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The politics of enjoyment: the media viewing preferences and practices of young higher-educated Chinese

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THE POLITICS OF ENJOYMENT: THE MEDIA VIEWING
PREFERENCES AND PRACTICES OF YOUNG HIGHER-
EDUCATED CHINESE

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Contents

Abstract

This dissertation examines the widespread phenomenon of online film and DVD viewing that is now prevalent among university students in China. In doing so, it analyses how the social organisation of enjoyment among aspirational urban and educated youth relates to the Chinese political order as the country integrates into the global market economy. Using observation, interviews and written responses, supplemented by journalistic and online material collected 'in the field' during 2006-2007 and 2010, the research centres on two comparatively neglected areas of Chinese studies: audience reception and foreign entertainment via largely non-regulated downloading and pirate DVDs. The dissertation shows how higher educated Chinese youth use their new semi-illicit media freedom to structure their own social and political attitudes and how in doing this they reassess certain established values of responsibility and morality and make them compatible with the adoption of new middle class aspirations learned and negotiated through their viewing of Chinese, and mainly foreign entertainment media. The research therefore aims to make a broader point about the character of China's ongoing modernisation, and the role of the 'foreign' within this, thereby breaking out of the impasse in which China is seen largely through the perspective of antagonism between the forces of control and those of freedom – a view that has tended to overshadow and oversimplify the field of Chinese studies, particularly since the 1989 political crisis.

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1.   The Politics of Enjoyment: Introduction

Over the period of market reform since the late 1970s, there has been a sea change in Chinese access to international popular culture. In the 1980s, though a growing phenomenon, the availability of Western films, TV series, pop music, and so on, was still haphazard and unpredictable for all but sections of the elite owing to the country's long political and economic distance from the world's major market economies (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 64-65, 100-101; R. C. Kraus, 2004, pp. 119-120). But in recent years, notwithstanding political and economic constraints including censorship and issues of access and affordability, at least among urban college students, China seems to be as 'plugged in' to international visual culture as anywhere else in the industrialised world, particularly via the internet (S. Chen, 2009, pp. 42-43; Y. Chen, 2009, p. 33; K. Guo & Wu, 2009, pp. 82-83). According to official statistics, school and college students account for a substantial proportion of China's 'netizens' (28.8%) with over 60% of internet users under thirty years old (CNNIC, 2010, pp. 17, 18). University campuses now generally have broadband internet access in student dormitories as well as libraries.[1] So, although by developed country standards the overall internet penetration rate is still relatively low (28.9%), it is growing rapidly and is now above the international average (25.6%) (CNNIC, 2010, p. 11), with rates in larger cities such as Shanghai and Beijing already reaching 60% (CNNIC, 2010, p. 15).

As a rising power, such developments have been followed closely in both academic and journalistic reports, though it is notable how, particularly outside China, such reports these have tended to cluster around certain themes – in particular, political censorship and economic liberalisation and the contradictions and compromises between the two.[2] Indeed, explicitly or implicitly, the question of democracy and the potential erosion of the Communist party's monopoly of political power tends to underlie research

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[1] The ChinaGrid project, a network covering more than 100 universities in China, was launched in 2002 (Gordon, Li, Lin, & Yang, 2004, pp. 124-125).
[2] I will discuss this further in chapter two but as Lee Chin-chuan (2000a, p. 10) suggests, the Chinese media has most frequently been analysed in a 'state versus market' framework, perhaps best summed up as 'between the party line and the bottom line' – the subtitle to Zhao Yuezhi's analysis of the field (1998). Even inside China where there is a strand of more assertive comment on China's rise (see Damm, 2007, pp. 279-280), this is tempered by caution over its conflicted, sometimes unharmonious nature (Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 181-182).

on the topic (see chapter two). Much of this focuses on regulatory and policy changes as well as structural reforms affecting China's state media industries from a political economy perspective (e.g. Chin-Chuan Lee, 2003; Lynch, 1999; Y. Zhao, 2008), with a sub-genre looking at the impact of the spread and use of the internet (e.g. Tai, 2006; Taubmann, 1998; H. Yu, 2007). Complementing this, from the critical and cultural studies perspective, there are also content and social analyses of prominent groundbreaking Chinese programmes (mainly dramas and soap operas) expanding from the textual analysis paradigm set by film studies and their readings of the films of the so-called fifth and sixth generation directors.[3] These two academic approaches undoubtedly highlight the context of media production and illuminate aspects of Chinese discourse, but the notion that there is a straightforward relationship between media message injected, so to speak, into the positioned audience is something that is now largely discredited by communications theory (Hall, 2006 [1973], p. 164). Indeed, as Higson has argued from the perspective of film studies, in a globalised world, instead of focusing on film production within discrete national cinemas, it may be more appropriate to explore the ways in which foreign films circulate and are referenced within a culture, including how they are understood by different audiences (1989, pp. 44-46).

Surprisingly, therefore, relatively few studies have taken audience responses into account: Lull's empirical study (1991) of Chinese television audiences was a pioneering exception, but makes a bold case for the medium's politically liberating effects (p. 127) which was clearly over-influenced by the 1989 Tiananmen protests and is, therefore, now somewhat out of date. Other studies have tended to focus on responses to individual Chinese programmes or series (e.g. Rofel, 1994; W. Sun, 2002; M. M.-h. Yang, 1997) whereas the few studies of foreign film and television reception are predominantly in the methodologically problematic survey tradition (e.g. Dong, Tan, & Cao, 1998; Harwood & Zhang, 2002) (see chapter two). As for the impact of newer media platforms, Hu's articles (2005, 2008) on fans of Japanese dramas are, in fact, a rare instance of research that touches on aspects of the downloading phenomenon among Chinese viewers.[4]

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[3] Sheldon Lu (2000) as well as Lydia Liu (1998), Geremie Barmé (1995), and Zha Jianying (1992) among others have written on Chinese soap operas in relation to the dramas' political and social context.
[4] Wen and Wang (2008) have also conducted a study on DVD and downloading.

Apart from the missing audience, academic neglect of foreign popular media's impact is also quite striking, especially as contact with the foreign 'other' is one of the means by which national identity is constructed (Higson, 1989, p. 38). This dissertation therefore attempts to both address these gaps in current research and explore the under-examined assumptions inherent in the 'repression v. liberalisation' structure of the academic debate on China's media which tends to take these two poles as necessarily or straightforwardly antagonistic.[5] This is perhaps a legacy of residual Cold War thinking in China media scholarship that tends to overlook constraints on the Western press's freedom, and neglects the degree to which the Chinese media is less controlled in practice than it might be in theory (S. H. Donald & Keane, 2002, pp. 14-15), though this is by no means to deny that authoritarian practices exist, as I discuss in chapter two. Yet, as Zhao Yuezhi points out, even in academic and journalistic literature in China, the relationship between the domestic media and the global communications system tends to be viewed either within a nationalist/culturalist perspective which warns of the dangers of outside media hegemony or a liberal democratising one which advocates greater pluralism via market freedom, whilst tending to overlook the degree of interaction and overlap between them (Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 138-140, 143-145).

Using interviews, written material, observations and theoretical reflections, this dissertation examines how the viewing of foreign entertainment by means of new digital technologies such as pirate DVD and downloading websites is impacting on Chinese society. Based on this research material, I will attempt to show how higher educated Chinese youth use their new consumer-based media freedom to structure their own attitudes in order to both reassess certain 'traditional', established values and make them compatible with the adoption of new middle class aspirations learned and negotiated through their viewing of foreign entertainment media.[6] This, I will argue, helps guide young educated Chinese towards a vision, if also a fantasy, of a modern unified, yet globally cosmopolitan China. There is therefore much overlap here with Rofel's point

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[5] Lynch (1999, pp. 7, 10), for example, takes media marketisation and political control to be ultimately incompatible. As Damm notes (2007, pp. 274-276), much research on the development of the internet in China also tends to focus on its potential implications for authoritarian rule.

[6] The expansion of Chinese consumer culture as an expression of pent-up desire for freedom vis-à-vis the state has been extensively examined (see D. Davis, 2000; Gillette, 2000; Ikels, 1996), although the state itself has been key to its emergence and development (see D. Davis, 2000, pp. 2-3; Gillette, 2000, p. 3; Ikels, 1996, pp. 1-4).

that 'postsocialist power operates on the site of "desire"' (2007, p. 6). As she points out, Chinese daily life in the 1980s was still suffused with politics, albeit a different kind from the Maoist era, whereas for much of the 1990s, the relevance of the overtly political seemed to have drained away in favour of 'life-enhancing' pursuits (2007, pp. 3-4), especially among urban populations.[7] However, Rofel's concerns are focused on the grassroots construction of this neo-liberal subjectivity and the relearning of what and how to desire (2007, p. 6). To this end, her emphasis is on how experimental, contingent and *ad hoc* these changes have been, albeit within the overall context of the Chinese nation-building project (2007, p. 2). In this dissertation, I will not be seeking to dispute this conclusion but will attempt to push its logic a bit further, looking at the extent to which the foreign, through its entertainment media, helps give China's national modernisation project an apparent coherence that it might not otherwise have for the key group of young higher educated Chinese. That is not to say that the project's inconsistencies and *ad hoc* nature are thereby concealed, but instead, that it helps reinterpret them in such a way that they become integral to the national project's functioning and hence gives entertainment, by default, a political dimension.

This dimension is what I have referred to as 'the politics of enjoyment'. 'Enjoyment', in this thesis, covers various shades of meaning, from its colloquial everyday and largely apolitical usage, to more technical theoretical terminology. The term refers, in part, to the distinctive role of entertainment media within Chinese official ideology. That is to say, the enjoyment of popular culture, and artistic production more generally, retains a political significance for the party-state, dating back to Mao's Yan'an Talks in 1942 (Latham, 2007, pp. 165-166), even though the pursuit of 'desire', as Rofel pointed out, has become increasingly legitimised and the coexistence of a populist market-orientation is now formally acknowledged (Pang, 2006, p. 108; Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 223-224; Ying Zhu, 2003, p. 90). Rofel's focus on 'desire' itself points to differing emphases within academia more broadly, as the use of terms such as 'pleasures', 'desires'

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[7] The state is also a player in the management of leisure. Wang Jing, for instance, has analysed the way city authorities in Beijing used the promotion of leisure during a 1996 campaign as part of 'learning how to become a modern and civilized Beijingese' (J. Wang, 2001, p. 78). This was overtly part of an economic campaign to get people to spend, but as Wang Jing emphasises, critiques of hedonistic excesses of consumerist behaviour miss its '*disciplinary* potential' (2001, p. 78). For a similar but more theoretically oriented view of the state's role in the move towards hedonism, see Ci Jiwei (1994, pp. 9, 203-206).

and 'enjoyment' has tended to vary according to the precise meanings preferred by the theoretical school that defines them. Thus, Foucault chose to speak of 'pleasure' because of his dissatisfaction with the psychoanalytic definition of 'desire' as a response to repression (or lack), whereas Deleuze preferred 'desire', once it had been redefined as a free-flowing source of empowerment (Parr, 2005, p. 109). Within Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, desire is the desire to go beyond one's current state and thus can never be ultimately satisfied, only sustained, resulting in a certain transgressive painful 'enjoyment' (or *'jouissance'*) (D. Evans, 1996, pp. 93-94; Glynos, 2001, pp. 201-202). The potential consequences of this ambivalence have subsequently been developed by Zizek (2005, p. 55) to highlight the way in which transgressive enjoyment (like carnival) can paradoxically function as a means of sustaining a political regime as it is partly dependent on what it transgresses. In this sense, by providing a degree of catharsis and social cohesion, enjoyment may transcend or even contradict official ideology, but does not necessarily disrupt it.

Some of the implications of these distinctions will be discussed further in the next section. But based on the evidence produced during my fieldwork on Chinese audiences, the degree to which the enjoyment of popular culture, through both its regulation and sanctioning, does or does not have a transgressive role within Chinese society is a significant theme in subsequent chapters.

Audience Theory

This dissertation rests upon the idea that the pleasure and enjoyment derived from popular entertainment has a crucial political and ideological significance which, in this case, can offer insights into understanding contemporary China. In what follows, I will trace how this study fits into the developing traditions of audience research[8] and latterly, how it relates to theories of desire, pleasure and enjoyment and their political implications which I shall argue can bring insights to the interpretation of the conflicting discourses that emerge from the data-driven tendencies of such research.

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[8] As this is a relatively new field in mainland China, I will deal more specifically with China-related audience studies in chapter two.

Mass entertainment is taken seriously by the Chinese authorities at least insofar as it is regarded as key part of a broader regime of social control (Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 212-216) and, more generally, an international power struggle for political and economic hegemony (see, for instance, CASS National Innovation System Team, 2000: sections I, III/3). It is perhaps easy to characterise this as the reaction of a regime that is anxious about its legitimacy but it also fits with a broader academic tradition, most notably of analysing the media's social and political impact. Indeed, audience pleasure has long been the subject of analysis in social science, Marxist, feminist, and cultural studies perspectives, ranging from anxiety about its allegedly mindless distractions to optimistic anticipation at its emancipatory potential, allowing desires to wander beyond the constraints of everyday reality (Allen, 2004, pp. 125-126; Stam, 2000, p. 68).

This political dimension, however, is not necessarily self-evident. At an everyday level, popular culture is, for instance, often dismissed as mere entertainment, a harmless pastime or simply an expression of free choice; yet on the other hand, it is also taken as a matter of intense moral and hence, political, significance (Alasuutari, 1999a, p. 90; Bird, 2003, p. 1). These ambivalences are reflected in the research traditions in the West which have tended to focus on, and dispute, the potential ideological effects of the media. Yet, in spite of differing conclusions and methodological positions, audience research as a field of study is to some extent founded on the idea that mass entertainment has a significance beyond itself. In part, this interest was originally driven both by the rise of technologies of mass communication and, from a specifically leftist perspective, by the search for an explanation of how the working classes were often lured during the course of the 20th century into supporting political forces that were regarded as against their own interests. Responding, in part, to the rise of fascism, the Marxist oriented Frankfurt school of criticism associated with Adorno and Horkheimer was scathing, for instance, in its condemnation of what it dubbed the 'culture industry' as a tool of the dominant exploitative capitalist economy. Thus Hollywood was criticised for the way cinema idols presented a lottery-like illusion that star status was attainable to all (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2006 [1944], p. 57). Even when cinematic tragedies appeared to acknowledge harsher realities, these were condemned for either presenting ultimately conservative narratives of noble but necessary suffering in the face of destiny or,

alternatively, the justified comeuppance for those who deviated from social and moral norms (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2006 [1944], pp. 61-62).

Whatever doubts there may be about such a blanket dismissal of popular tastes (which I will come to later), at a theoretical level this approach already hints at the direction Marxist theory was to take with Althusser's analysis of how culture worked to impose an ideologically skewed view of reality. As an 'imaginary relation to real relations' (Althusser, 2006, p. 102), ideology in Althusser's view was not merely a set of imposed beliefs but was already materialised in the practices of institutions ('ideological state apparatuses' or ISAs) including the church, law, but also the family, culture and media and thus had a 'relative autonomy' from the economic base (2006, p. 89). This analysis drew, in part, on Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts of the 'imaginary' and the so-called 'mirror stage' – the means by which the child's notion of a coherent self, rather than being innate, is instead constructed from a misreading of its image of the mother, or primary caregiver, as an ideal unfragmented whole. As misrecognition was inherent to social existence, Althusser therefore proposed that the Marxist idea of ideology as 'false consciousness' needed modification by placing it largely beyond the realm of consciousness altogether (Althusser, 2006, p. 108; Rabate, 2003, pp. 160-161). By embedding ideological deception not so much at the level of overt political beliefs but at the everyday world of habits and pleasures, both Althusser and the Frankfurt school thus provided theoretical accounts that offered some explanation of the continuing resilience of the socio-economic (capitalist) status quo.

Some of these ideas were taken up in film studies during the 1970s in what became known as 'Screen theory' after the journal of that name. Mulvey's article *'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* (2006 [1975]), in particular, set out an agenda to attack the dominant Hollywood paradigm that the Frankfurt school had critiqued, but from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective. Drawing on Lacan's mirror stage, Mulvey took mainstream film as providing a false sense of coherence and mastery not simply at the level of the narrative content, but by its very projection of the illusion of realism: in this sense, Hollywood ultimately was to be considered voyeuristic, with the camera imposing a vision of male mastery that viewers in the cinema, including female viewers, misrecognised as their own (Mulvey, 2006 [1975], pp. 345-348). Subsequently,

Lacanians such as Copjec and Zizek have criticised this as overly determinist, instead pointing to the way psychoanalytic theory also acknowledges the viewer's feeling that something may be missing or deceptive in the cinematic image (Copjec, 1994, pp. 16-18, 36-37; Zizek, 1989b, pp. 7-8). Thus, from a psychoanalytic perspective, even if narcissistic impulses may induce viewers' fascination with an image, this is accompanied by a certain dissatisfaction that there is perhaps more than the images succeed in portraying (Copjec, 1994, p. 37).

Although the explanatory strength of the Frankfurt school, Althusser and Screen theory undoubtedly raised the stakes as to the potential political significance of popular culture, such approaches came to be regarded as unsatisfactory (Alasuutari, 1999b, pp. 9-11; Morley, 1992, p. 67). Audiences were essentially conceived of without sufficient consideration of the social context they brought with them, as if Hollywood cinema was the only form of discourse in circulation (Moores, 1993, pp. 13-14; Morley, 1992, p. 67). Audience research, in contrast, depends upon the belief that the significance of popular culture is not self evident in the text, whether film or broadcast, as tended to be assumed in such theory-led approaches. Indeed, the parallel tradition of mostly American communications research adopted scientific, empirical and often quantitative methodologies to challenge this type of assumption and what was sometimes disparaged as the linear or 'hypodermic' theory of communication (Jensen, 1991b, pp. 136-137; Morley, 1992, pp. 45-47). In particular, the so-called 'uses and gratifications' research associated with Katz and Lazarsfeld and their *'Personal Influence'* (1955), looked not simply what effects the media had, but how it was used. Their conclusion was that meanings conveyed through the media were themselves mediated by opinion leaders within local communities and thus produced only limited effects, thereby contradicting the Frankfurt school's notion of a mass duped audience (see Livingstone, 2006, pp. 234-236, 246).

However, although a corrective to pessimistic theoretical determinism (Morley, 1992, pp. 51-52), 'uses and gratifications' was nevertheless subject to criticism for an overly individualistic conception of viewers that downplayed hegemonic social pressure upon audience interpretations: as Hall put it, 'there remains a dominant cultural order, though it is neither univocal or uncontested' (in Morley, 1992, p. 52). Moreover, its

dominant quantitative methodology produced somewhat limited insights. Indeed, George Comstock, one of the prominent empiricist researchers concluded in his 1981 survey of the field, '*Television and its Viewers: What Social Science Sees*': 'There is no general statement that summarises the scientific literature on television and human behaviour, but if it is necessary to make one, perhaps it should be that television's effects are many, typically minimal in magnitude, but sometimes major in social importance' (in Ang 1991: 157-158). As Ang suggested, the positivist 'law-like precision' (1991, p. 156) of such research, in spite of its emphasis on empirical scientific rigour, had tended to produce disappointing results even when judged on its own terms (see also Schroder, 1999, pp. 41-42).

From Decoding to Discourse

The research carried out for this dissertation, like much contemporary audience research, attempts to take a path that both avoids theoretical determinism and goes beyond the limitations of quantitative methodologies.[9] Indeed, although the quantitative survey tradition in audience research is by no means dead, as I show in chapter two, theoretically speaking, it has been gradually superseded by the emerging field of cultural studies which found positivist methodology unsatisfactory and the underlying tone of elitist pessimism – whether the moral panics of the right or the anti-corporate tirades of the left – to be unappealing. This was especially the case for a new breed of academics who had themselves been brought up enjoyably immersed in the explosion of post-war pop culture (see Ang, 1985; Austin, 2002; Radway, 1987; Taylor, 1989).

The dissatisfaction with previously dominant approaches led to a new paradigm for audience research following Hall's now classic 'encoding/decoding' model (2006 [1973]). This and, in particular, Morley's subsequent use of it in the early 1980s, spurred a new interest in qualitatively-oriented audience research (Morley, 1992, pp. 6-9). The model proposed that both the encoding of the meaning of a media product and its decoding at the reception end of the process were necessary but distinct 'determinate moments' (Hall, 2006 [1973], p. 164). Hence, decoding had a certain autonomy though

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[9] Contemporary audience researchers (e.g. Bird, 2003, p. 16; Schroder, 1999, pp. 38-39) now sometimes accept that, in particular cases, quantitative methods may play a part in the methodological 'toolbox' of audience research projects, though not as the sole method.

because it was secondary in the communications process, the autonomy was only relative, echoing Althusser's position on the 'relative autonomy' of culture from the economic base. Contrary to the 'uses and gratifications' tradition, Hall disputed the idea that the ways in which audiences sometimes failed to take up the intended (encoded) message was mainly due to idiosyncratic personal or contextual factors. Instead, he proposed that audiences may fall into three basic categories, implicitly on class lines: those who accepted the message's 'dominant hegemonic position', those who adopted a 'negotiated code' (its basic premises, but not necessarily how it affected viewers' local conditions), and finally the 'oppositional' position which rejected the message in its entirety (Hall, 2006 [1973], pp. 171-173).

In the wake of this essentially hybrid model, there have been three broad phases in modern audience research, namely, reception studies, ethnographic research and a 'constructionist' view based around discourse theory (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 1). The initial audience reception research that most closely followed Hall's approach focused on the moment of decoding and on groups of viewers defined by class – in particular, Morley's focus group study of the BBC's *'Nationwide'* current affairs programme (see Morley, 1992: ch. 3). His subsequent, more ethnographic *'Family Television'*, where families were interviewed about their viewing at home, developed out of a belief that the *'Nationwide'* research had been too decontextualised since it was conducted outside the home with groups viewing a programme they might not otherwise watch and had paid too little attention to contradictions within individual responses (Morley, 1992, p. 133).[10] Morley's argument, in part, was a response to Laclau and Mouffe's *'Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy'* which questioned the idea of a settled coherent human subject and instead proposed the subject, in a Foucauldian manner, as being the effect of its social relations, hence its instability: a viewer therefore might adopt a range of 'subject positions' and could not be assumed to have a stable, consistent (class-based) attitude to the types of material s/he was exposed to (Morley, 1992, p. 134). For that reason, although Morley was wary of what he took to be Laclau and Mouffe's abandonment of the idea that some subject positions may determine or structure others (Morley, 1992, pp.

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[10] The assumption that the encoded message is also coherent and part of the 'dominant hegemonic position' is also somewhat contentious (Morley, 2006, pp. 110-112).

134-135), he was nevertheless critical, in retrospect, of the way his *'Nationwide'* study had tended to take responses as representative of a broader class-based position, at the expense of other categorisations such as gender, race, age, and so forth.

Despite the original balanced intentions of the encoding/decoding model, the subsequent emphasis was on decoding and its relative autonomy, leading to a strong move away from the Frankfurt school's and Screen theory's antipathy to mass culture (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 9; Morley, 2006, pp. 101-102). Indeed, Fiske, influenced by de Certeau, took this agenda on to argue that media consumers inhabited a subversive 'semiotic democracy' (1987, p. 95) that could challenge existing media power holders (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 10). Similarly, cultural studies and a sub-genre of fan studies began to find resistance in mass culture itself, for example, in the way that women used romances or soap operas as a way to claim a degree of independence (see Ang, 1985, pp. 133-136; Ang, 1996, pp. 94-95; Radway, 1987, p. 211; Taylor, 1989, p. 38),[11] though this also generated some scepticism in media reception studies for its tendency to play down the influence of political economy and ownership (Kellner, 1995, pp. 38-39). Ang, however, went further, attacking the way that pleasure was not considered legitimate in its own terms (Ang, 1998 [1988], p. 528) and how much audience research had seemed to be prompted by, or reacted against, the notion of a moral danger inherent in the mass media (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 11).[12] Indeed, hierarchies of taste may be reinforced by the judgements covertly embedded in public narratives driven by national broadcasting agendas in many countries around the world, including China, although these have been increasingly challenged both by market-oriented deregulation and multi-media expansion (Hellman, 1999, pp. 105-106).[13]

Ang's position was part of an emerging, more radical 'constructionist' view, from the later 1980s onwards, which took issue with the very concept of 'audience' as a natural pre-existing category rather than a product of audience (and ratings) research itself (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 6; Morley, 1992, p. 178). Morley's *'Family Television'*, for

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[11] Although cultural studies research such as Morley's was not necessarily targeted on fans, fandom research has developed partly from a desire to de-stigmatise popular genres and those who enjoy them (Bird, 2003, p. 52). From a practical perspective, they are also a more easily identifiable audience to study (Gray, 2003, pp. 65, 67).

[12] For an example of this type of approach in the Chinese context, see Chu and Ju (1993, p. 320).

[13] For the implications of this in the Chinese context see chapter two.

instance, was criticised by Ang for not sufficiently reflecting on the impact of his own presence within his *'Family Television'* research (Ang, 2006 [1989], pp. 188-189). The field instead began to put a greater emphasis on how the flow of discourses shapes social reality. Subsequent research expanded its scope to examine media commentary, reviews, self-reflective comment and even creative activity by audience members themselves (e.g. Austin, 2002; Bird, 2003; Hermes, 2009), as well as reflections on the role of research itself in framing views of the media (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 7).

We can therefore see how audience research has, broadly speaking, moved from a focus on decoding to discourse which is taken as 'a topic in its own right, not as a lens through which to peek at individual acts of reception' (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 13). This has shifted attention away from questions of whether audiences see through the media message towards an analysis of audiences' discursive 'interpretative repertoires' in response to their viewing (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 15; Jensen, 1991a, pp. 41-42). For instance, American interviewees' criticisms of the soap opera *'Dallas'* (1978) in Katz and Liebes' study were originally interpreted by the authors as being founded on a real-world knowledge of America compared to less well-informed opinions of foreign viewers (1990, p. 101), but as Alasuutari suggests, the criticisms may equally well have been motivated by viewers' desires to distance themselves from the low status of popular culture itself (Alasuutari, 1999b, p. 16). In that sense, '*Dallas'*, and reactions to it, can be seen as part of a broader 'meta-text' that envelops it.

Interpretative Repertoires

If, as I have noted above, audience research needs to take the socially constructive aspect of discourse into account, issues remain over how this should be done. There are a number of problems to address, particularly with regard to the extent and/or limits of discourse itself.[14] The term itself is a wide-ranging one, often used somewhat imprecisely. At one pole, the Foucauldian approach tends to look at discourse as a specific group of statements within a particular field, such as medicine or the law, though because of this

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[14] Morley, for instance, suggests that although the knowledge of an audience is of course constructed through discourse, this need not imply it has no existence beyond discourse (Morley, 1992, pp. 178-179). This point is reinforced in both Bird's and Couldry's more recent calls for a broader concept of audience research that does not remain tied to audiences' interpretations of a particular text (Bird, 2003, pp. 5-7; Couldry, 2004, pp. 119, 121).

breadth of focus, Foucault did not generally engage in a textual or linguistic examination of actual discourses, but instead looked at the historical and institutional parameters (in the medical profession, for instance) that enabled them to be produced (Mills, 1997, pp. 6-7, 62). At the other end of the spectrum, within linguistics, discourse analysis tends to refer exclusively to texts themselves and their cohesive linkages which in conversational analysis, for instance, involves looking at how meanings are structured through the regularities in speakers' turn-taking and other linguistic features (Wooffitt, 2005, pp. 65, 79).

Whilst these modes of analysis have their distinct purposes, each has its limitations: briefly put, conversation analysis rather neglects extra-textual issues of power, ideology and subject positioning whereas Foucauldian analysis tends to gloss over the precise local context of discourse. There have been attempts, however, to combine these approaches, seeking to retain their strengths whilst compensating for their shortcomings, most notably with 'critical discourse analysis' associated with Fairclough as well as Potter and Wetherell's work on 'interpretive repertoires' (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 202-211; J. Potter & Wetherell, 1987, pp. 146-154). The latter was particularly developed for interview analysis in order to examine the range of discursive resources available to and used in more interpersonal everyday exchanges. This enables a more detailed analysis of how power operates at a day to day level but, unlike conversation analysis, takes account of matters beyond the actual text in order to explore subject positions and their ideological bases (Wooffitt, 2005, pp. 154, 169).

An instance of this type of research can be found in Edley's work (2001) on masculinity in which he uses interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions in his interview analysis. Interpretative repertoires are defined here as the typical vocabulary and metaphors used to describe a particular field which are identified through repeated formulaic uses or 'scripts' in people's talk (Edley, 2001, p. 202). For instance, when asking schoolboys about the aim of feminism, Edley found that it was defined fairly consistently as seeking equality with men, but when asked about the aims of feminists, they were often said, rather more negatively, to be part of a campaign of aggression by lesbians or unattractive women unable to find boyfriends. Thus, analysing

such repertoires helps identify the inconsistencies in subjects' views about a particular issue.

Analysis can also highlight potential dilemmas and conflicts contained within these parameters. Echoing Althusser, although ideology might sometimes be taken as a coherent set of beliefs (that, for instance, from a Marxist perspective, preserve the dominance of the ruling class), in daily life these become 'lived ideologies' or common sense behaviours which are not nearly so coherent and which reveal the existence of many social arguments and tensions (Edley, 2001, pp. 202-203). Edley's own interviews with schoolboys on their attitudes to the family, for instance, showed conflicts emerging between a modern, 'enlightened' commitment to believing in a wife's right to work and the simultaneous insistence that children should not be left to nannies or surrogate parent figures.

The degree to which these dilemmas are played out in social relationships is related to the power relations within a discourse community and the extent to which people's identities are shaped in relation to the influence of others. This leads to a consideration of 'subject positions' in which identities are shaped by the ideologies and discourses produced by a culture's institutions, though within these constraints, people also have varying degrees of power to modify, reject, and dispute them, or to claim other identities, at least within the discursive options available to them (Edley, 2001, p. 209). So, in Edley's interviews, this time with adults, masculinity emerged as seeking a challenge or taking a risk, though his informants saw this as driven internally, not culturally imposed by watching Bond films or the like. However, some were keen to distance themselves from what they regarded as extremely stereotypical forms of masculinity such as bodybuilding or rugby playing, and instead preferred to emphasise their 'averageness'. Others went further, seeking to challenge the stereotypes altogether and professed to being unembarrassed at doing things normally associated with women, such as nursing (2001, pp. 211-217). Analysis of these subject positions, however, is not straightforward. For instance, it would seem that the latter two claims concerning being average or non-stereotypical challenge the notion of the 'macho' male, but at the same time, they also assert a non-conformity to expected norms that is itself somewhat 'macho'. This double-edged quality can also be seen in the schoolboy interviews on feminism

which expressed a desire to be fair-minded, yet tended to dismiss those who campaign for the cause (2001, p. 217).

In a specific application of this approach to audience research, Buckingham (2001) analysed media students' responses to Disney. Through their critical stance, he saw the participants as asserting themselves as both 'discriminating agents' versus the undiscriminating masses, and as 'politically correct' viewers, able to see through ideological reactionary stereotypes. Critics were also able to express themselves as 'mature adults' in contrast to vulnerable children (2001, p. 284) and demonstrated their non-Americanness, thereby showing themselves to be independent of a foreign ideological force. What unites these positions, Buckingham suggested, was a wish to disassociate oneself from the humiliation of powerlessness for 'to profess an enthusiasm for all things American, or to celebrate one's infantile desires are simply untenable positions – at least if one wishes to avoid the ridicule or disdain of others' (2001, pp. 284-285). Yet, their position was somewhat contradictory: when asked to recall their own childhood memories of cartoon watching, these otherwise staunch Disney critics became rather more ambivalent (2001, p. 289).

Notwithstanding a certain analytical cruelty inherent to such research, the kind of attentiveness to the contradictions and broader power plays revealed within these examples can, as a general approach, offer some useful practical models for the research carried out for this dissertation. They have the potential to provide a quite sophisticated account of the contending discourses that help give meaning to significant social concepts such as masculinity and national identity, as well as legitimising (or otherwise) pleasures conveyed through the media. Crucially, however, as a hybrid of the empirical and the interpretative, they depend upon a certain transparency and reflexivity in the presentation of the textual analysis as well as an approach which moves '*in* and *out* of the text' (Hook, 2001, p. 543), providing, in essence, a form of triangulation as extra support (see also Bird, 2003, p. 5; Couldry, 2004, p. 121).

Interpreting Interpretative Repertoires

Whilst a qualitative approach is generally premised on an openness to the research data which drives any conclusions reached from it (Flick, 1998, p. 8), a theoretical position,

whether acknowledged or not, is nevertheless inherent to any social research (Ang, 2006 [1989], pp. 183-185). In particular, the hybrid nature of this type of analysis naturally raises the question of the relationship between the data and the interpretation placed upon it, and so the researcher's view of the relationship between power and the affective pleasures, desires and enjoyment – or lack of – that popular entertainment produces will inevitably affect any decision on how to interpret 'interpretative repertoires' (see O'Connor & Klaus, 2000, pp. 370, 378-379).

As noted above, the move towards discourse analysis in audience research is, with a number of adjustments, largely a response to the work of Foucault. Its fundamental strength lies in the way it offers a means of tracing the discursive power plays that shape the social order, neatly balancing an interrogation of their truth claims without arrogantly proposing its own. However, whilst this may seem an advance on a simplistic notion of Marxist 'false consciousness' and the more determinist theories of audience research, as there is no position outside power in Foucault's account, this leaves him open to the charge of not being able to explain where resistance comes from, except on the assumption that it is a necessary counterpart to power itself (Foucault, 1978, p. 95; Mills, 1997, p. 40; Nealon, 2008, pp. 4-5). That is to say, if the whole social domain is shaped and formed through power flowing through discourse, the question still remains whether resistance to its hegemony can be more than a by-product or an ultimately marginal, localised phenomenon (Feldner & Vighi, 2006, p. 304; Zizek, 2001, p. 94).[15]

The position developed by Zizek, on the other hand, emphasises the need to go beyond the discursive basis of power, especially in view of the status of enjoyment within psychoanalysis. As Freudian theory proposes that the social order emerges from the repression of primary desires, consequently, the hegemonic discourses that sustain it can never be complete or consistent – there is always something beyond (Homer, 2005, pp. 57, 65). Thus, the Zizekian stance, although not rejecting the value of discourse analysis in highlighting the way that power is deployed, nevertheless, crucially points to the ambivalent, contradictory nature of enjoyment as a disavowed libidinal supplement of the

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[15] Foucault's position was, of course, not unvarying and in his later writings he attempted to address the issue of freedom in an investigation of ancient Greek practices of 'care of the self' through which a degree of autonomy could be achieved by critical self reflection (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988, pp. 1-9; Oksala, 2005, pp. 186, 190), though it remains a matter of debate how successful this was (Armstrong, 2008, pp. 25-26).

power discourse itself (Feldner & Vighi, 2006, p. 148; Zizek, 2005, p. 55). This explains Zizek's exploration of film and popular culture as a form of public fantasy constituting power's supplementary support, but thus also a means of diagnosing its potential vulnerabilities (Glynos, 2001, pp. 192, 195). The internally split nature of power also leads to his argument against the Foucauldian approach (as developed by Judith Butler) whereby resistance comes through disidentification from dominant norms in order to create new forms of transgressive subjectivity (see Armstrong, 2008, p. 28). From a Zizekian perspective, public discourses already depend upon their own 'inherent transgression', and therefore such disidentification may not be as liberatory as it appears: instead, Zizek suggests 'simply taking the power discourse at its (public) word, acting as if it really means what it explicitly says (and promises) – can be the most effective way of disturbing its smooth functioning' (J. Butler, Laclau, & Zizek, 2000, p. 220).

Zizek's main appeal, in this context, therefore lies primarily in how his analysis of the role of transgressive enjoyment (i.e. the Lacanian '*jouissance*') and its illicit sanctioning offers an understanding of the way political cynicism and detachment can coexist with regime stability – indeed, even reinforce it (Sharpe, 2004, pp. 157-158; Zizek, 1989a, pp. 28-30, 2005, p. 55). Particularly within later Lacanian theory (which Zizek favours), desire has a radically ambivalent status insofar as it is regarded as being fundamentally intersubjective and consequently, 'If we remain within the domain of desire [...] then the ultimate ethical, political horizon is [...] what does the Other want from me, what am I for the Other?' (Zizek in Mellard, 2006, p. 58). Desire, in short, remains subject to the broader social order, even if restlessly moving from one object to another (Homer, 2005, pp. 85-87).[16]

Of course, the psychoanalytic perspective has not gone unchallenged. Foucault was critical of the psychoanalytic position on primal Oedipal law as the incitement to desire at least insofar as it still conceived of power as repressive (Foucault, 1978, pp. 17-49, 82-85), and thus preferred to refer to 'pleasure'. Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, whilst sharing Foucault's view of power as productive, instead proposed a redefinition of desire itself, not as an effect of the Freudian universalisation of

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[16] This is in contrast to the Lacan's explication of the Freudian 'drive' which, unlike desire's intersubjectivity, is related to the unconscious (Mellard, 2006, pp. 56-58).

Eurocentric Oedipal prohibitions, but as a productive liberating force that can potentially disrupt or 'deterritorialize' historically situated social constraints (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, pp. 26-27, 113; Holland, 1999, p. 57). As a way of understanding contemporary consumer behaviour, browsing channels and clicking websites in a manner that challenges the very definition of audience (Livingstone, 2003, p. 353; Morley, 1992, pp. 278 -279), a Deleuzian perspective clearly has attractions though, as already noted, it remains a point of contention how far the imperative to enjoy is necessarily liberating (Homer, 2005, p. 58). Moreover, from the theoretical perspective, it can be argued that Lacan had already sidestepped the basic thrust of the Deleuzian/Foucauldian critique of Freud by redefining the Oedipus complex as a metaphor for the general social order, as entered through language, rather than resting upon the family as such (Caldwell, 2009, pp. 26-27; Holland, 1999, p. 42). Indeed, as Zizek notes, the later Lacan had already shifted his focus, pointing to the paternal metaphor itself as 'ultimately an imposture' designed to stabilise an otherwise fragile and thus changeable social order (Zizek, 2001, p. 95). Within this framework, psychoanalytical universalism therefore does not necessarily, as critics have alleged, merely accommodate itself to the status quo nor does it ignore historical change or differing modes of socio-cultural organisation, but instead permits an analysis of how the social order maintains its current stability and where its fissures may lie.

These are the types of theoretical approach that the present work attempts to bring to Chinese audience studies and thus address what I have termed the 'politics of enjoyment'. The task will be to look at what can be regarded as the largely disavowed undercurrent of the Chinese media scene (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 275), namely the pirate flow of DVD and downloaded entertainment that is *de facto* tolerated but is nevertheless not formally legitimised. However, the value of any theory in relation to empirical research lies ultimately in the way that, as Glynos puts it, 'analysis involves the painstaking articulation of concrete content to […] theory, thereby generating not only a more sophisticated understanding of both, but also a host of anomalies that may force a re-articulation of the theory itself' (Glynos, 2001, p. 207). I therefore draw upon theories that seem appropriate to the data I have obtained and in line with Morley's approach to

the interpretation of his interview material for *'Family Television'*, the results are, as he suggested, open to potential revision and reinterpretation (Morley, 1992, pp. 162-163).

Fieldwork

This dissertation, for the reasons already noted, adopts an interpretive, theoretically-oriented approach to audience research though, as I shall now outline, the research initially proceeded in an exploratory fashion (for an overview, see appendix 1). In line with much qualitative work, my methods developed in the light of an ongoing assessment of the material gathered during initial and subsequent investigations (Flick, 1998, pp. 41-42; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 42-43).

My choice of research site was initially the result of my decision to work as an English language teacher in Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) between September 2006 – July 2007 and from September 2008. The advantage of working in university department was that it enabled me to have extended daily interaction with the focus of my research – young urban, educated Chinese. Apart from observation during my teaching work as well as, more incidentally, on and off campus in other social interactions and activities, I was also able to make use of a smaller number of other contacts at Minzu University, where I had previously worked, 2004-2005.[17] I then wrote up my observations and any impressions they generated in fieldnotes, subsequently using these to feed into more direct information gathering. I toured, for instance, a number of well-known DVD selling locations mentioned by students and experimented with various types of popular downloading software (BT Comet, Xunlei etc.) that they used. I also kept an eye out for relevant articles in the press and online, as well as from a number of lifestyle and news magazines.[18] Some of these were informative in themselves on some aspects of the DVD and downloading phenomenon, including the workings of volunteer translation groups, whilst others provided instances of responses to films and television

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[17] Then known as The Central University for Nationalities, it is officially a centre for ethnic minority students, though the university also accepts a 40% quota of majority Han Chinese. In my experience, the rural v. urban distinction was much more significant to these students than their ethnic status (though had I included members of the more distinct Uighur and Tibetan groups, my case study might have been somewhat different). The Minzu University students tended to come from somewhat smaller towns, in more provincial areas, than their counterparts at BLCU. But, like BLCU students, many were hoping to work in Beijing after graduation.

[18] *'New Century Weekly'*, *'Southern People Weekly'*, *'Life Weekly'*, and *'Outlook Weekly'*.

series, both domestic and imported, that caused controversy for one reason or another. I used a number of these themes as springboards for the third strand of the research, obtaining written and oral responses, with consent, from students directly.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, I taught a total of eleven classes at BLCU, of which five took part in the research (approximately 25 students in each) plus a number of other students contacted through e-mail.[19] BLCU recruits from a wide geographical range, though according to students themselves, only about a fifth, at most, are from rural areas and even fewer from farming backgrounds.[20] Most instead come from a mix of what in China are characterised as middle sized towns and cities, with a sizeable but smaller proportion from the larger metropolitan areas. Socially, the largest number come from lower level white-collar worker families, with parents working as mid-ranking company employees, teachers, police, clerks, and so on,[21] but with a substantial minority with professional, official or business backgrounds. Whilst not classified as an elite or 'key' institution, the university has a generally above average reputation and compared with Minzu University, the students generally had somewhat higher national university entrance exam scores.[22] After graduation, about 20% of BLCU English department students go on to postgraduate study in China and a similar number study abroad or in Hong Kong; of the rest, about 80% find professional white-collar jobs in Beijing, such as in IT, advertising, marketing, management, translating or teaching.[23] As Fong points out (2004: 638), there is a strong element of geographical hierarchy in Chinese society,

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[19] Two further classes took part in the 2009-2010 academic year.

[20] In Sep. 2009, BLCU had over 3,600 undergraduates in total; of these, approximately 650 studied in the English department. The university also has a large contingent of foreign students studying Chinese language (data from BLCU English Dept. Students' Office: 28th Oct. 2010).

[21] Salaried workers – *gongxin jieceng* (工薪阶层).

[22] Entrance requirements differ for students from each province, but BLCU's are generally higher than Minzu University's. Between 2006 and 2009, BLCU's average entrance exam scores for students from Beijing, for example, were between 588 and 583. At Minzu University, it ranged from 551 to 577 over the same period. At the respective English departments, BLCU's entrance scores for students from the capital were consistently in the 580s from 2006 to 2009, whereas Minzu University's were between 557 and 569 over the same period. Top ranking institutions such as Peking and Tsinghua universities have average score of about 630 (http://baike.baidu.com/view/22187.htm; http://baike.baidu.com/view/8874.html?tp=1_01; http://baike.baidu.com/view/1563.htm; http://baike.baidu.com/view/1471.html; accessed 23rd Sep. 2010). More detailed data for BLCU and Minzu universities is available from http://www.blcu.edu.cn/xshch/luqufenshu.htm and http://zb.muc.edu.cn/svlcontent?action=FETCH_CONTENT&content_id=719; accessed 23rd Sep. 2010.

[23] In 2010, 24% of the department's graduates were accepted as postgraduate students in Chinese universities; 20% went abroad to study (data from BLCU English Dept. Students' Office: 28th Oct. 2010).

reflected in the importance many students attached to the chance to study in the capital and potentially obtain a Beijing residency permit (*hukou*). My student contacts were, of course, therefore not representative in the sense of being 'typical' young Chinese, if such exists. Indeed, the arts orientation of the university also meant that there was a preponderance of girls in my sample which has to be taken into account in their preferences regarding dramas and soap operas, for instance, which are often seen as a female genre (Bird, 2003, pp. 141-143; Y. Zhao, 2008, p. 212). However, in spite of the specificity of my sample, I would argue that the students who took part in my research can, nevertheless, be seen as representing a widespread aspiration in Chinese society, namely to go to university, preferably in the capital, in order to obtain 'good' professional white-collar jobs, work for foreign or large state companies or institutions, or go on to further study and so on. As Liu notes, much of Chinese urban family life is oriented towards these goals as part of a drive to become middle class (F. Liu, 2008, pp. 193-194) and as Rosen suggests, with increasing social stratification (OECD, 2004, pp. 27-32), there has been a correspondingly greater willingness on the part of young Chinese to aspire to materialism (Rosen, 2004, pp. 27-30). Students are therefore under a degree of pressure: apart from the strains of living away from home for the first time, common concerns of students included financial pressure, getting along with roommates, and above all, anxieties either about job prospects or preparing for postgraduate course entry exams or, in some cases, the prospects of successfully applying abroad for scholarships.

Although the main fieldwork took place at BLCU (Sept 2006 – July 2007), the project started with a classroom-based preliminary experimental study at Minzu University in Beijing where I was then working in the English department (June 2005). Without regular access to students' dorms, my research is not an example of participant observation in the classic anthropological sense of the term. Indeed, as audiences fragment into 'users' and consumers owing to the spread of new technologies, such participation becomes increasingly difficult (Livingstone, 2003, p. 353; Morley, 1992, pp. 278 -279). So, in order to test out the overall feasibility of the research, I first experimented with asking my first and second year students to make small group presentations in class on their film preferences and I also gave two third year writing classes an hour to produce short essays after filling in a questionnaire (see appendix 4b).

Although the results were in some respects quite productive, the process revealed some of the characteristic limits of each method and later influenced my decision to adopt a multi-method approach. As Elizabeth Bird acknowledges, there can be no absolute model of research that captures reality as it, so to speak, really is – only different means of engaging with it (Bird, 2003, pp. 6-7). The point therefore is to find a method or set of methods that suits the purpose at hand (Bird, 2003, p. 16; Morley, 2006, pp. 106-107).

In this case, I quickly concluded that a questionnaire was not particularly useful unless followed up with a methodology that encouraged a more reflective response and in that respect, essay writing seemed to produce somewhat deeper insights than group presentations.[24] Apart from entailing less direct peer pressure, or indeed pressure to avoid silences, writing encourages a more sustained, organised train of thought, at least in order to meet the requirements of the essay format itself. To that extent, producing essays might be considered a more artificial mode of expression compared to, for instance, small group interviews which can be used to simulate the type of social discussion that often shapes opinion in daily life – and, in fact, I did later use them – but writing arguably has the advantage of being a more private, and in some cases, a potentially more confessional activity (see Ang, 1985; Bird, 2003, pp. 11-12). It is, of course, possible that in writing their essays, my students sought to provide what they thought I, as their teacher, wished to read, however, as I will discuss below, this was not my impression. Moreover, the strength of less directly interventionist methods such as these, in contrast to highly structured questioning, is that they allow the participants space to express themselves at greater length, at least within the framework given. But, of course, this can also be a weakness insofar as such methods do not easily allow the researcher to intervene with questions or probes.

For that reason, I subsequently initiated a pilot interview study, this time in London with a group of five Chinese postgraduate media studies classmates (recruited by an acquaintance) in order to experiment with questioning techniques (see appendix 4a).[25]

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[24] It might be suggested that this was a consequence of the students' English language skills, but most of the students I was working with were at a level where they could express their intended meanings without strain, even if not error free.

[25] Though both the preliminary and pilot studies provided useful background information and informed how the fieldwork proceeded, because of their provisional nature, analyses of the results has not generally been incorporated into this dissertation.

My questions were based on some used in my previous questionnaire but I also asked the group to respond to comments taken from my preliminary study. The quotations (for example, films 'reassure my heart', 'strengthen our friendship' and so on) were chosen to represent themes that I had noted from my analysis of student essays and presentations – a process of categorising or coding responses into thematically similar 'data units' (Flick, 1998, pp. 188-189; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207). I found that this way of using other students' comments as discussion prompts was quite effective: apart from checking the generalisability of my thematic coding, it stimulated engaged responses from interviewees as well as allowing me to maintain a certain distance from any negative or positive judgements that the quoted comments might express. That said, the drawback of such an interventionist or structured approach was that it left interviewees with less opportunity to choose their own topics, as did the dynamics of a group interview that perhaps inhibited some from speaking more extendedly.

As a result, when it came to interviews for my main fieldwork (see appendices 2a-d), I decided to speak to students in a mix of individuals, pairs and latterly, small groups. Individual and paired interviewees were chosen from among those whom I had noticed mentioning films or television series in incidental conversations, without necessarily knowing my research interests.[26] I also further experimented with the relatively 'non-interventionist' approach of Wengraf (2001, pp. 111-152), limiting myself to asking what films and series interviewees liked to watch and to 'tell me more' about topics they had raised. In fact, 'less interventionist' might be a more accurate term, for although Wengraf is strict in insisting that interviewees be encouraged to speak uninterruptedly (the interviewer only asks subjects to expand on themes they have already raised in a preliminary session), the identification of such themes and their subsequent interpretation, nevertheless, has the researcher's imprint. Moreover, Wengraf's focus is biographical interviewing which is more likely to be framed as a narrative than my interests were. I therefore adopted a substantially modified version of his approach, allowing interviewees to initially set the agenda but also permitting myself not only to request that they expand on topics they had mentioned, but also press for clarifications and raise topics that were

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[26] Such allusions even occur when referring to non-media related topics, describing people's character or appearance, or referring to more general social conditions (see F. Liu, 2008, p. 199).

brought up by other interviewees or in written material; see transcript sample, appendix 3(iv).

As Rubin and Rubin suggest, in this type of research, the initial inquires may be quite general but these will allow the researcher to narrow the scope down to aspects that appear to be most significant to informants and focus in on these in order to obtain more detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 53). This was the overall approach I took in my main fieldwork with regard to both interviews and the essay topics I set for my third year 'Advanced Writing' course that usually required essays of one or two A4 pages long, written in class. In the case of essay writing, beyond an explanation of the topic itself, I was careful not to conduct classroom discussions in advance of eliciting my informants' views (see appendix 2b). In the beginning, the topics were also deliberately open-ended, such as *'What films and programmes do you like or dislike?'*, and only subsequently focused on themes that I had noted either in published and sometimes online material or those that had been brought up by interviewees themselves.

As Rubin and Rubin emphasise, however, qualitative research is a 'dynamic and iterative process' that requires a 'responsive' approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15). In this particular case, it was my intention to start my main fieldwork with a general essay on film likes and dislikes (Essay 2). But when some of my second year oral English class students, who were unaware of my research project, asked me to use films in my teaching, as an exception to my normal practice, I decided to show brief extracts from the films *'The Last Emperor'* (1987) and *'Big Trouble in Little China'* (1986) as stimulus for subsequent discussion.[27] The strong reaction, especially to the latter, led me to explore this further and set the topic for a third year writing class (Essay 1) in order to find out the extent to which the initial reactions were replicated with another group, in a more reflective written format (see chapter six). I then proceeded with my initial plan (Essay 2), seeking a general outline of what types of material students preferred to watch. I also started a series of interviews (Recordings 1-10) with a variety of students from both BLCU and Minzu University, seeking to elicit what genres students preferred and

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[27] Subsequently, I also viewed and discussed *'American Beauty'* (1999) with another class in response to their request for in-class film study. In addition, I showed brief extracts from *'Mission: Impossible III'* (2006) to a group of five students following comments about the film by one of my interviewees (see chapters four and seven respectively).

questioning them on their reasons. After analysing both the initial essays and interviews, I then chose the topics for future essays written in subsequent months.

My choice of patriotism (Essay 3) was a follow-up to the *'Big Trouble'* reactions (see chapter six) which had included strong feelings about the way China was represented by and to the outside world. I set the next topic, 'cultural garbage' (Essay 4) in response to a debate covered online and in the press following a speech by a Chinese official, Liu Binjie[28] as well as some of the judgements in my early interviews (see chapter seven). My choice of 'cultural distance' (Essay 6) also followed on from interviews and from my learning that the US drama series *'Desperate Housewives'* (popular online) had had poor viewing figures when broadcast on Chinese TV (see chapter five). Other topics, on Chinese blockbusters (Essay 5), US drama series (Essay 7) and their Korean counterparts (Essay 8) were all in response to what students had chosen to talk about in recorded interviews with me (see chapters three and five). Of course, although these topics were broad and fairly familiar to most students, not all were necessarily of equal interest to all my essay writers, but as Gray argues, if audience research is to understand how programmes and films 'overflow' into social life, it should not only focus attention on enthusiasts for (or against) a popular programme or genre, but on a wider range, including those who are merely casual viewers or even may have barely watched but nevertheless often have a point of view (Gray, 2003, pp. 76, 65, 79). In order to reflect this social aspect of audience reactions and as some of my respondents mentioned how they sometimes discussed what they watched (especially dramas), I therefore also organised a series of short group discussions with small groups from a second year oral class, in order to try to simulate what these discussions might entail. In order to clarify some themes that had come up in previous research, I also initiated some contacts by e-mail with first year BLCU students and Minzu University third year students and postgraduates who responded to a request to answer some of my questions (see appendix

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[28] Liu Binjie of The General Administration of Press and Publication (*Xinwen chuban zongshu*; 新闻出版总署) criticised 'cultural garbage' at a forum at Peking University on cultural industries in January 2007. Though advocating a generally tolerant approach, he criticised individualistic and distorted interpretations of classical works and established history which he suggested would threaten the transmission of the nation's heritage to future generations (S. Lu & Miao, 2007, p. 11).

2e).[29] Finally, I asked two BLCU writing classes (in academic year 2009-10) to specify what methods they used to access films and why (Essay 9) in order to supplement information provided by previous interviewees and to trace the extent to which these practices had perhaps changed over the period of my investigations.

As already noted, a number of foreign drama series such as *'Lost'*, *'Prison Break'* *'Desperate Housewives'*, and *'Sex and the City'* were widely popular, but the overall range of viewing that students mentioned during interviews and in their writing was quite extensive. A short list of films mentioned by students in their essays on film preferences (Essay 2), including those they downloaded, would include (in no particular order), *'Shrek'*, *'On a Clear Day'*, *'Crash'*, *'Braveheart'*, *'Dances with Wolves'*, *'Schindler's List'*, *'Farewell My Concubine'*, *'Troy'*, *'Pulp Fiction'*, *'Out of Africa'*, *'Curse of the Golden Flower'*, *'Pride and Prejudice'*, *'Brokeback Mountain'*, *'Hero'*, *'All Quiet on the Western Front'*, *'Modern Times'*, *'Jasmine'*, *'Hotel Rwanda'*, *'Titanic'*, *'Dead Poets Society'*, *'Garfield'*, *'October Sky'*, *'The Truman Show'*, *'Independence Day'*, *'The Shawshank Redemption'*, *'On the Mountain of Tai Hang'*, *'Gandhi'*, and *'Cars'*. Not all my informants had seen all these films, and some were more frequently mentioned than others, but the variety of material gives an indication of the impact the new wider access to digital media has had on students, for very few had seen these films at the cinema or on TV – indeed most were only available through pirated means. Yet, in spite of the shift to a more individualised computer-based format mainly through downloading, films seemed to retain their social importance as a means of forming and maintaining relationships. Students regularly shared files and discs, and passed on recommendations. Classmates or roommates also commented that watching together strengthened friendship, thereby making the best, perhaps, of enforced togetherness.[30] Indeed, peer pressure required people to keep up with what others were watching in order to be able to join in their conversations.

For that reason perhaps, there was a definite desire to see what was new and 'hot', particularly popular American drama series which, apart from individual films, were

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[29] The Minzu University students were contacted via a former colleague in the English department and were all translation majors.
[30] All students are required to live on campus in dormitories (4-6 to a room), though some students may move out to rented accommodation in their final year, especially if preparing for postgraduate course entrance exams.

frequently the first topic mentioned when I asked students what they and their peers liked to watch (see chapter five). Nevertheless, digital media technologies, unlike cinema release, do not discriminate entirely in favour of the new, thereby giving a new lease of life to older, so-called 'classic' films which some students were surprisingly familiar with. *'Gone with the Wind'*, *'Waterloo Bridge'* and *'Roman Holiday'* could therefore be cited alongside modern classics like *'Titanic'* or *'Lord of the Rings'*, though to some extent this may have been due to the older films' cheap availability on DVD (and previously on VCD).

Apart from ranging through time, it is clear that, although some students claimed not to watch Chinese films at all, most moved freely across national/linguistic divides. Many, for instance, seemed to have seen some or all of the recent Chinese blockbusters of the 'fifth generation' directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige (discussed in chapter three). But likewise, popular mainstream international films (such as the *'Harry Potter'* series or *'The Da Vinci Code'*) were also widely known. Of course, the fact that my respondents were mainly language students might be said to account for such bi-cultural tastes, though English is, in fact, a compulsory part of all Chinese students' education and a key component of university entrance exams, postgraduate course selection tests and often part of selection procedures for many job opportunities (G. Hu, 2002, p. 30).[31] In spite of their language abilities, my informants were also reliant on subtitles for the rapid-fire pace of most films and TV series they watched and so, to that extent at least, they were no different to other students. In fact, subtitles (though their quality can vary) seemed not to be regarded as an intrusion, and in any case, are familiar on many domestic TV broadcasts for those who do not understand standard Mandarin. Indeed, I came across only one student who indicated that a foreign language posed any intrinsic barrier to the enjoyment of a film though cultural matters might. Nor did political antipathy to a country appear to be any kind of obstacle and, when asked, no one suggested that watching or even preferring foreign films made anyone any less Chinese.[32] Only in cases where foreign films touched on representations of China were any

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[31] Since 2001, English language education has been extended into primary three classes and above. Meanwhile, between 5-10% of undergraduate content-based courses were also required to be taught in English or another foreign language (Lo Bianco, 2009, pp. 192, 199).

[32] That said, I was told a strong preference for Japanese cartoons could potentially raise some objections from friends, especially if historic tensions were once again in the news (Fieldnotes: 17/10/06).

objections expressed, and these were sometimes the result of my intervention – a topic I will explore in chapter six.

Of course, the act of communicating with a teacher, and in my case a Westerner, can itself induce both teacher and students to take certain positions, perhaps bringing 'politically correct' sentiments of one kind or another to the fore, or encouraging students to produce what they feel the teacher/researcher is seeking. Perhaps my respondents might in some instances have been anxious to show themselves to be 'international' or live up to their status as university students or in other cases seek to put an 'ignorant foreigner' right, or provide what they thought would please me, and so on, but even if these are in some sense fronts or faces, such attitudes nevertheless have effects in the wider world.[33] Researchers therefore need to be sensitive to the assumptions interviewees have of them and their reasons for or feelings about being participants in the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 87, 89-91). As Bird notes, there is an inevitable power relationship between researcher and research subject, but the aim should be to take measures to account for this (Bird, 2003, pp. 19-20) and insofar as I could, I tried to encourage students to think of themselves as in the position of 'expert', explaining their own views and preferences to an interested outsider. Indeed, interviewees seemed pleased to be asked to help in the research and our conversations were invariably pleasant and lively.[34] In my experience, students tended to regard foreigners in general as being relaxed and open (a belief reinforced by foreign films themselves) which perhaps facilitated their willingness to express themselves to me. Moreover, many of the viewing practices and the material they referred to were, at least initially, unfamiliar to me and as a non-American, I also had no obvious stake in most of what they watched. More importantly, students' oral or written communications with me were generally private – either one to one, or with a small group of friends – and their views, whether for and against either Chinese or foreign films, or any other aspect of film-watching, were expressed, in the main, without obvious hesitation.[35]

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[33] Equally, researchers may sometimes be over-anxious to find the radical or controversial and neglect other, equally significant but more conservative forces – or, indeed, vice versa (see chapter two).

