000), Zhang Yimou’s Yingxiong (Hero) (2002), Mancheng Jindai Huangjinjia (House of Flying Daggers) (2005), and Shimian Maifu (Curse of Golden Flower) (2006), and Chen Kaige’s Wuji (The Promise) (2005) were popular. In
many ways, the cultural appetite of post-modern China seemed directed toward the pre-modern and feudalistic traditions. The phenomenon of the revival of neo-Confucianism in the age of global capitalism has serious political and social implications. It demands our intellectual scrutiny and political intervention.

In a scene in Romance on Lushan Mountain, Geng Hua and Zhou Yun are enjoying themselves at the waterfall. Zhou Yun, wearing her super short skirt, gently mocks Geng Hua and calls him Confucius because he dares not approach her. “People say that Confucius passed away two thousand years ago. How come I still see Confucius here?!” We can follow Zhou Yun to ask the same question – how can we explain the revival of neo-Confucianism in the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries? How is the recuperation of traditional Chinese culture related to the emergence of a new state discourse (“soft power”) that serves as an ideological foundation for the rise of China on the global stage, or even the new Chinese empire? More specifically:

First, are controversies about China’s future directions dressed up in historical garb? What kinds of thoughts and feelings about the present are invested in the production and consumption of tradition-inspired cultural products?

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2 Some of these popular films resembled Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will (1935) in that they exhibited fascist impulses.
Second, how far is the assertion of traditional values overturning modern ideas, such as egalitarianism, and gender equality? How is neo-Confucianism legitimizing state-sponsored violence and naturalizing the exploitation of labor? To what extent does neo-Confucianism serve as the ideological foundation for China’s embrace of authoritarian capitalism? Or, is neo-Confucianism a form of self-Orientalism that allows China to appropriate its national and cultural difference for political oppression internally, and economic imperialism externally?

Third, can neo-Confucianism be utopian? To what extent can the recuperation of the cultural past provide a resource for debates and criticisms, and the expansion of economic equality, social justice, political freedom, not simply a comfortable relief from the disorienting world of economic development?

In short: The revival of pre-modern Chinese culture, such as neo-Confucianism, in post-modern China is not as simple and cute as boy-meets-girl romance. Instead, it is serious politics.

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In his work “Tixilinbi” 《题西林壁》, the poet Su Dongbo’s (苏轼/苏东坡) writes:

横看成岭侧成峰，远近高低各不同。不识庐山真面目，只缘身在此山中。

We can be daring to consider Su Dongbo as a deconstructionist and read his poem by using (post-) structuralist methodologies. A dualism is set up in his poem: profile versus side-view, far versus near, high versus low, appearance versus reality, and inside versus outside. Interestingly enough, the last two lines – “we cannot see the reality of Lushan Mountain because we are inside the mountain” (“不识庐山真面目，只缘身在此山中”) can be interpreted as a deconstructionist move. The binary oppositions are deconstructed: the opposition between appearance and reality turns out to be a false problem because such an opposition is embedded in another reality. If we replace “reality” with “politics” or “ideology,” then, the two lines become – “we cannot see the politics (or ideology) of Lushan Mountain because we are in politics (or ideology).” The binary opposition between the presence and absence of politics (or ideology) are deconstructed. It turns out to be embedded in another political (or ideological) narrative. Romance is Lushan Mountain signals the unprecedented transformation of the PRC after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

When confronted with the depoliticized representations of Chinese culture and love, we need to proceed with caution and ask to what extent such representations can be an instance of what Wang Hui calls “depoliticized politics” – and I will add “de-
ideological ideology.” The solution to the problem of de-politicization is not to negate the negation (the negation being the de-sublimation of love) by going back to the time when love is sublimated. Rather, we should re-politicize the libidinal, to bring politics, such as class analysis and ideological critique, back to love and the depoliticized representations of Chinese culture and history. In his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in response to the fascist impulse to aestheticize politics, Walter Benjamin suggests that the communist response is to politicize art. Following Benjamin’s call, one can respond to the Chinese post-socialist party-state’s fascist impulse to libidinalize politics by politicizing the libidinal and turning love into a political concept.\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Love is (re-)politicization.}

\textsuperscript{28} For love as a political concept, see Michael Hardt’s excellent presentation on youtube.
Chapter 2
Wearing Class Struggle, Putting on Ideology: Fashion, Consumption, and History in Xie Tieli’s Film Never Forget (1964)

In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership, and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods have come to an end, there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador classes; there is still a bourgeoisie; and the remolding of the petty bourgeoisie has only just started. Class struggle is not over yet. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the ideological battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous. At times it will become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of whether socialism or capitalism will win is still not really settled.” (Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” February 27, 1957.)

1 This passage can also be found in the second section “Class and Class Struggle” in The Quotations from Mao Zedong (aka The Little Red Book) published in the mid-1960s. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify Mao Zedong’s political thoughts in the mid-1960s. Rather than consider the resilient forces – the landlord, comprador bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie – from the old society (feudalism, colonialism, bureaucratic capitalism) as posing threats to the new society (socialism), he began to realize that the capitalistic roaders (共产党内的走资派) within the communist party were the major threats to Chinese socialism.

The original quotation is in Chinese:
毛泽东:“在我国，虽然社会主义改造，在所有制方面说来，已经基本完成，革命时期的大规模的急风暴雨式的群众阶级斗争已经基本结束，但是，被推翻的地主买办阶级的残余还是存在，资产阶级还是存在，小资产阶级刚刚在改造。阶级斗争并没有结束。无产阶级和资产阶级之间的阶级斗争，各派政治力量之间的阶级斗争，无产阶级和资产阶级之间的意识形态方面的阶级斗争，还是长时期的，曲折的，有时甚至是很激烈的。无产阶级要按照自己的世界观改造世界，资产阶级也要按照自己的世界观改造世界。在这一方面，社会主义和资本主义之间谁胜谁负的问题还没有真正解决。”毛泽东：关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题 (一九五七年二月二十七日)

Source: 中国文革研究网.
Introduction: Class Struggle on the Trouser-Legs

I would like to begin this chapter by telling a story about the consumption of a pair of tight-fitting trousers (小裤管), or the so-called “strange-looking outfits,” before the dawn of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) in China. This incident occurred in the Gao Mei boutique on Shanghai’s Nanjing West Road on May 17, 1964. With the intention of buying a pair of trousers, a female customer went to the store and asked to have a pair of narrow and tight-fitting trousers (小裤脚) tailor-made for her. The kind of trousers she requested was sometimes called “chicken leg trousers” (鸡腿裤) – the trouser-legs become narrower from the knees downwards and look like the shape of a chicken leg. (The other kind of tight-fitting trousers was called bell-bottom (喇叭裤), whose trouser-legs become wider from the knees downwards (大裤脚). This kind of trousers was sometimes called “floor-sweeping trousers” (扫地裤), because it resembled the shape of a broom that one uses for house-cleaning. 

http://www.wengewang.org/read.php?tid=13959&keyword=%B9%D8%D3%DA%D5%FD%C8%B7%B4%A6%C0%ED%C8%CB%C3%F1%C4%DA%B2%BF%C3%AC%B6%DC%B5%C4%CE%CA%CC%E2.

For the similarity between the “floor sweeping trousers” and the broom, see figure 1.
salesperson in the boutique turned down her request, saying that the staff would not be able to fulfill her demand. “If we re-adjust the trousers to satisfy your request, then, your trousers will cling closely to your backside, and the trouser-legs will become very narrow. This kind of strange-looking outfit will not be welcome. The socialist economy cannot produce consumer commodities that can potentially have adverse effects to social morality.” The female customer was quite angry to hear this. “I am not happy to receive this pair of trousers! You have not fully satisfied your customer’s request. I don’t understand why you can possibly turn this down. As long as you can provide what I have got in mind, I am happy to pay for the trousers.” She even asked the salesperson to explain to her how clothes can be related to class and ideology. “How is it possible that a pair of tight-fitting trousers is imbued with bourgeois thinking? How can this kind of clothing possibly have negative influence on social morality?” The two women continued to argue (Chen Yu 2009).

Then one of the staff members in the store wrote to the newspaper *Jiefang Ribao* (Liberation Daily) to inquire what could be done about this. After receiving the letter of inquiry, the editorial board suggested that the readers have a public discussion about this incident. The editorial board asked: How should one treat
Strange-looking outfits? Many people wrote to the newspaper to participate in the public discussion. Within four months, Liberation Daily had received more than 1,690 letters. Eventually, the CCP’s Propaganda Department published a newspaper article in the People’s Daily to conclude the debate. According to the article:

What one wears is supposed to be a small thing in life. But it also reflects the perspective and taste of different classes. Based on the discussion of the masses, a conclusion can be drawn: what one wears cannot be separated from what one thinks. Some people think strange-looking clothes are pretty, while some think they are ugly. The difference in opinions is due to the fact that they belong to different classes and share different lifestyles, hence the difference in perspective and taste. A number of readers wrote to Liberation Daily to point out that strange-looking clothes are the products of capitalism. From the perspective of the lazy and exploitative class and the kind of hooligans who don’t have proper jobs, strange-looking clothes are suitable for their sex-driven, decadent, and licentious lifestyles. In contrast, the laboring people enjoy economical, comfortable, convenient, and thrifty clothes. (November 14, 1964)

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3 The original quotation is in Chinese.

“营业员拒绝给女顾客做‘小裤管’”

1964年5月17日，在南京西路高美服装店，一位顾客同营业员发生了争执。争吵的起因是女顾客要求把一条灰色的华达呢裤子做成“小裤管”——类似于今天所谓“西裤”，在那个时代属于典型的“奇装异服”。营业员拒绝了她的特殊要求，并申明：裤脚过窄的裤子我们是不能做的。女顾客试样时发现，果然没有按照她的意图改裤脚，便再次要求改小。营业员说：“再改小就要形成包屁股、小裤脚了，这种奇装异服是不受欢迎的。”“社会主义商业不能制作有害社会风尚的商品。”顾客很生气：“给我做的裤子式样不称心，你们没有满足消费者的需要。”“反正我付钱你交货，定做就是为了称心如意，你们有什么理由拒绝呢？难道我做一条小裤脚裤子就影响社会风尚吗？做一条小裤脚裤子就是资产阶级思想吗？”

3衣着穿戴看来是生活小事，但反映了不同阶级的审美观和生活情趣，这是群众通过讨论得出的一个共同结论。起初有人提出，“萝卜青菜，各有所爱”，穿什么衣服和人的思想没有关系。许多人不同意这种看法，摆出大量事实，说明爱穿什么衣着和人的思想是不能完全割裂的。有人认为奇装异服很美，有人则认为很丑，这就是由于阶级地位和各阶级生活方式不同，审美观点和生活情趣不一样。不少读者在给《解放日报》的来信中指出，奇装异服是道地的资本主义产物。在好逸恶劳的剥削阶级和不务正业的流氓、阿飞看来，奇形怪状的服装，正好适应他们荒淫颓废的生活方式和空虚没落心理的要求。而劳动人民喜爱的则是经济实惠、舒适方便、朴素大方的服装。
In order to explain how unusual the “chicken leg trousers” were in the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, let me briefly describe what was considered as suitable and appropriate to wear at that time. In the mid-1960s, the military uniform was arguably the most desirable piece of clothing for men and women in socialist China. The figure of the soldier in the People’s Liberation Army would probably be considered as the trendiest figure. One would wear the military uniform with loose-fitting trousers (大裤管), as opposed to tight-fitting ones. One would also wear a thick belt on his/her waist, and carry a bag imprinted with words like “Serve the People” or “The Red Army is Not Afraid of the Long March.” One might also wear a pair of “liberation shoes.” This kind of outfit was regarded as the most “fashionable,” at least in a proletarian way. It was practical and functional, and convenient for work and productive labor. But what about the bourgeois figure? What kind of outfit would he/she be wearing? In the cartoons, the bourgeois figure was sometimes caricatured as one wearing

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陈煜, 中国生活记忆: 建国 60 年民生往事 (中国轻工业出版社, 2009)

*For the politics of clothes in socialist China, see Tina Ma Chen’s essays and Finnane’s book.*
tight-fitting trousers with narrow trouser-legs (小裤脚) (i.e. chicken-leg trousers) and pointy shoes. He might also have an “airplane hairstyle.” One can think of Elvis Presley’s hairstyle – it resembles the taking off of the airplane. During the most turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, curiously enough, some of the “radical” factions of the red guards assigned a class label to different kinds of clothes: the western suit was critiqued as bourgeois or capitalistic, the Chinese qipao was considered as feudalistic, and the Soviet-style “bulaji” dress (布拉吉/连衣裙) was regarded as revisionist. With these images in mind, we can understand why the consumption of a pair of chicken leg trousers would cause some problems in the mid-1960s.

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5 See Yi Zhongtian’s presentation in “Sixty Years of Classic Memory: Fashion” in the TV program called “Fengyan Fengyu” (风言锋语).
6 There is no simple causal relationship between the western suit and capitalistic or bourgeois ideologies in the Chinese historical reality. Similarly, there is no simple causal relationship between the Chinese qipao and feudalism, and between the Soviet-style “bulaji” dress and revisionism. The ones who radically critiqued or denounced the class dimension of clothes during the Cultural Revolution had yet to fully explain the complex mediations between class and ideology, as well as clothes.
7 It is puzzling to hear that the western suit was considered as bourgeois by some people during the Cultural Revolution. Lenin was often shown to be wearing a western suit. After the establishment of the PRC, many Chinese leaders appeared in western suits too. How can the western suit be bourgeois?
8 It is useful to distinguish between high-cut qipao (旗袍高开叉) and low-cut qipao (旗袍低开叉). During the seventeen years (1949-1966), low-cut qipao was not severely condemned. What was critiqued was high-cut qipao because it objectified women, turning them into objects of men’s desire and consumption.
Fashionable clothes, such as bell-bottomed trousers and high-heel shoes, long hair, not to mention lipstick and makeup, were all radically critiqued during the most turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. Fashion was denounced, rather unjustly I think, by some people as the expression of petty-bourgeois sensibility. It was also linked to counter-revolution. While the CCP Propaganda Department concluded that what one wore was a reflection of the taste of one’s class, what was missing in their description was how they arrived at the conclusion. What made the government see things this way? We were not told.
In any case, it is worthwhile to ask what we can draw from the story about the chicken leg trousers. What does the story tell us about fashion and consumption, class and ideology, politics and history? More specifically: Do clothes reflect class and ideology? Is the wearing of fashionable clothes an expression of bourgeois thought and behavior? What is the politics of fashion consumption within the context of Chinese socialism?

This chapter tries to answer these questions by looking at the representation of the consumption of a good-quality suit in Xie Tieli’s film Never Forget (1964), which is an adaptation of Cong Shen’s play Wish You Good Health (it is also translated as To Your Health) (1963). My focus is on the complex relationships between fashion and consumption, class and ideology, and the politics of history within the context of socialist China in the 1960s. Before I begin, let me say a few words about the organization of the article so that my reader will “never forget” my argument. Since Never Forget has not been translated into English, I have

9 Xie Tieli has also directed other films, such as Baofeng Zhouyu (A Prodigious Storm) (暴风骤雨) (1961), Zaochun Eryue (Spring February) (早春二月) (1963), Zhiqu weihushan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) (智取威虎山) (1970), Longjiangsong (Glory to the Long Jiang) (龙江颂) (1972), Haigang (The Harbor [sometimes it is translated as On The Docks]) (海港) (1972), Dujuanshan (Azalea Mountain) (杜鹃山) (1974), Hai Xia (海霞) (1975), among others.
chosen to tell the story in details as a way to introduce the story to the reader. In Part 1, I present *Never Forget* as a cautionary tale about the danger of fashion and consumption within the context of Chinese socialism. In Part II, I engage in conversations with cultural critics such as Cai Xiang and Tang Xiaobing, who have offered insightful accounts in Chinese of *Never Forget* as a socialist cultural production.¹⁰ While their cultural criticisms focus on Cong Shen’s play, I contribute to the existing scholarship by examining Xie Tieli’s filmic adaptation of the story. By attending to the film’s political unconscious, I argue that the representation of fashion and consumption in *Never Forget* reveals, symptomatically, the historical contradictions with which Chinese socialism was confronted at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution. In this part, I emphasize the ways in which the cultural is linked to the political-economic.¹¹

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¹⁰ For Tang Xiaobing’s work on Cong Shen’s play *Never Forget*, see Tang Xiaobing’s essay (1993). It was published in an edited volume called Zaijiedu 再解读 (Reinterpretation). In fact, the latter has the same pronunciation as Zaijiedu 再解毒, meaning detoxication. The implication is that to re-interpret socialist cultural production by making recourse to critical and cultural theory is to get rid of the toxin that is ideology. For Cai Xiang’s work on Cong Shen’s play, see Cai Xiang’s book (2010), especially chapter 7.

¹¹ See Tani Barlow’s recent work on the debate about class, ideology, gender, and politicization (or what Alain Badiou calls “the event”) and de-politicization (“the era”) in relation to Wang Guangmei’s (the wife of Liu Shaoqi) qipao during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. See Tani Barlow’s talk (2009).
Never Forget: A Story of Fashion and Consumption in Chinese Socialism

The abolition of classes means, not merely ousting the landowners and the capitalists—that is something we have accomplished with comparative ease; it also means abolishing the small commodity producers, and they cannot be ousted, or crushed; we must learn to live with them. They can (and must) be transformed and re-educated only by means of very prolonged, slow, and cautious organizational work. They surround the proletariat on every side with a petty-bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat, and constantly causes among the proletariat relapses into petty-bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternating moods of exaltation and dejection.” (Vladimir Lenin’s “Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder” [April 1920]12

12 The Chinese translation is as follows:
消灭阶级不仅仅是驱逐地主和资本家——这个我们已经比较容易地做到了——还要消灭小商品生产者，可是对于这种人既不能驱逐，又不能镇压，必须同他们和睦相处：可以（而且必须）改造他们，重新教育他们，只有通过长期的、缓慢的、谨慎的组织工作才能做到。他们用小资产阶级的自发势力从各方面来包围无产阶级，浸染无产阶级，腐蚀无产阶级，经常使小资产阶级的懦弱性、涣散性、个人主义以及由狂热转为灰心等旧病在无产阶级内部复发起来。” (列宁,《共产主义运动中的“左派”幼稚病》(1920年)
For the quote in Chinese, see:
For the quote in English, see: Vladimir Lenin, Collected Works (Volume 31) (USSR: Progress Publishers, 1964) p. 17—118. Source:
http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch05.htm

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Xie Tieli’s *Never Forget* is a filmic adaptation of a rewritten play. The play, written by Cong Shen, was originally called *Zhuni jiankang* (Wish You Good Health, or To Your Health) (1963) – “health” refers to one’s ideological well-being. Shortly after the publication of the play, Cong Shen modified some parts of his work and the revised version of the play was re-named *Qianwan buyao wangji* (Never Forget) (1964). The filmic version of the play was then directed by Xie Tieli. To be sure, the film (and the play) is a piece of political propaganda: “Never Forget,” or more precisely, “Never Forget Class Struggle,” was an educational slogan of the intense socialist revolutions and mobilizations in the 1960s. The film (and the play) is a cultural elaboration of Mao Zedong’s idea of continuous class struggle even in the context of socialism. The socialist regime was worried that the young generation would fall victim to what Mao Zedong called the “sugar-coated bullet.”  

13 Mao used “sugar-coated bullet” (糖衣炮弹) in his speech on March 5, 1949. See Xinhua’s website. The original quotation is in Chinese:

党的七届二中全会强调要加强对党的思想建设，防止资产阶级思想侵蚀党的队伍，有预见性地提出了防止“糖衣炮弹”进攻的重大问题，并进一步提出了“两个务必”的重要思想。毛泽东在七届二中全会的报告中预见性地提出了防止“糖衣炮弹”进攻的重大问题，强调要加强党的思想建设，警惕居功自傲和资产阶级思想的腐蚀。他指出，因为胜利，党内的骄傲情绪，以功臣自居的情绪，停顿起来不求进步的情绪，贪图享乐不思再过艰苦生活的情绪，可能生长。因为胜利，人民感谢我们，资产阶级也会出来捧场。敌人的武力是不能征服我们的，这点已经得到证明了。资产阶级的捧场则可能征服我们队伍中的意志薄弱者。可能有这样一些共产党人，他们是不曾被拿枪的敌人征服过的，他们在这些敌人面前不愧英雄的称号；但是经不起人们用糖衣裹着的炮弹的攻击，他们在糖弹面前要打败仗，我们必须预防这种情况。
individualistic, decadent, and detrimental to continuous class struggle and socialist revolution.

*Never Forget* is a cautionary tale of the danger of fashion and consumption within the context of Chinese socialism. The young and innocent worker Ding Shaochun, the protagonist of *Never Forget*, is subjected to the influence of two opposing sides: the proletarian side and the *petty* bourgeois side. (The capitalistic, or “grand,” bourgeoisie was not a dominant subject in socialist China in the 1960s.) On the one hand, the proletarian side is represented by the Ding family – including the father Ding Haikuan, the mother Ding Mu (Ding Mother or Mother Ding), the son Ding Shaochun, the daughter Ding Shaozhen, and the grandfather Ding Yeye (Grandfather Ding). Added to the list is the model factory worker Ji Youliang, who is a close friend of Ding Shaochun and whom Ding Shaozhen fancies. In fact, the last name Ding is suggestive of the political affiliation of the proletarian family. The word “Ding” has the same pronunciation as 钉 (nails), as in screws and nails (螺丝钉). Since *Never Forget* was

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_696694.htm
released in 1964, there are good reasons to believe that the surname of the proletarian family can be related to the nationwide “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng Campaign” in 1963. Born in 1940, Lei Feng was originally an orphan. After the Japanese imperialists had killed his father, and after his mother committed suicide as a result of the sexual harassment she had suffered at the hands of her landlord’s son, the CCP brought him up. Later, Lei Feng joined the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and became a member of the CCP. By means of diligent study of Chairman Mao’s works, he lived a life of frugality, eschewed selfishness, and dedicated himself to the communist revolution and the people. In *The Diary of Lei Feng*, he expresses his aspiration to become "a revolutionary screw/nail that never rusts."

A man’s usefulness to the revolutionary cause is like a screw in a machine. It is only by the many, many interconnected and fixed screws that the machine can move freely, increasing its enormous work power. Though a screw is small, its use is beyond estimation. I am willing to be a screw. The screw needs to be maintained and cleaned in order to avoid rusting. The thought of a human being is the same. It needs to be constantly checked or else it will have problems. (April 17, 1962)\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} The original quotation is in Chinese:
一个人的作用，对于革命事业来说，就如一架机器上的一颗螺丝钉。机器由于许许多多的螺丝钉的联结和固定，才成为一个坚实的整体，才能够运转自如，发挥它巨大的工作能力。螺丝钉虽小，其作用是不可低估的。我愿永远做一个螺丝钉。螺丝钉要经常保养和清洗，才不会生锈。人的思想也是这样，要经常检查才不会出毛病。(*雷锋日记*: 1962 年 4 月 17 日)
After his death in 1962 (at the age of 22), Mao initiated the “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng” campaign. The country’s youth was encouraged to follow Lei Feng’s example to become a socialist new person.\textsuperscript{15} Devoted to revolution and construction, the members of the Ding family can be considered as the useful screws and nails of the socialist revolutionary machine.

On the other hand, the petty bourgeois side is represented by the Yao family, which includes the problematic character Yao Mu (Yao Mother or Mother Yao) and her daughter Yao Yujuan. The two families are related by the fact that Yao Yujuan is married to Ding Shaochun. They live in the same building: the

\textsuperscript{15} The motif of education, as it is expressed in the representation of the growing up experience of Ding Shaochun, is part of the “socialist education campaign” in the PRC in the early 1960s. Such a campaign encompassed the “Learn from Chairman Mao” campaign – *The Quotations of Chairman Mao* was published in 1964. It also encompassed the “learn from the workers, peasants, and army” (工农兵) campaigns. While the Daqing (大庆) oil field was praised as an exemplar of industrial production, and while the Dazhai (大寨) commune was promoted as an agricultural model, the young generation in socialist China was encouraged to learn from Comrade Lei Feng. The latter evolved to become the “Learn from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)” campaign. In fact, the discussions of what views young people should have in relation to happiness (青年应该有什么样的“幸福观”) in the magazine *China Youth* (1963-5) is also part of the discourse of socialist education. For the discussions, see the following essays: Hu (1963), Wei (1963), Gan (1963), Gao (1965), and Chen (1964). According to Cai Xiang, the discussions of youth and happiness in the *China Youth* magazine in the mid-1960s can be considered as the pre-history of the nationwide discussions initiated by the publication of Pan Xiao’s letter in the early 1980s (潘晓的信《人生的路为什么越走越窄》)
proletarian Ding’s family lives downstairs and the petty bourgeois Yao’s family lives upstairs. Again, the surname name “Yao” is suggestive: the word 姚 (yao) has the same pronunciation as 妖 (yao), which means evil spirits (妖精) and wicked monsters (妖怪). There is also a homonym 摇 (yao), which means to shake or to de-stabilize. Nicknamed as the “family tutor,” Mother Yao teaches Shaochun to subscribe to (petty) bourgeois ideology and go the capitalistic road at home, thus undoing what he has learned at the workplace. A shop-keeper in the old society, i.e. before the establishment of the PRC, Mother Yao is a symbol of the survival of the forces of the old petty-bourgeoisie in the new socialist society. Such a class-fraction is shown to cast adverse influences on Shaochun’s political and ideological development, and eventually to weaken and undermine his commitment to socialist revolutionary struggle. Such a representation also reveals the fact that the gendered and sexualized space of the family (e.g. marriage and kinship), which lies outside the direct control and supervision of the socialist state and its ideological state apparatus, is imagined to be a site of concern for the socialist government (especially because the latter has yet to achieve the hegemony over the everyday life.) Ultimately, the struggle for Shaochun’s education is the battle between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, and between socialism and capitalism. In fact, one may use the
language of Freudian psychoanalysis to describe the situation: if the socialist body is the human psyche, the proletarian Ding’s family (e.g. Ding Haikuan) who lives downstairs is the ego and superego, and the petty bourgeois Yao’s family (e.g. Mother Yao) who lives upstairs is the id (or the unconscious). The battle for Shaochun’s education can then be seen as the battle between the superego and the id.

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The protagonist of *Never Forget* is Ding Shaochun. As a factory worker, Shaochun has been recognized as a “progressive producer” by his work-unit. In his spare time, he likes to shoot wild birds. His name is telling of his personality: “shao” (少) means “young” and “chun” (纯) means “pure.” Indeed, he is young, innocent, and somewhat childlike (even though he is a young adult), which can partly be seen in his student-like hairstyle. The portrayal of Shaochun as a student-like figure is evocative of his political immaturity and ideological naivety. As a student of socialism, he tries to learn what social class is. Ignorant

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16 The original quotation is in Chinese: 剪着一抖一面倒得“学生式”短发，显得有点稚气和调皮 (3).
of the history of class struggle, he asks his parents who the “Bad Guy Sun” – the feudalistic landlord who exploited his grandfather before the founding of the PRC – is. In the process of learning how to use a proletarian perspective to look at the world, Shaochun makes mistakes. For instance, he has mistaken class exploitation as the social division of labor. In his love letter to Yao Yujian, Shaochun writes:

You kept saying that your family background is not good. [Note: Yao Yujian’s mother used to be a shop-keeper, or the old petty bourgeoisie, before the establishment of the PRC.] But I don’t care about this. I think you and I are the same. Although the professions in which your family and my family are engaged are different, it is just a matter of social division of labor.17

In other words, Shaochun has mis-identified the class enemy as the difference of professions. He fails to recognize the fact that the old petty bourgeoisie is a class-fraction that exploited labor in the old society. His ideological naivety can also been seen in one of the phrases he often uses: “Oh yes, you are probably right!” In the film, whenever Shaochun says this, he is shown to be scratching his head as a child does. In the story, there are several

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17 The original quotation is in Chinese:
你总说你的家庭出身不好，而我却根本不计较这个[⋯⋯] 我认为你和我都是一样的人，你的家庭和我的家庭虽然职业不同，但那只不过是社会分工不同罢了。（43）

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times he thinks the bourgeois worldview is potentially correct. All these point to his political ingenuousness. But through the guidance of his father Ding Haikuan, whom, one may deduce, is the mouthpiece of the CCP, Shaochun grows up and becomes a socialist new person.

In *Never Forget*, the young generation, such as Shaochun and Yujuan, are fascinated with good-looking clothes, and are vulnerable to bourgeois temptations. In the beginning of *Never Forget*, Shaochun, who has borrowed a leather jacket from the performance group, looks at himself in the mirror. Feeling gratified, he asks Yujuan and his mother-in-law Mother Yao if he looks like an engineer.

Shaochun walked toward his bedroom, put on a leather jacket, and then looked at himself in front of the mirror. Yujuan came out of the kitchen. She walked toward the drawer close to the table, and took out some cream to moisturize her hand. She was staring at Shaochun’s jacket too. Mother Yao asked Shaochun: “Whose jacket is this?” “I borrowed it from the performance group.” Shaochun answered. He zipped up the jacket. The jacket was coffee-brown in color and it looked quite new. Mother Yao came towards him and examined Shaochun’s jacket. She spoke in a complimentary way: “Clothes make the man!” Yujuan added to her compliment: “Shaochun has got a great body. Any kind of clothing will look good on his body.”
Shaochun was happy. He turned toward Mother Yao and asked: “Mom, do I look like an engineer?”

This is what happens in the film. Similarly, in the beginning of Cong Shen’s play, Shaochun is shown to be wearing a leather jacket. Mother Yao compliments him for looking like a technician. Then, Yujuan brings in a good-quality suit—it is borrowed from Doctor Xu in the clinic. Shaochun tries it on and Mother Yao compliments him for looking like a senior engineer. In both cases, the person that Shaochun has got in mind is probably Shao Yongbin, the husband of Yujuan’s second sister. Working as an engineer in the Department of Water and Electricity, Yongbin is part of the new professional-managerial class—or the *new petty bourgeoisie*—in the newly established socialist state. Since members of this new class-fraction may earn more than the average factory worker, they have got extra money to buy better clothes and tend to dress in a fancier manner. But how is Yongbin dressed? In the beginning of the story,

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*The original quotation is in Chinese:*

少纯说走走进自己的卧室，穿起皮夹克照着镜子。 玉娟也从厨房走出跟了进来，一面到床边的二屉桌旁，从抽屉里取出香脂来擦手，一面端详着少纯穿着的皮夹克。 姚母通过两间屋子的通门看见少纯，忙问：“你这穿的是谁的皮夹克啊？”

“演剧，借的。”

少纯回答道，拉上了拉链。这是一件咖啡色的小翻领的皮夹克，还很新，他穿着大小正合适。 姚母走过啦，倚在门边上打量着少纯，奖赏地说：“可真是七分衣裳三分人哪！”

玉娟也夸耀说：“少纯的身材长得就是适称，什么衣裳穿到他身上也不走样。”

少纯更得意了，又返身问姚母：“妈！我演个工程师像不像？”（10–11）
Mother Yao, who is superficial enough to judge others by their appearances, recalls the day when she saw Yongbin off at the airport. Impressed with Yongbin’s outlook, Mother Yao says to Shaochun:

Your brother-in-law was an engineer. Look at what he wore! That day, we saw him off at the airport. He was wearing a western-style suit\textsuperscript{19} that cost as much as RMB 200 (or more). He was also wearing a high-quality suit and a pair of leather shoes. They were all foreign imports\textsuperscript{20}.

Shaochun is a factory worker. Since he cannot afford to buy the leather jacket, he borrows it from someone else. The act of borrowing (rather than owning) shows that the fashionable consumer commodity does not belong to the proletarian class character. It is foreign to him. But through borrowing the leather jacket, Shaochun tries to imitate the fashion style of someone whose occupation (e.g. technician, engineer) is more respectable than his, and whose

\textsuperscript{19} The engineer Shao Yongbin is said to be wearing a western-style suit in the newly established PRC. So it is not correct to say that the western-style suit is a product of bourgeois ideology and that it is completely denounced during the Chinese socialist period. Chinese people did wear the western-style suits during the seventeen years of the PRC that preceded the Cultural Revolution.

\textsuperscript{20} The original quotation is in Chinese: 你二姐夫就是工程师，你看人家那身穿戴！出国的那天早上，我们送他上飞机场，他穿着一身二百多块钱的西服，外面还套着一件毛料的风衣，连那皮鞋呀，都是出口货！” (11)
social status is higher than his. It is through fashion imitation that Shaochun can have the fantasy that he can be like Yongbin, or on equal par with him. But this cannot be sustained for long due to the lack of purchasing power on Shaochun’s side. He does not have enough money to buy fashionable clothes.


Socialism produced its bureaucratic class [within the Chinese Communist Party]. This is part of the reason why the Cultural Revolution broke out. In addition, socialism also produced its own “middle class,” or “middle stratum.” This stratum was formed by the managers of the state enterprises, experts and specialists, technicians etc. The city was the space in which this stratum existed. This is how the three major differences – the difference between the worker and the peasant, between the city and the countryside, between mental labor and manual labor – that Mao Zedong

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21 While Shao Yongbin is said to be wearing a western suit, it is interesting to note that Shaochun puts on a leather jacket to imitate the engineer. Why does he not borrow a western suit to imitate Yongbin? One may wonder if the psychoanalytical mechanism of displacement is at work.

22 In *Revolution/Narration* (2010), Cai Xiang addresses the ideology of consumer democracy. “On the one hand, consumption cancels class difference, and produces an illusion (or an ideology) of class equality. However, what sustains such an illusion is the purchasing power of the consumer.”

The original quotation is in Chinese:

一方面，消费取消了阶层背景，因此生产出一种阶层平等的意识形态幻觉，但是，支持这一消费行为的却是消费者的支付能力，消费者支付能力的差异性，便决定了这一阶层平等的意识形态的幻觉性。
articulated were formed. Since the middle class led more comfortable lives and worked in more comfortable environments, this stratum became the object of desire. This is why Lin Yusheng would like to stay in the city in *The Young Generation*, and why Ding Shaochun would like to imitate the engineer in *Never Forget*. (My emphasis)

In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the dominant taste of a society is the taste of the ruling class. In *Revolution/Narration*, Cai Xiang challenges his argument by pointing out that in Cong Shen’s play (or in this case, Xie Tieli’s film), Shaochun does not imitate the taste of the proletariat – the ruling class of Chinese socialism. He does not imitate the taste of Mother Yao who is a former shop-keeper (the old petty bourgeoisie) either. Instead, he subscribes to the taste of Yongbin who is a state engineer. The latter is the middle class/stratum, or in the vocabulary of Marxist theory, the professional-managerial class or the new petty bourgeoisie. In Cai Xiang’s analysis, the new petty bourgeoisie as a class-

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24 The original quotation is in Chinese: 社会主义生产出了它自己的“官僚主义者阶级”，这一点毋庸置疑，并且成为“文革”爆发的部分原因之一。但是，除此以外，社会主义还在生产着自己的“中产阶级”，或者“中产阶层”。这一阶层通常由企业的管理者、专家、技术人员，等等构成，而城市则成为这一阶层存在的主要的空间形态，也因此产生如毛泽东所谓的“三大差别”（即工人和农民之间、城市和乡村之间、脑力劳动者和体力劳动者之间的差别）。正是这一差别的存在，也是因为这一新的中产阶层较为舒适的生活和工作环境，而成为社会羡慕或“地位追求”的对象。因此，不仅如《年青的一代》中，有林育生留在“城市”的要求和相应的行动，也导致《千万不要忘记》中丁少纯模仿“工程师”的趣味冲动。
fraction is not the residue of the old society plagued by feudalism, colonialism, and bureaucratic capitalism, but instead, it is a new and emergent social formation. In other words, the new petty bourgeoisie is a product of socialism: it is actively produced by the new socialist state (rather than being abolished by it). Cai Xiang’s claim challenges our conventional understanding of the relationship between the middle class, capitalism, and socialism. He is also correct to point out that the problematic figure of the socialist new petty bourgeoisie has not been satisfactorily handled in Never Forget. After this new social actor, and his taste and sensibility, have been introduced, the issue is prematurely foreclosed. The question of the socialist new petty bourgeoisie is tamed by the author’s (and the director’s) choice to represent the Shao Yongbin character in his humble proletarian outfit in the later part of the story. (“Mother Yao went outside, opened the door, and saw someone in a uniform carrying a distinctive travel bag. [Yongbin] appeared un-groomed and scruffy.”25) In other words, in Never Forget, the interesting problem of the socialist new petty bourgeoisie (or the socialist middle class) is solved abruptly, rather than being thoroughly discussed and properly interrogated.

25 The original quotation is in Chinese: "姚母走出去，打开门一看，来人穿了一身不起眼的布制服，提着一个不同的旅行袋，不加修饰，风尘仆仆的样子” (78-9)
In the story, Shaochun’s interest in the smart-looking leather jacket is made to contrast with his younger sister’s attitude. Due to the influence of his wife Yujuan, Shaochun is interested in fashionable clothes while his thrifty sister is not. Shaochun’s sister is called Ding Shaozhen – “shao” means “young” and “zhen” means “true.” Although she has a slightly annoying personality (for example, she likes to report to her father what her brother has done wrong), she is a diligent factory worker and is responsible for the operation of the cranes in the factory. Since she actively participates in productive labor, she manages to earn the reputation of the “progressive element” in her workplace. Shaozhen’s outlook is indicative of her passion for productive labor: “Shaozhen’s hair was cut very short and it was tucked inside a light blue work cap. She was also wearing a pair of worker’s trousers over her floral-patterned shirt.”26 The way she is dressed shows that she is a young, healthy, energetic, sincere, and honest woman worker.

26 The original quotation is in Chinese: [丁少真] 剪得短短的头发塞在浅蓝色的工作帽里，小花布的夹袄外面套着工裤 (1).
In the story, after Shaozhen has given the money she has earned at work to her mother, Ding Haikuan suggests to his wife that they use the money to buy their daughter a new sweater. But Shaozhen turns down the offer, insisting that the money should be used to buy her father a new sweater instead. The sweater that her father has been wearing is too old, Shaozhen thinks. In any case, Ding Haikuan and Mother Ding buy a new red sweater for their daughter. Of course, Shaozhen is very happy to wear it because it is a gift from her parents. Later Shaozhen and Youliang are planning to see a football match together. Just before she sees Youliang, Shaozhen has a conversation with her sister-in-law Yujuan. Although Shaozhen wears the new sweater beneath her work uniform, the fashion-conscious and slightly judgmental Yujuan comments on how old-fashioned Shaozhen’s new sweater is. But it does not make Shaozhen uncomfortable. She does not care too much what she wears. Rather, she is worried that the new sweater may embarrass Youliang and make him feel uneasy. That is why she wears an extra layer to cover it.

Yujuan saw Shaozhen’s red sweater from her sleeves. Out of curiosity, she asked: “When did you buy the new sweater?” “Father bought it.” Yujuan said enthusiastically: “Let me see.” She asked Shaozhen to take off her overcoat so that she could examine it in full detail.
Yujuan stepped back, stared at her, and commented in a serious way: “The color is ok…” Then she shook her head, “It's too old-fashioned!”

Not taking her comment too seriously, Shaozhen smiled, and put on her overcoat.

Yujuan took her overcoat away, put it on the side, and said: “You are going to see Youliang. Why do you want to wear it?”

Shaozhen still wanted to put on the overcoat. “Youliang dresses in such a simple way. I am too embarrassed to show the new sweater.”

Shaozhen is not as enthusiastic about fashion as her sister-in-law Yujuan.

What we remember about Yujuan is her interest in fashion, consumption, and shopping. In the film, Yujuan looks at herself in the mirror three times. She wants to make sure that she looks proper and decent before leaving home and work. “It is a habit for Yujuan to look at herself in front of the mirror. Although her hair and her clothes are already well-groomed, she still makes minor adjustments to them. It is only when she has made sure everything is proper and tidy that she leaves” (2). Also, she has spent RMB12 to have a portrait photograph taken by a

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The original quotation is in Chinese:

玉娟一眼看见了少真袖口露出的红毛衣，好奇地问： “你什么时候买的新毛衣啊？”
“爸爸给买的。”
玉娟很有兴味地说： “让我看看。”
说着叫少真脱去外衣， 好让她看过 “全貌”。
玉娟退了几步， 打量着， 一本正经地评论说： “颜色还可以……。” 遗憾地摇摇头， “样子太老了!”
少真无所谓地笑一笑， 随手又要将外衣穿上。
玉娟一把抢过来， 把外衣扔在一边说： “你去见友良， 还穿它干啥？”
少真还是套上了外衣： “人家友良那么朴素， 我挺不好意思的。” (23-24)

“[姚玉娟] 习惯地对着墙上镜子， 整了整已十分光溜的头发。 拉了拉原已很为整齐的上衣， 这才走去门口” (2)
professional photographer. The large-size photograph is hung in her bedroom. This shows her narcissism and self-indulgence. Yujuan works as a nurse in a clinic. Ironically, rather than giving the “medicine” to Shaochun to help cure the “disease” (i.e. bourgeois ideology or the capitalistic mode of thinking), what Yujuan does, in the later parts of the story, is to make her husband more vulnerable to the bourgeois “virus” at any rate, she is the catalyst of his “sickness.”

Later, Shaochun and Yujuan are told that Shao Yongbin will be coming for a visit. The couple would like to dress smartly to impress him. One day, when Shaochun and Yujuan are shopping in the department store, they arrive at the clothing section and discover someone trying on a good quality suit. The suit costs as much as RMB 148! It is certainly very expensive.

In the glamorous-looking department store, there were plenty of commodities and lots of people. Shaochun and Yujuan walked down the stairs. Shaochun stopped and said to Yujuan: “Let’s go back home.” Yujuan, enthusiastically, replied: “It’s still early. Let’s check out the fashion section.” Then they walked towards the fashion section. The display windows of the fashion section presented different kinds of new clothes. One customer was trying out a good-quality suit. The salesperson was explaining the good points about that particular suit.
Shaochun and Yujuan walked towards them and looked at the suit in an admiring way. Yujuan commented: “This good-quality suit is excellent.”
“And it has a special type of collar!” Shaochun said.
The customer who was standing in front of the mirror took off the suit and said: “OK. I am going to buy this.”
The salesperson took the suit and wrapped it at the counter. Shaochun and Yujuan walked towards the counter. While Yujuan touched the good-quality suit, she asked the salesperson: “How much does it cost?”
“RMB 148!”
Yujuan was shocked: “Wow! It’s so expensive!”
While she was doing the wrapping, the salesperson said: “It is of excellent quality.”
Yujuan wanted to take a closer look at it. But Shaochun pulled her to one side and said: “Let’s go.”
The couple left the counter. Yujuan said: “Yongbin is coming for a visit. Let’s think of a way to buy this suit!”
Shaochun said: “How can we think of a way to buy it? How can we have so much money?!"
“You can talk to your father and ask him to buy you one.”
Shaochun looked at Yujuan and shook his head. Then he said: “I am not going to look for trouble!”
The couple left the fashion section and went somewhere else.28

※ The original quotation is in Chinese:
灯光闪耀的百货商店里，商品琳琅满目，人群熙熙攘攘。
少纯和玉娟从楼梯走下，少纯停步对玉娟说，“咱们该回去吧。”
玉娟兴致勃勃地说：“还早了，我们到服装部去看看。”
他们向服装部走去。
服装部的橱窗里摆着各式各样的新式服装。一个顾客在镜子前试着一套料子服，售货员在一旁介绍着这服装的优点。
少纯和玉娟要过来，远远地再那里羡慕地看着。玉娟称赞的说：“嗳，这衣服样子真不错。”
“还是三开领的呢！”少纯说。
站在镜子前的顾客脱下那件料子服对售货员说： “好，我就要这一套啦！”
售货员接过料子服走到柜台前包装， 少纯和玉娟也走近柜台。玉娟摸着那套料子服问售货员道：“这套衣服多少钱一套啊？”
“一百四十八！”
玉娟吃惊地：“哟！这么贵啊！”
售货员一边包装着一边答道： “料子好啊！”
玉娟还想细看，少纯拉了玉娟一下说： “走吧。”
两人离开柜台走走，玉娟道： “二姐夫要来了，我们想办法买一套吧！”
少纯皱着眉头说： “想什么办法啊？我们手头哪来那么多钱哪？！”

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In fact, Shaochun has got a suit at home already. The problem is that it is not made of natural materials. Yujuan thinks it is difficult to press a trouser-line on the suit as the suit is made of synthetic materials. The couple think that Shaochun’s suit is not good enough.