[34] One class discussion was an exception to this pattern, which I will discuss below in chapter six.

[35] The one area that students might have been a little coy about referring to (and a topic I did not push) was pornography. However, a student I have known for several years told me that when he visited a friend at

I will not, in fact, attempt to make a comprehensive analysis of all the films and series students raised, and in any case, these changed according to what was currently in vogue. Rather I will look at films, series or genres that were either frequently mentioned or were a more prominent or apt example of one the prevailing 'repertoires' (in Edley's terms) that students used when discussing what they watched and the various dilemmas thereby exposed. For although students appeared to express themselves freely and candidly, unlike the highly rhetorical tenor of university speech contests I was occasionally asked to judge, contradictions and points of tension nevertheless emerged. What was interesting, however, was that these were as likely to occur within individual responses as between them, signalling the sort of ideological dilemmas Edley refers to (see appendix 3 for details of data analysis procedures).

In total, I recorded interviews with forty-two students (aged eighteen to twenty-two) which I subsequently transcribed. Seventeen were conducted either individually or in pairs and twenty-five in small groups, all outside normal classroom activities. The individual and paired interviews were on average about one hour long, whereas the group discussions took about twenty minutes each. The conversations took place in English, except one in Mandarin with a non-English major.[36] I also scanned forty-three essays and photocopied twenty-five others written by two classes (2006-2007), in addition to receiving fifteen e-mailed responses to a set of my questions. Subsequently, in 2010, I collected a further forty-five shorter one page essays from another two classes describing their viewing methods. Overall, my intention was to use a variety of angles and formats from which to observe, stimulate and theorise students' responses to the newly 'on demand' accessibility of international popular culture. In sum, interviews gave students the chance to initiate topics at the outset and provided me with an opportunity to follow up on points they made. Essays allowed for a wider coverage of students and, in some instances, permitted me to check whether interviewees' views were idiosyncratic or more representative of my students as a whole. Group interviews gave some insight into how students might discuss such media among themselves while e-mail contacts allowed me

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Peking University he was given *'A Girl's Guide to 21ˢᵗ Century Sex'* (2006), an explicit documentary series, as well as a number of other more risqué downloads.

[36] Only one student took up my offer to conduct the interview in Chinese. Most students spoke quite naturally in English, only hesitating occasionally over the names of some European directors or less familiar film titles, and seemed happy to have the opportunity to practice.

to reach out to some students outside BLCU and to focus on some themes already raised and thereby obtaining material of sufficient diversity and depth and generating interesting patterns of both mainstream and 'alternative' discursive responses.[37] It is within these responses to foreign entertainment media by the young educated 'proto middle class' that I sought to observe how China's social order is redefined and then begin to theorise how this creates new forms of modern subjectivity in China's transitional, post-socialist era.

The Chapters

Thus far, I have outlined this dissertation's general argument that the impact of imported popular visual culture forms part of the process of redefining the boundaries of a modern Chinese identity, with implications for the reassertion of certain established notions of social and national identity while also offering a route towards the formation of linked but alternative redefinitions associated with aspirations for a new, cosmopolitan status. In addition to introducing my general theoretical approach to audience research through a Foucauldian inspired analysis of discursive or interpretative repertoires, I have also reflected on Zizek's psychoanalytic approach to the 'politics of enjoyment' as a means of analysing how this process of redefinition operates through the relationship of desire for the 'other' via often pirate access to the globalising media economy.

In Chapter two, *Gaps: Audience and Media Research in China*, I follow on by first looking at some of the strengths and weaknesses of existing academic research into Chinese audiences and then examining the broader literature on the Chinese media in which the research is situated. This leads on to a description of the empirical background of Chinese downloading and pirate DVD viewing practices, namely the use of software, file-sharing websites, online translation groups and so forth, which might be said to operate within the gaps between the established structures of media control and the new market economy. The tendency in the communications research literature to view political and economic forces as conflicting (and pirate media viewing as a 'guerrilla

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[37] In subsequent chapters, all quoted essay writers are identified by a pseudonym followed by 'E' and the essay number and the student number: (*E2/15*) = essay 2, student 15. Similarly, interviewees (solo or paired) are identified by 'Int.' followed by the student number: (*Int. 7*) = interviewee 7. All quoted group interviewees are identified by 'G' followed by the group number and the student number: (*G3/1*) = group 3, student 1. Quoted e-mailed responses are identified by 'Em.' followed by the student number: (*Em. 11*) = e-mail respondent number 11. Details are given in the relevant appendices.

activity') is, I will suggest, an inadequate account of how audiences experience their relationship with the media.

The next chapter, *Frustrated Aspirations: Negotiating Asian Hybridity*, provides of an analysis of diverse responses, both defensive and negative, to two recent trends towards cultural hybridity in popular visual culture in China. I will first discuss my respondents' overwhelmingly negative reactions to Chinese martial arts blockbusters, generally seen as flaunting China's 'feudal' past for foreign prizes and commercial profit. Secondly, I will examine student reactions to the so-called 'Korean Wave', consisting mainly of neo-traditionalist Confucian family and teen-oriented dramas, which provoked both scorn and guilty pleasure. Overall, I will argue that, in each case, the material is used by students to reinforce a boundary against aspects of Chinese identity regarded as obstacles to China's modernisation, one of the country's most important guiding ideologies. This initial focus on the domestic and the Asian establishes the context for my subsequent exploration of students' responses to the Western 'other'.

Chapter four, *Viewing Hollywood: the Search for a New 'Main Melody'*, will then move on to look at more positive reactions to foreign films. I will first explore viewers' preferences for what they considered the greater realism of Hollywood films and their belief in the didactic value of what they watched, drawing both self-belief and work ethic from them. As well as boosting their morale in pursuit of their goals, I will analyse how Hollywood was also appreciated for helping shape these aspirations, opening up new creative and liberal possibilities. This theme is taken up in Chapter five, *Viewing US Dramas: a 'Chinese American Dream'?*, in which I analyse views on popular series such as *'Sex and the City'*, *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Prison Break'*, and how they enable the construction of redefined Chinese values. In order to show how this works, I will examine how these series allowed students to engage with issues of sexual openness, luxury consumption, and new types of heroism. From these two chapters, I will argue that, in spite of the potential contradictions involved in both refusing yet also embracing hedonism, such responses constitute a means by which the liberating pursuit of desire and hedonism through the enjoyment of films simultaneously acts as a guiding or disciplinary force.

These mainly positive responses to American films and series lead on to the discussion in Chapter six, *Pragmatic Nationalism: Patriotism and Modernisation*, which examines students' more negative reactions to foreign representations of China, with particular focus on extracts which I showed them from the martial arts spoof *'Big Trouble in Little China'* and Bertolucci's *'The Last Emperor'*. I will argue that students' strong reactions to these films demonstrate an inconsistent but ultimately pragmatic approach in which the tensions between patriotic sentiment and modernisation are reconciled in the notion of patriotism as self-improvement. This pragmatic stance leads on to the penultimate chapter, *Blurred World: Censorship and Piracy*, which will deal explicitly with the question of the disciplining and regulation of enjoyment in the context of a set of viewing practices that operate in an officially grey area of legality. I will first discuss students' knowledge of and attitudes to official censorship and the extent to which it is blurred and, arguably, depoliticised by the existence of new media and pirate products. I will then examine the issue of media piracy itself and how the weak legal structures that characterise China's market transition induce a simultaneous desire for social order and the participation in its transgression which, I argue, forms a symbiotic relationship.

The main threads will then be tied together in the *Conclusion*. In doing so, I will argue that young urban, higher educated Chinese live with multiple radical uncertainties, providing conflicting and unstable targets for their desires that thereby generate an opportunistic, curiosity-driven mentality accompanied by a thirst for radical certainties – but that these must be constructed *ad hoc* using, among other things, messages derived from foreign popular visual culture. These, I suggest, help mediate a transition to a new redefined Chinese identity largely compatible with mainstream official norms based on notions of middle class lifestyles which, arguably, offer respite from some of the harsher realities of China's transition to the global market economy.

Chapter 2.   Gaps: Audience and Media Research in China

Although there is a great deal of academic work on the Chinese media and its twists and turns during market reform (for example, C.-C. Lee, 2000b; Lynch, 1999; Y. Zhao, 2008), empirical audience research has been relatively limited, especially qualitative research. A number of exceptions exist which I will examine in the first part of this chapter, but relatively little of the interpretative and theoretical tradition of enquiry discussed in chapter one has so far had much influence.[1] Apart from this neglect of audience, other gaps have also opened up in the field with the recent proliferation of new media technologies such as the mobile phone, DVD and the internet, which have created a dynamic but inevitably unstable area of study.[2] It is therefore necessary to look at the conditions under which audiences' uses of media such as DVD and downloading have developed during a period of state-led marketisation and reform. New media technologies are themselves a product of China's increasing linkage to the global economy and the economy's growing commercialism, but what is of interest here is how they fit into both new and pre-existing structures that regulate the Chinese media landscape and, moreover, how these developments have been addressed by existing scholarship – a topic I shall address in the chapter's second section.

Keeping track of such a moving target is a challenge. In fact, when I first started my preliminary investigations into foreign film-watching in Beijing in 2005, the old VCD format was still quite widely available in China, with DVD a relative newcomer. Film downloading, likewise, was only just beginning to have an impact, yet by 2006, when my research began in earnest, DVD had all but replaced VCD,[3] and many viewers were using the film sharing sites that had begun to multiply online. These developments will be

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[1] The major qualitative study of Chinese television audiences is still Lull's *'China Turned On'* (1991). Zhang Tongdao (2003) also undertook a series of quantitative surveys into television audiences. In addition, a number of surveys have looked at the effects of film and television viewing upon Chinese values (see G. C. Chu & Ju, 1993; Dong, Tan, & Cao, 1998; Harwood & Zhang, 2002). I will examine these in more detail below.

[2] There are major studies of internet development by Tai Zixue (2006) and Zheng Yongnian (2008) as well as regular statistical surveys by the official China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC). Case studies of new media uses have been rarer, though a qualitative study of students' internet use was conducted by Chen Yanru (2009) as well as a survey by He Guoping (2009) and a hybrid survey and interview study on DVD and downloading by Wen and Wang (2008).

[3] In 2003 VCD sales reached over 300 million discs but DVD production was already 485 million and sales of players were also growing rapidly (Cai, 2008, p. 132).

described in more detail in part three of the chapter, but just as I question the apparent conflict between the state's dual goals of media control and commercial profitability (see C.-C. Lee, 2000a, p. 10; Lynch, 1999, pp. 7, 10), so I suggest that the apparently subversive (pirate/underground) nature of the younger generation's adoption of the new digital viewing technologies (see Cai, 2008, p. 144; K. Hu, 2005, pp. 181-184) is perhaps something of an over-simplification.[4]

Audience Research in China

From the late 1950s till the early 1980s, the media research tradition in China was basically confined to 'political analysis' and 'rhetorical studies' (B. Zhou, 2006, pp. 119-120) but the first survey by the Beijing Journalists Association in 1982 saw the beginnings of a conceptual turn towards the study of 'audiences' rather than the undifferentiated 'masses'. Largely influenced by the US communications research paradigm (see chapter one), this change was officially institutionalised in 1996 when 'communications studies' (*chuanboxue*) was established in the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) as a field of study (B. Zhou, 2006, p. 124).

Within this new field, Zhou suggests that most academic studies have tended to concentrate on analysing the media's effects on audiences with a second strand looking at audience composition, though because of a lack of funding for fieldwork, the use of quantitative methods has been somewhat slower to develop (B. Zhou, 2006, p. 126).[5] The adoption of a cultural studies approach to audience research has been rarer still, with much work instead consisting of policy elaborations, commentaries or critical reviews rather than grounded research (B. Zhou, 2006, pp. 124-127).[6] Few articles refer to theory

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[4] As Yu Haiqing recently put it (2009, p. 19), 'The apparent dichotomy of control versus freedom has constituted the internal logic of China's information and communication technology (ICT) development and dominated Western scholarship on Chinese new media'. However, 'Dichotomies of state versus people and market, and socialism versus capitalism are no longer sufficient to explain concrete issues and cases'.

[5] Zhou analysed the three most influential Chinese academic journals covering mass communications ('Journalistic University', 'Journalism and Communication' and 'Modern Communication') between 1985 and 2002 (B. Zhou, 2006, p. 122).

[6] That is not to say there is no cultural studies work in China, but rather that such an approach is not frequently used in empirical audience studies (Cao, 2004, p. 30; Keane, 1998, p. 482). For an exceptional instance, see Zhang Kai's interviews with eight women about Chinese soap operas (2009). Most audience-related articles tend instead to offer critical comment, for instance, on the reasons for declining audience numbers for programmes such as Chinese New Year shows (see Y. Liu, 1998) or soap operas (see Q. Wu & Wei, 2007) or domestic film attendance (see Gao & Du, 2004) with recommendations for addressing these problems.

specifically, although there are introductions to Western theories, and among those that do, 'uses and gratifications' is the most frequently cited (B. Zhou, 2006, p. 128).[7] Overall, in spite of greater diversity and increasing output, there is still, as Zhou puts it, 'a great gap' in Chinese audience research. He therefore calls for case studies using cultural studies and reception analyses which are 'often neglected in Chinese journals' (2006, p. 129).[8]

Studies of uses of new media, including internet, mobile phone and other digital based technologies, have also been rather narrowly focused. Kluver and Yang's (2005, p. 307) review of English language research on the internet in China notes that while there has been much analysis of the potential democratising impact of the web (for example, Tai, 2006, pp. 285-292; Zheng, 2008, ch. 7), there has been little on the cultural effects of internet use.[9] Similarly, Wei Ran's review (2009, pp. 120-122) of Chinese language studies of new media found that most research focused either on technical or marketing aspects and overwhelmingly offered a general, non-empirical analysis without a political or theoretical focus.[10] Consequently, Wei concludes that 'few insights are available to shed light on the processes of how millions of Chinese adopt, consume, apply, and re-invent new media technologies, [or] on the social, political, and economic implications of the widespread of new media technologies' (p. 123).

In his preface to his own research on Chinese television audiences, Zhang Tongdao argued that this general lack of empirical research in Chinese media research was the result of the Chinese academics' preference for 'impressionistic and aesthetic evaluation' (T. Zhang, 2003, p. 1 preface). As Zhang put it 'as far as the Chinese media research situation is concerned, the most urgent requirement at present is the American school's empirical research method' (2003, p. 1 preface). However, over the years there have been a number of studies, particularly by Chinese scholars based in the US, which have used survey methods to look at the degree of influence of foreign media imports, mainly via television and cinema. Dong, Tan and Cao (1998), for instance, surveyed 439

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[7] See, for instance, Guan & Qi's study of audiences for military programmes (2009, p. 146).
[8] For a similar call for more audience-oriented study from the perspective of comparative film studies, see Zhang Yingjin (2007, pp. 30-32).
[9] Kelly Hu's observational study (2005) of online Chinese speaking fans of Japanese dramas is an exception which I will consider in *DVD and Downloading: New 'Guerrilla Audiences'?* below. He Guoping and Yao Yao have also published on downloaders of US dramas (2007).
[10] Harwit and Clark make a similar point (2006, p. 14).

high school Chinese who were asked to indicate on a seven point scale how far they recognised American values in what they had watched. These values ('equality, freedom, competition, individualism, honesty, ambitious, responsibility, tolerance, wealth, broad-minded [*sic*]') were chosen on the basis that they were believed to be both typical of Anglo-American culture and largely contrasted with traditional Chinese values such as harmony and collectivism (Dong, Tan, & Cao, 1998, p. 321). The obvious problem is that the American values researched in the study were pre-selected for the students by the researchers themselves and the vocabulary used to express them was potentially rather loaded.[11] And although the values' relevance to the students' own concerns was also measured, ranking the importance or usefulness of such values to individual life experiences is inherently problematic because of their highly abstract nature and the potential for diverse interpretations of their meaning. We might wonder, for instance, at the values and outlooks explaining the low importance attributed to wealth by interviewees (1998, pp. 120-121). So, when the authors conclude, after statistical analysis, that Chinese viewers' recognition of American values in TV and films and their degree of relevance to their own lives can predict acceptance of such values (1998, p. 326), this is something of an unacknowledged leap of faith on several levels.[12]

Another such survey, by Harwood and Zhang (2002), was based on Gerbner's 'cultivation theory' which comes out of the linear media effects tradition of communications research, noted in chapter one. The authors surveyed over 400 Chinese medical college students to see whether watching imported, mainly Western, television programming influenced support for traditional Chinese values. Using a 'Chinese Value Survey', students were asked to rate the importance (from 1 to 5) of a list of traditional values associated with personal character (e.g. working hard, trustworthiness, solidarity with others, etc.) and a set of values associated with hierarchical relationships (e.g. respecting tradition, loyalty to superiors, etc.). The survey also asked participants for estimates of their weekly viewing hours of 12 categories of Chinese and 8 categories of

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[11] Even taking the English terms used, the difference in positive or negative connotations between 'equality' v. 'equal opportunity' or 'ambitious' v. 'aspiring' is considerable, notwithstanding the fact that care was taken over their translation (see Dong, Tan, & Cao, 1998, p. 319).

[12] The researchers claimed that although 'wealth' was on average rated low as a personal value, it was ranked highly as a feature of American films and that such recognition correlated with acceptance of American values (see Dong, Tan, & Cao, 1998, pp. 318-319, 326).

imported programming. Overall, the results showed that the 'Chinese personal values' were strongly supported, though the hierarchal values were less so (Harwood & Zhang, 2002, p. 256). But when correlated with the viewing figures, the researchers found that viewers who reported watching more imported TV were less inclined to endorse these personal values (2002, p. 257). When broken down into the viewing of particular genres, it emerged that Chinese music performance shows, Chinese children's programming, imported films, and imported sport programmes were negatively associated with such values (2002, p. 258). The authors suggested that this was due to the fact that each of these programme types was imbued with an aspiration-oriented, materialist, individualist and/or competitive ideology. However, although this may seem plausible enough, as Harwood and Zhang themselves accept, a correlation does not necessarily mean a cause (2002, p. 260). The authors also noted that their measure may lack reliability, particularly as the list of personal values yielded an almost uniformly high degree of support. After all, who would not support 'trustworthiness'? But their admission itself evades a rather more severe problem inherent in such ranking exercises. What does it actually mean when we tick a box to say, for example, that we believe 'trustworthiness' is very important, or when we judge that 'loyalty to superiors' is rather less so? Would agreeing with one's bosses, for instance, count as loyalty even if one knew they were wrong, or would it be more loyal to tell them frankly? Posing this question indicates, at the very least, how abstracting values into lists conceals as much (or more) than it reveals.[13]

Although not exclusively focused on audience research, another earlier study of social attitudes in China by Chu and Ju (1993) also touched on media use, and particularly the degree of Western influence. Despite being questionnaire-based, their research went somewhat beyond narrow value-ranking exercises and was not only much more extensive, with 2000 urban and rural residents in or around Shanghai, but far more detailed, containing 360 items in total on a wide range of topics (1993, pp. 42-44).[14] Although Chu and Ju accepted that such research can never be wholly objective given

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[13] Similar problems affect a study by Chen which attempted to find correlations between Chinese students' values and patterns of internet use (S. Chen, 2009, p. 45).

[14] As well addressing media use, questions focused on both work and home life and often had moral implications: 'If you are not living with your parents, when was the last time you visited them' (p. 65), 'Do you often chat and spend your leisure time with your neighbors?' (p. 93), 'Do you like your present work?' (p. 106), 'If you had a difference of opinion with someone in your work unit, how would you handle it?' (p. 139), 'How do you think you should treat your ancestors?' (p. 232).

that it is necessarily subjective in the choice of questions, they nevertheless emphasised the collection of 'concrete data' (1993, p. 4) over ethnographic participant observation which they argued is often of limited generalisability and prone to observer bias (1993, pp. 16-18). They similarly critiqued text-based analysis of literature or journalism as too subjective for their purposes (1993, p. 19). From their results, they concluded that since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) all but destroyed the social underpinnings of the traditional structure of Chinese values and that the failures of the socialist system that replaced it left an ideological and moral vacuum. This gap, they suggested, was filled in the 1980s by an influx of loosely understood Western values, largely conveyed by the images of affluent lifestyles on film and television (1993, p. 13). In fact, Chu and Ju's title, *'The Great Wall in Ruins'*, concisely expresses their basic standpoint: published in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, their analysis is pervaded by a nostalgia for an older, morally secure China, in spite of their emphasis on the objectivity of their data collection.[15]

Apart from criticising the corrosive effect of the Cultural Revolution on moral values (1993, p. 171), Chu and Ju suggest that the other major influence on changing moral values was the Western media. Overall, not many participants in the survey reported much exposure to Western films and TV, and the main group to which Chu and Ju referred in assessing the effects of the Western media was a small group of younger, well educated Shanghai urbanites (1993, p. 55). The authors noted that this group was less traditional: according to the survey results, they were more likely to argue with elders and more likely to turn to friends than relatives for help. Results also showed that this group was more liberal in attitudes to divorce and cohabitation, more inclined to be fun-loving and apparently lacking in work ethic. Some of these patterns reflected general differences in the findings between young and old, but were more sharply pronounced among high consumers of Western media (1993, pp. 88, 102, 127-130, 210). As a result,

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[15] In an autobiographic sketch, the authors explain that Chu escaped to Taiwan with his family in 1949 and moved later to the USA whereas Ju was a student in China during the Cultural Revolution (pp. vii-xii). Both seemed concerned about the loss of traditional values in the Maoist period. As they put it, 'In olden day China, people were motivated to excel by a desire to bring glory to their ancestors. This traditional value served as one the few ideological incentives of the past. The Party's attack on ancestors, however, particularly during the Cultural Revolution has put this Confucian value under a dark cloud' (1993, p. 12). For an account of other aspects of nostalgia in China, including nostalgia for revolution itself, see Barme (1999: ch. 12).

Chu and Ju argued that this group represented the vanguard of a wider, but regrettable, trend towards urban individualist values and away from traditional Chinese norms:

> 'What seems to be highly appealing to young Chinese, our data suggest, are [*sic*] a life of affluence and perhaps a "happy-go-lucky" lifestyle which viewers of American television programs and movies may easily perceive. It seems that young people in China, who grew up in a cultural vacuum so to speak, are particularly vulnerable to that kind of hedonistic lifestyle which can be readily projected onto what they see on the video tubes and cinema screens. They do not pause to think whether those images are compatible with their own cultural heritage, or to ask whether these images reflect any reality at all' (1993, p. 320).[16]

Such views perhaps inadvertently paralleled the nationalistic line in the Chinese media after the 1989 crisis (B. Xu, 1999, pp. 104-105), but whatever basis there may be in Chu and Ju's general fears about the decline of public virtues in China, with hindsight, the idea that the Western media was eroding Chinese people's work ethic seems a little dubious now. The post-1992 intensification of market reform, for instance, considerably increased the competitive pressure on state employees to become more efficient and increasingly to take the leap into private entrepreneurship (see Duckett, 1998, pp. 108-109; Guthrie, 1999, p. 25). Indeed, it may well have been the previous economic stagnation of the state-sector that sapped a sense of commitment among younger people, especially against the background of exposure to alternative lifestyles in the Western media which could be contrasted to socialist reality – something that Lull argues was one of the factors in the 1989 Tiananmen protests.[17] Chu and Ju suggest, plausibly enough, that youthful disillusion and foreign media exposure may have been in a relationship of mutual reinforcement, but while other studies have agreed with this general proposition, and with no opportunity for follow-up questioning of this informants, it does not offer a

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[16] Chu and Ju (1993, p. 320) also expressed approval for the idealism of the young participants in the 1989 Tiananmen protests though their anxiety over China's moral decline seemed to evoke their deeper concerns. Ironically, this anxiety over so-called 'spiritual pollution' was itself shared by some of the conservative Communist party leaders who were decisive in supporting the suppression of the Tiananmen demonstrations and had supported the 'anti-spiritual pollution' campaign of the early 1980s (see MacFarquhar, 1997, pp. 357-360).

[17] This is a theme pursued by Lull (see following section) who looked at audience reactions to both foreign and domestically produced programming: for instance, *'Xin xing'* (*'New Star'*), a 1986 pro-reform soap opera pitted a heroic reformist official against an old, bureaucratic boss. Lull found that not only did viewers appreciate the criticism of the state bureaucracy implied in the series but often added to it by commenting how the fictional reformer could not possibly have behaved as heroically in real life as he did on screen (1991, pp. 119-120).

precise analysis of why this group in particular stood out from other sections of society (1993, pp. 166-167).[18]

The studies I have noted were largely focused on the impact of the still relatively recent spread of television in China during the 1980s and 1990s, in a research tradition that sought to measure or correlate its psychological and cultural effects. Some similar research is still carried out. Huang Huilin and colleagues (H. Huang, Wang, & Jiang, 2007a) published a survey of children's viewing habits and values in the capital, concluding that China faced a dangerous loss of national culture in the face of foreign imported cartoons (2007b, p. 129).[19] But with television viewing becoming more established, scholarly attention broadened somewhat. Zhang Tongdao of Beijing Normal University, for instance, initiated a series of large scale surveys of Chinese television audiences between 1998 and 2002, looking at the significance of social relationships among viewers in different locations and settings (T. Zhang, 2003, p. 2).[20] Apart from producing a wealth of statistical information on preferred programming genres and the general diversification of Chinese media choices (2003, pp. 140-141),[21] the researchers also drew upon aspects of Morley's ethnographic research in *'Family Television'* in order to look at of the role of context upon viewing practices (T. Zhang, 2003, p. 252).[22] In contrast to Morley's households, for instance, they found that Chinese children, rather than fathers, tended to be masters of the remote control – perhaps not surprising in view of the one-child policy and 'little emperor' stereotype – though with mothers again tending to cede viewing choice to the rest of the family (T. Zhang, 2003, pp. 350-351). In shared college dorms, on the other hand, the will of the majority generally prevailed in what the researchers considered to be a 'herd mentality' (2003, p. 249). But as their

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[18] Analyses of the factors behind the 1989 crisis focus variously upon inner party struggles, consequences of economic reform, the rise of civil society (or its weaknesses) and Chinese cultural traditions of protest, though none of these explanations is necessarily sufficient or unproblematic (see Esherick & Wasserstrom, 1990, pp. 835-838, 859-860; D. Zhao, 2001, pp. 3-12).

[19] Stephanie Donald's research on children's media in China also stressed its cosmopolitan nature, at least in urban areas. She found many fans of Harry Potter, for instance, but takes a more positive, non-nationalist view of the phenomenon (2005, pp. 102-105, 111-112).

[20] A similar questionnaire-based survey of news programme viewing was carried out in Beijing by Yu Guoming (2000, pp. 12-14), concluding that viewers wanted more focus on controversial social issues.

[21] In general, Zhang confirmed a trend away from the national broadcaster, CCTV, to provincially based stations as well as from news programming to entertainment (2003, pp. 140-141).

[22] Unlike Morley, however, who undertook interviews in viewers' homes, Zhang and his colleagues preferred to use questionnaires.

analysis notes, the survey responses revealed an inconsistency insofar as students tended to report themselves as independent of and even resistant to peer and other pressures affecting their viewing choices, yet because of the constraints of dorm life, they nevertheless bowed to the collective will (2003, p. 247). As the authors suggest, similar ages and interests perhaps made consensus easier, however, the survey methodology offered no way to probe such issues other than speculatively (2003, pp. 246-248). As a result, although Zhang complains of a 'wealth of monotony' (*fengfu de dandiao*) in the otherwise predominantly non-empirical Chinese language media research (2003, p. 1 preface), his own work, even if a useful counterbalance, is rather constrained by its statistical framework. Moreover, although looking at the recent installation of television in student dormitories, Zhang's research was just prior to a more dramatic development with the widespread introduction of broadband connections on campuses and the subsequent explosion of downloading.[23]

Since Zhang Tongdao's work, Wu Hongyu carried out a similar quantitative survey in 2006-2007 involving almost 2000 respondents across Zhejiang province (2009, pp. 77-78). Like Zhang, Wu concluded that there was a process of diversification among viewers (2009, pp. 196-198): rural residents and the older generation, for instance, reported watching more television than higher educated and younger groups (2009, pp. 92-96). Overall, audience motives for watching were focused on entertainment, though there was some dissatisfaction at programmes' low quality (2009, pp. 197-198). But as with Zhang's surveys, discerning the reasons for these findings is problematic. The polarization of Chinese audience studies between non-empirical commentary and quantitative positivism has, however, prompted some calls for greater diversification towards interview analysis and other such qualitative and ethnographic methods (Cao, 2004, pp. 30-31; C. Li, 2005; F. Li, 2009, p. 32). In part, such calls have been driven by anxieties of those, including some industry insiders, who seek a counterweight to commercially oriented ratings-driven programming (e.g. Shang & Liu, 2008; Yonghui Wang, 2009). Yao and Qian, for instance, suggested that the dominance of ratings in the television industry is inappropriate to Chinese conditions, arguing that 'the more

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[23] As I noted previously, over 100 universities in China were covered by the ChinaGrid project launched in 2002 (Gordon, Li, Lin, & Yang, 2004, pp. 124-125). Broadband was in the process of being installed at Minzu University in 2005 when I worked there.

culturally and economically underdeveloped a society is, the more it needs guidance by an elite' (Yao & Qian, 2006, p. 3).[24] As China's higher educated middle classes – representing 'advanced productive forces' and 'progressive culture', as they put it – are only a small, not necessarily well-paid minority compared to Western nations, they are therefore dangerously neglected by ratings measurements as they constitute an insignificant segment of the audience for advertisers (Yao & Qian, 2006, p. 4). Such a perspective reflects the views of some within the Chinese intellectual elite (Y. Hong, 2002, p. 33) and, as Zhao Yuezhi notes (2008, p. 140), a certain strand of anti-imperialist official thinking in the PRC. Forces of commercialism, however, are also strong as television stations depend on advertising revenues. Indeed, it is perhaps symptomatic of this commercial orientation that one of the few published Chinese qualitative audience reception studies was carried out as part of a market-oriented focus group study looking into the effectiveness of television advertising (X. Wang, 2008).[25]

The only other wide ranging qualitative study I am aware of that overlaps with issues of audience reception is Chen Yanru's research into Chinese students' internet use.[26] In particular, Chen looked at concerns about the degree of Westernisation amongst young Chinese by asking 44 postgraduates of various majors to write about their online habits (Y. Chen, 2009, pp. 31-32).[27] As an advocate of a unifying Chinese identity in the face of globalisation (Y. Chen, 2009, p. 39), Chen found that cultural nationalists' anxieties were, nevertheless, perhaps exaggerated insofar as her respondents claimed to adopt a sceptical attitude to online material and also had a knowledge of Chinese literary classics, both ancient and revolutionary (2009, p. 34). Yet, in spite of the methodological

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[24] Yu Guoming also points out that ratings fail to pick up online viewing of soap operas (2009, pp. 36-37).

[25] Groups aged 16-45 from two cities, Shenyang and Shanghai, were asked what programmes they watched on China Central Television (CCTV), the main state television broadcaster. News emerged as the top category as it was integrated into viewers' daily routines (X. Wang, 2008, p. 134). Other knowledge based programmes such as *'The Lecture Room'* were also mentioned (p. 135). Overall, interviewees regarded the channel as authoritative and non trivial. CCTV's evening drama series, for instance, were said to be more serious than Korean and teen idol dramas often broadcast by local channels (p. 136).

[26] Although not purely qualitative, a hybrid questionnaire and interview study of foreign TV drama downloading is also reported in a conference paper by Wen and Wang who surveyed 230 respondents and conducted 10 follow-up interviews (2008, pp. 276-277). No further information, however, is given on the participants, though they appear to have been a mix of students and employees. In addition, another hybrid study using surveys and interviews was undertaken by Donald (2005), but focuses on children's media (see note 19 above).

[27] Her respondents' 'self-reports' were supplemented with some follow-up interviews, though further details are not given.

differences with values-based research already discussed, it is noticeable how this study was motivated by linked concerns and is perhaps characteristic of the genre in taking a somewhat conservative view of what constitutes Chinese (and/or Western) culture and values.[28]

For a major study of Chinese audiences that breaks decisively from the survey tradition and embraces some of the cultural studies critique of over-reliance on quantification that I discussed in chapter one, we have to go back to Lull's interview-based research on Chinese television viewing (1991) and a subsequent, smaller study by Zhong Yong (2003), a Chinese scholar based in Australia. Although Zhong does not cite Lull, the two have certain overlapping characteristics which I will comment on in due course. Lull's interviews with almost one hundred urban families and broadcasters took place in 1986 and 1989, both before and immediately following the suppression of the Tiananmen democracy movement (Lull, 1991, p. 2). Indeed, the account they provide of the fairly widespread complaints among the urban population about the slow pace of reform appeared quite prophetic in the immediate aftermath of the crisis.[29] Interview responses showed how people began to view programmes more critically after the initial thrill of actually being able to own a television. Generational conflicts emerged, for instance, with some of the older generation finding imported dramas alien and rather too racy: 'It is not appropriate for us to watch modern love stories in front of our children and grandchildren', noted one (1991, p. 155). But for younger and middle-aged viewers, dissatisfaction went in the other direction, comparing locally produced dramas unfavourably with foreign imports, as either slow-paced, predictable or overly didactic (1991, p. 160). This kind of judgement was itself a microcosm of a much broader comparison that audiences made between China and foreign countries, leaking through television broadcasts in between the cracks, so to speak, of state sanctioned propaganda. Glimpses of foreign lifestyles in the backgrounds of programming, for instance, were often noticed as intently as the foreground: 'I want to know how far we are behind foreign societies' admitted one interviewee (1991, p. 174). Even international sport

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[28] As Gloria Davies points out (2007, pp. 87-89), anxieties over cultural loss was a prominent intellectual current among a number of Chinese scholars in the 1990s.

[29] Of course, one could argue that rather than the slow pace of reform *per se* being the cause of unrest, it was the feeling among those in the state sector of being left behind the growing wealth of new entrepreneurs and well-connected officials that was the real source of antagonism.

programmes reinforced at least some viewers' notion that China was comparatively backward (1991, pp. 172-173).

Lull's interviews also picked up the growing consumer consciousness in China, though the path was not necessarily a smooth one. There was, interestingly, some resistance by viewers to the very idea that programmes should be interrupted by advertising, so broadcasters had to respond by bundling them up between programmes (1991, pp. 162-164). With personal incomes still low, much advertising was, in fact, for industrial machinery with little appeal to the interests of the average householder. Technically, the adverts were also noticeably 'primitive' in comparison to the slicker foreign commercials that also occasionally ran. Television, nevertheless, stoked up considerable consumer demand:

> 'Look at the Western people's kitchen. Western people come home from work, go into the kitchen, open this and that, and cook dinner. In my family we have to put the refrigerator in the bedroom! Western people take a shower and go to bed. We don't have a shower in the house...' (1991, p. 174).

Indeed, as one parent noted, his seven year-old daughter was picking up the habits of a new lifestyle, wearing makeup and jewellery and greeting her parents with a kiss when they came home from work: 'that's a completely Western custom' (1991, p. 166).

Shaped by the extraordinary political events that followed, and by his implicit relation to them, Lull therefore concluded that although television was initially promoted by the party-state in order to enhance its ability to shape the population's thinking and behaviour, the state had underestimated how the medium would stimulate dissent and inspire a desire for greater freedom. In the immediate post-1989 perspective, it was perhaps understandable for Lull to see television not only as an intrinsically liberal-subversive medium that undermined party authority but one which would continue to do so as the 'cultural influences that helped stimulate unrest in the first place are still fundamentally in place' (1991, p. 127).[30] As things turned out, however, it was the consumer and lifestyle revolution that triumphed in China rather than the political one and the assumption that the events of 1989 had 'sharpened critical viewing even more'

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[30] Writing in 1994, Pei Minxin took a similar line, arguing that market forces had allowed an unintended 'self- liberalization' of the Chinese media which could facilitate future political democratisation (1994, pp. 150, 178). An updated version of this view is provided by Bruce Gilley (2004, pp. 24-26, 72-73).

now looks misplaced, at least in the sense Lull meant it – essentially against the regime (1991, pp. 218-219). Lull, of course, was right in pointing out that the spread of television undoubtedly had a deep influence, and in ways that the government could not wholly predict or control, noting how 'propaganda and resistance can spring from the same source' (1991, p. 216). But following 1989, and especially after 1992,[31] the government did respond to some of the concerns that came up in Lull's interviews, improving technical quality and astutely redirecting the frustration at China's 'backwardness' outwards by fostering popular enthusiasm for a modern nationalism as a condition of China's economic success.[32]

The other ethnographic case study by Zhong, which I have already alluded to, was carried out rather later in 1999-2000 when the impact of China's consumer revolution had become more evident and television was perhaps less of a novelty. Indeed, Zhong emphasises the degree to which alternative uses of the television set for karaoke, game and VCD playing and so forth had begun to make an impact. Like Lull, Zhong observed the viewing habits of families in their homes, in this case fifteen households in three cities: Beijing, Wuhan and Guangzhou (2003, p. 233). Based on his observations, Zhong characterised some of his audiences as 'loyal', referring to those, for example, who regularly watched the main state broadcaster's (CCTV) news broadcasts and drama series attentively – generally older householders and with official positions (Zhong, 2003, pp. 234-235). Some parents also came into this 'loyal' category as they required their children to watch certain programmes such as news, documentaries and selected series in the belief that they were educational and would teach proper attitudes to life, although one child admitted she preferred cartoons and resented being lectured by the television (Zhong, 2003, p. 235). Other families, however, were rather less 'loyal' in these terms. They preferred to watch alternative channels to CCTV, such as Hong Kong broadcasts or cable TV (Zhong, 2003, pp. 235-236). In Guangzhou, in particular, Hong Kong programming was said by interviewees to be culturally closer, more entertaining and more open to modern life beyond China itself (Zhong, 2003, pp. 236-237).

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[31] A new wave of market oriented reform occurred after 1992 following Deng Xiaoping's tour of southern China and the Shenzhen special economic zone (Young, 1997, p. 158).
[32] I discuss this further in chapter six.

In a pointer to the growing significance of new media technologies, Zhong also noted what he termed 'abusers', namely those who rarely watched the official CCTV broadcasts at all and instead used the television for other purposes entirely such as karaoke or playing video games (Zhong, 2003, pp. 237-238). This, he suggested, transformed the television 'from a central carrier of top-down distributed television signals into a monitor that plays a supportive role in people's pursuit of other causes' (Zhong, 2003, p. 238). Indeed, Zhong referred to karaoke's 'political subversiveness in China' as it 'sabotages television's function as a monolithic *houshe* (throat and tongue) of the Party-state and as a royal carrier of centrally disseminated signals' (Zhong, 2003, p. 239). Most of Zhong's families also had VCD disc players attached to the television and some had large collections, including a mix of Hollywood blockbusters and classics (Zhong, 2003, p. 241). As with karaoke, Zhong concluded that disc viewing essentially weakened the voice of the state as it 'transferred the power of programme selection from official television operators to individual viewers' (Zhong, 2003, p. 241).

In common with Lull's study, Zhong saw subversive potential in the spread of new technology, but his conclusion emerged not from eliciting how television viewers challenged the state broadcasters' messages, but rather by observing how many by-passed such messages altogether by moving to newer, more individualised technologies attached to their sets. In this respect, Zhong's study illustrates, along with both Chen Yanru's internet and Zhang Tongdao's television research, the greater pluralism in the Chinese media away from a single, monolithic state broadcaster. With the luxury of hindsight, however, both Lull and Zhong's research, I would suggest, can also illustrate some of the potential pitfalls in interpreting the data which emerges from an ethnographic account. Of course, methodologically speaking, Lull's study in particular was in many respects pioneering. But although it was quite distinct from the media effects and values research approach, interpretatively it perhaps remained within its horizons, but in this case, Lull interpreted the change in values he detected as part of a positive long term, anti-authoritarian trend, rather than a threat to Chinese moral principles. Similarly, Zhong's study, with its strong emphasis on the potential subversiveness of new technologies, comes close to Lull's position, but in a final caveat he notes how this liberation from state television 'arguably pampers the users' rather than motivates resistance (Zhong, 2003, p.

246). However, his switch also illustrates the way in which interpretative frameworks in academic studies of Chinese audiences have tended to be constrained. That is to say, the studies which I have reviewed have tended to revolve around themes of potential moral decline, and a Chinese cultural essence facing the threat of Westernisation, or alternatively, an implicit belief that television or technology, and even economic integration with world markets, inevitably promote freedom and undermine autocracy.[33] But as I shall discuss in more detail in the next section, the post-socialist commercialisation of the Chinese media environment in which Chinese audiences are situated is a remarkable testament to the inadequacy of such an assumption.

Chinese Media and Film Industry Reform: Mastering and Marketing

Chinese audience attitudes and behaviours have been evolving and developing since the 1980s in an era of 'reform and opening up'[34] with the expansion of television and now other newer media. But in order to assess audiences' attitudes to DVD and downloading technologies as well as their content, it is necessary to understand their relation to other more mainstream media. Audiences' uses of new media are, in part, a response to policies that have promoted both expansion and commercialisation, whilst attempting to maintain overall regulatory and, ultimately, ideological control (Pang, 2006, p. 106). I will therefore offer an overview of how some the major sectors of the media have been transformed during the post-Mao period of reform before going on to show in the following section how new DVD and downloading technologies have emerged against this background.

One of the paradoxes of the Chinese media over this period is that its growth and commercialisation have not entirely undermined its ideological cohesion. The messy hybrid condition of its development under market reform has, nevertheless, led to a wide range of scholarly descriptors, from 'producer of social knowledge', 'arena of

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[33] Lull's research is most obviously in the latter category. Apart from Chu and Ju (1993), among audience studies that might be placed in the former are Dong, Tan and Cao (1998, p. 321), Harwood and Zhang (2002, pp. 245-248), Huang Huilin (2007b, p. 129) and Chen Yanru, (2009, p. 34). Zhang Tongdao's television audience surveys, however, may be an exception to these paradigms as, overall, his research challenges the view of audiences as a mass, and focuses on audience fragmentation and power relations in the context of reception (2003, pp. 247-249).
[34] The phrase *'gaige kaifang'* has been widely used to refer to Deng Xiaoping's reform policies since the late 1970s and those that followed them (Dillon, 2009, p. 18).

improvisation', 'Party Publicity Inc.', 'junk food manufacturer' to 'watchdog on party leashes' (Z. He, 2003, p. 197). Any of these might be plausible characterisations of the new media landscape when looking at one or other of its many facets, but what they have in common is that most of these accounts have been questioning, either explicitly or implicitly, whether the CCP can maintain its political monopoly in the era of marketization (see Damm, 2007, pp. 273-276; Latham, 2000, pp. 653-654; C.-C. Lee, 2000a, p. 10).[35] The answer, notwithstanding the expansion, diversification, decentralisation and (relative) liberalisation of the Chinese media during the reform era, is that the party-state still has remained basically in control, though undoubtedly it has had to be vigilant and resourceful in order to maintain its pre-eminence, especially when dealing with the inherent contradictions of its own position and facing newer technologies which do not so neatly slot into existing hierarchies.[36] The question then is, how has it thus far managed it? And should it be a source of surprise, or is its success a temporary phenomenon?

China's reform era dates from 1978 but the real spur to unrestrained commercialisation of the economy occurred following Deng Xiaoping's 1992 tour of southern provinces (Young, 1997, p. 158). This was also the period immediately following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown and the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The reaction of the top leadership was, therefore, to both emphasise the need for economic liberalisation and also maintain political control. However, the Communist party has always been very alert to maintaining control over how people construct their values, behaviour patterns and outlook, and the media has long been used by the party as a vehicle for 'thought work' (*'sixiang gongzuo'*) to promote the CCP's ideal of 'socialist

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[35] More recently, some have begun to question whether state and market are necessarily in conflict: for instance, Zhao Yuezhi (2008, p. 111) argues that 'the bottom line seems to have [...] become the party line'. See also Yu Haiqing (2009, p. 19) who argues for 'new approaches' to the issue.

[36] One way to look at how the Chinese media functions is to categorise it into, on the one hand, more 'traditional' sectors which fit into established, though evolving, governmental structures (e.g. press, broadcasting, etc) and, on the other, new media (internet, DVD, etc.) for which new mechanisms of management have had to be improvised and adapted. That said, there is also a certain degree of overlap between the two (e.g. cable and satellite broadcasting) and indeed, there have been turf wars between competing administrative bureaus; e.g. between the Ministry of Information Industries (MII), responsible for communications infrastructure, and the State Administration of Film and Television (SARFT) which, although theoretically limited to regulating content, has also tried to develop and control China's profitable cable network system (E. L. Davis, 2005, p. 79; Sinclair & Harrison, 2004, pp. 45-46).
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spiritual civilisation' (Brady, 2008, pp. 44-60; C. R. Hughes, 2006, pp. 22-24). This is a rather vague term but is defined by a high-ranking propaganda cadre, interviewed by Lynch, as promoting collectivism (over individualism), as well as inculcating respect for education, science and art (1999, p. 10 n. 22). The success of this work influences the degree of legitimacy the regime enjoys and reduces the need to rely on cruder instruments of control such as financial reward and explicit shows of force. China's media policy therefore involves negotiating an uneasy balance between economic and ideological goals. Lynch (1999, pp. 7, 10), in fact, argues there is a fundamental contradiction between the liberalisation and repression inherent to them, but one which its leaders refuse to acknowledge. In his view, the propaganda state has all but broken down in the post-Mao period, under the impact of three forces: commercialisation, globalisation and pluralisation (of media outlets), resulting in administrative fragmentation, property-rights reform and technological change. Essentially, his argument is that the profit motive recognises no ideology and therefore decentralised marketization of the Chinese economy makes control and censorship increasingly problematic. The proliferation of new communications technologies merely multiplies these challenges. He also rejects the suggestion, academically popular in the mid-1990s, that this loosening of control might allow the emergence of civil society (i.e. groups independent of government) which could lay the foundations for eventual democratisation (see White, Howell, & Shang, 1996, p. 37). As many have noted, very few of these organisations have real autonomy (Keane, 2001, pp. 786-787; Tai, 2006, pp. 48-53), and media institutions, in particular, still fundamentally lack the freedom to act with political independence. The result, according to Lynch, is a kind of unstable stalemate, neither democratically liberal nor totalitarian, but instead what he dubs 'praetorianism' (1999, p. 2), whereby different interest groups, both in and outside the party-state structure, struggle relentlessly for advantage and influence, without any one managing to exercise dominance. In this view, rather than developing civil society, China has become an 'uncivil society' (1999, p. 236) where rampant self-interest undermines the state's ideological influence but the state still manages to suppress any alternative visions or sources of authority from organising effectively.[37]

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[37] Yan Yunxiang makes an analogous point with regard to the increase in individualism within rural family

There is, of course, no doubt that the state has relinquished its previous monopoly over public discourse, but as I shall show, that does not mean that the centre has lost all control. Far from it, for it is notable that unlike certain other areas of the economy, the media has been kept within the structure of the state sector and, consequently, genuinely independent media has yet to emerge.[38] Some media organisations are direct party organs, such as the *'People's Daily'*, whereas others are non-party but are still officially state-owned and party-supervised at the appropriate level (M. J. Chan, 2003, pp. 161-164, 171). In the case of newspapers, for example, each is licensed to publish within the region administered by its sponsoring unit and not beyond, though there is a strong economic incentive to do so following the withdrawal of state subsidies in the early 1990s (Y. Zhao, 2000, p. 6). But as elsewhere in the state sector, market forces have been introduced into the Chinese media from the top down via a process of 'regulated marketisation' or 'bureaucratic capitalism' (Z. He, 2003, p. 211; Y. Zhao, 2000, p. 6). During the 1980s, media organisations were first required to operate as *de facto* businesses, though officially still not-for-profit enterprises. However, in 1987, both press and broadcasting were designated 'information commodification industries' (Huang and Ding 1997 in Y. Zhao, 2000, p. 6) and in 1992 it was announced that state subsidies would be gradually withdrawn over the next two years. Since then, the various sectors of the media have operated, in different conditions and with different degrees of success, under a dual mandate to serve, as Zhao Yuezhi put it, 'the party line and the bottom line' (Y. Zhao, 1998, p. 144) leading to what He Zhou (2003, p. 211) in the context of press reform refers to as 'cognitive dissonance' or 'incongruence' among those working in the industry.

One of the industries that struggled most during the reform period has been Chinese cinema, in spite of the international fame gained by directors such as Zhang

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life. Although the state has withdrawn from direct economic management of communes (which from the 1950s onwards had weakened both parental power and traditional kinship structures) it, nevertheless, still acts to prevent the development of independent organisations of civil society that might fill the resulting vacuum in moral authority. The result, he suggests, is the emergence of the 'uncivil individual' (2003, p. 226) particularly through the effect of marketization upon family and personal relationships.

[38] Some limited leeway for semi-independent media is possible as some government units have been willing to act as sponsors in return for a fee. A similar procedure ('wearing a red hat') was also used by many private firms in the 1980s-early 1990s to avoid local government harassment (Young, 1997, p. 157). This kind of overlap between private and state sector is indeed characteristic of China's post-socialist economy, and is the subject of a more general debate over just how far the state should withdraw from involvement in the market or seek to pursue some kind of hybrid 'third way' (see Nolan, 2004, pp. 174, 176-177).

Yimou and Chen Kaige during the 1980s. Caught between competition from the spread of television, an increasingly commercial environment and the CCP's continuing emphasis on cinema's ideological significance as source of political propaganda (Pang, 2006, pp. 107-108; Ying Zhu, 2003, pp. 84, 88-90) yearly cinema attendances fell precipitously from 29.3 to 10.5 billion tickets between 1979 and 1992 and by 1994 had dropped further to 3 billion (T. Wang, 2007, p. 1; Y. Zhang, 2004, p. 282).[39] In response, and in a significant change to a policy which had largely kept Hollywood out, the authorities decided to allow the state film distributor an annual import quota of ten films, including mainstream Hollywood releases, in order to shore up the exhibition industry.[40] As a result, *'The Fugitive'* (1993), starring Harrison Ford, was imported in 1994 and shown in 57 cinemas on a revenue-sharing basis, the first such deal in the PRC's history. An instant hit, it made over 25 million RMB (US$3 million), 17 million RMB more than the best performing Chinese film at the time (T. Wang, 2007, p. 2; Yeh & Davies, 2008, p. 40). Other titles followed and attendances soared – by 80%, for instance, in the Beijing area – and with *'Titanic'* (1997), four years later, the dominance of the Hollywood blockbuster was established, breaking all previous records with a box office take of 360 million RMB (US$43.5 million) (Rosen, 2002, p. 55; T. Wang, 2007, p. 2).

Although the box office surge was good news for cinema operators, it did not revive interest in Chinese films, in spite of the conspicuous critical success at foreign film festivals of 'fifth generation' directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. Like many state-owned enterprises, the industry's efforts to restructure itself in an otherwise commercializing economy had by the mid-1990s had failed to stem its decline (Ying Zhu, 2003, pp. 78-89). In these circumstances, painful analogies to doomed ships were almost too obvious to make. Cultural critic, Dai Jinhua lamented (in Schiller & Zhao, 2001, p. 143) that 'Like Titanic, the Chinese film industry is sinking amidst tender feelings and happiness, almost without any measure of resistance...' and therefore compared the impact of Hollywood to a pack of wolves (K. K. L. Chu, 2010, p. 96). Though official policy required that each cinema restrict foreign releases to one third of its screening time,

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[39] Because of corrupt reporting of box office takings, such statistics in China are reputed to be rather unreliable, but nevertheless indicate a broad trend (Y. Zhu, 2002, p. 193).
[40] Some Hollywood films had previously been shown in the 1980s on a flat fee basis (Rosen, 2002, pp. 50-51).

this regulation was frequently ignored in practice. From 1994-1999, box office takings for domestic films fell by 65%. On average, the ten imported films were taking two thirds of ticket revenue, whereas the remaining third was being shared out among ten times as many domestic films which consequently lost money (Rosen, 2002, p. 68; T. Wang, 2007, p. 2). A Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' (CASS) report issued a stark warning that China faced the possibility that foreign cultural products 'will turn our next generation into loyal consumers of Western culture who no longer possess a feeling of affinity with, or understanding of, their own national culture' (CASS National Innovation System Team, 2000: 1). In a more mute comment on the state of the industry, Zhang Yimou's *'The Road Home'* (1999) featured two posters for *'Titanic'* in the background of an otherwise remote rural village (R. Kraus & Wan, 2002, p. 434).

Against this background, the key question was whether the domestic industry would be able to respond to, or at least stop the slide in its fortunes. By the end of the 1990s, after studio consolidations and other reforms, many of the basic building blocks of a commercialised film industry had already been put in place, with production, distribution and exhibition all open to private investment, though still under state supervision (K. K. L. Chu, 2010, pp. 107-110; Yeh & Davies, 2008, pp. 37-42). As a result, art house films, often banned from domestic exhibition, as well as so-called 'main melody' movies (government subsidised and heavily promoted but not popular)[41] were gradually eclipsed by so-called 'new mainstream' productions (successful, low-budget, privately financed and government supported entertainment-oriented features) such as Feng Xiaogang's streetwise comedy *'Be There or Be Square'* (1999) and Zhang Yang's urban tale *'The Spicy Love Soup'* (1998) (Lau, 2007, p. 1; Y. Zhu, 2002, pp. 195, 205). The strategy has involved learning from Hollywood, not just in technique, something it has long aspired to, but in business methodology, de-emphasising the auteur approach to film-making (Y. Zhu, 2002, pp. 195-196).

However, though such films were seen as the industry's potential saviour, their initial impact was only sufficient to provide 'momentary resistance' (Lau, 2007, p. 1).

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[41] 'Main melody' entertainment (*'zhu xuanlu'*; '主旋律'), according to one official, opposes '...the trend to regard the economic profit (of television drama) as more important than its social benefits, to regard enjoyment as superior to orientation, to promote historical themes over realism, farce over serious drama, long form over short form, epic themes over ordinary themes, and productions that use foreign actors to those that use locals' (Y. Hong, 2002, p. 32). 'Main melody' films follow much the same prescriptions.

The domestic market was still too financially weak and piracy-ridden to provide an adequate platform from which to compete with Hollywood, and indeed, none of these films made any significant international headway. Chinese cinema had already produced larger budget, so-called, epic or 'giant films'[42] but, as noted, these still tended to have a somewhat propagandist, 'main melody' style seriousness of purpose, often with revolutionary, historical or biographical subject matter that distinguished them from Hollywood's blockbusters.[43] But the problem remained that these films were not especially popular or profitable (Y. Zhu, 2002, p. 193).

It took the subsequent international success of *'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'* (2000), directed by the Taiwanese American Ang Lee, to reveal a potential solution. The film was sold by its Hong Kong and Taiwan backers to Sony Pictures for a less than its production cost (US$15 million) whereupon it went on to take US$128 million in the US and US$213 million worldwide (Lau, 2007, p. 1) – 'maddening to the investors' as Lau put it – but with the domestic Chinese industry still in the doldrums, this unexpected success was clearly an example that could not be ignored. Zhang Yimou's response came with *'Hero'* (2002), marrying his previous art house experience to the martial arts genre in order to produce a so-called 'cultured blockbuster' (Lau, 2007, p. 1), but unlike *'Crouching Tiger'*, one that would attempt to appeal to both domestic and foreign audiences.[44] Zhang was unapologetic about his aim to make films that would have global popularity and was willing to make compromises in order to achieve this goal, even cutting an 18 minute section for the international version of *'Hero'* and preparing an alternative 'happy ending', though this was not used (T. Wang, 2009, pp. 304-305). With heavy promotion and strong government support (President Jiang Zemin attended the premiere in the Great Hall of the People), box office income reached 2.5 billion RMB out of a 9 billion total for the year – a record for a Chinese film. And after some characteristic hesitation from its US distributors, the film went on to make US$177 million

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[42] *'jupian'*; '巨片'.

[43] *'The Opium War'* (1997) was also labelled a blockbuster (*'dapian'*; '大片') rather than an epic, suggesting a greater confidence among Chinese commentators to stake a claim for their own 'de-westernized' version of the Hollywood genre (Berry, 2003, p. 223).

[44] In an interview, Zhang insisted that he already had the film in mind before *'Crouching Tiger'* appeared, but there is no doubt that Ang Lee's film enabled him to make *'Hero'* (See 'Hero News 58': http://www.monkeypeaches.com/hero/interview01.html; 31st March 2002, accessed 15th Oct. 2010).

worldwide.[45] With the subsequent release of martial arts blockbusters in the same vein (*'House of the Flying Daggers'* (2004), *'The Promise'* (2005), *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* (2006)), the genre gave the domestic industry some long awaited hope of a commercially viable future.

I will return to the question of audience responses to these developments in the next chapter, but in economic terms at least, recent data shows evidence of a general revival with domestic box office revenues increasing approximately 22% each year from 2002 to 2007 (K. K. L. Chu, 2010, pp. 96, 113). Yet, as Chu emphasises, this has not necessarily been at the expense of the CCP's capacity to maintain overall control through the licensing process and other means of intervention (2010, pp. 114-115). As a result, even though the reform period has witnessed an overall decline in audiences for Chinese films and a move away from cinema as a direct instrument of ideological education, there were signs that, from its low point in the 1990s, the Chinese industry had begun to recover by the early years of the new century.

In contrast to the Chinese film industry which has had to fight a rearguard action against its decline, television has witnessed an exponential growth, though again, not without some of the tensions and 'cognitive dissonance' referred to above. During the 1980s, access to audiences rose steeply from a mere 0.4% of the population in 1980 to virtually the whole population by the late 1990s (McCormick & Liu, 2003, pp. 142-143). To enable this, state investment in television infrastructure boomed from 670 million RMB in 1980 to 3 billion in 1989 (J. Hong, 1998, p. 92). Channels proliferated as official authorities down to county level were permitted to set up TV stations within their regions,[46] though each remains under the relevant level of party supervision and regulations ensure, for instance, that they must all broadcast state television's main channel, CCTV-1, as must cable networks.[47] However, the spread of satellite and cable in the 1990s (59% penetration by 2000) (M. J. Chan, 2003, p. 165) has, in practice, enabled provincial broadcasters to reach a national audience, though they have largely sought to compete through entertainment programming. As a result, overall programme hours

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[45] Box Office Mojo: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=hero02.htm; accessed 15th Oct. 2010.

[46] By 1995 there were over 900 channels broadcasting, excluding cable (J. Hong, 1998, p. 48).

[47] In 2004 regulations were issued forbidding county TV stations from broadcasting their own programmes, but Esarey found some stations, with local government support, ignoring the policy (Esarey, 2005, p. 52).

devoted to entertainment have risen steadily from about 26% in 1992, to 39% in 1996 and 44% in 2000 (R. Bai, 2005, p. 21) especially as channels have become increasingly reliant on advertising revenue (Ying Zhu, Keane, & Bai, 2008, p. 1).

Not surprisingly, the Chinese government has been wary of allowing foreign broadcasters direct access to this market. Satellite dishes were banned in 1993, coincidently or otherwise, shortly after media magnate Rupert Murdoch claimed that they would undermine authoritarian regimes worldwide (Lynch, 1999, p. 185). Since then, however, companies have demonstrated a willingness to accommodate many governmental demands in the hope of gaining access. Murdoch, for example, removed BBC news from the Hong Kong based Star TV satellite service immediately after acquiring it (Taubmann, 1998, p. 262) which, by then, was officially limited on the mainland to luxury hotels. And in return for its then owners, AOL Time Warner, broadcasting CCTV's English channel (CCTV 9) in America, the Hong Kong based CETV (China Entertainment Television) was allowed to broadcast in nearby Guangdong province, though some cable networks were already carrying it illegally. Under rules issued in 2005, foreign broadcasters were also to be permitted a 49% stake in entertainment programming joint ventures, subject to government approval (Hargrave-Silk, 2005). Basically, 'entertainment only' has, in fact, been the entry requirement for those who want to gain access, the only exception being the news channel on Phoenix TV, a joint venture between well-connected Chinese investors and Rupert Murdoch's Star TV. It is widely available on cable in urban centres and offers a less traditional presentational style, though still avoiding the most sensitive issues for the CCP (Chin-Chuan Lee, 2003, pp. 10-11).[48]

Measures against foreign control of domestic broadcasting have been a concern for many states around the world, but China's pattern of control is undoubtedly at the tighter end of the international spectrum (J. Hong, 1998: 22). Nevertheless, relative to the Maoist period, the Chinese media has experienced extraordinary liberalisation. Before the late 1970s, very little foreign material was broadcast, although some was imported for the

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[48] Murdoch, using his contacts with the son of a former propaganda minister, subsequently attempted to supply content to a Qinghai satellite TV company which would have allowed him to broadcast nationally, but the venture was closed down. By 2005, he had admitted he had 'hit a brick wall' in China and reduced his stake in Phoenix from 38 to 18%, instead turning his interests to a Chinese version of 'MySpace', the internet social networking site (Kahn, 2007).

party hierarchy, and that had to be anti-imperialist in nature (J. Hong, 1998, p. 52). Through the early 1980s, however, the larger provincial broadcasters won the right to import directly, with the result that the more conservative approach of CCTV was progressively stretched and tested; Shanghai Television (STV) for instance, took the American series *'Hunter'* (1984-1991) after CCTV rejected it as 'inappropriate' (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 60-61). In this way, new *de facto* criteria evolved during the 1980s so that anything not explicitly anti-government or overly violent or pornographic could be considered 'acceptable' as long as it was also 'affordable' (J. Hong, p. 64).[49] Pressure to import also occurred, in part, because the expansion of channels and broadcasting hours made imports essential as the country cannot produce enough of its own material to fill airtime. In 1980, on average, just over 2000 hours of programming were broadcast per week; five years later it was over 7000, and by 1990 it was over 20,000 (J. Hong, 1998, p. 79). Moreover, unlike the pre-reform period when stations could freely broadcast Chinese films, they now have to be paid for and average costs of domestic programme production are also significantly higher than imports. Importing, therefore, has had a strong economic motive behind it as advertising is now the major source of funding almost all China's television stations (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 61-64, 85) and because foreign programming is often popular, it attracts advertising revenue which can be used both to upgrade broadcasters' equipment, as well as provide bonuses for staff.[50]

These commercial pressures are strong. For this reason, Lynch argues that giving responsibility for profits and losses (in practice, the right to retain a percentage of advertising revenues) has transformed media units into demand-led entities, responding to the desire of audiences to be entertained, and largely sidelining the supposed priorities of 'thought work'. For the party leadership, the obvious response to these challenges has been to try to distinguish between 'harmless' non-political entertainment which may be ideologically suspect but can be tolerated, and hard news and current affairs which must remain under its control and guidance. But, in practice, this border had been hard to police: such are the pressures of commercialisation that it has even resulted in phenomena

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[49] The Chinese government often prefers non-explicit policy guidelines in order to maximise its room for manoeuvre (Keane, 2001, p. 786).

[50] Chinese broadcasters have been able to afford foreign material by offering airtime to foreign advertisers in return for free programming. Approximately 20% of CCTV's air time in the mid 1990s consisted of foreign programming. STV broadcast about 20-30% (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 74-75).

such as 'paid news' (*'youchang xinwen'*) and 'soft advertising' (*'ruan guanggao'*), in which companies either pay reporters directly or pay their organisations to provide good publicity, or at the extremes, reporters extort payment to avoid bad coverage. The *de facto* acceptance of 'soft advertising' was seen as a way of discouraging the more overtly corrupt 'paid news'. By the mid-1990s, it had apparently become a virtually institutionally legitimised phenomenon, constituting about 25% of current affairs programming at Beijing Television, for instance (Lynch, 1999, pp. 61-70).[51]

Loosening control over entertainment has, of course, been controversial in some ideological quarters as debates in the party's official journal *'Qiushi'* (March 1996) indicate:

> 'In this regard, certain Western political bigwigs are much wiser than some of our comrades. They said: As long as the youth of the country to be overturned have learned our language and dances and have a weakness for our movies and television programs, they will, sooner or later, accept our concepts of value. Unfortunately, this remark has been proved by what happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe' (Liu Renwei in Lynch 1999, p. 11).

With these anxieties in mind, the government issued an explicit foreign programme import policy for the first time in the mid-1990s, requiring that such imports be no more than 15% of output, should not be shown in prime time (7-9pm) and should consist of a diversity of import sources in order to avoid American dominance (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 123-124).[52] The cultural authorities have also attempted to go on the offensive, promoting the production of domestic dramas, often with a patriotic slant. In 1990, China's first soap opera, *'Kewang'* (*'Yearnings'*), presenting the lives of families through the Cultural Revolution, was hailed by the party leadership as a model of its kind and also achieved astonishingly high ratings (apparently watched by 98% of Beijing viewers when it was first aired) (J. Hong, 1998, pp. 122, 130-131). Since the mid-1990s, domestic dramas have, in fact, become the mainstay of most television stations and their predominant source of revenue. These are now almost all purchased from private production

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[51] A student working as an intern at a Beijing channel in 2005 also confirmed such practices to me.
[52] Lynch (1999, p. 143) reported how the central authorities had difficulty preventing the myriad of local cable network from defying official policy by broadcasting foreign material, either pirated or taken from satellite.

companies which, in conjunction with advertisers, have themselves become influential players in the media world (Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 212-213, 215).

Media groups have therefore lobbied policymakers to loosen regulations in order to allow private capital investment (domestic and foreign) into the industry, however, this is not necessarily contradictory to political control (Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 213-215); apart from the required production licences, documents and speeches from the centre continue to set the parameters of broadcast policy, though the way they are interpreted and implemented may involve 'testing the waters' (see also Keane, 2001, p. 795). In 2002, for example, Jiang Zemin made a distinction between cultural undertaking (*shiye*) and cultural industry (*chanye*), thus officially recognising the business nature of the latter and summing up a process that had been underway for some time (R. Bai, 2005, p. 41; Y. Zhao, 2008, pp. 108-111).[53] But that did not prevent the government from issuing an order, in March 2004, that all crime series be taken off prime time in a so-called 'screen cleansing' campaign (R. Bai, 2005, p. 48). Mid-2005 also witnessed one of the government's periodic clampdowns, halting further satellite foreign joint ventures and more rigorously enforcing censorship of existing broadcasts (Buckley, 2005).[54] Without doubt, the 'political wind' still matters.

Although political direction affects all media in one way or another, in comparison to film and television, the internet might be considered to be the medium most removed from state control, on the basis that it is both more interactive and unlike its more established counterparts, does not have roots in the traditional hierarchical state structure. Tai Zixue has argued, for instance, that the web is a potentially 'empowering tool for Chinese civil society' (Tai, 2006, p. 285) through blogging, internet forums and as an alternative source of information and opinion. However, Zheng Yongnian has taken a somewhat more cautious approach, noting how its rapid development is itself a government sponsored project and is thus better seen as 'mutually empowering' of state

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[53] Wang Jing, however, points out that *'chanye'* somewhat ambivalently combines notions of property ownership (*chanquan*) with public institution (*shiye*), unlike the term *'chuangyi gongye'* (creative industries) used in Hong Kong (J. Wang, 2004, pp. 13-16).
[54] A regulation was also issued in December 2004 banning 'non-local' reporting in order to curb journalists from using trips to the provinces to write about corruption or unrest ("Back on the Leash", 2005).

and society (2008, p. 166).[55] Indeed, it is possible to argue further that the notion of a divide between society and state, or an alliance between them, is not very tenable in an environment where such distinctions are so very blurred (Akhavan-Majid, 2004, p. 554; Keane, 2001, pp. 786-787). On this basis, the apparent choice facing the government, between either restricting its growth and thereby undermining economic development, or on the other hand, allowing free access that undermines its control, has turned out to be not as stark in practice as it first seemed (McCormick & Liu, 2003, p. 146). As with other media sectors, for instance, the government has been proactively organising the internet business into larger more manageable conglomerates (J. Wang, 2004, p. 13). In addition, the authorities have consciously tried to swamp the net with official content; by 1999, 1000 newspapers and 200 broadcasters had websites (Chin-Chuan Lee, 2003: 15). Moreover, as states worldwide increasingly share security concerns over crime, terrorism and cyber-warfare, the international regulatory structure for the internet has also been pressured to address these concerns, in spite of the potential for repressive regimes to take advantage of them. So, while the Chinese government is not alone in requiring that internet service providers (ISPs) monitor and keep records of activity on their servers, their definition of internet crimes are very broad, including catch-all categories such as 'endangering social stability' (C. Hughes, 2002, p. 207).[56]

Of course, because of its sheer size and decentralised nature and its lack of hard distinction between consumer and producer, the internet is not nearly as controllable as other forms of media.[57] Online chat rooms and bulletin boards, for instance, do allow arenas for lively discussion (G. Yang, 2003, pp. 469-472), but they are still subject to monitoring. In 2005, in the case of two of the most prominent based at Peking and Tsinghua universities, the authorities intervened to both prevent anonymous participation and restrict access to existing students, thereby cutting out a large and active community of graduates both in and outside China (Chiao & Wang, 2005). The security authorities have also been able to purchase internet filtering software from Western companies which have turned a blind eye to the uses their products may be put to (McCormick &

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[55] For a study of private and government sponsored internet projects in the countryside see Zhao (2008: chapters 8 & 9).
[56] Private ISPs must also connect through four internet access providers (IAPs) which are government controlled (Qiu, 1999/2000, p. 7).
[57] The implications of this will be explored in more detail in chapter seven.

Liu, 2003, p. 144). When it was pointed out that the Chinese version of Windows, launched in 1997, would permit the government to more easily block websites, Microsoft Regional Marketing Director Fernando de Sousa replied 'You could call it censorship [...but] there's nothing different in our Chinese product than in our English versions' (Taubmann, 1998, p. 265). More overt repression has also been co-operated with: the American internet company Yahoo, for instance, supplied the authorities with information from an e-mail account that led to the jailing of a Chinese journalist who contacted a US-based dissident group (Faris, 2005). I will have more to say about internet policy and users' reactions to it in chapter seven but suffice it to say here that even if not as tight as in other more traditional, institutionally based forms of media, the new medium has not escaped control.

The general conclusion that the Chinese state is weakened by the expansion of market forces in the media therefore appears to be a serious oversimplification. Lynch's implication that the government's message is obscured by the forces of commercialism seems to discount the extent to which the pursuit of profit and the depoliticisation of society is itself expressing the party line (Y. Zhao, 2008, p. 111), even if not necessarily the precise priorities of the propaganda cadres he interviewed. By perhaps too easily taking the lofty aims of 'socialist spiritual civilisation' at face value, and too quickly dismissing entertainment programming as trivial or 'off-message', Lynch perhaps underestimated the compatibility of the meanings conveyed through much of the commercialised Chinese media with the central aims of the party. Indeed, as Chu concluded with regard to the controlled commercialisation of the film industry, arguably the 'The dangerous "wolves" [of capital] have been successfully co-opted to make the authoritarian regime stronger and sustainable' (K. K. L. Chu, 2010, p. 118).

Whether these accounts are quite sufficient to explain how the CCP has managed to promote media modernisation, and yet survive, is however perhaps more debateable. As I have noted, communications scholarship has tended to point to a combination of evolving structures and methods of control, and the influence of powerful commercial interests, both domestic and foreign, that are ready to accommodate to the party-state's conditions. The evidence for these two forces can hardly be denied. In the sectors of the media examined here, traditional structures have been adapted, and in the case of new

technologies, new structures have been created that have been able to support both the forces of political control and market pressures. Yet, there is perhaps something too negative and reductive about explanations based solely on state repression and/or financial self-interest that makes one look further for something that might account for why media professionals and consumers have been generally willing to accept the limits imposed on them (Latham, 2000, pp. 653-654). An obvious answer is to simply note that for the generations of Chinese people who remember the Maoist era (directly or otherwise), and who are aware of the media strictures of those years, the current media landscape still provides a feeling of liberalisation. It is possible to also link this notion of relative progress to how both the notions of 'control' and of 'self-interest' have been positively promoted during the reform era, alongside a more negative fear of disorder if the status quo were challenged too directly (Latham, 2000, p. 650). Moreover, as I shall discuss below, there are alternatives made available by the spread of new media technologies and the pirate economy to consider. Crucially, however, the attitudes and practices of media users themselves need to be examined in order to understand some of the ideological frameworks – in Foucauldian terms, 'regimes of truth' (1980, p. 131) – that may sustain and/or challenge what has been a surprisingly resilient, if sometimes 'fragile hegemony' (Latham, 2000, p. 637) governing the Chinese media.

DVD and Downloading: New 'Guerrilla Audiences'?

The tensions involved in creating China's official semi-commercialised media edifice, as outlined above, also generate its unofficial counterpart which supplies much of what the official media structure cannot satisfy (Pang, 2006, p. 106). So, although there are financial and logistical constraints facing the Chinese media, many of the limits are ideological. Because of government censorship policies and quotas on imported films (Shujen Wang, 2003, p. 63), as well as Hollywood's own distribution and pricing strategies regarding legitimate products, if viewers were to refrain from watching pirate DVDs or downloads, much of what they currently like to watch would be either unavailable, cut or delayed – or beyond their budgets.[58] Against this background and

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[58] Recent Hollywood films not approved for release in China include, for example, *'Memoirs of a Geisha'* (2005), *'Brokeback Mountain'* (2005),*'Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men's Chest'* (2006). Films that

along with the spread and development of new media technologies, students' viewing practices, as I shall outline below, have also evolved towards a mix of DVD, downloading and online viewing – becoming what Kelly Hu (2005, p. 171) has referred to as 'guerrilla fighters in the politics of autonomy' – and exemplifying Foucault's well known maxim that 'Where there is power, there is resistance' (1978, p. 95). The degree to which this is a resistant practice is, as I shall suggest, a complicated question, but young educated Chinese in particular are taking advantage of new technologies to access materials which these have put within reach. As my most recent student informants put it, television offers 'limited choices' (*Tan Zheng – E9/35*) whereas cinema is too expensive, but the internet, can supply 'rich resources' free to anyone online (*Tao Xuhui – E9/36*).[59]

In fact, the PRC has long had this kind of unofficial undercurrent, leaking in on cassette and video from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s (Gold, 1993, pp. 909-912), shifting to VCD in the 1990s, only to be superseded by DVD at the turn of the century (Cai, 2008, pp. 132-133) and thereafter supplemented by access via the internet. The VCD format[60] which had uniquely prevailed in East Asia in the late 1990s became almost obsolete after the introduction of compressed DVD (or HDVD) from 2004 because of its greater storage capacity, which was especially useful for drama series (Cai, 2008, p. 134). This cut into the sales revenue of legal producers as well as those who had bought video rights to films, not to mention video rental shops (Cai, 2008, p. 135). The authorities reacted with a three month crackdown on DVD piracy in December 2004, collecting 154 million discs. But demand was still greater than legal supplies, for although the approval process for legal discs was faster and less strict than for film, it still can take months, whereas pirate discs can be produced rapidly for about 2RMB and sold at 5-7RMB (Cai, 2008, p. 136; Shujen Wang, 2003, pp. 63, 70). Much of the pirate DVD

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were released with cuts include *'Mission: Impossible III'* (2006) and *'Pirates of the Caribbean: at World's End'* (2007). In addition, television series such as *'Friends'* and *'Prison Break'* have not been broadcast (Barboza, 2006; Coonan, 2006; , "Does Portraying a Geisha Deserve Rebuke?" 2006; Frater & Coonan, 2006).

[59] Essay 9: third year writing classes 1 & 2 (17/18th Mar. 2010). Students are identified with pseudonyms here and subsequently as follows: 'E9/35' refers to Essay 9, student 35; 'Int. 11' refers to Interviewee 11; 'Em. 10' refers to e-mail respondent 10; 'G4/3' refers to group interview 4, student 3. For details, see appendices.

[60] The prevalence of VCD in Asia in the late 1990s has been cited as an instance of consumer power over the multinational producers, for although Hollywood studios considered the technology obsolete as early as 1996, they were forced to produce VCD versions films for the Asian market at a reduced price in order to try to compete with the flood of pirated copies (Shujen Wang, 2003, pp. 50-57).

material has been produced by legitimate factories using their spare capacity to run a shadow manufacturing operation (S Wang & Zhu, 2003, p. 109). Although the Chinese authorities have made efforts to combat this, driving some piracy overseas to countries such as Malaysia from where many discs are smuggled in (S Wang & Zhu, 2003: 112), US industry lobby groups, such as the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), estimated that many of China's 92 disc factories were involved in piracy (with an annual capacity of over 5 billion discs in 2007), including products for export. It advocated criminal cases against 20 plants but accused the government of dragging its feet over enforcement measures (IIPA, 2008, pp. 73-74).

Certainly, pirate discs are not difficult to find in China, with sellers squatting near the entrances to underground stations or on pedestrian overpasses in the evenings, attracting commuters as they return home. During a visit on the 4th October 2006 to Beijing's Xinkou Road, a well-known location for DVD sellers, I found them setting up stall after lunch with small tables and cardboard boxes in the alleyways between shops and retreating like mice into a hole whenever the police were rumoured to be approaching, though according to a vendor, when a concerted crackdown was imminent, warnings were circulated in advance.[61] A wide variety of recent films and TV series, Chinese and foreign, was on offer (from *'Lord of the Rings'* to *'Lost'*). But if none of the discs appealed, customers might be invited down to little back-alley dwellings, as I was, where more substantial stocks were available for browsing. Some discs were also sold in nearby clothing or fashion stores, literally under the counter. Likewise, in shops with a selection of legitimate copies for sale, as a customer browses through, an assistant may produce a stack of pirated titles from behind – indeed, there was one such on my university campus at BLCU. In all cases, technical quality was generally good, but any faulty disc could be brought back and exchanged. Some street sellers even provided me with their mobile phone number, printed on blank name cards.[62]

When browsing for DVDs, various sellers I spoke to between 2006 and 2007 said that their business was not yet seriously affected either by crackdowns or by alternatives

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[61] Similarly, according to one report 'The police come from time to time and we close until they've gone. But they come back in private and ask us to give them free DVDs. Then we open again' (Watts, 2006, p. 25).
[62] Xinkou Road, Beijing, 4th Oct. 2006.

sources of supply on the net.[63] According to Wen and Wang's survey of US drama viewers in China, employees tended to buy DVDs whereas students were rather more likely to download as they had more time and patience to do so (2008, p. 277). Essentially, demand was strong enough for both formats and, as much material online is from DVD rips, the two technologies have something of a complementary existence. For some students, however, DVDs still have the added advantage of allowing viewers to switch to English subtitles in order to combine their leisure activity with at least the illusion of language learning. And although downloads are free, over and above the monthly internet connection fee, pirate discs are still relatively cheap even for students (currently between 5 and 8 RMB at the time of writing; approximately US$1 or less).[64]

Nevertheless, since broadband began to be installed on campuses, downloading had become increasingly feasible. Indeed, in a reflection of wider changes, it is noticeable that the infrastructure of many Chinese universities has been transformed in recent years from institutions reminiscent of the country's state-owned industries, with cracked windows, broken chairs and smelly toilets, to places with state-of-the-art facilities, including wireless web access, air-conditioning, and new dorms. That said, not all students can afford their own computer, though increasingly it is becoming the norm.[65] Indeed, as a number of studies have found, college students are now very reliant on the web for both information and entertainment, even among those from more rural backgrounds whose internet experience is more recent (Y. Chen, 2009, p. 33; G. He, 2009, p. 117). Guo and Wu's more general survey of over 900 young 15-25 year olds in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou also indicates high levels of internet use, with video and music (ahead of news) being the most frequently mentioned reason for going online (K. Guo & Wu, 2009, pp. 82-83). In many, if not most, university dorm rooms, usually housing 6 students, there will therefore be at least one or two machines that can be used

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[63] Interviewed between Oct. 2006 and Feb. 2007. Students from provincial areas reported (Feb. 2009) that DVDs were perhaps less widely available in some smaller towns than in Beijing, but others suggested that the DVD market still held up against downloading as not everyone had a computer and some files were too big to download or were not easy to find online.

[64] Legal copies of newer films may range from about 20-40 RMB.

[65] According to a survey of 9,500 university students in Beijing and Tianjin in 2006, almost 49% had their own computers (SZNews, 2006). At the time of writing, my own enquires at BLCU suggest that most students, at least above second year, have their own computers. A similar pattern was confirmed to me by a lecturer at Minzu University (27th Oct. 2010).

for viewing together, with some students also linking up their computers to make file-sharing more convenient.[66]

File-sharing via the internet is not itself new but became considerably easier with the invention of 'bit torrent', a type of peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing mechanism created in the early 2000s by Bram Cohen (K. Hu, 2005, p. 177). Essentially it enables large files to be transferred more efficiently by dividing them up into many smaller files and avoiding server overload:

> 'One analogy to describe this process might be to visualize a group of people sitting at a table. Each person at the table can both talk and listen to any other person at the table. These people are each trying to get a complete copy of a book. Person A announces that he has pages 1-10, 23, 42-50, and 75. Persons C, D, and E are each missing some of those pages that A has, and so they coordinate such that A gives them each copies of the pages he has that they are missing. Person B then announces that she has pages 11-22, 31-37, and 63-70. Persons A, D, and E tell B they would like some of her pages, so she gives them copies of the pages that she has. The process continues around the table until everyone has announced what they have (and hence what they are missing.) The people at the table coordinate to swap parts of this book until everyone has everything. There is also another person at the table, who we'll call 'S'. This person has a complete copy of the book, and so doesn't need anything sent to him. He responds with pages that no one else in the group has. At first, when everyone has just arrived, they all must talk to him to get their first set of pages. However, the people are smart enough to not all get the same pages from him. After a short while they all have most of the book amongst themselves, even if no one person has the whole thing. In this manner, this one person can share a book that he has with many other people, without having to give a full copy to everyone that's interested. He can instead give out different parts to different people, and they will be able to share it amongst themselves. This person who we've referred to as 'S' is called a *seed* in the terminology of BitTorrent' (Dessent, 2003).

File-sharing sites offer software to facilitate the process by enabling the 'page holders' (peers) to connect to one another via a central server (a 'tracker'). As a consequence, and in contrast to other types of file transfer, the more people involved in the downloading process, the more efficiently it works. The length of time needed to download a film will vary according to size, the number of seeders and peers, but typically may take less than an hour for the most popular items, to several days for more esoteric material.

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[66] Based on dormitories at Minzu University (2005) and BLCU (2007).

In response to these developments, over 200 film Chinese downloading sites were established in 2006, including some subscription sites, but these have been largely undercut by those providing material for free (Zou, 2007) such as VeryCD, Tudou (Potato), YDY (Garden of Eden), Xunlei (Thunder) and Youku.[67] Demand for these services is considerable as entertainment (including games, music and video) is the most frequently cited use of the internet in China with over 62% of users in 2009 going online to view or download videos (CNNIC, 2010, p. 31).

Popular Chinese film viewing websites

One of the biggest sites, Xunlei, claims that over 130 million users have installed its downloading software (72+ million classed as active), with over 1.7 billion file downloads per month in February 2007.[68] In a sign of its significance, Google bought a 4% stake in the company in 2007 as a way of trying to lever its way into the Chinese market against the dominance of the locally-based search engine, Baidu, which had become popular by offering links to mp3 music downloads (Barboza, 2007). Without the legal constraints that faced Western sharing sites such as Napster, which was shut down for copyright violation after just 2 years, the file sharing sector in China has been quite innovative. Xunlei's downloader is based on what it calls P2SP, namely, using additional links to servers as well as peers, in order to enhance download speeds. Once installed by the user, Xunlei's software acts as a download file manager. Files, including music, video,

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[67] See www.verycd.com, www.sfileydy.com, www.youku.com, www.xunlei.com (accessed 17th Aug. 2010). YDY, BTChina and a number of other file-sharing sites were ordered offline in crackdown in late 2009 against those operating without a license (Jia Chen & Wang, 2009), though some, including YDY, subsequently re-opened.

[68] Data from Xunlei's website: http://pstatic.xunlei.com/about/other/banner.html (accessed 6th Aug. 2010). 1 billion = 1000 million.

films and software, can be found using the search box. Once a file is selected, users can see the progress of a currently downloading file as well as a list of those already downloaded, and while they are waiting, can get on with other activities. Essentially, the software makes downloading a relatively user-friendly experience without any need to know much about the terminology of servers, peers, seeds and trackers that lies behind it.
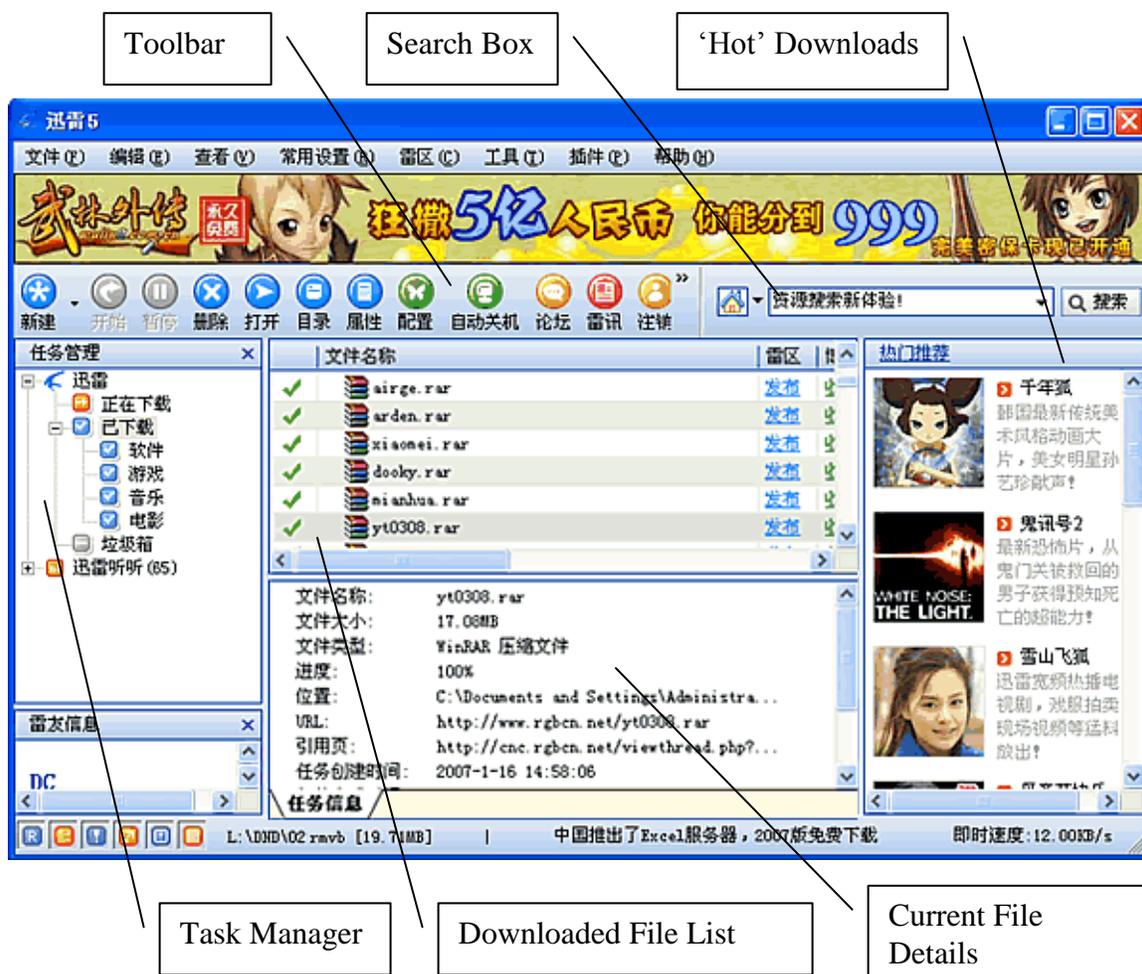
Xunlei file-sharing software[69]

Some sites such as Tudou, Youku, Ku6 and Xunlei's 'Kankan' allow for viewing online and others have brought out streaming internet TV software such as PPLive created at Huazhong University (now used, incidentally, by some European football fans

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[69] From Xunlei's website: http://pstatic.xunlei.com/about/other/banner.html (accessed 18th. Aug. 2010).

to by-pass their local subscription-based channels in order to watch Chinese channels'
free coverage of the English Premier League or Italian Seria A, etc.).[70] Most of the
download sites depend on advertising[71] rather than subscription and typically provide
film information as well as cartoons, and sometimes games, software, and so on. Many
also have their own bulletin board systems (BBS) with recommendations, comments,
technical tips, and also act as a place for subtitle translation groups to organise and recruit
members.

Viewing Patterns

As students' internet access has improved and as sites have developed, there has been a
drift towards certain larger more popular brands providing either online viewing or
resources for downloading, or in some cases, both. In essence, viewing methods have
diversified from discs to web-based methods of access, whilst sites themselves have
begun to consolidate towards a number of 'strong brands' that offer both convenience and
a wide range of resources ('My Internet' Brand Awareness Report 2008).

      During my preliminary study in mid 2005 at Minzu University, students'
predominant viewing method was still DVD as few had immediate access to television
and broadband was only in the process of being installed. Although newer dormitory
buildings had a TV lounge, each student room was provided with dial-up internet access
and therefore some students had begun to try out downloading. But at the time, speeds
were still too slow to make this a convenient option, so students were still more likely to
watch pirate discs on their computers, either buying in nearby outlets or from street
sellers. Because they viewed regularly, some rented DVDs from a shop on campus or
even from other students who had collections and wished to make a little extra money.
One girl told me she had over 2000 discs, though this was exceptional, especially as
space was at a premium in their cramped shared living quarters.[72] As for cinema
attendance, few were willing to buy a ticket when the same price would buy 5 or 6 pirate
discs, or rent as many as 25.

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[70] See www.tudou.com, www.youku.com, www.ku6.com, www.xunlei.com,
www.pplive.com/en/index.html, and http://allp2ptv.org/index.php (accessed 17th Aug. 2010).
[71] See, for instance, Xunlei: http://pstatic.xunlei.com/about/service/inmedia.htm (accessed 30th Jul. 2010).
[72] 15th Jun. 2005, Minzu University.

By the time of my main fieldwork in 2006-2007, broadband was fully installed in dorms at both sites I investigated, as well as other universities in Beijing, and so downloading, alongside DVD watching, had become prevalent. Some students told me how film watching had become a new habit for them as their high school days were almost entirely focused on preparing for college entrance exams (*Sun Lin – Int. 11*).[73] For others, however, campus life merely entailed a change in viewing methods: 'Before university I'd often buy DVDs, and now I have enough speed to download films, so I download more' (*Cai Minjia – Em. 10*). Many students had come to rely quite heavily on the internet for entertainment in their dorms and generally, most were satisfied with network speeds, although they could be erratic at times, and depended on the service provider the students had chosen. As one of my interviewees told me 'we will have one or two films in a week [...] but I guess if I had a very high internet speed access I might actually download every day' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). Some also mentioned that they had begun to watch online using video sharing sites such as Tudou and Youku. These were originally set up as the Chinese equivalents of the US video sharing site YouTube, though they have subsequently diverged from the original model with significantly more professionally produced content, either uploaded by users or licensed by the sites.[74] Nevertheless, as online video had been only recently been established (Tudou in 2005, Youku in late 2006), downloading was still the more favoured option for students at that time.

Later, however, online viewing had become more popular. When I asked two classes in 2010 to write an account of how they chose films and TV programmes and what viewing methods they preferred, both downloading and online viewing had become established as the preferred methods.[75] Virtually all the students accessed most of their viewing material through the internet as it was much more convenient simply to go online, despite having TV rooms on each floor of their dormitory buildings. As students pointed

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[73] See appendices for details on interviewees. Students are identified here and subsequently as follows: 'Int. 11' refers to interviewee 11; 'Em. 10' refers to E-mail respondent 10; 'E1/3' refers to essay 1, student 3; 'G4/3' refers to group interview 4, student 3.

[74] Youku, for instance, has licensing agreements with many local television production companies; see http://www.youku.com/about/en/faq/ (accessed 25th Jul. 2010). In Feb. 2010, Youku and Tudou also announced an agreement to share films and TV series they had bought copyright to after Ku6.com and Sohu.com created a US$10 million copyright fund in Dec 2009 (Q. Zhao, 2010).

[75] Essay 9: third year writing classes 1 & 2 (17/18th Mar. 2010).

out, resources on the web could be accessed at any time without having to conform to TV scheduling and moreover, the range of material available was much greater:

> 'I don't like to watch TV because the time and the programs are set which is extremely inconvenient. What's more, there are not so many interesting programs. I don't want to go to the cinema because it's expensive. Watching online is great for the reason that it's fast and free and I could choose from a large number of different films' (*Ren Qiangwei – E9/29*).

Even those who had a favourable attitude to certain types of TV series found it easier to access them through websites.[76] Cinema, on the other hand, was widely agreed to be a luxury and more of a social event as it required someone to go with – usually classmates or a boy or girlfriend (see also Pang, 2006, p. 108). Only exceptional films such as the 3D blockbuster *'Avatar'* (2009) were mentioned as perhaps worth paying for in order to appreciate the special effects. Similarly, by this point, DVD had become a more specialist format for students. Some, for instance, appreciated the multi-lingual subtitles on DVD which could help them with their language learning. Others would also consider buying 'classic' films such as *'Casablanca'* (1942) or *'Great Expectations'* (1946) which they regarded as worth collecting for repeated viewing, though some complained that legal DVDs were either too expensive or unavailable in China. Generally, however, most preferred to access content via the web.

Preferences were more divided on the merits of viewing directly online versus downloading.[77] Youku and Tudou were the most frequently mentioned sites for online viewing with Xunlei and VeryCD (using eMule software) most often mentioned for downloading. The first three of these sites are placed highly in Chinese internet traffic rankings while VeryCD is in the entertainment category top twenty.[78] Students said they

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[76] Students interviewed by Einav at a number of American universities also reported that convenience was a major motive for downloading (Einav, 2008, pp. 152-153).

[77] Wen and Wang's survey also reported broadly equal preferences for downloading and online viewing (2008, p. 277).

[78] All three websites were ranked by Nielsen Media Research in the top twenty Chinese sites in Jan. 2010 (measured by unique visitor traffic). Youku ranked 9th, Tudou 10th and Xunlei 15th (see http://www.cr-nielsen.com/traffic/rank/UB/201002/02-1677.html; accessed 26th Jul. 2010). In the entertainment site category including music download and other types of entertainment news site, Xunlei ranked first, with

chose them for the wide range of material they offered and the reasonable download speeds.

The sheer convenience of online viewing was a priority for some as there was no need to install software or store large video files and therefore 'Since I can watch them smoothly on the Internet, why bother downloading?' (*Rong Haofen – E9/30*). Downloaders, however, cited the lower picture quality when viewing online and the problem of buffering during peak periods. There was also the annoyance of being interrupted by commercials. As TV adverts were often cited as an additional reason to turn to computer-based viewing, some felt frustrated by their appearance in online video: 'I used to fall in love with Tudou, but I can not tolerate it any more, as advertisements kill me!' (*Ru Shaomei – E9/31*).[79] Other students, however, took a more pragmatic approach, for example, watching Hong Kong TV series online when picture quality was not a priority, but downloading US dramas in order to obtain clearer subtitles and to review episodes at a later date (*Sha Chaofeng – E9/32*).

Translation Groups

Subtitles are an area where a degree of direct 'grass roots' user participation can still be observed in the film watching process, despite the rise of big brand websites such as Youku, Tudou and Xunlei and the increasing use of licensed content. For although digitisation has ensured that the picture quality of pirated products has improved considerably compared to the wobbly hand-held videos taken from cinema screenings that were previously resorted to, the quality of subtitles can still be erratic, especially when rushed out by commercial operators using cheap part-time labour as translators. However, as Pang Laikwan (2006) pointed out, attitudes to product piracy have their disguised imbalances. Although pirates can now manage to obtain high quality copies – often leaked from post-production processing – their subtitles sometimes rely heavily on

VeryCD 11th according to China Websites Ranking, the official Chinese internet ranking site, run in partnership with Nielsen (http://www.chinarank.org.cn/category/Rank.do?categoryid=25921&issitelist=1; accessed 26th Jul. 2010). Meanwhile, among specialist online video-sharing sites, Youku and Yudou were ranked first and second by Nielsen Media Research (Jan. 2010; http://www.cr-nielsen.com/traffic/category/video/201002/02-1671.html; accessed 26th Jul. 2010).

[79] Since 2007, Tudou began to show advertisements surrounding, preceding and sometimes within video clips (see http://www.tudou.com/about/about_us.php; accessed 27th Jul. 2010). Youku also shows similar types of commercial (http://www.youku.com/about/en/faq/; accessed 28th Jul 2010).

local cultural or generic expectations to fill gaps in linguistic knowledge (Pang, 2006, pp. 76-78). This is generally considered to be further evidence of the moral shabbiness of pirate activity. Yet, as Pang notes, Hollywood studios when they purchase Asian film distribution rights in the US, routinely demand the right to alter the original film, changing dialogue, titles, making cuts, and so forth, to make it acceptable to the US market. On the other hand, the studios will generally attempt to minimise the adaptation of Hollywood products abroad which, other than dubbing, are imposed as a default standard (Pang, 2006, pp. 78-79).

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that some pirate subtitling is, in fact, little better than educated guesswork. My downloaded copy of *'Casino Royale'*, the 2006 Bond film, bore little relation to the original script. Similarly, on a DVD ripped copy of *'Brokeback Mountain'* (2005) which I downloaded from the Film Empire site, the beginnings of intimacy when the two cowboys start gradually confiding in each other, are almost entirely erased by the translation.[80] As they sit by their camp fire, Ennis speaks about his family circumstances for the first time, prompting Jack to respond with a quizzical smile at his friend's uncharacteristic openness:

Soundtrack	*Chinese Subtitles (Translated)*
E: What?	*E:* What?
J: That's more word than you spoke in the past two weeks.	*J:* In the last two weeks there still hasn't been any work we can do.
E: Hell, that's the most I spoke in a year.	*E:* When I was watching you smoking I understood.

In such cases, the subtitles are based on an amalgam of word misrecognitions (here mistaking 'word' for 'work' and 'spoke' for 'smoke') and contextual guesswork (the sight of Jack with a cigarette) which gives the film only a fragmentary sense, at best.

Of course, pirate versions will vary in quality and admittedly, *'Brokeback Mountain'* is a difficult task for any translator, with its heavily accented dialect and sometimes mumbly dialogue. Overall, the extent to which mistranslations affect the

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[80] Downloaded Dec. 2006 (http://bt2.cnxp.com). This copy, incidentally, was a leaked 'screener'; i.e. a copy uploaded by a Hollywood academy award insider (complete with telltale 'For your consideration' on screen). Hollywood studios were so concerned about such leaks that screeners were banned in 2003. They were subsequently re-introduced but often with digital 'watermarks' so that the leaker can be traced, though this in itself may not prove who the precise culprit was (Jardin, 2006).

interpretations of a film is beyond any straightforward quantification. The worst are easily identifiable, if only because they are internally incoherent. Some, on the other hand, contain only minor slips that would not seriously affect overall comprehension. Hovering in between is a third, potentially more misleading category in which the translation maintains a semblance of inner consistency but still veers jaggedly away from the original plot. Subtitles in a pirate DVD of the 2004 film *'Closer'* can illustrate the point. Alice and Dan meet on a bus and start to chat about their careers: [81]

Soundtrack	*Chinese Subtitles (Translated)*
D: …I had no talent. So I ended up in obituaries, which is…	*D:* I love singing. I can sing many songs.
D: …the Siberia of journalism.	*D:* …including German folk songs.
A: Tell me what you do. I wanna imagine you in Siberia.	*A:* I hope I'll have a chance to hear you sing.
D: Really?	*D:* Really?

A little later, when Alice candidly reveals that she has been 'stripping' for a living, this is rendered as 'struggling'. As local translators themselves struggle to fill gaps in their linguistic knowledge, they draw upon their own expectations of the society portrayed on screen (Pang, 2006, pp. 77-78).

However, the challenge of poor translation as well as entirely untranslated material is itself something that has generated a response from fans (Q. Chen, 2007, pp. B04-B05). One of the most striking features of the Chinese downloading scene is the self-organised, non-commercial subtitling groups ('fansubbers') that have responded to fill the gap.[82] Though they also translate films, their competitive spirit is driven, in particular, by drama series which have long runs and distinct 'seasons' that can generate a momentum of popularity that produces obsessive fan bases; moreover, as DVD pirates prefer to sell dramas bundled up as a complete series, online volunteers meet fans' demand for translations more quickly, episode by episode (K. Hu, 2008, p. 177). Translators are typically recruited by voluntary groups on the downloading sites' BBS forums. For instance, the 'YTET' subtitle group, operating on the YDY (Eden) site, recruited English,

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[81] See analysis by John Pasden, a US expatriate in China:
http://www.sinosplice.com/life/archives/2005/03/23/closer-subtitle-surrealism (accessed 4th Aug. 2010).
[82] Fansubbing originated in the US with amateur subtitling of Japanese cartoons on video cassette in the 1980s which were otherwise unavailable in English (Hatcher, 2005, pp. 519-520).

French, Japanese and even German speakers, as well as experienced users of subtitling software. Successful applicants were expected to be able to complete 400 lines of dialogue per day, providing detailed specifications of their accuracy levels and language proficiency, according to national college English test level scores, and were often given an episode to translate to test their skills. Once recruited, members were required to work under a moderator who announced a menu of tasks which the volunteers select from and finish within a specified time (three days in YTET's case).[83]

Different groups have slightly different standards, but an 'SCG' fansub group member in one of my classes (*Xing Zhangcai – Em. 14*) said she was required to translate a five minute segment of drama for the group after responding to a recruitment announcement online in 2008.[84] Members can then become proofreaders after having worked on five films or dramas but only if approved by five other proofreaders. According to a member of another group interviewed by one of my student contacts (22nd Jun. 2007), a skilled translator can complete 100 lines of dialogue per hour which, theoretically speaking, means that an average episode would take 8 hours. Additional time is then required for other technical matters. In the case of TV series, the original files are often supplied by group members living abroad, both Chinese students and expatriates, who will initially record the programme in its country of broadcast and send it online. Members then listen to their assigned section, transcribe it into Chinese and pass it on to proofreaders who will forward the final version to be input as subtitles. A link to the completed episode is then posted on the download site (L. Hu, 2006, p. 91). YTET, for instance, had subtitled almost 1000 films by the end of 2007, including 719 US and European, 168 Korean, 73 Japanese, 9 Indian, 2 other Asian and 8 miscellaneous, in addition to 156 TV series. Links to these and other groups' subtitles can also be found via specialised search engines such as Shooter (射手).[85]

Though speed to 'market' wins much kudos, some fans, like connoisseurs, begin develop a loyalty to a certain subtitling groups as reliable 'brands'. With each download file typically displaying the group's name or logo, clearly there is an element of pride in

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[83] See http://www.sfileydy.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=225. Recruitment postings for other such translation groups can be found at http://www.yyets.net/thread-14524-1-1.html and http://www.1000fr.net/viewthread.php?tid=101926 (accessed 7th Aug. 2010).
[84] See Sheng Cheng Garden site: http://bbs.cnscg.com/ (accessed 18th Aug. 2010).
[85] See http://shooter.cn (accessed 18th Aug. 2010).

the groups' reputations for both speed and accuracy and competition among them. One member blogged of how the thought of millions of viewers seeing his words gave him a kind of inner lift, which according to Chen (2007, p. B05), typified members' feelings of satisfaction in the attempt to match the quality of the films and programmes they love, though the ultimate root of the volunteers' motivation seemed somewhat elusive even to themselves.[86] Yet, the pursuit of perfection remains caught in the tension between the demands of speed versus quality. To be first with the latest episode is one thing, but to be best is another. Endless debates are possible over whether or how to translate culturally specific references or edgy foreign slang or jokes into Chinese equivalents (Q. Chen, 2007, p. B04).

Reportage in various Chinese weekly magazines on the rise of the translation groups reflects some of the exuberance of the participants and an admiration for their dedication, initiative and grassroots organisational capacity as well as perhaps a general 'techno-excitement' over the development of the internet world (Q. Chen, 2007, pp. B04-B05; L. Hu, 2006, pp. 90-91; Hua, 2007, pp. 68-69; Yu Wang, 2009). But along with this goes some defensiveness about its edgy relationship to propriety (e.g. Hua, 2007, p. 69; Yu Wang, 2009). Each film for download will invariably include a disclaimer scrolling across the screen stating that the file copyright remains with the original production company and is therefore only for educational, not commercial use. Users are asked to delete the file after 24 hours and invited to buy the legitimate product if they enjoyed it (G. He & Yao, 2007, p. 71). Those involved are undoubtedly aware that they are working in a 'grey area' of legality, but take refuge in the notion that they derive no personal financial benefit from the activity.[87] Indeed, a flavour of this ambivalence can be seen on the websites themselves. For instance, 'VeryCD', through its copyright statement, claims not to be responsible for links to content that is, in fact, stored on users' computers.[88] Nevertheless, they claim to take copyright very seriously and promise, if contacted in

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[86] Motivations may vary. A volunteer translator contacted on my behalf (22nd Jun. 2007) denied that language learning was her main motive: 'There are lots of ways for learning English way more efficient than doing translations'. However, another (*Xing Zhangcai – Em. 14*) whom I interviewed (24th Jul. 2010) said that she joined because she wanted to be an interpreter in future. Having been a member for almost two years, she noted that many drop out after a few months as relatively few are willing to devote the time and effort required.

[87] For similar arguments made by fansubbers elsewhere, see Hatcher (2005, pp. 531-533, 537).

[88] See http://www.verycd.com/about/law/ (accessed 30th Jul. 2010).

writing with all the relevant details, to delete any link to violators, but with so many links and so many download sites, this is not a very practical proposition.

With downloaders' unauthorized defiance of official distribution, or in many cases its lack in the Chinese market, Kelly Hu (2005, pp. 181-184) described the pirate disc and downloading trend in terms of guerrilla-style underground activities which allow 'the restructuring of time-space' (p. 174) whereby peripheral audiences are able to evade the constraints of their national and socio-economic position, making 'individual self-fulfilment possible' (p. 184).[89] Cai Rong's review of DVD consumption in China has also pointed to a move away from almost ritualised collective TV watching to a more individualised mode of consumption (Cai, 2008, p. 142; also G. He & Yao, 2007, p. 71; W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 282) as the combination of government censorship and restrictions on imports as well as the higher cost of cinema tickets push consumers towards pirated products (Cai, 2008, p. 138). Cai therefore suggests that 'Video technologies can be subversive devices – they can lead to social relaxations and even ideological challenges to the status quo' (2008, p. 139). From a commercial perspective, piracy and digital distribution have also undermined Hollywood's strategy of segmenting audiences through sequenced releases on various media – cinema, DVD, cable and so forth – as well as differential release dates and prices in each DVD region in order to maximise revenues (Shujen Wang, 2003, pp. 9, 13-14).[90] To that extent, DVDs and downloading have offered the more urban educated sections of Chinese society, in particular, a greater degree of agency over what and when to view in defiance of certain state and corporate interests, and thus, as 'A centrifugal force, it helps to diffuse the centralized production of knowledge and social coherence, giving viewers the power to structure their private time and leisure activities to define their own meaning' (Cai, 2008, p. 144).

Up to a point, this is undeniable. Since the open-door policy began in the late 1970s, the mutable, chameleon nature of unofficial traffic in entertainment media has been something of a constant, first eroding the state's and then the commercial world's

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[89] Hu observed websites based in Taiwan and Hong Kong, but which attracted Chinese speaking participants from various communities including the PRC.
[90] By producing DVD machines which can play discs from any zone, Asian manufacturers have played a role in undermining this strategy (Shujen Wang, 2003, p. 191).

efforts to stabilise their versions of legitimacy. As Gold noted with regard to the inflow of popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s and early 1990s, it created the potential for young mainland Chinese to inhabit a 'zone of indifference' to the hegemonic voice of the authorities (1993, p. 924). From a Foucauldian and Deleuzian perspective, the practice of accessing material that is either suppressed or cannot be easily admitted within the officially sanctioned media structure may therefore be seen to constitute a means of resistance, or at least an evasion of controls over the free flow of desire. On the other hand, as Hu herself accepts (2005, p. 182), it should not be assumed that this is necessarily how it is experienced. These are, in fact, complex matters that will be explored in greater depth below and in subsequent chapters, but it is sufficient to note here that the supposedly subversive motivation and excitement generated by the phenomenon may be as much an act of identification with certain state priorities as their transgression. That is to say, when they 'define their own meaning', users of new media may, for instance, be driven by a desire for 'up-to-dateness', catching up with the rest of the world, and in the case of online translators, the opportunity to deploy their skills whilst providing a virtuous, and even patriotic, 'public service' in giving others access to material free of charge. As noted in chapter one, such practices may form a place from which we can begin to explore how young Chinese use media to 'self-globalise', observing and absorbing new lifestyles from popular drama series – what one of my students referred to as a 'Chinese American dream' (see chapter five) – and constituting what Zizek has called the 'ideological fantasies' that potentially provide the kind of supplementary enjoyment that, paradoxically, give the current order support (1999a, pp. 184-186). The issue of subversiveness should not therefore be discounted, but it is a more open question. Participants in these semi-underground networks of cultural exchange are not necessarily to be understood as burrowing underneath the official structure which controls the 'production of knowledge', but may also be seen as repair teams filling in the gaps and thereby reinforcing the structure.

Chapter 3.   Frustrated Aspirations: Negotiating Asian Hybridity

As I noted in chapter two, students were among the vanguard of those who took advantage of the new media technologies provided via DVD and downloading in order to access entertainment that was often otherwise unavailable through traditional channels. To that extent, my respondents positively embraced the opportunities to participate in a more cosmopolitan China and, as aspirant members of a new 'white collar' middle class, they by no means rejected media globalisation wholesale. However, China's 'opening up'[1] to outside media creates certain ambivalent, and even hostile, responses among young audiences, as I discuss below.

In analysing young people's responses to these contradictions, I will focus on two recent trends in the Chinese entertainment scene, namely, the rise of the Chinese martial arts blockbuster, and the so-called 'Korean wave' of popular culture, particularly drama series, sweeping through China and other parts of East Asia. Drawing on data from student interviews, essays and e-mail contacts, I will examine my respondents' reactions to these in the first and second parts of the chapter respectively.[2] Both trends can be regarded as instances of globalisation and the particular types of cultural hybridity this creates and therefore offer interesting case studies of often frustrated and negative reactions to such developments. As such, this analysis will also help establish the context against which my respondents' preferences for Hollywood films and series, discussed in subsequent chapters, can be understood.

Responses to the Chinese Blockbuster

As I noted briefly in chapter two, while Hollywood has toyed with translating Chinese elements into its own forms and formulas, the Chinese film industry has responded in reverse, appropriating Hollywood formats to present its own domestic genres (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 210-212; R. Kraus & Wan, 2002, pp. 131-132; T. Wang, 2009, p. 300). In contrast to their earlier films, Zhang Yimou's and Chen Kaige's more recent

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[1] The phrase 'opening up' was associated with Deng Xiaoping's pro-market policies in the 1980s (Dillon, 2009, p. 18)

[2] Students are identified with pseudonyms here and subsequently as follows: 'E9/35' refers to Essay 9, student 35; 'Int. 11' refers to Interviewee 11; 'Em. 10' refers to E-mail respondent 10; 'G4/3' refers to group interview 4, student 3. For details, see appendices.

productions such as *'Hero'* (2002), *'The Promise'* (2005), and *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* (2006) aspired to the Hollywood blockbuster model, and more particularly Ang Lee's successful hybrid variant, *'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'* (2000) (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 69-73; Klein, 2004a, pp. 19-20, 32). The new Chinese blockbuster[3] aimed to make an impact internationally, both artistically and financially, by upgrading production values and marketing methods with a populist, identifiably Chinese content. In these terms, it was an attempt to present the national through a transnational genre (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 195) and thus save the domestic industry, as I noted in chapter two. This move was controversial and perhaps even contradictory, as I discuss below. But the potential strength of the strategy was evidenced by the way Hollywood had already begun to anticipate it, internalising aspects of the genre, for instance in *'The Matrix'* (1999), or more recently in the stylised fight scenes of *'Casino Royale'* (2006), thereby helping to eclipse the long held B-movie status of Chinese culture (from Charlie Chan to Jackie Chan) in the Western viewers' imagination (Foster, 2007; Klein, 2004b, p. 361).

Against this background, my students' negative reactions might seem somewhat surprising. Almost without exception, my informants were disparaging about the new genre and Chinese martial arts (*wuxia*) dramas in general. After hearing of big budgets and casts of thousands, they often described the results as 'very disappointing', 'meaningless' and ultimately 'not creative', as one student put it (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). The issue came up initially in my recorded interviews, not only when students cited particular preferences, but also when explaining why they preferred foreign material – I then subsequently decided to ask two classes to write an essay on the topic (Essay 5) in order to explore the extent of such views and on what basis they were held.[4] In this section, I will therefore briefly sketch the cultural significance of the Chinese blockbuster as a response to the entry into the Chinese market of its Hollywood equivalent, and then go on to analyse what the cultural costs were deemed to be, why students objected and how this

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[3] *'dapian'*; '大片'.

[4] I asked two classes (third year writing class 1 & 2) to write on the topic (Essay 5: 22nd & 23rd Mar. 2007). Publicity surrounding Zhang Yimou's *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* (premiered 12th Nov. 2006), was current at the time.

related to their conception of the way China should or should not engage with the wider world.

Rising China

It is now a truism to suggest that the new blockbuster represents China's global rise: 'In this digital age, a world-class power produces world-class movies' (Foster, 2007). However, as Xu reminds us, 'the effect of China's rise on the world has more to do with the ways in which different political and ideological agendas manipulate the *representations* of the rise than with the rise itself' (G. G. Xu, 2007, p. 2). Indeed, it has been claimed that by projecting a populist cultural vision of Chineseness to the world 'the era of ping-pong diplomacy has clearly been replaced by an era of kung fu diplomacy' (Eperjesi, 2004, p. 27). Zhang Yimou himself, when interviewed about *'Hero'*, also accepted the role of cultural ambassador, claiming that 'What I have done is sell Chinese culture with the help of the Chinese martial arts genre film' (quoted in G. G. Xu, 2007, p. 36). So, although the Hong Kong martial arts cinema tradition has often expressed a degree of underdog nationalism (Desser, 2006, p. 143; S. L. Li, 2001, p. 518), as Berry and Farquhar point out (2006, pp. 208-209), the genre represents more of a 'negotiation with' rather than an outright 'resistance to' a dominant Hollywood that by the mid 1990s was seriously threatening the Chinese domestic industry.[5] Yet, through the adoption of an already syncretic genre, the technical achievements of mainland directors' new blockbusters have undoubtedly showcased China's economic advance, demonstrating that it can match anything the West can offer, whilst still maintaining a national distinctiveness by presenting a tradition of Chinese superior moral virtue. As Foster noted, we see 'poetry recited while defeating foes', with heroic status defined by loyalty and self-discipline (2007).

However, in line with some of my respondents' concerns, the genre's critical reception in China was surprisingly mixed, especially considering the rise of post-Tiananmen, pre-Olympic, nationalism (C. R. Hughes, 2006, p. 1; K. Liu, 2004, p. 24;

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[5] The obvious instance of 'negotiation' is the Bruce Lee films of the 1970s, not only through the star's origins as an American-born Hong Kong Chinese, but also the way his persona incorporated a degree of Western style erotic masculinity. Subsequently, Jackie Chan in *'Rumble in the Bronx'* (1994), for example, has also expanded the martial arts genre beyond its traditional Chinese cultural origins (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 1-2, 200-201; S. L. Li, 2001, pp. 517, 528-529).

Unger, 1996, p. xi; S. Zhao, 1998, pp. 287-288) and widespread political and popular aspirations for China to project itself outwards to the world. So although Chinese reviews and critical commentary invariably mentioned the films' technical prowess and box office success,[6] they tended to do so in somewhat pejorative terms. Reviews of Zhang Yimou's *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* were, for instance, distinctly mixed – an 'unrealistic spectacle' according to Ng (2007).[7] The director's previous film, *'House of The Flying Daggers'* (2004), was likewise accused by mainland critics of prioritising 'style over substance' (T. Wang, 2009, p. 307). Similarly, according to Xu (2007, p. 27), the cinema audience in Beijing where he saw the film was distinctly restless, heckling when Zhang Ziyi survived her wounds, for instance. The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT),[8] whilst supporting the making of blockbusters in principle, also picked up this mood of discontent, commenting that such films must address the problem of 'gaining audiences but not applause' (SARFT, 2007b). And in spite of their general admiration for foreign films, my informants readily criticised the new blockbuster for adopting a 'Hollywood-style' that 'misled many foreigners' about Chinese culture, as one essay writer put it (*Bi Yufang – E5/2*). Rather than representing a 'win-win' situation that matched Hollywood production and promotion techniques to Chinese culture and values in a way that domestic audiences would wish to celebrate, students seemed more sensitive to the costs and sacrifices this involved in the battle to define the cultural perception of China.

Reactions: Selling Out?

In interviews and essays over the course of my fieldwork, students sometimes remarked upon the technical sophistication and spectacle of Hollywood productions. The sheer grandeur of the new domestic genre therefore offered a potential focus for national pride in a resurgent China, but as I already noted, there were reports of mainland audiences' unease with its flouting of generic expectations in pursuit of foreign sales.[9] The new

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[6] In 2004-2006 domestic films achieved over 50% of the box office share (Yeh & Davies, 2008: 44).

[7] For a summary of reactions see Martinsen (2007).

[8] *'Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju'*; '国家广播电影电视总局'.