Shaochun took off his shirt and squatted on the floor to fix the electrical blower fan sent in by his relative. In a leisurely way, Mother Yao was rolling the cigarette papers and made a remark: “Your father is such a miser. He has only got a son. When you were married, he did not even pay to have you tailor-made good-looking clothes!”

While working on the electrical parts, Shaochun said: “I have already had a good-quality suit. It fits quite well!”

While she was folding trousers on her bed, Yujuan overheard this. Embarrassingly, she held up the pair of trousers made of synthetic materials and said: “Forget it! When people look at it, they can tell immediately that it is made of synthetic materials. You cannot even use an iron to press a trouser-line. When Yongbin comes, you are going to stand next to him. How embarrassing is it!” As she said this, she imagined what it was like in real life and started to shake her head.

Shaochun held the electrical parts and said: “Well, what can we do about it? I have got what you don’t like. I am not able to afford the one you like!”

“你不好跟爸爸说说，让他给你买一套。”
少纯看了玉娟一眼， 摇摇头说： “哼， 我呀， 我才不自找那“卷刃”呢！”
两人离开服装部向别处走去。(18-19)
※The original quotation is in Chinese:
少纯家。 少纯脱了上衣， 蹲在地上修着那台三姨夫送来的鼓风机。 姚母悠闲地叼着烟草站在一旁发着议论： “你爸爸那人可也真够小气的了， 就你这么一个儿子， 结婚的时候都没给你做身像样的衣裳！”
少纯一边拆卸着另件， 一边说： “我不是有一套料子服嘛！凑合着穿呗！”

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To be sure, it is not necessary for Shaochun to dress formally to meet with Yongbin. He can just wear whatever he wears when he is at home. After all, Yongbin is a relative and Shaochun does not have to be so formal about the meeting. Shaochun can also wear his work uniform to meet Yongbin. If he really wants to treat Yongbin as a special guest, he can wear the suit that he has already got i.e. the one made of synthetic materials. It is not necessary for him to buy a new one.

Shaochun and Yujuan can hardly afford the good-quality suit that costs as much as RMB 148. What are they going to do about it? The business-minded Mother Yao, who used to work as a shop-keeper in the old society, offers them a wicked solution. When Mother Yao is introduced in the story, one can already understand what she is like. Yujuan, who is in the process of folding her pants, hears this and says with a mixture of provocation and embarrassment: "Well, this is a fake fur suit, and people can tell it's fake. There isn't even a straight line in the pants. When Sister-in-law comes over, you stand next to her, how embarrassing!" She seems to imagine the scene and is slightly embarrassed. Shaochun shrugs his shoulders helplessly and says: "What can I do? I don't like what you have; what you want, I can't buy!"

I want to suggest that the story Never Forget is similar to the creation stories in the beginning of the Old Testament in the Bible. If Haikuan is like God-the-father (or even Lacan’s Big Other), Shaochun is like Adam, Yujuan is like Eve, and Mother Yao is like the evil snake who seduces Eve to give the apple to Adam. The good-quality suit can be compared to the apple. Similar to the evil snake who contributes to the downfall of
tell she is a (petty) bourgeois character. “Mother Yao wore a pair of silk pants. Underneath her ear lobes were two gold earrings. She had the air of a wealthy old lady.” In contrast to the generosity of the proletarian Mother Ding who, for instance, shares with her neighbors the used coals she has found near the place she lives, Mother Yao is calculating about many things. She does not like to share things with others. Her petty bourgeois personality can be captured in her conversation with the young couple. After a successful scientific experiment in the factory, Shaochun rushes back home to let his wife Yujuan know the good news.

Shaochun ran back home happily. Once he entered the door, he said to Yujuan: “Yujuan, congratulate me! Our experiment was successful! And Yongbin complimented us.”
Mother Yao asked: “Will you receive any bonus [i.e. cash]?” […]
Yujuan commented: “Mother, you always talk about money money money.”
Mother Yao smiled and said: “I am money!”

mankind, Mother Yao has undermined Shaochun’s commitment to continuous class struggle and socialist revolution.

* The original quotation is in Chinese:
[yao mu] 穿一身“老箱底”的丝料袄裤, 耳垂上嵌有两枚金耳环, 按照以前的说法, 她就是一个相貌“富态”的老太太 (4)
* The original quotation is in Chinese:
少纯兴高采烈地跑回家来, 刚进门便对玉娟说: “玉娟, 快祝贺我吧, 我们实验成功啦!” 又得意地, “而姐夫也表扬了我们。”
姚母急忙走过来问: “有奖金吗?”[…..]
玉娟在一旁对姚母说: “妈, 你总是钱钱钱的。”
姚母笑了笑说: “我就是钱!”(85)
As the personification of the petty bourgeoisie, Mother Yao really cares about money. She constantly looks for ways to make more money. In many ways, this particular female character can be considered as an agent of what Mao Zedong calls the “sugar-coated bullet.” One must also be cautious of the gendered ideology of such a representation: it is the petty-bourgeois woman figure (Mother Yao) that brings about the proletarian man’s (Ding Shaochun) downfall.

Mother Yao comes up with a solution to help Shaochun buy the good-quality suit. She turns Shaochun’s interest in bird shooting into a profit-making activity. Mother Yao suggests: “In fact, if you [Shaochun] shoot wild birds more

33 The construction of the petty bourgeois figure is a response to Vladimir Lenin’s concern with the continuation of the communist revolution in the everyday life. The latter was one of the theoretical bases of some of the policies adopted by the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Congress of the CCP in fall 1962. See Lenin’s “Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder” (April 1920) and “The Tasks of the Youth Leagues” (October 1920). In the former, Lenin cautions the possibility of the class struggle waged by the small commodity producers, i.e., the (old) petty bourgeoisie in the post-revolutionary period (17-118).
For “The Tasks of the Youth Leagues” (October 1920), see website: http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/02.htm.
often, then you can buy the good-quality suit!” (21). Later Mother Yao manages to collect enough money to help Shaochun buy the good-quality suit. But where does the RMB 148 come from? First, Mother Yao makes a profit of RMB 28 by selling the wild birds that Shaochun has shot. Second, since Shaochun’s friend Youliang has to use his salary to support his mother and his two brothers and two sisters, Daliu, who works for the local branch of the CCP, delivers RMB 50 to Youliang. But Youliang turns down the offer. The opportunistic Mother Yao borrows the money from Daliu instead. Third, in the beginning of the story, Shaochun has been asked by a relative to repair an electrical blower fan. Although Shaochun insists on not charging his relative to repair the machine, Mother Yao secretly asks his relative for RMB 30 without Shaochun’s approval. The story does not explain where the remaining RMB 40 comes from. One may suspect that it is from the savings of the Yao family.

Now, Shaochun and Yujuan have got enough money to buy the good-quality suit. But Shaochun is still hesitant. He is not entirely sure if this is the correct way to handle things. His indecision shows that he is torn between two

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34 The original quotation is in Chinese: 实在呀，你多打几回野鸭子就能换来一套料子服！ (21).
forces: the proletarian worldview and the petty bourgeois worldview. In “A Discussion of the Theme and the Characters of *Never Forget,*” Liao Zhenlong describes the scene in which the conflicting class forces and ideologies are played out in Shaochun’s consciousness:

[Ding Shaochun] is relatively passive as regards to the consumption of the good-quality suit — it is Yao Yujuan who has bought the suit on his behalf when he is not around. Another detail is added [in the film]: When he is planning to buy the suit with Yujuan, suddenly he remembers he has promised Youliang to do scientific experiments. So he goes to see Youliang to let him know that he is not free. But it turns out that Youliang criticizes him. Shaochun cancels the idea of buying the suit. It shows that two different kinds of forces are in competition in Shaochun’s thinking. (54)\(^{35}\)

To buy or not to buy? This is the question. In the end, not only does Yujuan try to persuade Shaochun to buy the suit, but also she buys it on his behalf when he is away.

In the story, Shaochun is shown to have gone bird shooting twice. The first time he goes alone and manages to kill several birds. However, on his way

\(^{35}\) The original quotation is in Chinese:
[丁少纯] 对买毛料子衣服的态度也比较被动 — 是姚玉娟在他不在的情况下买来的，并且增加了这样一个细节，正当他准备跟玉娟出门去买这套衣服时，他想起和季友良做实验的事，于是跑去跟季友良说一声，结果反被季友良的一番劝阻和批评打消了去买衣服的念头，这表明了是在两种思想力量的不断争夺之中，而他在这当中是左右摇摆着的。 (54)
home, his bicycle gets stuck in the mud – it is a hint of the beginning of his downfall – and so he can only go back home the next day. While Mother Yao suggests that he can ask for a sick leave to rest properly, Shaochun insists going because he has never missed a day of work. Because he has not had much sleep during the previous night, Shaochun yawns at work, and it is discovered by his father. Haikuan makes a brief comment on it. After Shaochun has become more involved in the bird shooting activities, he is shown to be making more mistakes at work, and each one is worse than the previous one. Since he has gone shopping with his wife and has forgotten the time, he arrives at work late. He also forgets to close the electrical door of the machine, thus delaying the production process. The mistakes Shaochun makes begin to alarm his father.

In order to make more money to buy the good-quality suit, Mother Yao encourages Shaochun to go bird shooting again. Her rationale is that she can sell the birds to make extra cash. From the beginning, Shaochun knows that his mother-in-law makes a modest profit by selling the birds he has shot in the market, albeit with some reservations. But this time, Shaochun has made a big mistake. Shaochun needs to catch a train to go bird shooting. Since there is not enough time for him to go back home to grab his equipment, Yujuan suggests
that he should leave work early. At that time, Shaochun is waiting for a particular work process to be completed and he feels he has got enough time to do this. He leaves his workplace early without the consent of his team leader, even though he knows it is not the right thing to do. Then, he rushes back home, picks up the equipment, and rushes back to the factory to finish the necessary procedures to complete the heating process. Because he does everything in such a hurry, carelessly, he drops his key into the machine without knowing it. The factory workers have been warned many times not to drop anything metallic into the machine, otherwise it will have adverse consequences to the supply of electricity to the town. This time Shaochun is really in trouble! Meanwhile, Shaochun leaves work early the second time. This time, he has to catch a train to go bird shooting with Daliu. Shaochun is ambitious: he’d like to shoot as many birds as possible. And he does. However, he is so focused on bird shooting that he misses the train to go back home. He can only go back home the following day, which means that he has to be absent from work again. It just happens that when Shaochun’s father goes to Mother Yao’s home to ask her what she has done with the RMB 50 loan that Shaochun comes back home from his bird shooting trip. When Haikuan gets to know that the money has been used to buy the good-
quality suit, he becomes very angry. He gives Shaochun and Mother Yao a serious lecture.

Mother Yao, it’s fine to dress beautifully. What I am concerned with is that the person who is wearing the clothes is getting less beautiful! It’s similar to the goods you used to sell – you focused on the packaging but what is inside were rotten pears! [Then, Haikuan turns to Shaochun.] Shaochun, the question is not what you wear or what you eat. The question is what you think, what you desire, and what you aspire toward! My child! In this world, there are thousands and millions of people who don’t have proper clothes to wear! If you are only looking for personal satisfaction and material fulfillment, then, you will forget to open the machine door, forget to go to work, forget socialist construction, and forget world revolution!

Then, Daliu knocks on the door to ask Mother Yao to return the RMB 50 she has borrowed. Mother Yao cannot pay back the amount. She asks Shaochun to go bird shooting again so that she can sell the birds. This is the third time that she has asked Shaochun to go bird shooting! Finally, Haikuan gets to know this and he is absolutely furious. Pointing out it is not a good idea for a proletarian worker to be involved in petty-bourgeois transactions, Haikuan expresses his

※The original quotation is in Chinese:
亲家母，穿得漂亮倒没什么，怕的是衣裳里头的这个人越来越不漂亮啦！就像你们从前买的那种唬人的现货包一样，光在包装上下功夫，里面装净是有虫眼的烂梨！[......]
少纯啊！问题不在于你们穿什么，吃什么，问题在于你们想什么，追求什么，奋斗目标是什么！孩子！世界上还有成千上万的人连最坏的衣裳都穿不上！要是你们光追求个人的物质享受，那你们就会忘记开电门，忘记上班，忘记社会主义建设，忘记世界革命！(84)
worries explicitly. He is afraid that Shaochun will end up selling the working class’ thought and feeling.

Child! My child! Have you forgotten who you really are? Your grandfather is an employed peasant. Your father is an old worker and a communist party member. You used to wear a red neckerchief (or scarf) and belong to the communist youth organization! You are a member of the proletariat! Now, you are selling this and that, and eventually, you will sell all the thoughts and feelings of the proletariat away! (90-91)\(^3\)

Just before Shaochun went bird shooting the second time, he dropped his key into the machine. When he comes back home from the trip, he is still looking for it. Even with the help of Yujuan, he cannot find the key at home. Shaochun thinks that he must have left the key in the jacket that he borrowed from the theater group. Yujuan sends a telegram to the person who has retrieved the jacket, only to realize that the key is not in the jacket pocket. Guessing that the loss of the key may have negative impacts on Shaochun’s career, Mother Yao leaves her key at the place where the chicken are raised. Then, she tells Shaochun and Yujuan that they may be able to find the key there. Of course, Shaochun is

\(^{3}\) The original quotation is in Chinese: 孩子啊， 我的孩子！[……] 难道你忘了你是个什么了吗？你的祖父是个老雇农， 你的父亲是个老工人， 是个共产党员！你， 是系着红领巾， 带着共青团徽长大的！ 你是工人阶级的一个成员啊！ 你这样卖来卖去， 就会把工人阶级的思想感情统统卖掉！（90-91）
only too happy to find the key, but he has not questioned if it is his mother-in-law’s secret plan. The sensible and perceptive Haikuan and Youliang manage to see through the lie. They demand Shaochun to ask Mother Yao to show him her own key. However, she cannot present it. So Shaochun rushes back to the factory and digs into the machine. His key is there! He has really dropped the key into the machine! Because she feels too embarrassed with what she has done, Mother Yao plans to leave. Just before the story ends, Haikuan asks her to stay. Then, he lectures to his children on the importance of continuous class struggle in one’s everyday life. The forces of the old society are resilient, and bourgeois ideology may recuperate at any moment, he warns. The message that Haikuan wants to deliver is simple, direct, and powerful: “Never Forget Class Struggle!”

38 In Cong Shen’s play (this scene is missing in the film), Ding Haikuan describes the class struggle between the proletarian class and the bourgeois class in more vividly. It is expressed as the struggle for the hegemony over the education of the children of socialism. “While our children are wearing a red scarf, someone would like them to wear a black scarf! We tell them how glorious it is to labor and serve as a model worker, but someone says to them: “You cannot fill up your stomach by being a model worker!” We educate them not to care about reward, however, someone asks them: ‘How much money you are making?’” (71-2)

The original quotation is in Chinese:
在孩子们脖子上系着红领巾的时候，就有人总想偷偷摸摸地给他们系上一条‘黑领巾’！我们对他们讲劳动模范怎样光荣，可是也有人对他们说：‘模范也不顶饭吃！’我们教育他们不要计较劳动报酬，可是有人一见了他们的面不出三句话就问：‘你挣多少钱’？ (71-2)
Do you think once you have sent your mother away, then you will be safe? No! Your thinking is far too simple. This is not a question of your mother alone. This is the inertia of the old society. There are many people who are like your mother and they are everywhere! It is hard to notice that they have already harmed your ideological health and well-being [...] The party would like you to become the heirs of the proletarian class. But they would like you to become the heirs of the bourgeois class. This is class struggle! This kind of class struggle does not come with the sound of the gunfire or the canon. They creep into our lives when we are talking and laughing. This kind of class struggle cannot be detected easily! This kind of class struggle is also easily forgotten. Never, never forget [class struggle]! (97-98)

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Inspired by Never Forget, the viewer Bo Yibo wrote to the newspaper People’s Daily to express his view concerning fashion consumption, class struggle, and the battle of ideologies. He suggested that the characters in the play should be read as the personifications of competing classes, ideologies, and modes of production.

Mother Yao uses her bourgeois worldview to remodel Ding Shaochun. The result is that he walks on the dangerous path on his own without realizing it. His father

» The original quotation is in Chinese:

你們以為把你母親一送走,你們就保險了嗎？不！你們想的太簡單了！這不是你母親一個人的問題，这是一种旧社会的顽固势力。像你母亲这样的人不是到处都有吗？他们常常在不知不觉之间损害了你们的思想健康……党要把你们培养成无产阶级的接班人，可是他们，总要把你们培养成资产阶级的接班人。这是一种阶级斗争啊！这种阶级斗争，没有枪声，没有炮声，常常在说说笑笑之间就进行着。这是一种不容易看的清楚的阶级斗争！这是一场容易被人忘记的阶级斗争！千万，千万不要忘记啊！ (97-98)
Ding Haikuan, an older worker and also a cadre in the communist party, uses the proletarian worldview to educate his son and saves him. He helps his son to stand on the side of the worker again. (May 15, 1964)

He continues:

In socialist society, since the overthrown reactionary class is still present, the influences of the bourgeoisie and the old society are still present. The petty bourgeoisie is still present. Class struggle is inevitable. This kind of class struggle is often shown in the economic realm, the political realm, and the ideological realm. The struggle is presented as the battle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between socialism and capitalism. It is only when the proletariat wins the battle that socialism can be established, that the transition to communism can be completed. (May 15, 1964)

Ultimately, the conflict between the Ding’s family and the Yao’s family is the clash between two antagonistic classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

It is the conflict between two opposing modes of thinking– proletarian consciousness and bourgeois ideology. It is also the battle between socialism and capitalism. The political message of the story is obvious: “Never Forget Class Struggle!” even within the context of socialism.

* The original quotation is in Chinese:
薄一波, <在阶级斗争的熔炉中锻炼——话剧《千万不要忘记》观后> 人民日报 1964.05.15 第 5 版.
“以姚母为一方，用她的资产阶级世界观来改造他 [丁少纯]，使他不自觉地走上了一条危险的道路；以他的父亲，老工人出身的干部丁海宽为另一方，用无产阶级的世界观来教育他，挽救了他，使他重新站到工人阶级的立场上来。

* The original quotation is in Chinese:
社会主义社会，由于被推翻的反动阶级还存在，资产阶级的影响和旧社会的习惯势力还存在，小生产者的自发倾向还存在，阶级斗争仍然是不可避免的。社会主义社会里的这种斗争，经常表现为经济战线上、政治战线上和思想战线上不断的矛盾和斗争。它总是围绕着无产阶级同资产阶级这两条阶级，社会主义同资本主义这两条道路进行的。无产阶级只有在这一斗争中取得彻底胜利，才能建成社会主义，并且在将来条件成熟的时候，胜利地过渡到共产主义。
The Politics of Fashion and Consumption in Chinese Socialism

In “The Formation of the Theme ofNever Forget,” the playwright Cong Shen explains how he became interested in writing the play.

One night, my roommate, who is currently a branch secretary (he used to be a worker), and I were talking. He said that everyone works in the factory for 8 hours, and even if there are meetings, one works for at most 10+ hours. But there are 24 hours in a day. The factory workers spend the rest of their time at homes and their relatives’ places. It is difficult to say what kind of education they receive at home. It is difficult to know who their relatives and friends are. The factory workers are exposed to different kinds of people and ideas. When we are not promoting socialist education, others are spreading the thoughts of the bourgeoisie. While the workers receive the education in the factory, what they have learned can be undone at home. He kept saying: The impact of the family cannot be underestimated!

Cong Shen perceptively points out the problem of time management in socialist modernity. (The management of time is also a problem of capitalistic modernity because it has to do with the reproduction of labor.) To be sure, there

42 The original quotation is in Chinese:
有一天夜里，我和住同屋的一位团支部书记（不久以前他是个划线工）谈起这个问题来。他说，每天工人在工厂里只有八个小时，遇上开会也顶多有十个小时，可是一天有二十四小时呢，其余的时间他们是在家里或者亲戚朋友那里度过的，家里对青工进行什么教育，亲戚朋友都是一些什么人，那就很难说了。啥人都有，啥思想都有。我们在进行社会主义教育，也有人在散布资产阶级思想影响。[......] 这样白天青工在厂里接受的教育，晚上就有可能被他家里一笔勾销。 他再三说：“家里的影响可起作用啦！
are 24 hours in a day: if 8 hours are devoted to sleep and rest, 8 hours are devoted to production and work, then the remaining 8 hours can be devoted to the family, as well as consumption and leisure. But how should the latter 8 hours be organized in socialist modernity? What should the socialist everyday life look like? What should the socialist view of family and consumption be? These are the important questions that Never Forget poses.

In Never Forget, the primary sources of conflict – the engagement in leisure activities such as bird shooting and the purchase of a good-quality suit – have to do with consumption and spare time.\(^4\) (In fact, it is possible to use Freudian psychoanalysis to look at Shaochun’s interest in shooting wild birds. To be sure, the factory and home, especially his parents’ place, is the space of discipline and control. These are the spaces of “castration” – he feels “emasculated” when he is

\(^4\) I want to thank Simon Milnes for discussing with me the meaning of the consumption of wild birds in nature. He makes two points: First, the wild bird shooting is not purely a consumption activity. It is a money-making (not a money-spending) activity, at least when Mother Yao is scheming to use it that way. Second, it is also different from classic consumption in that it does not involve spending money on the petty bourgeoisie’s goods and services. It is going outside of society and grabbing something of worth for yourself, from nature, for free. No wealth is consumed. The fact that Shaochun goes bird shooting may just reflect the fact that there were not so many truly “consumerist” hobbies available. So people made their own entertainments and diversions. Those could be a distraction from socialism/class consciousness without being “consumption”.
working and spending time with his father and grandfather. The patriarchal father is constantly present in these spaces: Ding Haikuan is not only the head of the factory, but also the dominating figure at home. His grandfather, who comes from the countryside to spend time with Shaochun’s family, is another dominating male figure. It is not until when Shaochun goes to the countryside to shoot wild birds that he can feel more relaxed and at ease. The instrument he uses for bird shooting is also a phallic symbol – it resembles an erected and virile male penis. He feels re-masculinized in nature.) When Shaochun shoots wild birds, he does so outside the space and time of the factory. When Shaochun desires a good-quality suit and eventually, with the help of his wife, buys it, he does so outside the space and time of productive labor. It is in this sense that the film expresses the socialist regime’s anxiety toward fashion and consumption, in particular, excessive consumption and over-consumption.

If we can agree that *Never Forget* is a story about the consumption of fashion commodities (at the expense of production and of forgetting class struggle), then the next question to ask is: how is the consumption represented in the film? Is it approved and recommended? Or, is it critiqued and denied? In my analysis, Ding Haikuan’s attitude toward consumption is ambiguous and
ambivalent. He does not endorse or disapprove fashion consumption explicitly. While he never supports Shaochun’s consumption of leisure activities or fashionable clothes, he never objects to it. Instead, Haikuan expresses his view toward consumption in the form of the double negative: “I do not object to it.” Here, we need to be cautious: That he does not object to consumption does not necessarily mean that he endorses it. Similarly, that he does not endorse consumption does not in itself mean that he rejects it either.

In the story, Haikuan makes clear that he does not oppose Shaochun’s consumption of leisure activities. He just warns his son: “I don't object to the fact that you shoot wild birds. Just be careful not to get addicted to it” (30). In other words, as long as it does not interfere with his work performance, Haikuan does not oppose to Shaochun’s hobbies. Similarly, Haikuan has never disapproved of his junior colleague Daliu shooting wild birds in his spare time, nor has he warned Daliu not to go bird shooting with his son. Similarly, Haikuan has never

41 The original quotation is in Chinese: 打野鸭子我不反对，可也不能着迷啊！I want to point out that addiction is linked to consumption, not production, in Never Forget. If Shaochun is addicted to the consumption of leisure, such as shooting wild birds, can one say that Youliang is also addicted to productive work? But Youliang’s “addiction to labor” is not problematized. Youliang is praised as a model worker. What is the socialist critique of the workaholic?
stopped Shaozhen from watching football games with Youliang in their spare time. For Haikuan, what is the most important is socialist production and revolution, not consumption. What concerns him most is the ideological education of the young generation, not the shooting of wild birds or fashion consumption. He can tolerate such consumptive activities as long as they do not impede Shaochun’s commitment to socialist construction and revolution.

While Haikuan does not oppose Shaochun’s engagement in leisure activities, he does not object to his consumption of clothes either. In the story, Haikuan makes clear that he does not really mind what his son wears – and we can go even further to say that he does not mind that his son wears a good-quality suit. Haikuan explains: “Shaochun! The question is not what you wear and what you eat. The question is what you are thinking, what you desire, and what you aspire toward!” (84). What Haikuan cares about is not the smart-looking clothes, but the person who wears the clothes. He says: “It’s fine to dress smartly. I am just afraid that the person who wears the clothes is getting less

\[\text{\textsuperscript{45} The original quotation is in Chinese:}
\text{少纯啊！问题不在于你们穿什么，吃什么，问题在于你们想什么，追求什么，奋斗目标是什么！}
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beautiful!” (84). In Haikuan’s opinion, what matters is the person who consumes the clothes, not the clothes or the act of consuming them. What is important is the socialist consumer him/herself, not the act or the object of consumption.

We can use Haikuan’s general principles to work with specific cases. In Never Forget, four different kinds of clothes are featured. The first kind is the piece of “linen cloth.” Before the communist liberated China from imperialism and feudalism, Grandfather Ding was too poor to buy a decent piece of clothing, and could only use a piece of linen cloth to cover his body. This is not an option for clothing the people after the communist revolution. The second kind is the kind of clothing that the proletarian characters wear in their everyday lives in socialist China. This is the kind of clothes that Ding Haikuan and Ji Youliang wear, which are simple and functional. The third kind is the red sweater that Ding Shaozhen wears when she meets with Ji Youliang to see the football game.

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*The original quotation is in Chinese: 穿得漂亮倒没什么，怕的是衣裳里头的这个人越来越不漂亮! In the story, when Haikuan has a chance to meet the engineer Yongbin in Mother Yao’s home, Yongbin is dressed in humble and simple proletarian clothes. It would be interesting to imagine what Haikuan’s reactions would be if he encountered Yongbin in his good-quality suit. Would he be critical of Yongbin’s fashion? Would he consider Yongbin’s consumption of the good-quality suit as expressing class struggle?
What distinguishes the red sweater from the clothes that the proletarian characters wear is that the red sweater, a gift from Ding Shaozhen’s parents, is slightly more fashionable. Ding Haikuan says to his daughter in this way: “Now all the young people in the factory have got one [the red sweater] already. You should probably get one too” (20). The red sweater is fashionable among the factory workers. It is tempting to say that Ding Haikuan not only endorses the consumption of practical and functional clothes, but also the consumption of a mild and reasonable degree of fashion. (If we pursue this line of logic, then, it is not entirely correct to say that fashion consumption is entirely denied or rejected during the socialist period.) The fourth kind is the good-quality suit that Ding Shaochun wears when he meets with Yongbin who is a state engineer. The good-quality suit is more than functional: it is made of excellent materials. It is aesthetically pleasing. It looks good.

I would like to suggest that the consumption of these different kinds of clothes echoes with Mao Zedong’s idea. In his famous speech, “Yan’an Talks on Literature and Art” (1942), Mao Zedong articulates the dialectical working of

\(^{47}\) The original quotation is in Chinese:
现在厂里的年轻人差不多都有了，你也应该买一件吧!
popularization and raising standards as it pertains to arts and literature. In his talk, Mao starts by posing the question: “whom do we serve?” His answer is that one should serve the proletariat, such as the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers, as opposed to the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie (e.g. the intellectual class), or the other exploitative classes. The working class should be considered as the primary audience (or the consumers) of the arts and literature produced by socialist cultural workers. Then, Mao asks another question: “How should we serve?” Two options are offered: popularization or raising the standard of living. Which one should be the priority? In the 1940s, Mao emphasized that the most urgent task was popularization – to make arts and literature widely available to the masses and the people.

Admittedly, Mao deals primarily with arts, literature, and cultural production. But I believe his ideas can be creatively appropriated to articulate the socialist order of things, including the consumption of clothes. To focalize Mao’s ideas to Never Forget: Ding Haikuan insists that clothes should be produced first and foremost for the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers. Clothes should be produced for the people and the collective, not for the privileged individuals. The most urgent task in China is popularization – the mission of making clothes
widely available to everyone. However, according to Ding Haikuan, the goal of popularization has yet to be completely realized in the new socialist society. He reminds: “But now, thousands and millions of people do not even have the worst kind of clothes to wear!” So the objective should be that everyone in China should be able to wear the most basic and functional kind of clothes, which is the kind of clothes that the proletarian characters wear in their everyday lives in *Never Forget*.

The dialectic evolves: the change in quantity will lead to the change in quality, and popularization will lead to the demand of higher standard. Once the most basic and functional kind of clothes has been widely democratized, the Chinese can strive to wear clothes made of better qualities, such as the red sweater that Shaozhen wears when she goes to see a football match with Ji Youliang. Once the standard has been raised, then, through a dialectical turn, the task of popularization should begin. And after the red sweater has been widely popularized and democratized, then, the Chinese can also strive to wear the good-quality suit that Ding Shaochun purchases. The long-term vision should be

*The original quotation is in Chinese:
可是现在，世界还有成千上万的人，连最坏的衣服都穿不上!”*
that fashion and good-quality clothes should be made available to everyone, not merely to the individuals in one privileged class.\footnote{In Chen Yun's play, *The Young Generation*, Xiao Jiye's opinion can also be examined in terms of Mao Zedong's idea of the dialectic of popularization and raising standard. The character says: “Who has made life happier? Is it only that your life has become happier? Or is it that thousands of millions of people have become happier thanks to your labor? If one only strives for one’s own happiness and forgets the fact that our country is very poor and many problems are awaiting to be solved, and the responsibility that a young person should have towards his or her party and the people, then, what kind of places would this kind of happiness lead us toward?”}

The dialectic of popularization and the raising of standard of living can help us answer part of the question. But what exactly is Ding Haikuan’s view regarding fashion and consumption? What is the socialist view towards fashion and consumption? To answer this question, we need to look at the end of the play where Haikuan lectures his son.

A good-quality uniform, this is a good thing. It’s better than the piece of clothing I am wearing. It’s also better than synthetic materials. This is something that the laboring people dare not imagine to have. Now, you dare to have it, and some people can also own it. This is a good thing. This is the result of revolution and construction! There will be one day when everyone in China and everyone in the world can wear the best kind of clothing! But now, thousands and millions of people do not even have the worst kind of clothing to wear! \footnote{This quote comes from the play. The original is in Chinese: 萧继业： 使谁的生活变得更幸福？是仅仅使你个人的生活变得更幸福？还是使千百万人因为你的劳动而变得更幸福？如果一个人只追求个人的幸福，忘记我们的国家现在还是一穷二白， 在我们的面前还排着多少困难, 忘记我们年轻人对党对人民应负的责任， 这样的幸福会把我们引导到什么地方去呢？}
What is noteworthy is that Ding Haikuan regards the high-quality suit as “a good thing,” and that the desire to buy it and to wear it is “a very good thing.” In other words, he endorses the consumption of fashion and is favor of good quality clothes as such. In “The Formation of the Theme of *Never Forget,*” Cong Shen explains how he rewrote the play. In the original version, the consumption of the good-quality suit was portrayed in a negative way. Later, he was advised

毛料子，这是好东西，它比我这身斜纹布强，比人造哔叽也强，这是从前的劳动人民连想都不敢想的东西，现在你们不但敢想它，还有不少的人能够穿它，这是很好的事情，这是革命和建设打来的成果！我们总有一天，能样全中国和全世界的人民，都穿上最好的衣裳！可是现在，世界还有成千上万的人，连最坏的衣裳都穿不上。

In contrast, what Haikuan says in the film is slightly different:

Shaochun, the question is not what you wear or what you eat. The question is what you think, what you desire, and what you aspire toward! My child! In this world, there are thousands and millions of people who don’t have proper clothes to wear! If you are thinking about the high-quality uniform only, if you are thinking about shooting a few more wild birds, then, you will forget closing the machine door, you will forget going to work, you will forget the fact that our country needs to make more progress, and you will forget world revolution!

The original is in Chinese:

少纯啊！问题不在于你们穿什么，吃什么，问题在于你们想什么，追求什么，奋斗目标是什么！孩子！世界上还有成千上万得人连最坏的衣裳都穿不上！要是你们光追求个人的物质享受，那你们就会忘记开电门，忘记上班，忘记社会主义建设，忘记世界革命！

Shaochun, the question is not what you wear or what you eat. The question is what you think, what you desire, and what you aspire towards! My child! In this world, there are thousands and millions of people who don’t have proper clothes to wear! If you are thinking about the high-quality uniform only, if you are thinking about shooting a few more wild birds, then, you will forget closing the machine door, you will forget going to work, you will forget the fact that our country needs to make more progress, and you will forget world revolution!
by his comrades to rewrite some parts of the play to depict fashion consumption in a more neutral way.

In the first draft of the play, the representation of the good-quality suit was one-dimensional. It gave people an impression that we opposed the wearing of the good-quality suit. Then, many leaders and comrades pointed out this problem to me and I rewrote the play according. Compared with the first draft, the description of this particular scene in the finalized version was very different.51

Indeed, there is no reason for socialism to oppose to material abundance or a prosperous life. This should be an important goal for the socialist project.

In *Never Forget*, although the good-quality suit is acknowledged to be the kind of clothing to be desired, the actualization of such a desire is arrested. Although the good-quality is a good thing, it is not something that one should desire in the present, but something to be achieved in the future. In *Revolution/Narration*, Cai Xiang makes a similar point about the deferral of desire:

In Haikuan’s lecture, the taste of the good-quality suit is still regarded as the taste of the ruling class. It is silently approved. But since it is presented as something to be achieved in the future, the actualization of such a desire in the present is delayed.52

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51 The original is in Chinese: 剧中对料子服这个情节的描写, 原稿就带有片面性, 容易使人感到我们反对穿料子服, 后来许多领导同志都不断地指出这方面的缺点, 我就不断地进行修改, 现在这个情节就比原稿有好大的不同了。52 The original is in Chinese:
I will go even further to say that fashion consumption is shown somewhat negatively in *Never Forget*. The story begins with Shaochun’s desire for a good-quality suit, and ends with his father’s warnings about the danger of fashion consumption. To be sure, Shaochun cannot really afford to buy the good-quality suit. In order to obtain RMB 148 to buy the suit, he has to shoot a number of wild birds and allow his mother-in-law to help him sell them in the market. Because he spends a great deal of time shooting wild birds, he makes a number of mistakes, and each mistake is more serious than the previous one. The root of the problem is that his bird shooting activity has badly interfered with his work performance. In the beginning, Shaochun yawns at work and it is discovered by his father. Because he spends some time shopping with his wife in the department store, he arrives at his work late. Shaochun has also become more careless and absent-minded. For example, he has forgotten to close the electrical door of the machine. Because of this mistake, the production process is interrupted. In order to go bird-hunting, Shaochun, without the permission of his

在丁海宽的这一意识形态的长篇“演说”中，“毛料子”的“趣味”仍然占着“统治地位”，并被默认，只是以一种“将来”的方式被悬置起来。
supervisor, leaves work early – the first time he has to go back home to pick up the equipment and the other necessities, and the second time he has to catch a train. Worst of all: Because he does everything in a hurry, he has carelessly dropped his key into the machine without knowing it – and such a mistake may bring disastrous consequences to the supply of electricity in his town. He is so engrossed with bird shooting that he has missed the train to go back home, consequently, he misses work. Youliang and Haikuan have to take the shift on his behalf. Since Shaochun desires to buy the good-quality suit, he has to shoot more wild birds so that his mother can sell them. Due to the pressure to shoot more birds, his work performance is severely affected. In the end, Ding Haikuan lectures to his son seriously:

If you are only thinking about the high-quality uniform, if you are only thinking about shooting a few more wild birds, then, you will forget closing the electrical door, you will forget going to work, you will forget the fact that our country is making progress, and you will forget world revolution!  

The political message is obvious: fashion consumption is the site where class struggle is waged.

53 The original is in Chinese:
要是你们光想着自己的毛料子，光惦着多打几只野鸭子，那你们就会忘了关电门，忘了上班，忘了我们的国家正在奋发图强，忘了世界革命！
Two cases are presented to us: The first case is that Shaochun consumes fashion and makes a number of mistakes. The second case refers to the socialist workaholics Ding Haikuan and Ji Youliang. In *Never Forget*, Ding Haikuan is represented as an experienced and dedicated manager (and worker) in the factory. When he appears in the beginning of the story: “He was wearing an old uniform made of cloth, with the sleeve-covers on the outside. Underneath he was wearing a Chinese-style “xiaogua.” The shoes he was wearing were made of cloth. They were home-made” (3). This outlook shows that he is an honest, sincere, diligent, and frugal proletarian character. In the story, he works all the time, not only in the factory, but also at home – his home is an extension of his workplace. Even when he is having dinner, he is still discussing work-related matters with his children. For example, he constantly reminds them not to drop anything metallic into the machine. Similarly, Shaochun’s good friend Ji Youliang works very hard all day long – in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Sometimes he discusses work with Ding Haikuan even after the dinner is over. The young and promising Youliang spends most of his energy on revolution and

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54 The original is in Chinese:丁海宽穿着一套旧布制服，戴着套袖里面衬着一件中式小褂，脚上穿的是家做的布鞋。(3)
construction. He is so passionate about his work that he willingly sacrifices his spare time to do scientific experiments for the factory. As a “Lei Feng”-type character in the story, one can imagine that Youliang will become a supporting column for the socialist building. It is very likely that he will become another Ding Haikuan character in the future. However, Youliang does not have any hobbies outside the workplace. As opposed to Ding Shaochun who works for 8 hours and uses his spare time to shoot wild birds and go shopping, Ji Youliang spends most of his time working in the factory. In other words, preoccupied with production, Ding Haikuan and Ji Youliang do not consume and do not cause trouble. In his essay, “The Historical Meaning of Never Forget – The Anxiety of the Everyday Life and Modernity,” Tang Xiaobing remarks that the distinction between production and consumption, work and leisure, factory and home, the public and the private, the collective and the individual, is suppressed in the model figures such as Ding Haikuan and Ji Youliang (1993: 228-9). Adding to his

55 The patriarchal father Haikuan does not show any respect of Shaochun’s privacy. This is shown in that Haikuan reads Shaochun’s love letter to Yujuan without his son’s permission. “Haikuan pointed towards the letter and said: “Let me read you a few lines: ‘Every time I break up with you, I feel infinitely empty’…” […] Haikuan got more angry: “It gives you enough to choke (?) with the word “empty.” He even said “infinitely empty!” (43) Not only does Haikuan reads Shaochun’s personal letters (even his wife is hesitant to do this and expresses slight objection to the invasion of his son’s privacy), but also, he openly mocks his son for his feeling of loneliness and emptiness.
observation, I suggest that in *Never Forget*, the socialist new man is portrayed as a productive, but leisure-less and consumption-less, figure.

While these two cases are extreme ones, does the film imagine the third case – one that can accommodate production and consumption simultaneously? Not really. In my analysis, there is no logical connection between the desire to have a high-quality uniform and the interest in shooting wild birds in one’s spare time on the one hand, and the consequences of (1) forgetting to close the machine door, (2) missing work, (3) forgetting the fact that one’s country is still in the stage of development, and (4) forgetting the important task of world revolution. The fact that Shaochun desires to wear a piece of smart-looking clothing does not in itself lead to the conclusion that it will be detrimental to his work performance. It is perfectly possible to imagine that he can wear the good-quality suit while arriving at work on time and performing his duties responsibly. Similarly, the fact that Shaochun enjoys shooting wild birds in his leisure time

But what is the problem of feeling lonely and empty after breaking up with one’s girlfriend? Haikuan must learn to respect other people’s private lives. The original quotation is in Chinese:

海宽指了指信一说：“我念几句你听听；‘每当我分手以后，我心里总是感到无限的空虚’……” [……] 海
宽越越生气；“空虚就够够了，他还来个‘无限’!” (43)
does not necessarily mean that he will become less committed to class struggle, nation building, and world revolution. In fact, he can enjoy bird shooting during his spare time while being a politically committed revolutionary. Nevertheless, this is not an option in the story.

In the first case, Ding Shaochun consumes and makes mistakes. In the second case, Ding Haikuan and Ji Youliang work all the time and do not consume or engage in leisure activities. The third case – the “work hard and play hard” attitude – is not offered as an option. However, rather than taking the representations of their attitudes toward fashion consumption as an unmediated reflection of the subjectivity of the socialist new person, I suggest that such representation can be read as a symptom of Chinese socialist modernity. I would like to suggest that fashion consumption reveals, symptomatically, the historical contradictions with which socialism was confronted at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution.

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Regarding the representation of fashion and consumption in *Never Forget*,
different Chinese literary and cultural studies scholars hold different opinions. In
his blog entry, “The Temptation of Fashion” on May 29, 2007, the Peking
University Chinese literature professor Zhang Yiwu points out the contradiction
of fashion and consumption within the context of Chinese socialist modernity. By
engaging with *Never Forget* (1964) and *The Army Soldiers Under Neon Lights* (1964),
he points out:

On the one hand, fashion is regarded as dangerous temptations. It is regarded as
one of the ways in which the bourgeoisie may invade the socialist body. In order to
have a good (read: communist) future, fashion has to be repressed. But on the other
hand, fashion is also regarded as one of the goals to be achieved in the future.
Fashion does not have to be something far-fetched. It is something that everyone
can enjoy. It is not that this goal cannot be achieved at all. It is only on the condition
that everyone is given the chance to appreciate such kind of life that we can really
enjoy fashion [...] The planned economy of socialism affirms the legitimacy of
fashion in the everyday life. But at the same time, fashion is denied in the everyday
life. It is relegated as something to be achieved in the future. The contradiction has
been written into the culture of fashion: on the one hand, it is considered as
something to be achieved, but on the other hand, it is repressed, denied, and
overcome in the everyday life. This is the reason why fashion is perceived to be a
source of unease and anxiety within the context of socialist planned economy. *

* There is a factual error in Zhang Yiwu’s analysis. The setting of *The Army Soldiers under
Neon Lights* is 1949-1951 – before the planned economy. The first Five Year Plan was
carried out in 1953-7.
The original quotation is in Chinese:
张颐武的博客: 时尚的诱惑：女魔头的魅力 (2007-06-02)
“一方面，社会认为时尚是危险的诱惑，是资产阶级的进攻的一部分。只有抑制它我们才会有好的
未来。但另一方面，时代却又将这种精致的享受定为了未来实现的目标，它其实并无新奇之处，是
未来必然让大家享受到的东西。它并不是不可实现的，而是说应该在所有人都享受这样的生活时，
我们才可以理直气壮地享受的。[…] 计划经济其实肯定了日常生活的时尚文化的合法性，但只是
In other words, the representation of fashion consumption in Chinese socialist cinema is contradictory: it is affirmed and denied at the same time. His observation can be further interpreted as a symptom of the socialist state’s anxiety towards consumption.