[9] The reportedly lukewarm response of Chinese audiences despite box office success was perhaps partly a consequence of a highly professional, Hollywood-inspired marketing campaign generating expectations that were not met (T. Wang, 2009, pp. 302-304, 308-309; also G. G. Xu, 2007, pp. 27-28). However,

Chinese films' flexible reconfiguration of established cultural boundaries can be regarded as one of the consequences of a broader process of economic globalisation (see Duara, 2005: 51; Ong, 1999, p. 240), but whatever the advantages of such flexibility, as Ong has emphasised, they are by no means evenly spread, with well-connected new middle class urban elites arguably benefiting disproportionately (Ong, 1999, p. 11). It is therefore a small step from here to a suspicion that wider national interests are being 'sold out' for the benefit of a minority with their own definition of what the national interest is. As Zhao Yuezhi put it, 'as "China goes Hollywood" by reshaping its film industry and incorporating Hollywood financial and cultural capital as well as its business practices and narrative styles, Hollywood incorporates China into "global Hollywood"...' (2008, p. 165).[10] One way to interpret audience objections is therefore to see them as a negative reaction to the process of hybridisation, or negotiation, involved in producing such films.

Yet, as theorists of cultural hybridity such as Appadurai (1996, p. 4) and Bhabha (1994, pp. 7-8) have argued, the spread and growth of transnational media also has a certain liberatory potential, offering greater agency vis-à-vis the power of the state and fixed culturally conservative understandings of identity. Indeed, it might be said that my respondents, as both foreign language learners and digital media consumers, were living examples of the more cosmopolitan citizenry that China's participation in international markets requires (see Duara, 2005, p. 51). As such, they now had the freedom to bypass Chinese state television and side-step film censorship or quota restrictions by picking up a pirate DVD or downloading a film online. So as part of a modernising China and as aspirant members of such elites, my students welcomed the freedom to view many mainstream Hollywood productions, but nevertheless, they still overwhelmingly disliked the new Chinese equivalent.

Such was the hype surrounding these films (T. Wang, 2009, pp. 302, 306-307) that virtually all students had picked up some of the publicity and reactions to the films as they came out – though not all of it favourable. One of my interviewees, for instance, told

whatever the strengths and weaknesses of each of these films, the reasons for the cool reaction to the genre as a whole remain opaque.

[10] The independent Chinese filmmaker, Jia Zhangke, criticised Chinese directors for their 'ridiculous attempt[s] to imitate Hollywood' as part of a more general process of globalization as 'Americanization' (T. Lu, 2006, p. 139). However, even if only particularly successful, the effort to produce blockbusters in China and elsewhere in Asia can also be seen as an attempt at 'de-westernization' of the genre (Berry, 2003, pp. 218, 223-225).

me that she had not seen Zhang Yimou's *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* (2006) but had heard on the radio just after its Beijing premiere that the film was 'nothing interesting' (*Wen Hongju – Int. 3*).[11] Others, as I will show later, had come across comments and articles circulating on the internet. At least in the case of Zhang Yimou's *'Hero'*, some Chinese critics' and reviewers' hostility was political.[12] The way the first emperor's would-be assassin is portrayed giving up his opportunity to rid the people of a brutal dictator seemed to show uncritical support for national unity above human rights (see T. Wang, 2009, pp. 303-304).[13] However, among my interviewees, only a student who was preparing for his postgraduate entrance exam in sociology (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*) interpreted *'Hero'* in a political way, seeing the film as a plea for loyalty to the state until Taiwan was returned to the motherland.

But this was an exception. The main complaint of my respondents did not concern the film's message but rather that it told the same story over and over from varying perspectives and therefore lacked an interesting plot.[14] In my first recorded interview, for instance, I asked two girls to talk about their film watching experiences and after discussing a number of recent Hollywood releases such as *'Harry Potter'* and *'The Da Vinci Code'*, their conversation moved on to recent Chinese films they liked and disliked. But they expressed disappointment at the recent turn in Zhang Yimou's career and only gave *'Hero'* praise for its use of colour (*Yao Yang – Int. 2*). In spite of the complex presentation of the plot, they considered the basic story to be 'too simple' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*) and they even suggested 'maybe [Zhang Yimou] just wants to fool the audience because he uses three ways or maybe four ways to tell the same story' (*Yao Yang – Int. 2*). As I will discuss further below, the idea that Chinese directors might be trying to cheat their audiences in some way was a theme that recurred from time to time in students' narratives. Other interviewees also mentioned that they 'like[d] the colour of the films', in one case because her hobby was photography (*Zhu Shangru – Int. 16*), but this was not

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[11] The interview took place on the 15th Dec. 2006, the day after *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* was premiered in Beijing.

[12] For an overview of critical reactions to Zhang Yimou, see Zhang and Ping (2010).

[13] A similar endorsement of tough state centralism was also evident in a sub-genre of television costume dramas such as *'Yongzheng Dynasty'* (1999) and *'Kangxi Dynasty'* (2001) which, since the 1990s, have become a major form of programming (Y. Zhu, 2008, pp. 28-32; Ying Zhu, Keane, & Bai, 2008, p. 7).

[14] *'Hero'* focuses on the story of an assassination attempt on the King of Qin, but is told in a complex series of colour-coded flashbacks from the perspectives of the would-be assassins and the king himself.

enough to redeem the genre as a whole. One student's comment that Chen Kaige's *'The Promise'* was 'really beautiful but terrible' was a fairly standard response (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*). Even a fan of *'Hero'* who actually appreciated its innovative narrative style, using different characters' perspectives in symbolically coloured flashbacks, nevertheless had doubts about the blockbuster trend as a whole. As a student of literature who was preparing for postgraduate entrance exams, he appreciated a certain sophistication in 'the way stories could be told and how truth could be altered' but 'when [...] the most famous director in China continued to do this kind of film, you know the kind of high class, the ancient, some kind of kung fu style film and forgot about real life, people do not like this [...]' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*).

My students' judgements of Chinese blockbusters of this kind included a range of critical comments which were often intertwined with their views on other genres. In the following case which took place shortly after Zhang Yimou's latest film *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* opened in Beijing, I interviewed two girls together who were in my third year writing class. They were roommates, both from Beijing, and had mentioned downloading US series such as *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Prison Break'*. But when I enquired about the reasons for these programmes' more general popularity with students in China, they launched into extended and lively outburst against the quality, first of Chinese costume dramas and then, as I shall discuss later, the shortcomings of Zhang Yimou's blockbusters. There is a double offence, for instance, identified in the following exchanges on Chinese historical series:

> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): '[...] so many things about ancient China...they just ruin our history and even sometimes be disloyal to our history...so many shocking things'.
>
> *Tang Zhihua* (*Int. 8*): 'Yes they just modernise the language [...]'.
>
> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): '[...] wearing ancient clothes but saying something modern and shocking'.
>
> *Tang Zhihua* (*Int. 8*): 'They are so naïve...[I] cannot bear!'.
>
> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): 'And always just show kung fu and fly...that's enough'.
>
> [...]
>
> *Tang Zhihua* (*Int. 8*): 'I think it's very boring...very old plot, nothing fresh'.

Apart from anything else, the degree of irritation in these comments was quite striking.[15] There was a sense of shock and betrayal at the perceived lack of fidelity to history and actuality, in spite of the status of such series as populist entertainment. But the reasons for such a passionate response perhaps become clearer if we bear in mind how a sense of nationhood, as Bhabha (1990, pp. 1-3), Appadurai (1996, pp. 178-199) and others have argued, is maintained (or otherwise) by narratives of shared culture and history expressed through literature, images, the media and popular culture more generally. As Duara suggests, the social and economic anxiety and instability wrought by marketisation creates an even greater demand for 'authentic' symbols of cultural and national identity. However, as the process of commercialisation devalues them, this generates greater anxiety about what is authentic, fuelling a recurring loop of controversy (Duara, 2005, pp. 53-54). But in this case, the sense of betrayal was twofold, for the martial arts genre was regarded as not only failing to respect the past, but also by its omissions, failing to authentically represent a 'fresh' present or future. Paradoxically, in one sense it was too modern, but in another, not modern enough.

These are issues I will return to later in this section, but what was also rather notable in many students' objections to the new Chinese blockbusters in particular was that in spite of their rejection, as I will show below, of its pandering to foreign tastes, such complaints were often still accompanied by an anxiety about how China is viewed abroad: '[...] I think Zhang Yimou is ruining our culture, and gives a really bad image to the world' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*). Thus, even for critics of the historical blockbuster strategy as a betrayal of a national cultural tradition, the foreign could not simply be ignored or rejected. In particular, what my students were concerned about was not simply whether Chinese culture would be popular abroad, but what kind of Chinese culture would be appreciated. Of course, this might be seen again as a side effect of my presence as a foreign interviewer, but such sensitivity to foreign reactions is consistent with a wider tendency to treat the success of Chinese directors abroad as either as a cause for national pride or, conversely, a source of shame for the compromises and perceived

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[15] These were not untypical of my respondents' comments. As a student in one of my group interviews put it, such historical films and dramas were 'just rubbish' (*Pei Suojing – G2/2*).

betrayals involved (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 196; B. Xu, 1997, pp. 155-156). The fifth generation directors, for instance, earned their earlier status against domestic criticism of their 'selling oriental exoticism to a Western audience' (Chow, 1995, p. 176) in films such as *'Yellow Earth'* (1984) and *'Red Sorghum'* (1988). As Chow suggests, their mournful, lusciously screened 'oriental orientalism' can also be taken as a kind of defiant parody (1995, p. 168), displaying what it is like to be imposed on by one's own culture and at the same time, stared at and pitied by outsiders (1995, pp. 170-171). In this vein, the new blockbuster, it may be argued, has done the same in reverse for a rising China, metaphorically translating the martial arts genre to a higher international plane, and at the same time displaying what it is like to be stared at and *admired* by outsiders. Yet, this very admiration was of a type that was unsettling for young educated Chinese, such as my students, with aspirations to join the emerging professional middle class.

Indeed, a real tone of frustration – even betrayal – was detectable in many comments. What was striking here was that the move towards blockbusters was not merely regarded as a failure due to miscalculation or error, but rather the result of a deliberate strategy by directors whose motivations were suspect. As Zizek has argued, because of the elusive nature of many cultural traditions' intrinsic value (beyond easy summation or definition), their 'sacredness' is often experienced as potentially under threat or theft by an outsider, or traitor within, who does not truly appreciate them (1993, pp. 201-205). At least, for the students I interviewed above, the notion of a sell-out was close to the fore:

> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): '[...] Nowadays it's just throwing a lot of money at fighting and those beautiful pictures. Actually he [Zhang Yimou] cannot just have a good story, so I think he just wants to please the foreign...the foreign...'.
> *Tang Zhihua* (*Int. 8*): 'It's too commercial'.
> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): 'Wants to get Oscars'.
> [...]
> *Xiao Tingyan* (*Int. 7*): 'I cannot understand why he, as a Chinese director would do that, but actually he fails every time and didn't get any prize, but he just continues to do that'.

Such views were fairly widespread among my respondents. However, even while criticising the pursuit of Oscars, students' tended to oscillate on the legitimacy of striving for success abroad. When I set the topic of Chinese blockbusters for two third year advanced writing classes (Essay 5), one student admitted, in spite of disapproving of the new genre, 'Personally I hope Chinese movies could be approved by the outside world, and usually we think a golden figure could be the best and fastest way' (*Ge Zhouru – E5/11*). Another attempted to strike a balance, arguing that 'We should borrow other [countries'] advanced techniques [...] but we cannot lose ourselves [... for] Oscar judges [...] and for earning money' (*Han Yan – E5/14*). But some interviewees were, as I put it to them, rather self contradictory on the issue. In the following case, two girls from my second year oral class (class 1) explained to me that they were very keen DVD collectors:

> *Interviewer*: '[...] but [previously] you said when you chose DVDs you sometimes looked to see whether they had won some awards'.
> *Zha Yingbai* (*Int. 6*): 'Yeh'.
> *Interviewer*: 'But you just told me Chinese directors pay too much attention to trying to win awards'.
> *Pu Shan* (*Int. 5*): [*Laughter*]
> *Zha Yingbai* (*Int. 6*): 'But failed'.
> *Pu Shan* (*Int. 5*): 'Yeh, they failed'.

Provisionally at least, the apparent inconsistency or dilemma was resolved here by suggesting that the problem was not so much the adherence to foreign models as the failure to meet their standards. As above, my students saw selling China to foreigners in return for financial and cultural capital as even more contemptible for not actually having succeeded.

In line with the theme of selling out, a persistent anti-commercial view was expressed by many respondents. This was not a plea for the more 'main melody' material, with directors functioning, as one essay writer put it, like 'professors teaching people what is right and wrong, not artists creating what they want [...]' (*Cong Liying – E5/7*).

But with the authorities allowing more market freedom, other essay writers criticised fifth generation directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige for exploiting the new liberalisation by too overtly taking the commercial road:

> 'I am nostalgic and miss the great movies once directed by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. I think [they] are on the wrong track and seem to be going further and further away from the essence of Chinese movies [...] and purposely design scenes to cater to some westerners' interest. Hopefully with the increasing influence of directors like Jia Zhangke [...they] can come back to the normal track and not be driven by commercial profits. We need dignity [...]' (*Hou Fang – E5/15*).

In some respects, my respondents came close to identifying age and experience with moral compromise and a betrayal of idealism. As part of the younger generation themselves, there was a potentially bitter-sweet side to this, as one claimed, 'many old Chinese directors are changing [for the worse]...but new Chinese directors are making progress' (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*). Another student praised members of the younger, so-called sixth generation of directors such as Jia Zhangke and Zhang Yuan along with the fifth generation's earlier films such as Chen Kaige's *'Farewell My Concubine'* (1993) (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*) and Zhang Yimou's *'To Live'* (1994) (*Yao Yang – Int. 2*). Some also noted how young independent directors, like their predecessors, had difficulty showing their films domestically, but 'every time Jia Zhangke can get foreign awards' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*). Indeed, even an interviewee who admitted he had not actually seen any of Jia's works still cited *'Still Life'* (2006) as a good example of a film that 'reflects the real life nowadays' whilst still able to win a major international prize (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). Ironically, this was in spite of the fact that the earlier films of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige which drew students' praise had been subject to strong intellectual criticism for selling out Chinese culture for foreign awards (B. Xu, 1997, pp. 156-158). Nevertheless, my respondents took such awards not only as evidence of quality, but also as confirmation that the blockbuster genre was not the sole path to success. By

implication, a more virtuous path perhaps also offered hope to students themselves as they contemplated their own uncertain futures in the 'real world' after graduation.

Therefore, the issue at stake for students was not necessarily Chinese film directors' pursuit of foreign success *per se*, but the way it was done. In particular, the appeal for 'dignity' and the complaint that recent films 'have nothing to do with the modern world or even real life' (*Ge Zhouru – E5/11*), point to how much of the ambivalence over the new martial arts blockbuster is deeply rooted in the genre itself. Even the success of Ang Lee's *'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'* (2000), in spite of some students' praise for its artistic style, could be dismissed as having a rather mundane theme: 'it's only about martial arts...and it's nothing special [compared to] other films in China' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*).[16] Although such films and costume dramas are still quite popular in China (Ying Zhu, Keane, & Bai, 2008, p. 7), they still do not necessarily carry high cultural status.

Historically speaking, despite constituting a distinctive and recurring theme in Chinese language cinema, martial arts have been vulnerable to repudiation through much of the twentieth century by political reformers under both the Nationalist and Communist regimes.[17] Politically committed modernisers instead preferred realism which, as part of an ideology of scientific progress (and Social Darwinism), was seen as engaging directly with the early twentieth century threats to China's national and cultural existence whilst also offering the hope of social change (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 77). As a result, political elites disapproved of what they regarded as the backwardness or purely commercial motivations inherent in the more spectacular operatic mode of film making that martial arts belong to (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 11).

Among my respondents, this tension between the traditions of realism and spectacle was most clearly reflected in comments on *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* and

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[16] The film was genuinely hybrid, integrating the traditional spectacle of martial arts fight scenes with a more Hollywood style attention to narrative and character development (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 72; Klein, 2004a, pp. 19, 32). But it initially received a rather lukewarm response in both Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Although the director himself had expected it to be received best among Chinese speaking audiences, some mainland viewers were put off by the Cantonese speaking actors' stilted Mandarin, and in line with local generic expectations, many found its action sequences overfamiliar in content and ponderous in execution (Klein, 2004a, pp. 36-37).

[17] The Nationalist government banned martial arts films in 1931 and the prejudice against the genre was effectively maintained by the Communist party until the 1980s (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 9-10).

the debate surrounding it, which was current at the time.[18] Some interviewees, for instance, heard that the film was an advance on *'Hero'* as it was based on the classic 1930's play, *'Thunderstorm'* (*Leiyu*), which therefore provided it with a better plot (*Song Zijie – Int. 1; Yao Yang – Int. 2*). However, this was the very aspect that others found problematic. In particular, the transposition of the play's setting from early twentieth century Shanghai to ancient imperial times appeared to jar with established expectations. With opulence and glitter replacing the sober atmosphere of the original, it was felt that 'these images actually distracted the audience from the story' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). Others sensed a more vulgar opportunism: 'people said to [Zhang Yimou], *'Hero'* didn't have a good story and [so] next time he is just plagiarising a story from our best drama' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*). In fact, *'Thunderstorm'* was itself heavily influenced by other models (Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill) which were crucial to the foundation of modern realist drama in China as distinct from the Chinese operatic tradition of storytelling (X. Chen, 2003, p. 4). During the Mao era, the play became further 'canonised' as an exposé of the 'feudal' ills of pre-revolutionary society, with its author amending the plot to emphasise the class dimension (X. Chen, 2003, pp. 7-9). As a result, any appeal to the purity of an indigenous original in this case can hardly stand scrutiny. Nevertheless, at a generic level, because of the play's iconoclastic origins, Zhang Yimou's mixing of the modernist realist tradition with its more spectacle-oriented martial arts counterpart could be seen as a kind of sacrilege. A large part of students' unease can perhaps therefore be traced to their sense that a modernist classic had been polluted by the very Chinese traditionalism it stood in opposition to.

Although, in this instance, a sense of generic fidelity was at stake, authenticity can be judged from several different perspectives and infidelity to historical accuracy could also be used as grounds for criticism. In particular, the issue that drew attention of both the media and my respondents was the overtly sexualised appearance and behaviour of the female characters in the film. My third year writing class interviewees, for instance, who had criticised costume dramas, as I noted above, for their lack of authenticity were scathing about Gong Li's depiction of the empress in *'Curse of the Golden Flower'*:

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[18] The film opened in Beijing on 14th Dec. 2006.

Xiao Tingyan (*Int. 7*): '[...] Gong Li is very shameful [...] shameless'.

Tang Zhihua (*Int. 8*): 'Yes every time when she disappeared she just tried to seduce everyone'.

Xiao Tingyan (*Int. 7*): 'It is not a typical ancient Chinese woman...'

[...]

Xiao Tingyan (*Int. 7*): 'So many historical experts complain about the clothes of our queen'.

Interviewer: 'The clothes?'.

Xiao Tingyan (*Int. 7*): 'Too open'.

Once again, the idea of a loss of dignity, selling out to a kind of visual prostitution, with 'open' or revealing dress, is evident. Against the background of mainland Chinese cinema in which women were, until recently at least, rarely portrayed as objects of an overtly sexual gaze (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 109-112; Chow, 2007, pp. 211-214), the tight, rather low cut costumes in the film attracted a good deal of comment in the media and online, with some reportedly mocking it as 'Curse of the Golden Corset' (L. Lin, 2006). But this is where the indignant tone of criticism, ostensibly in the interests of defending historical accuracy and standards of public morality, could shade into an ambivalent form of enjoyment, allowing commentators to teasingly juxtapose the erudite with the earthy. As my literature student interviewee (and fan of *'Hero'*) explained, with reference to an online blog posting he had come across:

'[...] costume in that time indeed was very, very bold historically, it is true, but in the film it was made too explicit especially around the chest and [the director] deliberately chose some of those actresses with very big...yeh, so actually it's a total distraction' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*).

In fact, as far as the traditional Hong Kong kung fu film is concerned, the genre has never sought to be especially historically faithful, instead occupying a mythical zone somewhere between 'feudal' China and the modern world of firearms (S. L. Li, 2001, pp.

519-522).[19] But the new blockbusters' combination of martial arts with historical and psychologically realist elements left it more exposed to this kind of criticism. The love triangle in *'House of the Flying Daggers'*, for instance, was seen by both critics and online commentators as inconsistent with the martial arts film tradition which usually centres on brotherhood rather than romance (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 138-139; T. Wang, 2009, pp. 308-309). So at least part of the pleasure of attacking the new genre was the satisfaction that could be derived from simultaneously mocking and drawing attention to its transgressions of propriety whilst, at the same time, displaying one's knowledge of both modern and ancient classical Chinese culture.

In this light, discussions on the degree to which the new blockbusters were historically accurate might seem rather beside the point – instead they can be regarded, in part, as the pleasure of discursive combat itself. Such debates may also be related to more general concerns about status and authority: in particular, the genre's vulnerability to ridicule can be seen as a reflection of the presumed position of Chinese intellectuals, among whom film directors might be counted, as both moral exemplars and, in some sense, speakers on behalf of the nation.[20] As already noted, this often leads to accusations of selfish motives when critical and academic disagreements occur (see Davies, 2007, pp. 30, 64-65). Even the possibility that fifth generation directors used their connections in the media to suppress their junior counterparts was considered by one of my interviewees (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*). On the other hand, according to some of Zhang Yimou's defenders (see Martinsen, 2007; Y. Zhang & Ping, 2010) it had almost become fashionable for media commentators to disparage the director. The reasons, as I have suggested, revolved around the costs and benefits of transnationalism, invoking the fear of a sell-out and thus losing control of what could count as culturally authentic. It is therefore in this perspective that the concept of national cinema, despite transnational and commercial pressures, can be seen to still have a force (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 2-3), for if

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[19] Later, in the 1990s, the genre began to merge with the action movie in more contemporary settings (S. L. Li, 2001, p. 537).

[20] The scholarly tradition of 'worrying about China', according to Davies' (2007, pp. 15-17), gives Chinese intellectual life much of its authority and significance, though as Zhang Xudong points out, this moral authority is intertwined with the state and has also been rather disrupted in recent years by the rise in importance of the market economy (2008, pp. 39-40).

China's most prominent directors, as intellectuals, were taken to be implicitly representing the nation, many students did not feel they were being adequately spoken for.

Although directors were certainly the most obvious targets of blame in this instance, my students were sometimes unsure whether there were wider factors that might be held responsible: '[...] there are maybe various reasons, commercial, political whatever, I don't know exactly' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). At times, students seemed to have an uneasy feeling that China was somehow backward and therefore its best quality was being held back from audiences: '[...]...what people are seeing, it is not the cream of the industry, it's the crap of the industry' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). Some of my interviewees, particularly my two keen DVD collectors, took an overtly elitist line. After criticising recent Chinese blockbusters, I asked if there were Chinese films they liked, but they complained that films by independents such as Jia Zhangke were difficult to find, not simply because of the authorities, but also because of lack of box office appeal. Indeed, they bemoaned the low tastes of the Chinese public, even suggesting that domestic audiences were less mature than those abroad:

> *Zha Yingbai* (*Int. 6*): '[...] compared to some Western world or European audiences, Chinese people [...have] lower level of appreciation'.
> *Pu Shan* (*Int. 5*): '[...] just want a very...simple'.
> *Zha Yingbai* (*Int. 6*): 'I mean those very spectacular scenes'.
> *Pu Shan* (*Int. 5*): 'Where the pictures are very beautiful or the [...] plot is very satisfying...something like that'.

Others were not as overtly anti-populist, but the widespread disdain for commercial success perhaps contained a similar, if unspoken, sentiment. Occasionally, essay writers were willing to question an elitist expectation of high-minded didacticism and the way 'we are used to the stereotype of old Chinese films that tend to teach some moral principles' (*Peng Huang – E5/ 27*). But even when interviewees praised the popular comedies of Feng Xiaogang, for instance, they still felt the need to defend their preference against the charge of low taste:

Song Zijie (*Int. 1*): 'Yeh...maybe people will say that his work is just for commercial...'.

Yao Yang (*Int. 2*): 'Making money'.

Song Zijie (*Int. 1*): 'But [...] the reason why I think his films can make money is because the film is good'.

This sentiment, however, did not necessarily stretch to their opinion about Chinese blockbusters' good box office results since the same interviewees still felt able to criticise their commercialism.

Within a critique of commercialism, my informants tended to represent the new blockbuster as the product of a struggle between market and government, despite the fact that the revival of the martial arts genre on the mainland was, in part, a consequence of the state's own push towards more populist and profit-orientated television programming in the early 1990s (Keane, 1998, pp. 477-478). As already noted, martial arts had long been a suspect genre, so this change in broadcasting policy was very much to the disdain of cultural elites who felt it was a sell out to 'low brow' forces (Hamm, 2005, pp. 250-251; Zha, 1995, p. 33). Indeed, despite some mainland scholars' attempt to re-evaluate Jin Yong, the well known Hong Kong-based martial arts author (Hamm, 2005, pp. 239-241), even producers and writers of such costume dramas tended to look down on their own work (Thomas, 2003, pp. 18-21, 33). But, as Thomas reports, anxieties were also evident among the genre's supporters – either young female actor-loving 'starchasers' or the predominantly male Jin Yong readership who were particularly suspicious of the motives behind CCTV's *'Swordsmen'* (*Xiaoao jianghu*) (2001) series. For these possessive fans, the broadcaster's claims to have upgraded the genre appeared to be little more than the authorities' highjacking of a type of culture that had been previously disparaged and left to the diasporic margins (Thomas, 2003, pp. 180, 212).

My informants, however, tended to see the government's role in relatively benign terms. As one essay writer put it: 'Businessmen are stimulated by profits while the government is trying to be more tolerant...Shouldn't we find a balance?' (*Ding Weisi – E5/8*). In fact, as already noted, the state was actively promoting the genre with, for instance, the release of *'House of the Flying Daggers'* benefiting from a government

ordered cinema blackout period to exclude Hollywood competitors (T. Wang, 2009, pp. 302, 306-307). Some of my interviewees did speculate on this kind of official support: 'I don't know why some high-ranking officials gave [Zhang Yimou] a good name' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*). Others instead sought government intervention to remedy the situation: 'I hope SARFT or other authorities could succeed in discouraging the copycat costume epics and bring 'normal' movies back to the screen' (*Ge Zhouru – E5/11)*. For my respondents, unlike hard core Jin Yong martial arts fans, the notion of defending a cultural essence or 'maintaining our spirit' (*Han Yan – E5/14*), was less likely to be associated with resistance to the party-state and its strand of anti-traditional thinking – indeed often the reverse, with the state authorities being seen as its ultimate guardians against rampant commercialism.[21]

What emerged quite strongly from my respondents, among all the possible contradictions surrounding the new martial arts films, was not simply their disquiet about the lack of historical and/or generic authenticity in the new blockbuster genre, but what it conspicuously ignored. Even those more sympathetic to the idea that Chinese filmmakers should try to win international acceptance still expressed frustration with the way they represented China. No matter how photogenically it was done, mining the imperial past and its 5000 years of history appeared to be, in some sense, a denial of China's modern face. It was therefore an irritant that films, arguably the most archetypically modern form of Chinese cultural production, seemed to have to depend for their success on something so backward looking and 'self-negating' (S. L. Li, 2001, p. 516) as ancient history and martial arts. For aspiring students, despite feelings of historical pride, appealing to the West with one's glorious history was almost a form of cheating, especially when it seemed to be done in an inauthentic manner; in fact, it produced a sense of frustration that China could not meet the West (representing modernity) on its own modern terms.

So, although the new Chinese blockbuster may in some sense represent a step up in sophistication from the older martial arts genre, in that it transcends the naked nationalism of older kung fu films, many of my contacts viewed it with discomfort as a potential sell out. As Duara has suggested, the cultural hybridity that globalisation brings

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[21] Wang Jing has argued that Chinese integration into world markets has '[...] opened a space for the state to intervene and, through its mechanisms of checks and balances, to arbitrate the contradictions of capital accumulation' (2001: 95).

generates a potential crisis of cultural authenticity. But judging from the responses of my young educated respondents, it was not just that their own culture was being threatened by outsiders or by shameless money-oriented 'traitors', prostituting their artistic heritage for personal gain. Rather, it was that their access to international culture in order to share in the foreign other's enjoyment was thereby also symbolically threatened.[22] That is to say, the new Chinese blockbuster genre may be technically polished enough and sufficiently tempered in its nationalism to be acceptable to mainstream foreign audiences, but for aspiring Chinese youth, it simultaneously tampered with their sense of an authentic, historically-rooted Chinese identity, while denying their desire for a creative Chinese modernity that can stand direct comparison with the developed world only by shedding the ostentatious display of archaic Chineseness altogether.

Korean Dramas: Opium of the Aspirational

If the Chinese blockbuster, at least its initial form, stimulated unease amongst my students for imprisoning China within its global stereotype, one recent cultural phenomenon that has been particularly influential since the late 1990s, the so-called 'Korean Wave', appeared to offer another, perhaps more acceptable means of reconciling the global and the local. Like the Chinese blockbuster, it adopts and develops Western forms and techniques, but arguably is more successful in localising their content in a popular contemporary way. Korean dramas, for instance, typically feature good looking urban young professionals in idealised tragic urban romances (so-called 'trendy dramas') or alternatively, family oriented series with traditional values such as filial piety, and have become popular throughout in the East Asia (Chua, 2004, pp. 205-206; Leung, 2008, pp. 59-60; Lin & Tong, 2008, pp. 91-94).[23] Certainly, the influence of Korean pop culture and a more generalised East Asian style has become widely evident in Beijing, whether in fashion, hairstyles, music or entertainment. Korean dramas, likewise, were a familiar genre among students whom I interviewed.[24] It is this international dimension that has led academic work to place Korean pop culture within an analysis of either globalisation

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[22] Drawing on the point made by Zizek above (1993, pp. 201-205) regarding the sense of threat to the enjoyment of local traditions, I suggest that the reverse is occurring in this case.

[23] In 2002, a total of 67 Korean dramas were broadcast on various Chinese channels (Leung, 2008, p. 59).

[24] Students sometimes referred to both Korean and Japanese dramas together as a combined genre, but generally, Japanese dramas were less frequently mentioned perhaps because of the more recent surge in Korean culture into China, and also because of political sensitivities over relations with Japan.

and/or post-colonial cultural hybridity, for although the wave is specifically identified as Korean, it is its pan-Asian characteristics, now including mainland China, that have been highlighted as of greatest significance in the search for a non-Western cultural globalisation (Cho, 2005, pp. 148-149; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Jing, 2005; Klein, 2004b, pp. 367, 370; Shim, 2006, p. 27).

What is of particular interest here is the extent to which the wave can be interpreted as a rejuvenation of Confucian values in a modern form across East Asia in order to become the more acceptable face of 'archaic Chineseness' that my respondents, as discussed above, otherwise rejected. That is to say, in contrast to students' exasperation with China's recent apparently complicit response to the Hollywood blockbuster form, could it be that Korean dramas offer an alternative Asian form of globalisation and, therefore, a model that might be acceptable for China to adopt? Indeed, does the Korean wave create some form of fused Confucian/neo-liberal middle class social consciousness that might suit the hybrid conditions of China's post-socialist society? The notion of a potential East Asian modernity is a view already explored, for instance, by Iwabuchi (2005, pp. 19-21; 2002, pp. 16-19) and Chua (2004, p. 217). Or, in contrast, does the phenomenon act rather more as a Trojan horse for individualist consumerism, and herald an even more thoroughgoing social and political Westernisation?

After outlining these issues in more detail, I will show in the last section of this chapter how, for many of my informants, the popularity of Korean dramas in fact represented neither of these alternatives – instead, they viewed the genre as a tempting distraction from their vision of 'self-globalisation', and all the more insidious for its easily digested cultural compatibility. My students were, in this sense, what Gray (2003, pp. 71-74) has referred to as 'anti-fans' or, in some cases, 'non-fans', namely, uncommitted, occasional viewers. Perhaps not surprisingly, such viewers have been somewhat neglected by audience researchers as they are potentially more difficult research subjects, even though they represent a significant part of media audiences (Gray, 2003, pp. 66, 77).[25] This is especially the case bearing in mind how the discourses surrounding a genre extend well beyond the programmes themselves (Gray, 2003, pp. 72-

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[25] As noted in chapter one, Morley's pioneering *'Nationwide'* study, following Hall, did make an attempt to detect the oppositional positions of audiences, but thereafter, the field turned towards exploring fans of disparaged genres.

73). Yet, by focusing on explaining the success of the Korean wave, analysis of its influence in China and elsewhere has, arguably, tended to overlook these counter discourses.[26]

Triumph of Hybridity?

There are three fairly well-known definitions of globalisation through which the Korean wave can be analysed (Shim, 2006, pp. 26-27). First, globalisation has been seen as a form of cultural imperialism which, from the 1970s, facilitated Western (mainly American) media dominance over local and national cultures. Subsequently, however, this argument has been challenged on the basis that cultural flows have now begun emanating from peripheral regions, including Korea, and moreover, that studies of audiences have, in any case, shown how viewers do not just absorb what they are presented with in a straightforward linear way, as I noted in chapter one. Blanket support for national cultures may also run the risk of uncritical romanticisation, obscuring the local or regional cultures that lie hierarchically beneath them (see A. Y. H. Fung, 2008, pp. 85-86).

As intellectual support for the more simplistic critiques of cultural imperialism has weakened, the developmentalist view of globalisation as essentially 'the universalization of capitalism' – part of the process of (inevitable) world modernisation – has come to prevail (see Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 39-42; Shim, 2006, p. 26; Straubhaar, 1991, pp. 40-41). This neo-liberal approach looked especially dominant in the wake of the fall of the Soviet system and the so-called 'end of history' (see Fukuyama, 1992), though, not surprisingly, it has been criticised for too closely defining modernity within the framework of Western capitalism and thereby conflating the terms (Shim, 2006, p. 26). A third post-colonial approach attempts to avoid these pitfalls by appealing to ideas of hybridity and fluid power relations between the centre and the periphery, as noted in the previous discussion of Chinese blockbusters (Kraidy, 2002, pp. 319-324, 333-335). The general assumption here is that local forces, when faced by the drive to capitalist modernisation, are potentially rejuvenated, using methods of cultural and technical

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[26] Joseph Chan (2009, p. 32), however, notes that there were signs of a reaction against the Korean wave in 2006 at the Shanghai TV Festival and hints from government officials that Korean drama imports might be curbed.

appropriation to variously dilute, deflect or domesticate the power of the dominant centre, as argued by Bhabha (1994, pp. 4-8) and Appadurai (1996, p. 4).

Shim suggests that this is what has happened with the so-called 'Korean wave' (see also Klein, 2004b, pp. 370-371). Before the late 1990s, Korea had little cultural impact beyond its borders (Shim, 2006, p. 25). To the rest of the world, and even within Asia, South Korea was a prolific manufacturer but little else. Yet, ironically, it was the sudden uncertainties of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, mainly affecting Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Korea, & Hong Kong, that created the conditions for the Korean media boom, as tighter economic conditions meant that its television exports, substantially cheaper than Japanese or Hong Kong equivalents, were suddenly boosted (Chua, 2004, p. 204; Shim, 2006, p. 28).

Though initially triggered by economic circumstances, it seems to have been Chinese reactions, however, that turned this into a cultural wave. Indeed, the term 'Korean Wave',[27] is said to have been coined in a 1999 Chinese newspaper report on a visiting Korean pop band '*H. O. T.*' (Cho, 2005, p. 173). Alternatively, Shim cites CCTV's broadcast of the drama series *'What is Love About?'* in 1997 as the wave's actual (if not the term's) point of origin. Whatever the case, the China connection has certainly been notable from the beginning. The initial popularity of *'What is Love About?'* led to the second highest rating in Chinese TV history when it was re-broadcast in prime time the following year (Heo in Shim, 2006, p. 28). This success was reinforced by series such as *'Stars in My Heart'*, a hit in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1999. By 2005, the historical drama, *'Jewel in the Palace'* (*'Dae Jang Geum'*), was reported as taking China 'by storm' with an estimated 160 million viewers (Jing, 2005). Korean TV export earnings, as a result, soared from US$12.7 million to US$37.5 million, 1999-2003 (Shim, 2006, p. 28) with China taking a 20% share in 2001 (D.-h. Lee, 2008, p. 189).[28]

What makes the Korean wave a 'wave' is its multi-national and multi-faceted impact – a cult of popularity across mutually reinforcing media platforms and pop culture genres. Ahn Jae-wook, for instance, the lead actor in *'Stars in My Heart'*, is also a 'K-pop' idol who has played to fans in Beijing, along with an increasing number of Korean

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[27] *'Han liu'*; '朝流'

[28] Sales of Korean dramas to China have continued to rise though the share has declined owing to increased Japanese imports (D.-h. Lee, 2008, p. 190).

bands.[29] Such fans – the so-called *'Ha-han'*[30] – have become an identifiable, even formative, sub-group of Chinese youth culture, with a voracious appetite for all things Korean. As one of my group interviewees noted, 'a lot of teenagers watch Korean shows and Korean dramas' (*Wan Chengju – G5/1*). Tourism has also been stimulated, with large increases in visitors to South Korea from neighbouring Asian counties (up 50% from 2002-03), often specifically visiting locations of dramas such as *'Autumn in My Heart'* and *'Winter Sonata'* in an indication of the Korean wave's broader appeal than a mere teen-based crush would suggest (Shim, 2006, p. 30). Indeed, in Japan, the most active fans of Korean dramas are often middle-aged housewives (Mori, 2008, pp. 130-131).

For Korea this has, of course, been a remarkable turnaround. When the South Korean government started liberalising its media market under US pressure in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hollywood's market share leapt from 53% in 1987 to 80% by 1994 and as cable television took off in the mid-1990s, imports of foreign programming also jumped from just under US$20 million to US$42 million (Shim, 2006, pp. 31-32). However, this 'threat' provoked the Korean government to take the economic implications of culture seriously for the first time, after years of concentration on building up heavy industry and manufactures. A government report, for instance, pointed out that the total revenues earned by Spielberg's dinosaur-based blockbuster, *'Jurassic Park'* (1993) were, rather startlingly, the equivalent of 1.5 million exported Hyundai cars (Shim, 2006, p. 32). In response, government financial support for cultural industries rose and Korean business was encouraged to invest in the sector. By the turn of the century, Korean film making had made a remarkable comeback, to such an extent that, by 2003, local films had achieved over 53% of the market from a mere 16% ten years earlier (Klein, 2004b, p. 370; Shim, 2006, p. 34).

The Korean revival has therefore been put forward as the best case for showing that globalisation is not merely 'cultural hamburgers' for everyone, but can, in a sense, represent the potential for a more varied diet. As Klein put it, local culture is 'thriving under globalization, adapting to new conditions and taking on new meanings without losing all connection to its origins' (2004b, p. 379) though, in a more negative vein, it

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[29] That said, in the music scene at least, the initial energy of the wave seems to have somewhat dissipated (Pease, 2006, pp. 178-179).
[30] '哈韩'

should be noted that the plurality of content may also serve to disguise the homogenization of the very form of globalised economic system that produces it (see Keane, 2004, pp. 53-54, 65-66; Kraidy, 2002, pp. 322-323; Zizek, 1999a, pp. 215-218).[31] However, although my respondents generally disliked the Korean drama genre, their reasons, as I shall discuss below, were rather different.

Pan-Asian, Middle Class Identity: Repackaging Tradition, Masking Imperialism?
For my informants, the greater media choices that globalisation offered were something they generally welcomed, even if they also had concerns about commercialisation and the compromises involved. In the case of Korean pop culture's recent success, much of this is the consequence of greater market liberalisation, partly under US pressure, and the openness that resulted as Korean censorship was loosened and local stars were freed from state broadcasters' interference in how they presented themselves.[32] But the way foreign forms are appropriated for more traditional purposes is often said to explain some of the cross-Asian appeal of the Korean wave: it repackages traditional sentiments in a modern form that can appeal to young Asian audiences that otherwise find traditional culture stale, but without overtly challenging older generations who find undiluted Western pop culture disturbing (Chua, 2004, p. 216; Lin & Tong, 2008, pp. 99-102; I. F.-c. Yang, 2008, p. 200).[33]

Nevertheless, some Korean accounts have certainly adopted a similar line of essentialist cultural prescriptivism when explaining the wave's appeal: Kim Han-gil, the head of the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, for instance, was reported as pointing out that 'Compared to Western drama's sensationalism and violence, which doesn't suit Chinese sensibilities, Korean dramas are drawing interest from Chinese people' ('Daehan Maeil', July 21, 2001; in Cho, 2005, p. 154). However, this appeal to traditionalism can seem a little shaky as Asian cross-cultural dramas often sacrifice local specificity to commercial interests (Chua, 2004, p. 117). As Kang Jin-gu points out, the

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[31] Klein, for instance, cites some domestic criticism of the Korean film industry as 'Copywood' (2004b, p. 367).

[32] Such restrictions are still, of course, very much a feature of Chinese broadcasting regulation though as Leung points out (2008, p. 58), local TV stations are constantly negotiating with the authorities.

[33] Korean singers, for example, adopted aspects of American trends such as rap, mixing them with local elements: one Korean rap song sings of maternal sacrifices for the family: 'Mother I miss you, My family was too poor to eat out...' (Shim, 2006, p. 39).

emphasis on teen love and affluent lifestyles in many Korean dramas has stimulated some parental unease and hostility elsewhere in Asia (in Cho, 2005, p. 155), though as one of my interviewees pointed out, this was precisely because they recognised a certain shared cultural affinity, as I shall discuss later. However, it is clear that Korean entrepreneurs have learned from the marketing practices of Hollywood and the pop idol manufacturing system of Japan. In that sense, the wave is symptomatic of how control has passed from more traditional ideological bureaucrats, characteristic of Korea's state-led capitalism, to market-savvy impresarios and entrepreneurs (D.-h. Lee, 2008, pp. 190-191; Shim, 2006, pp. 35-38).

Some writing in the Western press has felt able to go further, making a case for the wave as a comprehensive triumph of neo-liberalism, despite its oriental guise. Norimutsu Onishi in the *'International Herald Tribune'*, for instance, pointed beyond the economic to the political, indeed Western, democratic roots of the phenomenon in the late 1980s, linking it, moreover, to an outflow of Korean Christian missionaries into China after the countries' establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 (Onishi, 2006). Onishi explicitly described the wave as 'a filter for western values', on the one hand bringing 'Christianity with an Asian face', whilst on the other, facilitating consumerist values and teen culture via dramas, sit-coms and hip-hop in more familiar, easily digestible Asian versions. Although 'not overtly political', Onishi, nevertheless, presents the wave as a general agent of social liberalisation. A Chinese Tsinghua University student is quoted to support the point: 'We know that South Korea and America have similar political systems and economies. But it's easier to accept that lifestyle from South Koreans because they are culturally closer to us. We feel we can live like them in a few years'.

However, whereas the neo-liberal position enthused over Korean media's market expansion and fretted about the capacity of the industry to sustain the trend (Cho, 2005, pp. 159-160), cultural nationalists, on the other hand, faced a dilemma. The spread of Korean dance music and other populist forms are potentially suspect as merely Asian versions of American culture – although more easily identified with by Korea's neighbours, they are perhaps less a triumph of Korea's authentic traditions and creativity

than its prowess in commercial imitation.[34] As Chua points out, there is no denying that Japan tends to set the production standard in the region even if Koreans equivalents filled the gap when Japanese production tailed off in the late 1990s (2004, pp. 205-207). But this put nationalists in a quandary as the Korean wave then becomes a masking agent for otherwise suspect American and Japanese cultural imports (Cho, 2005, p. 158).

Conflicts between economic liberal and nationalist responses, and the contradictions within them, have also been noted by postcolonial critics who, after dismissing nationalist assertions of Korean uniqueness (or laments for its dilution), tend instead to diagnose the wave as a market response to the tastes of the growing middle classes across Asia (see Chua, 2004, p. 217). Though the wave is generally acknowledged to be more than its economic roots, the postcolonial position has pointed to it being, essentially, the result of capitalist logic as China shifts culture to the market, but without yet having the productive capacity to meet consumer demand (Cho, 2005, p. 164). Yet, some have suggested, in an apparent echo of the nationalist view, that Korean dramas are also a more acceptable, culturally closer means by which people are able to form a new modern middle class identity: as one of my respondents put it, 'matching what they need innermost' (*Kang Li – E8/22*). Lin and Tong's interviews with fans in Singapore and Hong Kong, for instance, indicated (2008, pp. 112-114) that such dramas had a particular appeal for educated career women positioned between the conflicting demands of participating in the competitive modern economy and the expectations associated with traditional family life. As aspirants to such white collar jobs, this position might seem to match the life path being pursued by many of my informants, but as I will discuss below, their reactions to such dramas were rather different.

This socio-economic type of analysis, like a nationalist approach, also has its potential contradictions, or at least can take two possible tracks. A more negative view of the process sees viewers being lured by the attractions of individualist consumerism into abandoning local community solidarities. Thus the beautification of masculinity and the

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[34] Undercurrents of doubt were expressed by pop critic Im Jin-mo, questioning whether the Korean wave really had its 'own unique cultural code and grammar, whether ballads are really Korean music, and whether TV dramas are really creative' (Im 2001: p. 7 in Cho, 2005). Lee Dong-hoo, indeed, traced the success of Korean dramas ultimately to foreign models (2004, pp. 270-271), arguing that *'Jealousy'* (*Jiltu*), a local TV hit in 1992, has strong parallels with the Japanese drama *'Tokyo Love Story'* (1991) while *'Three Men and Three Women'* (1996) was based on the well-known American sit-com *'Friends'* (in Cho, 2005, p. 175).

portrayal of elegant, though not overtly sexual, young office women is prioritised over more specific affiliations (Chua, 2004, p. 217). The other track instead focuses on the trend as a means of deterritorialisation whereby media flows evade and erode national sovereignty, building other solidarities, often implicitly against authoritarian state structures (see Cho, 2005, p. 176). China's Hunan Satellite Television, for instance, had to struggle against the restrictions of the central authorities over its importation of Korean dramas (Leung, 2008, p. 58). From this position, it can then be argued that a new identity is being formed at the point where people are, in a sense, learning together how to be middle class as they recognise common problems and seek solutions to them as Asians. As Chua (2004, p. 217) put it, 'the discursive and conceptual spaces for the possible emergence and formation of a pan-East Asian identity have been laid', indeed, ahead of its 'real' political or social equivalents which have been otherwise slow to materialise in post Cold War East Asia (Cho, 2005, p. 178).

In their analyses, Chua (2004, p. 203), Shim (2006, p. 39) and Cho (2005, pp. 158-159), in fact, all draw upon Iwabuchi's work on Taiwanese fans of Japanese dramas which concludes that their success, and by allusion, that of Korean dramas, depends upon a sense of recognition and identification being evoked – a 'utopia-within-reach' – in contrast to American series which were said to have stimulated envy (2001, pp. 56, 76). Thus cultural flows are claimed to have created a form of alternative modernity, not altogether independent of Western hegemony, but nevertheless distinct from it (Iwabuchi, 2005, pp. 19-21). Although this may seem to overlap with the more conservative cultural nationalism which emphasises traditional Confucian values, in this case it is denationalised and stripped of overtly hegemonic connotations (particularly important for Japan), instead emphasising class, age, gender and other non-nationalist means by which modern identities are constructed. Indeed, traditionalism is also in some respects downplayed: dramas that cross national boundaries tend to avoid the rural, unless as nostalgia for a purer, less hectic era, particularly as the countryside signifies the intensely local. The urban, on the other hand, can be regarded as almost placeless (Chua, 2004, p. 216). Likewise, although the portrayal of the family is more central in some Korean dramas, the focus of 'trendy dramas' in particular, still tends to be set against the background of middle class lifestyles in a competitive society (Chua, 2004, pp. 216-217).

So, despite different developmental levels in each part of Asia, there is a degree of modern cross-cultural 'sameness' portrayed in such dramas, albeit in a slightly and intriguingly 'other' context.

Chinese Academic and Media Responses

Some of these themes, and the dilemmas that the Korean wave has produced, are echoed in Chinese reactions, but the main focus in the press and among academics has, instead, been on the phenomenon's success, explaining it and the lessons to be learned from it, using an underlying neo-liberal logic (Kim, 2009, pp. 749-751; Leung, 2008, p. 67). This rather contrasted, as I will show, with the dominant response of my own contacts who, although acknowledging the popularity of Korean dramas – 'young girls, they are very crazy about them' as one boy put it (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*) – tended to remain lukewarm at best, typically describing them as 'slow'. Even some girls who professed to sometimes enjoy them nevertheless poked fun at their own and other viewers' reactions: 'Koreans are good at making the atmosphere to make girls cry. Two of my classmates...they are boys...even cry [*laughter*]' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). But in the press, with the exception of nationalist objections to historical 'distortions', negative responses tended to be dismissed as protectionism, particularly the special pleading of Chinese TV producers who fear competition (see X. Huang, 2005; Jing, 2005).

As in Korea, common traditional values have been highlighted when trying to explain dramas' cross-border success: *'Nanfang Daily'*, for example, quoted Shanghai University's Prof. Ge Hongbin, attributing the popularity of *'The Great Changjin'*[35] (*'Dae Jang Geum'*) to being 'culturally well accepted by East Asians who are deeply influenced by Confucianism' (Y. Zhang & Wu, 2005). There is a double theme here: first, that traditional values need restating in a society pressured by rapid modernisation, but also that such traditional values, in fact, carry timeless virtues that facilitate personal success in the modern world. The theme of persistence of an ordinary woman against adversity, for instance, was particularly singled out as generating both a sense of identification and hope. Li Hao, an editor at Hunan Satellite TV, dubbed the it a 'youth

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[35] A 70 episode story, first broadcast in Korea in 2003-4, about an ordinary woman who rises to become court physician in the Chosun Dynasty. Shown on China's Hunan Satellite TV in 2005.

motivational series'[36] (X. Huang, 2005) while Xinhua news agency reported Chen Gang, Vice-president of Hunan Economic TV, pointing to the way 'Such qualities are very much called-for in our personal development in the present-day society' (Y. Zhang & Wu, 2005). This relevance to individual aspirations was also highlighted by Wu Zuolai, research fellow at China Art Institute, contrasting it with the less personally involving focus of Chinese historical dramas on intrigues among palace elites (Jing, 2005) – a criticism also made of Chinese blockbusters. In this regard, Ding Fongfong suggested that Chinese dramas tend instead to follow the ancient Greek/Western model of 'saviour' heroes, in contrast to the Korean more homely and potentially more democratic focus on details of ordinary family domesticity, thus bringing a welcome warmth into the coldness of modern life (Ding, 2007, pp. 82-84).

However, a strong sub-theme of such Chinese explanations of Korean success was instead how it coldly exposed the institutional weaknesses of Chinese dramas (see X. Huang, 2005). Such reporting displayed a clear strand of neo-liberal admiration for the Korean's market responsiveness, singling out their professionalism and production values for specific praise. A feature in *'Beijing Review'*, for instance, noted the five years of preparation behind the *'The Great Changjin'*, including a website to collect audience suggestions for the script. Jing Xiaolei (2005), its author, took the opportunity to criticise local producers for their protectionist instincts and shoddy practices. Chinese scripts were said to be churned out 'in a rough way' whereas Korean actor loyalty was contrasted to their job-juggling Chinese counterparts. Likewise, calls to 'keep the Korean current out' at a TV producers' seminar in Shanghai were juxtaposed with evidence that the bulk of imported programmes were, in fact, mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, with imports, in any case, banned from the primetime slot by SARFT. Yet 'what first comes to the minds of China's TV producers is not how to make better shows, but how to suppress their rivals through administrative maneuvers' (2005). Thus nationalist/protectionist criticism of the success of the Korean wave led to a counter-current of market liberal discourses advocating the benefits of media competition (Kim, 2009, pp. 749-750; Leung,

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[36] *'Qingchun lizhi pian'*; '青春励志片'

2008, pp. 65-67). The tone was clear: China should learn from Korea's skill in combining personally relevant values with technical and marketing professionalism.[37]

Though one could argue that calls for Chinese TV production to match the competition do have an underlying nationalist logic, overt expressions of anti-Korean sentiment have been rarer. Historical dramas are the main exception.[38] A number of Korean drama series have been set in the Goguryeo Kingdom period (391-413 A.D.) which is the subject of fiery historical dispute between Chinese and Korean nationalists. The *'Oriental Morning Post'* reported that the *'The King's Four Guardian Gods'*, for instance, was on a possible SARFT blacklist for its anti-Chinese distortions, though the insertion of fictional elements and characters was also said to have dissatisfied Korean domestic audiences, in spite of good ratings (Luo, 2007). Reports, nevertheless, lamented how this and other such dramas 'seriously distort Chinese history and defame Chinese people' and both netizens and TV producers were quoted urging that such distorted versions should be censored or boycotted (J. He & Huang, 2007).

Non-nationalist audience rejection, on the other hand, has been rather less prominent, with most accounts instead preferring to concentrate on explaining the success of the wave, the social causes of its appeal (as in cultural studies' fandom research) and the lessons for the Chinese TV market.[39] Chen Yanru's research on forty-four Chinese postgraduate 'self-reports' on their internet use (Y. Chen, 2009, pp. 31-32) indicated that girls in particular were fans of the idealised world of handsome boys and beautiful women and the elegant settings which, as Chen puts it, was a 'haven' from pressure or boredom (Y. Chen, 2009, p. 34). However, despite this and the evident commercial success of the wave, among my own interviewees, Korean dramas, though not Korean culture as a whole, were almost invariably described in strikingly dismissive terms even

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[37] The Korean model is also advocated by Wen (2006), as part of a state-private commercialisation strategy.

[38] Another nationalist sub-theme is that, unlike the upfront Western influence epitomised by *McDonald's* and *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, greater vigilance is required against Korean dramas as they 'noiselessly erode' Chinese understandings of its culture, replacing it with Korean nationalist 'common sense'; e.g. that Koreans invented acupuncture, etc (J. Li, 2006). Some of my student contacts also elaborated on this theme, recalling that South Korea had claimed to UNESCO that dragon boat racing originated in Korea.

[39] An exception is Yue who argues that Korean dramas function as feminised 'urban fairy tales' in contrast to the more masculine sense of struggle for a future of freedom and justice expressed in US dramas such as *'Prison Break'* (Yue, 2007, pp. 69-71), but the assumption that a preference for the latter is necessarily a narrowing of the gap between fantasy and reality is something that will be examined in more detail in chapter five.

by those who admitted watching and even enjoying them. This confirms what Wang and Wen's empirical survey on US dramas noted in passing, namely that many of their fans considered Korean dramas unrealistic, even if in some respects culturally closer (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 279). Interestingly, Pease (2006, p. 180) suggested that on the music scene, the extreme youth and somewhat lower social status of the most vociferous teen K-pop fans tended to put off more urban or higher educated students: 'the right music had become the wrong music because the wrong people now liked it'.

Student Responses

A similar stigma seemed to have been associated with Korean drama series which were frequently ridiculed by my students as 'Cinderella stories' aimed at young girls and housewives. Plots were typically disparaged, for instance, by two girls as stereotypical, predictable and slow. One, a fan of US dramas, succinctly summarised the plots: 'There are always two men and two women – A loves B, B loves C, C loves D in a circle' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). The other highlighted what she saw as their excessively melodramatic style: 'Drops of tears go down her face – maybe it takes five minutes – and the movie doesn't move. That's not interesting' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*). The latter comment came from one of the small group interviews I organized with one class, composed mostly of girls (see appendix 2c) for, apart from a minority of committed fans, this was a topic where opinion on the genre seemed to emerge more clearly in the group format, especially where there were both fans and non-fans together (see Gray, 2003, pp. 77-79). Indeed, although I subsequently set an essay on the same theme (Essay 8), the results were rather bland – it appeared that for non-fans the essay form was rather too long and burdensome.[40] However, the group format, with four or five participants, resulted in a more quickfire exchange of echoing and sometimes conflicting views, especially as the participants were all very familiar with each other. I also obtained some data from volunteer e-mail contacts (all girls), from a first year class at BLCU and a mix of third year students and postgraduates at Minzu University whom I contacted through a former

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[40] As the essay was set in June 2007, the lacklustre student response may also have been influenced by a more general fatigue at the end of a long academic year.

teaching colleague.[41] As Korean dramas were among the themes I invited these students to comment on in a set of questions posted to a class e-mail box (see appendix 2e), some did so. Here, in contrast to the group interviews, there was an element of privacy, but without the requirement to respond at greater length or seriousness. As volunteers, these were also, I would speculate, more likely to fall into the category of enthusiasts or perhaps the more eagerly committed students in general, though not necessarily fans of Korean drama.

Indeed, whereas my individual interviewees and essay writers generally dismissed Korean dramas as merely lacking anything of specific interest, reactions among the group interviewees and volunteer e-mail contacts were often strikingly vehement. There was real indignation amongst them, even if expressed with humour and perhaps some self-mockery. One e-mailer, an ambitious Beijing girl with plans to study abroad, even suggested 'I would rather kill myself than wasting time watching them' (*Gan Quan – Em. 1*). Another girl from a more provincial background ridiculed the dramas' emotiveness in a group interview: 'Shouting and screaming like "I love you so much" and so on...I just cannot bear it' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*). Indeed, the excessive, melodramatic character of the genre was dismissed in terms that themselves seemed, perhaps parodically, melodramatic – a point I will return to. Meanwhile, in an echo of the dismissal of soap lovers in the 1980s,[42] the fans of Korean series were described by other female students as simply having nothing better to do: 'generally they [groups of girls] spend a lot of time indoors and they are watching the TV series, eating some snacks in the TV room' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*). In an e-mailed response, a film enthusiast from Beijing, though not a Korean drama fan herself, nevertheless tried to analyse the genre's appeal, suggesting that 'It is understandable that people who are nowadays under great pressure would like it. And also I think university female students dream of such romance' (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*). In a similar, if more dismissive vein, they were said to be women, young and old, who were exhausted by the burdens of life: 'I guess [that] stuff [is] produced especially for housewives [and...] women who always get so tired from work also enjoy Korean dramas because it makes them relaxed watching them' (*Gan Quan – Em. 1*).

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[41] In my preliminary study at Minzu University, Korean dramas were mentioned as favourites in some girls' essays and presentations, especially for their portrayal of romance and beauty.

[42] Challenged by Ang (1985, p. 38), Hills (2002, p. 146) and others (see chapter one).

Whatever the motivations behind their popularity, such dramas were regarded by many of my contacts as ultimately escapist. Unlike English language dramas, watching Korean series tended to be seen as merely indulgent, as they could not be rationalised as in any way educational. Time-wasting, in fact, was a frequent source of guilt for students who felt they should be studying and preparing for their futures. In that sense, in spite of the claims for their role in the shaping of middle class ideals, which I referred to above, respondents here saw them as, in fact, a direct threat to their social and professional aspirations. This rather contrasts with Iwabuchi's findings with Taiwanese reception of Japanese dramas where it seemed that as Taiwan had become wealthier, viewers became more attracted to the closer Japanese vision of a modern lifestyle than the rather fantastic and distant American version they had once yearned after (Iwabuchi, 2005, pp. 27-28). However, perhaps as mainland China had not yet reached the same level of development, the cultural proximity of an indulgent modern lifestyle was implicitly perceived as a threat to the means to achieve it.[43] This might account for the depth of irritation expressed by girls who felt the series exploited their own weaknesses. As I noted above, some girls' reactions to the dramas had a somewhat melodramatic streak that they disparaged in the dramas themselves. Yet the excess of this reaction may be taken as an indication of their very attractiveness. For 'anti-fans', the genre was suspected of performing a kind of trick, luring women into a recurring loop of unrealistic romantic fantasizing. As my Beijing film enthusiast respondent above confessed: 'The more Korean dramas I watch the deeper I hate them – they are really a waste of time and I remember nothing once I finish watching one. However, I can't stop once I start to watch. They remind me of opium' (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*). Similarly, when I asked one of my group interviewees how such dramas compared to Chinese dramas, another Beijing girl suggested that '[...] they are very good at trying to get people to believe that there are fairy tales existing in society and in our real work' (*Yu Shifei – G5/2*).