In “The Historical Meaning of Never Forget – The Anxiety of the Everyday Life and Modernity,” Tang Xiaobing calls the socialist affective configuration – the affirmation and denial of fashion and consumption – "the anxiety of the everyday."57

The historical meaning of Never Forget is that it has displaced and repressed the root of the problem, and because of this, it has recorded the collective anxiety of its historical period. If Wish You Healthy [the title of the play] expresses the confusion and desire of overcoming modernity, Never Forget [the title of the film] symptomatically expresses the avoidance of answering the question. It has
externalized its internal anxiety onto the other – “bourgeois slime-pit”, “disease/virus”, and “class enemy” etc. (1993: 233)  

Tang Xiaobing’s argument is a dialectical one: what is bad about the text (i.e. that it has displaced and repressed the root of the problem) is what is good about it (i.e. that the text has recorded the collective anxiety of its historical period). Perceptively, Tang points out the political unconscious of Never Forget – that the psychoanalytical mechanisms of repression and displacement are at work. But how exactly do repression and displacement work in Never Forget? This question is answered by Cai Xiang.

In Revolution/Narration (2010), Cai Xiang tackles the problematic ways in which consumption and desire are reduced, simplified, and relegated to bourgeois ideologies during the socialist period. He explains that the consumptive activities that Ding Shaochun is engaged in – the shooting of wild birds and the consumption of a good quality suit during his spare time – should

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58 The original quotation is in Chinese:
《千万不要忘记》的历史意义，正在于它通过对真正问题的转移和压抑反而忠实地记录了一段历史经验以及这一时代的巨大的集体性焦虑。与前作说，“祝你健康”这一剧名表达了克服现代性所带来的困惑的欲望，《千万不要忘记》则已征兆出对真正问题的回避，内在的焦虑外在化成异己的。需要否定的他性——“资产阶级泥坑”、“病菌”、“阶级敌人”等等。 （233）

59 The original quotation is in Chinese:
社会主义本身所生产出来的消费和欲望问题，被单纯归结为“资产阶级意识形态”的影响问题。
be considered as a product of social modernity. What is at stake is socialist consumption and desire.\textsuperscript{60} This is one side of the problem. The other side of the problem is that consumption and desire, as the products of socialism, in turn, produce the crisis of socialism.\textsuperscript{61}

On the one hand, the objective of revolution is to construct a society of material abundance. But on the other hand, when a society of material abundance has been built, it can potentially destroy revolution itself, preventing the revolution from moving forward.\textsuperscript{62}

The contradiction is as follows: socialism produces consumption and desire, and the products of socialism, in turn, produce the crisis of socialism. Cai

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} Socialism produces the time of production/labor, it also produces the time of leisure. Especially in the city, with the establishment of the system of 8 hours of work, and thanks to the development in science and technology, the time that can be devoted to leisure is increased. Desire, including the cultural expression of desire, such as aesthetics, beauty, and taste etc., is closely related to the time of leisure.
\end{itemize}

The original quotation is in Chinese:

在“革命后”的语境中，“革命”和“建设”之间，似乎存在着一种天然的悖论，一方面，革命要求建设一个物质丰裕的社会，而另一方面，这个物质丰裕的社会却有可能摧毁革命本身，或者说使革命就此停滞不前。\textsuperscript{61}
Xiang considers what Tang Xiaobing calls “the anxiety of the everyday” as a symptomatic expression of a larger historical problem.

At that time, socialism was not able to offer a good way of life. It could only convert the clash over taste (lifestyle) to the clash over politics (class struggle). It is an expression of anxiety. This is not simply the anxiety of the everyday, but also a political anxiety.⁶³

Inspired by Cai Xiang’s interpretation, I read such an anxiety as a symptomatic expression of the historical contradictions with which Chinese socialism was confronted on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The historical contradiction is that in the 1960s, socialist China had already achieved hegemony over politics and economy, but the regime had yet to obtain hegemony over culture. For the latter, I mean the socialist way of life – with its system of objects – had yet to be fully constituted. Let me quote Cai Xiang once again:

The proletariat managed to achieve absolute political and economic power within the socialist nation-state. But it had yet to obtain hegemony over culture, especially in the everyday. So it had to rely on the narrative form of “politics” and “collectivity” to reorganize the cultural order. Such an order was political. This act revealed the embarrassing position of proletarian literature – strong in

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⁶³ The original quotation is in Chinese: 当那时的社会主义无法提供一种独创性的好的生活方式，因而只能借助于权力将这一“趣味”（生活方式）的冲突转化成政治（阶级斗争）的冲突，本身就表现出一种“焦虑”，这一焦虑并不仅仅是“日常生活的焦虑”，在某种意义上，更是一种政治的焦虑。
terms of politics and weak in terms of culture [...] The difficulty is really to confront the class difference and individual desire produced by socialism.64

When we try to look at the politics of fashion and consumption in this way, then, the Cultural Revolution is not only a radical critique of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie within the CCP and the petty-bourgeois intellectual class, but also, it is an attempt to enable the socialist regime to overcome its contradictions (“strong in terms of politics and weak in terms of culture”) and regain hegemony over culture and ideology by means of continuous revolution and class struggle.

64 The original quotation is in Chinese:
无产阶级固然在社会主义国家掌控了绝对的政治和经济的权力，但是在文化上却未必具有绝对的领导权，尤其在日常生活领域，因此又必须借助“政治”和“群体”的叙述形式，重新讨论既有的文化秩序，而只要对既有的世界秩序进行重新的讨论和安排，它就必然是政治的。这样一种叙事格局，正表明了其时社会主义时期所谓“无产阶级文学”的尴尬位置——政治上的强势与文化上的相对弱势。而借助于权力政治展开的文化冲突，在另一种意义上，又妨碍了文化政治的深度展开。而这一尴尬的深度困难仍然在于，社会主义如何正视它自身生产出来的阶层差异包括个人欲望。
Chapter 3
“Mao’s Children Are Wearing Fashion!” (‘毛泽东的孩子们穿起了时装!’)\(^1\)

Figure 1\(^2\)

\(^1\) After seeing the performance of the first Chinese fashion model team in the early and mid-1980s, the western media exclaimed “Mao’s Children are Wearing Fashion!” The statement was quoted in several Chinese magazines and TV shows I researched. But the original source cannot be identified.
I would like to begin this chapter by drawing my reader’s attention to a photograph in the Chinese newspaper Jingji Ribao (Economic Daily) (经济日报) published on June 3, 1992. (See figure above.) This photograph featured a Chinese woman factory worker in a poetry reading competition. On the stage, against the backdrop of Chairman Mao’s portrait, she recited Mao Zedong’s poem “To the Female Soldiers” (“为女民兵题照”) (1961).

飒爽英姿五尺枪，
曙光初照演兵场。
中华儿女多奇志，
Five-foot rifles, flashing bravely, 
On the training ground, at break of the day,
How remarkable the spirit of Chinese women,3

2 Source: http://blog.big5.voc.com.cn/blog_showone_type_blog_id_538415_p_1.html
3 In fact, the Chinese-English translation is not entirely accurate. According to Guo Moruo’s essay, entitled “Buai hongzhuang ai wizhuang” (Don’t Like Red Dress, Like Military Uniform) (不爱红装爱武装) published Remin Ribao (People’s Daily) (人民日报) on April 25, 1964 (Page 7), Chairman Mao used “zhonghua ernü” (Chinese children) (中华儿女), not “zhonghua nüer” (Chinese girls) (中华女儿). “Zhonghua” (中华) refers to Chinese people, including men and women. “ernü” (儿女) means boys and girls, or sons and daughters, or children. In contrast, nüer (女儿) means girls only. The embrace of military uniform is not limited to Chinese women only; it is extended to both Chinese men and women. The original quotation is in Chinese:

但在主席诗中受到表扬的，据我看来，却不仅限于女民兵，而是男女都一样。值得注意的，诗中提的是“中华儿女”，而不是“中华女儿”。当然，为了平仄的关系，“中华儿女”在诗律上是失调的。这儿的第四字，严格地说，不能用平声。但如果主席的表扬是仅限于女性，那么尽可以写成为“中华少女”或“中华女子”；然而不是这样，而是“中华儿女”。这无疑是由于女民兵而联系到了所有的民兵。因而“不爱红装爱武装”句，也就不是仅仅限于女性了。 (郭沫若, “不爱红装爱武装,” 人民日报 1964.04.25 第7版)
They love the martial dress, not the red dress.\(^4\)

In the poem, Mao Zedong sings praises to the revolutionary potentials of Chinese women. He glorifies the military uniform (武装, 军装) that Chinese women wear and the rifles they carry. (Indeed, in many ways, Mao’s socialist feminism echoes with his slogans like “women can hold up half of the sky” (“妇女能顶半边天”) and “Times have changed. Men and women are the same [or equal]. Whatever male comrades can do, female comrades can also do too” [“时代不同了，男女都一样。男同志能办到的事情，女同志也能办得到”]).\(^5\) But ironically, the woman


\(^5\) Source: Maozhuxi yulu (Quotations From Chairman Mao) (毛主席语录)

I’d like to take this opportunity to point out that “sameness,” or more precisely, “equality” is gendered. Mao Zedong says that “whatever male comrades can do, female comrades can also do too.” However, he does not say “whatever female comrades can do – caring for children, shopping, cooking, washing, cleaning, and working fulltime – male comrades can also do too.” See Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s (Stanford UP, 1988), p.24-25. True gender equality should entail “whatever male comrades can do, female comrades can do too” and “whatever female comrades can do, male comrades can do too.”

\(^6\) Even before he became a Marxist, Mao Zedong was aware of the oppressiveness of certain kinds of clothes and accessories on Chinese women’s bodies, such as “tall buns and long skirts,” “facial makeup,” “jewelry on their hands,” and “pierced ears and bound feet.” Mao’s feminist impulse can be found in his essay “The Women’s Revolutionary Army” (July 14, 1919). He writes:

If a woman’s head and a man’s head are actually the same, and there is no real difference between a woman’s waist and a man’s, why must women have their hair piled up in those ostentatious and awkward buns? Why must they wear
worker reciting the poem onstage is wearing a floral shirt and a skirt, rather than military uniform. Standing on high-heel shoes, her legs are slightly crossed. Her pose expresses her gentility, elegance, and femininity. According to the Chinese standard in the 1980s, it was visually, probably sexually, provocative.

This photograph is interesting in that it reveals the disjuncture between Mao’s poem and the newspaper article, between Mao’s portrait at the background and the female factory worker in the foreground, and between the masculinized military uniform and the skin-revealing feminine outfit. The photograph shows the incompatibility between the representation of woman’s clothes during the socialist and the post-socialist eras. It unravels the tension between what Alain Badiou calls the revolutionary “event” and the politicization of those messy skirts clinched tightly at their waist? I think women are regarded as criminals to start with, and tall buns and long skirts are the instruments of torture applied to them by men. There is also their facial makeup, which is the brand of a criminal; the jewelry on their hands, which constitutes shackles; and their pierced ears and bound feet, which represent corporal punishment. Schools and families are their prisons. They dare not voice their pain, nor step out from behind closed doors. If we ask, how can they escape this suffering, my answer is, only by raising a women’s revolutionary army.

of the everyday on the one hand, and the era of economic modernization and
developmentalism, and in Wang Hui’s (汪晖) words, “de-politicization” on the
other.  

Figure 2: The female red guard in the Cultural Revolution

7 For the distinction between the event and the era, see Tani Barlow’s recent work on
Wang Guangmei’s qipao. For the distinction between the event and the pseudo-event,
see Slavoj Zizek’s critique of Alain Badiou’s works. For “de-politicization,” see Wang
Hui’s book in Chinese: Wang Hui, Qu zhengzhihua de zhengzhi: duan ershi shiji de zhongjie
yu jiushi niandai (Depoliticized Politics: The End of the Short Twentieth Century and the 1990s)
(汪晖, 去政治化的政治 短20世纪的终结与90年代) (2008). See also Wang Hui’s book in English,
The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity (Verso, 2011)
This chapter, entitled “Mao’s Children Are Wearing Fashion!” is part of my project that engages with fashion – understood as consumer commodity and artistic production – to address Chinese consumer culture from the socialist to the post-socialist periods. Emphasizing the complex mediations between the cultural and the political-economic, I focus on the specific ways in which Chinese fashion, media, such as cinema, documentary, and new media, and consumer culture are related to the radical economic, political, and social transformations of the PRC in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This chapter examines the representations of fashion consumption in contemporary Chinese cinema and feminist discourse. I argue that such representation reveal, symptomatically, the historical contradictions of the early stage of China’s economic reforms.

In Part I, “The Portrait of the Factory Worker in Her Red Dress,” I engage with Qi Xingjia’s film Red Dress is in Fashion (齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子) (1984), a “major melody film” sponsored by the post-socialist party-state to promote China’s capitalistic modernization. I point out the ideological significance of how fashion and consumption are handled in the film. Rather than portray desire,
pleasure, and consumption as potentially dangerous to class struggle, nation-building, and socialist revolution, the red dress is presented as a desirable commodity for the female factory workers. The model factory worker is portrayed as one who consumes the red dress while being a good and diligent worker. The underlying message deserves our attention: there is no contradiction between consumption and production. In the chapter, I look at the changing relationship between production and consumption in the post-revolutionary era.

In Part II, “The Revisionist Narrative and its Discontents,” I engage with the Chinese feminist debates about fashion, femininity, and gendered consciousness in the post-socialist period. According to the revisionist narrative, Maoist socialism promoted sameness and homogeneity at the expense of difference and multiplicity. Such form of repression can be observed in Chinese people’s clothes. The colors of the proletarian uniforms – blue, green, white, and grey – were dull and monotonous. Since Chinese women had to wear the clothes of the worker, the peasant, and the military soldier, Maoist socialism denied their natural femininity, turning them into masculine or genderless beings. However, the revisionist narrative continues, the country’s modernization project allowed Chinese people to wear colorful outfits with diversified styles. They could
express their personalities and individualities through fashion and consumption. Through fashion and makeup, Chinese women were also encouraged to express their femininity and regain their consciousness as gendered beings. In this part, I confront the revisionist argument by showing its contradictions and limitations. I show that the socialist period was not as repressive as what the revisionists present it to be, and also, the post-socialist period was not as liberatory as the revisionists claim it to be. I also examine the changing subject and object relationship between the human character and fashion commodity from the socialist to post-socialist periods. In the conclusion, shifting gears from gender to sexuality, I remark on the sexual politics of fashion and consumption.

In many ways, the cinematic representation and the feminist discourse can be considered as examples of what the leading Chinese Marxist and feminist theorist Dai Jinhua calls “invisible writings” (隐形书写). In her essay “Class and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Women’s Literature” (2004), Dai Jinhua illuminates the relationship between class, gender, and ideology in contemporary Chinese cultural productions. She addresses: “statements on class division became invisible writings everywhere in Chinese society during the 1990s and occasionally relied on different methods of cultural transference. The
topics of gender and women have become one of the important ways of doing this, highlighting and concealing the existence of class reality” (297). Although she does not explain the psychoanalytical transference mechanism, Dai Jinhua helpfully points out that class and ideology are often embedded in the discourse of women and gender (femininity), and I will add fashion and consumption to the list. In the following, I show that is through the discourse of fashion, gender, and consumption that we can detect the changing political ideologies in contemporary China. Indeed, ideology is central to our understanding of Chinese society. Since ideology is so overwhelmingly important, it is usually taken for granted. Since it is taken granted, paradoxically, it is relegated to the background and fails to be recognized as fundamental component that structures and shapes one’s historical experience. The task of cultural criticism is to render the hidden social structures visible.

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The Portrait of the Female Factory Worker in Her Red Dress

Figure 3: Red Dress is in Fashion Poster
Figure 4: Poster of *Red Dress is in Fashion*

Figure 5: The final scene in *Red Dress is in Fashion*. In the front row, the girl on the left is A Xiang, the girl in the middle is Tao Xinger (she is wearing the red dress), and the girl on the right is Ge Jia.
In this part, I examine the representation of fashion and consumption in Qi Xingjia’s film *Red Dress is in Fashion* (齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子) (1984). I explain the way in which the cinematic portrayal of the consumption of a red dress by a factory worker expresses the ideology of China’s economic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The main character of the film is Tao Xinger (陶星儿). She is a young, beautiful, intelligent, and compassionate female worker in a garment factory in Shanghai. Through her diligence, sense of responsibility, and passion and commitment to labor, she earns the title of the model worker (劳动模范/劳模).

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↑ Since the film does not have English or Chinese subtitles, it may be slightly difficult to follow the names of the characters. I include the list of characters here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>陶星儿 (Tao Xinger)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Model Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>葛佳 (Ge Jia)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>阿香 (A Xiang)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>芳芳 (Fang Fang)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>莉莉 (Li Li)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>来娣 (Lai Di)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小不点 (Xiao Budian)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>值班长 (Zhibanzhang)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Worker Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>董晓勤 (Dong Xiaoqin)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Policeman (He was Tao Xinger’s ex-boyfriend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>小铃木 (Xiao Lingmu)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>The Old Petty Bourgeoisie (Street vendor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>模特大王 (Mote Dawang)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fashion Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>吹箫老人 (Chui Xiao Lao Ren)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Old man playing the flute on the street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>陶父 (Tao Fu)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tao Xinger’s Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>陶母 (Tao Mu)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Tao Xinger’s Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>土根 (Tu Gen)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>A Xiang’s Brother (from the countryside)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>土根妻 (Tu Gen Qi)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>A Xiang’s Sister-in-law (from the countryside)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This can be seen from her name – “Xinger” (星儿) means a little star, and indeed, she is the favorite of the factory supervisor Zhibanzhang (Class Monitor) (值班长).

Another prominent character is A Xiang (阿香), who moves from the countryside to the city to work in the factory. When A Xiang first arrived in Shanghai, she was not terribly fashionable. However, she learned to adapt to city life quickly. In the end, she turns out to be the most fashionable character in the factory. It is through Tao Xinger and A Xiang that the other female characters, such as Ge Jia (葛佳), Fang Fang (芳芳), Li Li (莉莉), Lai Di (来娣), and Xiao Budian (小不点), are introduced. All of them work in the same factory and live in the same dorm, and are good friends. Men are simply irrelevant in their lives.

In the beginning of the story, the frugal and thrifty Tao Xinger does not show much interest in fashion. It is a habit for her to dress in plain colors – mostly white and sometimes dark blue. Her disinterest in fashion and consumption can also be seen in her conversation with the Japanese businessman. When asked if she prefers white shirts and blue trousers to beautiful clothes, Tao Xinger replies that her job is to make other prettier, not to make herself look fashionable.
Businessman: [in Japanese]
Translator: Do you like white shirt and blue trousers? Don’t you like to wear good looking clothes?
Tao Xinger: I have just finished the meeting and got out of the train.
Businessman: [in Japanese]
Translator: You don’t wear good-looking clothes when you are having a meeting?
Tao Xinger: No! This time, we don’t have a conference to exchange tips for fashion. Instead, we discuss how to make other people look prettier.10

Tao Xinger’s lack of interest in fashion is made to contrast with A Xiang’s passion for it. To be sure, A Xiang is the most fascinating character in the film. Her name is meaningful. The character xiang (香) has the same pronunciation as xiang (乡), which means countryside, as in “xiangtu” (native soil or home village) (乡土), or “huixiang” (going back home) (回乡). A Xiang comes from the countryside. In fact, her rural identity can be further confirmed by the name of her brother Tu Gen (土根) – Tu (土) means soil or earth and Geng (根) means root. (In the later part of the story, Tu Gen and his wife go to Shanghai to visit A Xiang. Aashamed of her rural identity, A Xiang is thoroughly embarrassed by their

10 The original quotation is in Chinese:
日本人: (讲日语)
翻泽: 你喜欢穿白衬衫，蓝裤子，不喜欢穿漂亮的衣服吗？
陶星儿: 我只是刚开完会下火车来。
翻泽: (讲日语)
日本人: (讲日语)
翻泽: 开会时就不会穿漂亮的衣服吗？
陶星儿: 不！我们这次开会不是服装交流会，而是讨论如何把别人打扮得更漂亮。
visit.) Some of A Xiang’s snobbish co-workers look down on A Xiang and give her an unpleasant nickname – “xiangxiaren” country bumpkin) (乡下人). This makes A Xiang very upset. To compensate this, she dresses and acts in a hyper-urban and hyper-cosmopolitan way. One day, wearing a red dress, a pair of “toad-eyed sunglasses” (or “panda-eyed sunglasses”), and a pair of high-heels, A Xiang shows off her outfit to the other factory workers. This look was fashionable in China in the early 1980s.

Worker 1: Country bumpkin, where did you buy this dress?
A Xiang: You are a country bumpkin instead! You keep wearing the dress you borrowed from your younger sister. This dress is made of American materials. You cannot get these materials from China. Have you seen this before?
Worker: How amazing! [in an ironic way]
Worker 2: The country bumpkin is proud. She is wearing clothes made of American materials!
A Xiang: Who calls me a country bumpkin? I am going to be very angry!!

To prove that she is not a country bumpkin, A Xiang chooses to wear clothes made of foreign materials. Her red dress is made of American materials,

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11 The original quotation is in Chinese:
女工 1: 乡下人，这裙子哪儿买的？
阿香: 你自己才是乡下人，老借你妹妹衣服穿。这些是美国料，国内染不出来。你见过你？
女工 1: 了不起了！
女工 2: 乡下人现在也神气了，美国料也穿起来了！
阿香: 谁再叫我乡下人，我真生气了啊！
(齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子: 十分四秒-十分五秒)
she insists. To further claim her urban identity, A Xiang (阿香) also lies to her colleagues that she has got a brother living in Hong Kong (香港) (“Xiang Gang”). This is the other meaning of her name. She claims that her brother helps her buy fashionable outfits in Hong Kong, and then he sends them to her in Shanghai. Due to A Xiang’s connection, the factory workers no longer call her the country bumpkin. They treat her nicely, hoping that she can help them buy fashionable clothes from Hong Kong too.

One day, the model worker Tao Xinger discovers a red dress in A Xiang’s locker in the changing room. (It is not respectable for Tao Xinger to open A Xiang’s locker without her consent.) Tao Xinger is very curious about the red dress. Without A Xiang’s permission, she takes the dress out of the locker and stands behind it to see how she looks if she is to wear the dress. The model worker loves the red dress! It just happens that A Xiang enters the room and is looking for her dress. When she realizes that Tao Xinger is holding her dress, A Xiang is generous enough to allow her good friend to try it on. She even comments that Tao Xinger looks fabulous in her red dress. A Xiang decides to lend it to Tao Xinger.
A Xiang: Where is my red dress?
Tao Xinger: It’s here!
A Xiang: Here you are. Let me see! Why don’t you wear it so that I can have a look at it?

[Then Tao Xinger tries it on.]
A Xiang: Pull this up a little bit.
A Xiang helps Tao Xinger makes minor adjustments to the outfit.
A Xiang: Loosen your hair.
A Xiang: It’s good. Let me see. Oh my goodness! I am so jealous!

[Tao Xinger is very embarrassed. She uses her hands to cover her face.]
A Xiang: Let me see!
A Xiang: It’s too revealing! It’s too revealing!
A Xiang: It’s like this dress has been tailor-made for you! Look at your figure. So Venice!

Tao Xinger: Venice? Venus!
A Xiang: Yes! Yes! Yes! Venus!

[Then the two girls laughed.]
A Xiang: Come! Come! Come! I can guarantee you are going to lead the fashion trend. The fashion models in the world are in trouble!

Tao Xinger: Do you think I can wear this dress?
A Xiang: Why not? I can lend it to you. Come! Turn around! Good! Tomorrow, we can go to the dress competition (斩裙) in the park together!

Tao Xinger: What is dress competition?^{12}

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^{12}The original quotation is in Chinese:

阿香: 我的红裙子呢？
陶星儿: 你别吵吵，衣服在我这呢！
阿香: 在你这！我看看！嗯，你穿给我看看！套上去！你往哪儿插你？从这儿出来。
[陶星儿在试穿阿香的红裙子]
阿香: 把这拉上！
[阿香给陶星儿整理一下她的衣服打扮]
阿香: [把头发]放下来，放下来！
阿香: 好了，让我看看！哎呀！妈呀！真嫉妒死我啦！
[害羞的陶星儿用双手掩盖着身体]
阿香: 让我看看！
陶星儿: 太露了！太露了！
阿香: 放下来！放下来！这裙子就好像为你订造的！你看你的线条，多么的威尼斯[Venise]！
陶星儿: 威尼斯？ 维纳斯[Venus]！
阿香: 对对对！维纳斯！
[两个女孩都笑了。]
Indeed, what is a dress competition? When A Xiang first arrived in Shanghai, she was introduced to a fashion trend called “dress competition.” A beauty-loving young woman, she is intrigued.

Girl: A Xiang, you have been in Shanghai for more than one year. You still don’t know what “zhan qun” (dress competition) is?
A Xiang: Dress exhibition? I have heard of it, but have never seen it before.
Girl: This is it. Look! Here she comes. This woman purposely stands beside another woman to compare which dress is more beautiful. The more beautiful one beats the less beautiful one. This is called dress exhibition.
A Xiang: Then, if one wants to join the dress exhibition, then one must compete!
Girl: You can try it too.
A Xiang: Me? No! No!

阿香: 来来来！我保证领导时装新潮流啦！大世界时装模特不灵啦！
陶星儿: 你说我能穿吗？
阿香: 怎么不能？我借给你！来！转一圈！好！明天我们一块去公园斩裙！
陶星儿: 什么叫斩裙啊？
(齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子（VCD碟 A）: 十三分五十三秒 - 十五分十一秒)

The original quotation is in Chinese:

13 The original quotation is in Chinese:

女工: 阿香，你到了上海都快一年了，还不知道什么叫斩裙？
阿香: 斩裙？听说过，没见过。
女孩: 那就是！你见，来了－太阳裙故意站到连衣裙边上，比比谁漂亮。漂亮的把不漂亮
阿香: 看起来，要想斩裙，就要竞争啊！
女工: 你也试试看。
阿香: 我？不不？
(齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子（VCD碟 A）: 四分五十五秒-五分三十分)
In fact, “zhan qun” (斩裙), which can be crudely translated as “dress competition,” refers to the act of presenting or showing off one’s beautiful clothes in the public. This is definitely a new term in China in the mid-1980s. While “qun” (裙) means dress or outfit, the pronunciation of “zhan” can refer to three Chinese characters: zhan (展), as in exhibition; zhan (战), as in war; and zhan (斩), as in cutting or chopping. The latter is used in the film. One may want to ask why and how a dress can cut or chop (or why and how it can be cut or chopped). Should a dress not be exhibited at all? In fact, all of the meanings of “zhan” – zhan (exhibition) (展), zhan (war) (战), and zhan (cutting) (斩) – are used in the film. In the dress competition, one has to exhibit (展) one’s dress in public. Similar to a war (战), the young women are in competition with one another. The dress competition is a beauty contest. Resembling the chopping of one’s head “zhan tou” (斩头), each dress tries to defeat the other, or to cut and chop (斩) the other off. Beauty can be quite violent too.

Later, A Xiang and the other girls are planning to go to the park to join the “dress competition.” They take the dress competition very seriously. They have done many things to prepare for it. The film sequence presents the labor that goes into the production of feminine beauty. First, the female factory workers are
taking showers together. While Xiao Budian is singing passionately in the shower, some girls are laughing (and even screaming), and the others are talking about fashion. They keep asking A Xiang when the fashionable clothes will be delivered from Hong Kong. Tao Xinger comes back while they are busy changing into their beautiful clothes. Originally she is not interested in the competition, but due to A Xiang’s insistent persuasion, the model worker finally agrees to join them. Afterward, the factory girls are busy putting on makeup, coloring their eyebrows and eyelashes, using the hair-spray to stylize their hair, twisting their hair, using the lipstick, combing their hair, wearing the earrings, and cleaning their faces. These activities are shown in close-up, emphasizing each character’s individuality. The use of the shallow depth of field further enhances the effect. While the background and foreground are fuzzy, the viewer’s gaze is directed to how the beautiful look is achieved. Beauty is laborious: the girls spend a lot of time and energy getting ready for the informal contest.

The story reaches its climax when the factory girls show off their beautiful dresses in the “dress competition.” The sequence is really like a commercial advertisement. The factory workers are ready for the catwalk. This is the moment
of sisterhood: Hand-in-hand, they walk across the park together and present themselves in a confident and elegant way. This definitely attracts a great deal of attention from the viewers. Afterward, the model worker Tao Xinger is then asked to do the “catwalk” on her own. In the beginning, she is slightly embarrassed and reluctant to do this. But she does it in the end. When she does the “catwalk” and shows off her red dress, the tempo of the music changes – it slows down dramatically – and her walk is presented in slow motion. Tao Xinger is young, beautiful, and feminine (and a model worker!). The way she shakes her head gently to show off her long and smooth hair resembles the shampoo commercial that we see on television. More shots of her red dress are presented. The viewer is led to focus on the changes of the shape of the dress due to her elegant movement. Although Tao Xinger is quite an attractive woman, the red dress seems to be the subject while the model-factory-worker-as fashion-model seems to the object. She is the model of production and consumption. The shot-reverse-shot shows he viewers’ reactions. From their facial expressions, some woman viewers are jealous of Tao Xinger and her red dress. But men seem to react in the opposite way. Three men whistle to her, and a jealous girlfriend hits her boyfriend simply because he likes Tao Xinger and her red dress too much! Definitely, the female factory workers are the winner of the dress competitions.
Tao Xinger becomes the star of the contest – let’s recall that her name means a little star. They spend the rest of the day in the park together. Running in front of the water fountains, and doing all kinds of interesting poses, they are genuinely happy. While Ge Jia uses her camera to take pictures, Tao Xinger lies on the grass and breathes deeply. Her facial expression suggests that she is enjoying the orgasmic moment to the fullest. Perhaps it is the intense feeling of consumption: she “consumes” the red dress, and the way in which the other consumes her red dress. The experience of the “dress exhibition” helps Tao Xinger gain confidence to express herself through fashion and consumption. The model worker Tao Xinger is liberated. She is no longer imprisoned by the old, conservative, and moralistic values of fashion.

Since the female factory workers enjoy the “dress competition” a lot, they ask a specialist to go to the factory to teach them how to dress fashionably. Beauty has to be learned and acquired.

[Dressed in beautiful clothes, a woman is dancing and doing a catwalk.]

Girl: Who is she?
Ge Jia: She is the classmate of my sister. She is part of the fashion performance team. From her, you can learn how to do makeup, how to do the cutting, what goes well with what
(materials and colors), including fashion trend and working out. She is awesome. You are welcome to ask her.

Girl: Look! She has changed another set of clothes!

(Then, the fashion model gives another performance.)

[...]

Model: Last year, the pleated skirt was in fashion. This year, flared skirt with large and wide plaids is in fashion. What is going to be fashionable next is the long dress. Sports fashion will be next. Simple cut. Light color.

A Xiang: What kind of clothes will go well with this?

Model: How beautiful! It will go well with white or black. Now, three colors are fashionable in the international fashion circle. White, red, black. White represents purity. Black represents propriety. Red represents passion.

[...]

[A Xiang shows the fashion model her red dress.]

A Xiang: Look!

Model: This red dress will go well with a white shirt. It’s pretty and gracious.

A Xiang: Can you do the cutting for me? Thank you!

(All the girls laugh.)

14 The original quotation is in Chinese:

(时装大王在表演。)

女孩： 她是谁？

葛佳： 我姐的同学。时装表演队。怎样打扮, 如何裁剪, 配料配色, 做什么款色,包括时装潮流，加上健美。有风度，有风采。都可以请教她！

女孩： 看看，她又换了衣服。(时装大王在表演。)

[......]

时装大王： 去年流行百褶裙。今年开始流行那种大格宽纹的喇叭裙。下面将要流行那种长长的连衣裙。今后服装的趋势，是将流行运动时装，造型简朴大方，颜色是淡雅。

阿香： 哎，王姐，你看我这料子配什么好？

时装大王： 真漂亮！配上白的黑的都可以。 现在国际上流行三种颜色。白的，红的，黑的。白的表示纯洁。黑的表示端庄。红的表示热烈、大方。[......]

[阿香把有黑色斑点的红裙子拿给时装大王看。]

阿香： 你看！

时装大王： 这件红裙子配白衬衣，又漂亮，又大方。

阿香： 你帮我裁好吧！谢谢你！

[她们都笑了。]

齐兴家： 街上流行红裙子 (VCD 碟 B): 十二分二十九秒 - 十六分二十五秒)
The fashion class is accompanied by a comportment lesson. The fashion specialist teaches the factory girls how to pose and move in an elegant and feminine way.

[The fashion model offers a comportment class. The factory workers follow her to pose elegantly.]

Model: 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 2, 2, 3, 4. Like this! Come! Yes! You have done very well! Do this! This is pretty good. Can you see it? Yes, your hand should be like this. If we want ourselves to be pretty, elegant, and gracious, first of all, we have to raise our qualities and cultivate our cultural sensibilities. Of course it includes doing aerobic exercises. Pay attention to your head. Come! Your arm should be higher!\footnote{The original quotation is in Chinese: [时装大王主持仪态班。工厂的女工都跟着她摆出优雅的姿态。]
时装大王: 三, 四。一, 二, 三, 四。二, 二, 三, 四。这样！来！对！做得很好！你这样。这个做得挺不错的！看到了吗？手，对，这样。我们要是自己的仪态美丽大方，首先要提高自己内部的素质和文化修养。当然也包括做健美操。头！来！手再高一点！
（齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子（VCD 碟 B）：十六分三十二秒- 十七分十五秒）}

They continue the lesson.

*****

In what follows, I focus on how the characterization of the model worker, the worker, and the factory supervisor expresses the changing ideologies of the PRC. Tao Xinger is an excellent person. At work, her impressive performance has
earned her the reputation of the model worker. She also has good working relation with the other female factory workers. At home, she takes care of her parents and is a good daughter. In her spare time, she also cares about the lonely old man who plays the flute on the street (吹箫老人). The latter is left behind by the “getihu” (private entrepreneur or shopkeeper) Xiao Lingmu (小铃木). (The story offers a moral critique, but not a political-economic critique of the entrepreneur.) Importantly, Tao Xinger is interested in fashion.

Ge Jia: Our model worker is into fashion. China has hopes!
Tao Xinger: Ge Jia, you are so mean!

[...]

Ge Jia: Do you dare to wear the red dress?
Tao Xinger: It’s nothing! In the competition I joined, each girl was more pretty and modern than the other girl. Once you have seen something like this, you want to be number 1 for the rest of your life!

Ge Jia: Do you mean production? Or do you mean beauty contest?
Tao Xinger: If I am allowed to do this, I want both!
Ge Jia: Oh! You have only left Shanghai for three days, and you start to think in this way! Our Ms. Tao is liberated!

Tao Xinger: Really?
(Then the two girls laughed.)
(My emphasis) 

*The original quotation is in Chinese:

葛佳: 咱们的劳模都在追求时髦，中国有希望喽！
陶星儿: 葛佳，你这张嘴真尖刻！[......]
葛佳: 就说刚才那条红裙子吧，你敢不敢穿？
陶星儿: 有什么？这次参加三省操作比赛，一个姑娘比一个姑娘漂亮摩登。你只要见过这样一次场面，你就想一辈子都当第一名！
葛佳: 你是指生产，还是指选美？
When Ge Jia asks Tao Xinger if she wants to choose labor (production) or participating in a beauty contest (consumption), Tao Xinger expresses that she would like to have both. She does not see any contradiction between production and consumption. She is also interested in the consumption of love. Before arriving in Shanghai, she was in love with Dong Xiaoqin (董晓勤), but eventually they were separated.

The worker A Xiang is passionate about fashion and consumption. She claims that her brother from Hong Kong can send fashionable outfits to her in Shanghai. In fact, A Xiang has been lying to the factory manager and her co-workers all along. She does not have any close relatives in Hong Kong. What she does is to ask the “getihu” (private entrepreneur) Xiao Lingmu to buy fashionable clothes from Hong Kong and then she pays him back. Since the money she collects from the factory girls is not enough to cover the full price of

陶星儿: 只要能，我都想！
葛佳: 哎哟！离开上海才三天，咱们的陶姑娘解放了！
陶星儿: 是吗？
(然后两个女孩都笑了。)
(齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子（VCD 碟 A）: 十七分二十五秒 - 十八分四十五秒)
the clothes, she uses her salary to pay for the remaining sum. She has to pay for other people’s respect for her. A Xiang’s mistake is that she lies to her boss and co-workers. In the end, she is forgiven. This is not a big mistake.

Zhi Banzhang (Class Monitor) (值班长) is the manager of the factory. We can see her attitude toward fashion and consumption from her conversations with A Xiang and Ge Jia.

Class Monitor: What’s going on? (She walks toward A Xiang) It’s too exposed. It’s more revealing than the vests that male comrades wear.
A Xiang: If I hide it, then people can’t see!
Class Monitor: If you don’t want people see it, then, don’t make it so fastidious. Look at these foreign characters. As long as it is produced in the west, it is good!
Ge Jia: It’s made in China. Originally it was produced for the foreign markets [i.e. export]. But it was sold in the domestic market. (She laughs.)
(Class Monitor laughs too.)
Class Monitor: What you wear does not look foreign or Chinese. And it’s so tight!!

* The original quotation is in Chinese:

值班长：你们闹什么？（走向阿香）坦胸露背的，比男同志的背心都……
阿香：贴身穿又看不见！
值班长：不想别人看，就勿穿这么考究！外国字，一串一串的, 什么都是外国的好。
葛佳：中国制造的四个字。出口转内销的。（笑）
(值班长也笑了。)
值班长：街上流行红裙子（VCD碟 A）: 十分五十秒 - 十一分五十三秒）
In another occasion, she has a similar conversation with Tao Xinger and Ge Jia.

Class Monitor: Look at this beautiful dress! Is it yours, [Tao] Xinger?
Tao Xinger: Yes, it’s mine! Does it look good?
Class Monitor: It’s too exposed! You can wear it at home – when nobody is around!
Ge Jia: Nobody appreciates it at home!
Class Monitor: You!
Ge Jia: I am telling the truth! Those who love the red dress are all on the streets. To wear it at home? You are such a conservative!
Class Monitor: You! When can you lock up your mouth?
Ge Jia: Really? I have always wanted to use zippers to zip it up!18

Class Monitor does not have strong opinions about fashion and consumption. She does not endorse fashion explicitly. She does not reject it either. She just thinks that the fashion that A Xiang, Tao Xinger, and Ge Jia wear are too exposed. She is mostly concerned with morality.

18 The original quotation is in Chinese:
值班长: 这裙子真漂亮啊！星儿, 是你的？
陶星儿: 是我的！好吗？
值班长: 露得太多啦！没人的时候在家里穿嘛！
葛佳: 家里没人欣赏！
值班长: 你这张嘴啊！
葛佳: 我说的是实话！爱好红裙子的人都在大街上！在家穿？老保守！
值班长: 你这张嘴啊，什么时候才能用锁锁上？
葛佳: 是吗？我也一直想要拉链，把它给拉上！
(齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子（VCD 碟 A）: 十五分五十一秒-十六分四十六秒)
The changing representations of the model worker, the worker, the factory manager, and their relationships to fashion and consumption reflect the changes of the official ideologies in the early stage of China’s economic reforms. The reformist fractions of the Chinese government made it clear that there is no simple causal relationship between fashion, class, and ideology. They insisted that *beauty does not have a class character. Clothing is not necessarily related to one’s ideological well-being*” (美是没有阶级性的，穿衣戴帽不一定与意识形态的健康与否必然相连). Their logic is that it is possible for one to belong to the proletariat class (and have proletarian consciousness) and be fashionable at the same time. The new humanist subject in post-revolution China can also be a beautiful and fashionable subject.
The Revisionist Narrative and its Discontents

Joining the party [i.e. Chinese Communist Party] and wearing dresses are two different things. However, it is strange that some people tried to make the connection between the two. In Hebei, a young woman, who had been working in the communist youth group, applied to join the party. However, someone in her work unit commented that wearing dresses might have negative influences to others. So her application was rejected. Everyone has the desire for beauty. It is perfectly natural for a young woman to wear dresses and make herself look more appealing. The desire for beauty is an expression of the desire for modernity (civilization). How can it possibly have “negative influences?” Whether a comrade can join the party should not be dependent on what one wears and carries, but whether one is whole-heartedly devoted to serving the people, whether one has got communist ideals and beliefs, whether one has put those values into practice. The criteria of party membership were written in the constitution already. How can someone in the party judge other people by their appearances? It must be a special case. But from their perspective, the clothes of party members must have patches, their feet must have mud, their bodies must have sweat, otherwise they would not look like party members. However, the age when people are proud of the patches on their clothes is gone. Our society is moving forward and our values have to be updated. The old way of judging people by their appearances needs to be changed. (Jia Zhaoquan, “Party Membership and Wearing Dresses,” People’s Daily, December 2, 1986)

19 The original quotation is in Chinese:
入党与穿裙子, 风马牛不相及。然而，生活中偏有把两者硬扯在一起的怪事。河北平泉县某单位一名女青年，一直做共青团工作，早就提出入党申请。可是，她所在单位党组织负责同志说她“穿裙子影响不好”，竟拒其于党组织的门外。爱美之心，人皆有之。一个女青年穿穿裙子，把自己打扮得漂亮些，乃人之常情，不足为奇；何况，爱美之心还是一种对文明的追求，何来“影响不好”之说？一个同志能不能入党，不能看他穿什么，戴什么，而应该看他有没有全心全意为人民服务的思想，有没有共产主义的理想和信念，并且是不是踏踏实实地为这种理想和信念而奋斗。至于加入党组织的具体条件，党章上也写得一清二楚。作为一级党组织的负责人，岂能以貌取人？毋庸置疑，在今天那种还把穿裙子作为一个同志不能入党理由的人是个别的。在他们看来，党员的衣服就该有补丁，脚上就该有泥土，身上就该有油汗，否则就不象个党员的样子。殊不知人们以穿补丁衣服为荣的时代已成过去。社会在进步，观念要更新。那种以衣貌取人的旧观念早该改一改了。(贾昭全, “入党与穿裙子”, 人民日报 1986 年 12 月 2 日)
In the second part of the chapter, I examine the Chinese feminist discussions and debates about the consumption of the red dress, a symbol of femininity, as a way to unravel the historical contradictions with which the PRC was confronted in the early stage of the economic reforms and opening up era. To achieve this goal, I engage with the revisionist narrative, one of the central ideologies of China’s modernization project, and address the problems and limitations of this narrative. Let me explain the revisionist narrative by referencing to an entry called “A Fashion Comeback” (服饰) in a photographic album called China’s Thirty Years (2009).

The Cultural Revolution was a dark time for fashion in China. People were forced to abolish “antiquated” concepts, culture and dress, and anything associated with “the bourgeoisie.” As a result, people wore neither traditional Chinese costumes nor Western-style suits, and China became renowned for its uniform dress code of blue or green “Mao suits.” Those who wore jewelry or make-up faced serious consequences. The Mao suit – fashion from sturdy blue serge – and green army uniforms were the only attire available to most of the population for decades until the end of the Cultural Revolution. Dress in China underwent a drastic change after the turbulence. In 1979, French designer Pierre Cardin staged a fashion show in Beijing, and his bold and futuristic designs excited Chinese audiences, most of whom were still wearing simple cotton-padded jackets. China’s youth rediscovered the joy of dressing up as a result of Deng’s “open-door” policy, and modern fashions began to reappear on the streets. Today, China’s young are among the most fashion conscious in the world and her cities’ clothes shops are jam-packed at weekends with costumers eager to dress to impress. (65)²⁰

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²⁰ China Photographers’ Association, China’s Thirty Years (Hong Kong: Oxford UP, 2009)
During the past thirty years, from socialism to post-socialism, the story of the unprecedented economic, political, social, and cultural transformations of the PRC is often told from the revisionist perspective, or what Lisa Rofel calls the “post-socialist allegory.” 21 According to the revisionist narrative, Maoist socialism denied human nature, suppressed the natural desires of Chinese people, and created abnormal political passions in them. In contrast, the economic reforms liberated Chinese people from the communist shackles of continuous revolution, class struggle, and ideological critique so that they could, finally, embrace their true humanity and express their innermost nature. Examining the rhetoric of such a liberal humanist discourse more closely, the revisionist argument was often presented in terms of binary oppositions: sameness versus difference, homogeneity versus heterogeneity, and uniformity versus multiplicity. According to the revisionist logic, Maoist socialism as

The original quotation is in Chinese:

1970年代的中国色彩是灰蓝色的。被外国记者誉为蓝蚂蚁的人群，因为其服装色调的惊人一致性而著称于世，在国际化成为经济趋势以前，人民对开放的实践主要还是在外在观察上，当时的服饰变化被摄影记者们记录下来当着新闻，又像今日的服装广告一样，推动了中国的服装革命。中国的色彩，就这样丰富生动起来。[来源：中国摄影师协会，见证：改革开放三十年[商务出版社，2009]]

repressive governmentality promoted sameness at the expense of difference. One of the examples they use to strengthen their argument are the clothes that Chinese people wore. During the socialist period, for example, Chinese people wore the clothes of the proletariat – the worker (工), the peasant (农), and the soldier (兵). The colors of their clothes – mostly blue, green, white, and grey – were boring, dull, and monotonous. In such political circumstances, Chinese people lost their personalities and individualities and were turned into identical beings.\(^{22}\) In contrast, according to the revisionist argument, the economic reforms

\(^{22}\) It is a common strategy for the revisionists to characterize the socialist period as one filled with drab and monotonous colors. This is the viewpoint offered by Gong Yan (龚彦), the hostess of the Chinese TV show “Fenguan fengyu: liushi niandai jingdian jiyi: shishang” (风言风语：六十年代精典记忆：时尚). But, in response, Yi Zhongtian (易中天) provided an interesting comment. Such “sameness,” he said, should be seen as neatness or tidiness instead!

Gong Yan: In the beginning of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese people’s clothes had so few colors. You can count them with your fingers. Blue, grey, white, green, and black. That’s all, right? Teacher Yi, don’t you think it is monotonous?

Yi Zhongtian: That depends on how you look at it. At that time, we felt it was neat and tidy!

The original quotation is in Chinese:

龚彦: 建国初期，有人说我们那个大街上人们衣服的颜色，一只手就数过来了。蓝的，灰的，白的，绿的黑的。对吧？就这几个颜色。易老师，你觉得单调么？

易中天: 那看是用什么眼光看了。当时看的感觉是整齐嘛！

At another point, Yi Zhongtian provided another way to look at socialist fashion politics in China.

Yi Zhongtian: It was a form of identification. It was about I could be one of the members of this society. To use the language of that time to
and opening up policies initiated by the post-socialist party-state celebrated difference and multiplicity. Such liberatory politics can be observed in the fashion that Chinese people wore. The government made it clear that Chinese people’s standard of living, including the clothes that they wore, had to be improved (“要改善人民的衣着”), and the clothes offered to them should be diversified (“服装要多样化”). In the post-socialist period, Chinese people were encouraged to wear colorful outfits with varied styles. They were given the choice to express their personalities and individualities through fashion and consumption.

In fact, the revisionist ideology was also widely disseminated in “major melody” films (主旋律电影), the propaganda sponsored by the Chinese government. The dismissal of revolutionary politics and ideology was expressed through the dismissal of the Mao suit. For example, in Lu Xiaoya’s film, The Girl in Red (陆小雅: 红衣少女), a cinematic adaptation of Tie Ning’s fiction “A Red Shirt describe this: A member of the revolutionary troop, I was recognized.

The original quotation is in Chinese:
易中天: 它当时更多的是一种认同感，就是我能够作为这个社会的一员，或者用当事的话说，革命队伍的一员，我被认同了。
without Buttons” (铁凝: 没有钮扣的红衬衫), two teenage girls An Ran (安然) and An Jing (安静) make fun of the obsolescence of the Mao uniform. Standing in front of a shop window, they see two mannequins in the socialist uniform. The girls think the Mao suit is old-fashioned.

[On the street, An Ran and An Jing see a woman carrying two watermelons below her breasts. Fashionably dressed, the woman is wearing a pair of sunglasses.]

An Ran: Haha! She is like Panda “Huanhuan!” [Note: An Ran thinks that the woman looks like a panda because she is wearing a pair “panda-eyed sunglasses.” Panda Huanhuan is a animation cartoon character in China in the 1980s.]

An Jing: Don’t point at other people. Let’s go!

An Ran: Sister. Come!

[An Ran and An Jing stand in front of a shop window. The mannequins are dressed in the Mao suits. To these young girls, they look very old fashioned.]

An Ran: [speaking to the mannequins] You poor thing. No one changes your clothes in such hot weather. [To her sister] These mannequins look as if they were having jaundice!

An Jing: The wax prevents the paint from getting cold!23 (Lu Xiaoya’s The Girl in Red) [1984])24

23 The last line comes from the famous Cultural Revolution Peking model opera Zhiqiuweihushan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) (智取威虎山). The original quotation is in Chinese.

座山雕: 脸红什么?
杨子荣: 精神焕发!
座山雕: 怎么又黄啦?
杨子荣: (镇静地) 哈哈哈哈！防冷涂的蜡！

(京剧: 智取威虎山; 第六场《打进匪窟》）

See: http://blog.163.com/dys566@126/blog/static/228801452007231754138/

24 The original quotation is in Chinese:
安然: 哎！哈哈！熊猫欢欢！[注释: 熊猫欢欢是动画片。熊猫指的是熊猫镜（太阳眼镜）。]
In the film *The Girl in Red*, the Mao suit (the old) is contrasted with the red shirt (the new). The latter is similar to the red dress that Tao Xinger wears in Qi Xingjia’s film *Red Dress is in Fashion*. Diverging from “socialist” colors such as blue, grey, green, and black, bright red colors, the feminine dress, and fashionable accessories like “panda-eyed sunglasses,” were celebrated as symbols of modernization. This can be observed in Bao Zhifang’s *Black Dragonfly* (鲍芝芳：黑蜻蜓) (1984), another “major melody film.” Focusing on fashion modeling and presentation, this film features a scene in which the film director Zhou Zhou, alongside his wife Huang Peng (a singer) and his daughter Zhou Jing (a fashion model), tells a young and aspiring fashion designer Yang Tianping and his friend Cui Yong (an actor-turned-fashion-model) that he is prepared to make a film about the colors of life in the post-revolution era. Zhou Zhou’s assumption is that the Cultural Revolution is a dark age.

安静：嘘，别指人家，走吧！
安然：姐，你来！
[看到橱窗里的男女模特人偶]
安然：怪可怜的！这么热的天，连衣服也不给换。这位女士和先生好像得了传染性肝。
[注 释: 这位女士和先生穿的是中山装。]
安静：防冷涂的蜡！
(陆小雅: 红衣少女: 四分二十五秒-五分二十五秒)
Zhou Zhou: Fashion should be rich and colorful. After the third plenum, people dare to pursue beauty [...] During those ten years of turmoil [of the Cultural Revolution], people were imprisoned in the world of blue and grey. They could not see the world of changing colors [...] Monotonous colors cannot represent our China. I [...] want to enrich the colors of life and bring beauty and life together forever! 25

This is another illustration of the revisionist narrative. Their argument is familiar: repressed by the socialist regime, Chinese people’s desire for beauty and colors was liberated by the forces of the post-socialist party-state and global capital. Thanks to the economic reforms, Chinese people were given the opportunity to wear colorful outfits with diverse styles. They had the choice to express their personalities and individualities through fashion. At this point, we need to pause briefly to contemplate the revisionist idea of choice and ask several questions. 26 The first question concerns the object of choice. Why must we...

25 The third plenum refers to the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Congress of the Chinese Communist Party which was held in December 1979. The original quotation is in Chinese.

26 For a psychoanalytical critique of choice, see Renata Salecl, *The Tyranny of Choice* (Profile Books, 2011). For a cartoon animation about choice narrated by Renata Salecl, see the website: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bqMY82xzWo. For her lecture on...
necessarily choose difference rather than sameness? Can we choose sameness but not difference, or uniformity but not individualities and personalities? The second question is about the relationship between choice and desire. Is choice liberating the repressed desire, or is choice creating new desire? The third question has to do with the subject of choice. Can he or she choose not to choose? Is choice always free? To what extent is the person who chooses liberated by his or her choice? To what extent can it be oppressive to the person who does the choosing? On the surface, it seems that having the choice to express one’s personalities and individualities is a good thing. But in some cases, choice can be anxiety-provoking, and freedom can be oppressive. The demand to highlight one’s difference from the other person can sometimes cause distress. This is captured by the mainland Chinese actress Li Bingbing (李冰冰). In an interview, she pointed out the embarrassing situation of “zhuangshan” (撞衫). This Chinese phrase is used to describe the awkward moment in which one wears the same

“The Paradox of Choice” in the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) forum, see the website: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4_HGRjJs9A
kind of clothes (e.g. same style and same color of dress) with someone else in the same social occasions.

Li Bingbing: When I was a child, “zhuangshan” [wearing the same kind of dress with someone else] was not a problem at all. Everyone wanted to wear the same kind of clothes, especially between good friends. Every child would tell his/her parents that since so and so wore that particular outfit, he/she would like to have the same outfit too. At that time, “zhuangshan” did not exist. Everyone would like to dress in the same way. However, now, it is expected that we should not wear the same kind of clothes at work. This is especially true for those of us who work in the entertainment industry. The point of the profession is to transmit ideas of fashions and trends. It is not a good idea for “zhuangshan” to occur.27

Li said that “zhuangshan” was not a problem at all when she was a child (partly because students wore uniforms in school), but it was a problem for her in her professional life, especially because she worked in the entertainment industry. She must dress differently from other actresses. To appropriate her observation, we can say that the “zhuangshan” issue would not be considered as a problem during socialism, because, as the revisionists say, everyone dressed (or was asked to dress) in the same way, and we can add, the coercive demand to be

27 The original quotation is in Chinese: 李冰冰: 小的时候, 不是撞衫的问题, 是大家都要穿一样的衣服, 特别是跟自己的好朋友, 两个人买衣服都会尽量地跟爸爸妈妈要求说谁谁穿了一件什么样的衣服, 我也想要一件。那个时候好像不存在撞衫, 是大家都希望穿成一样的。在我们现在工作的范围内, 希望大家不要撞衫, 特别是这个行业嘛, 主要是想给更多的朋友们传递出更多更好的时尚的潮流最前端的这些信息, 那么撞衫肯定是没有那么美, 没有那么好玩了! <<似水流年>>第 20 集《时尚》(下)
different from the other did not exist at that time. But it was a problem during post-socialism. The requirement to be different, including the need to emphasize one’s personalities and individualities through clothing, turned the arena of everyday self-presentation and identity into a struggle and a competition in which people have to expend energy and invest desire.

From socialism to post-socialism, from repression to liberation, the story of China’s economic reforms is also couched in the language of gender. This can be seen in *China’s Sexual Revolution* (2007), a CBC (Canada) TV documentary, which offers an orientalist depiction of the gender and sexual politics of contemporary China. In the introduction of the TV documentary, the narrator announces that “[Chinese socialism] turned couples into comrades, not lovers, and cloaked men and women into the same asexual Mao suit.” This is the typical revisionist story. Then, the audience is introduced to the perspectives offered by two diasporic Chinese/Chinese-American women. The first one is Cha Jianying (查建英), the author of *China Pop* (1995). The second one is Kan Yue-sai (靳羽西), who brought cosmetics to mainland China in the 1980s. She is a famous and successful businesswoman, with “the fame of Oprah and Martha Stewart combined.”
Cha Jianying: [During the Cultural Revolution] women were turned into men. Everyone was dressed alike, men and women. The fashion statement back then was that you can all become brothers and sisters. The only way women could show a bit of their figure was by sewing in their blue uniform so that they can have a waist line. The Red Guards went on the street and cut everybody's long hair and that's a very blatant way of trying to make everyone the same.

Kan Yue-sai: They [the Chinese women] dressed like men. Women dressed like men. No color. No make-up. The hairdo was only one kind of hairdo. Basically: no style. Nobody was wearing anything provocative. Nobody was going to prominently display their lips.

Cha and Kan maintain that gender difference and fashion were denied during the socialist period. Such a revisionist viewpoint is also shared by feminist critics in China. In her conversations with the British feminist critic Harriet Evans, the Chinese feminist critic Li Yinhe (李银河) said:

28 Cha Jianying said: “the only way women could show a bit of their figure was by sewing in their blue uniform so that they can have a waist line.” Two points can be inferred from her presentation. First, Chinese women’s femininities were erased during the socialist period. Second, Chinese women resisted the state-imposed masculinization of their bodies by making minor adjustments to their clothes to make themselves look more feminine. However, what Cha Jianying expressed can be used to critique her own argument. She had contradicted herself. When she said that Chinese women sewed in their uniform so that they could have a waist line, she was already pointing to the presence of gender differences in women’s clothes.
In China, from the 1950s to 1960s until the end of the Cultural Revolution, the atmosphere was that men and women were the same. Women had to do what men did. Women demanded gender equality and the blurring of gender boundaries. At least this is how it was promoted in the mainstream culture. For example, women had to work in the mines. Women did fieldwork on the railways. These were men’s jobs in the past. This was what the media was trying to advocate during the first thirty years of PRC. At that time, women used to cover all their female (feminine) characteristics. No women put on make-up. The clothes they wore did not show any secondary sexual characteristics. The way women dressed was the way men dressed. They tried not to highlight any gender differences. This was the tendency of the first thirty years of PRC. In the period of the economic reforms and opening up, in the beginning in the 1980s, the display of gender differences was becoming increasingly obvious. Some women put on make-up. Some women wore clothes that exposed their bodies’ secondary sexual characteristics. Some women went back home to become housewives […] After the 1980s, Chinese women displayed a tendency of going back to their traditional gendered roles. They also displayed a tendency of emphasizing gender differences. This is how the question of sex and gender evolved in China historically.  

The gender politics of the revisionist narrative can be described in this way: Maoist socialism is characterized by gender erasure, or according to some extreme interpretations, “the murdering of sex or gender” (性别谋杀). Since

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29 The original quotation is in Chinese:
李银河: 我觉得在中国有这样一种情况，从 50 年代到 60 年代一直到文化大革命结束，有这样一种气氛：男女都一样，女人要去做男人的事，要求男女平等，要模糊性别界线。主流文化一直是这么宣传的，而且大家也是这样做的，比如说女人下矿井、女的到铁路上去做好多野外的工作，干那些过去都是男人干的活。建国之后的头 30 年媒体一直在提倡这样一种倾向。当时的女性习惯于掩盖所有的女性特征，所有的女人都不化妆，衣服也尽量穿得不显露第二性征，打扮得跟男人一样，尽量不突出性别的差异，这是前 30 年的一种倾向。然后就到了改革开放时期，从 80 年代初开始，性别的特征变得越来越明显，比如说化妆，穿一些非常暴露第二性征的服装，还有些女人回家去当太太了。[……] 80 年代以后，中国女性有一种回到传统角色去的倾向，那种强调性别差异的倾向。我觉得这是性别问题在中国的一个历史变化过程。(李银河, 艾华, “关于女性主义的对话,” 社会学研究, 2001 年第四期)
Chinese women were asked to wear the clothes of the proletariat, Maoist socialism masculinized them, suppressed and denied their femininities, and turned them into genderless beings. The regime also emasculated and feminized Chinese men, preventing them from expressing their true masculine self. On the contrary, the revisionist narrative continues, the economic reforms and opening up policies emancipated Chinese women and recovered their lost womanhood. Chinese women were encouraged to express their natural femininities and develop their consciousness as gendered beings. They did not have to wear masculine or unisex clothing, such as the military uniform. Instead, they were feminine dresses, such as the red dress and makeup, and could consume fashionable clothes. (Interestingly, wearing a sexy outfit and putting on lipstick can be a form of feminist liberation to the revisionists. This kind of feminism is very different from second wave feminism in the West!) In post-socialism, Chinese men were also empowered to become real men and act out their raw and masculine selves. The country’s modernization was presented as a developmentalist project of overcoming gender erasure and recovering gender difference. Juxtaposing Chinese feminist politics and history with (the American version of) French post-structuralist/deconstructionist feminist theories, what the revisionists demanded is not the de-construction of gender, but the re-
construction of it. They wanted to have more, rather than less, gender difference (or femininity).
Figures 6-9: Women Workers in Chinese Socialism (e.g. 三八女子带电作业，三八女子炼铁工人)
In the above, I show that the revisionist narrative presents itself as a progress narrative (repression in socialism, liberation in post-socialism). I also emphasize that the story of progress is embedded in gendered terms (gender sameness and gender repression in socialism, gender difference and gender liberation in post-socialism). In what follows, I confront the revisionist argument by showing its limitations and contradictions. My objective is two-fold: First, I show that the socialist period is not as repressive as what the revisionists present it to be. (However, I do not claim that the socialist period is non-repressive or completely liberatory). Second, I show that the post-socialist period is not as liberatory as what the revisionists claim it to be. (However, I do not claim that the post-socialist period is completely repressive or non-liberatory.) To achieve these goals, I will use the keywords that the revisionists use – gender sameness, gender repression, gender difference, and gender liberation – to critique their argument. In particular, I ask the following questions:

First: Is socialism really characterized by gender erasure (or the celebration of gender sameness)?

Second: Is the celebration of gender sameness in socialism really gender repression?
Third: Is post-socialism really characterized by the celebration of gender difference?

Fourth: Is the celebration of gender difference in post-socialism really gender liberation?

The answers to these questions are “no.” Let me explain them one by one. First, the revisionist narrative argues that since Chinese women were asked to wear proletarian clothing during the socialist period, gender sameness was promoted and women’s femininities were erased. But was this really the case? While the revisionists are correct to say that gender was not pronounced in women’s clothing, nevertheless, it is historically inaccurate to say that women’s femininities were obliterated at that time. When we look at Chinese-language sources, such as the pictures in the China’s Cultural Revolution Research Website (中国文革研究网), Chinese men and women did dress in slightly different ways during the Cultural Revolution. And when we look at non-Chinese sources, such as Michelangelo Antonioni’s documentary Chung Kuo – Cina (1972), which chronicles the lives of the Chinese living in the rural areas in the early

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30 China’s Cultural Revolution Research Website (中国文革研究网) (Web: http://www.wengewang.org/)
1970s, there were indeed signs of femininities on women’s clothes. For instance, the shirts that women wore have different colors and patterns (e.g. check shirts, plaid shirts). The collars of their outer layers were wider. Their hairstyles were different too. My observation is echoed by Harriet Evans. Let’s see her disagreement with Li Yinhe’s revisionist interpretation of the Chinese socialist experience.

You [Li Yinhe] mentioned that men and women were the same from the 1950s to the 1960s. I cannot fully agree with you. On the surface, the ways in which men and women dressed were similar. But when you pay close attention to the photographs taken at that time, you can see that there were feminine patterns on women’s clothes, and also, some women had braided hair. Women’s images, including the representation of women in the official propaganda, did display signs of femininities. This is related to what I have been researching on. If you look at some of the women’s magazines published during the socialist period, such as Women of China, China Youth Daily, and the like, these publications were concerned with the issues relating to sex and gender. The topics included sex education, puberty, physical development, and many other things. True, the quantity was limited, but at least they were there. Through these materials, it is clear that gender differences were indeed present [during the socialist period].

Then, Evans proceeded to point out how such gender differences were biological determined and hierarchical.

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31 The original quotation is in Chinese:
Harriet Evans: 你刚才提的 50 年代到 60 年代男女都一样，我不完全同意，表面上穿得差不多一样，但你仔细去看当时的照片，女的都会有一点小花、小辫什么的，而且图片里头，包括宣传，女人的形象还是有点女性味。涉及到我所研究的一些东西，在 50 年代、60 年代、70 年代中间，虽然很多人说有关性的话题基本上是一个禁区，实际上你去看包括当时一些妇女杂志，比如《中国妇女》、《中国青年报》等等一系列有关性方面的书，包括性教育、青春期、生理发育等很多东西，虽然数量不多但还是有的，通过这些材料很明显的有一种性别区别 日…]
In addition, in her book *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now* (2009), Juanjuan Wu points out:

Although both men and women wore plain clothes in the same drab colors and the same square, simple cuts, minor details in women’s and men’s wear did exist that, to some extent, served to differentiate the sexes in Chinese eyes. For instance, to a casual observer a woman’s dual-purpose jacket looked very much like a man’s Mao-suit jacket, but it differed in the type and number of pockets and in the number of buttons. (37)

Juanjuan Wu explains the difference between the Mao suit worn by men and the dual-purpose jacket (两用衫) worn by women. Alongside the military attire (军装), the most fashionable clothes for men were the “three old styles” (老三装) and the “three old colors” (老三色). The three old styles consisted of the Mao suit, formerly called the Sun Yat-Sen suit (中山装), the youth jacket (青年装), and the causal army jacket (军便装). The “three old colors” referred to subdued blue, white, and grey. In addition, olive green, the color of the military uniform, was also popular at that time. For women, the most common outfits were the plain dual-purpose jacket and the traditional-styled jacket. Wu goes on to explain how the pockets and the buttons were different in men’s and women’s clothes. For men, the Mao suit had five buttons for the front closure, one button on each of the four frontal patch pocket flaps, and three buttons on each sleeve (Wu 3). For women, although the proletarian dual-purpose jacket resembled the Mao jacket...
in color and silhouette, it had four buttons (rather than five buttons), and two rectangular, flapless front patch pockets (rather than four pockets) (Wu 4). (For the minor differences between men’s and women’s clothing, see the figure below – pay attention to the number of buttons and pockets. The minor differences in their clothes do not accentuate gender, but to indicate, like a label, either “male” or “female.”) Wu also points out that a modest degree of fashion was permitted during the socialist period. For women, an accepted and modest way of being fashionable was to wear the inner shirt’s patterned collar on the outside of the plain jacket so that the pattern could be seen. Different styles of scarves were also considered as fashionable accessories for women (4). As there were still signs of femininities, albeit minor ones, on women’s clothes, it is not historically accurate to claim that femininities were completely erased during the socialist period.
Second: According to the revisionist narrative, since Chinese women were asked to wear masculinized or unisex clothing, gender was repressed during the socialist period. In reply, I challenge and comment on the way the revisionist
narrative is posed rather than respond to their criticism directly. Rather than endorse the revisionist language like “gender repression,” “gender erasure,” and “the murdering of gender”, I suggest that it can be productive to use words like “gender neutrality” and “androgyny”\textsuperscript{32} to describe socialist gender politics. Rather than simply look at the negative aspects, we can think dialectically to look at the positive aspects of “gender neutrality” or “androgyny.” Indeed, what did Chinese women gain, and how were they empowered, by gender-crossing (without being male-identified)? What kinds of new gendered possibilities were available to them when they were not expected to act and perform their femininities? What kinds of gendered options were open to them when they could act, in Xiaomei Chen’s words, like “womanly men” and “manly women?”\textsuperscript{33} To pose the question in a slightly different way is to ask what kinds of gender options are foreclosed by the revisionist category of “gender erasure.”


Third: According to the revisionist narrative, Chinese women were free to wear feminized clothing, such as the red dress, during the post-socialist period. It is in this sense that gender difference was promoted. However, the representation of femininity in the revisionist narrative is closely linked to commercialized consumer culture. The kinds of femininities not directly associated with commercialized consumer cultures are not included. In other words, the revisionist narrative’s version of gender difference is limiting because it is not different enough. To pursue this line of logic further: we can say that the revisionists deny Chinese women other ways of being feminine because they celebrate one kind of femininity (i.e. the consumerist version) at the expense of other kinds of femininities. The revisionists claim that socialist gender politics is one of gender erasure, but paradoxically, their version of post-socialist gender politics turns out not to be gender difference or liberation, but another form of gender erasure in disguise!

Fourth: The revisionist narrative presented the opportunities to wear feminized clothes during the post-socialist period as a form of gender liberation. But to what extent it is really gender emancipation? What kinds of gender possibilities are excluded and foreclosed? Underlying the revisionist narrative is
the assumption that Chinese women must necessarily dress in a feminine way to be considered as liberated women. But why must they necessarily dress in a feminine way? Why must they necessarily act in a feminine way so as to be liberated? Why can’t they dress in a masculine way and be liberated? In a feminist utopia, Chinese women should be able to dress in a masculine way, or in a feminine way, or both. For example, if they want, Chinese women should be allowed to dress in a masculine way in the morning, in a feminine way in the afternoon, and in an androgynous way in the evening. They should also be able to change their gender preference the next day. Indeed, in the feminist utopia, Chinese men should also be allowed to dress in a masculine or feminine manner as well. Therefore, when the revisionists assume that the Chinese women should not be asked to dress in a masculine way, but instead they should be encouraged to dress in a feminine way in order to be liberated, they have really recuperated and rehearsed the very hierarchical relationship they try to critique in the first place. Ultimately, their version of gender difference is quite oppressive (especially to those Chinese women who enjoy being and acting in a masculine way, such as “butch” lesbians and “drag kings”). It turns out to be gender determinism that denies Chinese women other ways of being and acting in the world. It is gender inequality. With an intension of critiquing gender erasure in
socialism, the revisionists’ version of gender difference is ultimately a form of gender erasure in disguise.34

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34 We need to do some theoretical work involving sex and gender, sameness and difference, and equality and inequality. What is our feminist utopia? Our feminist utopia should be one that recognizes multiple forms of sexes (men and women) and genders (masculinities and femininities), rather than one that eradicates sex (men and women) or abolishes gender (masculinities and femininities) as such. Our feminist utopia – a world of sex and gender equality and freedom – should be a privilege-less society in which the sex of an individual (male or female), or the gender of an individual (masculinity or femininity), should be considered as inconsequential to one’s struggle for sex and gender liberation. One’s sex and gender should not be regarded as the determining factor of the organization of society. On the one hand, rather than simply deny sex and gender, we should oppose essentialism or biological determinism, that is, the idea that sex and gender can serve to ground and legitimate hierarchical and oppressive social norms that put the sex and gender other in disadvantageous positions. We should reject the idea that sex and gender itself can carry any political, social, and economic implications. On the other hand, we should also reject nominalism that considers the sex and gender other as abstract, idealist, and disembodied creatures. In other words, what we should demand is not the eradication of sex and gender as such, but rather, the abolition of the determining effect of sex and gender. When we try to approach the problem from this perspective, then, what should be radically critiqued is not sex or gender (or sexual or gender difference) as such, but rather, sex or gender determinism. What needs to be rejected is sex or gender inequality.
“She is Wearing her Body on her Clothes” (她在衣服上穿着身体)

I will continue to confront the revisionist argument by showing its limitations and contradictions. My focus is on the changing subject and object relation between the human figure, such as the Red Guard and the fashion model, and the clothing commodity, such as the military uniform and the red dress. In China’s Sexual Revolution (2007), a TV documentary produced by Canada’s CBC, the director presents the radical changes in gender roles and sexual attitudes in China from the socialist to the post-socialist periods. In one scene, a group of female Red Guards, dressed in military uniforms, marches confidently in the Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Shouting a revolutionary slogan “Long Live Chairman Mao!” (毛主席万岁), these active and energetic Red Guards want to make revolutions. The other scene is set in a fashion show. A group of fashion models does catwalk to show off the fashionable clothes designed by fashion designers. The changing relation between the woman figure and the fashion commodity, and between the subject and the object, from socialism to post-socialism.

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35 Source: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNjkxMDMzNTY.html
In contrast to the fashion model, a symbol of middle class consumption, the Red Guard, a symbol of the proletarian subjectivity actively engaged in socialist production and construction, is a more inclusive and democratic figure. This is explained in Harriet Evans. In her essay “Fashions and Feminine Consumption,” she underlines the politics of class and gender categories.

The lines of differentiation in the Mao images were determined by the ideological and political tendencies of the time, and not by the social hierarchies of consumption. In the class terms of the time, they included the rural, the elderly, the uneducated, and the poor, leaving many potential spaces for a gendered and even sexual appeal across the boundaries of difference that operate in today’s consumer culture. The accoutrements of fashion now displayed to appeal to women’s consumer passions exclude everyday gendered identities that are not commercially valued by consumer culture. The rural, the older, the poor, and the disadvantaged are virtually absent from the images that dominate the front covers of women’s magazines. (179)

Comparing the representations of woman and fashion in Chinese media cultures in the 1960s and the 1980s, what characterizes women’s clothing during the socialist period was the masculinized military uniform. Chinese women – including youth (青年) (“qingnian”) like the Red Guard and the proletarian woman (“funü”) (妇女) figure – rejected the red dress and embraced the military clothing (不爱红装爱武装). In contrast, what typifies Chinese women’s outfit in the 1980s onward was the red dress. The fashion model and the middle class woman
consumer were more interested in the red dress, rather than the military uniform. The middle class woman consumer consumed, and indeed they were consumed by, feminized clothes. However, it is crucial to note that the way that the Red Guard wore the military uniform is not the same as the way the fashion model wore the red dress. If we use the language of the subject and the object to describe socialist gender politics, then, the Red Guard is the subject and the military uniform is the object. She wears the military uniform to engage in national liberation and socialist revolution. However, the subject and object relation is reversed in later times. In the post-socialist period, fashion is both the object and the subject of production. In the realm of production, fashion is manufactured in the factory and is the object of production. In the realm of consumption, however, fashion is the subject of production. It produces the fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer). The fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer) is the

object. It is because fashion is a technology of capitalistic consumer culture that subjugates women and objectifies them. The revisionist narrative claims that Chinese women were given the free choice to embrace femininity in the post-socialist context. However, if we closely look at some of the hidden social and cultural structures, the scenario has less to do with free choice and female agency, but more to do with how commercial advertising produces a gendered consumer subject. It has less to do with the construction of a free and independent female subject, but more to do with the capitalistic technology of subjectification (or subjugation) through desire and pleasure. In other words, contrary to the Red Guard who wore the military uniform, it is the red dress that wore the model (or the middle class woman consumer). It is not that the fashion model wore the red dress, but that the fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer) was worn by the red dress.

One may ask: Why must the fashion model be regarded as the object? Why must the fashion commodity be regarded as the subject? Why is the fashion model worn by her fashion commodity? Why does the fashion commodity wear the model? In her essay “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes” (更衣记), Eileen Chang’s (张爱玲 Zhang Ailing) provides a possible answer.
The sloping of shoulders, narrow waist, and flat chest of the ideal beauty, who was to be both petite and slender, would disappear under the weight of these layers on layers of clothing. She herself would cease to exist, save as a frame on which clothing could be hung. (66)

Similar to the phrase “A human being is a hanger; A horse is a saddle rack” (人是衣架，马是鞍架), what Eileen Chang (Ailing Zhang) articulates allows us to see that the fashion model, and by extension, the middle class woman consumer, is not the subject, but the object. She is like to a hanger of clothes. Her function is to show off the clothes, to allow fashion as the subject to express itself. (In fact, we can also think about the labor involved in wearing and showing off the clothes.) In other words, in contrast to the Red Guard who wore her military uniform, it is the fashionable clothes that wore the fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer). The fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer) was worn by her fashionable clothes. Similarly, it is the fashionable clothes that consumed the consumer, not the consumer who consumed the clothes. The consumer was consumed. She had already been chosen by the market economy to express her choice, personality, and individuality. In other words, this is anti-choice, anti-

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The original quotation is in Chinese:
削肩,细腰,平胸,薄而小的标准美女在这一层层衣衫的重压下失踪了。她本身是不存在的，不过是一个衣服架子罢了。
personality, and anti-individuality. In fact, the objectification and commodification of woman, fashion, and the body can be further explained by the fact that sometimes women, through diet, exercise, anorexia, makeup, facial, and plastic surgery, and other methods, change their bodies (or body parts) to fulfill certain social expectations and to be considered as beautiful. Wei Pengju (魏鹏举) summarizes this phenomenon to us: “Fashion packages the body. The body, in return, packages fashion.” (“时装包装着身体，身体也反过来烘托包装着时装”).

In *A Primer for Daily Life* (1991), Susan Willis appropriates Fredric Jameson’s theoretical innovation – the dialectic of ideology and utopian impulse in mass culture – to look at U.S. suburban cultures. In an essay “Work(ing) Out,” she compares the woman who uses the machine to work, with the woman who uses the machine to work-out. She argues that the woman who uses the machine to work is the subject and the work machine is the object. In comparison, the woman who uses the machine to work-out is the object and the work-out machine is the subject. Willis’ reasoning is this:

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38 魏鹏举, “时装:消费社会的身体寓言,” 《天津社会科学》2004年03期

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[The nautilus work out machine] gives women access to the machine but denies access to production. It requires energy and effort and negates the experience of labor. It isolates the individual from other women who work out and defines her body as an assemblage of body areas and muscle functions, each requiring a specialized machine and machine function. The nautilus machine and the woman who works out on it is the distorted 1980s equivalent of Rosie the Riveter astride the body of a battleship. As an icon in the popular imagination, the nautilus metamorphoses women’s relationship to self and to labor. Nothing is produced but the body itself. (73, 75)

According to Willis, the woman who exercises by using the work-out machine is the object, and the work-out machine is the subject. But this is just one part of the dialectic. Willis proceeds to tell us the other part of the dialectic. “The woman inside the nautilus machine is the object produced by the machine even while she is at the same time the producer producing herself as the product of the machine” (my emphasis, 75). The first clause is that “the woman inside the nautilus machine is the object produced by the machine.” The work-out machine is the subject and the woman who uses the work-out machine is the object. But what interests us here is the second clause: “she is at the same time the producer producing herself as the product of the machine.” On the surface, the woman who uses the work-out machine is the producer, or the subject. But ultimately, the work-out machine is the subject, and she is the object. The woman herself is the product of the work-out machine. In other words, she is simultaneously the subject and the
object, but ultimately, the object. This is why Willis argues that she is “the producer [read: the subject] producing herself [read: the object] as the product of the machine.”

Susan Willis provides excellent analysis of the difference between the work machine (production) and the work-out machine (consumption) in relation to the construction of woman’s subjectivity. I am interested in relating her observation to the discussion of the military uniform (production) in socialism, the red dress (consumption) in post-socialism, and the construction of woman’s subjectivity in modern China. During the socialist period, the woman who wears the military uniform, such as the female Red Guard, is the subject, whereas the military uniform is the object. However, appropriating Willis’ insight, during the post-socialist period, “The woman wearing the red dress is the object produced by the red dress even while she is at the same time the producer producing herself as the product of the red dress.” The first clause is that “the woman wearing the red dress is the object produced by the red dress.” As I have explained above, the red dress is the subject and the woman who wears the red dress is the object. But what interests us here is the second clause: “she is at the same time the producer producing herself as the product of the red dress.” On the surface, the woman who wears
the red dress is the producer, or the subject. But in fact, the red dress is the subject, and she is the object. The woman who wears the red dress is the product of the red dress. The woman who wears the red dress, such as the fashion model (or the middle class woman consumer), is simultaneously the subject and the object, but ultimately, the object. This is why she is “the producer [read: the subject] producing herself [read: the object] as the product of the red dress.”

In “Work(ing) Out,” Susan Willis explains the workings of the dialectic of ideology and utopian impulse in American suburban culture. She details how the glimpse of the utopian impulse is immediately arrested and contained.

In the 19th century, Marx wrote against the worker’s alienation. He demonstrated that in selling labor power, the worker was separated both from control over production and from the fruits of labor, the commodities and profits from their sale. The contradiction of the commodity is that it can be absolutely divorced from the worker while at the same time it is the container of the worker’s alienated labor […] In such a [capitalistic] system, the utopian impulse often finds expression in the very forms that simultaneously articulate its containment. The image of a woman producing herself on the nautilus machine and Cindy Sherman dramatically posing into her self-activated camera are both expressions of women’s deep desire to deny alienation. Both articulate the desire to seize control over the production and the commodity. Both demonstrate the utopian desire to be in control, to activate the machine. And they express the highly reified desire to be absorbed into the machine’s function. Both express the utopian longing to no longer see one’s alienated labor in the commodity, but do so by the dystopian formula of making the self into the commodity. (77)
Willis appropriates Marx’s insight of the contradiction of the commodity to point out that “the utopian impulse often finds expression in the very forms that simultaneously articulates its containment.” Focusing on American popular culture, Willis argues that the form can be detected in the way in which women use the work-out machine to exercise. This form conjures the image of the way in which women use the work-machine to produce and labor. Focalizing Willis’ idea to Chinese consumer culture, I suggest that the form can be detected in the way in which women consume their fashion (e.g. the red dress), which is a commodity and a form of containment. Appropriating Willis’ explanation, I argue that women’s consumption of fashion commodity (e.g. the red dress) can be interpreted as their utopian desire to deny alienation, to seize control over production and the commodity, and to be in control of their everyday lives. It also demonstrates their unconscious utopian desire to activate their unconscious collective experience of being a subject of history in socialism. Chinese women’s consumption of the red dress also expresses their utopian longing not to see their alienated labor in the commodity. However, by doing so, they make themselves the very object they try to seize control in the first place. The utopian impulse is immediately arrested.
Conclusion: From Gender to Sexuality: The Sexual Politics of Fashion Consumption

In the above, I presented the gendered dimensions of the revisionist and socialist narratives. In particular, I engage with the socialist narratives to argue against the revisionist narratives and point out the latter's contradictions and limitations. However, both narratives turn out to be inadequate, because the category of gender can only allow us to see the historical complexity of fashion, class, and ideology (production and consumption, sameness and difference, repression and liberation) from the vantage point of the discontinuity of the socialist and post-socialist periods. A third narrative – one that deals with sexuality in addition to gender – is needed to articulate the complexity of the socialist and post-socialist orders of things. What does sexuality allow us to see which cannot be otherwise perceived by gender? In what follows, I suggest that if we engage with the category of sexuality to examine the historical materials, we can see the continuity between the socialist and post-socialist periods. More specifically: if we use the category of queerness to provide a critique of the dominant regime of hetero-normativity, we are better positioned to observe the continuity between the socialist and the post-socialist periods. Here, by queerness, I mean alternative modes of being a sexed or sexual subject in the world that do not subscribe to hetero-normative ideologies, such as the heterosexist
understanding of bourgeois marriage, nuclear family, reproduction, futurity, and so on. It can mean homosexuality, but it does not necessarily have to be so. In the following, I focus on two dimensions of the queer critique of hetero-normativity: first, the hetero-normative male gaze, and second, heterosexuality.

Indeed, it is the hetero-normative male figure who looks at the woman figure in her fashion. This gaze is gendered and sexualized. When we bring in the critique of the hetero-normative male gaze to the analysis, the hetero-normative male figure is the subject, whereas the woman figure in her fashion – whether the military uniform or the red dress – is the object. During the socialist period, Chinese women were subjected to the hetero-normative male gaze that was the socialist party-state. The object produced by the male gaze was the woman as the producer and the laborer. Chinese women were also subjected to the hetero-normative male gaze during the post-socialist period. Their bodies – including their fashion and the way they fashioned themselves – were objectified and commodified in the market economy. The subject of the male gaze was the market. The object produced by the male gaze was the female consumer alongside her fashion.
This brings me to another point: the hetero-normative male gaze produces contradictory sexual subjects in both the socialist and post-socialist periods. According to the revisionist narrative, since Chinese women were asked to wear proletarian clothes, Maoist socialism denied their femininities and sexualities and turned them into genderless and sexless beings. The repressive regime de-gendered and de-sexualized Chinese women. In response to the revisionist criticism, I’d like to bring in the Chinese problem of overpopulation to the discussion. How can we explain the fact that there are more than 1.3 billion people in China today? It is precisely because Chinese people had a lot of sex during the socialist period that so many babies were produced. Here, when I use the word sex, I mean reproductive sex. But if we think of sex as pleasure and eroticism, it can be speculated that Chinese people had even more sex during the socialist period. In other words, a contradictory sexual subject – one simultaneously de-sexualized and sexualized – was produced at that time.

According to the revisionist narrative, since Chinese women had the freedom to wear colorful clothes with diversified styles and attend to their sexual appeal (e.g. they were presented with the choice to wear sexy clothes, such as mini-skirts) during the post-socialist period, they were liberated to become
gendered and sexualized subjects. It is in this sense that Chinese women were interpellated to become sexualized, or even hyper-sexualized, subjects in the consumption-oriented economy. But it should be noted that since the early 1980s, the one-child policy mandated by the party-state had rendered Chinese women de-sexualized subjects and limited their sexual expressions. It is true that sex can be considered as pleasurable eroticism, and not necessarily a means of reproductive futurity. But the social morality imposed on Chinese women and their fashion and bodies worked to limit their sexual expressions. In other words, another contradictory sexual subject – one simultaneously sexualized and de-sexualized – was produced during the post-socialist period. The contradiction of the production of Chinese women as both the sexualized and de-sexualized subject is what unifies the socialist and post-socialist periods.

In Part II, “The Revisionist Narrative and its Discontents,” I engage in an intersectional analysis, one involving class and gender, to critique the revisionist narrative. But such a strategy proves to be inadequate to deal with the complexity of the problem concerning fashion, gender, class, and ideology (e.g.
production and consumption, sameness and difference, equality and inequality).