It is tempting to see these as the reactions of ambitious urbanites, an issue I will return to later, but I found among them non-fans and even anti-fans who came from less cosmopolitan locations, as well as some fans from larger cities. But girls, whether fans or

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[43] Straubhaar (1991, p. 51) found that less educated audiences in Latin America tended to prefer domestically or regionally produced material in their own language.

not, all explained the particular addictive elements of these series as elegance, beauty – 'all pretty and dressed fashionably' (*Fang Liu – Em. 9*) – featuring upmarket lifestyles and above all, the message that 'life is beautiful' and that 'Cinderellas can become princesses' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17)*. Critics of Korean dramas, at best, conceded that such series were a form of harmless relaxation so long as one knew they were unreal. The group of girls talking here, for instance, took care to acknowledge that their friend, Peng Jiwei, was not taken in by the genre and watched, in some sense, ironically:

> *Xu Ruoyun* (*G3/2*): '[...] she knows that it's not real' [*referring to Peng*].
> *Pan Jihua* (*G3/1*): 'Yeah'.
> *Interviewer*: 'You said it was 'Cinderella' didn't you?'
> *Peng Jiwei* (*G3/4*): 'I just watch it for fun – it is not so complex, by Chinese TV's standards'.
> *Pan Jihua* (*G3/1*): 'Don't have to use your brain'.
> [*General laughter*]
> *Xie Qimei* (*G3/3*): 'So she can relax and just watch it'.

Korean dramas, in line with cultural studies research on soap opera fandom (see Ang, 1985, p. 106; Spence, 2005, p. 150), appeared to those who appreciated them as a slightly illicit pleasure, though also a painful one. As a casual, but 'non-fan' viewer from Minzu University explained, although 'they're generally light and very funny in the beginning, [a]s the plot goes on, they get sad and complicated, bringing the fans' hearts along' (*Fang Liu – Em. 9*). Another Minzu University student I interviewed even recalled, with laughter, how as a teenager in a remote part of Guangxi province, she used to sneak out of bed to watch but 'I cried and in the morning my eyes [would] be very red [...] and my mother [would] discover it' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). The problem, she explained, was not the content as such, but her parent's fear of her giving way to indulgent romanticising instead of studying for her university entrance exams. Again, such dramas portrayed a middle class lifestyle, but were suspected of betraying the means to achieve it.

Nevertheless, some girls who admitted being true fans – even if acknowledging the plots' inherent naivety – pointed to what they regarded as typical Eastern grace and

idealism. A translation postgraduate e-mailing from Minzu University explained, 'Korean dramas are very delicate in expressing tender feelings, such as love, family kinship which cater to the taste of most Chinese women' (*Du Mintao – Em. 4*). In that sense, the programmes perhaps shared a degree of restraint and space for self-reflection which Kelly Hu found appealed to Hong Kong fans of Japanese series, giving the dramas a certain therapeutic value in confronting problems, emotions and fantasies (K. Hu, 2008, pp. 115-124). In spite of their unrealistic idealism, they perhaps had a kind of emotional realism that Ang highlighted in her research on viewers of *'Dallas'*, particularly the way a melodramatic 'tragic structure of feeling' enabled fans to imaginatively engage with the sufferings in everyday reality rather than simply escape them (1985, pp. 45-49, 61). But with Korean dramas, their sense of delicacy and opportunity for emotional reflection was contrasted by fans among my informants to the alarming up-front sexuality and aggression of American and European equivalents where, as a girl from Minzu University student put it in an e-mailed response, 'you can see 30 mins after the beginning, the leading roles are in bed' (*Wei Jinmao – Em. 8*).[44] At least in that sense, Korean dramas were a form of escape. A BLCU girl from a rural background explained to her group:

> '[Korean dramas] can express the love so so vividly. Usually I would be moved by them and I don't like the movies about war or violence or something like this...I like some easy movies can make me feel easy... I don't like, I don't like [to] be pressed' (*Liu Weihua – G2/4*).

Some, writing privately – in this case, another female translation postgraduate e-mailing from Minzu University – hinted that Korean dramas were a relief from real life pressures and pointed to their family-based plots as an antidote to homesickness:

> 'That's my favourite, because I like the in-depth plots and the lifestyles in Korean [series], besides all the dramas [are] composed of family relationships and moral

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[44] Iwabuchi makes a similar point with regard to Taiwanese fans of Japanese dramas, suggesting that although they considered local dramas too conservative with regard to sex, American series such as *'Beverley Hills 90210'* were perhaps too open (Iwabuchi, 2005, p. 25).

issues. I won't feel lonely even I watch it by myself, for is as [if] I were one of the family members' (*Kong Yuguo – Em. 7*).

As in this instance, fans tended to evoke a sense of loss, or yearning for something missing, with Korean dramas playing a compensatory role 'filling up a vacuum in Chinese people's hearts' as one essay writer put it. This was something she attributed to the way 'Chinese values [had been] uprooted and abandoned during the Cultural Revolution and the process of modernization' (*Kang Li – E8/22*). Another Minzu University e-mail contact from a small town expressed similar views, suggesting that 'Korean dramas have ethics, morals, values and human feelings that China lacks' (*Hong Zhu – Em. 5*). Thus, fans' sense of lack and the pursuit of something forever lost, 'chasing the feeling of ideal love in their heart' (*Wei Jinmao – Em. 8*), perhaps contained a hint of admitted weakness – an air of faintly defeatist recognition that such dreams were necessarily displaced to a lost past or to a virtual, and virtuous, reality. But this admission, however brave and candid, may once again explain the wariness of many other girls towards the genre's attractions. For non-fans, Korean dramas were an affront to girls' pursuit of 'real' dreams and, by extension, the realisation of a strong China.

So, while many observers have speculated that the series' appeal might lie in a recognition of cultural familiarity, for many of my respondents, this was to some extent a double-edged sword. Indeed, one girl I interviewed – a strong fan of the US series *'Sex and the City'* – related the issue specifically to power and status: 'at least they do not dare to look down upon people watching American [series...]. Maybe it's because of its economic power [...] My roommates [...] still look down upon themselves when they were watching the Korean ones' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). From this perspective, Korean dramas were seen as the refuge of the weak.

Boys, on the other hand, even if dismissive of the genre, seemed to be less personally threatened, although they were fewer among my sample and were less likely to bring up the topic. One of my interviewees, however, told me he was particularly interested in and attracted to Korean culture because, coming from a northern province, there were ethnic Koreans in his home town and in Beijing he had made some Korean friends. But, although he was sceptical towards Korean dramas, he was less stridently

dismissive than some girls: 'it's not I dislike all of them, I like some of them, but if the films are very naïve [*laughter...*]' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). Indeed, his main reservation with the genre, as with many girls, was that it lacked didactic value: '[...it] just tells us about romantic love, it can't make us think about something' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). Another boy I interviewed, also explained how 'sometimes I like to watch them' even if '[...] some of them are very childish maybe' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*). But although he was apparently not personally concerned with any stigma in viewing such material, when asked to compare them with Chinese dramas, he suggested that Chinese censors would not permit the making of such 'affecting' romances for fear that they would both arouse parental objections and undermine traditional Chinese values:

> *Ye Rongbai (Int. 15)*: '[...] when you watch Western movies you just take it for fun, you won't think 'oh this kind of thing is reality' [...] but when you are watching Korean things, well, things are different'.
> *Interviewer*: 'So you are saying that the Korean ones seem closer to reality?'.
> *Ye Rongbai (Int. 15)*: 'Yeh, it's a big problem for parents to worry about'.

Indeed, their very cultural closeness merely intensified their danger, particularly, it seemed, to girls.

In contrast, therefore, to the suggestion that Korean dramas are purveyors of chic, modernised versions of traditional values, most of my respondents portrayed them as a distracting threat to the very neo-liberal/traditionalist alliance that would lead to personal achievement and national strengthening. For the minority of fans I encountered, the dramas seemed to be a refuge from the pressures involved in these very modernising processes. Although, as I suggested previously, there was no clear-cut urban/provincial division in the backgrounds of critics and fans of Korean dramas, it was nevertheless noticeable that fans tended to be either from among my e-mail respondents at Minzu University – an institution with slightly lower entrance exam scores and generally less urban student population – or, alternatively, among BLCU students from more provincial areas. The most vociferous 'anti-fans', on the other hand, were generally girls from larger cities. Some support for this view is provided in Chen Yanru's 'self-report' study,

mentioned above, which had a substantial number of students from rural backgrounds and indicated 'little or no resistance' to the attractions of Korean dramas, despite recognition of their 'fairy tale' quality (2009, pp. 34, 33).[45] That is not to say that there were no city based fans among my sample or that all provincial students were fans, but my impression from observing group interviews at BLCU was that the few fans tended to be quieter members of the class and, in some cases, achieved lower scores in assignments and exams. Anti-fans, by comparison, were generally more prominent class participants and higher achievers. Their antagonism to Korean series and the sense of indulgence and weakness they associated with their fans was perhaps a reflection of their position as young women on the threshold of adulthood whose ambitions were still in the process of being realised and who were living in a developing society where middle class lifestyles could not be taken for granted. In contrast, the fans interviewed by Lin and Tong in the more developed economies of Hong Kong and Singapore used Korean dramas as a means to fantasise about a traditionalism that did not necessarily exist in their lives: 'They identified with the social realism of women portrayed in the dramas, who appear to be strong and carefree on the surface, but in fact they cherish the wish of being a happy housewife, and to have a husband to lean on' (Lin & Tong, 2008, p. 113).[46] As many of these fans were career women working in middle class professions, in contrast to my interviewees, they already enjoyed a certain financial security and consequently, the indulgent escapism of Korean dramas was perhaps more of an attraction and less of a threat.

For most of my respondents, however, even though Korean dramas were distanced from any direct representation of Chinese society, the temptation to indulge in escapist neo-traditionalism or trendy middle class romances was problematic, if only because of what many girls, in particular, saw as their insidiously comforting distractions. Thus, Korean dramas directly exposed a tension between the sacrifices required to achieve middle class lifestyles and the actual performance of these lifestyles, but by rejecting such 'visual opium', my upwardly mobile young respondents were able to

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[45] Chen, based at Xiamen University on the coast near Taiwan, does not state which universities her students attended, but they were all postgraduates.

[46] As Lin and Tong point out, the Singapore government promotes conservative 'Confucian' family values which may have influenced some of their interviewees (2008, pp. 114-117).

define themselves as realistic, disciplined dream builders, not addicts. As with their reactions to Chinese blockbusters, they tended to be uneasy with either a denial of modernity in films that exoticised what they regarded as somewhat decadent, backward aspects of China's traditional culture, or in depictions of contemporary Asian lifestyles that seemed to distract from the means to achieve them. Instead they sought out a realism which they felt Hollywood was better able to provide, as I will explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.   Viewing Hollywood: Seeking a New 'Main Melody'

China lives with its ideological past and present intertwined in complex, often inconsistent yet also apparently compatible ways, creating what Zhang Xudong has described as an open, hybrid, 'experimental' post-socialism (2008, p. 10). As noted in the last chapter, this very hybridity could lead students into inconsistently defensive stances in their film-watching opinions in which their desire to become modern and contemporary provoked a rejection of some of the products of modern hybridity, whether domestic or from abroad, especially those that seemed to imply a backward stereotype of China or threaten progress to that goal.

Students' defensiveness in these instances by no means represented a nationalist rejection of the foreign *per se*. Indeed, the pervasive culture of DVD and downloading among young educated Chinese bears witness to a positive enthusiasm to absorb and engage with globalised entertainment media and to bypass the constrictions of official domestic media's mainstream or 'main melody' didacticism which, in the words of one official, has traditionally opposed 'the trend to regard [...] enjoyment as superior to [political] orientation' (Y. Hong, 2002: 32). But, without denying film and television's function as a means of relaxation and leisure, it was evident from students' own responses that they also recognised that an educational element is intrinsic to the medium. From a theoretical perspective, as Zizek notes, 'cinema doesn't give you what you desire, it tells you how to desire' (Fiennes & Zizek, 2006). Yet, in an increasingly open economy with its unofficial undercurrent of media piracy, there is undoubtedly a much wider range of messages than before to choose from. In a globally interpenetrated media world it therefore makes sense to study film from a consumers' perspective, as Higson and other film scholars have long suggested (1989, pp. 44-46; Yingjin Zhang, 2007, pp. 29-32), going beyond the conceptual boundaries of national cinema and, we might add, its equivalent in broadcasting systems.[1]

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[1] Berry and Farquhar argue that the national cinemas approach with its assumption of a stable national cultural entity is no longer viable in the era of globalisation, particularly in the case of China with the added complexity of the distinctive positions of Hong Kong and Taiwan (2006, pp. 2-3). This leads to an analysis of cinema that is transnational, but this can be understood in two ways: either with the national hierarchically subsumed under a wider notion of Chinese culture or alternatively envisaged in a non-hierarchical manner as a varied and contested field of differing yet linked elements (2006, pp. 4-5). The former retains a sense of unity and coherence, but only changes the ground on which it is based whereas the

Within this expanded choice, preferences for particular films, as I noted in chapter one, ranged across a wide spectrum. Nevertheless, there were a number of recurring, if sometimes conflicting themes in my informants' responses. Echoing their reaction to cultural hybridity, I will suggest that my students rejected not so much the didacticism in mainstream films but what they considered to be the wrong kind of didacticism. In their search for fresh messages or even old messages freshly presented, students' responses to the films they watched suggested, first, that they were seeking ways to sustain their faith under the pressurised yet contradictory post-socialist system that they found themselves in and, secondly, that they were looking for a vision of their own future that this faith might open up for them. I will therefore begin this chapter by discussing the role foreign entertainment media plays in bolstering the morale of students by reinforcing their belief in the value of pragmatism, hard work, and a certain 'realism' in what I shall suggest is a broader depoliticising move which simultaneously has political implications. This will first involve looking at two instances of students' responses to films they watched in their classes, including *'The Shawshank Redemption'* (1994), before considering the types of films students chose for themselves.

Credible Encouragement

Audience researchers have highlighted how watching 'mere' entertainment can often be a contentious issue (Alasuutari, 1999a, p. 90; Bird, 2003, p. 1). Although my respondents watched for mainly for 'relaxation' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*), 'for fun' (*Yao Yang – Int. 2*) and to 'relieve pressure' (*Wan Jiaying – E9/37*), in common with other audiences around the world (see Hoijer, 1999, pp. 181-183), some of my students appeared guilty and defensive about their supposedly trivial viewing habits, as I noted in chapter three with viewers of Korean dramas. Under such social pressure and indeed perhaps a consciousness of their higher educated status, it was clear from my research that the students I encountered liked to feel that they derived some educational and, in some respects, a moral benefit from their viewing, and in particular, a sense of encouragement to bolster their determination to persist towards to their goals in spite of pressures and

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latter challenges the very basis of that unity. This is not to deny the real effects of that sense of unity but rather to note how it requires both constant reiteration and a degree of suppression of difference (2006, pp. 5-7).

moments of doubt. Indeed, although in reporting their preferences to me, students may in some cases have played down their viewing of escapist entertainment, if so, this would reflect the wider social circumstances in which their film watching took place and the messages they felt they ought to derive from them.

When I asked third year students at BLCU to write about their viewing preferences (Essay 2), across the range of films they mentioned, a number of themes could be discerned. Firstly, they liked films that they felt conveyed messages of persistence, self-belief and encouragement which provided what I call a 'vaccination against disillusion'. So-called 'main melody' Chinese films and programmes that contained equivalent uplifting messages were rarely mentioned as favourites, and were generally not popular with most students who regarded them as overly politicised and lacking credibility. Films and dramas with a revolutionary theme, for example, were generally dismissed across a range of interviews and essays as 'usually very boring' (*Zhang Jie – Int. 14*) and as I noted in chapter three, students tended to reject the idea of artists acting as teachers. Even a student who was a party member commented that 'sometimes Chinese films will [...] just present some good things to the audience' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). But as I also described in chapter three, students largely rejected some of the alternatives to traditional 'main melody' productions, whether blockbusters or costume dramas.[2] Thus my respondents tended to disparage Chinese films and drama series, either for overtly following the government's 'main theme', or for ducking 'realism' altogether by being set, for example, in a falsified distant past (see Y. Hong, 2002, pp. 34-35).

A second strand of preferences that emerged from my student's responses was for films which I refer to as offering 'creative alternatives' and 'liberal possibilities'. These allowed students to wander imaginatively to see other cultures and lifestyles as well as encounter, in films such as *'Brokeback Mountain'* (2005) and *'Mona Lisa Smile'* (2003), messages of social tolerance and resistance to conservative traditions. Through these preferences, it therefore appeared that my students were searching for a middle way between traditional propaganda messages and what they regarded as escapism or empty

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[2] The main exception to this was the comedies of Feng Xiaogang which some students mentioned liking (see chapter three).

entertainment. Instead, they were seeking a fresher alternative produced by Hollywood itself which combined an element of moral inspiration and learning, but in a more enjoyable and credible manner than most domestically produced material.

Moral Cultivation and 'The Shawshank Redemption'

I will explore various facets of this search for a more credible alternative 'main melody' throughout this chapter, but what particularly caught my attention during my conversations with two students from Minzu University whom I interviewed separately, was that although most of what they watched was viewed on computer in their dorms, in a number of cases the films they raised with me had in fact been shown to them in their classes, and in particular, their political education classes. Although a specific case, this nevertheless fits in with a general trend within such courses to focus less on overt ideology through 'thought work' (Marxist theory, party policy and so on) than on attempts to shape behaviour directly through offering apparently practical advice. As a Tsinghua University professor was reported admitting, simply trying to 'pour' Marxist philosophy into students is 'very difficult' in the current diverse social and economic environment (Z. Zhou, 2006). Not only is this an acknowledgment of the unpopularity of political education, but also an implicit recognition that if such classes were to be taken at face value, they might raise potentially awkward questions.[3]

One solution to these difficulties has therefore been to consolidate such courses across the university system from eight down to four whilst tilting the balance away from political-economy to less heavily theoretical historical topics and also more individually-oriented 'Morality and Self-cultivation' classes.[4] In spite of its obviously disciplinary intent, such morality classes also promise some utilitarian value as they centre around themes of persistence and self-discipline, with films sometimes used to both convey and spice the message. According to my interviewees from Minzu University some 'main melody' Chinese films were shown in their Moral Cultivation classes in order to illustrate

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[3] According to Pan Su-yan, students at the elite Tsinghua University in Beijing not only found political courses dull but sometimes asked their politics lecturers whether they sincerely believed socialism was superior (Pan, 2009, p. 164).

[4] *Sixiang daode xiuyang*: 思想道德修养

these topics, such as, *'Zhang Side'*,[5] a 2004 biopic of Chairman Mao's self-sacrificing security guard. But, Hollywood fare was just as likely to be used.[6] One student, for instance, recalled having being shown *'The Shawshank Redemption'* (1994) three times in one year in both Criminal Law and English classes as well as her Moral Cultivation course. As she explained, in the case of Moral Cultivation, 'they have to encourage us so they show the film' and so the message of the film, as she put it, was 'not to lose heart in setbacks' (*Wen Hongju – Int. 3*). According to a boy from another department who attended the same class, the teacher showed the students this film at the point in the course that related to persistence, self discipline and maintaining a hopeful or positive outlook (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*).

Like the US drama series *'Prison Break'* with which it was sometimes compared, the film tells the story of an innocent man who, through much guile and persistence, manages to escape from brutal incarceration after 20 years of secret tunnelling in order to both win his freedom and expose the prison's corrupt governor. The lecturer's teaching point, according to my interviewees, was that 'this hero [is] in an unfair situation, but he gets through by his own efforts and in the end realises his goal. [The teacher] told us if a person comes across difficulty, you should have this attitude...proper attitude' (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*).[7] Other students at BLCU who had watched the film on their own initiative expressed similar sentiments. When asked to describe her film preferences, one of my essay writers said that she wished to thank the director because:

'Once I lose heart trying to overcome difficulty, I can remember his persistence, courage and belief. Then I will encourage myself to persevere. If Shawshank

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[5] '张思德'

[6] Students from BLCU told me that their Moral Cultivation class included a variety of films, including *'Yuanmingyuan'* (2006), a documentary recounting the destruction of the Old Summer Palace by foreign forces in 1860, but also films and programmes on more practical topics such as how to how to prepare for job interviews. Informants said they appreciated the way the teacher gave them what they regarded as potentially useful advice (20th Sep. 2010).

[7] In a similar vein, a review of the film by Han Jinling of the Marxism-Leninism Education Department of Weifang College in Shandong highlights how '[the hero] Andy's intelligence lies in his ability to see who among the prisoners is out of the ordinary and can help him' and how he manages to use his previous banking experience to gain the favour of the corrupt governor when he needs an accountant to launder money. According to Han, with students facing increasing job competition as graduate numbers increase, Andy had become their idol and the film 'deeply affected students' outlook on job hunting and careers' (2006, p. 72).

[*sic*]⁸ can do it, why can't I solve these relatively little problems? Gradually I have changed into a person who has will power and fortitude' (*Bi Yufang – E2/2*).

As I will show later, this theme of persistence recurred in response to a number of films students reported watching. However, what was striking in this case was that not only could a Hollywood film fit the requirements of Chinese political education, but that it could do so without recourse either to a nationalistic interpretation of a corrupt and brutal American prison system or, indeed, the race and class-based nature of the injustice; unlike the white middle class escapee, most of the prisoners, including the black narrator, are lower class workers resigned to the inequity of the system. The lesson conveyed to students was therefore both individualistic and realistic in the sense that it made no attempt to disguise the implication that they themselves might come across injustice and corruption of one sort or another rather closer to home and that they would have to deal with it patiently.

Corruption, even if sensitive, is hardly a taboo subject in the Chinese media and public discourse, as can be seen in daily news reports or, for instance, television drama series since the mid-1990s. But, as Bai Ruoyun points out, these invariably feature a virtuous party official who eventually triumphs, thereby evoking the ancient imperial tradition of the 'clean official' (R. Bai, 2008, pp. 48-49). In this way, support for party rule is mobilised even while depicting its shortcomings, though among Bai's audience interviewees, few thought that such clean officials existed in reality (R. Bai, 2008, p. 51). Nevertheless, as he suggests, the portrayal of a determined stand against corruption can perhaps provide the kind of emotional realism identified by Ang as one of the keys to understanding the attraction of soap opera (R. Bai, 2008, p. 56). Indeed, without an admission that some within the system are corrupt – and without a means to re-channel the anger this generates – the party's appeal for loyalty would risk losing much of its credibility.

In the case of *'The Shawshank Redemption'*, there is no focus on 'clean officials'; quite the reverse, as the prison's governor is corrupt and the system appears implacable. According to my Minzu University interviewees, the message conveyed in their Moral

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⁸ The main character is, in fact, named Andy Dufresne. Shawshank is the name of the prison.

Cultivation class was therefore that they should take heart and deal with social injustice by drawing on the inner resources that higher education provides. The key to the lesson's credibility rested on how the realistic didacticism of the educational message matched the film's apparently realistic depiction of violence and corruption. My interviewees suggested that both they and their classmates generally appreciated the use of Hollywood in this way, first because 'theory is very boring' (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*) and secondly, because compared to Chinese films such as *'Zhang Side'*, it avoided the idealisation of socialist models and exemplars. Again, as Bai points out, although the anti-corruption investigator in the TV drama *'Pure as Snow'* (2001), for example, is portrayed as sometimes losing his cool, in the end he accepts his superior's more rational, evidence-based approach (R. Bai, 2008, pp. 54-59). Ultimately, therefore, the difference between foreign and domestic popular entertainment, as my informant put it, was that in China it seemed as if

> 'Chinese people are always gentlemen. [...] I think such films are very interesting, but not realistic...In foreign films you can see good people or leaders, they also use dirty words...I am not saying this is a good thing, but it is films reflecting real life...' (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*).

Student appreciation for foreign realism was another recurring theme, as I shall discuss further below. Yet, ironically, the central plot of *'The Shawshank Redemption'* ultimately rests on the scarcely credible notion that a tunnel could be hidden for years in a prisoner's cell behind a flimsy poster of a film star. In that sense, it can be argued that the film plays a depoliticising role insofar as the American film's gritty, un-gentlemanly portrayal of everyday life offers plausibility to the attractive fantasy that cool intelligence and persistence will necessarily win in the end. To some extent, the American setting distances the injustice, but the very distancing facilitates its application to Chinese society. So although Chinese viewers may not react fundamentally differently to viewers in other contexts – many other audiences have been reported as finding the film personally

inspirational (Gilbey, 2004)[9] – we can nevertheless note that the appropriation of a foreign film provided the credibility for a (depoliticising) political message to be conveyed in the first place, largely because the Chinese industry is constrained from doing so quite as bluntly.[10] As such, its surreptitious, but nevertheless, candid admission of systematic injustice was sufficiently fresh in the Chinese context to allow the fantasy resolution to be enjoyed, unlike the sugar coating of most 'main melody' local films and dramas.

Vaccination against Disillusion

At least when films conveyed messages of encouragement that seemed fresh and credible, students did not therefore reject outright elements of didacticism but indeed sought them out when choosing what to watch. Key to this credibility was a measured dose of imported 'realism'[11] that acted, I would suggest, as a kind of vaccination again loss of faith in the possibility of personal advancement and success within the current system, despite widespread private 'incredulity' at the system's more familiar socialist metanarratives of selflessness and collectivism (F. Liu, 2008, p. 196).[12] However, it is important to note that this acceptance of a didactic element to their viewing was not because students were the passive recipients of media messages, as assumed by the so-called 'hypodermic model' of communications outlined in chapter one (see Jensen, 1991b, pp. 136-137; Morley, 1992, pp. 45-47; Spitulnik, 1993, p. 296), but rather because they felt free to accept or reject the medicine on offer – the relative freedom, and frankness, was one of the conditions of the medicine's acceptance.

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[9] The film achieved its success initially in the US, but later internationally, mainly through video and DVD rental as it performed poorly at the US box office, for although nominated for seven Oscars and generally well received by critics, it was initially overshadowed by the success of *'Forrest Gump'* (1994) (Kermode, 2003, pp. 11-12).

[10] As already noted, not all Chinese series and films shy away from confronting contemporary social realities, but they must do so within certain bounds if they are to be exhibited at home. *'Lost in Beijing'* (2007), for instance, was only shown after making substantial cuts. Its screening licence was subsequently cancelled and its director punished after the deleted scenes were circulated on the internet and the uncut version had been submitted to the Berlin film festival (Martinsen, 2008b).

[11] As Hallam and Marshment point out, 'realism' comes in many forms, none of which can be regarded as having a straightforward correspondence to reality and therefore the concept is perhaps best analysed through how it is used (2000, pp. x, xv-xvi).

[12] That is not to say that these are the only messages emerging in state discourse as there is also an emphasis on competition, qualifications and personal development (F. Liu, 2008, pp. 196-197).

One of Lull's points emphasised in his research into Chinese television audiences in the 1980s was that media messages are themselves 'polysemic' and can be read in different ways which meant that state television could face resistant reactions from audiences tired, among other things, of the government's 'constant self-promotion' (1991, pp. 214, 218). When explaining their viewing preferences, my respondents were also aware, in a general sense, that their national media, including entertainment, operates under official constraints and imperatives designed to discipline society: '[they] always try to introduce something to you, try to teach you something *true*... [*laughter*] like the good people will be good, have a good end, but we know in reality...' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). But contrary to Lull's thesis (1991, pp. 216-220) in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, even if access to foreign media messages had stretched the credibility of the party-state's propaganda, this was largely taken for granted by my respondents and in some respects discounted. Consequently, although students were sometimes conscious of the greater freedoms in the lives of young people portrayed in American films (as I will discuss below), it was not necessarily a revelation to them as it had been to some of Lull's audiences in the 1980s (1991, pp. 171-175). When, for instance, I pointed out to one interviewee (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*) that another girl had mentioned viewing foreign films with a certain envy at the freedoms young people elsewhere enjoyed, she responded laconically: 'we have realised [this], so we won't....' – the unfinished phrase itself a form of mental shrug – adding 'if she becomes frustrated, or depressed, I think it's unnecessary because we are just in it, in such a situation'.

So, whilst China's official socialist 'melodies' imposed certain limitations on the Chinese media, many of my respondents tended to view them with a measure of detachment, if not actual cynicism, whereas their Hollywood-mediated countermelodies were still often sufficiently fresh to work a certain magic. And whereas Lull (1991, p. 173) found that the glimpses of foreign cultures and lifestyles via television made Chinese audiences in the 1980s feel 'discouraged' and critical, many of my students instead used the new freedom provided by DVD and downloading to seek out a defence against such discouragement. A girl, for instance, could write about her appreciation for the football film, *'Goal!'* (2005), with its tale of a poor immigrant boy making it to the English premier league, as it 'teaches me how to be strong....and how to pluck up courage to

pursue my dream without hesitation' (*Chai Haiming – E2/ 4*). Likewise, when asked what they thought they learned from the films they watched, a pair of interviewees cited the Tim Burton film *'Big Fish'* (2003) for its 'attitude of adventure' and the inspirational way in which 'however difficult it is, the main actor, he never...he never thought about giving up...' (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*).

Nevertheless, students' emphasis on messages of encouragement implied the need for it in the first place. As I noted with reference to their responses to *'The Shawshank Redemption'*, they appreciated such messages precisely in order to help them persevere through doubts and disappointments. The fan of *'Goal!'*, for instance, drew a link between *'Titanic'* (1997) and the pressured social conditions in which students found themselves: 'As the competition between people becomes more and more fierce, this film makes me believe that true love still exists and we are not living in a cold and indifferent society' (*Chai Haiming – E2/ 4*). Similarly, a second year student expressed admiration for *'Braveheart'* (1995), the tale of Scottish medieval heroism, with its moody bagpipe music and message of persistence against the odds. When I asked why this was significant to her, she recalled taking part in an election for a position in her student union, only to find that a lecturer and the previous incumbent had already colluded to pre-select another candidate. The election was therefore fake, and as she put it, 'disgusting', especially as a similar disappointment had occurred at her high school over a chance to become a party member. But the fact that the hero of *'Braveheart'* is ultimately betrayed, captured and killed was, nevertheless, irrelevant to her as the 'process was more important than the result' (*Zhang Jie – Int. 14*), both vaccinating against disillusion and strengthening her resolve to seek alternative opportunities.

For students still unsure of their futures, such films provided reassurance. One of my most conscientious writing students and a fan of *'Seabiscuit'* (2003), the story of a depression era racehorse winning against the odds, summed up what this type of film meant to her: 'I learn never to concede victory easily, never to lose confidence because of the misfortunes in life. [Films] help reinforce my belief that 'Life is very much like a mirror: when you smile at it, it smiles at you'' (*Hou Fang – E2/15*). These sentiments might seem a little naïve to the more cynical observer, at least in the terms she used to express them in, but unlike the reactions to Korean dramas described in chapter three,

students did not seem to view such inspirational films with the same scepticism perhaps because they depicted, and encouraged, hard work and persistence and were therefore not regarded as indulging in mere fantasy. One of my third year e-mail respondents from Minzu University, for example, when asked to describe a recent film and what she thought of it, mentioned downloading *'The Pursuit of Happyness'* (2006) which she said 'stimulated me to fight' against life's dissatisfactions (*Kong Yuguo – Em. 7*). Based on a true story of a man who loses his home but then defeats twenty other trainees in order to be taken on by a stockbroking firm, the film received some generally positive reviews in the US (LaSalle, 2006; Puig, 2006). But there was a political dimension to the reactions: the right of centre *'National Review'* named it as one of the best conservative films of the last twenty-five years for its depiction of uncomplaining hard work and ambition (Miller, 2009), whilst the more liberal *'New York Times'* dismissed it 'a fairy tale in realist drag', despite praising the performances (Dargis, 2006).[13] However, for my respondents, who faced an increasingly competitive environment, it was this very mix of realism and dream fulfilment that had a particular appeal. Confronted by an almost 27% annual rise in undergraduate numbers from 1999 to 2004 and the consequent difficulty in finding graduate level jobs (Wan, 2006, pp. 19, 24-25), many students were not surprisingly concerned about their career prospects (J. Han, 2006, p. 72), and therefore true life (fairy) tales of success against the odds had a considerable attraction.[14]

There were, however, some limits to students' willingness to suspend disbelief in this manner. *'Forrest Gump'* (1994), which was also widely regarded by reviewers as politically conservative (Deacy, 2005, pp. 32-33; Maltby, 2003, p. 440; Miller, 2009), produced more divided reactions. Despite having performed poorly at the Chinese box office owing to poor dubbing and perhaps its excess of specifically American cultural and political references to Elvis, JFK, Nixon and others (Rosen, 2002: p75, n. 26), as a 'classic', it nevertheless has had a longer digital 'half-life' in DVD/downloading communities. But unlike *'The Shawshank Redemption'*, with its depiction of intelligence and perseverance, *'Forrest Gump'* shows its simple-minded hero's uncanny success,

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[13] Some British reviews from traditionally liberal sources such as *'The Independent'* and the BBC took a similarly negative line (Arendt, 2007; Quinn, 2007).

[14] As I noted previously, against a background of widening inequality in China since the 1980s (OECD, 2004, pp. 27-32), young Chinese are often said to be more materialistic (F. Liu, 2008, p. 206; Rosen, 2004, pp. 27-30).

whether a participant in the Vietnam war or Sino-American ping-pong diplomacy, to be dependent upon his innocent human goodness and sheer good fortune rather than intellect or insight. Among my contacts, it was noticeable that the film seemed to strike a particular chord with those attending the slightly lower academic level Minzu University,[15] perhaps because it both downplayed the importance of raw intelligence – as one put it, 'IQ is not the first' (*Chen Qianwei – Em. 3*) – and for the way the hero's motto metaphorically sweetens life's otherwise alarming arbitrariness when he famously suggests that 'Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get'. Although deeply affected by the turbulent events of the period, Gump is politically unengaged, unlike his activist love interest. Yet, by the end of the film, it is she who is afflicted by AIDS, while Gump emerges unscathed. Many critics consequently saw the movie as a daringly direct paean to depoliticisation, though as Maltby suggests (2003, pp. 440-443), audiences could either take the film at face value, or instead see it as an exposé of right wing revisionist manipulation. Certainly, when I asked some of my interviewees at BLCU, responses were a little more varied, with some admiring how 'a small person can also achieve great accomplishments' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*) but others, more sceptically, found the ease with which Gump achieves success 'without very tough effort [...] a little weird' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*).

These divergent judgements might seem almost theological in their overtones that evoke the Catholic tradition that virtue will receive its (heavenly) reward, versus the (Calvinist) Protestant preference for demonstrating one's 'elect' status through worldly effort and self-cultivation.[16] Though the analogy may seem a stretch in the Chinese context, as Ci Jiwei points out, socialist ideas of modernisation, in contrast to traditional Confucian disparagement of mere labour, promoted production and the accumulation of capital for the state in a manner 'not unlike that found in the Protestant ethic' (Ci, 1994, p. 150). So, although students liked the idea that goodness would be rewarded, it was not one they necessarily relied on and, consequently, they tended to praise films that encouraged or reminded them to be confident and seize every opportunity.

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[15] As I explained in chapter one, entrance exam scores for Minzu University were generally lower than at BLCU.

[16] As Weber in his *'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'* put it, 'The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system' (2003 [1958], p. 117).

Cultural Distance: Limits to Cynicism

As I have suggested, even if sometimes wary of naïve idealisation, students sought reassurance through their viewing preferences and Hollywood productions were often able to provide the kind of credible inspiration that they were seeking and could identify with. Films set in widely differing circumstances far from their own experiences could still convey values that seemed relevant to their lives – indeed, more relevant than many domestic productions, as noted above – particularly through stories of personal success based on a mix of talent and persistence.

Given this generally positive view, I was also interested in exploring what barriers – if any – there were to students' appreciation of foreign material. However, my respondents did not necessarily specify their preferences according to cultural or national criteria and instead often referred to generic categories or to their own tastes either for different forms of entertainment. There were girls, for example, who liked the *'Pirates of the Caribbean'* films (2003, 2006, 2007) precisely because 'Johnny Depp and Orlando Bloom are very handsome' (*Wang Qingxiu – E9/38*) or because they considered *'Legends of the Fall'* (1994) a 'classic', in part, because of Brad Pitt's depiction of a 'wild, free, handsome man [*laughter*]' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*). The laughter from these girls as they confessed to these tastes perhaps signalled a certain nervousness at admitting that Pitt's good looks were a factor in the film's attractiveness, rather than his pursuit of justice. Indeed, although some students chose eclectically according to their mood, most of my interviewees and e-mail volunteer respondents said they preferred more intellectually stimulating material. As one girl put it, 'I don't like commercial films such as *Spiderman* and *The Pirates of Caribbean* because they can't make me think!' (*Mo Hongping – Em. 2*).

Cultural factors defined along East/West criteria were therefore not always key in determining students' preferences. When I asked my third year students specifically to write about whether they felt any cultural distance as they watched foreign films (Essay 6), it was not necessarily the most overt differences that they cited as problematic. Some, for instance, pointed out that the religious background to films such as *'The Da Vinci Code'* (2006) or the *'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe'* (2005) were obvious

potential differences, but not always insurmountable ones: 'although we couldn't accept their religious belief [...] at least we could figure out what these films wish to express to us' (*Cao Jiemei – E6/3*). On the other hand, more overtly religious films, such as *'The Ten Commandments'* (1956) or *'The Passion of the Christ'* (2004) were said by some of my interviewees to have little clear relevance their own concerns:

> 'to us there was no significance at all to understand[ing] this; those foreign films I like most are talking about universal problems of the whole human race, about violence, drugs, more practical or some very deep thinking ones, things like the ultimate value of life [...]' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*).

As in this case, students generally approved of realistic and thought-provoking films that they felt had a broader social significance, but as I discovered, there were some limits to their taste for such material. Another interviewee, for example, who also told me he preferred films that made him reflect, nevertheless felt puzzled and disappointed by the classic 1960s film *'The Graduate'* (1967) in which a young Dustin Hoffman plays a student seduced by his girlfriend's mother. At its release, the film seemed to catch the mood of a more liberal generation which had become alienated from the American dream and the dominant middle class values typified by the rather uninspiring career advice its hero receives to go into 'plastics' (Maltby, 2003, p. 176; Ryan & Kellner, 1988, pp. 7, 20). In this case, however, my interviewee's problem was that the high reputation of the film and specifically the Simon and Garfunkel soundtrack had set up somewhat romantic expectations that were not met. As he explained

> 'the song in the movie is so beautiful and I think the story should be very beautiful [...but] when I saw the movie, the picture, the sound, the people, and everything is so ordinary, common, nothing special, but it's so famous, so I can't understand why [...]' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*).

Films that were ground-breaking in their time can, of course, seem dated to subsequent generations living in a different social context, though as I will show later, this student

and others by no means rejected socially liberal films, nor those which encouraged rebellion against conservatism. Nevertheless, the depiction of alienation from middle class dreams *per se* seemed to be a theme with which young students could not easily identify.

Some of this puzzlement was present in comments on *'American Beauty'* (1999), the Oscar-winning tale of US suburban middle-class dysfunctionalism. The film's exposé of the dark side of the American dream (in the tradition of Arthur Miller's *'Death of a Salesman'*), reveals job insecurity, teenage angst, marital infidelity, drug culture and more, and unlike the realism depicted in *'The Shawshank Redemption'*, the characters display few obviously heroic qualities. Lester, the middle-aged protagonist, not only blackmails his employers when his job is threatened, but then becomes consumed by a sexual passion for his teenage daughter's best friend.[17] Some of my essay writers discussing cultural distance suggested that this was not necessarily the kind of realism they wished to see. As one boy put it: 'Many things they take as normal are weird in our view. Their culture challenges our routine life. [...] In the presence of their [...] lifestyle we seem to be ignorant and innocent' (*Qin Jinwei – E6/28*). The key point here was not necessarily that the film was more explicit than others, but rather the way it challenged what he considered to be established norms of behaviour. As another essay writer suggested, 'Chinese people share the value of working hard and hiding the pressures [of life]' and therefore may not accept how 'dreams are broken' (*Mao Jianqi – E6/23*). Other students to whom I showed *'American Beauty'*[18] as part of their second year oral English class also expressed ambivalent feelings, for although they were interested to study the film – we watched over a number of weeks, looking at the script and summarising the plot and characters – some felt that even if Chinese people accepted that America had social problems, it was rather 'depressing', as one told me in a subsequent interview, to see them depicted on screen (*Zhang Jie – Int. 14*). Similarly, in a group interview (*G5*)

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[17] The film 'presents itself as a satire on middle-class materialism', as Karlyn suggests, but Lester's rebellion against such a life depends upon his redundancy pay off and his wife's income and therefore 'disavowing an affluent lifestyle is a lot easier for those who are secure in it' (2004, p. 82).

[18] My oral English class requested me to teach using films and I decided to use *'American Beauty'* as I had previously screened it at Minzu University as part of an audio-visual class (Sep. – Jan. 2005). The film was chosen by the audio-visual students, perhaps because of its prize-wining status, along with *'The Shawshank Redemption'* (1994), *'Four Weddings and a Funeral'* (1994), *'Out of Africa'* (1985), *'Legends of the Fall'* (1994) and *'The Truman Show'* (1998).

with four girls from the same class, when I asked if they had ever watched anything and thought 'that's too much', their response, to general laughter, was *'American Beauty'*.

In contrast, on the one hand, to their somewhat cynical responses to the moral and political didacticism of Chinese 'main melody' material, and on the other, their appreciation of Hollywood's depictions of success against the odds – what might even be termed 'American main melody' – some of my students were thus rather perplexed by those films that revealed alienation from such success. Living in pressured competitive circumstances where modern middle class lifestyles are still to be strived for (F. Liu, 2008, pp. 201, 206-207), students could perhaps neither afford to be too naïvely utopian nor cynically realistic in their viewing preferences, and therefore attempted to negotiate a path between the two. So, if a certain candidness in foreign films could function as a potential source of credibility, this very directness could also undermine a film's emotional credibility when it challenged the audience's sense of propriety or its desire for encouragement in their own social aspirations. In spite of students' appreciation of greater realism, they preferred realism with an element of inspiration. This accords with a long cinematic tradition for, as Hallam and Marshment have suggested, one of the perceived advantages of early cinema over theatre was precisely that it provided 'a superior means of achieving the realistic representation of romantic fantasy' (2000, p. 20). Arguably, the same basic stance has been an even stronger tradition in Chinese cinema which has long favoured realism, but with a modernising purpose and hence often with a utopian romantic component (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, pp. 77-82). Certainly, among my student respondents, it was evident that both dimensions had their importance.

Shaping Desire

So far, I have described students' preferences in largely defensive terms as part of bolstering their 'dream faith' – essentially a belief that their personal progress was possible within the existing system. As part of this, it was perhaps hardly surprising that they should be weary of being lectured either through direct ideological instruction or even indirectly via 'main melody' entertainment which often seemed stale and predictable to them. Nor was it necessarily unexpected that students should feel under competitive pressure and therefore be receptive to messages that boosted their morale and

re-fuelled their energy to persist. What was striking, however, was the way in which Hollywood could bridge the gap between these two positions by re-freshing students' faith in their aspirations by means of particular kinds of realism that induced credible rather than credulous forms of encouragement.

Mention of aspirations and dreams, however, raises the question of how they are generated in the first place. Clearly, this touches on complex range of social, political, familial and emotional forces that lie outside my analysis here, but part of the answer can perhaps be gleaned in students' emphasis on the freshness of foreign films and yet, simultaneously, the way in which this newness could, as I have suggested, generate desires that integrated with some pre-existing discourses within Chinese society. Indeed, in some respects, the party-state itself has also been searching for a means of combining popular entertainment with approved messages and, as I noted in previous chapters, has already recognised some of these qualities in Hollywood. The great exemplar of this was *'Titanic'* (1997), which received a very public advance endorsement by President Jiang Zemin in March 1998 during remarks made at the National People's Congress:

> ''We must not take it for granted that capitalism is something that lacks ideological didacticism. A film by the name of Titanic is soon to be released...This film vividly depicts the relationship of money and love, the destitute and the prosperous, and the emotions of people confronted by disaster. This time I request that our government leaders [Seven Members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo] should also see the film, not because I wish to promote capitalism, but because, as the proverb goes, 'in order to be victorious in all battles, we must know ourselves and our other [enemy]'....You want to emphasise the strength of both ideological value and artistic excellence'' (quoted in Noble, 2000, p. 187).

According to Noble, Jiang's ideological justifications were a broader signal of the CCP leadership's approval for the transformation of the Chinese film industry into a business that could, in turn, produce Chinese blockbusters to match Hollywood (Noble, 2000, pp. 170-172; Yeh & Davies, 2008, pp. 40-45) and was therefore part of a much bigger discursive shift (Foucault, 1978, p. 11), known as 'Three Represents Theory', to incorporate the new business community into formal alliance with the official bureaucratic class (Joseph, 2010, p. 158).

It is evident from this that China has experienced a paradigm shift in the ways the dominant order channels and organises desire (see Rofel, 2007, pp. 3-5), loosening adherence to certain meta-narratives or 'master signifiers' ('the People', 'socialism', for instance) while strengthening others (scientific development, competition, wealth, as well as happiness and self-fulfilment and so forth). Here, then, is where desire and ideology can be seen to overlap, for if, from a psychoanalytic perspective, desires are shaped and generated through observing what others desire (Homer, 2005, pp. 70-73; Sharpe, 2004, pp. 42-43), the fantasy scenarios staged by popular entertainment media play a significant role. That is to say, as the sum of societies' rules and conventions is never consistent or fully 'harmonious' in current Chinese political parlance, it depends upon the lubrication of fantasy – supplied, in part, from abroad – in order to retain some sense of coherence, covering the inevitable inconsistencies that arise (Zizek, 1991, p. 6, , 1997, pp. 8, 28-29).

At its starkest, the contrast between audiences in the Mao era and the current online downloading generation is, for instance, immense. However, as Ci Jiwei has argued, throughout the twists and turns of the Chinese revolution, there was nevertheless an underlying basis of hedonism, even if often necessarily sublimated (1994, pp. 134-136). Moreover, structurally speaking, the difference between totalitarian and postmodern capitalist societies may be, as Zizek suggests, somewhat less than it appears, for as belief in society's authoritarian meta-narratives erodes, the notion of 'choice' itself and its natural partner, the imperative to enjoy, may become the new master signifier (1991, p. 103). The validity of this point in the Chinese context is, however, rather complicated by the ambiguous nature of the Chinese political structure itself, neither totalitarian, nor totalitarian, yet not part of the postmodern liberal democratic world order nor, economically speaking, neatly placeable within either the First, Second or Third World categories. This puts Chinese society in a position where it must function with several sets of master signifiers (traditional, socialist and capitalist) in tandem, each with their corresponding subject positions (see Y. Yan, 2003, p. 233).

Developmental Idealism, Default Standard

In spite of these complexities, the basic idea of desire being part of a learning process, even if not adopting a psychoanalytic perspective, does correspond to my students' views

about the learning processes involved in their viewing of foreign, and notably US film. Despite the fairly widespread ambivalence towards America among educated Chinese, the US still remains the model and zenith of modernity to which much else is compared (see Dai, 2001, p. 173; V. Fong, 2004, pp. 638-640). In response to a question I asked about the difference between Chinese and foreign films, one of my e-mail volunteer respondents, for instance, suggested: 'The stage of development of a society decides the quality and degree of civilization [...] It's the basic distinction' (*Cai Minjia – Em. 10*). It is this underlying Marxist developmental thought structure that reveals the position from which this and other students perceived the US, as both China's model and rival.[19] As such, it functions as the 'ideal ego': the ideal image that entrances but, frustratingly, cannot be attained, thus stimulating desire itself (Myers, 2003, pp. 21-22).[20]

A similar kind of developmental idealism was reflected in the way some students in my preliminary study at Minzu University, particularly those with a rural background, chose to trace their film-watching in distinct stages. Looking at Chinese students today, apparently at ease living in urban environments and wearing clothing barely distinguishable from that seen in Hong Kong, Taipei and beyond, it is easy to overlook the degree of rapid and radical change they have experienced. As some students themselves noted, their generation straddles China's cultural and economic opening in a very dramatic manner. Some still had warm memories of outdoor film-watching in the countryside during their early childhood, offering windows on the world, yet also promoting communal togetherness. Films such as *'Tunnel Warfare'*[21] (1965) could therefore still evoke nostalgia in spite of a retrospective awareness of their propaganda nature. It was a time of innocent 'dream-faith'. Later, however, many entered a new stage in their viewing whilst at school as they became familiar with Hong Kong films, opening their eyes to a world of colourful extravagance but also revealing a darker world of crime, drugs and sex not explored by mainland media. Another stage was reached by the time of

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[19] Although the number of Marxism courses has been reduced at university level and student interest in it is rather often rather low (Pan, 2009, p. 164; Z. Zhou, 2006), it nevertheless remains a basic theoretical resource which students sometimes draw upon, either directly or indirectly.

[20] Correspondingly, the 'ego ideal' is the perspective from which it is also viewed; the gaze one wishes to impress (Zizek, 1989a, pp. 105-107) – a key factor, as I have noted, in students' responses to films with Chinese themes insofar as they were concerned about how foreigners view China as archaic by watching recent Chinese blockbusters.

[21] '*Di dao zhan*'; '地道战', an anti-Japanese war classic.

middle and high school, as foreign films became more widely available. *'Titanic'*, as already noted, made a considerable impact on many. The sheer technical skill and scale of Hollywood was beyond anything that even Hong Kong could offer – these were, according to one student, 'real films'.[22]

Even for those with wholly urban, professional family backgrounds in my main study at BLCU, the technical spectacle of Hollywood was able to 'shock my eyes' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*) according to a girl who remembered the impact of the first *'Lord of the Rings'* film (2001). In spite of the dazzling colours and acrobatics of the new Chinese blockbuster, this still appeared as a distinguishing point between Chinese and Western films: 'Cultural background is different, and technological level is different' (*Deng Qing Em. 6*). Nevertheless, students from all backgrounds were keen to define themselves as above 'mere' spectacle and so the true value of American films was also located in their creativity and their ability to transcend nationality, reaching what were seen as universal themes – 'the life of other people on other planets' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*) or 'one person on a desert island' as in *'Cast Away'* (2000) (*Xiong Zhufei – Int 4.*).[23] In that sense, the foreignness of foreign films was experienced as having transcended to a kind of default world standard, in the same way that cars were no longer experienced as intrinsically German or numerals in any sense Arabic. The specificity of Hollywood's perspective, even when representing difference, was therefore not always evident.

When, for instance, I asked two girls what picture of America they got from the films they watched, they expressed scepticism at the relevance of the question, instead emphasising a common underlying humanity: '[...] when we watch [a film], actually, we are just in it...we forget reality' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*). As Mulvey's classic essay *'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* suggests, there is a sense of forgetting one's existence when viewing in the darkened cinema (2006 [1975], p. 345) and even if viewing on computer is a somewhat different experience, when engaging with films, or indeed other forms of narrative, there is often a sense of transportation or absorption into another world (Ferri, 2007, p. 20). At times the particular world could be very specific as one

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[22] Fieldnotes: 15th Jun. 2005.

[23] Respondents in Wen and Wang's study of DVD and downloading also pointed to the universality of the themes in American programming even if the settings were sometimes distant from the audience (2008, p. 280).

interviewee explained when I asked how he chose what to view: 'sometimes I want to know more about a city and I will choose a movie about that city or I want to see a kind lifestyle and I will choose that kind of movie...[it] depends on my purpose' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). Here he could satisfy his desire to see something new and modern, with lifestyles he could imaginatively aspire to. But when describing the attractions of *'The Chronicles of Narnia'* (2005), the fantasy film which he had recently downloaded, he noted that, rather than referring to a particular place or style, it had a more universal and reassuring message:

> 'it tells us something about life, [... how] good can conquer evil [*laughter*] and sometimes I think when we are watching movies, we don't think so much...it's just a kind of experience; we experience different lives by watching movies and it's very interesting and you can relax and enjoy' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*).

Hollywood, in that sense, could act as a painless teacher, allowing the dreams and aspirations of students to be repaired, reformed and reinforced through the lubricating effects of desire. Unlike the hybrid films examined in chapter three which raised issues of identity and representation too close for comfort, or domestic 'main melody' productions whose over-familiar didacticism lacked credibility, foreign films could, through their very distance, become both enjoyable and credible.

Of course, being able to 'relax and enjoy' movies seems so normal in the Western and Hollywood dominated world that one needs to remind oneself that the sense of normality is, in itself, a construct, particularly in the Chinese context where film has long had a political function (Pang, 2006, p. 108; Ying Zhu, 2003, p. 90). The question then is, to what extent is this an ease that reflects the viewers' absorption into the fantasy world presented or the ease with which it is re-interpreted or translated, so to speak, into the local context by audiences themselves, and, indeed, assisted by the state, as I noted with the use of Hollywood in political education?

In principle, although films may tell us what to desire, there would seem to be few limits to how an audience can radically integrate the conventions of cinematic narrative into its own terms. Kulick and Willson's research (2002) in remote areas of Papua New

Guinea is perhaps the most striking example of this. Local villagers, in accordance with their own everyday communicative practices, were said to 'not merely describe events in their narratives: they actively produce them' (2002, p. 274). For instance, after seeing *'Rambo'* in a nearby town, a villager retells the story of its muscled action hero, conflating it with tales of local bandits (known as 'rascals'). In his account the bandits are attacked by Rambo's formidable wife, but are so strong they can even survive a helicopter crashing upon them (2002, pp. 276-277).

      In contrast, in much of the Western world, for media-immersed generations, it is Hollywood itself that has achieved a universality that seems to trump over local contexts (Maltby, 2003, pp. 126-127). This comes through strongly in interviews with contemporary young European audiences. Young Belgians, for instance, felt that not to know certain 'classics' (e.g. *'The Godfather'*, *'Star Wars'*, *'Jurassic Park',* etc.) was a gap in one's cultural knowledge and not to have seen the latest blockbuster risked being locked out of conversations (Meers, 2004, pp. 160-166). As I noted in chapter two, Chinese researchers have also reported the importance of peer-pressure (Y. Chen, 2009, p. 35; T. Zhang, 2003, p. 249) and similarly, for some of my interviewees, film-watching was, in part, a matter of keeping up with those around them: 'I would feel my[self] an outsider of my fellow[s] if I don't watch any films' (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*). Indeed, as I shall show in the next chapter, the very act of being able to keep up with American dramas could provide a sense of transcendence beyond national confines. According to Meers, among young Belgians, Hollywood films were hardly seen as foreign at all whereas European films, on the other hand, were generally considered too everyday and gritty for the movie genre, in contrast to local soap operas, which did retain popularity. But the film genre generates such different expectations that the very concept, for instance, of a Belgian action film seemed ridiculous to local audiences. As Meers points out, it is as if local movies' very closeness to life around them makes them unreal as films, in the sense that they fail to conform to the hegemonised conventions and standards set by big budget Hollywood. This even extended to a prejudice against hearing their mother

tongue or dubbing in films. Anything other than English, especially American English, sounded dubious, and un-cool (Meers, 2004, p. 167).[24]

As Hallam and Marshment suggest, a sense of cinematic realism does not necessarily relate to audiences' perceptions of real life, but often to the default yardstick provided by Hollywood itself (Hallam & Marshment, 2000, pp. x-xi). So, in spite of, or indeed, because of the popularity of Hollywood material, the problem has been that any consciousness of China's failure to live up to the default standards represented either by a film's production values or its portrayal of reality, has tended to re-inscribe the foreignness of films, but this time tagged as 'advanced', with China as 'backward' or, as I noted in the case of Chinese blockbusters, excessively 'commercial'. Indeed, even though students frequently criticised Chinese directors' over-commercialism, as I noted in chapter three, when I challenged complainants why they liked Hollywood material which was presumably no less commercial, they either asserted its superiority in one facet or another – 'it's commercial but it has good stories' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*) – or simply made an exception for the American films they liked. In a sense, as the default standard, Hollywood seemed to be exempt from such judgements as there appeared to be nobody to sell-out to.[25]

However, that is not to say that the concept of China's technical and educational 'backwardness' is something that necessarily threatened students' sense of patriotism. Indeed, among my contacts in the case of heart-tugging 'rural realist' films such as Zhang Yimou's *'Not One Less'* (1999), it could reinforce it (*Zang Jieshan – Int. 9*; *Deng Qing – Em. 6*). But where it might prove more destabilising was if it provoked the perception of a Chinese moral backwardness that could, in turn, stimulate 'second thoughts'. One of my most overtly patriotic interviewees whose grandfather had taken part in the Long March, admitted that watching Western movies, especially some disaster films, made her

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[24] Nornes argues that preferences for dubbing or subtitling are probably, for the most part, conventionalised – audiences like what they are used to (Nornes, 2007, p. 191). In China's case, films and television series have usually been dubbed. In 1997, for instance, CCTV broadcast 177 dubbed films and series (over 58% from the US) (S. Qian, 2004, p. 56). However, subtitles are nevertheless a very familiar and accepted feature of Chinese broadcasting which also needs to cater for large parts of the audience that do not speak standard Mandarin but can read Chinese characters.

[25] There were of course a number of respondents who expressed a dislike of big-budget Hollywood, particularly among my e-mail volunteer contacts, some of whom seemed to be more specialist in their preferences.

feel that foreigners handled crises better than Chinese, not just from a practical or material perspective. Even though she was not certain whether this reflected Western reality, she felt that the contrast between what she saw in these films and her knowledge of China's handling of crises could be troubling, particularly where moral values were compromised, such as the cover-up in the SARS crisis: 'at first the reporters did not tell the truth about the population death and I think it's...it's incredible because this thing is connected with people's lives' (*Zang Jieshan – Int. 9*). Likewise, the broadcast of the American '9/11' memorial ceremony stimulated her doubts about whether China had done enough to remember the Nanjing Massacre. As Lull found in his investigation of Chinese televisions audiences in the 1980s (1991, p. 174), foreign representations that allowed Chinese audiences to make their own comparisons could produce a potentially self-questioning response.

Generally, however, what enabled the perceived superiority of foreign films to produce pleasure rather than disillusion was that, as already noted, in addition to injecting a dose of disease, such images also induced a vision of the beautiful healthy patient one wished to be or, to switch metaphors, offered tantalising glimpses of the shining city ahead for a weary traveller on China's dusty road to modernity. Again, it is essential to remember that these ideal images depended for their credibility on the feeling that viewing them was the result of free choice – something embodied in the semi-illicit status of DVD and downloading itself. Likewise, such a position presupposes a certain faith that you are already on the right path, or a belief in the 'other [who is] supposed to know' (Sharpe, 2004, p. 49). This 'knowing' expert status is what foreign films as a category seemed generally able to bear. As one student admitted in one of my group interviews, a scene in a Chinese drama with a coincidence or an unexpected event might seem quite implausible to her, and yet 'when I see it during a Western movie or TV series I think it's real – I don't know why [*laughter*]' (*Xue Yinpei – G4/1*). Although such a reaction may be a consequence of the distance between audience and subject matter as the viewer could not so easily judge its plausibility, Hollywood's credibility is arguably also the result of its status as 'ideal other' produced, in part, by the dominant developmental perspective that Marxism, in fact, shares with liberal capitalism. Indeed, the notion of 'advanced' and 'backward', 'developed' and 'developing' world is also compatible with

traditional Chinese hierarchical ethnocentrism (Ci, 1994, p. 35) which, even in its inverted form, typified by the modernising 'May Fourth' movement of the 1920s, nevertheless retains the same hierarchical structure, though one in which one's sense of intellectual identification with the modern foreign ideal must overcome a degree of nationalist emotional ambivalence.[26]

Creative Alternatives, Liberal Possibilities

Previous sections have shown how my respondents generally tended to regard Western films and dramas as open-minded and socially tolerant. They also saw them as exciting, partly because they offered a sense of the unpredictable. Even if, as I have noted, they felt a number exceptions went too far, they did not generally define 'strangeness' and cultural difference as bad, but as something that aroused curiosity – 'much more exciting ... because we don't know, we don't know something' (*Jing Liming – G5/4*). A sense of exploring the unknown and embracing the unpredictable in viewing foreign films and programmes gave them a sense that they were learning as well as relaxing, though it is worth noting that praise for Hollywood was not necessarily so much for its freedom from restrictions as for its ability to innovate within its own commercial and political boundaries. One of my volunteer e-mail respondents, a committed film and performance art fan, analysed Hollywood's skill as follows:

> 'In American films we often see American heroes saving the world. Or we can easily find out that democracy or liberty is emphasised; in Chinese films, we can see how poor the rural area is, also how pure our farmers are [...but the] big difference is that American film makers can emphasise their nation's main theme [while] at the same time make the film watchable and popular' (*Deng Qing – Em. 6*).

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[26] A well-known and controversial instance of this identification with the foreign was the documentary series *'River Elegy'* (1988) which characterised Chinese culture as backward and inward-looking, represented by the barren yellow interior in comparison to the successful maritime-oriented east (G. R. Barmé, 1995, pp. 223-224; X. Chen, 1992, pp. 693-696). As Chen Xiaomei observed, national self-denigration could provide a powerful, yet indirect, means of attacking domestic conservatives within the state system (X. Chen, 1992, p. 691). See also Mi Jiayan and Zhao Suisheng (2005, pp. 332-333; , 1997, pp. 727-730).

Although in making this comment, this student made a clear distinction here between Chinese and American technical and creative capacities, the structural equivalence between the two is also striking in the sense that she saw Hollywood's freedom as a component of its projection of power. Equally noticeable is how the idea that 'democracy or liberty' might itself be the key to producing 'watchable and popular' films was not a line she or other students often pursued when criticising Chinese films and dramas.

In fact, some students admitted to being quite moved by films about China's peasants and, as I noted above, sometimes mentioned Zhang Yimou's *'Not One Less'* (1999) for example, but many were, nevertheless, quite impatient with this kind of moralistic focus on rural lifestyles, suggesting that this was misleading about modern China, and perhaps too closely associated with official 'main melody' didacticism. Most of my interviewees were from urban backgrounds, even if not necessarily the largest cities, and some felt their own lives were not adequately reflected by domestic directors. In a group discussion with four second year oral class students, when asked about the difference between Chinese and Hong Kong films, one girl complained that mainland directors 'think all Chinese live in the countryside not [the] city. There are not so many Chinese movies about the cities. I think the directors pay much more attention on the countryside or the farmers' (*Jing Liming – G5/4*). When I interviewed another group from the same class and asked what they would prefer Chinese directors to produce, they responded that they wanted films that were 'closer to our lives' (*Su Yuan – G6/3*), beyond either rural realism or kung fu fantasies. Yet, this lack of closeness actually drove them to the foreign. When I put this point to the same group, asking whether the American films they preferred actually fulfilled their criteria of closeness and realism, they responded that they were 'closer to American life' (*Gong Zhufen – G6/1*) – by implication, closer to the lives they wished to live. So, although they rejected didacticism in favour of realism, it might be more accurate to say that what was wanted was a kind of aspirational didacticism, namely, 'much closer to the [Chinese] youth group [who...] want to learn about American's culture and the life in America and we maybe in future will go abroad and study [...] It is a great [...] very convenient way to understand...to learn' (*Qin Dongfeng – G6/4*).

However realistic or otherwise these aspirations,[27] they were fairly widespread among the student community, many of whom wanted if not to actually study abroad, either family-funded or through a scholarship, then alternatively to get a 'good job' in a foreign or joint venture company. Appeals for realism and closeness to life, in these terms, rather paradoxically suggested closeness to life abroad, in order that such aspirations could be brought closer and made real as part of a Chinese white collar dream – though this was rarely expressed in explicit terms.

Students' appreciation of American films' creativity, in part, lay in such films' capacity to create a bridge between the reality students knew and the realities they aspired to. Many, for instance, saw their viewing habits as filling a gap in both their schooling and wider social experience. One of my interviewees watched the US drama series *'Justice'* (2006), which centred around a team of Los Angeles defence lawyers. She found their skill with words intriguing because 'they just analyse people psychologically and get people's weakest point and fragile point and win that case [...] I think watching that process is very interesting...you know how to maybe persuade a person [*...*]' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*). Similarly, a law student I interviewed (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*) took an interest in the film *'Legally Blonde'* (2001), in part because Chinese education is commonly criticised for being too theoretical and abstract, leaving students themselves to figure out how they might apply knowledge beyond the classroom or lecture hall. Although a light comedy, it is not irrelevant in this context that the film's heroine enrols in Harvard's Law faculty, providing Chinese students a glimpse of how the elite of their chosen field might behave.

As well as reinforcing certain conservative behaviours such as hard work, persistence and endurance that enable the pursuit of dreams, foreign films, as I have noted, also helped to envision what these dreams might be in the first place and thus opened up some more liberal possibilities, even if deferred to an unspecified future. For instance, some responses contained a feminist hint of desire for individual autonomy (a

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[27] Statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education showed that in 2006 more than 130,000 Chinese went abroad for further study (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-12/07/content_7216561.htm; accessed 22nd Sep. 2010).

topic discussed further in chapter five).[28] Other students also wrote about how their eyes were opened to issues such as family violence via *'Don't Talk to Strangers'* (1994) or the impressiveness of 'primitive, savage life' via *'Dances with Wolves'* (1990) or homosexuality after watching *'Brokeback Mountain'* (2005).[29] In response to whether a film had made an impact on their thinking, an e-mail respondent cited the latter as 'It made me realize that love [among] homosexuals can be so strong, so touching, so pure, so unselfish and so great. People really should put their views on homosexual people in perspective' (*Mo Hongping – Em. 2*). In light of this, it is possible to take issue with Ci Jiwei's thesis (1994, p. 200) that the post-1989 period signalled the final unleashing of hedonistic impulses which had hitherto been forced by material and political restrictions into more idealistic forms, especially in the 1980s. At least among my respondents, some shadows of this liberal idealism remained alive, even if open-mindedness did not necessarily mean a settled liberalism. For instance, after viewing *'American Beauty'* (1999) in class, there was debate among some students over whether the militantly anti-gay Colonel Fitts' own repressed homosexuality, revealed in an unexpected kiss at the end of the film, could be real or might have other more opaque motives.[30] The idea that he might have repressed his own desires seemed puzzling to some and so other possibilities were considered. One boy suggested, for instance, that the kiss was perhaps part of a ruse to engineer a reconciliation with the Colonel's supposedly gay son, though this did not win wide acceptance with other classmates.[31]

In general, a trend towards social tolerance was evident among students, especially in their appreciation of narratives of individual freedom against the collective, allowing them to imagine how these liberal and perhaps ultimately hedonistic aspirations might be achieved. Indeed, students' responses suggested that liberal tolerance and semi-suppressed hedonism, in fact, went together since a glimpse of others' freedom was,

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[28] Scarlett O'Hara in *'Gone with the Wind'* (1939) was familiar to some female students: 'We are like Scarlett' claimed one (*Zou Yun – Em. 12*). The film's popularity emerged during my preliminary study at Minzu University in students' essays and oral presentations and I later followed this up through some of my e-mail contacts. As with Taylor's fan-based study of the film (1989, pp. 104-105), these students saw the heroine as a feisty, badly behaved Southern belle, expressing taboo and unrealisable desires but showing a ruthlessness which, although socially disapproved, they nevertheless admired: 'She is stubborn but it's kind of cute stubbornness' (*Lin Yuan – Em. 13*).

[29] *Bai Chuanyan* (*E2/1*); *Chen Yuwei* (*E2/21*).

[30] Second year oral English class 1 (23rd Jun. 2007).

[31] Fieldnotes: 23rd Jun. 2007.

potentially at least, an imaginative glimpse of their own. The key, as one interviewee put it, was the 'freedom [*laughter*]... [to] do whatever you want...' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). As a fourth year student, like many of her classmates, she was considering her future and had already had some internships working for a foreign car company. But whereas her parents emphasised the pursuit of a profitable career, foreign films inspired her to 'think about your own interests'. Growing up, she recalled watching Chinese films that typically showed how a bad student became a good one: 'at that time I thought it is the way I should be, but now I'm thinking...'. Her rethink was stimulated, in particular, by foreign teen films which, by contrast, displayed what seemed to be a much more open, creative lifestyle. When asked what specific freedoms this might involve, she referred to seeing a film in which three young boys decide to shoot their own movie:

> '[...] actually they are thinking about different ideas to make money and think the most profitable one is to make an obscene movie [*laughter*...]. You can see American children have more creative thinking and [...] movies about Chinese children or Chinese students are only school stuff, how to score higher grades – it's boring' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*).

Such an example could, of course, be interpreted as illustrating the grip of Western money-orientation as much as its freedom, but when I put this suggestion to her, she rejected it on the basis that money was what the boys themselves wanted. The point was that the transgressive creativity such films exemplified seemed virtually unthinkable, at least to many of my students, as were numerous other Western teenage activities that also featured in such movies, such as travelling to pop concerts, forming bands, and so on. What seemed to inspire students in these cases was often not so much the freedom itself, but the creativity and willingness to defy restrictions. This was illustrated by another teen film, mentioned by the same fourth year interviewee, in which a girl is excluded from a football team but disguises herself as a boy in order to be able to play. My suggestion that this perhaps also showed the limits of Western freedom, namely, that the girl could only

join secretly, was swept aside as Chinese 'won't even think about it' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*), in spite the story's parallel to the Mulan legend.[32]

The rejection of oppressive collectivist restrictions was a common theme in this strand of commentary, perhaps reflecting students' own pressured circumstances, both as 'survivors' of the notoriously demanding entrance exam competition, but often anxious about their future career prospects. However, their position contained its own contradiction, for part of what sustained the oppression that students sometimes railed against was their own urgent concentration on the means required to achieve such a free, liberal lifestyle.[33] This was nowhere better exemplified than in a comment by one of my interviewees on *'Mona Lisa Smile'* (2003) with Julia Roberts playing a young liberal/feminist teacher in a conservative 1950s girls' school. Although, as I noted above, this student had been puzzled by the generational alienation in the *'The Graduate'*, he nevertheless praised this film for its depiction of how people should 'fight for their own happiness', rather than sacrificing for others: 'Chinese students should have the courage to break something, to live their own life, not just for...examinations [*laughter*]' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*). The laughter in this case, however, was provoked by the particular irony that he had a part time job working on a newspaper devoted to examinations and how to pass them. A broader paradox, inherent to the intersubjective nature of desire itself (see Mellard, 2006, pp. 56-58; Zizek, 1997, p. 9), is thereby illustrated: to pursue one's dreams also means, in a sense, to betray them insofar as they are permeated by society's conflicting demands.

Thus the liberal possibilities that enticed students, nevertheless entailed their voluntary acceptance of realistic self-discipline and because of their focus on the self-satisfaction of desire, a detachment from the politically didactic in favour of hard work, persistence and the hope that talent would be rewarded. Unlike Korean dramas, described in chapter three, Hollywood films retained greater credibility as the default standard for 'advanced' entertainment and for providing realistic encouragement and reassurance that

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[32] The traditional story of Hua Mulan has been passed on in a number of versions through poems and operas, but at its core, it tells the story of a girl who disguises herself as a man in order to enlist in the army to prevent her father from being conscripted (Tang, 2008, p. 150).

[33] As noted with attitudes to Korean dramas (see chapter three), students were often suspicious that their indulgence of fantasy was an obstacle to the achievement of such dreams. In this case, however, Western films were generally regarded as more realistic and therefore not a distraction from their aspirations.

liberal possibilities and creative alternatives were potentially within reach for those with the skill and persistence to strive for them. In that sense, Hollywood could act as new 'main melody' for aspiring educated Chinese youth, in a manner that, although not synonymous with, was not entirely incompatible with state priorities.

Chapter 5.   Viewing US Dramas: a 'Chinese American Dream'?

The 1980s' generation is the first since 1949 to have been born and brought up, essentially, to take the market capitalist road but still under official socialist political supervision. In practice, this has generated significant tensions and contradictions between their oscillating desires for didacticism v. escapism, realism v. fantasy, which, as I noted in the last chapter, have been a recurring feature of students' engagement with entertainment media. My students attempted to resolve these tensions satisfactorily in ways that corresponded with their own interests, needs and aspirations, often making reference to the notion that some forms of escapism are themselves in some respects didactic – 'good for learning English' being the simplest justification at hand.[1] When probed a little further, students frequently suggested that foreign entertainment also provided a form of education that parents and teachers could not, or would not, provide that was not only 'more fun', keeping them amused and engaged, but also a direct link to the middle class lifestyle which they and, with qualifications, their parents – and by extension, the authorities – aspired for them.[2]

Key among these aspirational resources were US drama series, from *'Friends'* (1994-2004) to *'Sex and the City'* (1998-2004), *'Desperate Housewives'* (2004-), *'Prison Break'* (2005-2009), and latterly, *'Heroes'* (2006-2010), among others, each breaking like surf on the consciousness of a generation of Chinese students viewing in their dorms. A number of Chinese researchers have noted this 'hidden fashion' (*yinmi liuxing*) (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 275) and offered some analyses of the possible reasons behind its

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[1] English is a compulsory part of all students' education and a key component of university entrance exams, postgraduate course selection tests and often part of selection procedures for many job opportunities (G. Hu, 2002, p. 30; Lo Bianco, 2009, pp. 192, 199). Not surprisingly, films and TV series are a popular means of learning. Video extracts accompanied by glossaries and commentaries are a feature of the English language learning section of *'China Daily'* online, for instance (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/language_tips/auvideo/audio_film.html; accessed 2nd Oct. 2010). DVD is also useful as English subtitles are often provided.

[2] The way in which bi-lingualism is a selling point for elite private schools that have sprouted up in China also testifies to the degree to which an internationalized flavour to education is a means of establishing a new middle class ethos not only among those who can afford to do so, but also spreading to those who aspire to such a lifestyle (S. H. Donald & Yi, 2008, pp. 74-79). As Liu Fengshu suggests, Chinese parents, especially with the one-child policy, are very focused on education and higher education in particular, not significantly because of Confucian priorities, but because of strong competition in society (2008, pp. 193-194). See also, Fong (2004, pp. 98-99).

success and its limits. But unlike some foreign reportage which has highlighted the extent of state ideological control on foreign imports ("'Desperate Housewives' Airs in China", 2005; Osnos, 2007), domestic comment has tended to focus on issues of cultural compatibility (L. Li, 2006; H. Liu, 2006, pp. 14-15; Zhou, 2005) or, in more didactic mode, calling attention to the highly professional and market-sensitive US production processes which Chinese producers could learn from (Hou, 2008, p. 59; L. Zhu, 2008, pp. 102-103). So far, however, with the exception of Wang and Wen's (2008) hybrid questionnaire and interview study, there has been little actual audience research on this theme.[3]

As Chinese commentators have noted, such drama series generate a sense of cumulative anticipation not only through their content but via the seasonal and episodic nature of their form (Hua, 2007, p. 69; Zhou, 2005). In China, this is overlaid with an extra dimension of allure as most have not been publicly broadcast, giving them the surreptitious, yet personalised quality of a genuine word-of-mouth phenomenon (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 277). Among my interviewees, a *'Sex and the City'* fan recalled, for instance, how her interest in the series was initially sparked by a stream of enthusiastic text messages from her friend during a TOEFL[4] preparation class: 'she was quite excited about [...] the sex and the fashion – we didn't have much access to it when we were in high school, and it had to be imagined, really' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). As such, the popular spread of foreign series is part of the self-organised, below-the-surface nature of aspects of young people's everyday lives, exemplified, in this instance, by the online translation groups who compete to supply prompt and accurate subtitles. As I noted in chapter two, Kelly Hu described Chinese downloading practices in terms of guerrilla-style underground activities (K. Hu, 2005, pp. 182-184), implying a Foucauldian-style instance of counter-cultural tactical resistance to identities imposed by commercial or national forces, even if participants are themselves unaware of this. But transgressive practices are not always as straightforwardly transgressive as they might seem and as Zizek has suggested, postmodern hedonistic enjoyment has a disciplinary dimension with corresponding political implications. As I shall argue in what follows, through their

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[3] Wang and Wen state that they analysed 230 questionnaires and conducted 10 follow-up interviews (2008, p. 276) among what appear to have been a mix of students and employees, but no further details are given.
[4] Test of English as a Foreign Language – often required for application to foreign universities.

access to US dramas in particular, the new generation of students has created a shortcut to a 'First World' vision of life which provides a rich yield of what might be termed 'didactic escapism' that helps resolve some of the tensions generated by China's hybrid, post-socialist developmental path.

Yuppie Ethnography

The long-running popular US sitcom *'Friends'* (1994-2004), depicting the ups and downs of six young 'twenty-somethings' in New York, was the first series students normally mentioned as impacting upon their viewing. As one second year boy I interviewed put it, 'it is famous in the United States [and] you can watch [it] with the excuse you are trying to learn English' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). He had started watching in his first year of university, but with otherwise more intellectual tastes, had become 'totally bored'. Among my small group interviews with second year students, some girls mentioned watching *'Friends'* when they were in junior high school and remained more appreciative. As one explained, '[it] give[s] you a lot of laughing time and shows you *some* aspects of American life' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*), though she had now moved on to other programmes. In another group, a girl professed to having initially found it 'fresh' but had got tired of it after a few series as she felt it contained 'nothing serious' (*Peng Jiwei – G3/4*). So although it remained well-known and popular, to some extent, it also functioned as the lowest common denominator of the genre. Considered light, palatable viewing – 'acceptably funny' as another girl put it (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*) – it did not have the edge of violent conflict or taboo-stretching frankness provided by other more controversial dramas such as *'Sex and the City'* (1998-2004). That said, although CCTV had considered broadcasting the series in 2004, a news interview given by Qin Mingxin of its international department flagged up the broadcaster's dilemma. The sexual openness of the six friends 'cannot be generally accepted by Chinese audiences yet', he argued, and some of the jokes and slang were difficult to convey in Chinese. However, making cuts, he explained, was problematic as this would interfere with the continuity of the plot and, moreover, as most young people had already seen episodes of the series and 'feel quite passionate about it' they might object to the censorship ("Lost in Translation: Friends may fail to show in China", 2004).

CCTV's reasoning seems, on the face of things, a little odd. Unless positing a generation gap between the somewhat more abstract general 'Chinese audiences' who cannot accept the series and actual 'young people' who are already fans, the need for censoring what was already acknowledged to be widely available is not immediately obvious (Moser, 2006).[5] Admittedly, DVD and downloading audiences tend to consist of younger, more educated viewers (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, pp. 276-277) and yet, among my interviewees, it was clear that their judgement of the series' light-hearted inoffensiveness was made retrospectively after a period of adjustment during which it had indeed seemed somewhat 'vulgar' (*Zhang Jie – Int. 14*) and, at times, rather perplexing. Similarly, in Chen Yanru's essay-based research into students' internet use, which I mentioned in chapter two, girls also often admitted that they found *'Friends'* to be rather too sexually liberal and chaotic at first, but later, after further viewing, came to accept it as the natural pursuit of one's own desires (2009, p. 35). The traditionally rather negative and selfish connotations of individualism in China meant that the more positive version on view in *'Friends'* therefore seemed to provide a window into how American individualism is practised in everyday life, with individualist behaviour involving not just the pursuit of self-interest, but also the practice of self-reliance and respect for others' choices and so on, as Sun's and Wang's analyses of the series suggest (X. Sun, 2008, p. 253; C. Wang, 2008, p. 78). Chen Yanru proposes that for the post-1980s generation, widely regarded in China as being unprecedentedly individualistic, an American style 'pursuit of happiness' might seem to be quite compatible with a Chinese identity (Y. Chen, 2009, p. 35).[6] As one of my e-mail respondents suggested, such series 'can satisfy our imagination [about] developed countries, about people's life, ideas etc' (*Cai Minjia – Em. 10*). Another, a third year girl from Minzu University, put it this way: 'By watching [*'Friends'*], we feel we're experiencing the same life' (*Fang Liu – Em. 9*).

Nevertheless, this identification with the life portrayed in the series did not mean that it was necessarily close to students' own lives. In fact, it was evident from some of

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[5] The logic behind such censorship is something that will be examined in greater detail in chapter seven, in relation to the film *'Mission: Impossible III'*.

[6] Yan Yunxiang reports that even in rural China, where previous socialist policies had also stigmatized 'individualism' as self-interest (rather than self-reliance), the new reform policies have meant that individualist behaviour (*gexing*) has now been legitimized by some rural youth as modern, though rather more self-interestedly, in order to extract dowry money from parents and in-laws (Y. Yan, 2005, pp. 653-655).

my respondents that watching *'Friends'* required them to undergo a kind of initial apprenticeship during which the action might seem both exaggerated and inscrutable, with the 'canned laughter' ringing in students' ears, but without them getting the joke.[7] A girl who enjoyed the series told me that when she first started watching 'I didn't know why they laugh [...because] the lifestyle is very different' and the acting was more 'crazy' than in Chinese series (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). Such experiences could, in fact, border on the humiliating: as another interviewee admitted, 'when I first watched it I really couldn't bear the laughs – it makes me like an idiot' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). In other circumstances, this inability to fathom the other's humour might have produced a feeling of profound alienation and unease, or worse, at how another culture expresses its pleasures and enjoyment.[8] And yet, in contemporary China, under the influence of developmental ideology and its successive slogans and catchphrases – 'four modernisations', 'opening up', 'getting on track', 'peaceful rise'[9] – the potential antagonism is, for the most part, sublimated so that the unsettling challenge of difference is generally interpreted more benignly. Arguably, what this signals, in microcosm, is how the sense of historic exclusion from the developed 'premiere league' of nations is overcome, and consequently, how a sense of elite membership is gained once the dramatic or in this case, comic idiom, has been mastered. In that respect, it is part of the desire for 'self-globalisation' that I discussed in chapter three.

For some, a sense of membership could even be enhanced or 'upgraded' by using their wider knowledge of American society to question the series' portrayal of a sexually liberal America as exaggerated and 'stereotypical': as one of my more intellectual interviewees put it, 'not everyone I know says that, but I also read other newspapers and I

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[7] Canned laughter is perhaps a signal that one ought to be laughing and can be seen as a pointer to the way desire and enjoyment, like fashion consciousness, is dependent on others' desires (Zizek, 1989a, p. 35).

[8] In spite of the lightness of the material, it is here that we perhaps come close to one of the key ingredients of nationalist and racist sentiment, not based, as is sometimes supposed, on the belief that others are necessarily biologically inferior, but rather, on the fear that 'the other' is challenging the cultural basis of one's own way of life, particularly through the way another group structures and ritualises its desires differently (Balibar, 2007, pp. 84-86; Zizek, 1991, p. 165)

[9] The 'four modernisations' originated with Chou En-lai in the 1970s (Mackerras, McMillen, & Watson, 1998, pp. 130-131); 'opening up' was associated with Deng Xiaoping's pro-market policies in the 1980s (Dillon, 2009, p. 18); 'getting on track with the international community' emerged under Jiang Zemin in the 1990s as part of pre-WTO membership preparations (Guthrie, 1999, p. 151); 'peaceful rise' or latterly 'peaceful development' attempted to reassure the West in the 2000s that China's growing economic strength constituted no threat (S. Guo, 2006, pp. 1-2).

know people in America are criticising it' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). Indeed, despite the emphasis on the series' individualism expressed through its jokes, antics and mildly taboo behaviour, when I asked him to explain its appeal to students, he complained that 'a typical Chinese [thing is] when something is popular [...] a large number of people will follow suit' – a point that Zhang Tongdao made in his study of television viewing in college dorms, in spite of students' insistence to the contrary (2003, pp. 247, 249). But if *'Friends'* is conceived as part of an apprenticeship in individualism, saying one had passed through the stage of watching the series was in itself perhaps a way of asserting individuality.

The degree to which my respondents believed US series reflected real life is a complex topic which I will return to later, but as the above interviewee suggested, students generally took American society to be 'open',[10] meaning sexually liberal. When I asked a group of four second year girls why they said *'Friends'* was 'fresh', it was this aspect of 'openness' that they felt distinguished it from their own society:

> *Peng Jiwei* (*G3/4*): '[In *'Friends'*] they're very relaxed; you see they can have sex with anyone'.
> [*General laughter*]
> *Xie Qimei* (*G3/3*): 'That's quite different from Chinese tradition'.

Similarly, when I posed the same question to another small group, a girl remarked how the characters [...] fall in love with somebody so fast [...] (*Xin Yongqi – G1/2*). But openness, in a wider sense, also referred to the way American culture was seen as allowing people full vent to their opinions, emotions and desires. Explaining why she thought US series were popular, one of my e-mail respondents pointed to how 'the culture emphasizes energy and individualism, which I think works [with] all the young people' (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*). An essay writer on the same topic was more specific, suggesting that such series reflected 'what we would like to do when we are impulsive' (*Lu Yue – E7/21*). This goes some way to explaining the appeal of *'Friends'*, despite my initial supposition that student relationships and dormitory-style living arrangements

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[10] '*kaifang*'; '开放'.

already appeared to be very close and familiar in a way that might make the series' appeal seem rather superfluous. In spite of upgraded accommodation on many campuses, students still generally live between four and six to a dorm,[11] often attend the same classes, and are led and guided by elected class 'monitors' (head monitor and study monitor) who relay a stream of events, prizes, quizzes, speech contests, exam news and instructions, all of which reinforce the social bond of 'classmate' to create an enforced togetherness far beyond the term's significance in English.

There was wide agreement among my group interviewees that *'Friends'* presented a fresh individualist lifestyle, full of 'kidding around...quite different from our daily life' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*). In contrast to a Chinese sense of togetherness which was still largely underpinned by necessity, *'Friends'* presented an idealised, liberal social world without fear of injury, judgement or pressure where sensitive topics are not taboo and can be spoken of non-didactically: '[...] the relationship between the friends is what I am looking for because they really trust each other but somehow they laugh at each other but [...] don't want to hurt each other, just have fun' (*Xu Ruoyun – G3/2*). For some, the series even reflected their recollection of when they were in high school which, though pressurised, was nevertheless able to sustain teasing and banter that they now felt they lacked. But above all, it seemed that what students specifically appreciated about *'Friends'* was its cool, easy depiction of an alternative idealised 'young professional' ego in its 'real life' setting, beyond the tighter plot specificities of a Hollywood film, in which the characters' friendships offered a vision of closeness predicated upon individualistic openness.

In that sense, the series had an underlying quasi-anthropological appeal and was part of the 'aspirational didacticism' I referred to in the last chapter. Of course, my student viewers were well aware they were not dealing here with unmediated documentary reality, and as already noted, some were inclined to apply critical scepticism to what they saw. As a group interview member put it, 'you cannot expect so many dramatic things in your life' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*). Nevertheless, she believed that real life leaked through the fiction, revealing nuggets of ordinary American reality, even if not strictly realistic:

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[11] Living off campus, unless at the parental home, is officially frowned upon, though it sometimes occurs.

'[...] the way they like to go out and go to the seashore and camp on holidays and the way they share their apartment and discuss the troubles they have in their work, their personal life, their girlfriends, their boyfriends...there is still some part of the truth reflected in it...but more drama added' (*Qian Xiaoyan – G1/1*).

Rather than *seeing through* the drama, with the scepticism shown by my interviewee above (*Zhao Sijing – Int 10*), some students instead preferred to *look past* it to the lifestyle presumed to lie behind. As a result, it is possible to begin to see why students' belief, noted in chapter four, that Westerners were more imaginative and creative often corresponded not with any supposed limitations of the Chinese imaginative capacity, nor necessarily on political restrictions, but on the constraints of Chinese reality – for instance, where camping holidays were a rarity or the notion of a Chinese 'road movie' was still implausible when most people 'don't have the money to experience that kind of life' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*).

Discussion Forums

Viewers of US dramas in China are said to be predominantly in their twenties or thirties and higher educated (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 276) and although Wang and Wen in their audience survey have suggested that the popularity of American dramas in the PRC is predominantly a word-of mouth phenomenon (2008, p. 277), the degree of interest such series generate can also be judged by the extent of references to them in weekly lifestyle and current affairs magazines (see S. Chen & Liu, 2006; J. Lin, 2006) as well as in online media. To know them is to be within the circle of those 'connected' Chinese who are imaginatively globalised and, as noted with *'Friends'*, there is a strong informative element to this, reflected in the myriad discussion topics raised on bulletin boards and net forums dedicated to such drama series.

Although many of my informants made their viewing choices according to their friends' recommendations or in some cases in film magazines, they also looked for reviews online, particularly downloading sites themselves. One student, for instance, said she would browse users' opinions and ratings before choosing what to view (*Yang*

Guozhi – Int. 13). Another looked at sites to 'get the latest information about films and know the film comments of viewers' (*Wu Xiaorong – E9/40*). One of the largest and most popular is the YDY site (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, p. 276) which a student initially introduced to me in September 2006 and has a 'resource sharing zone' with postings of downloading links, subtitle files and so on, but also forums and sub-forums on the latest films and series, as well as a section for discussing so-called 'classics' such as *'Lost'*, *'Friends'* and *'Prison Break'* etc.[12] Other large, well known sites such as Qiling, mentioned in Wang and Wen's study (p. 276), are similarly organised with a wide range of topics, requests for help, discussion points and so forth.[13] Another more specialist site, Friends6.com,[14] and in fact the earliest of these forums (Yu Wang, 2009), though relatively smaller and more focused on US dramas, also had extensive discussion threads, ranging from the perhaps predictable question of 'who is your favourite character in...', to more esoteric queries on whether, for instance, Nissan benefited from soft advertising (i.e. product placement) on *'Desperate Housewives'* or not.[15]

Within this range, many discussions tend to stick quite closely to issues around the characters and the plot – Qiling's *'Prison Break'* forum, for instance had a long thread inviting predictions from posters regarding the potential fate of the inmates after one was killed.[16] Among my interviewees, this kind of focus on the internal fictional world was most evident with two roommates, both fans, who happily discussed the various characters in *'Desperate Housewives'* and their own favourites among them (*Song Zijie & Yao Yang – Int. 1 & 2*). As Elizabeth Bird has pointed out, this type of response contrasts with academic analysts who tend to focus on programmes' social and ideological significance – the potential subversiveness of audience behaviour, for instance – rather than fans' concerns for details of plot, character or their own aesthetic

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[12] Particularly since the run up to the 2008 Olympic Games, such sites now require posters to register, though most do so under pseudonyms. As of 2nd July 2010, YDY forum (http://bbs.sfileydy.com/) had 1,237,906 registered members with several thousand topics in each sub-forum; *'Prison Break'*, for instance, had attracted 11,783 topics and 336,086 individual posts. About a third of Wang and Wen's sample visited such sites though most browsed rather than actively participating in forum discussions (W. Wen & Wang, 2008, pp. 276, 282).

[13] Qiling (www.1000fr.net) had 340,985 members, 191,332 topics and 4,881,249 postings (2nd Jul. 2010).

[14] By 2nd July 2010, Friends6.com had 172,789 members, 63,499 topics and 1,111,347 postings, with an average of 80 posts daily (though numbers fluctuate widely) (http://www.friends6.com/forum/stats.php).

[15] Original posting 27th Mar. 2008: http://www.friends6.com/forum/thread-73564-1-1.html (accessed Apr. 7th 2008)

[16] Original posting 13th Sep. 2006: http://www.1000fr.net/thread-113966-1-1.html (accessed 4th July 2010).

judgements (Bird, 2003, pp. 121-123). But from my own browsing of discussion forum sites,[17] some of the more popular postings, in terms of numbers of replies and views, also involve original insights from fans acting, in a sense, as amateur experts who take advantage of the opportunity to show their talent and dedication. One poster on Friends6.com, for instance, worked out the ages of the characters in *'Friends'*, citing excerpts of dialogue, with responders offering praise as well as confirmatory and conflicting evidence.[18] Again, as Elizabeth Bird notes, there can be a degree of overlap between audiences' and audience researchers' concerns (2003, pp. 127-128; see also Hills, 2002, pp. 15-21) where viewers begin to reflect more widely beyond the drama itself or the lives of the characters.

YDY's forum, for instance, had a long posting in this 'expert' vein, focusing in detail on characters' mobile phones in *'Prison Break'* which again attracted many appreciative replies. Among other insights, the use of a relatively sophisticated model by the prisoner, Lincoln, was said to show that he displayed a certain good taste, whatever his other shortcomings, as well as matching his 'strong physique'. In contrast, the use of an ordinary model by the state governor was seen as indicating his unshowy modesty.[19]

'...并且不得不说，Lincoln的强健体型搭配 Treo 650还真是很协调'
(...it must be said, Lincoln's strong physique very closely coordinates with the Treo 650.)

图解: 诺基亚6030 Frank Tancredi (Sara的父亲)

图解: Palm Treo 650 Lincoln Burrows

'而堂堂州长用的手机却是诺基亚最低端的 6030，真是让人肃然起敬。' (...the State Governor uses the lowest end Nokia 6030, really making you respect [his modesty]).

'Prison Break': phones as a measure of character[20]

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[17] During the first weeks of April 2008 and July 2010 I looked at YDY, Qiling and Friends6.
[18] Original posting 28th Jul. 2007: http://www.friends6.com/forum/thread-65543-1-1.html (accessed 3rd July 2010).
[19] Posted 28th Feb. 2008. (Based on an article circulating on other websites). http://www.sfileydy.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=197998&extra=&page=1 (accessed 2nd Jul. 2010).
[20] Posted 28th Feb. 2008. Chinese text and images taken from http://www.sfileydy.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=197998&extra=&page=1 (accessed 2nd Jul. 2010).

Corruption and lavish official spending is a somewhat sensitive issue in China, so it is not hard to see this as an oblique criticism of the domestic abuse of power, though this kind of anti-materialism did not stop some posters contributing their own comments on their favourite models and brands. As Hills suggests (2002, pp. 28-29), although fans worldwide may sometimes resist or subvert the television industry's commercial priorities – campaigning against series cancellations, for example, or as in this instance, engaging in pirate downloading activities – they are not necessarily consistently anti-commercial, and in some respects can be considered ideal consumers.

Although the scope of potential areas for discussion in such sites is virtually endless, what I think we can see here is the degree to which this and other US series offered young people a yardstick for measuring their own compatibility with the modern world over a wide range of issues. This was perhaps no more evident than in a YDY forum posting that listed the heights, in centimetres, of *'Prison Break'* characters. Follow-up posters reported 'tearfully', or with pride, their own heights in comparison to such American 'giants': 'Ah, if I want to kiss Sara I must stand on a chair 😫' noted one self-mockingly.[21] On a broader scale, social issues also pop up, opening up the space for comparative discussion of matters such as how Americans disciplined, or neglected to discipline, their rather rowdy children (as portrayed in *'Desperate Housewives'*) and whether physical punishment would therefore be more appropriate.[22] In this case, posters were generally taken aback at the way youngsters interacted with their parents, as were some of my interviewees – 'the trouble, you just cannot imagine!' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*). Likewise, the degree of sexual openness was something that posters drew attention to, with a mix of excited, yet ambivalent, curiosity. As a posting on the Qiling forum teasingly suggested, if current US dramas had already dealt with issues of infidelity, homosexuality, transexuality and even incest, future series might be expected to feature sex with animals or even plants.[23] With responses commenting on the advantages or

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[21] Posted 24th Jan. 2008: http://www.sfileydy.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=190660&extra=page%3D5 (accessed 2nd Jul. 2010).

[22] Posted 11th Dec. 2007: http://www.friends6.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=70940&page=1&authorid=139287 (accessed Apr. 7th 2008)

[23] Original posting 31st Aug. 2009: http://www.1000fr.net/thread-284294-1-1.html (accessed 4th Jul. 2010).

otherwise of US openness, an element of transgressiveness in what otherwise often looked like a picture of material paradise is, I would suggest, one of the main appeals of these series and the reason they sometimes provoked a certain conspiratorial laughter among students when mentioned.

Evangelising Openness

While *'Friends'* had a general 'anthropological' appeal for urban educated youth, *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Sex and the City'* were clearly of more specific, though not exclusive, interest to female audiences, focusing, as they do, on a spectrum of female characters from comfortable middle class housewives to young professional women. As such, these series were rather more contentious, generating tensions between notions of modern individualistic freedom and traditional Chinese propriety. Although the birth control policies in the late Mao era, and particularly the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, implicitly challenged the notion of sex as merely as means of child bearing, thereby opening the way for a more adventurous expression of female desire in the market-oriented press and in popular literature, the dominant state discourse on approved sexual relations still has continued to stress the propriety of the boundaries of marriage (H. Evans, 1992, pp. 147, 156; Jeffreys, 2004, p. 64: citing Pan Suiming). Officials have remained wary of a more extended sexual freedom and condemn dramas which 'use an uncritical, even licentious approach to extramarital love and 'ménages à trois'...' (Y. Hong, 2002, p. 32).[24]

As I have already noted, my respondents generally agreed that Westerners were more 'open' but had differing views on whether Chinese people were too conservative or whether some scenes were too explicit to be shown. As a girl in a group interview put it, 'sometimes on the screen there are two naked people and I think that's too much, we cannot accept it...I mean kiss or give a hug is ok' (*Wan Chengju – G5/1*). Although my students generally accepted the easy-going attitude to sex in '*Friends*', some of them considered the sheer explicitness of *'Sex and the City'* to be 'open' beyond the point of

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[24] Until the 1980s, female workers in state enterprises required their supervisor's permission to marry and might be fined by their workplace for pre-marital sex (Rofel, 1999, pp. 240-244).

acceptability.[25] A girl from Minzu University who liked both series cheerfully acknowledged that *'Sex and the City'* was perhaps less popular for this reason and that '[...] some classmates even think I'm crazy to watch it' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). But compared to the rather apologetic tone of lovers of Korean dramas that I described in chapter three, fans of *'Sex and the City'* met such disapproval in a notably more confident manner. When I informed a fourth year student at BLCU that another of my interviewees had felt the series to be 'too open', she dismissed the criticism as an 'overreaction [...] maybe because [of] the region she comes from...' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*), though both were in fact from Beijing. Another first year student and strong fan of the series attributed viewer resistance to 'traditional ideas' from those who were not as well educated and had received a more provincial upbringing (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). This was despite the fact that one of her roommates, a Beijing girl who was one of my e-mail volunteer respondents, also found said she found it 'beyond my acceptance' (*Lang Wenyu – Em. 11*). At least among my respondents, there was no clear divide between fans and non-fans along metropolitan and provincial lines, even if some students seemed to assume there was. Fans nevertheless tended to consider themselves more worldly. Another interviewee from Beijing told me that when she asked to copy the series from her roommate's computer, her friend agreed, but warned her that she was 'too naïve to watch such an open TV series', in part, because she did not yet have a boyfriend (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*).

When challenged, fans sometimes defended their liberal tastes against social criticism by suggesting critics took fiction and the realities it portrayed too seriously (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). This was in spite of students' tendency to praise the realism of American dramas and disparage the melodramatic excesses of Korean series. As with *'Friends'*, viewers were divided over the extent to which *'Sex and the City'* actually reflected an underlying foreign reality, with speculation centring, for instance, on how women such as its characters would ever be able to get married after having had, according to one self-appointed 'accountant' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*), no less than forty-one serious on-screen relationships, hopping into bed with someone 'almost every twenty

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[25] In the West, *'Sex and the City'* has been regarded as pioneeringly explicit for a television series (Akass & McCabe, 2003, p. 3).

minutes', as she put it. Indeed, this more committed fan told me she had chosen the book on which the series is based as a presentation topic in her intensive reading class in order to encourage classmates to watch. She also recalled arguing with some annoyance against her American oral English teacher's insistence that the series was an exploitative, unrepresentative fiction. For her and her peers, therefore, no matter how dramatised or exaggerated, it was still regarded as a window on Westerners' 'open' attitudes to sex. A second year student also recalled being 'very surprised' when told by the same teacher that *'Sex and the City'* was 'cheating people', for as she put it, 'I [...] think Americans are very open, maybe not that kind of open, but at least very open' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*). But for the interviewee who was told she was too naïve to watch and, indeed, regarded the series as too explicit, it was simply a fantasy as 'you cannot change your boyfriend like you can change your clothes, or even more frequently' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*). Similarly, in common with my interviewees, posters on Friends6 also seemed divided, for instance, in their responses to a query whether the crime and deception on *'Desperate Housewives'* reflected American reality.[26] Most reassured the questioner that it did not, or at least only certain aspects of it. As one put it, 'Art originates from life but is higher than it. After all this is a TV series and reality is not the same'. Some, however, were willing to accept that *'Sex and the City'* perhaps reflected a more restricted East coast or Manhattan reality or a dramatised distillation of it. Meanwhile, others confessed that they did not know or that they found the matter irrelevant to their appreciation of the drama itself.

The divide between realism and fantasy was therefore perhaps not necessarily the crucial point, but rather the type of 'fantasy' on offer. In focus group research conducted by Jermyn with students and middle class professional women in Britain, what they regarded as most realistic about *'Sex and the City'* was its depiction of close female friendship, whereas the characters' conspicuous spending on designer labels and their seemingly unlimited leisure time was considered to be less plausible, but nevertheless still enjoyable (Jermyn, 2003, pp. 210, 214-215). In essence, they enjoyed what they perhaps lacked and wished for in their own lives and could see portrayed 'in the *mythos* of New York' (2003, p. 214). Among my students, however, the key issue with the *'Sex*

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[26] Original posting 3rd Dec. 2007: http://www.friends6.com/forum/thread-70663-1-2.html (accessed Apr. 7th 2008)

and the City' was less friendship which some had raised in the case of *'Friends'* or even fashion, which I discuss below, but rather 'openness' and sex itself. The most ardent fan I encountered, the young woman I mention above who defended '*Sex and the City'* against her American teacher's critique, indeed, took an up-front, almost evangelically feminist approach with her first year classmates, focusing, in particular, on the injustice of the 'ridiculous' double-standard of virginity required for girls (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). This was also a sore point among some of my second year interviewees who felt excited by the series but complained how 'Chinese men...care very, very much [and] if their girlfriend is not a virgin, maybe they will not marry her...' (*Pu Shan – Int. 5*). The prestige of *'Sex and the City'* could therefore be used as reinforcement against traditionalist restrictions.[27] Even my interviewee who had been branded too naïve to watch *'Sex and the City'* admitted, somewhat reluctantly, that due to the characters' open discussion of skills in bed and so forth, 'in some sense they just teach you' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*) despite her expressing scepticism about the reality of the series. Fantasy can therefore be seen here to also have a didactic function (Zizek, 1997, p. 9), allowing the desires of others to operate pedagogically, particularly in this case, when the series was the product of what, by consensus, was considered *the* advanced, modern society, whatever its other shortcomings.

'Just Live in Dreams'

The defence of '*Sex and the City'* to shore up a critique of traditional expectations of women was the position of what might be regarded as a pioneering minority. As I will discuss in due course, however, the mainstream current of students' opinions perhaps felt more comfortable using 'girl power' to question some of the boundaries against luxury consumption, rather than directly question those against open promiscuity, though in some cases the two overlapped. As a *'Sex and the City'* fan put it, 'through the series I know the sex attitude of foreigners and I just have the attitude of learning....and I love the clothes they wear' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*).

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[27] It was notable that although, in abstract terms, female students were in favour of sexual equality, when it came to debating (on another occasion in a second year oral English class) whether China might have a female leader at some point, they were surprisingly sceptical not just of the likelihood, but also the desirability of such a 'risky' prospect (fieldnotes: 13th Jul. 2007).

In a similar way, *'Desperate Housewives'* was also appreciated by girls I interviewed because 'we have curiosity and we can get satisfaction from this kind of movie [series]' (*Liao Yihua – G4/2*). Centring on the problems of a small circle of well-to-do suburban housewives in the fictional Wisteria Lane, this comedy-drama was acceptable even to those who found *'Sex and the City'* too explicit, despite its depiction of potentially risqué elements such as extra-marital affairs, homosexuality and drug addiction. Indeed, although a group of second year girls I interviewed suggested that in general 'we are more conservative, [...] not open like those Western people' (*Wan Chengju – G5/1*), when I asked them if *'Desperate Housewives'* was 'too open', unlike some conservative groups in the US which had objected to its light-hearted treatment of marital infidelity (Akass & McCabe, 2006, p. 6), they agreed it did not cross the boundaries of good taste.

Generally, *'Desperate Housewives'* stimulated students' curiosity rather than offending it. Among another group of girls from the same class, their curiosity ranged from 'maybe sex' (*Liao Yihua – G4/2*), 'women's lives' (*Qin Yang – G4/3*), 'the life between husband and wife' (*Xue Yinpei – G4/1*) to the 'lifestyle in foreign countries' (*Liao Yihua – G4/2*). When the latter commented that that the topics 'reflect our daily life' (*Liao Yihua – G4/2*), others were a little more sceptical about the series' realism, noting how the lifestyle is 'abnormal' (*Qin Yang – G4/3*) with 'many coincidences' (*Xue Yinpei – G4/1*). The main point made in the group, however, was not so much that *'Desperate Housewives'* was a literal reflection their own lives, but that it opened up sensitive topics that were closely related to their interests. When I asked if this was different to Chinese series, they agreed that 'maybe Chinese series want to reflect [a] harmonious society and family but American series reflect those conflicts between [...] housewives and even the husbands' (*Xue Yinpei – G4/1*) whereas Chinese dramas, with their ideological emphasis 'consider education more' (*Liao Yihua – G4/2*).[28] But when I asked whether they thought *'Desperate Housewives'* had any message, they tended to reject the possibility and, in spite of speaking of a sense of curiosity, their learning from the series was predicated on a belief that it was not trying to teach them anything:

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[28] In interviews with a number of mainly professional, higher educated women, Zhang Kai concluded that some still accepted many of the traditional roles of women as 'human re-producer' as depicted in some Chinese soap operas and derived comfort from them as an emotional outlet (2009, pp. 66, 68).

Song Luping (*G4/4*): 'I think it just show[s] some people's life'.

Liao Yihua (*G4/2*): 'I think humanity'.

Qin Yang (*G4/3*): 'Commercial [interests]'.[29]

Xue Yinpei (*G4/1*): 'Maybe they don't want to teach but we could learn'.

[*General laughter*]

Interviewer: 'Learn what?'

Xue Yinpei (*G4/1*): 'How to fight with another woman'.

[*General laughter*]

Song Luping (*G4/4*): 'Maybe in Chinese people's eyes the [series] is immoral'.

Liao Yihua (*G4/2*): 'And [...] maybe the pressure on women... [...] the need for status in society'.

Unlike *'Sex and the City'* where, as I noted above, some fans drew out its feminist implications, my informants' comments on *'Desperate Housewives'* rarely touched on whether the series undermined, as some Western commentators argued, the 'myth of motherhood and suburban bliss' (Seigal & Pozner, 2006, p. 207), or offered a 'faux feminism' that lacked empowering solutions to women's problems (Sayeau, 2006, p. 44).[30] Feminist critics were particularly divided over whether the drama's parody of a pre-feminist lifestyle, represented by the obsessively house-proud Bree Van de Kamp, was either critically subversive or nostalgically indulgent (McCabe, 2006, pp. 81-82) or perhaps even 'double-coded' as Lancioni proposes (2006, p. 140), leaving viewers to make and negotiate their own meanings. Bree, however, was one of the characters whom some of my paired interviewees discussed, recognising her as excessively image-conscious, and consequently, 'too perfect' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*) or as another girl put it, 'everybody just notices her smiling, [not...] the sorrow in her heart' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*).

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[29] 'Commercial' here probably expresses the view that the programme had no ideological agenda beyond seeking large audiences.

[30] Other scholars, such as Anna Marie Bautista (2006, p. 165) took a similarly critical line to Sayeau. Rosalind Coward, in contrast, described the series as revealing the 'continuity of disappointment' in women's lives (2006, p. 40). For a Chinese critical view of the way the series 'pushes audiences into a consumerist trap', see Yan Daocheng (2008, p. 36).

The argument, in this instance, over the characters' relative strengths and weaknesses, whether physical, moral or intellectual, ultimately seemed to evolve towards a preference for 'pure' character (*Yao Yang – Int. 2*) or intelligence over 'artificial' beauty (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*) represented by the character of Gabrielle, a former model. But, as in the case of Bree, even if her perfection was seen as a façade, it was also perhaps 'double coded' insofar as disapproval of image-consciousness did not prevent viewers' enjoyment of the style she and other characters in the show presented. Indeed, whereas contemporary Hollywood movies seemed rather haphazard in this regard, the consistent setting of a drama series in wealthy middle class suburbia presented an elegance that was particularly appreciated: '...maybe in the movies they've a very sexy image – I don't like that – but in *'Desperate Housewives'* they don't dress like that [...] it's very decent and very pretty' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*). Indeed, even a casual viewer said that she would 'just watch their lifestyle, just [for] entertainment' (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*).

When I asked another interviewee who also enjoyed the fashion in the series if she thought it might influence viewers, she pointed not simply to the clothing but to the general depiction of a middle class lifestyle: 'perhaps after seeing the TV series they think the middle class in America just live that way [...] the house with a lawn with many...many well-furnished rooms and [...] their way of speaking, their way of shopping, their way of eating...' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*). Though sceptical that this was how most middle class American women really lived – 'to me it seems like they [...] spend money quite casually [...]' – she was less sure that others might not take it as real. But as with other US dramas, regardless of whether they reflected reality or not, she felt viewers would simply enjoy the fantasy, thinking to themselves 'if I can live that way, that would be great' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*) as perhaps she herself did. Yet, by bringing such a lifestyle closer in the imagination, it still left it tantalisingly out of reach: '[...] I just cannot find anywhere to buy these clothes and if there [...] are such dresses I cannot afford them...so that's the reality...so just live in dreams' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*). Thus, in spite of students' tendency to suggest, that American films and dramas were more realistic since they avoided the didacticism of Chinese productions and transcended the stigma of immature daydreaming that they associated with Korean series, there was nevertheless an admitted element of fantasising involved.

This absorption of a middle class identity through fantasy was, nevertheless, a learning process, for as students' themselves suggested, US dramas 'can give us [what] I cannot get from our parents or education' (*Kong Yuguo – Em. 7*) or act as a means whereby 'you can see the daily life of Americans...' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*). But when the dubbed version of *'Desperate Housewives'* was broadcast nationally on CCTV 8, it received disappointingly low viewing figures, with social and cultural distance being cited by some Chinese commentators for its failure (L. Li, 2006; H. Liu, 2006, pp. 14-15; Zhou, 2005). In fact, the whole of the first season ran three episodes per night over a week (from 19th Dec. 2005) following the domestic practice of daily rather than weekly scheduling. This pattern is said to be symptomatic of Chinese drama's general inability to generate sufficient audience suspense to guarantee people will remember to tune in the subsequent week (Hua, 2007, p. 68). Whatever the reason, the compressed scheduling meant that the US series was deprived of the buzz of audience anticipation from episode to episode. The low ratings were also attributed to other technical factors. The dubbing was said to somewhat detract from the authentic dialogue, and the time-slot was late (10pm-1am) due to the state ban on imports in prime time, though it should be noted that Korean dramas, facing similar obstacles, generally achieved better viewing figures (H. Liu, 2006, p. 14; Zhou, 2005). The influence of 'cultural proximity', as I noted in chapter three, might also be cited as a factor where, as Straubhaar (1991, p. 51) found in Latin America, less educated audiences in particular, tended to prefer regionally produced material.[31] Indeed, Chinese commentators have pointed out that the world of leisurely American (upper) middle class housewives was too far removed from the experience and understanding of even urban Chinese women who almost always go out to work and thus have rather different values and lifestyles (Y. Shen, 2006). Moreover, the portrayal of adultery with a gardener, quite apart from its risqué nature, and in spite of some cuts in the broadcast version, might seem distinctly odd in a Chinese context where a rich upwardly mobile businessmen would, it was said, be a much more likely illicit catch than a manual (migrant) labourer (L. Li, 2006). In the face of such potential misunderstandings, as well as scheduling and regulatory obstacles, the failure of the

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[31] As Iwabuchi suggests, although local and regional programming may be more popular in many parts of the world, the notion of cultural proximity should not be taken as 'necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time' (2002, p. 133).

terrestrial broadcast is perhaps not surprising, though it is further testament, as seen with *'Friends'* above, to the 'apprenticeship' required in appreciating such a show.

However, for young, educated, computer-savvy and aspirational viewers who could watch on DVD or download, scheduling difficulties were simply by-passed, and notions of distance swept aside in a spirit of curiosity. When in one interview I asked whether American series didn't feel too distant or strange, my interviewee, a girl who was a fan of US series, responded quite bluntly: 'no, no, I can understand...actually...I want myself to be in that situation rather than what I am now' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). Many of the obstacles that had faced the television broadcast were therefore considered irrelevant. The word-of-mouth buzz about a series perhaps also created a certain anxiety about being left out of conversations that revolved around its characters: a girl from Minzu University noted, for instance, that ' *'Prison Break'* is the hottest topic in almost every dorm' (*Fang Liu – Em. 9*) while a BLCU student said that she watched *'Desperate Housewives'* 'because everyone's watching it' (*Wen Jing – E9/39*).

An indication of US dramas' impact on the urban scene, and their use as symbol of middle class elegance, can be seen in the following full page advert (in *'Beijing Youth Daily'*, 10th Jan. 2008) for *'Energetic City Life'*,[32] a suburban Beijing housing development (Martinsen, 2008a).

The advert's scenario offers the Chinese desperate housewife the promise of an American lifestyle, arranged by her husband:

'Lena awoke that morning to discover that her car keys and deposit book had disappeared. On the table was a slip of paper: *Dear, they're breaking ground on the final building in Energetic City Life. I'll email you the specifics. Love, your husband'*.[33]

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[32] *'Fei cheng'*; '沸城' – homophonous with the Chinese for 'Philadelphia' ('费城').

[33] Lena (*'Linai'*; '丽奈') is a shortened version of Lynette (*'Linaite'*; '丽奈特'), one of the main characters in *'Desperate Housewives'* (*'Juewang zhufu'*; '绝望主妇').

Its companion piece (17th Jan. 2008) alludes to *'Sex and the City'* (*'Yuwang dushi'*; 欲望都市), portraying a modern woman's quicksilver elegance, moving between work and play in 'Freedom City' ('自由沸城'):

'Carrie finishes discussing a manuscript at the publisher's at 18.19. At 18.28 she picks up a silk scarf in Zhongyou [department store]. At 18.57 she buys a pair of high-heeled shoes on the ground floor of 'Energetic City Life', and at 19.00 makes an enchanting entrance to a party. 19.02 she encounters two romantic opportunities. In this desire city ['欲望都市'] full of temptation and opportunity, it is only speed that rules' ("Freedom City", 2008).

Although hardly a replica of the elegant Wisteria Lane, it is also only a relatively small segment of Chinese society, even in major urban centres, that could afford to live in such an up-market apartment complex, yet the aspiration to such a lifestyle is widespread. Indeed, responding to why US dramas were popular online, one of my third year essay writers who aspired to study a Masters in International Relations suggested that the Chinese proto middle class, having already achieved life's basic necessities, now uses the foreign media to 'seek the values that they need' for a post-subsistence lifestyle. From a detached non-fan perspective, he took a more analytical line, arguing that although the view portrayed in such dramas was a fantasy one – a 'Chinese American dream' as he put it – their influence was sufficiently strong that they can also 'impose their fantasies on the reality of Chinese society' (*Huang Nan – E7/18*).

This process relies on what Wang Jing calls the 'engine of emulation' (2005, p. 533), resulting from the 'tiered logic' (2005, p. 532) of Chinese consumption, based on a hierarchy of urban locations. That is to say, consumption is fuelled by a desire to close the status gap between lower and higher tier urban centres by emulating first tier tastes,

often derived from overseas trends.[34] But, along with gap-closing there is also a simultaneous effort at gap-maintenance and indeed, gap-covering. Wang, for instance, analysed the so-called 'bourgeois bohemians' ('bobo')[35] which originated in the US in the early 2000s, subsequently transferring to China, largely as a marketing category in the media and advertising. Such fleeting trends have a dual function, both as a form of one-upmanship, but also for the top tiers, a means of disguising class and conspicuous wealth as matters of aesthetics, spiritual values and creativity in what is, essentially, an effort to erase class distinction via the politics of taste.[36] In a similar way, the debate over how to characterise and categorise China's rising wealthy population through asking, for example, who is, or is not, called 'middle class', is itself part of an ideological power play. Goodman (2007), for instance, suggests that China's 'middle class' has more in common with the 'high bourgeoisie' of 19th century Germany and Russia than current Western middle classes, particularly as it has stronger links to the state.[37] The motivation (in China) for using the term 'middle class'[38] is driven, he suggests, by anxiety to legitimise wealth as the term has connotations of moderation, normalcy and progressiveness. The motivation outside China for using such a term is, on the other hand, more driven by hope

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[34] This was evident, for instance, when I attended a national university speech contest on the theme of the upcoming Olympics. Many of the contributions emphasised how the games were an opportunity to show China's modern face to a world that seemed ignorant of it. As one contestant put it, she wanted foreigners to see that Chinese are the same as them insofar as they are also familiar with famous foreign brands. (Semi-final of the CCTV Cup speech contest, 9th-12th Nov. 2006, held at Beijing Foreign Studies University: fieldnotes: 19th Nov. 2006).

[35] 'Bobo' can be loosely defined as a combination of yuppie and hippie: i.e. young professionals who seek to distance themselves from money-oriented corporate culture by adopting more fastidious, aestheticised consumption patterns. ('*Bubo*'; '布波' in Chinese).

[36] Drawing on Bourdieu and others, Donald and Yi (2008, pp. 79-80) also emphasise the role of taste in understanding how class is formed, over and above strict income differentiation. Anagnost, likewise, emphasises the degree to which 'middle class' in China is a matter of imposed consciousness which promotes an anxious desire to find 'a way of 'fixing' one's location in the grid of possible social positions' through purchases and lifestyle choices (2008, p. 508). Fung and Ma, looking at southern Chinese audiences who are able to view Hong Kong TV, suggest a similar process at work. The territory acts as a kind of satellite relay station for broader international market-oriented culture, and tends to legitimise individualistic, upwardly-mobile aspirations for all social classes. According to the authors, even those who cannot or do not aspire to the conspicuous consumption displayed by television characters, tend to view them, nevertheless, as either like themselves (i.e. 'he's not so different to me, really'), or alternatively, admit the distance, but continue to revel in the impossible fantasy (A. Fung & Ma, 2002, pp. 70-75).