In her essay, “Against Proper Objects” (1994), the feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler urges her reader to bring gender and sexuality to the same analytical horizon for social investigation and cultural critique. In another occasion, she poses an interesting question “How can we fuck with gender?” To elaborate her question further: How can we fuck, without fucking according to the sexual norms set up by the regime of hetero-normativity, with gender? I end this chapter by suggesting that a more vigorous intersectional approach, one that involves class, gender, sex and sexuality (and ethnicity), is indispensable to deal with the convolutedness of the problem. We need to find a way to fuck with gender, class, ideology (and ethnicity) – all of them at once. In short, a Marxist queer critique is needed to confront the revisionist progress narrative cherished by the joint-venture of global capital and the post-socialist party-state. It will come soon.
When I presented my project on the Chinese middle class, fashion, and consumer culture to my friends and colleagues, one of the most common questions I received was posed in this way: “To be sure, the Chinese middle class is interested in fashion and consumption. But what about the working class? Are the (woman) migrant workers not interested in fashion and consumption? Are they not influenced by consumer culture that is the lingua franca in contemporary China?” This essay attempts to answer their reasonable and legitimate questions. Following the second part of my dissertation’s engagement with fashion, cinema, and documentary to address Chinese consumer culture in the socialist and post-socialist periods, this essay engages with Jia Zhangke’s film Shijie (The World) (贾樟柯: 世界) (2004) to explore the complexly mediated relationships among fashion and consumption, class and ideology, and politics and history. By analyzing the representation of class (the migrant worker), gender, fashion, consumption, and global capitalism in the film, I argue that the representation of the woman migrant worker, dressed in lavish and extravagant costumes and performing exotic dances for the tourists in Beijing’s World Park,
can be considered as a productive site for deciphering the contradictions of China’s unprecedented transformations in the age of global capitalism. Such representation enables us to see that the world is located at the disjuncture between fantasy and reality.

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In contrast to his early works the “hometown trilogy,” including *Xiaowu* (Pickpocket) (1997), *Zhantai* (Platform) (2000), and *Renxiaoyao* (Unknown Pleasures) (2002), which are set in the county-level city Fenyang and the district-city Datong in Shanxi Province, Jia Zhangke’s fourth feature film *Shi Jie* (*The World*) (2004) is set in the “Shijie Gongyuan” (The World Park) in Beijing. Similar to Disneyland or the tourist attractions in Las Vegas, the World Park is a theme park that presents a condensed version of the world history to the visitors. In this park, the temporalities of the past and the present, and the spatialities of East and West, are compressed and repackaged in the form of de-politicized, de-historicized, and reified quotations and pastiches for the consumption of the Chinese tourists. The World Park features a variety of miniature versions of world civilizations, both ancient and modern, both European and non-European.
These landmarks are indeed wide-ranging: from the temples in ancient Greece to the pyramids and the Sphinx in ancient Egypt, from the aristocratic castles of medieval Europe to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, from the Eiffel Tower, the Notre Dame Cathedral, and the Triumphal Arch in Paris, to the London Bridge and the Big Ben clock-tower in London. The most post-modern architecture in the World Park is probably the twin towers in downtown Manhattan. Although they were destroyed during the September 11, 2001 incident, in the World Park, this symbol of America-led finance capitalism is still presented as a model against which the tourists can consume with the click of their digital cameras. Curiously enough, the landmarks featured in the World Park are mostly from the developed west. There are no “Chinese” monuments – pre-modern or modern, socialist and revolutionary or otherwise – in the park. It seems that the world presented in the World Park is not the entire world, but the world minus China. One may wonder: Do the architects of the World Park consider China as part of the world? How can China be excluded from the forces of world history and culture? To what extent is such an arrangement a form of Chinese exceptionalism? Does it mean that China is so undeserving to be part of the civilized and developed world (the nation’s inferiority complex), or does it mean that China is so central to the world that it is not even considered as part of the world (the nation’s narcissism)? For
the latter case, China is not the other, but the one doing the exoticizing othering to the other.

The main characters in the story are Zhao Xiaotao (or Tao) (female) and her boyfriend Taisheng (male). ¹ In the World Park, Tao works as a dance performer and Taisheng works as a security guard (but ironically, Taisheng is one of the most insecure characters in the story. He often exercises his patriarchal authority over his girlfriend – even when he is cheating behind her back!) It is through this young couple that the other characters, such as Tao’s ex-boyfriend Liangzi (male), Tao’s friends Wei (female), Niu (male), and Anna (female), as well as Taisheng’s friends Erxiao (male), Sanlai (male), and Little Sister (male) are connected to the story. Most of the characters, including Tao and Taisheng, are not originally from Beijing. Leaving their hometowns to pursue their dreams in the cosmopolitan Beijing, the woman migrants work as dance performers in the World Park. On the stage, they wear spectacularly colorful and attractive costumes (fashion) and perform exotic dance for the tourists. The same is also true for the non-Chinese character Anna. With the intention of making more

¹ In fact, each monument of world civilization can be looked at as a personified character. The World Park itself can also be regarded as a character.

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money, Anna has to leave her children behind in Russia and works in China temporarily. She is a transnational migrant worker. In the World Park, she plays the role of a self-orientalizing and self-exoticizing Russian performer for the tourist’s consumption. Most of the female characters also have to do part-time jobs to earn extra money. For instance, some of them have to work as hostesses (one may guess, as sex workers as well) in karaoke bars in Beijing. Accompanying unattractive Chinese businessmen, they have to drink with them, listen to them sing karaoke, entertain them, and pretend to have a good time. Their part-time job is not too different from their full-time job in the park – both jobs require them to perform and to pretend to be someone whom they are not.

Most of the male characters are also migrant workers. Taisheng is not originally from Beijing. He is from Taiyuan. Alongside Erxiao, Taisheng works as security guards in the World Park. Leaving their hometown in Shanxi, Sanlai and Little Sister go to Beijing to look for Taisheng and Erxiao so that they can introduce work for them. Sanlai and Little Sister manage to find jobs in the construction sites in Beijing. Another important character in the story is Liu Aqun (or Qun), who is Taisheng’s secret lover behind Tao’s back. A native of Wenzhou, Qun is a “fashion designer.” Rather than designing clothes, she copies
western brand-name fashionable clothes for the consumption of her Chinese customers. Indeed, the film is filled with what Jean Baudrillard calls the simulacra in *Simulacra and Simulation*:\(^3\) the fake fashion designed by Qun echoes with the fake monuments in the park and the fake role and identities performed by the characters.\(^4\)

The majority of the characters in Beijing’s World Park are migrant workers. They work diligently for the normal operations of the park. In *The World*, Jia Zhangke uses the cinematic image to provide a powerful critique of labor exploitation in contemporary China – and indeed, the director’s critique can be extended to include labor exploitations in the third world in the age of global capitalism as well. In a scene in the opening sequence, against the backdrop of a miniature version of an Egyptian “pyramid,” a group of male security guards, are carrying gallons of distilled drinking water across the desert.

\(^2\) There are several fake objects (the simulacrum) in the film, such as the World Park, the fake fashion designed by Qun, and the fake identity card that Taisheng makes for his boss, Mr. Song.


\(^4\) Taisheng also works for Mr. Song in his spare time. He helps him to create a fake identity card.
Why does Jia Zhangke choose to include such a strange and somewhat surreal scene in the film? In fact, the choice of juxtaposing the male migrant workers with the pyramid is imbued with political meanings. As we know, it is the slaves in ancient Egypt who labored to build the pharaoh’s pyramid. The pyramid, with its triangular shape that resembles the class structure in ancient Egypt, is a testimony of the power of the privileged few (the pharaohs) over the underprivileged majority (the slaves). It is a symbol of class hierarchy. By placing the migrant workers alongside the pyramid, Jia Zhangke seems to suggest that the Chinese migrant workers in global China are similar to the slaves in ancient Egypt. The migrant workers work like slaves, or are treated as slaves, in the sweatshops. The gallons of water that they carry resemble the heavy stones that the slaves carried to build the pyramids in ancient Egypt. In this context, the pyramid is endowed with a new political meaning: the prosperity of the privileged few in contemporary China, such as the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the transnational and national bourgeoisie, is built upon the blood and sweat of the migrant labor force. The director hints that the world of globalization is also the world of new slavery. Indeed, it is the migrant workers’ labor that contributes to the prosperity of the brand new China.
The director’s representation of the lived experience of the migrant workers deserves our attention. Rather than narrate the story from the perspective of the Chinese middle class tourists who travel to different parts of the world, or those tourists who visit the World Park to appreciate the wonders of the world, the director tells the story from the point of view of the migrant worker. Such a choice echoes with Jia Zhangke’s self-identification as a “cinema migrant worker” (and one may add the “documentary migrant worker”). It also resonates with his long-standing interest in representing the subaltern and underprivileged in post-socialist China. Similar to Hegel’s theory of master and slave dialectic in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, and Lukacs’ articulation of the epistemic privilege of the proletariat’s standpoint over the bourgeoisie’s standpoint in *History and Class Consciousness*, the representation of the story from the migrant worker’s point of view allows one to get access to the perspectives of both the tourists and the migrant workers *simultaneously*. This is especially the case for the woman migrant worker. (I will elaborate this point later.) By looking at the world from the woman migrant worker’s perspective, the viewer can gain a more complex understanding of the capitalistic totality.
Before explaining the major theme of the film, namely, the dialectic of connection and disconnection, or what Deleuze and Guattari call “de-territorialization” and “re-territorialization,” I’d like to point out that Jia Zhangke’s representation of the migrant worker in *The World* can be seen as a continuation of the director’s interest in exploring the psychological states of the lower and lower-middle class in post-socialist China. In many ways, the young migrant workers in Beijing’s World Park can be considered as the displaced version of the unhappy teenagers in Shanxi Province in *Unknown Pleasures* (2002). Exposed to some material benefits of capitalistic modernizations, such as television melodramas, popular music, commercial films, disco dances, karaoke bars, cell phones, the internet, and so on, these young people are not completely insulated from the rapidly developing China. However, deep down, they understand that they can never be part of the world of the new rich and the consuming class. The director uses his camera to capture these young people’s psychology. Frustrated with their everyday lives, they have got explosive temperaments. This is also true for the young migrant workers in *The World*, although one can argue that they are less angry than the young people in Shanxi Province.
To be sure, travel is a prominent motif in *The World*. According to an advertisement of the World Park, “One can travel around the world without leaving Beijing.” Another one reads: “Give us a day. We will show you the world.” In many ways, the World Park is a microcosm of the entire world. Similar to the tourists, the migrant worker can travel around the world within one day. Moving from one tourist attraction to another, the migrant workers do not have to carry any money or passports. Similar to Thomas Freidman’s notorious book *The World is Flat* (2005), the World Park seems to be the perfect materialization of the de-territorializing dreams of globalization. In the story, most of the characters are busy travelling. They are constantly on the move. Interestingly, each character is associated with a particular kind of transportation. For example, the dance performer Tao can travel from one country to another country by taking a monorail train. When Tao is traveling in a monorail train, she tells her friend on her cell phone: “I’m going to India!” When she is outside the park, she takes a bus to travel within Beijing. Tao’s boyfriend Taisheng is a security guard. Inside the World Park, he rides a horse to patrol around the theme park. Outside his workplace, he drives his company’s van. Tao’s ex-boyfriend Liangzi also leaves for Mongolia by train. In addition, Taisheng and his secret girlfriend Qun travel to Taiyuan by coach. Qun’s
husband travelled to France illegally by boat. By the end of the film, Qun manages to obtain a visa stamp to go to Paris to be reunited with her husband whom she has not seen for ten years. Qun is planning to go to France by plane. In addition, Taisheng’s friend Little Sister, a construction worker, rides a bicycle. And the list goes on. The motif of traveling is also enhanced by the images of the newly built roads and highways in several transitional scenes. In fact, technology can also be considered as a form of travel and connection, both materially and psychically, and plays an important role in the story. Most of the migrant workers have got a cell phone and use it to call and text-message one another. The use of technology is gendered: While the patriarchal male characters Taisheng and Niu use the cell phones to exert their panopticon-like power to supervise, control, monitor, and discipline their girlfriends, the female characters are able to use their cell phones and text-messages to bond. They use technology to communicate with one another, build communities, and share resources.

Admittedly, The World is about mobility and travel (or, de-territorialization), but at the same time, it is also about immobility and disconnection (or re-territorialization). (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make similar observations about globalization in Empire.) In the story, money
(economy) and the passport (politics), or shall we say, political economy, play an important role in rendering visible the contradictions of globalization. The physical and emotional movement of the characters are severely limited due to the lack of money. The migrant workers can travel to Beijing to work, and we can imagine, they have to save up money to go back home during Chinese New Year. Since they have got little money, it is simply unrealistic for them to imagine that they can travel out of China. As revealed in the “conversations” between Tao and Anna (I use the quotations marks because Tao speaks Chinese and Anna speaks Russian, and they cannot communicate with each other on a superficial level. But deep down, they understand each other profoundly and can connect with each other in deep emotional terms.) Anna does not have enough money to travel to Ulan Bator, Inner Mongolia, to see her sister even though she misses her dearly. Money is the source of re-territorialization.

Such a restricting role is also performed by the passport. In the beginning of the film, Liangzi, Tao’s ex-boyfriend, goes all the way to Beijing to look for Tao, only to be disappointed that she has got a new boyfriend already. So he decides to go to Mongolia for an adventure. In the dining room, Tao is curious about what Liangzi has got in his front-pocket. When Liangzi shows his passport
to her, Tao simply replies that she does not understand what the document is. The implication is quite shocking: not having a passport, Tao has never traveled out of China before. This can be confirmed by Tao’s reaction to the chubby businessman in the karaoke bar (whose role is played by the sixth generation Chinese film director Wang Xiaoshuai) who suggests that he brings her to Hong Kong to see a jewellery exhibition. Tao turns him down by saying that she does not have a passport. In another scene, Taisheng is having a private and intimate moment with his secret girlfriend Qun in her fashion-copying workshop. Presenting her passport to him, Qun says that she is still waiting for the French embassy to grant her a visa stamp so that she can go to Paris to see her husband. Since they have been separated for such a long time, Qun says she is not entirely certain if they are still a couple. The passport (and the visa) does have an impact on human relationships and sociality in globalization. It is also another source of re-territorialization. Indeed, money and the passport interrupt and arrest the capitalistic discourse of flows and de-territorialization by unraveling a central contradiction: Although globalization is characterized by the free movement of capital, commodities, images, codes, and so on, the free movement of labor is
restricted, and in some cases, even denied. Freedom is not that free. In the end, de-territorialization turns out to be another form of re-territorialization.\(^5\) The gendered dimension of labor and mobility also deserves our attention. In the film, the female characters are more autonomous and have more agency than their male counterparts. In contrast to the male characters who are located in their workplaces, the female characters are more mobile and can move freely between different types of spaces. (Let’s not forget that the most transnational character in the film is Anna – she travels from Russia to work in the World Park in Beijing). The female characters like Tao, Wei, Yanqing, Youyou, and Qiuping have got the knowledge of two different worlds – what happen onstage and what happen offstage. Since they are asked to put on fancy and colorful costumes and perform exotic dances for the tourists, they have the knowledge of what happen onstage and can get access to the world of fantasy and dream.\(^6\) They also have got the knowledge of what happen offstage and can

\(^5\) See also Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, 2010)
\(^6\) The exception is probably the male character Niu. First, he is a somewhat feminized character. Second, he is also a performer (a clown?) onstage. However, the fact that Niu works as a performer does not contradict with my point, because in the film, we do not really see him perform onstage.
gain access to the world of reality. However, this is not the case for the male migrant workers. It is more difficult for security guards like Taisheng and Erxiao, and construction workers like Sanlai and Little Sister, to get access to the world of fashion, dance performance, consumption, and cosmopolitanism. The gendered aspect of mobility can also be observed in the part-time work in which the characters are engaged. In contrast to Little Sister who does his night shifts in the construction site, which is also the place where he works during the day, the female characters can leave the World Park temporarily to work as hostesses in the karaoke bars (and probably as sex workers in local hotels as well). They are more mobile in both physical and emotional terms.

The connection between gender, class, and mobility can also be observed from the transportation that the characters use to travel. Tao takes a high-tech monorail train in the World Park – she can travel around the world within 15 minutes! By the end of the film, Qun is about to fly to Paris to be reunited with her husband. (In the long version of *The World*, it is hinted that Anna is able to save up enough money to fly to Inner Mongolia to see her sister). Compared with the female characters, the male characters move relatively slowly. For instance, Taisheng rides a staggering horse in the World Park. Little Sister rides a
bicycle, and it is doubtful how far he can travel with a bicycle. Qun’s husband is said to have traveled to France illegally by boat, and one may wonder how long it took him to sail across the ocean. The male characters associated with relatively faster modes of transportation are Liangzi and Taisheng. While Liangzi leaves for Mongolia by train, Taisheng drives his company’s car outside the World Park. In terms of speed, still, the modes of transportation that the male characters take cannot be compared to those taken by the female characters. The female characters are also more mobile emotionally in that they are shown to have more animation scenes. If we agree with Tonglin Lu and Jason McGrath to look at the animation sequences as the expression of the psychological depth and intensity of the characters, that Tao is associated with four or five animation scenes (whereas Taisheng has got one only) indicates that the female characters are given a more three-dimensional and complete psychic representation. Thanks to their mobility, the female characters are shown to be able to experience reality in a more nuanced manner. They are better positioned to have access to the knowledge of the totality of capitalistic globalization.

In the following, I argue that the cinematic representation of the woman migrant worker (including her fashion, performance, consumption, and body) in The
World can be treated as a site to map and detect the contradiction of global capitalism in China. I use the film’s opening sequence, made up of five major scenes (A1, A2, B, C1, and C2), to explain my point.

A1: Tao is looking for a band aid at the backstage
A2: Tao (and the other dancers) perform on the stage
B: Tao is taking a monorail train and she says that she is going to India
C1: A group of security guards, carrying gallons of water, walk across the desert. Behind them is an Egyptian “pyramid.” (This scene has been analysed above.)
C2: A peasant stares at Beijing’s tall buildings and the “Eiffel Tower” at a distance

The very beginning of the film consists of the backstage scene (A1) and the onstage scene (A2). The contrast is noticeable. Backstage it is crowded, busy, and chaotic. The dancers are waiting to perform in the show. While some of them are playing cards, gambling, and smoking, the others are chit-chatting. They are enjoying themselves and are having quite a good time. In the very beginning of the film, Tao, dressed in an elaborate costume in green color, is desperately looking for a band aid. In a shrill and annoying way, she screams loudly “Does anyone have a band aid?” more than ten times. In my interpretation, the migrant worker is actively looking for a band aid – or shall we say, a solution – to heal the
wounds and scars inflicted onto her body due to the exploitative economic modernization and developmentalism projects in China during the past three decades. In fact, the director’s concern with the health and well-being of the migrant worker is also evidenced in the ending of the film. In order to make extra money to pay off his debts, Little Sister has to work overtime, and unfortunately, he is killed in an accident in the construction sites. By the end of the film, Tao and Taisheng are almost killed by gas poisoning in their dorm rooms during the cold winter. In response to Taisheng’s question “Are we dead?”, Tao whispers, “No. This is just the beginning.” These are their last words in the story. The migrant workers are not even allowed to choose death as the solution. They must go on to work like haunted beings. This is the fate of the Chinese migrant workers in global capitalism. Shot in a realistic and documentary way (with a hand-held camera), the backstage scene – and the dorm-room scene showing the living conditions of the migrant workers – represents the dire situations with which the migrant workers are confronted in their lives. Indeed, the backstage – the world of reality – is the opposite of the spectacles that the female characters perform onstage.
In the subsequent scene (Scene A2), Tao and the other female migrant workers are performing exotic dances on the stage. The spectacle is highlighted by beautiful costumes, the use of bright colors – mostly shiny gold colors – and bright lighting, not to mention high-tech-sounding electronic music. The onstage dance performance is spectacular, which adds to the grandeur of the landmarks and monuments in the World Park. Similar to Disneyland and Las Vegas, what is depicted onstage is a world without poverty and misery. However, it seems that the performances do not interact with one another in meaningful ways – the world presented onstage is one of alienation. The spectacular performance is carefully crafted and rehearsed. One may suspect that the migrant workers have performed the dance to the audience so many times that the dance itself is no longer imbued with vitality, energy, life, and spontaneity. It has become repetitive and reified. The dance performers resemble the machines computerized and programed to produce standardized commodities. The world presented onstage is what Guy Debord calls “the society of spectacle” and commodity fetishism.

In one of the opening scenes of The World (Scene B), Tao, dressed in the costume of an Indian princess, is shown to be taking a monorail train. The
broadcast is delivered in standard Mandarin, announcing that the entire journey around the World Park is going to be 15-minute long. Tao’s cell phone rings and she answers the phone. Rather than answer the phone in Hindi or English, she replies in Chinese. What is intriguing is that she replies in a local Chinese (Shanxi?) dialect, instead of the Mandarin language. This is a somewhat surreal juxtaposition: responding to her cell phone’s electronic music sounding ring tune, the Chinese-looking Indian princess picks up the call and speaks to her friend in a local Shanxi dialect! The striking disjuncture between the visual and the audio can also be extended to Tao’s reply: “I am going to India!” What does she mean by this? Is she really going to India? Why does she have put on the Indian princess’ costume to go to India? While the viewer is still wondering these questions, we come to realize that, in fact, she is going to a place called “India” within the World Park, but not to the real India. Similarly, Tao plays the role of an Indian princess, but she is really not an Indian princess in her everyday life.

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7 I’d like to point out the irony of acting (and performance). In the film, as Zhao Tao (the actress), who has appeared in many films (including short films) directed by Jia Zhangke, performs the role of Tao (the character). (Interestingly enough, the actress and the character have got very similar names. It is a symptom of the interplay of the real and the fictional in The World.) Zhao Tao is Tao in the film. But Zhao Tao is not Tao in her real life. And Cheng Taisheng (the actor) is Taisheng (the character) in the film. But Cheng Taisheng is not Taisheng in his real life.
The truth is that she is a migrant worker: Her job is to perform the role of an Indian princess for the tourists (e.g. the tourists may want to take pictures with her.) What is equally ironic is that Tao has never been to India before. She does not have money or the passport (not to mention a visa) to visit a foreign country. In the story, moreover, Tao also plays the role of a flight attendant in the World Park. But she is not a flight attendant. What is ironic is that, as revealed in her conversation with Little Sister at the construction site, she has never traveled by plane before, (In the long version of The World, Tao, dressed in an elaborate kimono, also performs the role of a Japanese woman. Obviously, she has not been to Japan before.) In other words, Tao is not what she is. She has never been what she appears to be.

In The World, the female migrant worker (including her fashion, performance, consumption, and body) can be conceptualized as consisting of two layers – fantasy and reality. What happens onstage is the world of fantasy, dream, and imagination. In this cosmopolitan world, Tao plays the roles of an Indian princess and a flight attendant (as well as a Japanese woman). The space she occupies is also the space of virtual reality and information technology – cartoon animation, cell phone, text messaging, and electronic music. However, it is
unsatisfactory to say that such space is simply appearance and illusion, bearing no resemblance to reality at all. In fact, as Slavoj Zizek tells us in his works on popular culture, fantasy cannot simply be discounted as the opposite of reality. Fantasy is as real as reality itself – the reality of fantasy. The role that Tao plays in the World Park cannot be discounted as appearance or illusion, but rather, it is part and parcel of the reality in which she lives. In *The World*, fashion, performance, and the body are constitutive of, and productive of, reality as such. Fantasy is also a real world.

The world of reality is the world of what happens at the backstage, in the dorm rooms, and outside the park. Although Tao works in the World Park, which, allegorically speaking, is the entire world, she feels so imprisoned in her workplace that she has to ask Taisheng to help her get out of the park. The world in which she works is a world of boredom, restriction, immobility, and unhappiness. When Tao does part time work in the karaoke bars to entertain the Chinese businessmen, she has to put up with the noise and their terrible singing, heavy drinking (one of her female friends vomits in the washroom because she drinks too much), and sexual harassment. This world is patriarchal and sexist. In the World Park, the migrant workers live in small and crowded dorm rooms and
do not have their own space. Taisheng lives in a dark and poorly ventilated dorm room with other male migrant workers. Even if Tao agrees to it, Tao and Taisheng cannot have sex in the dorm rooms because they do not have their privacy. They have to do it in a motel instead. Similarly, Tao has to share her living space with Wei. When Wei and her boyfriend come back, Tao and Taisheng have to leave their dorm room to give them some privacy. In addition, Tao is a poor migrant worker. Although she wears lavish and extravagant costumes onstage, she does not have enough clothes to keep herself warm during the cold winter. She comes up with a smart solution: she wears her raincoat to keep herself warm while she is in bed. True, the migrant workers have to devise ways to survive in this cold and cruel world.

In the above, I argue that the representation of the woman migrant worker in The World is a location where the contradictions and inconsistencies of global capitalism in China are rendered visible. This can be seen in the incompatibility and incommensurability between what happens offstage (scene A1) and what happens onstage (scene A2), between fantasy – fashion, appearance, and performance – and reality (scene B). In the following, I come back to class and the nation. The changing conception of representation and reality in Jia Zhangke’s
early works is captured by the cultural critic Jason McGrath. In the conclusion of his book Post-socialist Modernity (2008), McGrath explains that in Jia Zhangke’s hometown trilogy, “a contrast is drawn between representation and reality, between spectacle and ‘real’ life, or indeed between the new technologies of progress, globalization, and consumerism on the one hand, and most people’s actual, intractable conditions of existence on the other” (222). But such a distinction is shown to be more problematic in The World. In the latter, McGrath explains, one is “forced to recognize that in some very basic sense the ‘reality’ of post-socialist modernity lies not in a ‘real’ life condition that simply belies the illusions of global capitalism, nor in the utopian consumer imaginary of the contemporary mainstream media discourse in China – but rather precisely in the gulf between the two [...]” (223). Following McGrath’s line of inquiry, I suggest that the world presented in The World is situated at the disjuncture between fantasy and reality.
The world can be found between the world of fantasy and the world of reality. This point can be confirmed by the last scene in the opening sequence (C2) (See figure above.) This scene is comprised of three parts: the background, the foreground, and the middle ground. The background presents a miniature version of the Eiffel Tower – a symbol of French modernity and colonialism – amidst the Beijing skyscrapers and expensive residential buildings. It is the space of fantasy. The foreground presents a peasant. He is carrying a big basket of goods on his back and is walking slowly. It is the space of reality. The contrast between the background and the foreground, and between fantasy and reality, is representative of the unequal class relation and hierarchy in contemporary China.
The wealthy and the consumer class (and those who can afford to travel to
different parts of the world) in the background are made to contrast with the
poor and the precarious class, not only the peasant but also the woman migrant
worker, in the foreground. Such a relation also resonates with the disparity
between the fashion and performance onstage (scene A2) and the reality offstage
(scene A1).

Indeed, such a social relation can also be compared with Jia Zhangke’s
description of contemporary China. In a discussion forum about 24 City (2008), a
documentary film dealing with how the demolition of a state-owned enterprise
paves the way for the construction of a high-class residential district in Chengdu
in Sichuan Province, the director said that he aspired to portray two different
China(s) onscreen. “In The World, I’d like to show the China being renovated (被
装修的中国). In 24 City, I’d like to show the China being repressed and hidden (被锁
起来的中国)” (The Reflections of Jia 256). In fact, we can see the two China(s) in The
World too. Indeed, the contrast between the background and the foreground in
scene C2 (see figure above) can be thought as the contrast between the China
being renovated and the China being repressed and hidden. (We can extend this
idea to point out the global dimension of such a comparison: the foreground and
the background can also be regarded as the relation and hierarchy between the world renovated and the world locked up.) In addition, Jia Zhangke has gone one step further to show the title of his film – The World – in the middle-ground to present his vision of the world. Jia Zhangke seems to imply that *the world is located in the gap between different worlds*: between what happens onstage and what happens offstage, between fantasy and reality, between the background and the foreground, between the rich and the poor, and between the China being renovated and the China being repressed and hidden. In short, *the world is a class relation.*

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In addition to the representation of the woman migrant worker and her fashion, performance, and body, in what follows, I suggest that the World Park can also help us detect and map the contradictions of the global capitalistic totality in China. I’d like to end this essay by thinking about the World Park as an allegory of the world. What does the World Park allegorize? Why is *The World* called “The World?” How many worlds are there in *The World?*
From *Xiaowu* (1998) and *Platform* (2000) through *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) to *The World* (2004), Jia Zhangke relocates the historical conditions of possibility, and the fields and forces of production, to capture the impact of global capitalism on China. In his “hometown trilogy,” the stories of *Xiaowu* (1998) and *Platform* (2000) are set in Fenyang, a Chinese “xiancheng” (縣城), or a county-level city; and the story of *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) is set in Datong, a district-level city. (In spatial terms: a town is governed by a larger “xiancheng or county-level city, and a county-level city is governed by a larger district-level city.8) According to Xudong Zhang, what is distinctive about the “xiancheng” or the district-level city, and we can add, the county-level city, is its in-between-ness. “With no clear-cut boundaries or sharp distinctions between rural and urban, between industrial and agricultural, between high and low cultures, xiancheng becomes a meeting place for all kinds of forces and currents, whether contemporary or anachronistic” (77). Adding to Zhang’s observation, the “xiancheng” is also a site where the historical legacies of Chinese socialism and the forces of global capitalism coincide and collide. If the “xiancheng” is a privileged site to chart the

8 In 2005, Fenyang as a county-town had a population of around 400,000 whereas Datong as a district-level city had a population of around 3.2 million. In contrast, Shanghai had a population of around 18 million. See Xudong Zhang, “Poetics of Vanishing.” *New Left Review.*
contradictions of global capitalism in China, the World Park is another one. Indeed, the World Park can be seen as a more urban and cosmopolitan version of the “xiancheng.” It is a location where multiple and competing temporalities and spatialities meet as well. If the World Park can be seen as another “xiancheng,” conversely, the “xiancheng” can also be seen as another World Park.

In fact, some scenes in *The World* were shot in a theme park called “Windows to the World” (世界之窗) – this park is very similar to the World Park – in Shenzhen in Guangdong Province. In an interview, when asked about the difference between shooting the film in Beijing’s World Park and Shenzhen’s Windows to the World, Jia Zhangke said that the story can take place in either location, and the message he wanted to convey will not change. In other words, there is a generic quality to Beijing’s World Park. Similar to an international airport, a shopping mall, a corporate company, or other consumption-oriented postmodern venues, the World Park is a non-place. If the story that takes place in Beijing’s World Park can also take place in Shenzhen’s Windows to the World, it
can also take place in other amusement parks, such as Disneyland in Los Angeles, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, or tourist attractions in Las Vegas.⁹

In *The World*, in her fashion-copying studio, Qun tells Taisheng that her husband has fled to France and settled down in a place called Belleville in Paris. In fact, Belleville is Chinatown. (Ironically, there is nothing “belle” about this “ville.”) In her essay on fantasy and reality in Jia Zhangke’s cinema, Tonglin Lu provides an interesting comparison between the World Park in Beijing and Belleville (or Chinatown) in Paris.

Like the amusement park in Beijing, Belleville in Paris is also a localized corner where Chinese immigrants conduct business in their own language while staying isolated from the rest of the city. We can say that they live in their Chinese “Disneyland” in the heart of Paris, as the representatives of an exotic culture, while conducting legal and illegal business by importing goods made in their home country. Thus, despite the geographic change, Chinese immigrants in Belleville as a culturally dislocated community are not fundamentally different from the migrant workers in Beijing suburbs. Like migrant workers from Shanxi Province, Chinese immigrants from Wenzhou, Aqun’s [or Qun’s] hometown, serve as cheap labor forces in a city where they remain linguistically and culturally outsiders. Both groups speak their dialects and mainly socialize with their fellow countrymen. (172-3)

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⁹ The Shanghai Disney Resort is going to be open in 2015. Mickey Mouse will speak Mandarin!
Indeed, Qun’s husband in Belleville/Chinatown is similar to the migrant workers in the World Park in that both groups perform their exoticism for the tourists and the outsiders. (However, the difference is that the Chinese working class people in Paris’ Chinatown are playing themselves, whereas the Chinese migrant workers in Beijing’s World Park are playing someone else’s roles, such as the role of an Indian princess. The latter involves fashion, performance, and fantasy.)

The World Park can also be a microcosm of Beijing. (By extension, it can also be a microcosm of any other global Chinese city, such as Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei.) [...] Conversely, Beijing also resembles the World Park in that Beijing also features the radically old and the radically new simultaneously. On the one hand, buildings and spaces associated with pre-modern Chinese culture and history, such as the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, “Yiheyuan”/Summer Palace (颐和园), the “hutong” in old Beijing, can be found. On the other hand, Beijing displays postmodern, or even super- or ultra-modern architecture, such as the 2008 Olympic stadium (the “bird’s nest” and “water cube”) designed by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, CCTV tower designed by Rem Koolhas, National Grand Theater designed by Paul Andreu,
the 798 Art District, the Sanlitun (三里屯) shopping areas, the westernized Houhai (后海) bars, and the list goes on. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the radically old and the radically new in Beijing is exactly what is staged in the World Park. In the park, the temples from ancient Athens and the pyramids from ancient Egypt are placed within the same locale as the twin towers in downtown Manhattan. It is in this sense that Beijing is like the World Park as much as the World Park is like Beijing. In the end, the World Park is not universal, but “universalizable.”
Chapter 5
Dirty Fashion

All Reification is a Forgetting. (Theodor Adorno)¹

Let’s try to imagine that we are resting comfortably in a glamorous and luxurious Louis Vuitton flagship store in the city of Chengdu in Sichuan Province in China. Everything is clean, shiny and polished. Soft-sounding music is being played at the background. Dressed in Lacoste polos, wearing Christian Louboutin shoes, and carrying Louis Vuitton handbags, a group of Chinese middle-class women are sipping cocktails and eating hors d’oeuvres in a leisurely manner. Some of them are sitting on a comfortable sofa and have just begun to discuss the brand-name fashionable commodities that they have purchased. They seem to be very enthusiastic about them.

Announcement: For those ladies who have joined the ‘Friends of Louis Vuitton (LV),’ please proceed to the second floor.
Voice 1: Look at this! This is such a cheapie! Show me something more refined! Show me a distinctive brand!

Voice 2: Prada?
Voice 1: Prada? I just mentioned Prada…
Voice 2: Prada’s designs are so philosophical!
Voice 3: It’s more suitable for Europeans.
Voice 4: What about for young men?
Voice 2: Paul Smith is good too. It’s an English brand. The cotton shirts they made are very comfortable.
Voice 5: Lacoste has the best colors, I think.
Voice 2: Since most of the products sold in China are mass-produced in China, they have low quality. They don’t feel right.

This is one of the memorable scenes in Jia Zhangke’s (賈樟柯) documentary Wuyong/Useless (無用) (2007). My reader may laugh at the somewhat comical conversations among the Chinese middle-class women consumers. But their conversations reflect the problem of conspicuous consumption in China today. In an interview with Tony Rayns, Jia Zhangke remarks:

In recent years, ‘fashion’ has become a buzz-word in China. The nouveau-riche class is crazy about brand-name commodities such as Louis Vuitton, Armani, and Prada. But many people buy them because they are famous and expensive, not because they appreciate the designs. Many young people spend way beyond their means to buy these brand-name commodities. This suggests that [in China] wealth has become the most important – maybe the only – index to judge the worth of a human being. (Jia Zhangke 2009: 233)

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2 Following Sanxia Haoren/Still Life (三峡好人) in winning the Golden Lion Award for Best Film in the Venice Film Festival in 2006, Jia Zhangke’s Useless won the Horizons Documentary Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2007.
To be sure, fashion consumption has become a symbol of class hierarchies and social distinctions in China today. According to Jia Zhangke, the problem of conspicuous consumption of brand-name commodities has become so prevalent to the extent that what one wears, what one carries, what one uses, what one consumes, what one owns has become the only indicator of one’s social value. It has become the only criterion to judge the ‘price’ of a human being. In the interview, in addition to commenting on the problem of the Chinese middle class’ conspicuous consumption of brand-name commodities, the director points out the potential connection between fashion consumption and the erasure of history and memory. He remarks:

Fashion and power are closely complicit in China, and I sense that there is some obscure connection between the mania for newly released brand-name consumer products and the constant erasures of historical memories. That needs to be

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challenged [...] The ‘Useless’ idea is itself a challenge to China’s rapid development and a kind of rebellion. It challenges the obliteration of memory, the over-exploitation of natural resources, and the speed at which all this is happening. (Jia Zhangke 2009: 233-4).

Jia Zhangke hints at the intricate relationship between the promotion of Chinese consumer culture by the forces of global capital and the post-socialist party-state on the one hand, and the radical eradication of Chinese (socialist) history and the maintenance of the status quo on the other hand. But how can one articulate the complex mediations between fashion consumption and the loss of the sense of time, or more precisely, historicity, within the context of Chinese postmodernity and globalization? How does ‘Useless,’ the fashion exhibit designed by a young and aspiring Chinese fashion designer Ma Ke, address such political-economic and social concerns? Jia Zhangke summarizes Ma Ke’s fashion philosophy succinctly.

To me, what is the most attractive about Ma Ke’s work is that she has a keen understanding of what happened to China in the age of consumption. She realized that consumption has resulted in many social problems. For example, the assembly line has cut off the emotional connection between people. Who made this piece of clothing? You don’t know. Precisely because you can get rid of the old and buy a new one, many resources are wasted, and human memories vanish. You don’t remember. This problem echoes with the reality of contemporary China. Now, China is only interested in the new. The country would like to get of the old as much as possible. (Jia Zhangke 2009)
Entitled ‘Dirty Fashion,’ this article examines how contemporary Chinese artists use the visual forms – specifically, fashion and documentary – to reflect on the problems of Chinese consumer culture within the context of global capitalism. In the first part of the article, I will introduce the Chinese fashion designer Ma Ke (马可), currently working in southern China, and her latest fashion design ‘Wuyong’/‘Useless’ (无用) (2007).\(^4\) Presented at the Paris Fashion Week in February 2007, Ma Ke’s fashion design provides a critique of Chinese consumer culture. It raises interesting questions about the loss of the emotional connection between the producer and the consumer of the clothing commodities in the age of (post-) modernity and globalization. In this section, I will also offer my comments about Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ fashion design. In the second part of the article, I will discuss Jia Zhangke’s documentary, \textit{Useless} (2007), which is a transmedia dialogue with Ma Ke’s fashion design. My purpose is to show the way in which Jia Zhangke, through the medium of film, brings a new level of complexity to Ma Ke’s fashion. I argue that Jia Zhangke’s engagement with Ma

\(^4\) For the 無用 (‘Useless’) website, see: \url{http://www.wuyonguseless.com/}. See also London’s Victoria and Albert Museum website. \url{http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/fashion-in-motion-ma-ke-wuyong/}. A short video of Ma Ke’s fashion show held in May 2008 is shown in the website. One can also appreciate the pictures of Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ fashion show from this website.
Ke’s fashion is double-edged: while he embraces some parts of Ma Ke’s fashion, he uses the cinematic image to critique other parts of her work. In particular, he uses the montage to point out some problems of her ‘Useless’ fashion design.

Ma Ke’s Fashion Design ‘Useless’ (2007)

Clothes can cover us. Clothes can convey feelings. Clothes can carry with them stories. An outer layer in close contact with our skin, clothes can also have memories. (Jia Zhangke 2009: 229)

Ma Ke is one of the few internationally acclaimed fashion designers from mainland China today. Born in the city of Changchun in Jilin Province in China in 1971, she graduated from the Suzhou Institute of Silk Textile Technology in 1992. Then she went to the Central Saint Martin’s College of Art in London to receive specialized training in women’s wear. After earning her fashion diploma in England in 1996, she went back to China to set up a business company in the mid-late 1990s. The fashion company, overseen by Ma Ke herself and her partner Mao Jihong, is called ‘Zhuangtai’/‘Mixmind’ (狀態). Frustrated with the mass-produced clothing commodities that looked identical and boring to her, Ma

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5 In Chinese, ‘zhuangtai’ means ‘form’ or ‘state.’ But it was strangely translated as ‘Mixmind.’
Ke felt that creativity and originality were lacking in the Chinese fashion world. ‘Does clothing really have to be so shallow or superficial?’ she asked. This question prompted her to design something completely different, or in her own words, something exceptional to the norm, hence the birth of her first fashion line called ‘Liwai’/ ‘Exception de Mixmind’ (例外) in 1996. As ready-to-wear, ‘Exception’ is sold in fashion boutiques and department stores in cosmopolitan Chinese cities. According to Ma Ke, exceptionality is what defines ‘Exception.’ However, she has not adequately explained what is distinctively exceptional about her design, and how ‘Exception’ is an exception to the norm. Is it the content or the form that is exceptional? Exceptional to what, or what is the norm? We are not told. We need to be cautious to ask how exceptional ‘Exception’ can be. In fact, it is quite possible that ‘Exception’ is the opposite of what Ma Ke claims it to be. In other words, Ma Ke’s ‘Exception’ may not be exceptional but normative, if not banal and ordinary.

The launching of ‘Exception’ brought Ma Ke commercial success, enabling her to design for the sake of artistic creativity rather than profit-making. In the mid-

6 The website of ‘Liwai’/‘Exception de Mixmind’ 例外 is http://www.mixmind.com.cn/
2000s, Ma Ke embarked on a purportedly non-commercial collection called ‘Wuyong’/‘Useless’ (无用) (2007), or more specifically, ‘Wuyong/Tudi’/‘Useless/The Earth’ (无用/土地). According to Ma Ke, ‘Useless’ is artistic production. Unlike ‘Exception’ that is ready-to-wear, ‘Useless’ is high art. It is haute couture. In recognition of her achievement and contribution to the fashion industry, Ma Ke was invited to present her ‘Useless’ artwork in the Paris Fashion Week in February 2007. It was an honor to a Chinese fashion designer.\(^7\)

In their enthusiastic responses, the fashion journalists in Le Monde called Ma Ke an ‘anti-fashion fashion designer.’ The French and Chinese media also praised the ‘anti-fashion’ and ‘anti-consumption’ dimensions of her work. Since Ma Ke incorporated useless and discarded objects in her artistic creation – for example, she recycled a paint-covered sheet to make a dress, an old tarpaulin to make an over-sized coat, and a paint-splashed, ripped, and ragged piece of cloth to create something fashionable – Ma Ke’s design was also labeled by the media as an example of ‘eco-fashion,’ ‘promoting sustainable environment development.’

Later, Ma Ke was invited to display her ‘Useless’ art exhibit in the Joyce Gallery.

\(^7\) In fact, Ma Ke was not the first Chinese fashion designer to present in the Paris Fashion Week. Frankie Xie (谢锋) had presented ‘Jefen’ (吉芬) in the Paris Fashion Week in 2006. To symbolize the opening up of China to the world of fashion, Xie adopted the sign of the ‘Chinese door’ in his fashion collection.
in Paris’ Palais-Royal from March to April 2007. She was also invited to showcase ‘Useless’ in the ‘Fashion in Motion’ series in London’s Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008. In addition, together with Zhang Da’s and Wang Yiyang’s designs, Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ was featured in the ‘China Design Now’ exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum from March to July 2008. In 2008, Ma Ke’s company became a guest member of France’s Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture. The success of ‘Useless’ helped to establish Ma Ke’s reputation as an artist. The cultural and symbolic capital she earned may eventually help with the sale of ‘Exception.’