[37] Li and Niu's case studies in Beijing support this view insofar as many who are close to or are working within the state system have benefited from housing privatisation policies in the 1990s which, along with other welfare provisions plus greyer areas of income, have boosted their wealth far in excess of their official salaries (2003: paragraphs 28-30). See also essays in Goodman (2008).

[38] Both *'zhongchan jieji'* ('中产阶级') and *'zhongceng jieji'* ('中层阶级'), the latter referring to 'strata', are widely used terms.

that the new 'middle class' will make China more like the West, though the hope is itself perhaps driven by an underlying fear that capitalism may otherwise be prove to be compatible with autocratic government.

In fact, in Chinese sociological conceptions, class or social strata, a term that might be regarded as a euphemism for class,[39] is defined by a combination of profession, income, lifestyle and self-evaluation, but the percentage of the population that fulfils this set of criteria is tiny – less than 6% according a Chinese Academy of Sciences report (see J. Wang, 2005, pp. 544-545). However, although only 16% were categorised as having middle class occupations, self-evaluations not only yielded 73% of graduates, but almost half the population (48%) were claiming to be 'middle class' including many, for instance, who had minimal schooling (2005, pp. 542-543). By strict sociological definitions, therefore, the Chinese middle class barely exists, however, by self-evaluation and aspiration, it is far more widespread.[40] As Wang Jing put it, '[n]othing seemed to stop the Chinese from indulging themselves in a social imaginary that fans their dream of being part of the global, "cosmopolitan" culture' (2005, p. 545).

Double-coding and Pink Dramas

Indulging in global cosmopolitan culture, nevertheless, entailed inherent contradictions, when students, for instance, variously described *'Friends'*, *'Sex and the City'* and *'Desperate Housewives'* as close to daily life yet not necessarily realistic, non-didactic but a potential teacher, risqué yet elegant, and so forth. But far from being problematic, I argue that the potential for 'double-coding' or polysemic readings in such series was part of their attraction and a factor that made my students resistant to domestic so-called 'pink dramas' (*fenhong dianshiju*) which were their Chinese equivalents (Y.-c. Huang, 2008, pp. 103-104).

One of my students who wrote an essay on *'Desperate Housewives'* to which I have already referred, gives an instance of this duality, when appreciating the honesty of Western openness about 'social maladies' but, in this case, as a lesson not to repeat them:

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[39] '*shehui jieceng*'; '社会阶层'. The use of 'strata' rather than 'class' avoids the ideological connotations of class struggle (Anagnost, 2008, pp. 501-502).

[40] Like Goodman above, Croll suggests that in spite of the hype about a rising middle class, it remains a 'thin wafer' (2006, p. 101).

'[...] we Chinese are not open-minded enough. It is true that arson, suicide, murder and extra-marital affairs in the series are social maladies which we should not learn from, but we indeed have these problems. It shows the real life so naturally [...] and its aftermath will give us a lesson. [...] After watching it, we identify with them but rejoice for we actually didn't do such foolish things' (*Lu Yue – E7/21*).

However, the series provoked a good deal of laughter among my interviewees, as I noted previously, with students apparently enjoying the possibility of breaking conventions as much as drawing a moral lesson from them. Indeed, the 'double-coding' of *'Desperate Housewives'* left open the possibility of double satisfaction, teasing conventional moral codes without necessarily challenging them as the more explicit *'Sex and the City'*, or as I discussed out in the last chapter, the rather nihilistic tone of *'American Beauty'* seemed to do.

The tension between social propriety and the free reign of desire was, in fact, a recurring theme in girls' responses to a wide range of films, series and popular culture.[41] My interviewee who regarded *'Sex and the City'* as too open, told me that she so identified with what she referred to as the 'self-contradictory' character represented by Ingrid Bergman in *'Casablanca'* (1942) that she used her name as a password. As she explained, Bergman 'didn't tell Humphrey Bogart anything about being married but she, you know [...] wanted to stay with him but she cannot' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*). This student's implicit recognition of the film's double-coding corresponds with Zizek's analysis of the double-coding in a particular scene from the film (2006, pp. 81-83). Bogart and Bergman embrace – the scene then cuts briefly to a shot of the airport and quickly returns to find Bogart now smoking by the window. What happened while the camera discreetly looked away is left ambiguous, with contradictory on screen signals

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[41] One pair of interviewees, for example, contrasted the pop star Christina Aguilera (favourably) with her counterpart Brittney Spears whose life story they knew in considerable detail, in spite of criticising her as a shallow 'newsmaker'. They tended to judge such stars in moral terms with, for instance, Aguilera's respectability asserted and justified against Spears' excesses (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*). On the other hand, a quality of pseudo-transgressive uniqueness was appreciated by other girls who, for example, liked Johnny Depp as '...I think he's a little strange...considered [so] by other people... [but] he always acts as he wishes...' (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*).

allowing both facets of the ego, conforming and transgressive, to be potentially satisfied.[42] The logical conclusion, however, is not that the censorious 'Hays Code' of 1930s Hollywood was perversely a threat to the social order, rather than its bulwark. Instead we can see how it supported it with greater subtlety by serving up a 'side dish' of pleasure along with its prohibitions (2006, p. 85).[43]

Although more open in its depiction of marital affairs and other transgressive behaviour, the double-coding in *'Desperate Housewives'* arguably gives it and other US dramas an analogous function in contemporary China as the country's domestic political/media structure can less easily supply these kinds of 'side dish'.[44] At least for my respondents, it seemed hard to imagine how local dramas based on foreign models might achieve a sense of authenticity or credibility. When I asked a pair of interviewees who enjoyed *'Desperate Housewives'* whether a such as series could be set in China, merely changing actors and languages, they were doubtful. As one put it, 'if we see a foreigner [...] in the American version we will see it as funny but if we see Chinese people act in that version, it's strange' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*). Another group agreed the idea was 'strange', and a bit like seeing 'a monkey dressed like a person' (*Qin Dongfeng – G6/4*).

But there have been equivalents, as some students pointed out. So-called 'pink dramas' such as *'Pink Ladies'* (*Fenhong nülang*; 2003) and *'Falling in Love'* (*Haoxiang haoxiang tan lianai*; 2004) focused on career women in a filmic attempt to reflect China's new openness about fashion and femininity in the era of market reform (Y.-c. Huang, 2008, pp. 104-105). As some of my interviewees noted, *'Falling in Love'* was seen as an

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[42] Much of the self-contradictory spirit portrayed in such films refers, ultimately, in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, to the split nature of the ego. Although formed by a desire to identify with an idealised image (via the so-called 'mirror stage'), it must also forgo its original primary instincts (Fink, 1995, pp. 36-37). This betrayal of original desire causes feelings of guilt which then goad us ever afterwards to transgressively 'enjoy!' (Zizek, 2006, pp. 79-81). However, the tension this generates can be partially released in the way that society's conventions allow us, in a sense, to 'have our cake and eat it'.

[43] Melodramatic, so-called 'mandarin duck and butterfly' films and literature in early 20th century China provides another example. As Chow notes, '[t]heir didacticism is inconsistent with their lurid descriptions of a macabre reality' (1991, p. 65), indicating how the genre's depictions of depraved, foreign influenced city life appealed to its audience's desire to have things both ways (see also Pickowicz, 1991, pp. 48-52, 72-73).

[44] Domestic dramas touching on sensitive subjects are sometimes produced. The problem of finding affordable housing was one of the themes of *'Dwelling Narrowness'* ('蜗居') that aired in 2009. It caused considerable media comment but was criticised by a government official for what he regarded as its sensational depiction of corrupt officials and mistresses and its broadcast on Beijing Youth TV was halted after ten episodes, though it could still be found in slightly edited form online (A. X. Liu, 2009).

imitation of *'Sex and the City'* (Y.-c. Huang, 2008, p. 109), however, despite its modern, unabashedly materialistic and Western-looking settings, the clothing was less overtly sexual and explicit depictions or discussions of physical sexual acts were avoided (Y.-c. Huang, 2008, pp. 110-112). Moreover, the characters become increasingly anxious about their single status as the drama progressed. For women viewers, watching the Chinese series was, according to Huang, 'like taking an imaginary journey with the characters into what is deemed "inappropriate or immoral" in the Chinese context [and thus] enables them to place the boundary under control' (Y.-c. Huang, 2008, p. 113). But, as a fan of the American original put it, somewhat dismissively, 'they won't show pictures of people making love and they won't talk that much about sex [...and] they are more realistic to the Chinese way of living' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). This realism was for her the wrong kind of realism and, therefore 'we don't talk about it and it is not famous' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). Likewise, the Chinese version of *'Desperate Housewives'* (*'Beautiful Housewives'*)[45] which the scriptwriter apparently intended to act as a bridge to increase male understanding of female concerns (Sina, 2005) was, according to my interviewees, a paler copy, likely only to be popular with the old or, ironically enough, housewives. As with the injustice and corruption alluded to via *'The Shawshank Redemption'* in chapter four, it seemed that such 'dishes' needed to be outsourced to foreign suppliers.

New Heroes: Expert, not Red

Watching US drama series enabled my respondents to engage in what I called earlier 'didactic escapism' which combined the opportunity to learn about other modern lifestyles with varying degrees of potential transgressiveness, for as some students noted, young Chinese 'want to be out of this reality' (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*). But, as I have suggested above, the outsourcing of a transgressive 'side dish' does not necessarily signal a loss of ultimate social control, so cannot be taken as a straightforward indication of a 'widening digital gap between the Chinese state and its people' (Osnos, 2007), at least not in the subversive sense that this is often taken to imply (see Cai, 2008, p. 139; K. Hu, 2005, pp. 181-184). The 'double-coding' (Lancioni, 2006, p. 140) or 'polysemic' nature (Lull, 1991, p. 214) of such dramas meant that viewers could take various and sometimes

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[45] *'Meili zhufu'*; '美丽主妇'.

even contradictory messages from them. Moreover, the provision of internet access and the opportunity to download for free in some respects provided the means of escape that my students sought, so that they could 'live in dreams'.

That is not to say that pirate imports and downloads are beyond a dissident reading; indeed, it is undoubtedly tempting to see the popularity of '*Prison Break*', for instance, as some kind of political metaphor with its focus on the individual against the forces of the state. Among some of my respondents, discussed in chapter four, there was a current of eye-opening liberalism in their appreciation of American productions and there are, not surprisingly, those writing online who go further, adopting a somewhat dissident stance and consciously using Hollywood material to contrast to their own system. '*Prison Break*' was cited in one internet essay posted on various forums and other sites, for instance, that expressed mock Chinese perplexity at American individual rights:

> 'In *'Prison Break'* there is also the following strange phenomenon:
> An impatient warden can ignore the Governor.
> When he feels like it, the Governor can ignore the President.
> The Vice-President can frequently disagree with and contradict the President.
> The Governor's daughter can ignore the Governor' (Tiandi, 2006).[46]

Among my contacts, however, such an assertively dissenting position was rare.[47] My essay writers, for instance, had mixed views when I asked them to consider why series such *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Prison Break'* were popular online even though the former had not been as successful when broadcast and the latter not broadcast at all. Some took the opportunity to express a broadly liberal position, suggesting that 'the Chinese government should adopt the perspective of "art for arts sake" and reconsider its tightened censorship' (*Huang Nan – E7/18*), a point I return to in my penultimate chapter. However, there were rather more defensive warnings to keep an 'objective, clear mind' (*Li Mo – E7/19*) in the face of Western media imports, than there was domestically-

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[46] Written under a pseudonym.

[47] Nor would I suggest it was a common stance in online BBS comments devoted to the series which, in any case, have become more tightly moderated. In some cases, administrative announcements warn posters to act responsibly to avoid the site's censure. See, for instance, Friends6 at http://www.friends6.com/forum/announcement.php?id=7 (accessed 18th Oct 2010). An earlier warning can be found on YDY's site at http://bbs.sfileydy.com/viewthread.php?tid=14060&extra=page%3D1 (accessed 11th Oct. 2010).

focused dissent. Indeed, the prospect of dissent itself could be a source of anxiety if, as in one student's comment about '*Prison Break*', 'Chinese audiences don't know what the Chinese criminal justice system is, they [...] may be misled by the American one' (*Li Mo – E7/19*). Between these positions, others tried to pursue a middle way, suggesting that although classmates say 'the hero is so handsome and intelligent [...] Chinese people cannot accept the values in it root and branch' (*Chai Haiming – E7/4*). Alternatively, the 'soft power' of American series was suggested as a model for China's own future image projection and therefore 'the Chinese government and media workers should make more efforts in this regard' (*Hou Fang – E7/15*).

This type of 'on guard' stance evokes certain strands of CCP thinking that seek to control globalisation and/or Westernisation though perhaps the way I posed the question to my essay writers, and perhaps the greater formality of the essay form itself, led them to consider the issue in a more political manner than they would have otherwise. Such defensiveness evoked a type of tempered nationalism in which a degree of wariness towards the West and its cultural products was, as Zhang Xudong has suggested, not necessarily a fundamental rejection of globalisation but rather the unequal terms it sustains (2008, p. 71). Even when looking at the issue through the old *'ti-yong'* approach to Chinese modernisation – namely, the acceptance of Western practical knowledge (*'yong'*), with the maintenance of a Chinese essence (*'ti'*)[48] – it needs to be noted that this itself was an effort to facilitate modernisation by cordoning off a protected Chinese essence (Ci, 1994, p. 27). Of course, since its 19th century origins much has changed, and indeed, the notion of 'essence' itself is hard to sustain, but as Ci Jiwei, writing in 1994, predicted quite presciently, as full integration into the world economy accelerated through the 1990s, some token traditional values would be revived to disguise China's acceptance of the values and economic principles of globalisation (1994, p. 241). In that sense, the defensive position that I occasionally observed can perhaps be regarded as the little piece of traditional grit, so to speak, that makes the capitalist pearl.[49]

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[48] The phrase *'Zhongxue wei ti, xixue weiyong'* ('中学为体, 西学为用') is rooted in a 3rd century metaphysical commentary by Wang Bi, but re-coined in the 19th century by Zhang Zhidong, and proselytised by Feng Guifen (Ci, 1994, p. 27).

[49] Zhang Xudong has written of a 'postnationalism' that has emerged as a by-product of the efforts of the new urban proto-middle class to integrate with global markets. In doing so, it has faced a contradiction between liberal capitalist universal values and uneven geopolitical power structures that has resulted in 'its

So, it is its functioning as the pragmatic *'yong'* side of the equation that the viewing of many American series for didactic as well as entertainment value can be understood, especially for the white-collar professions. As I noted in chapter four, the drama series, *'Justice'* (2006), was picked out by one girl for the intriguing process of psychological analysis and linguistic skill of the lawyers, regardless of whether their clients were guilty or not (*Xiao Tingyan – Int. 7*). A self-described 'techie guy' enjoyed *'CSI: Crime Scene Investigation'* (2000-) which, even if 'exaggerated', as he put it, nevertheless offered 'a chance to see [...] technologies' in use (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*). Others watched *'The Apprentice'* (2004), after a recommendation from a postgraduate student, as a surrogate means of absorbing interpersonal skills and managerial work experience – 'it's kind of helpful to us' (*Xue Yinpei – G4/1*). Indeed, in a striking indication of how new commercial values can be integrated with tradition, during an oral English class presentation on China's generation gap, I listened to one girl pointing out how the show's flamboyant presenter attributed his success in business to lessons learned from his parents, drawing the conclusion that Donald Trump teaches filial piety.[50] But the common denominator here is the theme of schooled intelligence itself, something that was personified, above all, in the 'high I.Q.' of Michael Scofield, the hero of *'Prison Break'* and, by no coincidence, a civil engineer with expert knowledge of his own prison building who cleverly has its blueprint concealed in a large tattoo on his torso.[51] Such was their admiration for the series' ingenuity that a pair of interviewees told me they watched the first 22 episodes, back to back, in an overnight marathon. As one of the girls recalled '[...] I started to watch it at about 8pm and I finished watching it at 11am the next day' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*).

'Prison Break' fans invariably referred to the plot as the main attraction of the series – 'the process of handling [each] bad situation one by one' (*Song Zijie – Int. 1*) – pointing perhaps to a hunger for narrative's fundamental role in offering resolutions to

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sense of being frustrated, even denied by the existing hierarchy and codes of distinction set globally' (2008, p. 72).

[50] Fieldnotes: 16th Nov. 2006.

[51] According to the series' official website, '[b]eginning with an immaculate record at Morton East High School, [Scofield] would later graduate Magna Cum Laude with a B.S and M.S. in civil engineering from Loyola University of Chicago. Scofield then found employment in Chicago as a structural engineer at the prestigious firm of Middleton, Maxwell and Schaum' (www.fox.com/prisonbreak/bios/bio_scofield.htm) (accessed 28th Mar. 2008).

society's antagonisms (Chandler, 2007, pp. 114-115; Zizek, 1997, pp. 10-11). But the particular attraction for interviewees was how this resolution was accomplished via a display of intelligence and skill. These aspects were also seen as being embodied in the quality of the series' production values, which one student described as 'advanced' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*), as well as in the ingenuity of the plot structure that left the viewer constantly in suspense: 'you never guess what will happen next' (*Tang Zhihua – Int. 8*). As well as providing analyses of its narrative structure (Shu, 2007; Y. Wang, 2008), Chinese commentary on the series tended to hold it up as an example that domestic producers could learn from (P. Chen, 2007, p. 63; Hou, 2008, p. 59; S. Wang, 2007, pp. 13-14). Indeed, as with Chinese coverage of Korean dramas, much of the analysis of US dramas focused on their professionalized market-orientation as the key to their success. Ma Dayong, Professor of Chinese at Jilin University, for instance, was reported as advocating lessons to improve haphazard Chinese scriptwriting practices. According to the report, Ma praised the American programme development process for its very competitive, yet team-based approach which tightly integrates critical and audience comment with advertisers' views and the all-important ratings to decide plot lines. He apparently saw its efficiency as the reason why a crop of new genres is always being produced to replace those that appear to be on the wane (H. Wang & Hai, 2007). The implicit suggestion was that China should move away from the constraints of political collectivism and artistic opportunism (or indulgence) in this area and allow market forces to hone quality through customer-orientation, matching cultural production to the daily lives and needs of visual consumers.

My students' sense of the superior creative quality of foreign series over their Chinese equivalents also referred to more overt fantasy material such as the American series *'Heroes'* (2006-2010) which portrays a group of ordinary individuals who discover they have certain genetically endowed super-powers (mind reading, flying, controlling time and so forth). A boy who was fan of the series, explained to me in an interview that not only were American heroes less focused on 'their motherland, their belief in the governments and their loyalty' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*), but that Chinese domestic productions lacked this kind of fantasy material altogether, instead preferring a historical orientation. Although, as I pointed out, some martial arts films featured fantasy elements,

with characters exhibiting extraordinary powers (flying through the air, speeding like a bullet, and such like), he dismissed this as 'traditional [...] just kind of exaggeration [...]' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*). His association of America with advanced technology (genetics in the case of *'Heroes'*) gave the series a capacity to transcend any stigma of mere childish fantasy or superstition: 'it happens in future, with some technology, with some advanced technologies, something like that, but no exaggeration' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*). The key distinction here was that these fantastic abilities were, instead, seen as something that might potentially be realised in some imagined future, through genetic engineering or space travel. In contrast, even Zhang Yimou's film *'Hero'*, a triumph of special effects rivalling anything Hollywood could produce, was nevertheless, still burdened with being judged backward-looking and, as he put it, merely 'artificial' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*). The thirst for a future orientation therefore remained unquenched domestically, and he had to seek satisfaction externally. Of course, to a certain extent, this implies an underlying discontent with China's present, and immediate past, but, arguably, the reason such discontent does not actually fall into nihilism is that the desire to look forward may just as much entail, particularly for aspiring professionals such as this fan of '*Heroes*', a simultaneous optimism about the future (Ci, 1994, p. 211). However, domestic producers perhaps shy away from exploring this area for fear of interfering in the party-state's monopoly over the country's ideological course and sensitivities over its official, if infinitely distant, communist destiny.[52] The fantasy past is, in short, politically safer (Y. Hong, 2002, pp. 34-35).

Beyond this utopian identification with advanced technological standards, there was also a broader sense that the heroes of US series such as *'Prison Break'* offered a fresh, more democratic type of role model that had, as an essay writer put it, 'overthrown the traditional definition of 'hero' that Chinese people have been keeping in their memory for thousands of years' (*Cao Jiemei – E7/3*). The new heroes have humanising flaws that make them easier to identify with and therefore, 'as an ordinary person, everyone could

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[52] The Chinese government declared in 1987 that the country was in the 'primary stages of socialism' and would be for the foreseeable future (K.-s. Li, 1995, pp. 399-400).

be a 'hero' in some way' (*Cao Jiemei – E7/3*).[53] As Hou Yingshuai's analysis suggests, the series' individual style of heroism and the authenticity of its characterisation, with inmates given real personalities, reflects an American ideology of the individual against the institutions of the state and had a certain attractiveness to the younger generation in China which can at least identify with a desire to escape their current circumstances (Hou, 2008, p. 59).

Undoubtedly, Hollywood has frequently promoted itself as a fundamentally egalitarian force, producing what Maltby refers to as a 'democracy of desire' (2004, p. 12) as American culture has long been turned to as an alternative source of legitimisation and status among those trapped in their own oppressive circumstances, as I pointed out with reference to my student fans of *'Sex and the City'*.[54] But in *'Prison Break'* we see a particular sort of desire and a particular type of hero which contrasts, for instance, with the muscled action heroes epitomised by Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1980s. Although such films can be taken as part of a re-assertion of political conservatism (Jeffords, 1994, p. 15), as Tasker points out (1993a, pp. 232-233) they can be read more ambiguously with their display of excessive muscularity, balanced by self-disciplined training which therefore 'provides the space in which a tension between restraint and excess is articulated' (Tasker, 1993b, p. 9). As During suggests, such heroes also have a potentially democratic ethos through their generalised anti-establishment stance and body-builder strength, literally giving them the appeal of the 'self-made' (man), without the need for complex skills and scarce resources that many of the worldwide audience would have little access to (During, 1997, pp. 817-818).[55] But, as I have previously emphasised, among my respondents, a desire for escape was not

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[53] There is an overlap here with the praise for the 'democratic' focus of Korean dramas on ordinary lives, though without the suspicion of traditionalist conservatism these tended to attract from students (see chapter three).

[54] Debates on the value of popular culture can be traced back to disputes between Adorno and Walter Benjamin in the 1930s over the emancipatory potential of the film industry (Weissenborn, 1998, pp. 43-50). Although Benjamin saw film as intrinsically democratising insofar as it undermined the exclusivity of art through its multiple reproduction of images, Adorno and the Frankfurt school of criticism pointed to the negative influence of the commercial orientation of the culture industries (Maltby, 2003, p. 45) (see also chapter one).

[55] In order to appeal to a wide audience, such films tend to avoid highlighting real world cultural differences. Schwarzenegger's film *'Total Recall'* (1990), for instance, uses a science fictional plot in order to pit a unified, Earth-based 'us' against an alien 'them' (During, 1997, p. 820). Cowboy films, likewise, might also be regarded as being set in a generic, 'placeless place' somewhere between town and countryside – in spite of an explicit American location.

necessarily for action-oriented escapism and this type of hero was not a model for many. Even my male interviewees suggested that 'films like the *'First Blood'* and *'Rocky'*, I have no interest in' (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*) or as another put it, '[if] it's about violence, fighting, about sex or something like that, I won't watch that...' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*).

The difference with the hero of *'Prison Break'* is clear, for although also tastefully muscled (and tattooed), he is nevertheless a professional hero for the aspirant middle classes. It is this simultaneous democratisation and professionalisation of heroism, essentially severing its link to the state and/or wider community, in which one might claim, if not dissent, at least a change of focus in the Chinese context. The appeal of traditional heroes seemed to fade by comparison. An essay writer summed up the attraction of the series to young educated viewers like herself, compared to what she regarded as outdated domestic productions:

> '[...] people are tired of those cool guys who are audacious in gun battles or street violence and the moral heroes who are always going to sacrifice themselves to save other people are also old-fashioned. But as an American, Michael [in *'Prison Break'*] is independent, smart and handsome and is also an expert [...] appealing to female audiences [...] who prefer capable men to emotional [ones]' (*Gu Yan – E7/12*).

Here, then, blessed with brains, professional skills and good-looking too, is a thoroughly contemporary young hero, allied to no obvious cause but his own and that of his family – a hero fit for the capitalist road.

I have argued in this chapter that along with their entertainment value, US dramas played an important role in shaping my students' desires as to what the pursuit and achievement of modernisation and middle class lifestyles might mean in everyday, personal terms. Students acknowledged that such dramas were in some respects educational, although they did not attribute to them a direct pedagogic role. Rather such drama series compensated for some of the shortcomings that students associated with their education, both formal and informal, by presenting a vision of what they regarded as

dramatic fantasies of modern everyday lifestyles. Although these were not immediately available to my aspirational student viewers and even though they offered a representation of contemporary Western society that possibly few US citizens would identify in their day-to-day lives, they nevertheless had a certain credibility as popular series from the 'advanced' world that were more engaging and informative than their Chinese or Korean equivalents. In that respect, I have argued that they constituted a dream of liberal middle class professionalism as well as a relief from students' daily realities. In the next chapter, I examine how this focus on fictionalised Western lifestyles in such series influenced and, in part, shaped students' attitudes towards patriotic education and national identity.

Chapter 6.   Pragmatic Nationalism: Patriotism and Modernisation

While my students' reception of foreign entertainment media was complex and in some respects contradictory, as I have argued in previous chapters, it was generally positive and forms part of what I have referred to in chapter five as the creation of a 'Chinese American dream'. This might suggest a triumph of (neo)liberal attitudes, in one form or another, among young educated urban citizens, as some scholars have indicated (F. Liu, 2008, p. 207; Lull, 1991, p. 220; Rofel, 2007, p. 3).[1] Others, however, have noted how this very triumph seems to foster and be fostered by various nationalist counter-discourses (G. R. Barmé, 1995, pp. 233-234; Dai, 2001, p. 184; V. Fong, 2004, pp. 641-643; S. Zhao, 1997, pp. 743-745) which may not easily sit alongside a liberal agenda. In this chapter, I therefore draw upon my student respondents' views to examine how a positive engagement with foreign entertainment media does not exclude nationalistic reactions and consider how this sheds light on the ways in which contemporary discourses of cosmopolitan engagement circulating in China interact with those of patriotic education.

My first engagement with foreign films as a potential channel for the expression of nationalistic defensiveness came when I discussed with one class of students at the beginning of the academic year what type of English language teaching they had previously experienced and would like to have in future. A chorus of requests for watching films, perhaps unsurprisingly, soon followed.[2] Students were candid enough to admit that they wanted something fun – in contrast to the otherwise somewhat routine learning requirements of their university life – but also that they would welcome assistance from a native speaker in understanding the sometimes opaque idiomatic phrases and cultural references peppering even the most mainstream of Hollywood movies. One of the outcomes of my attempts to meet these requests was a powerful

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[1] As Liu defines it, neo-liberal in the Chinese context 'enjoins the subject to be the self-enterprising individual – autonomous, rational and free-choosing. Such a regime requires the subject to put the self at the center, or be authentic to the self, thus placing the authority in the hand of the individual subject in the construction of identity' (2008, p. 196). Rofel also emphasises the role of the 'desiring subject' and 'the individual who operates through sexual, material, and affective self-interest' (2007, p. 3), but argues that economic neo-liberalism, as applied in Chinese society, is itself not a wholly coherent concept and therefore results in diverse social practices (2007, pp. 199-200).

[2] Second year oral English (class 1); 12th Sep. 2006.

though largely unintended encounter with student nationalism through their rejection of foreign representations of China after some in-class screenings, as I shall discuss in detail below. Taken together, such responses seemed to illustrate some of the contradictions that occur when desire for the cosmopolitan faces other hegemonic realities. These reactions, as I will suggest, constitute attempts to mark off or delimit engagement with the wider world, but perhaps paradoxically, in an attempt to safeguard it.

Student Nationalism: 'Big Trouble'

My first encounter with nationalism as a significant aspect of students' responses to foreign films occurred when I decided to show an extract from John Carpenter's *'Big Trouble in Little China'* (1986) followed by a clip of Bertolucci's *'The Last Emperor'* (1987). I chose these as an initial stimulus for a discussion of students' film preferences and, more specifically, out of a curiosity to know if their views matched the generally positive view of the two films' hybridity that I had encountered in a lecture on 'Film, Media and Chinese Identities' at the University of Westminster (2006). As already noted, these screenings were in response to requests from a class (second year oral class 1) to use films in my teaching and were not initially intended to be part of my research.[3] But because of the intensity of the reaction, I wrote up an account of their reactions and decided to show the same extracts to another group (third year writing class 2) and ask them to write their responses in class (Essay 1).[4] I followed this up several months later by asking the latter group and one other (third year writing class 3) to write a general essay on 'patriotism nowadays' (Essay 3).[5]

I shall discuss students' contrasting reactions to patriotism in greater detail below, but overall, their views on these film extracts I showed were almost uniformly negative. Particularly in the case of *'Big Trouble'*, a US-made kung fu action comedy, students strongly rejected what they saw as an ignorant and possibly even malicious attempt to demonise China – as one complained, 'I assume that the director still believes that there is no law in China' (*Hou Fang – E1/15*). These responses were perhaps heightened by the context in which the films they were viewing were selected and presented by a Westerner.

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[3] Screenings and class discussion, 17th Oct. 2006.
[4] Screenings and Essay 1, in class: 25th Oct. 2006.
[5] Essay 3, written in class: 18th Jan. 2007.

Here, as in other instances, the intrusion of a 'foreign' view of China perhaps confirmed claims to an 'inside', authoritative yet defensive understanding of the films, rooted in an exclusive sense of being Chinese. As another student put it '[China's] culture is not closely related to other countries' so it's not easy for other countries' people to understand' (*Chai Haiming – E1/4*). Moreover, as Zhang Xudong notes (2008, pp. 71-72), when Chinese people's active efforts to join the global mainstream comes up against that very mainstream's 'orientalist' view of their culture, the results can be intense – even angry, as some students were in this case. Such reactions tend to be characterised 'tirelessly and tiresomely' (X. Zhang, 2008, p. 4) as a nationalist gap filler for the decline of communist ideology.[6] Indeed, in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, the state introduced patriotic education to mitigate against such apparent decline and the foreign influences contributing to it (C. R. Hughes, 2005, p. 254; S. Zhao, 1998, p. 297). My emphasis is rather different. Based on an analysis of my students' reactions and drawing on similar arguments made by Dai Jinhua (2001, pp. 174-176), Liu Fengshu (2008, pp. 207-210) and Vanessa Fong (2004, p. 644) as well as Hughes' discursive approach to nationalism (2005, pp. 266-267),[7] I argue that the nationalist reactions of my students are actually linked to cosmopolitanism rather than being in opposition to it and that, in the responses of my students, nationalism emerges as a weapon in the fight to defend, define and, ultimately, realise the vision of a truly globalised China.

'I Strongly Protest'[8]

As already noted, my students' reactions to viewing an extract from *'Big Trouble in Little China'* (1986), the cult action-comedy and homage to Hong Kong kung fu films, were virtually unanimous in their condemnation, though for a variety of reasons. The screening was not, initially, intended to be part of my field work, but was rather an experiment in response to students' earlier requests to use films as learning material in their oral English

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[6] As many have pointed out, nationalism was promoted by the state particularly in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations: see, for example, Friedman and McCormick (2000, p. 26), Zheng Yongnian (1999, pp. 51-52) and Zhao Suisheng (1998, pp. 289-290).

[7] Hughes (2005, pp. 266-267) argues that as discursive approach to Chinese nationalism avoids problems that arise when trying to define the term and also brings out the degree to which nationalism is not monolithic but includes contradictions within it which nevertheless serve particular political agendas.

[8] *Liao Yanting – E1/20*

course.[9] As a teacher, my primary aim was to try to ensure that students would have material they could talk about, so my choices were pragmatically tailored to this purpose. I showed both clips together without a break – *'The Last Emperor'* first and then *'Big Trouble'* – as they were relatively short and were a contrasting pair of genres (a historical drama and a comedy) which I hoped would provide a springboard for discussion of what genres they preferred. At the same time, however, as I have also already mentioned, I was also curious to discover whether the cross cultural hybridity in *'Big Trouble'* in particular – combining elements of martial arts and American western (Barron, Bernstein, & Fort, 2000, pp. 141-142; Conrich & Woods, 2004, pp. 108, 113) – was something that the students recognised and responded to.

Although *'Big Trouble'* opened in the US to mixed reviews (see Ebert, 1986; W. Goodman, 1986) and disappointing box office results, it was a pioneering attempt to incorporate kung fu elements into Hollywood, and has subsequently achieved success on video and DVD as a cult classic (Pollard, 2007). Its use of stock Chinatown stereotypes – part of Hollywood's so-called 'yellow peril' formula (Marchetti, 1993, pp. 2-6; Xing, 1998, p. 57) – perhaps opens it to the charge of negatively portraying Asians as a source of danger. But this is undercut by the comic tone of the film and the persona of its 'all-American' hero blundering incongruously through a culture that perplexes him (Conrich & Woods, 2004, p. 113). In this case, I told my twenty-five second year oral English students briefly that they were about to see part of an American film made in the 1980s and that we would discuss what they thought of it afterwards. They viewed an early scene where Kurt Russell (Jack), the John Wayne-like trucker and his Chinese buddy Dennis Dun (Wang) gingerly guide Jack's brash American juggernaut into the narrow misty back streets of Chinatown, only to stumble across a riot of gangland kung fu action, topped off by the spectacular intervention of three oriental gods descending from the sky amid smoke and crackling electricity.

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[9] Second year oral English class 1 (25 students); 17th Oct. 2006.

Big Trouble in Little China[10]

Although the class appeared to enjoy the spectacle, with students laughing and sometimes commenting to one another, when I asked them for their impressions, their initial responses were hesitant. The first comment was from a girl who said simply that it showed Chinese as conservative. I mentioned that I thought the director, in this case, might be basing his view of Chinese people on the overseas Chinese and the way he imagined Chinatowns formed a relatively closed community. But increasingly critical voices followed these initial comments. Rather than revel in the playful, over-the-top comedy of the scene as the director perhaps intended,[11] students expressed surprise, shock, and indignation at such a foreign representation of China, notwithstanding its setting in a fictional San Francisco Chinatown. They did not accept my suggestion that it was probably not intended to be a realistic portrayal of Chinese life (in China or elsewhere) and therefore might not necessarily be regarded as wholly negative in the eyes of Western audiences. By this point, the atmosphere had become quite impassioned – 'it's just rubbish' insisted one boy – with students criticising the film as an example of foreign ignorance, arrogance and perhaps even deliberate malice on the director's part. Indeed, as I observed in my fieldnotes 'a more accusatory tone [developed] as some began to ask why I had shown them this film and why I had asked them to do this task in the first place'.[12] When I responded that the film did not necessarily represent my view of Chinese culture, one girl commented that she thought I and other foreigners were a 'victim' of this

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[10] http://www.lazydork.com/movies/bigtrouble.jpg
http://davidlopan.com/content/images/lightning-storm-big-trouble-in-little-china.jpg
[11] See interview with Carpenter by Anthony Ferrante published in *'Cinescape Magazine'*, 26th Aug. 2001: http://www.mania.com/ghost-world-john-carpenter-interview-part-3_article_28927.html (accessed 4th Sept, 2010).
[12] Fieldnotes for 17th Oct, 2006.

kind of representation, even if not personally intending to look down on Chinese. As the target of criticism had now moved rather uncomfortably from the film to myself, in the interest of future relations, I gradually called a halt to the discussion and called for our regular ten minute class break. The second half of the lesson proceeded calmly, if a little tensely, as we moved on to other unrelated topics.

Later, wondering if the intensity of the response was perhaps idiosyncratic or reflected more widely shared views, I decided to pursue the matter with a different group, this time in a writing class (Essay 1).[13] Following the experience of my preliminary and pilot studies, I also hoped that writing would elicit more detail in a calmer atmosphere as well as tap into the views of those who might not otherwise choose to speak out. As before, I very briefly introduced the extracts giving the titles and the dates of the films, but on this occasion there was no discussion after viewing as it led straight into writing and, in order to reduce any sense of imposition, I gave students a choice over which clip they wrote about.

Once again, although on the surface everyone appeared to enjoy watching *'Big Trouble'* in particular, and most chose to write about it, or sometimes both, their responses nevertheless focused on the negative impression it made. After viewing, as one put it, 'I had an impuls[e] to tell the foreigners that China is not such a mysterious country' (*Chen Yuwei – E1/5*). A commonly expressed theme was 'how little foreigners know about China' or how their views are muddled or 'out of date' and how, for instance, '[...] women's abnormal small feet, mysterious Chinese kung fu, may be the whole picture of an ordinary Westerner's impression of China' (*Huang Nan – E1/18*). Other comments characterised foreign misunderstandings in more contemporary terms; either the West's 'very limited attention' to the developing world or, alternatively, the director's commercial imperative to attract audiences. Some students also considered more malicious motives. Several comments expressed disquiet that the Chinese actors in the film seemed both short and ugly, prompting the question: 'Did the director try to uglify Chinese or just make fun of Chinese?' (*Hua Fangzhi – E1/17*), while one student who was preparing for his postgraduate entrance exam drew explicitly upon his academic

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[13] Essay 1: third year writing class 2 (see appendix 2b).

knowledge, noting that 'Westerners prefer imagining a China than touching the real one. A scholar called this strange phenomenon "Orientalism"' (*Huang Nan – E1/18*).

As an indication of foreign ignorance, criticism often focused initially on the cultural accuracy of the film. One student observed, for instance, that the funeral scene, was inappropriate as the carrying of a large picture of the deceased would traditionally only occur in the case of a state leader (*Hua Fangzhi – E1/17*). Beyond such questions of cultural authenticity, others also pointed to transgressions of genre: for instance, how the combining of kung fu with either firearms or magic, mixed elements in an inappropriate and inauthentic manner that appeared 'ridiculous' (*Dong Shuai – E1/9*). The anachronism of the main characters (Jack and Wang) wearing modern clothes while the Chinese gang members wear ancient dress was also singled out for criticism (*Dong Shuai – E1/9*).

Such inaccuracies, however, might not have been so offensive had they not also been seen to have 'demonised' Chinese, as some put it in their essays (*Liao Yanting – E1/20; Meng Xiandong – E1/24*). Another admitted, 'I was shocked. I want to ask foreigners [...] Are these real Chinese customs [...] in your eyes?' (*Hu Ruotao – E1/16*). Students often cited the unrestrained violence of the Chinese gangs here, but most notable was how frequently it was linked to backwardness, with perhaps an unstated implication that 'modern' violence might somehow be less offensive. Comments focused on how Chinese people were shown not only to be 'cruel' (*Dong Shuai – E1/9*) but also 'conservative' (*Ding Weisi – E1/8*), and 'uneducated' (*Liao Yanting – E1/20*), either rejecting or ignorant of the modern world. By implication, they seemed to take modernisation (particularly education) as a morally cleansing process, for in its absence, the ignorant were shown as believing that problems can and should be solved through violence (*Hua Fangzhi – E1/17*).[14]

Some comments did, however, accept that foreigners' focus on traditional culture such as kung fu, pigtails, bound feet and Chinese myths was perhaps motivated by a sincere interest in China, but the introduction of ghosts in the film was seen as reinforcing a negative stereotype of Chinese. The appearance of these magical aspects were, once again, also related to foreigners' ignorance in portraying Chinese as superstitious,

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[14] Another possible implication here is that foreigners' ignorance of China is also a potential source of violence or, at least, an aggressive posture towards China.

irrational and in some sense, mysterious. A few students accepted this portrayal as perhaps having a basis in reality, at least in the past, but others insisted that the majority of Chinese were now educated out of such beliefs (*Bai Chuanyan – E1/1*). One, indeed, explicitly spelled out that in rituals for the dead 'living persons could do nothing [...] except express their sad feelings for losing them' (*Han Yan – E1/14*). In the light of these denials, students clearly considered foreign interest in such things irritatingly out of date and misguided.

Apart from objecting to the film's violence and implicitly racist ignorance, many also objected to the way they felt the film depicted Chinese people as standoffish and isolationist. The scene in which an old woman turns her back on the American hero's polite question, as he gingerly enters Chinatown, was frequently cited here. One comment perceptively noted that this negativity was perhaps intended to foreshadow the subsequent fight scene (*Fu Rifei – E1/10*) in which the director alludes to both Hong Kong films and the American western, but the same writer nevertheless felt a need to insist that 'the truth in China is that Chinese are warm-hearted'.

Beyond expressing a sense of shock and indignation, the students also expressed particular unease about the effect such images of China might have on foreign audiences. Some worried that foreigners might take what they saw too literally for although 'we also have these scenes in our films, [...] we know that they [do…] not exist (*Chen Yuwei – E1/5*).[15] The fact, moreover, that the film was quite entertaining and even funny, in a sense made it all the more disturbing for as one noted, it had made her laugh 'even though I too am a Chinese' (*Bai Chuanyan – E1/1*). This led some to suggest that China should take its own measures to overcome such negative images by promoting its culture more abroad through films, tourism trade and so on, though one respondent felt that foreign governments, through their control of the media, tend to 'delay and forbid' material that would show other cultures in a good light (*Hu Ruotao – E1/17*). For most, however, enhancing intercultural communication and making extra efforts to promote Chinese culture abroad was the key, but with a perhaps greater emphasis on its diversity,

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[15] This student recounted how she saw an American on the previous year's Spring Festival Gala programme who explained that when watching films as a boy, he had believed that Chinese kung fu practitioners could genuinely fly through the air. 'After he grew up, he came to China to learn kung fu. However, to his disappointment, it is impossible [...]' (*Chen Yuwei – E1/5*).

and in particular, moving away from historical to more contemporary and future-oriented themes. As one student put it, '[this film] warns me that we Chinese should introduce ourselves to the world, not only the past of China, but also the present and future [...]' (*Bai Chuanyan – E1/1*).

As I have noted, in both the oral class and the writing class, students tended to focus on the film as a representation of China rather than a spectacular comedy or a hybrid engagement with the Hong Kong martial arts genre. Interestingly, even the sole exception to the otherwise overwhelmingly negative responses also based his view on the realism of the films' depiction of Chinese culture, in particular, to Chinese beliefs about death and the need to be 'submissive', as he put it, to the supernatural order. In his view, 'This sort of belief [is] root[ed] deeply in nearly every Chinese man's mind and the director showed it quite accurately' (*Guo Jing – E1/13*). He also linked his point to the requirement in *'The Last Emperor'* for the assembled ranks of officials to show loyalty by kowtowing three times to the newly enthroned boy ruler 'no matter how young he is'. But the student was known in the class for his rather critical attitude towards both government and university authorities and so it was from this perspective that he concluded, 'the two directors did a good job' (*Guo Jing – E1/13*) in depicting Chinese respect for hierarchy. Although his appreciation of *'Big Trouble'*, in particular, was an isolated phenomenon among students in both classes, he based his view, as did his fellow students, on the film's dark depiction of China. But while he addressed what he considered to be the accuracy of this depiction, others felt differently. As another student remarked: 'Foreigners may be attracted by kung fu [...] It's really magical and interesting. However [...] we tend to see the dark and negative side of the films' (*Cheng Zhan E1/6*).

The clip from *'The Last Emperor'* drew fewer comments in students' essays perhaps because it was less provocative and more in line with their preference for accuracy and realism. Those who did mention the film tended to compare it favourably with *'Big Trouble'* at least insofar as it 'represents some objective history' (*Liao Yanting – E1/20*) and 'does not have too many stereotyped views of China' (*Hou Fang – E1/15*). For some, however, the pairing of the films suggested only a difference of degree rather than kind. Indeed, students criticised the director for presenting an image that showed 'China has its magnificence but is not civilised' (*Pan Jiaxin – E1/26*). The scene in

question depicts the toddler-emperor's impatience with the stately formalities of grand imperial ceremonial at his enthronement. As he playfully chases a huge sheet of billowing yellow silk through the doorway, he emerges into the light, only to face the massed ranks of kowtowing officials as far as the eye can see. But the little emperor is boyishly distracted by a kneeling mandarin's pet cricket chirruping in its little bamboo container. Pu Yi is charmed but tragically oblivious, the director seems to suggest, to the parallel with his own condition as an individual caged by history. For students, however, the film itself seemed to be caged by an incomprehensible desire to linger on China's past decadence: as one pointed out, Chinese leaders are no longer bowed to as Pu Yi was (*Niu Huifeng – E1/25*). It therefore appeared that 'Westerners have a mysterious, conservative and less-developed China in their mind' (*Ding Weisi – E1/8*). This matched the earlier responses of my second year oral class students who had little time for my suggestion that the film perhaps also conveyed the grandeur inherent in Chinese imperial tradition. One student, for instance, admitted that he had previously downloaded *'The Last Emperor'* out of interest in a foreign take on Chinese history, but he ended up fast-forwarding through it, puzzled at how it was deemed worthy of an Oscar. According to these viewers, the portrayal of imperial magnificence was nothing they had not seen a thousand times before.

As previous chapters have shown, such negative reactions were not typical of students' viewing experiences of foreign material overall. Indeed, as I have noted above, the choice of film and the context of presentation undoubtedly had some bearing on the intensity of the reactions. In the case of *'Big Trouble'*, the lukewarm critical reception in China to some of the martial arts blockbusters noted in chapter three may also have had some background influence on my students' attitudes towards displays of kung fu on film, though none specifically mentioned this. But the fact the film was both made by foreigners and presented by one, almost certainly heightened the students' critical responses. Removed from its association with the foreign, it might otherwise have been dismissed as a trivial comedy, not altogether dissimilar to the type of material Hong Kong filmmakers had been producing for decades and broadcast on Chinese TV without controversy. Indeed, several students observed that 'among Chinese films, there are quite a few fighting scenes like those in this film' (*Li Mo – E1/19*). But although, as I have

noted above, some comments pointed to cultural inaccuracies and generic transgressions of these two films, this was not necessarily the main issue: 'For us, the point is not kung fu but the chaos which shows the image of Chinese. It may leave a terrible impression [on foreign audiences] and mislead them about Chinese culture and Chinese people' (*Cheng Zhan – E1/6*). Despite the fact that my students' essays never addressed me directly – unlike after the screening with the oral class with whom I engaged in debate – in both cases the anger and indignation of their comments were largely in reaction to how China was depicted abroad. It was also evident that it was their concern for China's development and modernisation that provided the basis for their interpretation of the films as misrepresentations of their country and themselves, as they, and particularly '*Big Trouble'*, displayed – flaunted even – aspects of Chinese culture that seemed in students' eyes backward and demeaning.

Patriotic Education

The students whose views I draw on here were all educated within the period of so-called 'patriotic education' during the 1990s after the Tiananmen crisis. Indeed, many of the reactions above could be regarded as fitting into a pattern of student nationalism in post-socialist, 'post-Tiananmen' China (see C. R. Hughes, 2006, pp. 1-2; K. Liu, 2004, p. 24; Unger, 1996, p. xi) which bolsters the tarnished legitimacy of the CCP which promotes it.[16] Gries presents the point most graphically with two photographs – one of student demonstrators surrounding the statue of the 'Goddess of Democracy' in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the other of students ten years later with a banner depicting a 'Demon of Liberty' (the Statue of Liberty with a skull face) in protest at the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 (Gries, 2004, pp. 6-7). The contrast between the two images can, in fact, stand for a whole series of other events. Apart from the intense reaction to the Western media's coverage of the 2008 Tibetan rioting (AFP, 2008), protests involving students include anti-Japanese demonstrations over history textbooks in 2005 (C. R. Hughes, 2006, pp. 113-114; S.-D. Liu, 2006, pp. 144-145) as well as intermittent incidents abroad such as complaints against the Massachusetts Institute of

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[16] The Chinese authorities generally prefer to distinguish 'patriotism' (*aiguozhuyi*; 爱国主义), positively from 'nationalism' (*minzuzhuyi*; 民族主义), especially as the latter term also has overtones of ethnic loyalty whereas China is officially composed of 56 'nationalities' (民族) (S. Zhao, 1998, pp. 290-291).

Technology for displaying 19th century anti-Chinese woodcuts on a 'Visualizing Cultures' course website and similar outrage against a satirical depiction of a cross-dressed Mao by a New Zealand student magazine in 2006.[17]

Given this, and the corporatist, authoritarian nature of the state, some media commentators and scholars have therefore been suspicious of the alleged spontaneity of youthful expressions of Chinese national feeling (see D. Zhao, 2003, pp. 6-8). Indeed, Chinese history professor Yuan Weishi, for instance, went so far as to argue that textbooks fed students on 'wolf's milk' in an article in *'Freezing Point'* that led to the sacking of its editor (Shirk, 2007, pp. 79-80; Yuan, 2006).[18] Certainly, patriotism is widely promoted by the government in numerous activities and forums – from media outlets to school textbooks, as well as being integral to the logic of events such as the Beijing Olympics, the space programme, the return of Hong Kong and their numerous spin-off promotional activities (S. Zhao, 1998, pp. 294-296). This can be very plausibly seen as a process of re-establishing the hegemony of the party-state, in the Gramscian sense, working across a wide front to 'manufacture consent' not simply by overt authoritarianism but by drawing upon the desires of sections of society outside the party-state in order to create and to some extent negotiate a common ideology that is compatible with the purposes of the authorities (see Fairbrother, 2003, p. 607).

A major difficulty in legitimising the party's rule has arisen from its potentially contradictory purposes: namely, participating in global markets and encouraging consumer choice while remaining loyal to its basic socialist political heritage and the constraints of 'democratic centralism'.[19] Key aspects of citizenship education in the first decade of the post-Mao era had to be substantially revised in order to match new official commitments to market-based relationships and the legal concepts supporting them, as

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[17] April and May 2006 respectively: see http://zonaeuropa.com/20060428_2.htm; http://www.zonaeuropa.com/200605.brief.htm#044 (accessed 12th Aug. 2010). Jia Qingguo (2005, pp. 17-21) indeed attributes the alleged rise of nationalism mainly to the provocation of such external forces which, with echoes of the imperialist past, seek to contain China's entry into the modern world; see also (X. Zhang, 2008, pp. 63-64).

[18] As Wu Guanjun (2007, p. 2) notes, '[a]lthough most intellectuals are aware that there has been a growing nationalist current after 1989, they choose to distance themselves from it, instead of embracing it'.

[19] A white paper on 'The Building of Political Democracy in China' was issued in 2005 by the State Council which states 'The practice of democratic centralism also requires that "the majority be respected while the minority is protected." We are against the anarchic call for "democracy for all," and against anybody placing his own will above that of the collective' (see http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/whitepaper/democracy/democracy(1).html; accessed 15th Aug. 2010).

well as to official attempts to rehabilitate 'traditional' morality[20] and to re-define the CCP as representative of all classes (Law, 2006, p. 605). After 1989, however, with the evidence of the party's failure to maintain legitimacy among the educated youth, intellectuals and the broader urban citizenry, the emphasis on citizenship education was adjusted, this time to reinforce authority with the introduction of flag raising ceremonies in schools, military training in college, and the promotion of patriotic films, songs and so forth (S. Zhao, 1998, pp. 296-298). By the mid-1990s a comprehensive curriculum of patriotism education from kindergarten to university was introduced, focusing on:

> '(1) Chinese history (especially modern history and the rise of the CCP) and tradition; (2) China's characteristics and realities and their incompatibility to Western values; (3) CCP legendary and heroic stories of revolutionary martyrs; (4) CCP's fundamental principles and policies; (5) the great achievements of the party rule in China's modernization process; (6) socialist democracy and rule of law in contrast to the Western conception of rule of law; (7) national security and defense issues in the context of preventing a peaceful evolution and fighting against external hostile forces; (8) the peaceful reunification of the nation and the theory of "one country, two systems"' (in S. Zhao, 1998, p. 293).[21]

In its bare outline, the programme seems to lack much youth appeal and clearly was something of a rearguard action yet, contrary to many expectations, the party-state did stage a remarkable recovery in the post-Tiananmen period (see Shambaugh, 2008, pp. 23-24).[22] Poster campaigns, like the 1990's *'Amazing China'* series, give an insight into the party's response strategy. Focused on inspiring the younger generation, the images were designed to evoke pride in an ancient, eternal China (the Great Wall and so on) but were juxtaposed, through visual styles evocative of an earlier 'amazing' period, with symbols of modern construction – space rockets, satellite dishes and motorways, amid doves of peace and electricity pylons in the background (Landsberger, 2001, pp. 559-563).

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[20] These virtues are defined in the Central Committee's *'Implementation Outline on Ethic Building for Citizens'* (2001) as 'patriotism (*ai guo*), law-abid[ance] (*shou fa*), courtesy (*ming li*), integrity (*cheng xin*), solidarity (*tuan jie*), friendship (*you shan*), diligence and frugality (*qin jian*), self-improvement (*zi qiang*), devotion to job (*jing ye*), and contribution (*feng xian[…]*)' (Law, 2006, p. 604).

[21] From a CCP Central Committee Central Document, *'The Outline for Conducting Patriotic Education'*, drafted by the Central Propaganda Department, published in the *'Peoples' Daily'* (6th Sept. 1994). Although a lengthy document with many appeals to both Chinese tradition and the role of the party, it was noticeable that explicit references to Marxism were confined to a single sentence (K. Liu, 2004, p. 32).

[22] In Liu Kang's view, predictions of the party-state's collapse were, in fact, largely a legacy of a Cold War mind-set (2004, pp. 25, 165 n. 2). For a summary of Western academic views on the strengths and weaknesses of the CCP, see Shambaugh (2008, pp. 25-40).

'Amazing China' series (1996)[23]

The mix of imagery can be seen as a microcosm of the broader policy of binding patriotism, interpreted as party-state loyalty, together with modernisation – what Hughes has referred to as China's 'techno-nationalism' (2006, pp. 33-49) – as part of an integrated sense of idealistic citizenship, all removed from a discouraging emphasis on heavy-handed discipline.

Despite the open-door policy, the West is still regarded as a threat in some official policy documentation ('adversary forces of western countries plot to westernize and disunite' the PRC and 'compete for its next generations' according to one Ministry of Education document) (Law, 2006, p. 618). However, alongside overt calls to socialist principles, appeals to national unity tend to be more couched in, or at least mixed in with, the language and imagery of morality, pride in the country's development, the righteousness of its international stance and efforts to build a 'harmonious society'. Thus, along with stories of virtuous imperial officials, primary textbooks may feature accounts, for instance, of Yuan Longping, the developer of hybrid rice, as well as international examples of moral virtue such as Abraham Lincoln's abolition of slavery (Law, 2006, p. 611). Secondary schools supplement this with more overtly political precepts related to China's 'national condition' (*'guoqing'*), such as its official commitment to peaceful development, and its opposition to superpower hegemony and Taiwan independence (Law, 2006, p. 613).[24] Universities have also gradually reduced and consolidated (though

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[23] http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/ssc5.html (accessed 10th Sep. 2010).
[24] For similar examples see Hughes (2006, pp. 73-75).

by no means eliminated) unpopular political theory courses but with a compensatory emphasis on moral resilience and patriotic themes, as I discussed in chapter four (S. Zhao, 1998, p. 293; Z. Zhou, 2006).[25]

Commenting on his survey of and interviews with students from three cities in China, Fairbrother aptly noted that students retain varying degrees of identification with what they are taught (2003, pp. 613-618).[26] Nevertheless, they certainly need to be able to reproduce much of the patriotic education they receive if they are to progress since political study is a required part of university and postgraduate entrance exams as well as part of the application procedure for many state sector positions. Even for the sceptically minded or the unenthusiastic, as many students seem to be (Pan, 2009, p. 164), the official line has to be absorbed in order to obtain academic and career success, and therefore, remains a player in any argument.[27]

'Patriotism Nowadays'

The danger in such a focus on the impact of patriotic education, however, is that Chinese youth are characterised, by the Western media in particular, as either dupes, passively soaking up what they are taught, or as tunnel-visioned pragmatists tailoring their views to whatever secures their own advancement.[28] However, as Hughes has pointed out, even some of the texts circulating among the intellectual elites during the 1990s that have been defined as nationalist could easily be defined otherwise and need to be put in the context of a wider set of arguments among Chinese political factions that may incorporate other

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[25] For an example of how this is integrated with themes from popular entertainment, see chapter four.

[26] Fairbrother reported that, based on his survey of and interviews with university students in three mainland Chinese cities, the students were generally more patriotic and nationalistic than their Hong Kong counterparts though many were also conscious of a gap between their own perception of society and the education they had received (2003, pp. 613-614). For evidence that students were sceptical of their political education, see Pan (2009, p. 164).

[27] The curiosity to look beyond what is presented does not bring clear rewards in 'make or break' entrance examinations which tend to reflect the taught curriculum quite precisely, regardless of subject matter. A 1999 college exam multiple-choice question, for instance, required students to identify the 'core problem of Chinese–US relations' from a choice between human rights, environmental issues, trade or Taiwan – the latter being the designated correct answer (Law, 2006, p. 612).

[28] Western media coverage tends to divide between worried shock at the nationalistic responses of young Chinese, implicitly in contrast to the 1989 democracy demonstrators (e.g. Osnos, 2006), or amused shock at the untraditional and implicitly Western-oriented behaviour of others (e.g. Rampell, 2004).

non-nationalist agendas (2005, pp. 255-256).[29] Similarly, Dai Jinhua (2001, pp. 174-176), Liu Fengshu (2008, p. 209) and Vanessa Fong (2004, p. 632) have each in different ways pointed to the heterogeneous and potentially contradictory nature of Chinese people's expressions of nationalism. As I continued to explore students' responses to foreign films' depictions of China, the inconsistencies and unevenness in their nationalist critiques became increasingly apparent.

Following their viewing and discussion of the clips from '*Big Trouble'* and '*The Last Emperor*', what was striking was that the sense of indignation my students' expressed in their reactions did not appear to adversely affect my ongoing relations with the classes concerned, even with the initial discussion group which had expressed open hostility. This again might be interpreted as a product of circumstances in which my students had an interest in maintaining cordial relations with their teacher. Nevertheless, there was still something of a paradox to explore. I therefore decided to revisit the topic a couple of months later but this time in another context. Rather than observe responses to a selected set of images in film clips, I approached the issue in a more abstract manner, asking two classes of students to write on the title 'patriotism nowadays' (Essay 3).[30] As Elizabeth Bird has emphasised in *'The Audience in Everyday Life'* (2003, pp. 2-3), the media and reactions to it have the potential to seep into all areas of social and cultural life, so my aim here was to see in what terms and contexts my students would discuss the issue and whether, for instance, they would refer to any media-related examples. The examples which follow are taken from class 2 in order to illustrate the contrast with their previous positions in Essay 1 that I discussed above.

As it turned out, within this broader framework and its specific focus on 'nowadays', students tended to place the topic either in the context of sometimes tense Sino-Japanese relations, in the wake of anti-Japanese demonstrations in March-April 2005 (C. R. Hughes, 2006, pp. 113-114), or as part of a more general reflection on the changing nature of patriotism. Although they might have chosen to make a connection

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[29] In particular, the calls by political-economists Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang in the mid-1990s for a stronger control of revenue by the central government, in the wake of the break up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, was treated by scholars such as Zheng Yongnian and Joseph Fewsmith as part of a more general 'new nationalism' in China in spite of the fact that the authors' arguments were focused on economic reform (C. R. Hughes, 2005, pp. 249-250).