At this point, my reader may be very curious about Ma Ke’s fashion. What exactly is ‘Useless?’ What does it look like? Why is it called ‘Useless?’ Is it really

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8 For contemporary designs from Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Beijing, see China Design Now (2008), which catalogues the ‘China Design Now’ exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in March-July 2007. See Website: http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1636_chinadesignnow/

9 In fact, ‘Useless/The Earth’ was the first part, and probably it was the most famous part, of Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ series. In July 2008, Ma Ke was invited to present a variation of the same theme ‘Wuyong/Qing Ping’/‘Useless/Frugality’ (無用/清貧) at the Jardin du Palais-Royal in Paris. Her fashion was similarly considered as ‘anti-fashion’ by the media. For example, the fashion show was not presented in a private setting but a public arena. It was not held indoors but outdoors. Also, the fashion show was presented by modern dancers as well as martial arts and Tai-chi practitioners, but not by fashion models. The dance was choreographed by Shen Wei.
'Useless?' How ‘Useless’ is it? In addition, what is its fashion philosophy? How can it be a reflection of Chinese consumer culture? In Jia Zhangke’s documentary, Ma Ke presents her fashion philosophy in these terms:

Objects made by hands convey emotions. What I mean is that making things by hand is a long and laborious process. So handmade objects contain emotional elements, which are quite different from mass-produced commodities. According to a line in a traditional Chinese poem, ‘the mother stitches [to make clothes] for her travelling son’ (慈母手中線，游子身上衣). That’s the kind of emotion I am talking about. It’s never there in industrialized production. It’s easy to see why. With industrialized production, there is no link between the maker and the user. You don’t know who made your clothes. In a materialistic society, handmade objects will obviously never be popular. They go against the principles of business. Handmade objects last longer. People use them continuously. Precisely because they take longer to make, because the maker invests so much in them, even when such things get broken, they are unlikely to be thrown away […] But if we buy a disposable cup, we will use it once and throw it away. There will be no stories to tell about it. It’s essentially lifeless.

Ma Ke’s fashion theory is so provocative that it deserves a closer examination.

Three important points can be deduced from her narrative. The first point is the handmade object. According to Ma Ke, the close and intimate relationship between the maker and the user of the handmade clothing object is evoked by a famous Tang-Dynasty poem. ‘The mother stitches to make clothes for her travelling son.’ This poetic line conjures the scene in which the mother takes the time and effort to make clothes for her son because he has to travel far away. This is a good example of what Ma Ke means by the emotional connection
between the mother and the child, and how their relationship is mediated by the clothes. This particular handmade object is a special and meaningful object, carrying with it the affective investment of the mother in her son. Because maternal love is imbued into the making of it, the object is a sentimental one. Because time goes into the making of it, the object embodies a unique story. It has histories and memories. To elaborate her point, Ma Ke gives a second example. She invites the viewer to imagine a particular scene involving the grandfather, the father, and the son.

A simple household object might be handed down from the grandfather, or maybe he made it by himself, and then he handed it to his son [that is the father]. And the father used it, he would explain to his son where it came from. The whole process of life infuses the object. It has its own story. It becomes a talking point.

Ma Ke’s point is that the handmade clothing object tends to have a longer life-span. If the object is worn out, it will be mended, reused, recycled, and preserved. It will not be thrown away easily.

In her narrative, however, Ma Ke does not articulate where the stories are originated. Do they come from the handmade-ness of the clothing object? Or, do
they come from the transferability of the object from one individual (or generation) to another? For the latter case, the clothing object does not necessarily have to be handmade; it can be a mass-produced commodity. Ma Ke’s narrative runs the risk of being incoherent. Her first example (‘the mother stiches to make clothes for her traveling son’) argues that the handmade object can embody histories and memories. But her second example (‘the object is handed down from the grandfather to the father to the son’) reveals that interesting stories can be told about the object – and this object can be mass-produced commodity – as the object has been used by human beings. Ma Ke does not specify if the object should be handmade or mass-produced. She mentions in passing that ‘maybe it is made by the grandfather.’ But if the object is a mass-produced commodity, it can still embody stories. Such a disjuncture points to the fact that there is no simple causal relationship between the handmade object and story-telling.¹⁰

¹⁰ One should also be attentive to the gender implication of Ma Ke’s idea – it can be potentially conservative. In her first example, it is the woman who stays at home to do the stitching and knitting whereas it is the man who travels and enjoys the product of woman’s manual labor. In her second example, it is the man who has the privilege to participate in story-telling. It remains a curious fact that in Ma Ke’s narrative, women are not given any opportunities to create histories or memories.
The second point refers to the mass-produced commodity in the age of industrialization. The industrialized process involves the factory worker, who is the producer of the commodity, and the consumer of the commodity. Jia Zhangke articulates the problem that Ma Ke raises poetically: ‘The assembly line has cut off our emotions.’ There is simply no emotional connection between the producer and the consumer of the mass-produced commodity. Their bond has been cut off. The factory worker does not know the consumer; the consumer does not know the factory worker either. Their relationship is one of disconnection. According to Ma Ke, the mass-produced commodity does not embody any stories, histories, or memories. Since the commodity does not remember, if it is broken or worn out, it will be thrown away. It will not be reused or recycled. Similar to a disposable cup, the mass-produced commodity is essentially lifeless.

At this point, students of critical and cultural theories may be thinking of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936). Indeed, the story that the handmade object embodies is similar to what Benjamin calls the ‘aura’ of the artwork (e.g. painting), and the

11 However, Ma Ke does not specify whether she is referring to capitalistic or socialist modernity. There were machines in ‘actually existing socialism’ too.
meanings associated with it, such as uniqueness, originality, authenticity, tradition, authority, and rituality. Along the same line of thought, the loss of the history and memory as it pertains to the industrialized mass-produced commodity reminds of Benjamin’s idea of the withering or liquidation of the aura of the artwork since the invention of the technology of mechanical reproduction (e.g. film, photography) in modernity.

It is interesting to note that Ma Ke’s (马可) name sounds a bit like Marx (马克思). Indeed, the terms that Ma Ke uses, such as the handmade object, the commodity, industrialization, mass-production, are Marxian categories. Is her fashion theory Marxian? To answer this question, one can compare Ma Ke’s fashion ideas with the central theoretical concepts in the Marxist discourse. Let’s take alienation as an example. Compared with Ma Ke’s theory that focuses solely on how the consumer is separated from the producer, Marx’s concept of alienation, which can be found in Capital (volume 1), is more complex and three-dimensional. Marx’s idea of alienation allows one to examine disconnection on several different levels: not only the producer’s alienation from the consumer, but also the alienation of the producer from the product of her own labor (namely, the commodity); from her own labor; from herself; from her fellow
producers (the division of labor); and from her humanity or her ‘species-being.’ I’d also mention that Ma Ke’s focus is on the consumer whereas Marx’s emphasis is on the producer. Ma Ke’s theory is not Marxian.

Before proceeding to the third point, we can add the branded fashion commodity, which has not been considered in Ma Ke’s fashion theory, to the list. In Jia Zhangke’s documentary, renowned fashion brands, such as Louis Vuitton and Prada, popular among white-collar office ladies in contemporary China, are portrayed. In fact, Ma Ke’s ‘Exception’ is also a branded commodity. What deserves our attention is that ‘Exception’ is a brand that claims not to be a brand, or a commodity that claims not to be a commodity. Similar to other ‘No Logo’ products (e.g. the Japanese brand ‘Muji’), it is more convincing to categorize ‘Exception’ as a branded fashion commodity, at most it is an ‘anti-branded brand,’ or an ‘anti-commodity commodity,’ which is underwritten by the logic of commodification. By no means is ‘Exception’ exceptional to the capitalistic logic of commodification in postmodernity and globalization. Similar to the second point, the maker and the user of the branded consumer commodity are not emotionally connected. The factory workers who produce these brand-name fashion products do not know the consumers. The consumers have not
encountered the factory laborers either. There is no affective connection between them. If we are to use Ma Ke’s logic to look at her own fashion design, perhaps we can come to a conclusion that ‘Exception’ is also essentially lifeless.

The third point refers to Ma Ke’s fashion design called ‘Useless.’ For Ma Ke, the emotional relationship between the maker and the user is present in the handmade object. Interesting stories can be told about it. Due to the histories and memories it embodies, the handmade object is usually preserved for a longer period of time. But with the emergence of the industrialized mass production and consumption of commodities, such affective experience is unavoidably lost. Ma Ke would like to use her fashion design to rebel against the loss of the sentimental relationship in the age of industrialization. In contrast to Walter Benjamin who celebrates the progressive and revolutionary potential of mechanically reproduced art, such as film and photography, Ma Ke wants to recover the affective connection between individuals by going back to the pre-modern times when ‘the mother stiches to make clothes for her travelling son.’ In other words, Ma Ke is nostalgic and backward-looking. Rejecting the new, she embraces the old. Opposing the industrialized mass-produced commodity, she cherishes the handmade object, or in the imagination of Benjamin, she prefers
‘auratic art.’ It is in this sense that Ma Ke’s fashion is considered by the media as being ‘anti-fashion’ and ‘anti-consumption,’ even ‘anti-modern.’

I have explained Ma Ke’s anti-fashion philosophy, which is the content of her design. But what about the form? In fact, the form of ‘Useless’ is intimately related to its content. A crucial aspect of Ma Ke’s couture exhibit is the emphasis on craftsmanship: ‘Useless’ is handmade. The object is carefully sewn by the female laborers working on hand-looms, rather than being produced by sewing machines. To be sure, the choice of making clothes with one’s hands, or the choice of not using machines to produce the garment, is significant. It is part and parcel of Ma Ke’s fashion philosophy – ‘Useless’ tries to reclaim the affective relationship between individuals before the rise of market capitalism and its mode of technology. While Ma Ke takes pain to emphasize that ‘Useless’ should not be mistaken as a mass-produced commodity, we need to proceed with caution and inquire to what extent her claim is legitimate. When she says that ‘Useless’ is not a commodity, what she means is that ‘Useless’ is not mass-produced. Compared with Marx’s theory of the commodity in *Capital* (Vol. 1), and the theoretical exploration of commodification in the Marxist genealogy (e.g. Georg Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*), Ma Ke’s idea of the commodity is
not so complex.\textsuperscript{12} To be sure, the fact that ‘Useless’ is not mass-produced does not in itself mean that it is not a commodity. Since it is historically embedded in global capitalism, its handmade (and natural) dimension has been underwritten by the capitalistic logic of commodification.\textsuperscript{13} ‘Useless’ should be regarded as a commodity. In the end, ‘Useless’ turns out to be the opposite of what Ma Ke claims it to be: ‘Useless’ is a handmade commodity.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition, Ma Ke’s fashion design is natural and organic, but not mechanical or artificial. Embracing the interactions between human beings and nature, Ma Ke invites nature to do part of the design. In Jia Zhangke’s documentary, she explains her ideas of fashion, nature, and history.

Objects that have stories behind them are attractive. A few years back I thought about making some clothes and burying them, leaving them to change through time. I was always wondering if I could interact with nature when making


\textsuperscript{14} As a commodity that claims not to be a commodity, ‘Useless’ is an anti-commodity commodity.
things. I mean, surrendering some control of the effect so that nature did some of the designing. I’d just start by creating the basics, initiating the idea. I’d leave the rest to nature. So, when the dress was dug up, I felt it would be imbued with the time and space it was buried, not to mention the traces of its history. I think that objects do carry memories.

To resist the loss of the emotional connection between the maker and user of the object, and to help the apparel regain its lost memory, Ma Ke, interestingly enough, buries the fashion she designed under soil for some time. When the fashion material is unearthed, she reasons, it will find itself imbued with the imprint of the time and space of its soil. The dirt will then endow the fashion object with a sense of history and memory, turning it from one that forgets to one that remembers. This is the meaning of dirt on Ma Ke’s fashion on a micro level. On a macro level, the dirt functions to challenge bourgeois temporality. Having no teleological destination, dirt disrupts and intervenes the capitalistic narrative of progress, development, and modernization. In contrast to the glittery surfaces – we can think of the shiny reflections of the LV and Prada commercials in Jia Zhangke’s documentary– which can be regarded as the metaphor of speed, consumption, and disposability, dirt stands for slowness, duration, permanence,

\[15\] In fact, Ma Ke is not the first fashion designer to bury the fashion under soil as a form of artistic practice. Hussein Chalayan has already done this in his master graduating thesis in London’s Central St. Martin’s College of Art and Design.
and history. The dirt on Ma Ke’s fashion critiques Chinese consumer culture by interrupting the rush towards the future. It tries to stop, slow down, and defer the progress narrative of capitalistic modernization.

We need to ask to what extent the representation of nature in Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ is truly natural. In the second part of Jia Zhangke’s documentary, Ma Ke is shown to be preparing for her fashion show. She is quite meticulous about the kind of dirt she’d like to use. Her assistant shows her a sample of dirt to be put onto the fashion models’ faces and bodies. In response, Ma Ke comments: ‘The mud won’t do. It’s too damp. We need earth, not this kind of fine earth. It should be like the sample we sent in earlier.’ Ma Ke does not want to use any kind of dirt, but a particular kind of dirt. She wants to portray a particular kind of nature in ‘Useless.’ The same is also true for the lighting effect. In her conversation with Mao Jihong about the color of the light boxes to be used in the fashion show, Ma Ke says: ‘That color paper won’t do [...] It’s too yellow!’ She does not want to use any kind of light, but a particular kind of light for her fashion show. The nature in Ma Ke’s artwork is not natural, but naturalized, controlled, and artificial.
According to Ma Ke, the fashion object unearthed is endowed with stories. But how should we evaluate the affective result of ‘Useless?’ Has Ma Ke succeeded in recovering the emotional connection between the producer and the consumer? Admittedly, Ma Ke is the designer of ‘Useless.’ The female laborers working on the handlooms in her studio in China are the producers. And the French and English viewers in the fashion show are the consumers. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the producers and the consumers can be connected by ‘Useless’ in any meaningful ways. Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ design does not invite the audience to get to know the Chinese women workers who make ‘Useless.’ Their manual labor is invisible in ‘Useless.’ ‘Useless’ does not bring the producer closer to the consumer either. It’d be absurd to think that the workers would be emotionally invested in the viewers or consumers. What they want is to make a living. They sell their labor-power in exchange for wages. With the aim of recuperating the bond between the producer and the consumer, Ma Ke’s work does not manage to de-alienate the factory workers and the fashion viewers and rebuild their relations. She has not fulfilled the mission she sets out to achieve in

16 According to Ma Ke, ‘Useless’ is priceless. It cannot be purchased in the boutiques or department stores. Although it cannot be consumed in financial terms, ‘Useless’ can still be appreciated, or shall we say, consumed, by the fashion show and museum visitors in Paris and London.
the first place. As I will go on to explain, this task is ultimately fulfilled by Jia Zhangke in *Useless*.

Similar to her design, Ma Ke’s fashion show has been considered as *anti-fashion*. In terms of venue, for example, Ma Ke did not present ‘Useless’ in a fancy or luxurious hotel, or a glamorous exhibition hall in a business convention center. Instead, she presented ‘Useless’ in a school gymnasium in the suburbs of Paris. Later, the art exhibit was shown in London’s Victoria and Albert Museum. If fashion is about the new and the museum is about the old, then, Ma Ke’s choice of presenting her work in a museum is integral to her anti-fashion philosophy. Also, rather than hiring professional models, Ma Ke used amateur models. Compared with supermodels and celebrities, they looked more natural, human, and down-to-earth. What is also striking is that there were no runways in her fashion show. Rather than asking the models to do the catwalks to display the clothes, Ma Ke instructed the amateur fashion models to stand on tall and illuminated boxes. This arrangement is integral to her fashion idea: If the ephemeral presentation of clothes on a catwalk is similar to speed, efficiency, disposability, and waste in the age of mass production and consumption, the
way in which Ma Ke presented her exhibit reminds one of duration, permanence, and preservation.

The anti-fashion dimension of Ma Ke’s fashion show can also be observed in the seating arrangement. In a conventional fashion show, the most important people, such as the patrons and the sponsors, are invited to sit in the front row so that they can see and be seen. But Ma Ke’s fashion show challenged this form of power dynamics. The audience were encouraged to stand up, leave their seats, walk down the stairs, and walk around the fashion models to appreciate her artwork. In this way, conventional power structure is critiqued, and the hierarchical relationship between the audience and the fashion show is reversed and turned upside down.

The anti-fashion aspect of Ma Ke’s work can also be detected in the difficulty of categorizing it. Admittedly, ‘Useless’ is fashion. It is more convincing to regard it as haute couture, rather than ready-to-wear. But interestingly, it was assigned to be shown in the ready-to-wear section of the Paris Fashion Week. (The latter was comprised of three categories – men’s wear,
haute couture, and ready-to-wear).\textsuperscript{17} An \textit{Edelweiss} journalist once asked Ma Ke why she would not want to present ‘Useless’ in the couture section. Ma Ke replied by emphasizing the neither-nor aspect of her design – ‘Useless’ is neither couture, nor ready-to-wear. The existing fashion categories cannot adequately explain the uniqueness of her artwork, she claimed.

It is very difficult to define ‘Wuyong’ (‘Useless’). It can be everything or nothing. On the one hand, it is about anything related to every individual’s life. Thus, it finds wide application in ready-to-wear. On the other hand, its uniqueness and the fact that its design cannot be copied, makes it more like couture. Anyway, it is what it is. It is not anything that already exists. So it doesn’t matter whether it was shown as haute couture or ready-to-wear. (May 2007)

Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ can be ready-to-wear as much as couture. But ‘Useless’ can be other art forms as well. ‘Useless’ is like sculpture. For example, Stephane Marais, the make-up artist of the fashion show, remarked: ‘When I was putting on make-up for the fashion models, I felt I was doing sculpture.’ ‘Useless’ also resembles installation art or performance art. For instance, Thierry Dreyfus, the lighting specialist of the fashion show, exclaimed: ‘This is not a fashion show. I was designing lighting for an installation art!’ In other words, there is a trans-

\textsuperscript{17} While ‘Useless,’ according to Ma Ke, can move between couture and ready-to-wear, ‘Exception,’ is, strictly speaking, ready-to-wear. The latter cannot be seen as couture.
media or multi-media impulse in Ma Ke’s design. Transcending the boundary of fashion to become something else, ‘Useless’ resembles a performance in a theatre, or a sculptural exhibition, or an art installation, in a museum or art gallery. The boundaries between fashion and other art forms are rendered fluid, blurred, and ambivalent. While Ma Ke’s anti-fashion can be observed in its formal features, one needs to inquire if her design is really anti-fashion. It seems to me that her work is not so much anti-fashion, but rather, it is a different kind of fashion. Ma Ke’s anti-fashion is, at most, alter-fasion. Its mode of negativity is ‘lite’ and ‘decaffeinated’ (Slavoj Zizek). ‘Useless’ is reified, commodified, and ideological. Jia Zhangke’s documentary further points out the ideology of ‘Useless.’


In fact, we are all [economically] related. The tailors in Shanxi are related to the migrant workers in Guangdong. We are all related in this [economic] chain. Regardless of which stratum [class] you are in, which profession you are in, in reality, we are all related. (Jia Zhangke 2009)

The documentary Useless (2007) is comprised of three major parts. While Ma Ke’s fashion design and fashion show constitute the second part, what about the first and third parts? In fact, the first part of the documentary presents a group of manual laborers working in a garment factory in the city of Zhuhai in
Guangdong Province in southern China. These workers produce Ma Ke’s first fashion line ‘Exception,’ which is ready-to-wear. Three dimensions of their lives are featured: the factory where they work, the canteen where they eat, and the clinic where they see the doctor when they are sick. To be sure, the representation of the lived experience of the factory workers is a continuation of Jia Zhangke’s long-standing interest in the subalterns and underprivileged groups in China in the age of economic reforms. The genealogy of this interest can be traced back to the director’s portrayal of the urban wanderers in his first film Xiaowu/Pickpocket (小武) (1998), the socialist cultural performers in Zhantai/Platform (站台) (2000), the abandoned youths in Renxiaoyao/Unknown Pleasures (任逍遥) (2002), the migrant workers in Shijie/The World (世界) (2004), the poor and the displaced in the Three Gorges Dam project in Sanxia Haoren/Still Life (三峡好人) (2006) and Dong (东) (2006), as well as factory workers laid off from the state-owned enterprises in Ershisichengji/24 City (二十四城记) (2008).19

18 The clinic scene in Useless reminds us of the opening sequence of Jia Zhangke’s The World (2004). In the latter, the dance performer Zhao Xiaotao (or Tao) is looking for a band aid at the backstage. Taken together, it can be interpreted that Jia Zhangke provides a critique of China’s economic reforms from the perspective of the health and the physical well-being of the Chinese (migrant) workers.

19 The list can also be extended to the tailors-turned-coal-miners in the third part of Useless.
Similar to other contemporary Chinese documentaries about fashion, such as David Redmon’s *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (2005), Micha X. Peled’s *China Blue* (2005), and Ho Chao-ti’s *My Fancy High Heels* (我爱高跟鞋) (2010), Jia Zhangke explicitly links consumption to production. He insists that Ma Ke’s first fashion brand ‘Exception’ is produced by the factory workers in China’s Guangdong Province. The factory workers are the historical conditions of possibility, and the fields and forces of production, of Ma Ke’s fashion design. The second part of the documentary focuses on Ma Ke’s haute couture ‘Useless.’ The third part turns to the lives of the working class in the city of Fenyang (汾阳) in Shanxi Province in northern China. With the rise of the market economy, the local tailors cannot compete with the factories and department stores. In a memorable scene in *Useless*, a tailor-turned-coal miner says that excluding the cost of labor, it costs him 40 yuans (renminbi) to buy the necessary materials to make a suit. However, the department store sells the suit for 30 yuans. It is not possible for him (the petty bourgeoisie) to compete with the department stores (the big bourgeoisie). To make a living, many of the local tailors have to give up their jobs and work as

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20 Jia Zhangke also looks at the production of ‘Useless’ by the female laborers working on the handlooms in Ma Ke’s studio in China.
coal-miners.\textsuperscript{21} To that extent, the tailors are the repressed underside of Ma Ke’s ‘Exception.’ Their expertise has been rendered ‘useless.’\textsuperscript{22}

In an interview with Tony Rayns, Jia Zhangke articulates the significance of the three-part structure of his documentary. In particular, he explains the formal strategies that he uses to grasp, or what Fredric Jameson calls ‘cognitively map’ the workings of the global capitalistic totality.

Since making \textit{The World}, more and more I like to use the ‘block structures’ (板塊) and to represent more than one group of characters or more than one setting. \textit{Dong}, for example, brings together two Asian cities which are very far apart, Fenyang in the Three Gorges area of Sichuan and Bangkok in Thailand. And in \textit{Still Life} I told two unrelated stories which happened to take place in the same town. As I grow older, I experience life’s complexity and diversity, and it seems to me hard to represent those characteristics through a conventional linear narrative, such as a 90-minute story of one man and woman in a relationship. These days it’s no longer unusual to travel, to meet a wide variety of people and to experience very different kinds of relationship. Our sense of the world changes as we travel and cross-reference different realities and lives. Obviously,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{21} See also Li Yang’s (李阳) film \textit{Mang Jing/Blind Shaft (盲井)} which looks at the lives of Chinese coal-miners. Similar to other sixth generation of Chinese cinema, this film looks like a documentary.
\item \textsuperscript{22} While it is possible to read it as a tripartite documentary consisting of the factory worker, the fashion model, and the tailor-turned-coal miner, \textit{Useless} can also be read as a documentary about clothes. The first part of \textit{Useless} looks at ‘Exception’ as ready-to-wear; the second part engages with ‘Useless’ as haute couture; and the third part focuses on clothes as everyday necessity. The contrast between the first and second parts reveals the fact that fashion is situated somewhere between consumer commodity and art, and between mass/popular culture and high culture.
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low-cost air travel, satellite TV and the internet all contribute to this changing sense of the world. In most parts of China, it’s already the case that most people no longer know only the immediate reality around them. (Jia Zhangke 2009: 231)

The director’s use of the ‘block structure’ in his cinematic composition deserves our attention. In his previous documentary Dong (2006), Jia Zhangke uses a two-part structure to trace the footsteps of a contemporary Chinese painter Liu Xiaodong. In this documentary, the artist is shown to be painting the male migrant workers in the Three Gorges Dam area in China and the female sex workers in Bangkok in Thailand. In Useless, the director uses the same technique to feature different groups of people in different geographical regions. What connects them together is that they are located in the same economic chain.

In the documentary, I show that Ma Ke created her ‘Wu Yong’ [‘Useless’] label to protest against the industrialization of garment-making on a mass scale. In Shanxi, garment workshops in remote areas are dying out because they cannot compete with the garment factories in Guangzhou. By showing the Guangzhou factories, the fashion show in Paris, and the small tailor’s shop in Shanxi in the same film, I hope to build a revealing complex picture [of how the capitalistic system works in the contemporary reality]. (Jia Zhangke 2009: 231-2)

The director points out the importance of grasping the complex relationships among seemingly incompatible realities. In Useless, the first and second parts are related in that both the factory workers and the fashion models work to produce
Ma Ke’s fashion design – the workers labor to make the ready-to-wear ‘Exception’ while the fashion models labor to show off the ‘Useless’ exhibit. The first and third parts are also connected in that the local tailors in Shanxi (the petty bourgeoisie) cannot compete with the large-scale factories in Guangdong and department stores (the bourgeoisie). It may not be a coincidence that the Chinese tailors in Shanxi are shown to be laboring as coal-miners after they have lost their jobs. The coal they mine serve as the raw energy materials required for the normal operation of the factories in Guangdong. Added to this, it is also possible that after the local tailors in Shanxi have lost their jobs, some of them have to move to work in the factories in Guangdong. If this is the case, then, the local tailors are doubly exploited. Here, what Jia Zhangke has done is to ‘de-differentiate’ and make connections among fragmented and incoherent realities. He aspires to tell a more totalizing story of the workings of global capitalism. His work is a good example of ‘cognitive mapping.’

The Ideology of Ma Ke’s Anti-Fashion

Jia Zhangke’s representation of the coal-miners is the most fascinating part of the documentary. Why does Jia Zhangke choose to portray the coal-
miners in a documentary about fashion and consumption? In the following, I argue that this portrayal amounts to an ideological critique of Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ fashion idea. First of all, according to Ma Ke, the mass-produced commodity, as opposed to the handmade object, does not carry any histories or memories. But is this really the case? As we see in the third part of the documentary, the workers do in fact endow meanings on, and create stories for, the mass-produced clothing commodities. Take, for instance, Jia Zhangke’s interview with the working-class couple who work as coal-miners in Shanxi. The husband, formerly a tailor, has purchased a pink suit for his wife in a department store. His wife is fond of the pink suit simply because it is chosen by her husband. This can be interpreted as the agency of the consumer: the working-class couple adopt the mass-produced commodity and create the story of love for the pink suit.

In fact, people from the middle class also create stories for the branded commodities. In the second part of the documentary, Ma Ke mentions that a commodity, such as a disposable cup, does not embody any stories. Then, Jia Zhangke makes an abrupt cut to show the façade of a Louis Vuitton flagship

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23 Ironically, the couple seem not to be bothered by the fact that the husband, who used to work as a tailor, does not make the pink shirt for her.
store in China. This cut seems to suggest that the Louis Vuitton handbag, also a mass-produced commodity, is not very different from the disposable cup. If we follow Ma Ke’s logic, a lifeless object, such as the LV handbag, must not carry any stories. But on the contrary, the middle class consumers, such as the female ‘friends of Louis Vuitton,’ are genuinely passionate about it! Jia Zhangke shows a somewhat comical scene in which a group of Chinese middle-class women, dressed in fashionable clothes, are discussing the brand-name commodities they have purchased. One of them, in a somewhat annoying voice, announces that she likes Louis Vuitton. Another one expresses her preference for Prada because ‘Prada is very philosophical!’ Yet another customer likes Paul Smith because their shirts are comfortable. All of these personal choices are, in effect, stories created by the middle class consumers that end up endowing meanings on the mass-produced commodity.

I would go further to say that even Ma Ke herself is participating in this process of story-making. This is especially true when she presents the reasoning behind her first fashion-line ‘Exception.’ Dissatisfied with the fact that China can only be a labor-intensive and export-oriented sweatshop that produces cheap and low-quality clothes for western consumption, Ma Ke aspires to establish a
national fashion brand for China. She would like Chinese fashion to be recognized by the international fashion world. This is the meaning par excellence that she creates for ‘Exception’ as a branded commodity. Although Ma Ke says that the mass-produced commodity does not embody any stories, meanwhile, she is actively producing one herself.

The behaviours of these groups of people – the working-class coal-miners and the pink shirt, the middle-class consumers and their LV and Prada handbags, and the fashion designer herself – work together to refute Ma Ke’s idea that mass-produced commodities do not carry any stories. In fact, whether an object can embody stories has less to do with whether it is handmade or mass-produced, but more to do with how people use it. Indeed, it is the embeddedness of the object in concrete historical situations that is the source of its story. Contrary to what Ma Ke proclaims, there is no simple causal relationship between the handmade object and story-telling.

24 The logo of ‘Liwai’/‘Exception’ (a Chinese brand) is exceptional in that it is not presented in Chinese, but in English (‘Exception de Mixmind’).
Second: Ma Ke says that since no stories can be told about the mass-produced commodities, the commodities are disposable. They are not likely to be reused or recycled. But is it really the case? In the documentary, there is a desire on the side of the working class to prolong the life-span of the mass-produced commodities. Many of them try to preserve their clothes so that they can last longer. Some of the clothes have been worn for such a long time that they have become worn out. This can be seen from the clothes hanging outside the house of the coal-mining couples, and the clothes hanging inside the coal-miners’ bathhouse. Their texture shows that these clothes have been worn and washed many times. In addition, the working class characters, such as the man in the red vest, the wife of the coal-mining couple, and the middle-aged woman by the end of the documentary, bring their clothes to the local tailors to have them mended. Contrary to Ma Ke’s idea that the mass-produced commodities are disposable, the clothing commodities tend to be repaired, preserved, and ultimately healed by the working class’ hands.

The Montage of Fashion Models and Coal-Miners

The dirt in France is to be put onto the faces. The dirt in Shanxi is to be breathed into the lungs. (Jia Zhangke)
Going further in my exploration of the ideology of Ma Ke’s anti-fashion, we see that in the third part of the documentary, Jia Zhangke focuses on the lived experience of the coal miners. Their uniforms are covered with dirt. Their faces and bodies are also blackened with coal. This is a powerful montage: When we try to juxtapose this scene with the scene in which Ma Ke’s fashion models are covered with dirt, it is possible to say that the dirty coal-miners, who have just come out of the coal mines, should be regarded as fashionable as, or even more fashionable than, Ma Ke’s fashion models. If we are to use Ma Ke’s logic to look at the world, the dirty coal-miners should be regarded as the perfect incarnations of Ma Ke’s fashion idea. They too must be seen as a new kind of fashion model! They too express Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ fashion idea perfectly!\(^{25}\) Indeed, the dirt on the coal-miners’ clothes reminds one of the material conditions of coal-mining. Jia Zhangke has pushed Ma Ke’s idea to the extreme that such an idea may appear to be uncanny to Ma Ke herself.

\(^{25}\) I wonder how Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ is different from the big piles of dirty laundry in my bathroom. Indeed, the pungent smell of my dirty laundry indicates the historicity of the clothing object. It is doubtful if Ma Ke would agree that my dirty laundry is an excellent example of her ‘Useless’ fashion idea.
But will Ma Ke acknowledge any of this? In the transitional scene between the second and third parts of the documentary, Ma Ke is shown to be driving an expensive van from the city to the countryside. Visiting the poor, remote, and underdeveloped parts of the country is similar to the recovery of memory for a person who has lost consciousness, she says. (Her narrative comes across as somewhat condescending. It resembles the claim made by some late 19th and early 20th century European imperialists, who claimed that their colonial experience in Asia, Africa, or the Middle East allowed them to see the childhood or the primitive stage of human civilizations.) Indeed, there is little evidence to show that Ma Ke will joyfully embrace the idea that these dirty coal-miners are fashionable. It is doubtful that she will entertain this idea. As Ma Ke considers the countryside as backward, it is unlikely that she will use her fashion theory to judge the working-class coal miners and conclude that they are fashionable through and through. In other words, *Jia Zhangke’s inclusion of the coal miners in the documentary reveals the double standard of Ma Ke’s fashion idea.*

Ironically, when we try to look at this from the perspective of the working class, these coal-miners seriously consider their clothes and bodies to be dirty. They do not think there is anything artistic and philosophical about their dirty
clothes and bodies. After a day of hard work, what they want to do is to take a shower to get rid of the dirt.²⁶ According to the coal-miner couple, what is fashionable for them is what they see on TV commercials. The wife says that she’d like to buy a three-piece suit because she has seen it on television. Indeed, the working-class couple’s understanding of fashion is very different from Ma Ke’s. Thanks to Jia Zhangke’s montage, such an ironic mismatch can be interpreted as the ideology of Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ idea. Reflecting on how the industrialized mass production and consumption of clothing commodities have radically changed the nature and process of human interactions, Ma Ke aestheticizes, indeed theorizes, dirt, by using it to critique the problems of consumer society. But ironically, the coal-miners, who should really be considered as the perfect example of Ma Ke’s fashion idea, do not idealize or romanticize the ways in which dirt can disrupt modern temporality. To them, dirt is just dirt. It has to be removed after a day of hard work.

The Utopian Impulse of Ma Ke’s Anti-Fashion

²⁶ In fact, this is also true for the fashion models posing in Ma Ke’s ‘Useless’ show in Paris. Before the show begins, they are busy reading, texting, or playing games on their cell phones. After the performance, they would like to get rid of the dirt as soon as possible and then go back home.
Recently, Jia Zhangke has published a collection of essays in Chinese called *Jia Xiang/Jia Thinks* (贾想) (2009). In fact, the Chinese title is a pun. While the pronunciation of Jia (贾) is the same as that of another word Jia (假), their meanings are different. The former Jia (贾) refers to the surname of the director, whereas the latter Jia (假) means falsehood (or ideology). When ‘Jia’ is combined with ‘Xiang’ (想), which means ‘to think,’ ‘Jia Xiang’ (贾想) can mean ‘Jia Thinks,’ or ‘The Reflections of Jia.’ But ‘Jia Xiang’ (假想) can also mean ‘What If’ in the subjunctive mood. The book title is already filled with utopian longings and imaginations. From the last name ‘Jia’ (贾) to the falsehood ‘Jia’ (假), from ‘Jia Thinks’ (贾想) to ‘What If’ (假想), it is possible to observe what Fredric Jameson calls the dialectic of ideology (假: falsehood) and utopian desire (假想: what if) in mass culture.\(^{27}\) In the above, I show that Jia Zhangke’s documentary allows us to see the ideology of Ma Ke’s fashion. But can we also detect the faint traces of utopian impulse in Ma Ke’s fashion through Jia Zhangke’s documentary?

I would like to suggest that such utopian impulse can be observed in the representations of the naked and dirty bodies in Jia Zhangke’s documentary. Let

me focus on the dirty bodies first. The second part of the documentary *Useless* portrays the fashion models wearing Ma Ke’s dirty fashion. The clothes that the fashion models wear have been buried underground for some time. Dirt, the make-up used Ma Ke’s fashion show, has also been put onto the fashion models’ faces and bodies so that they look dirty. (It turns out that they are artificially made to look dirty.) The third part of the documentary features the coal-miners wearing their work uniforms. When they come out of the coal-miners, they are covered with coal and are dirty. When the fashion models are placed alongside the coal-miners, one is led to ask if the images of the dirty bodies can be connected to a repressed utopian wish for equality and democracy. Jia Zhangke’s cinematic montage – the juxtaposition of the fashion models in Paris and the coal miners in Shanxi – reveals a visible resemblance between the two groups that cannot be acknowledged in Ma Ke’s high-fashion philosophy. The montage seems to imply that dirt can cover up, erase, equalize, or remove class hierarchies created by fashion. Dirt can obliterate social distinctions among individuals. Indeed, when we are dirty, we are all the same.\(^{28}\) What we have then is equality: equality in our existence as human beings.

\(^{28}\) While dirty fashions and bodies can be interpreted as a utopian moment in Jia
In the second part of Jia Zhangke’s documentary, there is a scene in which the fashion models in Paris are undressing themselves. What are on display are several young women who are changing into Ma Ke’s dirty fashion before the fashion show begins. The viewer can see the women’s naked bodies. Without clothes – without the symbols of class hierarchies and social distinctions – the fashion models look the same in the sense that they are equal. Similarly, in the third part of the documentary, there is a scene in which a group of male coal-miners in Shanxi, after a day of hard work, take showers together in a bathhouse. What is on display is a group of men who are trying to wash off the dirt on their faces and bodies. Similarly, the viewer can see the men’s naked bodies. Without clothes, the coal-miners look the same in the sense that they are equal. It also seems that they are having a bit of fun taking showers together – it is the joy of

Zhangke’s documentary, we should also be aware of their dystopian impulse. Dirt can re-build, re-establish, and re-affirm class hierarchies and social distinctions in unexpected ways. For example, when preparing for her fashion show, Ma Ke is picky about the kind of dirt to be used. She is looking for a particular kind of dirt, not dirt in general. A sample of dirt has been shipped from China to France for her fashion show. But the poor coal-miners in Shanxi cannot have this kind of luxury to be covered by high-quality dirt, or enjoy the privilege to be buried under a special kind of dirt shipped from somewhere else.
being in a collective. When the fashion models are juxtaposed with the coal-miners, one is led to wonder how the images of the naked bodies can be linked to a repressed utopian desire for a more egalitarian society in which class barriers and social inequality are removed. Indeed, in this lonely and atomized world of capitalism, there is an unconscious collective desire for a world of equality that rejects class hierarchy and social distinctions. There is also hope and yearning for a non-alienating world of mutuality and reciprocity that cannot be offered by the society of spectacle and consumption.
Chapter 6
Rubbish!

Continuing the previous chapters’ emphasis on fashion, consumption, and temporality, the conclusion of the dissertation attends to the repressed other of Chinese consumer culture. According to Sigmund Freud, repression is a necessary step for the human subject to enter into a more advanced and established phase of social, sexual, and psychic development. Human beings have to repress their primitive and archaic desires to enter civilization. They also have to repress their sexuality (e.g. the love-objects or object-cathexes tied to the oral and anal stages) to complete their psychosexual development and enter into socially acceptable relations. To focalize Freud’s concept of repression to Chinese capitalism and consumer culture, I suggest that China’s drive to become a global capitalistic power requires the mechanism of repression. The constitutive other of Chinese consumer culture, such as extraction, production, distribution, and disposal, has to be constantly repressed for the normal functioning of capitalistic consumer culture. The repression of the knowledge of labor exploitation and environmental degradation is necessary for the normal functioning of (Chinese) capitalism. Capitalism wants its consumers to repress the knowledge of labor
and garbage, to push it out of their minds, so that they continue to consume without any critical reflection.

Addressing what comes after consumption, this essay examines the representation of rubbish, and the people who work with rubbish, in Wang Jiuliang’s documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (王久良: 垃圾围城) (2011). I ask how the documentary representation of rubbish and the scavenger can be treated as a productive site for political thinking. The organization of the chapter is as follows: In Part I, I present Wang Jiuliang and his works. In Part II, I introduce Wang Jiuliang’s documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. With reference to the theories of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, and Fredric Jameson, I approach the figuration of rubbish from different angles – (1) the return of the repressed in the form of the uncanny, (2) the abject, and (3) the dialectic of ideology and an utopian impulse. In Part III, I engage with Walter Benjamin’s writings about history – the angel of history, constellation, and dialectical image – to contemplate the temporality of rubbish. I ask how the latter can provide a different way to interpret the global rise of China, the Chinese middle class, and consumer culture.
Wang Jiuliang and His Works

Born in 1976, Wang Jiuliang is a young, promising, and politically engaged photographer from China’s Shandong Province. Since graduating from the Cinema-Television School at The Communication University of China, he has been using different artistic media – photography, documentary, visual art – combined with new digital media technologies – internet webpage, blog, weibo (微博) (the Chinese twitter), Global Position System (GPS), and Google Earth, among others – to tell stories about the repressed underside of China’s economic reforms. Launching his career in the mid-2000s, Wang Jiuliang’s artistic oeuvre so far can be roughly divided into two phases. His early works, comprising the photographic series, “Previous Lives” (往生) (2007-8), “Rituals and Souls” (礼魂) (2008), and “Absolute Happiness” (极乐) (2008), tended to focus on the local conceptions of death and afterlife in his hometown in China’s Shandong Province. These photographs were exhibited to the public in the mid- and late-2000s. While photography remains a central interest in his works, Wang Jiuliang has begun to work with other art forms, such as documentary and installation art, in his most recent productions. In addition to the photographic series Beijing Besieged by Waste (垃圾围城) (2008-2010) and The Fringes of The City (城边) (2009), he released the documentary Beijing Besieged by Waste (垃圾围城) (2011). Currently, he
has been involved in the making of the “The Supermarket” (超级市场) art series – including “Fruity Coffee” (果咖) and “Beijing Hotel” (北京饭店). Taken together, Wang Jiuliang’s oeuvre has tried to capture the effects of the residual. In his early works, fascinated with the afterlife of human beings, Wang Jiuliang attempted to capture what remains after life has been completed. In his recent works, interested in the afterlife of the commodities, he tried to grasp what is left behind after the process of consumption has come to an end.1

Wang Jiuliang’s recent works offer a substantial critique of Chinese consumer culture within the context of global capitalism. According to a journalistic report, “Rubbish Doesn’t Surround the City, but the City Surrounds Rubbish” (“不是垃圾包围城市，而是城市包围垃圾”), he suggested that the drastic

1 Wang Jiuliang’s works carry the spirit of Walter Benjamin’s philosophy. While Benjamin is fascinated with Jewish mysticism, Wang Jiuliang is interested in Chinese religions and beliefs. Similar to the Marxist Benjamin who provides a critique of commodification, Wang Jiuliang’s works offers a critique of Chinese consumer culture. While Benjamin is fascinated with historical remains, such as the out-of-fashion arcades in the 19th century Paris (e.g. The Arcades Project), Wang Jiuliang is interested in the debris of consumption. Similar to Benjamin who reads the scavengers and rag-pickers as the philosophers of history, Wang Jiuliang portrays the lives of the scavengers in his photographic series, “Beijing Besieged by Waste” (2008-10) and his documentary bearing the same title. While Benjamin is fascinated with new media technologies such as cinema and photography (which were new in Benjamin’s times), Wang Jiuliang uses new media technologies, such as the GPS, Google Earth, and other internet tools (which were new in his/our time), to make the documentary.
transformations that have taken place in China during the past 30 years can be observed in the changes in Chinese people’s attitudes toward consumption.

We often consume for the sake of consuming. We consume for the sake of “face” (“mianzi”) and vanity. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, it took 150 years for this kind of consumer culture to be formed in Europe and the U.S. But in China, it only took us 30+ years to complete the process. In the space of several years, we departed from a culture that cherished thrift and frugality and entered one that celebrated wild and excessive consumption – as if it were a form of compensation. We need to reflect on this kind of consumer culture. (Chen and Tao)

Wang Jiuliang is perfectly correct to point out the radical reversal of Chinese people’s attitudes toward consumption. Adding to his observation, I suggest that the transformation of Chinese people’s values can be seen more clearly through the juxtaposition of the political propaganda of the socialist period with the commercial advertisements of the post-socialist period. In the 1960s and 1970s, socialist slogans like “Labor is glorious, simplicity/plainness is fashion” (“劳动最光荣，朴素是时尚”), “New clothes can last for three years. Old clothes can last for three years. After sewing and repairing, they can last for another three years (“新三年，旧三年，缝缝补补又三年”), as well as “The new is for the first child, the old is for the second child, and after it has been sewn and mended, it can be given to the third child” (“新老大，旧老二，缝缝补补给老三”), testified to the fact that the environmentally friendly virtues like thrift and frugality (if not poverty) were celebrated in
popular culture in China during the socialist period. In contrast, Chinese people’s values toward consumption were turned upside down in the age of capitalistic modernization. These virtues were no longer upheld in Chinese public culture in the 2000s and 2010s. According to Wang Jiuliang, one of the representative examples in the advertising industry was “Sell ice to the Eskimos” ("把冰卖给爱斯基摩人"). Of course, the Eskimos living in the North Pole do not need to buy ice – they have got plenty of it. But with the intention of making more profits, businessmen created what Herbert Marcuse perceptively called “false needs” in the chain of consumption. Through vigorous marketing strategies, businessmen try to sell to people what they have already got. Wang Jiuliang is deeply critical of such waste-oriented culture, or what I call “Sell ice to the Chinese Eskimos” culture, taking place in China now.

Wang Jiuliang used multiple artistic media – photography, documentary, and installation art – to evaluate Chinese consumer culture in a critical way. Indeed, photography continued to be a central medium in Wang Jiuliang’s recent works. For example, his photographic series *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (垃圾围城) (2008-2010), together with his documentary bearing the same title, were primarily concerned with waste – the repressed other of Chinese consumer
Another photographic series of his, *The Edge of the City* (城边) (2009), chronicled the lives of the scavengers (拾荒者) in the rubbish dumps in Beijing. Coming from the remote and poor areas of the country, such as the Sichuan, Anhui, Henan Provinces, these scavengers did the kind of manual labor that nobody would like to do. In the rubbish dumps, they picked up the leftovers and recycled the useful materials from the scrap yards. Most of the scavengers had no choice but to live in rubbish-houses: they collected the materials from the rubbish dumps and used them to build houses. The scavengers also wore rubbish-clothes: after collecting the clothes that had been chucked away, they washed them and wore them. They also had no choice but to eat rubbish-food. Since their lived experiences are strikingly absent in the public discourses in contemporary China, the scavengers can also be regarded as the repressed other of Chinese consumer culture. While Jia Zhangke (贾樟柯) empathizes with the migrant worker and calls himself a “cinematic migrant worker” (电影民工), I think it is legitimate to call Wang Jiuliang a “photographic scavenger” (摄影拾荒者), a “documentary scavenger” (纪录片拾荒者), or an “artistic scavenger” (艺术拾荒者), as he respects and identifies with the working class with whom he works. Such a naming tries to break down the division and hierarchy between mental labor (intellectual labor) and manual labor.
While Wang Jiuliang’s incisive critique of Chinese consumer culture is shown prominently in his documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (2011), his critical evaluation of the aftermath of consumption can also be observed in his installation art and performance art. A scavenger himself, Wang Jiuliang collected disposable consumer commodities in the rubbish dumps. After accumulating a number of abandoned instant coffee packages and disposable hotel slippers, he created two installation artworks, entitled “Fruity Coffee,” or “Fruit-flavored Coffee” (a brand of instant coffee) and “Beijing Hotels.” These works were exhibited at Beijing’s Songzhuang Art Center (宋庄) from June 16 to July 20, 2010. These disposable goods, consumed mostly by the Chinese middle class, were used merely once before they were chucked away. They had very short life-spans, or they were designed to be so. Turning the big piles of useless (or use-less) rubbish to useful things, Wang Jiuliang recycled these discarded and abandoned materials, and exhibited the sea of instant coffee and hotel slippers inside and outside the art museum. The result was striking: it was as if the entire art museum was about to be engulfed by the big piles of rubbish! What Wang Jiuliang managed to achieve was the condition of being surrounded, enclosed, walled, and overwhelmed by rubbish. This certainly echoed with the theme of
Wang Jiuliang’s documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. By politicizing rubbish and turning it into art, by creating rubbish-art – rubbish-but-not-quite and art-but-not-quite (but quite alike), he was making a commentary about consumer culture. In the end, the art exhibition was so successful in visualizing the problem of excessive packaging that the company that produced these disposable consumer commodities sent a letter of complaint to the art museum.

According to Wang Jiuliang, his current work-in-progress is called “The Supermarket” (超级市场), a trans-media production involving photography, image, installation art, and others. The “Fruity Coffee” and “Beijing Hotel” series were part of the supermarket project. The project continued his critique of consumption and waste in contemporary China. In an interview, he offered a de-familiarizing view concerning the similarities between the supermarkets and the rubbish dumps.

I’d like to show the relationships between rubbish and consumer commodities, between rubbish dumps and supermarkets (both of them can be considered markets), and between the problem of rubbish and the social system. It is because there is a close connection between the excretion (waste) of consumption and people’s consumption values.²

² In some ways, Wang Jiuliang’s supermarket series is similar to Andreas Gursky’s photographic series, *99 Cent II Diptychon* (2001).

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After collecting disposable consumer products, such as packages of instant noodles, in the rubbish dumps, he placed them back onto a supermarket’s shelves. Then, he took pictures of these strange entities that were simultaneously consumer commodities and rubbish – consumer-products-as-rubbish and rubbish-as-consumer-products. How should we call these entities that appeared to be simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar? Wang Jiuliang coined the excellent term – the rubbish’s supermarket (垃圾的超级市场) – meaning there is a supermarket in the rubbish dump. Inspired by his insightful coinage, I think the opposite works equally well too: the supermarket’s rubbish (超级市场的垃圾) – there is also a rubbish dump in the supermarket. Indeed, Wang Jiuliang’s supermarket project helps to create a social awareness that when one purchases a product, one is complicit with, at least in support of, the consumption-oriented system that produces rubbish and pollutes the environment irresponsibly. One can go further to say that when one consumes in the supermarket, one is actually

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4 I want to thank Rey Chow for teaching me to use Wang Jiuliang’s insight on the similarity between the supermarket and the rubbish dump to look at the relationship between the museum and the rubbish dump. Indeed, the museum (or any other respectable bourgeois institution) can be regarded as a rubbish dump as much as the rubbish dump can be regarded as a museum.
buying rubbish. One is consumed by rubbish too. If we think in this way, the consumer in the supermarket is not different from the scavenger in the rubbish dump. (We can go further to say that the working-class scavenger is a more sensible consumer because he/she can obtain the commodities for free, whereas the middle-class consumer has to pay for them.) In the end, what Wang Jiuliang has done is an act of what Fredric Jameson calls “de-differentiation” (*A Singular Modernity*). He tries to make connections between the supermarket and the rubbish dump and relate consumption to disposal, so that the viewers can glimpse the complex workings of the capitalistic totality.


While shooting the photographic series, “Afterlives” (鬼神信仰), which explored the changes in the rituals of ancestral offerings in his hometown, Wang Jiuliang found that it was not possible to find a place to capture the purity and tranquility which he had hoped to find in his subjects. “Everywhere I went was garbage!” he complained. “In the end, I found myself cleaning up bags after bags of garbage before I could even start taking photographs.” This led Wang Jiuliang to wonder where these garbage bags came from. In an interview in a Chinese TV program called “Travelling with Dreams: *Beijing Besieged by Waste* photographer
Wang Jiuliang” (与梦想同行：垃圾围城摄影师王久良), Wang Jiuliang explained why he was interested in making a documentary about rubbish.

Before the production of *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, I was making a film about the traditional Chinese concept of ghosts, gods, and beliefs in the afterlife. I was shooting in my hometown for an entire year. That took place in the cemetery. What I needed was a very pure, relatively primitive, and natural environment. I’d like to re-present the atmosphere of the ancient times. But in reality, it was hard to find such an environment. What was really annoying was that there was rubbish all over the mountains. This prompted me to ask: how could a package or a rubbish bag from the U.S. or Germany arrive at a small village in China? At that time, I was reflecting on this particular issue.⁵

After some investigations, he learned that the plastic bags were used to carry chemical pesticides. In contrast to pesticides in bottles (which could be used for one year), these plastic bags were used only once before they were trashed. The use of disposable plastic bags in agricultural productions prompted him to make a documentary about rubbish. In the beginning, the working title of the documentary was simply *A Photographic Investigation of Waste Pollution Around Beijing*  Beijing Besieged by Waste. He had not yet realized that it would be called *Beijing Besieged by Waste*.

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⁵ Source: http://v.ifeng.com/history/renwujingdian/201111/d67e9026-4830-4976-8b1b-ac836d8bf491.shtml
Initially, Wang Jiuliang’s method was simple: the energetic and enthusiastic rubbish detective rode his motorbike and followed garbage trucks transporting household rubbish to waste management centers. He also followed trucks moving the rubbish from the transfer stations to the incinerators and landfills sites. In order to get to know where exactly the rubbish dumps were located, he made good use of new digital technologies, such as Global Position System (GPS). From 2008 to 2010, Wang Jiuliang visited 450-500 rubbish-dumping sites, both legal and illegal, in Beijing. After visiting a landfill site, he used a yellow sign to mark its location on Google Earth. After more than a year of hard work, in late 2009, the rubbish detective made a shocking discovery. Based on the distribution of the yellow signs on Google Earth, he concluded that Beijing is surrounded, and almost engulfed, by rubbish. (See figure below) This discovery led him to call his documentary 垃圾围城 (pinyin: Laji Weicheng; Translation: Beijing Besieged by Waste). 垃圾 (Laji) means rubbish (or in American English, trash or garbage) and 围城 (Weicheng) means “to surround the city” or “to besiege the city.” Here, the motif of 围城 (to surround the city) is

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The way Wang Jiuliang used the GPS system to map the locations of Beijing’s rubbish dumps can be related to Fredric Jameson’s idea of cognitive mapping. For the latter, see Part I “Totality as Conspiracy” in Fredric Jameson, The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System (1992), p. 9-86.
significant. Students of modern Chinese literature may be thinking of Qian Zhongshu’s famous novel, *Fortress Besieged* (围城) (1947). Students of Chinese Marxism may be thinking of Mao Zedong’s militaristic strategy “the countryside surrounds and overwhelms the city” (农村包围城市), the tactic that the political leader proposed after the first failed attempt to cooperate with the Nationalist Party in the late 1920s. It is worthwhile to note that the English title of the documentary is *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, not *Beijing Surrounded by Waste* or *Beijing Enclosed by Waste*. The militaristic overtone emphasizes the tense and antagonistic relationship between rubbish and the consumer, between the rubbish dump and its surrounding environment. Similar to Mao’s strategy, the rubbish dumps surrounding Beijing can be considered armed insurrection. Rubbish is warfare.

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7 Yang Jiang’s (楊絳) interprets Qian Zhongshu’s *Fortress Besieged* in this way: “Life is a fortress under siege. Those who are inside would like to get out, and those who are outside would want to get in. This is true for marriage. This is also true for profession. Most of life’s wishes are pretty much like this.” (“围在城里的人想逃出来，城外的人想冲进去。对婚姻也罢，职业也罢，人生的愿望大都如此。”) It is possible to appropriate Yang Jiang’s articulation to look at the global rise of China. “Those who are inside Beijing (or China) would like to get out of the country to see the world, and those who are outside want to get into Beijing (or China) to do business with the second largest economy of the world.” Whether such desire will lead to disappointment remains to be deciphered. In any case, what is interesting is that Wang Jiuliang adds “rubbish” to the “Beijing Besieged” title. Such an addition upsets the self-congratulatory discourse that sees the exchange between China and the rest (or the west) of the world to be “a win-win scenario.” The desire of China – and the desire for China – is arrested.
The geography of Beijing can be divided into six concentric circles: the innermost circle constitutes the first ring. Then it is expanded to become the second ring, the third ring, the fourth ring, the fifth ring, and the sixth ring. The rubbish dumping sites are mostly located between the fifth ring and the sixth ring of Beijing. Wang Jiuliang calls the enclosure created by these rubbish dumps
“the seventh ring of Beijing.”

Building on the director’s description of how Beijing is surrounded, besieged, overwhelmed, inundated, and beleaguered by rubbish, Wang Jiuliang shows that Beijing—and we can add China—is surrounded by rubbish. Adding to the director’s discovery, it is also possible to read the Beijing map, comprising of concentric circles, as a toilet. Indeed, the way in which rubbish, the excrement of Chinese consumer culture, surrounds and encircles Beijing (and China) is similar to the way in which the excrement of human beings surrounds and encircles the toilet. The prominent cultural critic Slavoj Žižek has made a similar point regarding toilet and ideology. His facetious observation of the relationship between the architecture of the toilet and European philosophy and politics can help us look at Beijing as a city-toilet (or China as a nation-toilet). In a book review, Slavoj Žižek explains how the designs of the French, English, and German toilets reflect the cultural and political ideologies of European countries.

In a traditional German toilet, the hole into which shit disappears after we flush is right at the front, so that shit is first laid out for us to sniff and inspect for traces of illness. In the typical French toilet, on the contrary, the hole is at the back, i.e. shit is supposed to disappear as quickly as possible. Finally, the American (Anglo-Saxon) toilet presents a synthesis, a mediation between these opposites: the toilet basin is full of water, so that the shit floats in it, visible, but not to be inspected […] It is clear that none of these versions can be accounted for in purely utilitarian terms: each involves a certain ideological perception of how the subject should relate to excrement. Hegel was among the first to see in the geographical triad of Germany, France and England an expression of three different existential attitudes: reflective thoroughness (German), revolutionary hastiness (French), utilitarian pragmatism (English). In political terms, this triad can be read as German conservatism, French revolutionary radicalism and English liberalism. In terms of the predominance of one sphere of social life, it is German metaphysics and poetry versus French politics and English economics. The point about toilets is that they enable us not only to discern this triad in the most intimate domain, but also to identify its underlying mechanism in the three different attitudes toward excremental excess: an ambiguous contemplative fascination; a wish to get rid of it as fast as possible; a pragmatic decision to treat it as ordinary and dispose of it in an appropriate way. It is easy for an academic at a round table to claim that we live in a post-ideological universe, but the
rubbish, I’d call the rubbish ring “the new Great Wall of China.” If there is a great firewall (internet censorship) in the Chinese virtual world, there is a new Great Wall – the rubbish wall – in the real world. This is not just a Chinese phenomenon. Perhaps the city in which we live is also besieged by waste. In *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, one particular scene features a Chinese flag in the rubbish dump. The Chinese flag – a disposable consumer commodity in a national festival – is trashed after the festival celebration is over. The implication of this scene is alarming: China may become a rubbish-nation. China, currently the second largest economy in the world, may be surrounded, encircled, submerged, captured, and engulfed by rubbish soon. In fact, Jennifer Baicjwal and Edward Burtynsky’s documentary *Manufactured Landscape* (2007), and Jin Huaqing, Michel Noll, and Carol Drinkwater’s documentary *Heavy Metal* (2012), have already hinted at the possibility of China’s ecological future in distress. These ecological documentaries chronicle how different kinds of e-waste are

moment he visits the lavatory after the heated discussion, he is again knee-deep in ideology.

While Žižek looks at the architectural design of the toilet to articulate the ideology of culture and politics, it is quite possible to see the Chinese squatter toilet (茅厕), as opposed to the sitting toilet (坐厕), as an ideological expression of Chinese culture and politics.
shipped from the first world (e.g. the U.S.) to the third world (e.g. China, Bangladesh). The diasporic rubbish upsets the well-being of the local habitats.

**Rubbish: The Repressed**

To exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right [...] to [...] hospitable memory [...] out of a concern for justice. (Jacques Derrida, *Specter of Marx*, p.175)

Wang Jiuliang’s *Beijing Besieged by Waste* documents the different ways in which nature has been scarred, damaged, exploited, and indeed denaturalized, in the age of capitalistic production and consumption. Diverging from contemporary Chinese commercial cinema which emphasize the construction of the Chinese middle-class identity through consumption (“you are what you consume”), Wang Jiuliang focuses on what comes after consumption, namely, rubbish disposal (“you are what you dispose of”). The beginning of the documentary presents several images of shopping malls and residential districts in Beijing. The images of several trucks transporting rubbish away from the residential areas to the refuse transfer stations are then shown. It is in these industrial plants that the rubbish is managed and compressed, or, in the language of Freudian psychoanalysis, *condensed*. While some of the rubbish is
managed in the composting plants to make fertilizers, some of it is transported to the incinerators. Some of it is driven to the landfill sites outside of Beijing, or, in the psychoanalytical imagination, displaced. The rubbish is then buried, concealed, covered up, or repressed. Indeed, there is a psychic dimension to the ways in which the waste is handled – it is displaced, transferred, channeled, and relocated to a different place out of sight. Although it is hidden somewhere else, it has not disappeared.

When I showed the Beijing Besieged by Waste documentary (especially the Google Earth scene showing how Beijing is surrounded by rubbish) to my friends and colleagues, the most common response I heard was “Holy Shit!” In fact, they were perfectly right to have such a response, not only because it was “holy shit!” to see that the entire Beijing was about to be engulfed by rubbish, but also because religion (“holy”) and rubbish (“shit”) are the prominent motifs in Wang Jiuliang’s works. While Wang Jiuliang’s early photographic works deal with local beliefs in death and afterlife, his most recent trans-media works focusing on rubbish offer a substantial critique of Chinese consumer culture. In one of Wang Jiuliang’s webpages, an internet viewer called 藍灾 (Blue Disaster)
provides an interesting and insightful observation to Wang Jiuliang’s works. He/she asks:

Both your earlier and later works are concerned with things gone and elapsed – rubbish and dead people. So, does rubbish embody a sense of ghostliness?

The question that Blue Disaster poses points to the possibility of using Wang Jiuliang’s early work on death and afterlife to interpret his later work on consumer culture and waste. Indeed, rubbish embodies a sense of the uncanny in *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. Similar to Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny” (1919) and Jacques Derrida’s idea of hauntology in *Specters of Marx* (1993), there is a psychoanalytical sense of ghostliness in rubbish. It is possible to appropriate Derrida’s idea of the specter to say that rubbish is “neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes” (63). The haunting of rubbish has to do with the repression of the subject, and the possibility of the return of the repressed in the form of the uncanny. In *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, the narrator reminds us that the refuse that we produced refuses to go away. It remains. It stays with us.

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9 If it is possible to use Wang Jiuliang’s early work to interpret his later work, it is also possible to use his later work to interpret his early work. To what extent can the Chinese tradition of ancestral offerings, such as the burning of paper-clothes, food (e.g. feast), housing (e.g. luxurious villa), automobile, and money, be considered as a form of consumption? Burning ancestral offerings is not unlike incinerating rubbish.
Nothing can stop the city from expanding. Nothing can stop the production of rubbish. We move the waste away from the city quickly. We bury it hastily. However, no matter how hard we try to hide it, it has not disappeared. It is still here. (Wang Jiuliang, *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, 2011)

To be sure, the rubbish rendered out of sight has not vanished. It is still present. What’s more, what is repressed is destined to come back to those who produce the rubbish in the first place. In the natural world, the polluted water, soil, and air will come back to the Beijing people. The river carries the rubbish back to Beijing and the wind blows the pollutants back to Beijing residents. The motif of the return is also prominent in the cultural (or man-made) world. The six-ring highway transport system encircles Beijing. The rubbish-ring, or what Wang Jiuliang calls “the seventh ring of Beijing,” also surrounds the city. In the virtual world, the representation of the rubbish-ring, or what I call “the new Great Wall of China,” in yellow signs on Google Earth also emphasizes the horror of the eternal return. Capitalism is a closed system and there is no escape.

In *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, the narrator says: “It’s really hard to imagine that the waste we throw away will somehow come back to us with a new look.” (“真的难以想象，我们扔出去的垃圾，最终又会换一种面孔回到我们的身边。”)
Minute 36). In the language of psychoanalysis, the repressed may reappear in some unanticipated form to haunt the Chinese consumer. It may return to ruin and destroy the Chinese consumer subject. In what follows, I argue that the repressed rubbish returns to haunt the Chinese consumer in the form of the animal, which appears in the marriage photo and food.

Let’s focus on the marriage photo first. In a memorable scene in Beijing Besieged by Waste, against the background of Beijing’s Wenyu River (温瑜河), a wealthy and classy area populated with western-style golf courses, polo clubs, and luxurious villas, a newly-wedded middle-class couple is taking their marriage photos. The Chinese couple are formally dressed: The bridegroom is wearing a tuxedo and the bride is wearing a wedding gown. They are posing elegantly in front of the camera. While they are immersed in the mood of love, a flock of sheep, led by an old herdsman, starts to wander toward them. In some ways, the animals add to the pastoral and romantic atmosphere. As the bridegroom tries to grab hold of a lamb, the camerawoman takes the snapshot immediately. This is supposed to be a sweet moment, but the Chinese middle-class couple do not know that they are taking their photo with rubbish. In fact, rubbish dumps have been built along the Wenyu River, resulting in the pollution
of the water. (The narrator reports to the viewer: “We can even say this: This river is a landfill!” (“甚至可以说: 一条河流就是一个垃圾场。”) (Tracking: Minute 33). The couple have no idea that the place they take their marriage photo is close to a rubbish dump. What adds to the irony is that when the bridegroom and the bride take pictures with these cute and cuddly-looking animals, they do not realize that the lambs have just visited the landfills. Led by a herdsman-cum-scavenger, who enables and facilitates the return of the repressed rubbish to the couple, the sheep have just eaten rubbish for lunch. Some of them have also drunk some water from the polluted river. Because they have been eating unhygienic food and drinking contaminated water, some of the animals are so sick that they have to receive medical injections.

The marriage photo reveals how rubbish creeps into the everyday lives of the Chinese unsuspectingly. The repressed rubbish also comes back to the consumer in the form of food. The very beginning of Beijing Besieged by Waste presents a flock of sheep eating rubbish. The middle of the documentary features a herd of cows eating rubbish. In a particular scene, the director uses the close-up to present the cows’ udders (Minute 53), reminding us that the milk we drink in our everyday lives may come from these deformed udders. The later part of the
documentary presents numerous pigs feeding on swill, the leftovers of the restaurants. Speaking of swill, I want to point to a disturbing scene in the documentary. In fact, the oil (地沟油) used in restaurant-cooking may not be entirely hygienic. Some of it has been filtered from the swill. After being boiled, it is re-used to feed the customers in the restaurants.

Man (Interviewee): Now some restaurants filter the oil out of the swill and serve it back the customers.
Woman (Interviewer): That’s disgusting! Really?
Man: Oh, you don’t believe me?
Woman: I often dine out.
Man: They just filter and boil it, and then they serve it to the customers.
Woman: Do they do it themselves, or do they ask you to do it?
Man: They don’t need us. They just pour the swill into a barrel and then use a bamboo strainer.
Woman: Wow! No way! I will not go to restaurants anymore!
Man: If you don’t go, there will always be rich people who will visit the restaurants.

Given the fact that there is no way out of the ecological system, the implications of animals eating rubbish deserve our attention. If the animals we consume in our everyday life eat rubbish, then, when we are eating lamb, pork, and beef, we are also eating rubbish. If the milk we drink is contaminated by rubbish, then, we are also consuming rubbish indirectly. One may propose the problem can be solved if we are to become vegetarians or vegans. But the
problem cannot be solved in this way. Wang Jiuliang shows that the rubbish-dumping site casts an adverse impact on its surrounding environment – the water is polluted. The narrator comments on the low quality of water in Beijing: “None of the river flowing through Beijing is clean.” If the water used to irrigate the crops is contaminated, the vegetables we consume are also polluted. In fact, this is already the case. Several rubbish dumps have already been found close to Daxing (大兴) – “Beijing’s vegetable basket” (北京的菜篮子) – located in southern Beijing. The vegetables grown to feed the Beijing population come from Daxing. These examples point to the horror of reality: it is not that the Chinese may live in the apocalypse in the near future, but that they are already living in one. They are doomed!

**Rubbish: The Abject**

In a lecture, when introducing his photograph series, *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (2008-2010), Wang Jiuliang asked the audience to imagine what their lives would be like if they were those animals – the sheep, or pigs, or cows – who were given nothing but rubbish to eat. What would life be like for the plants and vegetables which were irrigated by dirty water? I’d extend his question further to imagine what life would be like if we were those scavengers. Similar to the
animals, the scavengers were also surrounded by rubbish in their everyday lives. Many of them worked in the rubbish dumps. They had no choice but live there and claimed these dirty places as homes. According to the narrator, there were as many as 2000+ scavengers who used to live and work in the biggest landfills in Beijing. Some of them had no choice but to live in rubbish-houses, wear rubbish-clothes, and eat rubbish-food.

At this point, I’d like to introduce Julia Kristeva’s idea of the abject to enrich my analysis of the documentary. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva explains how the corpse bears upon the formation and the disruption of the viewer’s subjectivity. By appropriating the (post-) structuralist principle of binary opposition, Kristeva maintains that the condition that guarantees the existence of the self is the presence of the other. In the beginning of human life, both individually and collectively, the notion of the “I” or the “self” simply does not exist. Instead, what we have is a mess of un-nameable desires and instincts. The part we embrace is called the self, whereas the part we reject is called the other. The other includes everything we fear, dislike, loathe, and everything we dream and fantasize about but dare not articulate. The latter includes the desire to hurt, destroy, and behave in ways that are socially
intolerable. She calls the other “the abject.” In contrast to Jacques Lacan’s idea of “objet petit a” (or the object of desire), the abject is situated at a place before we enter the symbolic order. It is located at a place before we enter the mirror stage and the narcissistic stage. The abject is therefore associated with our archaic memory – the primitive effort to separate ourselves from the animal. It is also related to the moment when we (as babies) are separated from our mother, when we begin to claim that this is “me” and “the (m)other.” In “Approaching Abjection,” Julia Kristeva explains to the reader the un-namable and meaningless quality of the abject:

[The abject is a] twisted braid of affects and thoughts [which] does not have, properly speaking, a definable object. The abject is not an object facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an object, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I. (1)

The abject is the ultimate horror of human experience because it is the site where meaning collapses. It is also the locus where human beings are confronted with something one cannot name. Kristeva equates the abject with different kinds of boundaries and ambiguous entities, including food, filth, waste, or dung – the kinds of items that are found on indistinct and unclear borderlines between
the self and the other. She explains that the horror of the abject is “not [the] lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order, [and] what does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The abject, a product excluded in the process of constituting the subject, is not external to life but is part of life, or more precisely, it is the essence of life. The abject is internal to the formation of the subject.

The transformation of the abject into the object is another crucial step for our understanding of the formation of the subject in relation to the object. While the abject consists of everything we do not want to be associated with, it does not simply disappear when it is rejected. Instead, it is transformed by the subject into what Kristeva calls the “signifiable object.” Compared with the abject, the “signifiable object” is a different kind of other because it is the condition for the stable formation of the self. Kristeva appropriates the (post-)structuralist idea that the meaning of an item has to be constructed through its structural difference from another item:

I expel myself, I spit myself, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself […] it is thus that they see that “I” am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. (3)
In Kristeva’s analysis, the object is originally located within the subject. The object comes into being by means of the self-loathing or self-rejection of the subject. The object has always already been part of the subject, but it is only in retrospect we can say that that is the case. In fact, one cannot even say that the process begins with the rejection of the abject from within the boundary of the subject because the existence of the subject does not precede the process, but rather emerges as the product at the end of the process. It is only in retrospect when one views the process from the perspective of the subject (which has already come into existence) that one can observe that the process starts with the rejection of the abject from within the boundary of the subject. At the beginning of the process, nothing exists except an un-namable mess of the abject.

After the subject has expelled part of itself, it does not leave the rejected part as it is. Instead, through a conscious process of naming (by means of language and representation), the subject transforms the rejected part as the “signifiable other” in relation to the subject, so that the individual comes to establish his/her identity as the subject. This is a process not of being but of becoming a subject. According to Kristeva, the subject’s rejection of the abject, or
more accurately, the “signifia-
ble object,” contributes to the formation of the
subjectivity of the self. The process affirms that the subject is alive:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates
itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live,
until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond
the limit – cadere, cadaver. (3)

The abject is a border or boundary that marks the threshold between the subject
and the object, and consequently guarantees and sustains the identity of the self.

I am interested in using Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject to work with
the representation of rubbish and the scavenger in Wang Jiuliang’s Beijing
Besieged by Waste, which can be seen as a documentary of abjection. Kristeva
explains that the self-rejection of the abject constitutes the subject and the abject.
Through the process of naming, the abject is turned into the “signifiable object,”
thereby taming and domesticating its horror. In fact, a similar process is at work
in Beijing Besieged by Waste. The rubbish is produced by the Chinese consumer.
But the rubbish as the abject is rendered safe and domesticated through the
process of visual representation (or what Kristeva calls naming). The
documentary-form functions as a screen to mediate the viewer’s relationship to
the rubbish that appears to be uncanny, even horrifying.
In her psychoanalytical imagination, Kristeva considers the corpse to be the ultimate abject of human experience. She asserts: “The corpse […] is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (4). The corpse is the site where the Real may erupt into our lives. Similar to the Kantian sublime that has the potentiality to shatter the subject, the corpse conjures up intense fear – the fear of castration, for example – and jouissance. It is therefore the most intense form of waste.

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, “I” is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border? (Kristeva 3-4)\(^{10}\)

In Kristeva’s analysis, the corpse is horrifying to the person who views it because the dead body, uncanny as it is, breaks down the stable categories of life and death.

\(^{10}\) Kristeva says that the corpse, rather than the dung, is the most intense form of waste and is abjectively horrifying. While this may be potentially true on a personal level, it is debatable if her theory can be used to articulate abjection on the societal level without any modifications.
Deviating from Kristeva’s assertion that the corpse is to be seen as the ultimate horror of human life, I suggest that rubbish and the scavengers can be regarded as the abject in Wang Jiuliang’s documentary. The abjected rubbish is fear-provoking because it disturbs our sense of the border and the system. Rubbish breaks down our established idea of the inside and the outside. Is the rubbish in the documentary inside or outside our lives? From the perspective of psychoanalytical repression, the disposed rubbish should be located outside of our lives. It should be condensed in the management centers, and displaced from the urban centers to the rubbish dumps and landfill sites. However, similar to our dreams, the slip of the tongue, and literature, which Freud considers to be the ways in which our repressed desire returns, the documentary-form betrays the insistent force of the repressed. *Beijing Besieged by Waste* reminds us that the repressed rubbish is, in fact, inside our lives. It is not only that the rubbish is not too far away from the residents of Beijing, but also that the rubbish as a transformed object has already returned to our lives in unrecognizable forms. For example, according to the documentary, the rubbish exists in the form of a circle, a ring (“the seventh ring of Beijing”), or a wall (“the new Great Wall of China”). Since it is accumulating, it may swallow and bury us at any time. The transformed version of the rubbish can be found in the marriage photo we take.
It can also be found in the food (meat and vegetables) we eat and the water we drink. The rubbish can also be found on the shelves of the supermarket where we do our grocery shopping. In short, the repressed rubbish has returned to us in disguised forms. Rather than come back to us in the future, what is frightening is that it has already returned to us in unanticipated forms. In a disturbing way, Beijing, and by extension, the city in which we live, is already a rubbish dump. In a disturbing way, we are already surrounded and besieged by rubbish. In a disturbing way, we are already scavengers.

This brings us to the idea of the scavenger as the abject of Chinese consumer culture. To begin with, the scavenger is portrayed in a somewhat horrifying way. When they are first introduced in the documentary, the atmosphere is gothic-like: the air is foggy, steamy, misty, and vaporous. The scavengers are portrayed as mysterious, and somewhat dangerous, figures. Since they wear hoods and caps and have something to cover their mouths, we cannot see their faces. And since they wear baggy clothes, we cannot see their bodies. There is no way to tell if they are men or women. Some of them also work as herdsmen. The sheep they take care of eat rubbish. Similar to the madman who eats human flesh in Lu Xun’s famous story, “A Madman’s Diary” (狂人日记)
(1918), some scavengers eat rubbish too. Do human beings eat rubbish? Not really. If human beings do not eat rubbish, then, to what extent can we consider the scavengers as human beings? Or perhaps they are inhuman (or semi-human)? In order to confirm their humanity (or the lack of it), we will look at the self-representation of the female scavengers in the documentary.

In *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, the female scavengers are featured twice. In the first instance, one of the female scavengers asks the documentary-maker not to film her when she is busy sorting out rubbish. She does not want people to know that she works in the dumps.

Woman 1: The trash does not look good on the camera. Film more of Ms. Liu!
Woman 2: We old ladies collecting trash do not look good on the camera.
Woman 1: Don’t film us. We don’t look good. We’ll be ashamed if people from our village see us on TV.
Woman 2: We don’t tell our families that our job in Beijing is to collect trash. People will laugh at us if they know we work in the rubbish dump.
Woman 3: Even our parents do not know we collect trash for a living. We tell them we work in Beijing. None of us tell people we collect trash in the dump. We told them we have a job, not this!
Woman 4: To pick garbage. To pick broken stuff.

These female scavengers are not proud of their job. Working with rubbish materials makes them less respectable, they think. The job of sorting out garbage
waste has rendered them less human. In the second instance, a female scavenger boldly presents herself in front of the camera and tells us her life as a scavenger.

We built houses with the bricks from the dump. It’s been over ten years. I’ve spent over ten years in this house. The clothes they [i.e. the other female scavengers] wear, nine out of ten were found in the dump. I am not kidding you. This silk scarf I am wearing was also found in the dump. I thought it looked nice, so I washed it and put it on. As for them, all of their clothes were from the dump. I will not be afraid if you laugh at us. All we wear was found in the dump, including the underwear. Some rich people from high-end residential areas like throwing things out. Sometimes we find brand new clothes, one pack after another […] Most of what we eat is from the trash. That’s true, especially my elder sister. If she finds something not so bad, like sprouting potatoes, she takes it home, removes the bad part, and eats the good part. People in Chaoyang and Tongzhou districts look down on us because we are from the outside. They look down on us. They don’t even want to talk to [us]. They say [we] are filthy. They won’t even eat what you cook. They don’t think it’s clean.

This scene raises questions about the humanity of the female scavenger. On the one hand, she is a human being. She is one of us. But on the other hand, she is unlike us in the sense that she lives in rubbish-houses, wears rubbish-clothes, and eats rubbish-food. Because of her living and working conditions, she has been deprived of her humanity. She appears simultaneously human and inhuman. Appropriating Homi Bhabha’s idea that the performative mimicry of postcolonial subjectivity is white-but-not quite (“not quite/not white”), the female scavenger in the rubbish dump is, similarly, “human-but-not-quite, but quite-alike.” In short, she is radical alterity. (But what complicates the issue is
that the female scavenger turns back to the camera to reassert her humanity in a confident way: “I will not be afraid if you laugh at us.” This is the moment we realize that she is more human and less passive than we think she is.)

The fact that the humanity of the female scavenger cannot be easily identified may cause distress, even fear, to the viewer. What adds to the horror is that we are confronted with the idea that if we keep consuming and producing rubbish, our future society will become rubbish dumps. To the documentary viewer, the ultimate horror is that we will become the scavengers ourselves. If this is the case, we will be besieged by rubbish. We will have to live in rubbish-houses, wear rubbish-clothes, and eat rubbish-food. In contrast to the middle class conception “you are what you consume,” the documentary unravels our innermost fear by telling us that “we will become what we dispose of.” Perhaps, in a Deleuzian way of becoming, we are becoming scavengers; we are becoming rubbish. Perhaps, in a more frightening way, we have already become scavengers; we have already become rubbish.
Rubbish: The Utopian Impulse

In his influential essay, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” (1979), Fredric Jameson invites students of cultural studies to look at mass cultural productions dialectically. Critiquing the reified ways in which commercialized mass and popular culture (the culture industry) have been analyzed, he proposes that ideology and utopian impulse co-exist in the mass-cultural form. Theorizing in relation to the movement of history, he suggests that “the works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well: they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated” (1979: 144). Also, the works of mass culture, even if their function lies in the legitimation of the existing order […] cannot do their job without deflecting in the latter’s service the deepest and most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the collectivity […] (1979: 144). This poses a difficult challenge to the cultural critic: the critique of ideology and the discovery of utopian impulse have to be pursued simultaneously. If one pursues ideological analysis of mass culture

11 Jameson makes the distinction between the utopian program and utopian impulse. When he uses the word “utopian” in this quote, he means utopian impulse (or desire or fantasy).
without attending to the utopian components, then, the criticism will devolve into an easy denunciation of the ruling class’ manipulation of the working class through cultural hegemony. Conversely, if one pursues the investigation of utopian desire and fantasy while overlooking ideological critique, the analysis may become myth criticism, devoid of the determinations of historical situations.

In the conclusion of *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson provides similar theoretical assertions. Rather than simply equate ideology with false consciousness, class bias, ideological programing, and the structural limits of the values and attitudes of particular social classes in a simplistic and mechanical way (e.g. vulgar Marxism), he suggests that cultural critics can also find their inspirations from the positive hermeneutic in the Marxist genealogy. Such a genealogy includes “Ernst Bloch’s idea of hope or of the Utopian impulse,” “Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogical as a rupture of the one-dimensional text of bourgeois narrative, as a carnivalesque dispersal of the hegemonic order of a dominant culture,” and “the Frankfurt School’s conception of strong memory of that *promesse de bonheur* most immediately inscribed in the aesthetic text” (1981: 285). Jameson proposes a completely new way to interpret the politics of mass culture. He insists that a negative hermeneutic must be exercised
simultaneously with a positive hermeneutic; and that a Marxist practice of ideological analysis can simultaneously be a decipherment of the repressed utopian impulse (1981: 296). Taking up Jameson’s call, in what follows, I look at the dialectic of ideology and utopian desire in the figuration of rubbish and the scavenger in Wang Jiuliang’s *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. While it is convincing to argue for the ideology of rubbish as the product of capitalistic consumption, to what extent is it possible to say that it is permeated with an unconscious desire called utopia? If rubbish is reactionary, how can it be revolutionary?

I believe there are several ways to detect the utopian impulse in the figuration of rubbish. First, rubbish is relational. Rubbish is produced by the discourse of consumer culture as much as the proletariat is produced by the capitalistic mode of production. Such a relation – the relation between rubbish and the consumer, and between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie – is unidirectional. Similar to the distinctions that Georg Lukács makes with respect to the standpoints of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in *History and Class*.

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12 The fact that rubbish (and the scavenger) can be read as a desire, a dream, an aspiration, or a utopian impulse, can be confirmed by the Chinese title of Wang Jiuliang’s documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste* (垃圾圍城). See the footnote about Yang Jiang’s (楊絳) interpretation of Qian Zhongshu’s novel, *Fortress Besieged* (圍城) (1947).
Consciousness,

the perspectives, or standpoints, of rubbish and the Chinese consumer are decidedly different. When we adopt the point of view of the consumer, we can only see ourselves as the consumer, but not the repressed other of consumer culture (rubbish). However, if we try to imagine ourselves as rubbish and adopt garbage’s worldview, we can see the distance between us (rubbish) and them (the consumer) simultaneously. If we occupy the standpoint of rubbish, we will have the epistemic privilege to see the world in completely different ways.

Similar to the proletariat and the multitude, rubbish is inherently collective. Rubbish is not countable. It is not possible to speak of one rubbish [sic!], two rubbishes [sic!], three rubbishes [sic!], and so on. One can only say a pile of rubbish, or a heap of rubbish. In other words, rubbish rejects bourgeois individualism and embraces proletarian collectivity. The rubbish collective also exhibits signs of equality and democracy. For example, it is absurd to say that an

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\[13\] See the chapter entitled “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in particular “Part III: The Standpoint of the Proletariat” in Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness (1923).

\[14\] For example, in Ramin Bahrani’s short film, Plastic Bag, the story is told from the perspective of the plastic bag, not that of those who produce/consume it. The voiceover narration is done by Werner Herzog.
obsolete plastic bag is more rubbish than a pile of industrial waste. It is equally absurd to say that an old-fashioned i-Pod is less rubbish than leftovers from last night’s dinner. Instead, they are equally rubbish. In other words, rejecting hierarchy and embracing reciprocity, rubbish embodies an equalizing, democratic, and utopian impulse. Rubbish also exemplifies the spirit of the proletarian multitude in that rubbish allows for the expression of sameness and difference, and singularity and multiplicity, at the same time. For example, we can still recognize the identity of a rotten apple within a pile of rubbish. The fact that the rotten apple has been rendered rubbish (sameness) does not in itself mean that the identity of the rotten apple is lost. On the contrary, its identity as a rotten apple (difference) is maintained and preserved when it is embedded in the pile of rubbish. The rotten apple will not necessarily lose its individual identity when it becomes a member of the collective. The rubbish collective is not one but many things.

Continuing my analysis of the politics of rubbish, I suggest that the figure of the scavenger is also a productive site to think about the utopian impulse
embedded in waste. The section on Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection argues that rubbish and the scavenger in Wang Jiuliang’s *Beijing Besieged by Waste* can be considered as the abject. There is no essence to the abject. Abjection is relational and dependent on one’s perspective, which can be explained with reference to the human being, the plant, and cow dung. From the perspective of the human being, the cow dung is the abject. But from the perspective of the plant, cow dung is not abject-waste but nutritious food. That means, cow dung as abject waste is not absolute but relative. It is dependent on the perspective of the subject, which can be either a human being or a plant. To relate the discussion of the abjectness of cow dung to the scavenger, let’s try to imagine the Chinese consumer as the human being, the scavenger as the plant, and rubbish as cow dung. According to the Chinese consumer, rubbish is the abject. It is the object of abjection. However, according to the scavenger as the subject, rubbish is not the

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15 One may argue that the weakness of the “rubbish is utopian politics” argument is that it has not taken into account the lived experience of the scavenger. If rubbish is indeed utopian, then, how can we explain that many of us think it is not a good idea to be living and working in the rubbish dumps? How can we account for the fact that some scavengers think that it is truly unpleasant to be in the rubbish dumps? It seems to me that the distinction that Jameson makes – between utopian program and utopian impulse – is useful to reply to such critiques. What I have in mind is utopian impulse, not utopian program.
object of abjection. The scavenger’s relationship with rubbish is different from the Chinese consumer’s relationship with rubbish.

To be sure, the scavenger consumes. But the way the scavenger consumes is not the same as the way the Chinese consumer consumes. How does the Chinese consumer consume? According to the female scavenger, “some rich people from the high-end residential areas like throwing things out. Sometimes we find brand new clothes, one pack after another.” The attitude that the Chinese bourgeois consumer adopts is one of disposability and waste. In contrast, the female scavengers reuse the materials they find in the dumps. “We built houses with the bricks from the dump.” “The clothes we wear were found in the dump.” “Most of what we eat is from the trash.”

The female scavenger uses the word “we” – it is the gendered collective of the “we” – but not the “I” of the lonely and individualistic consumer. The attitude that the scavengers adopt to consumption is one of thrift and frugality. The scavengers make a living by sorting out materials in the rubbish dumps. While some scavengers pick up leftovers from the rubbish dumps and salvage them, other scavengers recycle useless materials from the scrap yards, rework them,
and turn them into something useful. By means of the “R” formulas – reuse, recycle, reduce, repair, re-purpose – the scavengers reverse and redirect the linearity of the progress narrative of capitalistic consumption. Adopting the consumer commodity-as-rubbish, the scavenger transforms what is perceived to be useless into something useful, and in the process, reverses consumption-time. The scavenger also disrespects the capitalistic notion of exchange-value and tries to create a new kind of use-value. As opposed to the Chinese consumer who pays to buy the commodity that will eventually become rubbish, the scavenger can acquire the commodities in the dumps for free. In other words, there is a communizing impulse in the way the scavenger works with the rubbish commodities. While trying not to romanticize their poverty, the scavenger embodies faint traces of utopian impulse that we have yet to fully appreciate. Rejecting the subjectivity of the capitalistic consumer, the scavenger’s attitude toward consumption embodies what Fredric Jameson calls “utopian impulse.” It gestures toward a new kind of communizing subjectivity that is already happening in the capitalistic consumer society.
Rubbish Time

During the past five years, China Central Television (CCTV) has produced a number of TV documentaries about the past, present, and future of global China. *The Rise of Great Nations* (大国崛起) (2006), *The Road to Revival* (复兴之路) (2007), *The Great Journey* (伟大的历程) (2008), *Beyond Made in China* (跨越中国制造) (2009), *The Power of Corporations* (公司的力量) (2010), *Wall Street* (华尔街) (2010), *Stock Market, China* (大市·中国) (2011) are some of the examples. The most famous TV documentary is probably the 12-episode series, *The Rise of the Great Nations* (大国崛起) launched before the Beijing Olympic Games.¹⁶ This TV documentary chronicles the rise and fall of nine nations within the contexts of capitalistic and imperialistic modernity. They include: Portugal and Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Netherlands in the 17th century, the U.K. and France in the 18th and 19th centuries, Germany and Japan in the early/mid-20th century, Russia and the Soviet Union, and the U.S. in the mid/late 20th century. As the “ideological state apparatus” (Louis Althusser), these documentaries were produced as pedagogical tools to educate the Chinese that these former colonial empires, once

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¹⁶ Some of the netizens (net-citizens) mocked the official propaganda documentary and called it 大国勃起 – the erection of the nation. Interestingly, the rise of China was regarded as the erection of a male penis.
condemned as the capitalistic and imperialistic aggressors during the socialist period, can now be looked at as the role-models that China can learn from and emulate in the early 21st century.

It is curious that the Chinese nation is not mentioned, let alone discussed, in *The Rise of the Great Nations*. But it does not mean that China is not expected to become a world power in the 21st century. In fact, the end of *The Rise of the Great Nations* is the beginning of another CCTV documentary, *The Road to Revival (复兴之路)* (2007). The latter 6-episode documentary registers modern Chinese history in the long 20th century. For example, the first episode focuses on Chinese history from the Opium War (1940-2) to the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命) (1911). The second episode focuses on Chinese history from the founding of the Republic of China (1911) to the People’s Republic of China (1949). The third episode focuses on Chinese socialism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. And each episode focuses on a particular Chinese Communist Party leader and the ideologies of the state discourse. For instance, the third episode attends to Mao Zedong and Chinese socialism. The fourth episode looks at Deng Xiaoping and the ideology of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as the guiding principle of the country’s economic reforms in the 1980s and the 1990s.
The fifth episode focuses on Jiang Zemin and the state discourse of the “three represents” (三个代表) theory in the early 2000s. And the sixth episode addresses Hu Jintao’s idea of “harmonious society” (和谐社会) and “scientific development” (科学发展观) in the late 2000s. The story that the Chinese government tells its citizens is a linear and teleological narrative that moves from repression to liberation. After the “ten years of turmoil” (十年浩劫) of the Cultural Revolution, it is presented that China has entered the correct path of modernization. Thanks to the economic reforms and opening up policies, Chinese people’s lives have dramatically improved over the course of three decades. This is the temporality of the Chinese nation-state. This is also the temporality of the Chinese middle class, a product of the joint venture of the party-state and global capital.17

I am interested in using Walter Benjamin’s theory of history to work with Wang Jiuliang’s documentary. In “Theses of the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin offers a renewed way of interpreting and analyzing history. Updating

17 The slogans of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing – “One World, One Dream.” (同一个世界，同一个梦想) and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai – “Better City. Better Life.” (城市，让生活更美好) can also be regarded as expressing the temporality of the Chinese nation/party-state and the Chinese middle class.
the method of historical materialism (which he contrasts with historicism), he invites his readers to leave the mob of comfortable conformists and join the army of awkward rebels, to distrust the kind of authoritative analysis that prides itself as objective and apolitical, “to brush history against the grain” (Part VII), “to blast open the continuum of history” which he considers to be “a sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” (Part XVI), and to scandalize the complicity between history and power. To him, the revision of history is a political undertaking, as it serves an emancipatory purpose, that is to give the dead an afterlife, and to liberate the kind of voices that have been unfairly repressed and silenced by power. Benjamin remarks: “history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now” (Part XIV). It is in this particular “now” instance that “time stands still and has come to a stop” (Part XVI).

Indeed, Benjamin’s notion of history and the past is always present. The sufferings of the past generations continue to seek redemption in the present. And particular moments in the past may flash up as an image in a [present] moment of danger in order to initiate a revolution, and to redeem the dead and the suffering generations of the past (Parts V and VI). Benjamin calls such an
“arrested” image a “constellation” (Parts XVII). The constellation becomes “citable” by the later generations (Part III). For Benjamin, the re-writing of history is therefore a conscious political endeavor that aims to quest for the “redemption” and “happiness” of the repressed and subordinated voices (Part II). In his imagination, the historical materialist (as opposed to the historicist), is like the “angel of history.” “Endowed with a weak Messianic power,” the angel of history can manipulate and appropriate the present to change the past. Inspired by Paul Klee’s painting, *Angelus Novus* (1920), which he purchased in 1921, Benjamin depicts the “angel of history” as one caught between the past and the future, between the large pile of debris accumulating in front of him, and the storm of progress that thrusts him toward the future.

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixed contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what

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18 In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin explains the dialectical image as “what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.” (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [N2a,3; p. 462])
we call progress. (Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Part IX)

The representation of the “angel of history” in Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” is relevant to our discussion. It can be compared to Wang Jiuliang’s self-representation in *Beijing Besieged by Waste*. In the documentary, for more than ten times, Wang Jiuliang shows himself to be taking photographs and shooting documentary footage about garbage. It is in this sense that the documentary can be viewed as an auto-ethnography. What is particularly interesting is that, similar to the Benjamin’s messianic “angel of history,” Wang Jiuliang is shown to be standing between two seemingly incompatible worlds. What lies in front of him is a sea of rubbish piling up; and what lies behind him is the cityscape of Beijing populated with numerous modern-looking residential buildings. As the Chinese “angel of history,” Wang Jiuliang is situated between the past and the future, between the large pile of wreckage and the storm of capitalistic progress that propels him forward. He is trapped between rubbish and the country’s unprecedented transformations called capitalistic modernization. But dissimilar to Benjamin’s angel of history, who observes the suffering of the past generations but is too powerless to intervene, Wang Jiuliang uses political art – photography, documentary, art exhibition – to intervene and
interrupt the narrative that global capital and the Chinese state celebrate. His political art disrupts the progress narrative of the Chinese middle class.

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At this point, it is worthwhile to ask what is going to happen if we are to place Wang Jiuliang’s documentary, *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, alongside the official TV documentaries, such as *The Rise of the Great Nations* and *The Road to Revival*. What is going to happen if we juxtapose the representation of rubbish, the polluted environment, the scarred landscape, the exploited labor, and the disposable scavengers in *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, with the representation of the rise of China and the Chinese middle-class on the global stage? How would rubbish and the scavenger enable us to think about Chinese consumer culture differently? Should the rubbish piling up and surrounding Beijing not slow down, unsettle, intervene, or even disrupt the fast speed of capitalistic development taking place in China now?

First: The representation of rubbish and time, or rubbish-time, in Wang Jiuliang’s documentary challenges and disrupts the monolithic temporality, or what Benjamin calls “homogeneous and empty time,” of the Chinese nation-
state, the Chinese middle class, and its ideology of consumer culture. To be sure, rubbish-time is not singular but multiple. It is similar to Benjamin’s idea of constellation in *The Arcades Project*. If a constellation is made up of a number of stars both near and afar, it is only from the perspective of the now that these stars take on a particular shape and configuration. This is also true for rubbish. Every component of the rubbish heap brings its own temporality to the rubbish dump to form a constellated image. For example, a rubbish dump may be made up of a disposable plastic bag, a pile of industrial waste, an old-fashioned i-Pod, a broken chair, the leftover of last night’s dinner, and a rusted can of expired tomato-dices. These items carry with them their histories and memories to the rubbish collective. The rate of their decay and decomposition can be potentially different. The rusted can of tomato dices may have expired already. The old-fashioned i-Pod was sold relatively cheaply in a department store during the summer sale. Compared with the leftover of last night’s dinner, it may take a long time for a non-biodegradable plastic bag to decompose. The industrial waste (e.g. e-waste) may be shipped from the U.S. to the third-world countries in Latin America, Africa, or Asia. The broken chair may be appropriated by the scavenger for repair. The multiplicity of temporalities embodied in rubbish disturbs and challenges the monolithic progress narrative portrayed in *The Rise of*
Great Nations and The Road to Revival TV documentaries. The rubbish-constellation insists that there are many different ways to look at the rise of China and the Chinese middle class in capitalistic globalization.

Second: if the temporality of the Chinese nation-state, the Chinese middle class, and its ideology of consumer culture can be represented by a straight line (“progress”), then, the temporality of rubbish can be represented by a circle. This is particularly true when we try to think of the geography of Beijing as being made up of several concentric circles, comprising of the first ring, the second ring, the third ring, and so on. Wang Jiuliang visited 450-500 rubbish dumps in urban Beijing. These dumps, located between the fifth and the sixth rings of the city, form a rubbish-ring (“the seventh ring of Beijing), or a circle. The rubbish is literally encircling the city. It is about to engulf and submerge Beijing. The return of the repressed rubbish also adds to the motif of circularity. The rubbish may come back to us in the form of the animal in the marriage photo, or in the form of the food (meat and vegetables) we eat and the water we drink. Wang Jiuliang also considers the similarities between the rubbish dumps and the supermarkets. Perhaps the consumer-commodity-as-rubbish (or rubbish-as-consumer-commodity) has already been placed on the supermarket shelves waiting for us
to purchase. Rubbish accumulates. Unlike the straight line that points toward somewhere else, rubbish stays. Stubbornly, the refuse refuses to go away.

Third: the representation of rubbish and the scavenger in Wang Jiuliang’s *Beijing Besieged by Waste* can be conceptualized as a figuration of utopian impulse. As I explained in the earlier section, the rubbish can be thought in terms of the proletarian collective – the expression of equality and democracy, and the simultaneous assertion of singularity and multiplicity. By means of the “R” formula – reuse, recycle, reduce, repair, re-purpose, the scavenger reverses the linear temporality of Chinese consumer culture (a unidirectional straight line) that cherishes disposability and waste. The documentary representation of rubbish and the scavenger allegorizes our desire for a radical break from the capitalistic system in which we live.

**What is to be done?**

In an interview, Wang Jiuliang expressed that the root of the problem is not waste management. The problem cannot be solved once and for all by policy-making and legislation. It cannot be eliminated by building more landfill sites, or scientifically-sophisticated and technologically-advanced incinerators. He said:
“We should ask how we can recycle these materials, how we can produce less rubbish, and how we can waste fewer resources.” While insisting on the importance of solving the problem of rubbish disposal, Wang Jiuliang shifted our attention to consumption, or how rubbish is produced. He pointed out the importance of the three Rs – “reduce,” “reuse,” “recycle” – and I will add “repair” to the existing list. He explained:

One thing we can do is to rationalize our consumer behavior. When we buy something, we should carefully consider if we really need it. Is the consumption of this thing necessary or optional? For example, we can choose to have a KFC fast-food meal. We can also choose to eat something more environmentally-friendly. If I have a bun and fry some vegetables, then I will not produce so much rubbish. We need to pay more attention to our consumption behavior and build a rational attitude. Self-reflection will help us a lot. It sounds rather general, but it is the essence.

What is noteworthy is that in addition to the ethics of consumption, Wang Jiuliang stressed on the importance of offering critiques of the industrialized processes of production.

There are several reasons accounting for the production of rubbish, including disposal (the last stage), consumption (the middle stage), and production (the first stage). We need to attend to these three parts and look at them in close details. For rubbish disposal, we need to ask what kinds of technologies are used,

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19 Interview with Wang Jiuliang: Source: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjkyNTY0NDUy.html
20 Interview with Wang Jiuliang: Source: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjkyNTY0NDUy.html
what kinds of laws are enforced, and what kinds of systems are institutionalized. For consumption, we should know where our concept of consumption comes from, what kinds of consequences it will bring. In addition, there are many concrete things we can do: to abandon or resist excessive consumption, to get rid of unnecessary consumption behaviors, and to condemn incorrect consumption behaviors etc. In terms of commercial production, in my opinion, it is unnecessary for certain consumer commodities to exist, or put differently, they should not exist. The capitalistic system requires one to produce for the sake of producing. False needs are created to make you consume more. What comes after consumption is rubbish. This is really a complex system.

In other words, Wang Jiuliang looks at the problem through the lens of totality: production, consumption, and disposal – and I will add extraction in the totalizing chain. (In fact, in the documentary, the narrator mentions extraction in passing. He says that nature is doubly exploited: raw materials are excessively extracted and rubbish is disposed in the mountains.) Specifically, Wang Jiuliang points out the problem of excess in terms of extraction, production, and consumption.

The problem is excess. Excess in terms of the extraction of natural resources. Excess in terms of capitalistic production (we produce for the sake of producing). Excess in terms of consumption (we consume for the sake of consuming.)

Importantly, Wang Jiuliang points out how these processes are imbued with the capitalistic logic. The fundamental problem is that these processes are

21 Interview with Wang Jiuliang: Source: http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjkyNTY0NDUy.html
manipulated, controlled, and determined by the logic of global capitalism.

According to a journalistic report,

In the process of making *Beijing Besieged by Waste*, Wang Jiuliang slowly realized that what lies underneath the problem of waste is capitalistic consumption. “We need to allow the public to be aware of the fact that rubbish production has less to do with the action of the government, the establishment of laws and policies, the building of more landfill sites, or the import of advanced technologies, but more to do with the understanding of the workings of capitalistic production.”

In his weibo (the Chinese twitter) messages, when asked how one should deal with the pressing problem of rubbish management, he proposed two solutions.

On the surface, one must legislate and make policies that are going to work; and deep down, one must radically reflect on the consumption values we pursue.

Based on Wang Jiuliang’s suggestions, it can be seen that he has gradually shifted the discussions and debates about rubbish from disposal (waste

**22** 王久良：《垃圾围城》的现实意义
Also, in the documentary, the narrator says: “A great debate about waste incineration is taking place in China. The supporters hold that it is not the most efficient way to eliminate waste. While the opponents argue that toxic substances emitted from incineration will do harm to people’s health. However, this debate only narrowly focuses on the consequential problems of the waste. Both the supporters and opponents of incineration have shifted the focus to the technical aspect of waste incineration. But very few people want to delve into the causes of the waste problem.” (Tracking: 1 Hour 10 Min)
management, such as landfill, incineration, and making compost) to consumption, production, and the extraction of natural resources. Importantly, what he has done is to de-differentiate, to make connections between different spheres that seem to have no relation with one another, or in short, to totalize. Such a totalizing effort allows him to conclude that these interconnected processes – extraction, production, consumption, and disposal – are all imbued with the logic of global capitalism. If we try to look at the world through the totalizing perspective, if one is equipped with a nuanced understanding of the workings of capitalistic production and consumption, the problem can be more adequately dealt with. But I am interested in going one step further to desire a radical break from the current economic system in which we live. I join Fredric Jameson to imagine a completely different class structure and social organization that extracts, produces, consumes, and disposes of waste in a completely new way. No doubt, this is a long-term struggle, but I believe hope is ahead of us. In

23 In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson explains: “For it is the very principle of the radical break as such, its possibility, which is reinforced by the Utopian form, which insists that its radical difference is possible and that a break is necessary. The Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, not by offering a more traditional picture of what things will be like after the break (232).
any case, Wang Jiuliang must be delighted to realize that his documentary has brought the Chinese government’s attention to the pressing problem of waste. In April 2010, the Beijing Municipal Government allocated 10 Billion RMB to solve the problem of rubbish disposal. Ecological activism in China has just begun.24

24 Let me offer a recent example of environmental activism in southern China. On 23 November 2009, more than 10,000 residents of Panyu (番禺) in Guangzhou protested against the incineration of rubbish.
Appendix
Snapshots: A Brief History of Fashion in the Late 1970s and Early 1980s

In the Appendix, I’d like to offer a powerpoint-like presentation of the key moments of the Chinese fashion discourse in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This part enriches our understanding of the wide variety of fashion commodities (e.g. Pierre Cardin fashion, panda-eyed sunglasses, and bell-bottomed trousers) presented to the Chinese at that time. Comparing woman’s fashion in the 1960s and the 1980s, it is possible to say that what characterizes women’s clothing during the socialist period was the military uniform. Chinese women, particularly the female red guards, rejected the red dress and embraced the military clothing (不爱红装爱武装). They celebrated masculinized clothing and expressed relatively little interest in the feminized red dress. In contrast, what typifies Chinese women’s outfit in the post-socialist period was the red dress. Chinese women began to show more interest in wearing and consuming the red dress (as opposed to the military uniform) (不爱武装爱红装). They learned to embrace their femininity through fashion consumption. Judging from the shift of their clothing preference – from the military uniform to the red dress (从“不爱红装爱武装”到“不爱武装爱红装”), it is fair to say that Chinese women began to develop
their fashion consciousness and learn to become fashionable subjects in the economic reforms era. In fact, the historical emergence of Chinese women’s fashion consciousness can be detected in the words the Chinese used to describe their clothes.

Thirty years ago we didn’t even have a word in Mandarin for fashion. These days in Mandarin we translate ‘fashion’ as shishang (时尚), back then we only had the word fuzhuang (服装) which can be translated as ‘clothing’. Then the word shizhuang (时装) came along which meant ‘clothes in season’, or ‘contemporary clothing’. So the concept of fashion didn’t even exist in the language.¹

This is the observation of Guo Pei (郭培), the first generation of fashion designer in post-socialist China.² Indeed, the radical changes in the Chinese attitude towards fashion consumption can be seen from the words that the Chinese used to describe their clothes – from “fuzhuang” 服装 (clothes) in the 1960s and 1970s, to “shizhuang” 时装 (fashion as clothes, or seasonal clothes) in the 1980s and 1990s, to “shishang” 时尚 (fashion as a consumptive lifestyle) in the 2000s and onwards. The words 时装 (shizhuang) and 时尚 (shishang) reflect

¹ Source:  http://maosuit.com/insights/%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87-guo-pei-interview-part-two/
² I’d also like to draw my reader to the attention that Guo Pei (郭培), alongside Sun Jian (孙检), appeared in Sally Ingleton’s documentary, Mao’s New Suit (1997). The documentary chronicles Guo Pei and Sun Jian’s joint fashion show in Shanghai in 1996.
the Chinese’s desire for, and investment in, fashion in the post-socialist era. Added to the list are words like “fashion model” (模特儿) (“mote’r”) and “haute couture” (”高级时装,” “高级定制,” “高级定制时装,” “高级定制服”.) These terms were new and foreign to the Chinese in the 1980s, and even the 1990s.

While we can agree that Chinese women began to develop their fashion (时装, 时尚) consciousness, what kinds of fashion were presented to them in the late 1970s and early 1980s? What kinds of fashion were they taught to desire through cinema and television, and what kinds of fashion were they encouraged to consume through fashion show and fashion magazine? In what follows, I will offer a power-point-like presentation of the key moments of the Chinese fashion discourse in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Providing the snapshot overview in chronological order, I begin with the French fashion designer Pierre Cardin’s visit to China in 1979 and end with the production of the first Chinese film about fashion designers and fashion shows – Bao Zhifang’s film Black Dragonfly (鲍芝芳: 黑蜻蜓) – in 1984. In order to be comprehensive, I will provide one example from

3 I want to point out that the word 模 (mo) can be used to describe the model worker, as in 劳模 “laomo” and 模范工人(“mofan gongren”). This word can also be used to describe the fashion model, as in 模特儿 “mote’r” and 时装模特儿 “shizhuang mote’r.”
each of the following category: fashion, fashion show, fashion magazine, and the trans-media exchange between fashion, cinema, and television, produced in China, the U.S., and Japan.

- **Year 1979: Fashion Show: Pierre Cardin Visited China**

![Figure 1](source.jpg)

**Figure 1.** 来源：司徒北辰，李兆， “皮尔·卡丹：从法国来的‘疯子’” 中国新闻周刊 (2008年44期)

Let’s begin by looking at the photograph in 中国新闻周刊 (China Newsweek) above. In 1979, the world-famous French fashion designer Pierre Cardin was invited by the Chinese government to visit China and present his fashion in Beijing and Shanghai. This photograph features his encounter with a group of young Chinese female workers. As we can see, the French fashion designer is so fondly and passionately received by the Chinese. (Indeed, the way in which
Pierre Cardin was greeted by the young women was not very different from the way in which the attractive male pop star (a singer or a TV/film star) was welcomed by his young female fans.) On the left hand side, we see a group of young Chinese women factory workers in their work uniforms. With the exception of their shoes, what they are wearing is more-or-less the same. The color of their clothes is relatively plain. On the right hand side, we see Pierre Cardin in his suit. The colors of his suit, his trousers, and his shoes match and form a harmonious whole. Underneath his suit, he is wearing a shirt and a tie. He also has a handkerchief in his pocket. These accessories are unique and aesthetically pleasing, but they serve no practical functions. The fashionable clothes that Pierre Cardin wore is more individualistic than what his Chinese counterparts wore. The contrast between the Chinese women workers and Pierre Cardin is striking. Judging from their poses, this scene can be interpreted as the struggle between two opposing forces – between woman and man, between sameness and difference (or uniformity and multiplicity), between the collective and the individual, between China and the West (France), and even between socialism (political revolution) and capitalism (economic modernization). In the end, the capitalistic side won. The Chinese began to desire Pierre Cardin and the
values associated with the brand name – individualism, multiplicity, and difference.

In 1979, Pierre Cardin brought 12 fashion models – 8 from Europe and 4 from Asia (Japan) – to China. He presented his fashion shows to the Chinese audience in the Beijing Ethnic Cultural Palace (北京民族文化宫) in Beijing and another venue in Shanghai. In fact, Pierre Cardin’s presentation was not called a fashion show (时装表演) on the Chinese side – it sounded too capitalistic and bourgeois. Instead, it was called the “clothing observation or demonstration event” (服装观摩会). To further tone down the controversy, the entrance to the special event was exclusive and restricted. It was not open to the public. Only the governmental officials, and the professionals, administrators, and technicians in clothing and export, were invited.

During the “clothing observation event,” the fashion models showed off a number of fashionable clothes that Pierre Cardin designed. Each outfit had its own distinctive flair and individuality. Indeed, the colorful clothes presented on the stage formed a huge contrast with the uniformity and the drab colors – blue, green, grey, and white – that the Chinese audience wore. According to the article
“Living: French Fashions Go to Peking [Beijing],” published in *Time* magazine on February 12, 1979, “The [Pierre Cardin] collection […] ranges from garments with thigh-high slits and see-through torsos to dresses and coats with overstuffed ‘pagoda’ shoulders and gold kimono jackets worn over tight silk pants.” Such fashion presentation was certainly foreign, strange, and perhaps even shocking to the Chinese audience growing up in the socialist era. Part of the reason was that the fashionable clothes designed by Pierre Cardin emphasized women’s femininity and highlighted their sexual appeal. These outfits were certainly different from the Mao suits or the Sun Yat-sen uniforms, which downplayed sexual and gender differences. The author of the *Time* magazine article described the “sexless” fashion that the Chinese wore in the 1970s:

Sex is not something they talk about openly in China. Nor do they dress with it in mind. The country’s slim, trim women wear no perfume, jewellery, nail polish, or shadow on their almond eyes; for the most part, they march around in the same austere white shirts, shapeless blue pants and sandals as the men folk.

By watching the fashion show, the Chinese audience began to learn and appreciate the fact that men and women wore different kinds of clothes in other
parts of the world. This is why the author of the *Time* magazine article considered Pierre Cardin’s fashion show in China as a “Great Leap Sexward.”

![Figure 2: Pierre Cardin’s fashion show in China in 1979](image)

My reader may be curious why I chose to use American sources (or American sources imbued with Cold War and orientalist ideologies) for my discussion of Pierre Cardin’s visit to China. This is because I could not find any contemporary Chinese sources published in the late 1970s. Originally, the Xinhua she journalist Li Anding (李安定) was about to publish a news report of Pierre Cardin’s fashion show in Beijing and Shanghai. Just before it was released, *Reference News* (《参考消息》) reprinted a commentary article published in a Hong Kong newspaper, which asked whether it was reasonable for the Chinese to watch (Pierre Cardin’s) fashion shows at the times when some Chinese people did not even have clothes to wear. Such an article expressed the dissatisfaction of some members in the administration towards fashion shows and fashion models. Because of this, the news report could not be published.

就在李安定要就这次表演发一篇简短的消息时，《参考消息》刊登了一篇香港报纸的评论，大意是国人连衣服都穿不上，还看什么时装表演。文章传达出有关领导对时装表演和模特的不容，有关此次表演的消息只好就此搁置.

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In “Catwalk” (天桥), the first episode of a Chinese TV program called Phenomenon 1980 (现象1980), Li Anding (李安定), a XinhuaShe journalist who had been to the fashion show, recalled how Pierre Cardin’s presentation was different from traditional Chinese shows. “Their show was more close to the everyday life and it was more relaxed. It was very different from the kind of singing and dancing performances that we were used to. In comparison, the Chinese performances were more rehearsed.” (“他们特别生活化，特别随意，不像中国那种歌舞表演，都是排练好。”) Then he explained the climactic moment of the fashion show. It was certainly shocking.

A beautiful woman [fashion model] with blond hair walked toward the audience and then she stopped. Out of impulse she opened the buttons of her outfit. The result was stunning: It is as if a big wave had come towards the audience. Many of them moved their bodies backwards immediately.

In fact, Xu Wenyuan (徐文渊), who later became one of the leaders of the Shanghai Fashion Performance Team (上海时装表演队) in 1980, made a similar observation. She recounted her experience of watching the performance. Most of the fashions he [Pierre Cardin] designed were relatively more westernized in the sense that the chest and the back were revealed. When the models were doing the catwalk, the audience was very quiet. I had strong impression of one outfit presented in the show. One of the models, who had very good body shape, wore a piece of clothes and an outer layer. When she came out
to perform and walked to the centre of the catwalk, she allowed the outer layer to fall down. You could see her chest and back! It was unimaginable in our society at that time. So some of the male comrades lowered their heads and dared not look at her!\(^5\)

The remarks offered by Li Anding and Xu Wenyuan allow us to have a glimpse of the Chinese audience’s reaction. Certainly, Pierre Cardin’s “clothing exhibition event” was new, interesting, spectacular, and even shocking, to them.

![Figure 3: Pierre Cardin in China in 1979.](http://jishi.cntv.cn/xianxiang1980/classpage/video/20110826/100095.shtml)

In fact, the French designer, similar to the clothes he brought to China, was a spectacle to the Chinese audience too. Let us take a look at the photograph.

above. In the middle is Pierre Cardin. Wearing a western suit and a pair of decent trousers, a scarf, an overcoat, and a pair of leather shoes, the clothes that the French designer wore are unique and distinctive. In terms of cutting, his suit is more tight-fitting and it clings closer to his body. The contrast is striking: the Chinese men were wearing the Maoist suits or the Sun Yat-sen uniforms. Also, the Chinese uniform was, generally speaking, more loose-fitting. So it is not only that Pierre Cardin’s fashion models performed for the Chinese audience, but also that the fashion designer himself became the fashion model for the Chinese! Conversely, if Pierre Cardin was rendered a fashion model for the Chinese, the Chinese audience turned out to be the fashion models for the French fashion designer. In Pierre Cardin’s perspective, the Mao suit or the Sun Yat-sen uniform was the exotic clothing object. In 1979, the streets of Beijing and Shanghai were turned to runway for fashion catwalks.

Pierre Cardin to China in 1981

Source:
(1) 作者不详, “皮尔·卡丹初入中国记,” 城色 (2008 年 12 期);
(2) 韩勇, “皮尔·卡丹：导演模特入侵,” 中国新闻周刊 (2007 年 45 期)
In 1981, Pierre Cardin went back to Beijing to present another fashion show. Again, the fashion show left a strong impression on the Chinese. It expanded their fashion horizon. To me, what is the most interesting about his second visit to China has less to do with his fashion show, but more with what happened before the “clothing observation event.” This time, Pierre Cardin would like to use Chinese models for his fashion show. Since fashion modelling was virtually unknown in Maoist China, the recruitment of Chinese fashion models was somewhat a challenge. Song Huaigui (宋怀桂), who was asked to look for fashion models for the fashion show, had to explain to the young people in Beijing what fashion modelling was and what it entailed. But the biggest challenge came from the parents. According to Song Haigui, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was not uncommon for the parents to go to the work-unit and ask what a clothing performance team was. Repeatedly they claimed that “our children cannot join this profession” (“我们的孩子不能干这一行”) because “if they joined it they would become bad” (“干了以后就学坏了”). To ease their worry, Song Haigui had to spend hours explaining to the older generation that the clothing performance team was not what they had imagined it to be.
Gong Haibin (贡海斌) worked in a dye house in Beijing. When Song Huaigui was about to approach him, Gong Haibin was making a film with his colleagues Zhang Tielin (张铁林) and Fang Shu (方舒). After the audition, Gong Haibin was asked to stay in the fashion team and perform in Pierre Cardin’s show. However, his parents opposed. “Why should we allow our son to abandon his opportunity of making a film, and instead opt to join a clothing performance team?” Gong Haibin’s parents asked. Their assumption was that fashion modeling was the same as modeling in the artist studios. As the models would be asked to take off their clothes and pose for the painters or the sculptors, they imagined that the fashion models would also be asked to pose naked for the audience in the “clothing observation event.” According to Gong Haibin’s parents, fashion modeling was a vulgar, lowly, and degrading profession. It was not a reputable job. At this point, Gong Haibin encountered another problem: his work-unit opposed his decision as well. But in the end, Gong Haibin managed to stay in the clothing performance team.

Another model Shang Xiaomei (尚晓梅) encountered similar problems. Her father, who used to work in the military, was displeased about her decision to join the clothing performance team. He tried very hard to discourage his
daughter from doing so. His logic was understandable: he was just afraid that other people would make unpleasant comments about his daughter and it would not be good for her. Shang Xiaomei’s work-unit was also critical of her decision. But perhaps the strongest resistance was experienced by the youngest model Shi Kai (石凯). Shi Kai’s father was an engineer. He attended every single rehearsal in which his daughter participated and tried to persuade his daughter not to do it. “If you dare to perform in the fashion show, I will break your legs!” Shi Kai’s father threatened her. But in the end, Shi Kai stayed in the fashion team. She even signed a contract to become an official Pierre Cardin fashion model.

Eventually, Song Haigui chose 10-20 people to join the clothing performance team. Most of them had working-class backgrounds. While some of them sold vegetables and fruits, some of them wove carpets, and the others worked in the garment factories. Every night they received specialized trainings offered by two professional coaches from Paris. Since the opposition voices from the older generation were so strong, some of them dared not tell the truth to their parents and work-units. Some of them also took sick-leaves to make sure they could attend the trainings. In 1985, Pierre Cardin came back to China to
showcase another fashion show. This time, the fashion show was finally open to the public.

- **1980: Fashion Magazine *Fashion* (时装) was founded**

  After Pierre Cardin’s visit in 1979, some American and Japanese clothing performance teams (服装表演队) came to China to present their shows too. These visits prompted the Shanghai Clothing Company (上海服装总公司) to set up its own clothing performance team. This was the first clothing performance team in China. Xu Wenyuan (徐文渊) was asked to be the person in charge for this team. It is also in 1980 that the first Chinese fashion magazine, *Fashion* (时装), was published. We can appreciate the emergence of fashion consciousness by the magazine title: It was not clothing (服装), but fashion (时装).

  In order to show how fashion functions as an ideology of the economic reforms, let me quote a passage from the newly founded *Fashion* magazine. Written by Liu Fang (流芳), the article is called “Liberate Thinking; Be Bold and Innovative” (1983).
Since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese people’s standard of living has been improved, their thinking continues to be liberated, and their demand for clothing has been rising rapidly [...] Everyone loves beauty. The attention to clothing presentation is an expression of the desire for beauty. However, during the process of fashion reform, many people expressed concerns. They were afraid to be labeled as wearing “strange-looking outfits.” [...] Nobody has ever proposed a scientific standard to measure “strangeness.” Something appeared as strange because one was not exposed to or was not used to it [...] History has proved that clothing must change. Clothing is closely related to the social reforms [...] Today, we should have a better understanding of the definition of “strangeness.” We should not label certain kinds of clothing “strange-looking” too easily. Of course, we are not promoting “strange-looking” outfits either. Clothing should be good-looking, of good-taste, suitable, fit the body, so that one can work and act easily. The fashion designed by the most famous fashion designers in the world, or the fashion presented in the Paris fashion show, may not become fashion trends. Only those outfits adopted by the majority of the people should be preferred. Our goals are to remove the obstacles and to encourage free thinking, to support the designers and the consumers to try new ideas, in order to promote the design and export of our country [...] We have the conditions to create something new for our nation and generation, and to contribute to the development of world fashion.
In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the defiant young man was considered as another fashionable and trendy figure. This figure would be wearing a T-shirt, a pair of bell-bottom jeans, as well as a pair of pointy shoes (尖頭鞋). He would also be wearing a pair of sunglasses – these kind of sunglasses were sometimes
called toad-eyed sunglasses (蛤蟆镜) or panda-eyed sunglasses (熊猫镜) because they resemble the eyes of a toad or a panda. The fashionable and stylish figure would also be carrying a radio-cassette player on his shoulder and walk down the street in a somewhat “flamboyant” way. Such presentation was considered as “hip” at that time. We may recall in a memorable scene in Jia Zhangke’s first film *Pickpocket (Xiaowu) (小武)* (1998), where the character Xiaowu is carrying a radio-cassette player on his shoulder and walks in a “hip” way in his hometown in Shanxi.7

Figure 5: The presenter of CCTV’s TV program, “Red Dresses are in Fashion,” invited the audience to look at the cartoon. “Explosive hairstyle, toad-eyed sunglasses, pointy leather shoes, bell-bottoms, hand-held radio cassette. This look was the coolest and the most fashionable in the early 1980s. As some of the audience may remember, this kind of outfit, considered as “strange-looking outfit,” was criticised. Bell-bottoms were also called ‘floor-sweeping trousers.’ If one wore this kind of trouser in school, the trouser-legs would be cut.”

Indeed, this is exactly what happened in Wang Xiaoshuai’s film Qing Hong (2005).

Regarding toad-eyed or panda-eyed sunglasses (see figure below), let me briefly mention the influence of U.S. popular culture (and its representation of fashion) to the Chinese. David Moessinger and Virgil W. Vogel’s TV series, The Man from 8 [街上流行紅裙子] 看看這幅漫畫，爆炸頭、蛤蟆鏡、尖頭皮鞋、喇叭褲、手提個錄音機滿街走，在 80 年代初，當時可是最酷最前衛的打扮了。很多人會有這樣的記憶，那時這樣的打扮往往被視為奇裝異服，還經常會被人指指點點。喇叭褲叫“掃地褲”，如果在學校出現，搞不好就被剪掉一塊。Source: http://blog.big5.voc.com.cn/blog_showone_type_blog_id_538415_p_1.html

9 In Carma Hinton’s documentary, Small Happiness: Women of a Chinese Village (the Chinese title: 小喜; pinyin: Xiaoxi) (1984), the peasant man and woman who are getting married choose to wear sun-glasses – it is a sign of fashion – and ride on a horse in their wedding.
*Atlantis* (1977), was introduced to China as *The Man from the Bottom of Atlantic* (大西洋底来的人) in 1980. After the TV series was broadcast, the main character Mark Harris (麦克.哈克斯戴), played by the actor Patrick Duffy, immediately became a hero in China. The sunglasses that Mark Harris wore became very popular among the young Chinese generation. When wearing the Mark Harris sunglasses (麥克鏡), some Chinese men might say seriously: “I am a log from the Atlantic Ocean.” (我是一根从大西洋飘来的木头)

![Workers wearing toad-eyed or panda-eyed sunglasses](image)

*Figure 6: The workers are wearing toad-eyed or panda-eyed sunglasses*
Figures 7-15
Year 1980: Fashion in Cinema: The Case of Huang Zumo’s Romance on Lushan Mountain

Women’s fashion, such as the red dress, was an important motif in Chinese cinema in the early and mid-1980s. Examples include Qi Xingjia’s Red Dresses are in Fashion (齐兴家: 街上流行红裙子) (1984) and Lu Xiaoya’s The Girl in Red (陆小雅: 红衣少女) (1985). For the discussion of the representation of fashion in Huang Zumo’s Romance on Lushan Mountain (黄祖模: 庐山恋) (1980), please see Chapter 1.


The Japanese TV popular melodrama, Red Suspicion (Japanese characters: 赤い疑惑; Japanese pronunciation: Akai giwaku) (1975-6), directed by Segawa Masaharu (瀬川昌治), Kunihara Toshiaki (国原俊明), Furuhata Yasuo (降旗康男), and Tomimoto Soukichi (富本壮吉), was introduced to China in 1982. When it was first broadcast in China, it was entitled Blood Suspicion 血疑 (Xueyi). The main characters, Ohshima Sachiko (大岛幸子), played by the famous actress, Momoe Yamaguchi (山口百惠), and Sagara Mitsuo (相良光夫), played by the famous actor, Tomokazu Miura (三浦友和), immediately became the darlings of
the Chinese audience. Some of the female viewers in China tried to copy Sachiko’s haircut (幸子头). Others tried to imitate the way she is dressed, resulting in the creation of the “Sachiko shirt” (幸子衫). This shirt is also called the “bat-sleeved shirt” (蝙蝠袖衬衣), because the loose sleeves resemble the bat’s wings. Some of the young male viewers also tried to imitate the way Mitsuo is dressed, hence the birth of the Mitsuo shirt (光夫衫) in China.

Figure 16: Sachiko’s hairstyle (幸子头). In Jia Zhangke’s (贾樟柯) documentary, 24 City (二十四城记), the character Song Weidong (宋卫东), played by the actor Chen Jianbing 陈建斌, recalls his relationship with his girlfriend in high school. He mentions she has got the same hairstyle as Sachiko (幸子) in Blood Suspicion (血疑). The Sachiko character is played by Momoe Yamaguchi (山口百惠). By the end of
the conversation, Song Weidong is shown to be playing basketball, and the audience can hear the song of the TV melodrama, ありがとう あなた (Thank You) (谢谢你), sung by Momoe Yamaguchi.

Figure 17 (Left): “Sachiko shirt” (幸子衫). Since the sleeves were loose, this kind of shirt was also called “bat-sleeved shirt” (蝙蝠衣). Because this kind of shirt was so popular, Chinese books with titles like How to Cut a Sachiko Shirt or How to Weave/Knit a Sachiko Shirt (《幸子衫裁减法》《幸子衫编织法》) were published. Figure 18 (Right): the “Mitsuo Shirt” (光夫衫)

- **Year 1984: Fashion Show in Chinese Cinema**

  The fashion show is a prominent motif in the Chinese films produced in the mid and late 1980s. The most representative of these is Bao Zhifang’s film Black Dragonfly (鲍芝芳: 黑蜻蜓) (1984). Arguably, this is the first Chinese film

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To be sure, China’s economic reforms are also accompanied by the opening of the Chinese people’s wardrobe. Rather than wearing the Maoist suits or the Sun Yat-sen uniforms in their everyday lives, the Chinese, especially the young generation, began to wear something different, something more diverse, colorful, or “modern.” The Chinese began to learn how the individuals in the capitalistic or economically powerful countries dressed and led their lives. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that in Red Dresses Are in Fashion (1984), the most

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10 It is not surprising that Red Dresses Are in Fashion, a government-sponsored “major melody” about the proletarian worker’s consumption of fashion, begins with the music “This is Life” (这就是生活) and the images of the computer, tall buildings and
fashionable character, A Xiang (阿香), lies to her co-workers that her brother in Hong Kong can help them buy fashionable clothes and have them sent to Shanghai.\textsuperscript{11} It is also not a coincidence that after watching the American TV drama *The Man From the Atlantis* (大西洋底來的人) in 1980, the young Chinese generation started to imitate the American actors by wearing toad-eyed or panda-eyed sunglasses. It is also not a coincidence that in Huang Zumo’s *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, the (Chinese-) American character Zhou Yun (周筠), who appears in as many as 43 eye-catching outfits, was born and raised in the U.S., and brings fashionable clothes to China. The list can be extended to Japan. After watching the Japanese TV melodrama *Red Suspicion* in 1982, the young people in China tried to imitate the male and female characters’ by wearing the “Sachiko shirts,” the “Mitsuo shirts,” and the “Sachiko haircut.” All these examples relating to the U.S., Japan, as well as Hong Kong, point to the construction works, and airplanes and cargo trading. (Later, we also see images of English learning, and the consumption of furniture and radio-cassettes, which are also the symbols of China’s economic reforms and opening up and the symbols of the emergence of the proto-Chinese middle class.)

\textsuperscript{11} I want to add the influence of a Hong Kong TV series, *上海滩*, to the Chinese audience in the mid 1980s. The main character, Xu Wenqiang (许文强), a gangster character, played by the famous Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat (周润发) (发哥), appears in a suit. Some Chinese tried to imitate him by wearing a suit.
relationship between fashion and economic modernization and development.\textsuperscript{12} Integrated to the state discourse, fashion was no longer radically critiqued as an expression of petty bourgeois sensibility and lifestyle, but was presented as the proof of the rising standard of living and the success of China’s economic reforms. Fashion is a political allegory.

\textsuperscript{12} The East Asian “economic miracle” in the 1970s and 1980s created the so-called Asia’s four “little dragons” (亚洲四小龙) – Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. Of course, Japan is the “big dragon.” The popular cultures from the economically powerful Hong Kong and Taiwan had a major influence to the mainland Chinese in the early 1980s.
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Biography

Ka Man Calvin Hui obtained his PhD in Literature at Duke University, and has fulfilled the requirements for graduate certificates in East Asian Studies and Feminist Studies. Born in Hong Kong, he received his BA in English (First Class Honors and Dean Honours List) at the University of Hong Kong in 2003, and his MA in English at King’s College London (University of London), United Kingdom in 2004. During his graduate study, he received numerous fellowships and awards, including International Research Travel Fellowship (2011-12) and Women’s Studies Dissertation Fellowship (2010-11) offered by Duke’s Graduate School. He will begin his job as Assistant Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at the College of William and Mary in Virginia in August 2013.