[30] Essay 3: third year writing classes 2 and 3, 18th Jan. 2007 (no class discussion preceded).

with their disapproval of *'Big Trouble'*, none did so and instead their main focus was to contrast patriotism with what they regarded as extremism – either the excessive collectivist self-sacrifice of the revolutionary past or more recent neo-nationalist outbursts on the internet.[31] In contrast, they suggested that patriotic values were more appropriately conveyed through less demonstrative characteristics associated with education, forbearance and hard work. 'Only educated people have the ability to bear the burden of developing' (*Ding Weisi – E3/8*) and so, as another suggested, instead of displaying 'shorter tempers and narrower points of view [...] we should [...] work harder to perfect ourselves' (*Meng Xiandong – E3/24*). Although some expressed concern at a decline in people's unselfish commitment to the nation, for most, modern patriotism was something integrated into ordinary life, and therefore needed to be defended against the distortions of irrational hotheads, past or present. As one essay put it, 'Patriotism of sacrifice [...] has changed to one of hard work and professionalism' (*Cheng Zhan – E3/6*).

Some of these essays drew upon media examples to illustrate their point. Some judged the borders of excess to have been crossed when, for example, commentators made a fuss about 'trifles' in their criticism of the martial arts star Jet Li for playing a canine man and making China 'lose face' (in *'Danny the Dog'*, 2005) (*Cheng Zhan – E3/6*) or, when people attempted to organise anti-foreign boycotts (*Hou Fang – E3/15*). In line with this stance, there were no suggestions that Zhang Ziyi and Gong Li had been wrong to take roles in *'Memoirs of a Geisha'* (2005) in spite of the patriotic fury that had been unleashed on the internet against Chinese actresses playing Japanese 'prostitutes' (S. Shen, 2008, pp. 163-164).[32] Indeed, instead of learning from patriotic socialist role models such as Lei Feng, these students suggested that Chinese people should be learning from the likes of Bill Gates or Sony: 'We should get the best out of foreign products and learn from them and use what we learn to enhance the quality of home-made products. That is patriotism' (*Hou Fang – E3/15*).[33]

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[31] For accounts of anti-Japanese online nationalism in 2005, see Tai Zixue (2006, pp. 273-280) and Liu Shih-diing (S.-D. Liu, 2006, pp. 145-153).

[32] The film's premiere in China was cancelled by the authorities a week before opening ("Does Portraying a Geisha Deserve Rebuke?" 2006).

[33] There is, as Anagnost notes (2008, p. 506), a strong popular current of publishing 'success studies' (*chenggong xue*) in China, often looking at the biographies of successful foreign businessmen, though implicitly to learn in order to compete with them.

The students implicitly accepted the basic logic of market liberalism that interfering in an actor's international career or breaking the rules of international free trade was unacceptable and perhaps even irrational. They advised the 'so-called "patriotic youth"' (*Ding Weisi – E3/8*) emerging in recent years on the internet in particular (S.-D. Liu, 2006, pp. 145-153; Rosen, 2005, p. 360) to 'quiet down and learn skills' (*Ding Weisi – E3/8*) as they themselves were doing and 'not [...] envy others' (*Meng Xiandong – E3/24*). Since the heroic age of self-sacrifice was over, 'We need not [...] do things that can shock or startle people' (*Chen Yuwei – E3/5*). Instead, the ordinariness of patriotic professionalism was stressed, ranging all the way from China's Olympic runners to taxi drivers receiving praise from foreign visitors or the acknowledgement of factory workers' contribution to China's high growth rate (*Chen Yuwei – E3/5*). This link between individual advancement and patriotism also facilitated a defence of meritocratic self-interest, entirely compatible with the theories of Deng Xiaoping (or even Adam Smith). As one noted: 'Businessmen also try to make money for themselves. However, meantime they also increase China's revenue' (*Cheng Zhan – E3/6*).

The overlap between national interest and self-interest might have raised students' doubts about the need for patriotic education in the first place, but their criticisms of extreme nationalist outbursts did not lead to an interrogation of the values associated with patriotism. Occasional responses leaked a sense of fatigue – indeed one of the most studious and diligent members of the class noted 'I have heard the word 'patriotism' thousands of times since I was in primary school' (*Hou Fang – E3/15*) – but neither she nor her fellow students suggested that patriotic education might itself have contributed to the excesses they complained of, or that they might have been fed on 'wolf's milk'. They tended to see excesses more as the result of a lack of education than anything else. Only the sole student who had praised both *'Big Trouble'* and *'The Last Emperor'* took a more pointedly sceptical line: 'Many truths are forbidden [so] a cloud of mistrust haunts the cyber world [...but] netizens are surprised to find that [...] insult and even swearing are allowed as long as their object is not anything to do with the Chinese government' (*Guo Jing – E3/13*).

Within the more mainstream view held by my students the need to draw a line between modern patriotism and its nationalistic, irrational xenophobic borders, whether

past or present, was not matched by a sense of need to do likewise on China's liberal globalising frontier. Only the instance of Chinese students abroad who changed their nationality was mentioned as perhaps a step too far, despite noting a Chinese-born Nobel prize winner having done so: 'though it is their own right to choose another country and work for it, they should stop and think [...] about patriotism beforehand' (*Chen Yuwei – E3/5*).

Nationalist Globalist Alliance

Whereas an invitation to students to consider the meaning of patriotism as a concept tended to elicit an emphasis on moderation, a direct encounter with foreign material related to China could, as noted earlier, stimulate a sense of shock and a desire to protest against the way they felt Chinese culture had been 'uglified', orientalised and shown to be uncivilised. Arguably, these sentiments expressed a sense of victimhood which, as various scholars suggest, has been an element of Chinese nationalism going back to China's semi-colonial status in the 19th century and its subsequent invasion by Japan (Gries, 2004, pp. 48-51; Y. Guo, 2004, pp. 33-34; Suzuki, 2007, pp. 37-42). Zhang Xudong has argued, as China became increasingly integrated into the world economy in the 1990s but was still diplomatically shunned, Chinese patriotism once again became strongly characterised by notions of being discriminated against or misunderstood particularly when facing a clash between an imagined consumer utopia and its more uneven realities (X. Zhang, 2008, pp. 71-72). Dai Jinhua has also pointed to the contradictions generated when urban residents experienced a surge of Western advertising, soap operas and pirated Hollywood blockbusters flowing into China during the 1990s, at a time when highly nationalist bestsellers such as the anti-American polemic, *'China Can Say No: A Choice of Politics and Attitude in the Post-Cold War Era'* (1996), had pushed to the top of the top of the best-seller lists in the PRC, along with a clutch of titles in the same vein, such as *'Why China Says No: America's Mistaken Policies toward China during the Post–Cold War Era'* (Dai, 2001, pp. 162-163).

> 'These cultural artefacts inadvertently summoned individuals to construct a
> fantasy about the wonderful life of the petite bourgeoisie. The nuclear family, as a
> globalized standard image, became a perfect ideological means to convey the

ideal of everyday life that is understood to be non-ideological. Therefore every brand of beer, famous Western alcohol, perfume, tie, and leather shoe became the emblem of success' (2001, p. 178).

Dai's trawl round Beijing's bookshops in 1995 also confirmed the continuing Chinese fetish for books with 'Harvard' in the title (2001, p. 185, n. 7). Along with these, a full range of mainstream American best-sellers, from the latest Steven King novel to the thoughts of Ted Turner, Jack Welch and other legendary business gurus were all available in Chinese translation. And as the cover blurb on *'China Can Say No'* conceded, 'China is saying no not in pursuit of opposition but to seek a more equal dialogue' (Dai, 2001, p. 175).

The inherent duality, not to say inconsistency, of the nationalist discourse was exposed when the American-produced documentary film *'Nanking'* (2007), retelling the worst atrocity of the Japanese invasion, received a low key reception in the Chinese media and limited popular response (Xinhua, 2007). As a *'People's Daily'* commentary noted, the topic perhaps needed a more dramatic, *'Schindler's List'* style treatment to attract audiences (H. Li, 2007) since the subject seemed to have little intrinsic interest when not tied to some perceived slight to national dignity. Instead, the film was almost entirely eclipsed by the intense 'techno-nostalgia' surrounding the Hollywood blockbuster, *'Transformers'* (2007), based on the original 1980s toy-based TV cartoon series. In fact, this was the biggest cinematic hit in China since *'Titanic'*, breaking opening box office records and stimulating a rush on Transformer toys in the Beijing shops (R. Wang, 2007). For young professionals the whole phenomenon did not merely evoke the good old days of lost youth, but also served to remind them of their own success:

'"My parents couldn't afford a transformer toy around 20 yuan ($3), which was half of their monthly income at that time," says Song Yang, a 29-year-old estate agent, who bought a new version Optimus Prime for 480 yuan ($63) from Wei's store. "Maybe that's the reason I still fancy Transformer toys today."' (R. Wang, 2007).

Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that the sight of fathers queuing up with their sons to re-experience their childhood itself represented the transformation of China insofar as it exemplified the consolidation of imported culture across the generations.

Fitzgerald adopted a Fukuyaman *'End of History'*[34] approach in his suggestion that the 1990s' turn to nationalism was merely a spasmodic reaction to the discomforting realisation that 'the tide of history has thrown them up on the shores of the west' (Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 29). Dai, in contrast, locates the origins of the 1990s nationalist outburst rather more specifically in the internal tensions caused by the rise of a class of *nouveaux riche* who could now afford expensive Transformer toys, but whose ascent the prevailing discourses in advertising, soap operas, blockbusters and so on had cumulatively served to obscure by essentially normalising and thereby depoliticising their presence. Without an alternative outlet for an expression of these tensions, nationalism acted as a kind of safety valve or even displacement therapy, generating reassuring communal feelings at a time when the state infrastructure of welfare provision and the traditional bonds of extended family were weakening (Dai, 2001, p. 183). Nationalist responses to domestic anxieties therefore clouded the possibility of any serious public examination of the impact of globalisation and the consequences of escalating social stratification (Dai, 2001, pp. 183-184).[35]

So, if nationalism and globalisation are linked, the former acting as a cloak for the latter, as Dai suggests, what is it that helps keep them synchronised together? Is it that the distractions of sleek global advertising along with the occasional outburst of nationalist indignation are sufficient to create enough communal unity to distract from China's social and political problems? Or is something further required to overcome these tensions?[36] As Fong's study (2004) of Dalian teenagers observed, the pull towards a

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[34] Fukuyama's basic thesis was that the fall of the Soviet bloc signalled the end of the era of ideological conflict and the intellectual triumph of Western liberal democracy (1992).

[35] This argument is supported by Wu Guanjun's analysis of the more strident nationalist discourse which poses as resisting foreign pressure. Wu argues that its colourful language actually facilitates China's greater integration into the international market by re-channelling the resulting socio-economic tensions of marketization into a distracting but self-satisfying chivalrous male pose in defence of the Chinese race and its womanhood. As Wu suggests, discussions over 'which "race" of men has the best access to women's bodies are necessary for the nationalist discourse and movement [...] to thrive' (2007, p. 20) but that these 'obscenities' merely distract from the core economic issues that generate such sentiments in the first place.

[36] A Zizekian point here, summarised by Butler and derived from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001, p. xvii) concept of 'antagonism', would be that that society is never wholly describable and consequently there is a

worldwide supra-national, middle class identity is very strong, to the extent that it seems to undermine or at least challenge and complicate national identity, as Appadurai (1996, pp. 33-35) and other globalisation theorists have suggested. Indeed, Fong argues that the relatively average urban teenagers she observed almost felt out of place in their own society as they had been brought up to have the best as only children, the centre of family hopes and expectations, and yet could see that their own country did not quite reach the lifestyles available abroad. After watching the US situation comedy *'Growing Pains'* (1985-1992), for instance, a young viewer was heard to remark 'It's just my bad luck to be born in China' (V. Fong, 2004, p. 631). These teenagers, like many of my students, wished to live a middle class life similar to that which they saw in images around them of wealthier societies: 'that's not just an American dream that's my dream too' insisted one. The constant exposure to something better elsewhere left them feeling somewhat 'cheated' (2004, p. 631). This sense was reinforced by Fong's young informants as a whole who judged geographic locations in a hierarchy with the countryside at the bottom and China's larger cities such as Shanghai and Beijing higher up, superseded by a premier league of locations beyond China's borders in the West. The sheer unrelenting prestige of 'foreign' societies gave them a 'halo effect': foreign brands were considered better quality, foreign languages helped obtain better jobs, foreign companies and joint ventures paid more, foreign footballers displayed greater skill and drama and so on (2004, pp. 638-640). And unlike some of their parents' generation, especially poorer laid off workers who might complain that the pursuit of Western lifestyles had merely allowed the bosses to rip off the state, the younger generation attributed their country's shortcomings in, for example, corruption and the pervasive use of backdoor methods to Chinese moral deficiencies (2004, p. 638). This even stretched to overseas Chinese communities, who although wealthy, were still regarded with some ambivalence for their shady dealings and reputation for 'meanness' (2004, p. 642).

Another study by Liu Fengshu, based on interviews with Chinese university students, also caught a sense that middle class individualist competitive capitalist values based on Western lifestyles have essentially prevailed or 'gained the day' (2008, p. 207)

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constant contest among advocates of (hegemonic) explanatory concepts that aim to restore a sense of wholeness, though when this fails, the search turns to substitutes, blame, or scapegoats (R. Butler, 2005, pp. 3-4, 31-36).

at least to the extent that the party's collectivist discourses did not play a significant part in the students' narratives. Instead, corresponding with my essay writers' preference for a studious, low-key form of patriotism, Liu's student interviewees constructed their identities around notions of hard work and self-sufficiency within the family unit. But none of this necessarily cast doubt on feelings and expressions of nationalism. Indeed, Fong recounts that her informants who frequently complained about life in China took umbrage when she, a Chinese-American, started doing the same (2004, p. 641). In spite of regularly expressing disappointment in their own country, teenagers would also speak in filial terms about having a duty to their motherland (*zuguo*) but expressed as part of, rather than in contradiction to, their dream of going abroad – though, tellingly, the fear of envious criticism led some to keep quiet if they were lucky enough to be actually applying for a visa.

Because it appealed for loyalty rather than admiration, such 'filial nationalism' was far more effective than blatant praise of the nation-state. Fong describes an incident in which a class was asked to produce an essay praising China on the 50th anniversary of the PRC, but almost half failed to do so, including some of the best students: 'If I knew how to write this essay, I would have!' cried one (2004, p. 642). Unlike the early half of the 20th century when filial loyalties to clan and lineage were a force that competed with revolutionary nationalism, by the 21st century these had already been socially disrupted and broken and therefore a sense of filial responsibility was entirely compatible with state priorities (2004, p. 644). So, contrary to the assumptions of Fukuyama (1992, pp. 270-272) and those who argue that globalisation erodes nationalism, but also contrary to those who suggest that the apparent decline of ideological conflict presages a retreat to xenophobic nationalism, Fong suggests that identification with national and global communities can co-exist and that strong nationalism does not solely depend on belief in one's culture's superiority (2004, p. 644). For Fong's young urbanites, the alliance of nationalism and globalism was kept together by ideas of filial duty, though it should be recalled that this did not prevent the presumably no less filial students in 1989 turning against the regime.

We therefore return to a paradox – but a paradox that provides perhaps the answer.

That is to say, it was particularly notable in my interactions with my students who wrote essays on '*Big Trouble'* and on 'patriotism nowadays' that those who argued against excessive nationalist reactions had previously been driven to almost unanimous indignation about *'Big Trouble'*.[37] But although the film brought out clearly the sense of victimhood that Zhang Xudong (2008, pp. 71-72) referred to, the root of the offence it caused seems to have been that it was an affront to their own identity as modern people, exhibited, moreover, in front of a global audience, rather than remaining within the family circle of Chinese language cinema. The sense of being misrepresented to the world – note that Fong's teenagers (2004, p. 632) already identified themselves as part of a modern trans-national middle class – promoted a defensive response that, as I have examined in the case of my students, dampened the desire or capacity to distance themselves from the nationalist zealotry of so-called *fenqing* (angry youth), despite their criticisms of such zealotry in other contexts.[38]

In that sense, China's new post-socialist environment produces 'split subjects'. Rather than attempting to assess the rise and fall of Chinese nationalism, it might therefore be better to view Chinese attitudes to nationalism and globalisation as inherently inconsistent, but nevertheless having a strategic or performative function – a function that helps determine the terms on which nationalism and globalisation are actually defined. Approaching the topic in a more abstract form, my students acknowledged neither any connection nor any contradiction between their own desire to protest and the protests of others they sought to criticise. Discourse itself is inherently limited and incomplete as I noted in chapter one. Nevertheless, such inconsistencies offer an opportunity to identify ideological dilemmas by observing how a concept is being used through the analysis of 'interpretative repertoires' available to the user. My respondents' main stance was to try to distance patriotism from the phenomenon of extreme nationalism practised by online commentators while, at the same time, they denied a lack of public spiritedness among the more mainstream younger generation. The solution my students' adopted was therefore to redefine the term as a form of self-improvement, or of the realisation of one's dreams, which they argued contributed to the national interest. As

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[37] Third year writing class 2 wrote essays on *'Big Trouble in Little China'* and on 'patriotism nowadays'.
[38] '愤青'

such, it conformed to what might be termed a 'pragmatic nationalism' (S. Zhao, 2004, p. 262; Y. Zhao, 2008, p. 168) promoted by the state itself, which downplays radical populism and instead places patriotism within a narrative of national progress through integration with the global economy. In these terms, the 'enemies', whether foreign or Chinese, were those who blocked this path.

Chapter 7.   Blurred World: Censorship and Piracy

In their pragmatic and sometimes patriotically inclined quest for 'self-globalisation', young Chinese film viewers are nevertheless partially circumventing the influence of the official media and at least some of the messages it conveys. As I noted in chapter two, various scholars have tended to attribute a potentially subversive quality, even if unintended, to the unofficial, pirate nature of DVD and film downloading, and indeed to much activity on the internet, insofar as it seems to prioritise 'self-fulfilment' (K. Hu, 2005, p. 184) beyond official national priorities (see also Cai, 2008, pp. 139, 144). Such a view is reinforced by some of the metaphors of control employed in the West to describe censorship and internet control in the PRC, most notably the 'Great Firewall' (see Tsui, 2007, p. 60). Yet, as I shall explore in this chapter, this is not necessarily quite how it is experienced by student downloaders in the context of an increasingly competitive, yet weakly regulated market economy (Boisot & Child, 1996, pp. 605-608; Liao, 2009, pp. 125-126). Within what I have termed the politics of enjoyment, just as the existence of rules and social taboos may generate a certain curiosity to seek access to more 'open' media from abroad, their absence or their opaque and unpredictable application can create a mix of apathy and ignorance about censorship, as well as a potential platform for complicity with and even support for the authorities' periodic (re)impositions of control.

This chapter will therefore begin by examining more precisely how China's censorship systems and policies are implemented and what students' reactions to these were. In particular, it will look at issues surrounding *'Mission: Impossible III'* (2006), and the extent to which students had a dual attitude to censorship that helped blur the dilemmas they confronted when trying to define the 'frontiers of the permissible'. I shall then explore how the increasingly tolerant attitudes to what constitutes 'permissible' in popular media culture interact with attitudes to the pirate economy on which students' film-viewing practices and preferences are dependent.

'Jingjing' and 'Chacha': China's Bounded Cyberspace
The idea of a boundaryless cyberspace is not something that the Chinese authorities have ever accepted and as the relevant infrastructural requirements remain under national

control, the authorities have been able to construct a basic legal, economic, social and technical architecture of control over internet activity, as a number of studies indicate (Crandall, Zinn, Byrd, Barr, & East, 2007; Tsui, 2003, p. 67; Zittain & Edelman, 2003). Initially confined to a limited number of research labs and academic institutions,[1] the internet was essentially unregulated in China until services became publicly available in January 1995, whereupon a series of control safeguards began to be put in place. The following year, for instance, it was formally stipulated that the state would have a monopoly on internet access providers and hence China's internet gateways to the outside world.[2] Subsequently, the Ministry of Public Security launched its 'Golden Shield' project as part of a wider programme of so-called 'golden' e-government projects which, complemented by a series of regulatory developments, forms the technical backbone of the so-called 'Great Firewall' (Walton, 2001). Yet, as some scholars have pointed out, these controls have, ironically, facilitated the construction and expansion of the internet, if only because it would not have developed in China as rapidly as it has done without the party-state's belief in its ability to exercise ultimate sovereignty over it (Qiu, 1999/2000, p. 13, n. 31; L. L. Zhang, 2006, p. 286).

However, just as there has perhaps been some irrational optimism over the emancipatory potential of new communications technologies,[3] there can be an equally oversimplistic emphasis on the repressive dimensions of the government's attempts to

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[1] 'Surmounting the Great Wall, walking towards the world' (*'Yueguo changcheng, zouxiang shijie'*; '越过长城, 走向世界'), was the first ever Chinese e-mail message, sent from the Beijing Institute of Computing Applications to Karlruhe University in Germany via the China Academic Network on the 20th of September 1987 (Qiu, 1999/2000, p. 6; Tai, 2006, p. 122). The message reflected something of the spirit surrounding the technology itself as well as the mood of the times, epitomised by China's 'Four Modernisations' and 'opening to the outside world'. The notion of the net's emancipatory potential evident in this message is echoed in similar debates (see Stokes, 2001; Williams, 2002) regarding the introduction of other communications technologies – film, radio, television, video and so on – as well as the potential for the erosion of national sovereignty over the media through the processes of globalisation (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 33-35; Deuze, 2007, pp. 15-20; Giddens, 2003, p. 14).

[2] Ordinance of the State Council No.195 (1996) permitted only four Internet Access Providers (CSTNet, CERNet, ChinaNet and GBNet) to directly link to the global computer network (Qiu, 1999/2000, p. 7). Subsequently these expanded to nine, but still connect through three state-controlled 'internet exchange points' ("Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study", 2005, p. 6).

[3] In 2000 US President, Bill Clinton, commented 'There's no question China has been trying to crack down on the internet [...] Good luck. That's sort of like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall' (Dickie, 2007). The connection between communications technology and democracy is a question that can be traced back to, among others, Marshall McLuhan and his 'the medium is the message' (see Qiu, 1999/2000, p. 1). A well-known rebuttal of such technological determinism was provided, on the other hand, by Raymond Williams (see Jones, 1998).

control them. While much domestic research on internet developments in China perhaps remains within an 'uncritical modernization paradigm' (Damm, 2007, p. 289), foreign academic and journalistic commentary has tended to oscillate between discourses of political 'liberation' and 'control' (2007, pp. 274-276; H. Yu, 2009, p. 19)[4] without quite capturing the hedonistic nature of much Chinese internet culture (Damm, pp. 288-291). Indeed, for most of my students, their experience of the internet was one of fun and in some cases, self expression. As a third year interviewee recalled, his 'internet life' was still relatively brief, having started in junior high school when he first went to internet cafés to read and play games. At university, when he got his own computer, he started downloading films and more recently, had started his own blog, 'a mixture of my journal, my daily stuff and sometimes just my thoughts', which he told me had almost 400 readers (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*).

The term 'Great Firewall', adopted and spread by the foreign media, is perhaps therefore somewhat deceptive as it evokes the symbolic myth of the ancient and unbroken wall rather than its complex and fragmented historic reality (Lovell, 2006, p. 23). From the technical point of view, it is also rather misleading, particularly as internet censorship is mainly achieved through the somewhat subtler means of keyword filter (Crandall, Zinn, Byrd, Barr, & East, 2007; Tsui, 2003, p. 71, , 2007, p. 60). When attempting to access restricted content, users typically receive an error message without being able to distinguish clearly whether the site has been blocked or is unavailable for other technical reasons, such as unannounced maintenance or heavy usage. Likewise, routers which were supplied initially by the US-based Cisco, have enabled specific pages to be made inaccessible, rather than whole sites (e.g. the BBC's main news page might be accessible, but not specific links from it) making censorship more fine-grained, and hence less visible. Because of these elements of uncertainty, China's internet has therefore been compared to Foucault's (and Bentham's) panopticon for the way it relies on inducing compliant behaviour, building it into the social architecture rather than resorting to cruder forms of control (see Crandall, Zinn, Byrd, Barr, & East, 2007; Tsui, 2003, pp. 76-77).[5]

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[4] See chapter two, section two: *Chinese Media and Film Industry Reform: Mastering and Marketing.*
[5] Of course, that is not to say that direct repression cannot be and is not used in particular instances, as demonstrated by the case of Shi Tao who was arrested in 2004 for e-mailing an internal party document

The main focus of comparison here is that although the authorities' restrictions are in a general sense known, in principle if not in detail, the very vagueness and uncertainty over the extent of monitoring[6] and how serious the consequences of a breach might be – what Link (2001) has referred to as the 'anaconda in the chandelier' – leads to a social culture of inculcated, barely noticed self-censorship which, rather than being specific to the internet, is integrated unexceptionally into other aspects of Chinese life. Yet, according to Winokur, much 'neo-Foucauldian' research into the internet worldwide (e.g. Lessig, 1999, pp. 5-6; Mitchell, 1995, p. 59) focuses on how 'society constitutes its constituent members as either prisoners or jailers, not the way that society itself is in fact a prison house in which surveillance is distributed in a manner that makes us our own prisoners' (2008, p. 176). The emphasis of these penitentiary metaphors on control is, therefore, apt, although they do not refer to political conditions in which self-censorship may be necessary as a matter of survival just as much as the effect of a discursive regime. However, the image of intimidation they invoke is also perhaps a little misleading, because regulatory processes may just as significantly be seen as mechanisms offering the public reassurance and security. As Link himself noted, compliant behaviour can be naturalised to the extent that dissidents may come to be seen as either foolish eccentrics or malevolent troublemakers (2001). The panopticon, in other words, may be judged from Bentham's utopian rather than Foucault's dystopian perspective.

This requires a consideration of the social basis of technologies, for it should be noted that the perceived need to protect the young and restrict employees' work usage of the internet were the very reasons that filtering software technologies were developed in the West.[7] Indeed, as I will discuss later, when my respondents considered the question of censorship, it was as likely to be in terms of protecting the young as more overtly political restrictions. The extension of filtering technologies to China, even if applied to somewhat different ends, was justified by government officials in similar terms. For although the effectiveness of censorship relies to a great extent on its secrecy,

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overseas and was prosecuted after the authorities ordered his e-mail provider, Yahoo, to supply details of his identity (Faris, 2005).

[6] By law, internet cafes are in fact required by law to keep a log of customers' identity and sites visited for 60 days ("Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study", 2005, p. 3).

[7] In the US, for instance, schools and public libraries have been required by the Children's Internet Protection Act to install internet filtering software since 2000 if they wish to receive certain types of federal government funding and therefore many have done so (Deibert, 2008, pp. 229-230).

occasionally prompting outright denials,[8] it also relies on projecting its legitimacy in terms of legal norms often based on international practices. Liu Zhengrong, deputy director of the State Council Information Office's Internet Affairs Bureau emphasised as such in a rare press conference to international journalists (14th Feb. 2006), adding that only a few pornographic and terrorist websites are blocked and that most censorship is by service providers themselves, and is based on public notifications – indeed the 'China Reporting Centre of Illegal and Unhealthy Information' was claimed to have received 235,000 tip-offs from the public since its establishment in June 2004' ("Regulator Meets the Press", 2006).[9] My point is not to take Liu's assertion at face value, for most censorship in China is necessarily a secretive and top-down process: internet news sites, for instance, reportedly send representatives to monthly meetings for specific guidance from officials on current reporting policy (Faris, 2005).[10] Rather, it is to note how the playing down of political censorship combined with the effort to legitimise it, manages to turn the tables by blurring the definitions of 'harmful' material in order to project the censors as the diligent servants of the people, responding to public demand.

Such dual legitimization and promotion of censorship as a virtuous activity was perhaps most artfully and confidently promoted through the introduction of *'Jingjing'* and *'Chacha'*, two friendly cartoon cops, pioneered initially by the Shenzhen Public Security Bureau, and which appear on screen to both enable and remind users to report 'unhealthy' material (An, 2007; Y. Hong, 2006).[11] These and similar cartoon police links which connect to reporting sites have spread to a variety of web pages and BBS sites across the county, though often discreetly placed at the side or bottom.

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[8] At a UN conference on internet governance in Athens (30 Oct - 2 Nov. 2006) Yang Xiaokun, an official at China's mission in Geneva, denied any internet censorship in China (Smith, 2006, p. 17).

[9] Several recent developments suggest that the authorities have started to promote the legitimacy of censorship in the name of self-regulation, with, for instance, open recruiting having been initiated for news monitoring committees (Xinhuanet, 2006).

[10] For an alleged example of 'working instructions', January 2008, see http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/01/internet-censors-latest-working-instructions/ (accessed 1st Aug. 2010).

[11] Postings on the Hangzhou cyberpolice site that I visited (8th Feb. 2009), for example, mainly consisted of complaints about online financial scams and problems encountered on the *Taobao* shopping site (China's equivalent of *eBay*) plus the occasional complaint about porn sites: http://www.pingpinganan.gov.cn/web/bbs/index.asp

Sina BBS: police pop-up ('Reject vulgar content, promote harmony')[12]

However, it is clear that regulatory enforcement across China, particularly in an area as novel and dynamic as internet management, tends to take place against a background of constant negotiation among interested parties, punctuated by initiatives and campaigns, often spurred by events such as the fatal fire in a Beijing internet café, killing 25 people, in June 2002 and big political set pieces such as the National People's Congress or the Beijing Olympics.[13] Qiu and Zhou's research (2005) into internet café regulation, for instance, demonstrates how the policy-making process must attempt to integrate many official agendas – in some cases overlapping, in others potentially conflicting – including: 'network security (Ministry of Public Security), socialist spiritual civilization (Ministry of Culture), IT industry growth (Ministry of Information Industry), commercial entity management (State Administration for Industry and Commerce), and the protection of

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[12] The posts here debate the alleged smallness of a Chinese electronics company's donation to the then recent Sichuan earthquake victims – screenshot taken from Sina.com BBS site Apr. 20th 2008 by 'Imagethief' (William Moss, PR expert working in China): (http://news.imagethief.com/blogs/china/archive/2008/05/20/why-do-jing-jing-and-cha-cha-fry-western-politicians.aspx) (accessed 21st May 2008).
[13] Controversy surrounding the fire in June 2002 led to a significant and highly publicised crackdown, coupled with an intensification of regulatory supervision of internet cafés (Qiu & Zhou, 2005, pp. 267, 270-273). Their popularity with the young (especially students, unemployed youth, and migrant workers) has meant that they have come to occupy a social role akin to video game parlours or billiard halls, which, in some cases they replaced and therefore gave them a whiff of danger in the public and, particularly, the parental mind (Tsui, 2003, p. 72).

minors (State Birth Planning Commission)' (Qiu & Zhou, 2005, p. 273).[14] Moreover, in line with much Chinese regulation, regulations are often specified in broad-brush terms, both because of compromises made in their formulation and the desire not to limit the scope for official action (and perhaps to encourage self-censorship), meaning that local enforcement has wide scope for interpretation and variation.[15] However, local governments' capacity to implement national directives is rather patchy, given that, as one provincial official commented, the central authorities 'only give policy but no money' (Qiu & Zhou, 2005, p. 275).

High ranking officials interviewed by Zhang in the summer of 2003 and 2004, described the overall development of internet policy as crossing a river by feeling the stones under foot, a phrase used by Deng Xiaoping to describe economic reform as a whole (L. L. Zhang, 2006, p. 281).[16] Over time, the policy stones in the internet sector have become more clearly identified. In the words of a Public Security Ministry source they are 'legislation, blocking, build-up, education, and self-regulation', (where 'build-up' refers to the promotion of 'healthy' Chinese content), with the overall policy direction moving away from crude blocking and towards more self-censorship (L. L. Zhang, 2006, pp. 279-280). But the actual process has been rather more scattered and haphazard and continues as work in progress. A Ministry of Information Industries official's analysis, for instance, reflected an administrator's dissatisfaction with what was seen as unfinished business:

> 'What we had been doing was more like fixing the problems as they occurred, which were only makeup actions, not preventive ones. In this case, we were always in the passenger's seat and driven by the occurring issues and other headaches. It is obvious that we need more preventive policies and regulations. Another big issue is that we don't have a consistent legal structure for all internet-related activities at this point. When we put the new rules into practice, they

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[14] For overviews of the Chinese political structure and its often personal and informal workings see Saich (2001, pp. 107-109) and Lieberthal (2004, pp. 192-208).

[15] State Council Order No. 292, (Sept 2000), outlined the first formal restrictions for internet content providers. Nine (vaguely worded) categories of forbidden content are indicated (Article 15), including data 'Which harm the dignity and interests of the State' and 'Which spread rumors, disturb the social order, and damage the social stability' ("Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study", 2005, p. 14).

[16] '*Mozhe shitou guo he*' (摸着石头过河): a popular proverb but its political use originated in speech by the senior economic planner Chen Yun, repeated by Deng in an economic forum in 1984. Henceforth, it became associated with Deng's pragmatic approach to economic reform (H. Y. He, 2001, p. 287).

sometimes simply conflict with some other existing rules' (L. L. Zhang, 2006, p. 282).

As with film piracy which, as I will discuss later, is also subject to a similar pattern of periodic crackdown rooted, fundamentally, in the complex nature of Chinese governance, such comments illustrate the constraints on state power in the PRC.

Yet, in spite of the difficulties I have noted for party-state administrators, most observers have concluded that the results have been remarkably successful. Indeed, according to one survey, 'China operates the most extensive, technologically sophisticated, and broad-reaching system of Internet filtering in the world' ("Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study", 2005, p. 4). From a purely technical and comparative perspective this may be the case,[17] but rather than arguing back and forth over the effectiveness or otherwise of Chinese censorship, it may be better instead to consider the extent to which its strength is dependent, at least in part, on its weaknesses. In other words, as I shall explore in the following sections, the cracks in the technical, legal and enforcement structures of the 'Great Firewall' may, in fact, be what guarantee a degree of tolerance and indeed support for the wall's existence.

Student Reactions to Censorship

My student informants did not seem particularly concerned with the issue of censorship. Few of them raised the topic when talking about their film watching preferences, and only referred to it obliquely in passing, or in response to my direct questions. Even when I asked two classes to write about how they accessed media and their reasons for doing so (Essay 9), few specifically referred to censorship, preferring, as I noted in chapter two, to focus on issues of convenience and choice. This is not to say that they were uninterested in issues of freedom: as I already discussed in chapter four, freedom from stifling convention and stereotypical role models was a popular theme. Nor were they unaware of government control, at least in general terms. When, for instance, I mentioned to two Johnny Depp fans that the second of the *'Pirates of the Caribbean'* (2006) films had been effectively banned from the cinema for its some of its supernatural content, they were

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[17] Zittain and Edelman (2003), for instance, found that China's internet filtering was more extensive than that in Saudi Arabia.

surprised, but as one of them remarked, 'some very good Chinese films cannot be shown in public in theatres' (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*).[18] In general, students' awareness of specific recent cases of film censorship seemed rather patchy, not least because restrictions could be entirely sidestepped by viewing on uncut pirate DVD or downloaded versions. As cinema scholar Pang Laikwan points out, piracy has privatized and thus, in a sense, depoliticised what was previously a collective and ideologically controlled film-watching experience in the cinema. Even though this very depoliticisation can itself be considered a political challenge to state authority, it is an indiscriminate, rather anarchic force which also subverts Hollywood interests, and even more so, China's domestic industry which is undermined in its home market (Pang, 2006, pp. 108-110).[19] In these circumstances, viewers therefore face a somewhat confusing and opaque reality. Indeed, the secrecy surrounding censorship decisions and the nature of the quota system which results in a film not being imported rather than actually banned outright, means that it is hard to know what has or has not actually been censored. In any case, with cinema-going comparatively expensive, except for cases that caused a major controversy such as *'Memoirs of a Geisha'* (2006) which was the target of patriotic attack on Chinese actresses playing Japanese 'prostitutes', most of my interviewees were surprised when told that a specific film they had watched had, in fact, been either refused a cinematic release or cut.[20]

'Mission: Impossible III'

The obvious question then is why bother censoring foreign films if everyone is watching anyway?[21] A case that came up in one of my interviews (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*) was

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[18] China's censoring authorities usually require filmmakers to amend titles with 'ghost' ('鬼') or 'spirit'/ 'god' ('神') and other overtly superstitious associations that are often preferred in Hong Kong. As a result, the Hong Kong title for *'Pirates of the Caribbean'*, literally *'Haunted Ghost Ship'* ('神鬼奇航'), was translated more literally on the mainland as *'Caribbean Pirates'* ('加勒比海盗') (S. Xu, 2007). The third film of the series was only screened with substantial cuts to Chow Yun-fat's portrayal of a Chinese pirate ("Chow's Pirates Scenes Slashed", 2007; Coonan, 2006).

[19] As Pang puts it '[i]f watching pirated movies is, in fact, political, its meaning might ultimately reside in being non-political' (2006, p. 108). I will discuss the issue of piracy in more detail in the latter part of this chapter.

[20] As I noted above, because of nationalist protests, the film was cancelled by the authorities a week before opening in China ("Does Portraying a Geisha Deserve Rebuke?" 2006).

[21] According to students from rural areas (Feb. 2009), even in relatively remote towns, many Hollywood releases are available in pirate versions.

'Mission: Impossible III' (2006), starring Tom Cruise, which was delayed in its scheduled Chinese cinema run in order for cuts to be made in a number of scenes set in Shanghai that were believed by the censoring authorities to show China in an unflattering light (Frater & Coonan, 2006). Such delays are, of course, financially significant as they enable pirates to thoroughly flood the market ahead of screening, but what was no doubt particularly galling for the studio in this case was that, as the script and filming had already been given official approval, it was anticipated that the appearance of a major international star in local setting would give the film a boost in the Chinese market (Frater & Coonan, 2006).[22] Indeed, the news of Cruise's presence attracted over 100 journalists to a Shanghai press conference (30th Nov. 2005) (Chinaview, 2006). The offending scenes, as it turned out, were not overtly political: the main objection, apart from the portrayal of local police being taken unawares by a major crime, was that in spite of the spectacular shots of the futuristic Pudong area, there were also views of dilapidated buildings, shirtless mahjong players and laundry strung out to dry – all inconsistent with the image of a rising modern China.

My interviewee had in fact viewed a downloaded uncut version of the film and was unaware of any censorship in this case. Although she was otherwise very liberal in her attitudes as a fan, for instance, of *'Sex and the City'*, she nevertheless raised an objection to scenes, ostensibly of old Shanghai, though they were actually shot in a couple of canalled and tourist-oriented 'water villages' near Suzhou. Even as someone who acknowledged that Chinese films often presented an overly beautified self-representation, the film, in her view, showed an inappropriately 'old-fashioned' image of China and she 'didn't feel they reflected the real character of Shanghai' (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*). Like students' objections to scenes of Chinatown in *'Big Trouble in Little China'*, which I discussed in chapter six, she was sensitive to images of China that to her seemed

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[22]Hollywood's notion that localisation in this manner will ease their entry into the Chinese market has, so far, largely proved to be misconceived. The Disney animation, *'Mulan'* (1998), for instance, had its run abruptly shortened on the 7th of May 1998 following the American (supposedly accidental) bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo war. According to Rosen (2002, pp. 67-68), though it had had a relatively positive coverage initially, all changed afterwards: criticism ranged from its distortions of history to complaints about the characters' abnormal appearance. In possible recognition of such problems, Disney co-produced its first locally produced animation, *'The Secret of the Magic Gourd'* (2007), with modest success, though it was still dwarfed by Chinese box office takings for mainstream films such as *'Spider-man 3'* (2007) and *'Pirates of the Caribbean'* (M. Lee, 2007).

backward – in fact, perhaps too much like her own small home town in southern China where, as she acknowledged, many people did indeed play mahjong.

However, the logic of censorship is complex, especially when considering that the scenes in question are in plain view to anyone who walks the side streets of Shanghai or any other Chinese city and, moreover, to the worldwide audience that viewed the film outside China. The oddity was compounded by a case of accidental 'advertising' in which a telephone number scrawled on a wall for seekers of fake IDs or other documents happened to feature just above Tom Cruise's left shoulder in one scene. After an internet forum posting of the frame was subsequently picked up by the newspaper *'Information Times'* before the film's official release, the advertiser was inundated with phone calls from pranksters, journalists and other netizens curious to discover whether the number was itself real or fake (G. Xu, 2006, p. A19).

Incidental advertising in 'Mission: Impossible III'[23]

The evident humour of this response, acknowledging the flip side of China's push for modernisation, marks it as another 'side dish' of reality inadvertently served up by a foreign source (see chapter five). Without pirate DVD, it would never have been noticed. Moreover, without the general effort by officials to cover up, there would have been no reason for noticing in the first place what was otherwise a mundane sight of China's un-

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[23] http://zonaeuropa.com/culture/c20060614_1.htm (accessed 6th Aug. 2010).

glossy reality. The effect of this recognition is to perhaps create a brief sense of community among those who tweak the tail of authority and share the humour embedded in the contradictions of their own society's modernisation. But more fundamentally, what it seems to point to is how the authorities' image-cleansing is not particularly addressed at the offending scenes themselves, but instead seeks to block the knowledge that outsiders may glimpse aspects of China that locals and foreigners otherwise see clearly. Yet even this is an inadequate explanation, for virtually any Chinese person can discover 'the view of the other' by watching uncut versions on DVD or online. The cover up is, therefore, revealed as primarily a matter of form.[24] Of course, prosaically speaking, one could say that it sends an extra reminder to Hollywood that great care should be taken when representing China, or to turn the question around, had the cuts not been requested, it might have been interpreted as a loosening of policy. Seen in this light, the cuts become a defence of the authorities' own image as the guardians of China's status in the eyes of the idealised foreign other, which is itself predicated ultimately on a notion of China's weakness. Even at the expense of some mockery for its over-fussiness, a measure of reassurance is therefore produced in a gesture to the idea that Western powers see, or at least ought to see, China as a rising and equal power, not just a picturesque backdrop for their own fantasies of high-tech, heroic daring.

As a follow-up to the interview I noted above, I decided to show five second year students, three boys and two girls, the scenes in question on a laptop, using an uncut version I downloaded from a Chinese site.[25] One of the group (*Nie Yuntian – G6/2*) had already downloaded and watched the film and another (*Gong Zhufen – G6/1*) had heard from classmates about the case of the telephone number for fake documents, but none knew that the cinema version had been cut. When I asked what they thought of the extracts, no one referred to anything they considered objectionable. But when I told them some parts had been deleted in the cinema version, they were nevertheless able to surmise which cuts might have been requested and also why. As one student put it, 'you mean the old buildings [...] they're a bad thing for China' (*Nie Yuntian – G6/2*). Nevertheless, they considered the censorship to be unnecessary as the scenes in question were not felt to be

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[24] Formal appearances, as Zizek has argued, are nevertheless significant in maintaining a political regime's authority (see 1997, p. 125, n. 22).
[25] Group Interview 6: 15th Jun. 2007.

serious distortions of the city's reality. While one boy seemed to take a more caustic view of the cuts, complaining that 'they always do that' and that 'Chinese films always keep in with the government' (*Su Yuan – G6/3*), the others in the group were rather more low-key. Most responses instead centred not so much on the act of censorship itself but on whether the film's portrayal was acceptable. As another boy commented, 'I think the movie just wants to show a kind of feeling, very narrow streets [...] so I can understand that' (*Xiang Dingyuan – G6/5*). Implicit in these reactions seemed to be an acknowledgement of the possibility that censorship could be exercised for entirely reasonable purposes even if, in this case, it was an over-zealous defence of China's image. Indeed, when I raised the same issue in a separate interview with a boy from another second year class, he also focused on the question of the acceptability of the portrayal. Though he had not seen the film, he took a similarly tolerant line, but with reservations:

> 'I think every government wants to give a good impression of their country and they don't want foreigners to see the bad aspect of the country or the city, so I think it depends on the film. If the film is about real life [...] I think China shouldn't ban it, if the film is not true, [...] it is reasonable to ban it' (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*).

The Dilemmas of Liberalism

As I have discussed in the case of *'Mission: Impossible III'*, students tended not to be in favour of censorship, though they were understanding and perhaps even tolerant of its application in particular cases if they were aware of them. It is perhaps possible that some among the group I spoke to might have felt a little restrained from overtly criticising censorship in front of a foreigner, however there were those among my interviewees who said there was no more need for restrictions in China than anywhere else. When I raised the matter of banned films with a fourth year student who was a *'Sex and the City'* fan, she dismissed the need for cuts or banning. As far as *'Mission: Impossible III'* was concerned, although she had not previously heard of this particular case, she argued that 'it's only a movie and there are good sides and bad sides to countries so why do we have to cut them' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*). Nor did she see any reason to object to Chinese

actresses playing Japanese women in *'Memoirs of a Geisha'*. As a matter of principle, she insisted that '[...] we should be allowed to see every kind of movie that has been directed' (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*), though for children, she accepted there should be limits.

In the case of cinema release, however, the problem is that China does not have a film classification system. Frustrated filmmakers therefore feel shackled with having to ensure no scene will be unsuitable for children, and since 2003, prominent industry and CPPCC[26] figures, including actress Gong Li, have lobbied for the introduction of a rating system (Yong, 2010, p. 171). However, although they succeeded in obtaining a commitment to commence research into the matter (Y. Lu, 2007, p. A18), and even though any proposed classification system did not legally interfere with the power to ban for political considerations, it is clear that the authorities have been reluctant to concede the shield that the suppression of sex and violence provides for their core political priorities. As SARFT's spokesman pointed out, the proposal has wider implications beyond film, for the regulation of television, pop music, video, plays and so on (Ying Zhang, 2007).[27] Dispensing with the catch-all categories appropriate to a single mass audience therefore has risks, as it is arguably the explicitness of political censorship itself that, from the authorities' perspective, needs to be concealed.

In fact, hardly any of my students were actually aware of the film classification debate itself – a sign of how new media technology makes censorship seem of minor relevance. Through these means, students had access to virtually anything they wished to view to the extent that some claimed they 'seldom consider the border between countries' when watching films (*Zha Yingbai – Int. 6*). But as noted above and in chapter six, when the matter of cultural integrity was considered, the borders could come up again, particularly in cases where a sense of distortion or threat from outside was perceived. Even those who opposed censorship still had concerns over the terms on which globalisation takes place (see X. Zhang, 2008, pp. 71-72). My third year essay writers, as I pointed out in chapter five, tended not support outright blocking of US dramas, but

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[26] Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (*Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi*; 中国人民政治协商会议).

[27] On 19th Aug. 2009, SARFT confirmed that a classification system would not be introduced at present (Landreth, 2010). A major pillar of the authorities' film censorship strategy is the maintenance of the audience as a unitary category, against industrial and commercial pressure to allow for market segmentation.

some attempted to reconcile the tension between defending cultural integrity and viewers' freedom of choice with an appeal to the efficacy of education. One, for instance, took the opportunity to express a basically liberal line, suggesting that the Chinese government, in what she referred to as its 'parenting' role, 'should not merely block the influence of American TV series, which has resulted in a backlash of underground activities, but encourage 'her children' to learn and evaluate them, most ideally, integrating the good values with Chinese culture [...]' (*Kang Li – E7/22*).

This appeal to education over censorship was also raised by an interviewee (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*) who referred to the inevitability of cultural globalisation as something that he himself embraced. As I mentioned in chapter five, he relished the immediacy of being able to download the latest episode of his favourite American series, *'Heroes'*, within hours of its US broadcast and thereby, I would suggest, symbolically abolish his Third World status, as a viewer at least. In this respect, digital media and piracy have combined not only to circumvent state restrictions but also to undermine commercial obstacles through means such as phased release dates (or 'windowing') of films and series in different regions (Shujen Wang, 2003, pp. 9, 13-14). But my interviewee, in spite of embracing the opportunity to avoid such restrictions, felt that the impact of global media was something that should be mediated locally by an exchange of perspectives, preferably across generations within the home: 'I really enjoy it...you know from this kind of argument you can learn a lot' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*). Coming from an intellectual family, he supposed the majority of young viewers were unlikely to experience this kind of debate as 'most [...] don't even have a chat with their parents'. They therefore, needed to be guided by the authorities: 'I think at present we need censorship', for otherwise 'people become too individual and very hard for the government to manage'.[28] However, he considered current methods of government censorship objectionable, not so much for their aims, but primarily because the means they used were somewhat lazy or passive. As he put it, 'you just kind of say [...] cut it out, it's ok, problem solved', and, in any case,

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[28] Similar attitudes were found by Latham (2000, p. 650) amongst Guangzhou journalists. Damm's interviews in 2001-2003 with a mix of student researchers and citizens in Fujian and Guangzhou also found that they were not shocked at censorship and even defended it in some instances it on the basis that many Chinese were poorly educated and therefore vulnerable (2007, pp. 283-284). My most overtly patriotic interviewee, also felt teenagers were vulnerable and therefore 'the government [has] its reasons' for censorship (*Zang Jieshan – Int. 9*). She also had doubts about the viability of a film classification system as she thought that, in practice, it would not be obeyed.

the measures could be easily by-passed online or on pirate disc. He instead advocated a more proactive policy of guidance 'from government to schools, from schools to parents then from parents to their children...but this kind of job will consume a lot of time and energy' (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*).

The move suggested here was not a return to crude propaganda, or 'chalk and talk' style pedagogy which students generally found uninspiring. Rather, this student's ideal was interactive debate in which a consensus could be forged that checked the potential challenge to social order posed by what he considered unacceptable values such as rampant consumption and sexual promiscuity, thereby removing the need for cruder forms of censorship. Some of these anxieties were also expressed when I asked my two third year classes (Essay 4) to write about their attitudes towards Hunan TV's popular talent voting show *'Super Girl'* (2004-2006),[29] China's version of the UK's *'Pop Idol'* (and its US equivalent *'American Idol'*).[30] Peppered throughout many students' responses was the feeling that, although a variety of tastes should be represented across the media landscape, the young still needed to be protected and guided. Whereas students typically asserted that, on the one hand, 'every individual has his right to choose' (*Hu Ruotao – E4/16*) and that the government does not have the right to ban 'arbitrarily', some still felt that programmes such as *'Super Girl'* demonstrated how the mass of youthful voters 'do not have the ability to judge whether this kind of culture is good or not', though ideally the government should 'take some measures to lead them instead of controlling them' (*Hu Ruotao – E4/16*).

A similar line of thinking could even be discerned in the most self-consciously feminist fan of *'Sex and the City'* I encountered, whom I referred to in chapter five (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). In spite of rejecting social pressure to maintain premarital female virginity she, nevertheless, took the view that guidance was needed in order to protect

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[29] *'Chaoji nüsheng'*; '超级女声'.

[30] On the 21st Sep. 2007, the authorities announced a comprehensive clampdown on such talent shows, banning all external voting (i.e. by text, phone or e-mail) and issuing comprehensive and detailed regulations regarding the backgrounds, behaviour and appearance of competitors, hosts and judges, in order to uphold professionalism and 'conscientiously resist the winds of vulgarity' (SARFT, 2007a). The enthusiasm for nationwide direct popular voting and the campaigning by fan-based support groups was believed to have raised internal disquiet at the obvious potential political analogies that might be made, as well as provoking commercial jealousy from the national broadcaster, CCTV (Hartley, 2007, pp. 38-40). For a variety of media articles, Chinese and English, on the democracy analogy see Soong (2005).

girls, and the notion of 'true love' itself, from the pitfalls of Korean dramas' 'Cinderella mentality' on the one hand, and the careless promiscuity of US series on the other. Indeed, in a manner that recalls the rationale behind the cuts in *'Mission: Impossible III'* which I discussed earlier, she regarded the television censorship of imported series as itself a form of teaching, 'showing our government's attitude' (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*). This was something she found both acceptable and reassuring – 'you can't have freedom everywhere' – despite, or even because of, her being able to by-pass it via new media.[31]

Such ambivalent views were not inconsistent with those expressed by some of the internet administration officials interviewed by Zhang, which I referred to above. They suggested that current censorship practices were considered to be only a necessary stopgap while structures and habits of self-censorship were built up and policy approaches refined:

> 'Technically blocking access to certain online content is only a temporary solution. There should be some better ways to handle it. For example, pornography may not necessarily be blocked completely since some people might just need it, while it should be blocked from children. The rating system used by the US movie industry gives us a good clue. It is not wise in my personal opinion to deal with different situations with one solution' (L. L. Zhang, 2006, p. 284).

Zhang herself suggested that there is a kernel of liberalism among officials who, as much as the citizens they censor, also see the internet as an indispensable part of a modern lifestyle they themselves inhabit. Although film classification, as I have noted, was not official policy, it can still be seen as representing the direction in which some insiders would eventually like to move (2006, pp. 283-284). Nevertheless, the private tolerance of diversity of taste and even ideology detected among the higher educated technocratic class of officials clearly does not hinder their willingness to routinely and engage in censorship.[32] The fan of *'Heroes'* whom I referred to above (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*) also

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[31] Pointing to the way in which power can work even when people do not necessarily fully subscribe to its precepts, Zizek argues that '[i]n an uncanny way, belief always seems to function in the guise of [...] a 'belief at a distance': in order for the belief to function, there *has to be* some ultimate guarantor of it, yet this guarantor is always deferred, displaced, never present *in persona*' (1997, p. 108).

[32] Another illustration of this occurred with the censoring of journalist Zhao Jing (Michael Anti) in Dec. 2005 after a successful request by the Chinese government to Microsoft to delete his blog following his support for dismissed editors at the Beijing News newspaper. The case caused controversy in the US, fuelling accusations of American corporate complicity in repression, behind its discourse of freedom and

admitted that, in spite of his own preference for 'guiding' rather than censoring, if he were in charge of current censorship policies, he would keep them as they are.

Dual attitudes exist amongst those involved in censorship, as Zhang's evidence indicates, but my engagement with students on these matters also produced divided and contradictory views, not only between responses but within them. Consequently, the 'liberation' and 'control' discourses (see Damm, 2007, pp. 274-276) which evoke the notion of a repressive state versus liberal youth underestimate the subtlety of what is involved. Whenever the issue was raised, my respondents tended to express a desire for the benefits of both liberalism and control and therefore resolved the dilemma through a belief in education and guidance as a means of inculcating a degree of self-restraint. More often, however, they ignored the matter altogether as it barely impinged upon their freedom to obtain what they wanted by accessing pirated products through new media that bypassed the regime of controls. This made censorship, to a large extent, a matter of form, though perhaps reassuring nevertheless.

Piracy: 'A Win-win Situation'?

As with censorship, piracy was not something that seemed a major concern to my respondents when discussing their film watching preferences, but instead appeared to be something largely taken for granted. It would, in fact, be hard to avoid pirate products in China even if one wished to, and certainly, from my observations, students routinely made use of copied software, books, downloads, not to mention clothes and other products, without obvious qualms or, in some cases, awareness. As I shall examine below, academic research on piracy tends to focus on whether it is, or is not, a 'problem' and the extent to which it is subversive of hegemonic state or commercial interests, chaotically undermining all such interests in Pang Laikwan's view (2006, pp. 109-110), or undermining state hegemony through on online 'visual democracy' as Zhang Yingjin proposes (2010, p. 168).[33] However, in the light of the reactions (and non-reactions) of

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corporate responsibility (MacKinnon, 2008, p. 41; Magnier, 2006). Zhao, however, later revealed that he not only knew but was on good terms with his government censor who would admit candidly, 'I know you are right, but it's my job [...] when you get [my] job you can do the same thing to me' (2007).

[33] Zhang Yingjin takes issue with Pang Laikwan's more ambivalent view of piracy, instead suggesting that it has direct democratic potential as a tactic of the weak against both commercial and state hegemony (2010, pp. 155-156).

my respondents, I will suggest that piracy constitutes, both from the pragmatic perspective of aspiring young urban middle class students and arguably for the state itself, what one of my essay writers referred to as a 'win-win situation', allowing a degree of freedom to be exercised, without directly threatening authority overall.

The widespread availability of counterfeit products of all sorts is perhaps best understood as a consequence of the country's rapid marketisation and uneven developmental path since the 1980s (Shujen Wang, 2003, pp. 82-83). Although vastly more consumer-oriented than it was during Maoist autarky (H. Lu, 2000, pp. 131-142), Chinese economic policy in the 'open door' period has, nevertheless, effectively suppressed Chinese consumption rates by means of exchange controls and a low fixed exchange rate to the US dollar, in order to prioritise export-led growth. In simple terms, this has meant that China's foreign earnings have been quietly appropriated by the state for reinvestment in low interest US bonds, thus enabling American consumers to continue buying more cheap Chinese goods (Fallows, 2008; Rajan, 2010, pp. 219-220). Against this background, piracy has had a re-balancing effect, essentially allowing the aspirant Chinese middle class to affect a middle class lifestyle in spite of not necessarily having the means to pay for it. Thus, pirate goods have also been able to play a strong pedagogical role, particularly since the mid-1990s, as an influential trainer of Chinese tastes (Pang, 2006, p. 104). Former rock musician Kaiser Kuo, in spite of having been a victim of piracy himself, nevertheless argues that illicit cultural products have been 'inexhaustible source of inspiration for musicians and filmmakers, raising the bar significantly for them, and [has] created larger and more discerning audiences' (Kuo, 2001).[34] Piracy, in this view, may be the price Americans pay for their desire that Chinese become more integrated into the world economy.

A complementary, but more radical line of argument, however, is to deny that piracy is really the problem it is presented as (Schwabach, 2008, pp. 65-67). The increasing incidence of counterfeit goods worldwide is attributed to many factors: the growth of free trade, the greater availability of cheap, high quality copying technology,

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[34] A notable instance of this was the cosmetic sellers who came round female students' university dormitories selling pirated foreign brands, though even these counterfeits were not cheap at 80 yuan a bottle (roughly the price of a student's weekly food budget). Students told me that before coming to university, many had never used make-up but after they saw others, especially foreign students, they started experimenting (fieldnotes: 7th Dec. 2006).

the rise of middle class audiences (with American tastes) in the developing world, and the relatively high price of legitimate products. Essentially, the factors that have made the product more desirable and easier to produce and distribute have also made it easier and more worthwhile to pirate (Yar, 2005, pp. 681-684). However, Yar (2005, pp. 685-691) draws attention to the way this supposedly 'increasing problem' is socially constructed by vested interests (see also Pang, 2006, p. 10). For instance, tighter and more comprehensive intellectual property rights regulations have been promoted by the industry and supported by the US government which has spread them worldwide through the WTO and other international organisations. Many governments around the world have accepted new copyright norms fearing US trade retaliation, with the result that previously accepted practices have become not only illegal, but criminalised.

In order to attract foreign investment, the Chinese government has progressively enacted copyright and intellectual property legislation since the 1980s.[35] The state has also reacted to foreign complaints and pressure with periodic campaigns, though these tend to displace rather than eradicate the phenomenon. Trade associations like the Motion Picture Association (MPA) have, nevertheless, attempted to keep up the pressure, making considerable efforts to undermine the social acceptability of copying, by suggesting that it is part of organised crime, and even linked to terrorism. According to the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), piracy levels reached 90% in China, Ukraine, Indonesia, Colombia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Pakistan, Kuwait, Romania, and Bolivia, while losses to the US industry were said to be in excess of US$3 billion in 2002, with China said to be responsible for US$250 million (Yar, 2005, pp. 677, 680). But Yar questions some of the statistical bases for calculation of losses, much of which is provided by the industries concerned which have a vested interest in exaggerating the problem. Moreover, every pirated copy is calculated as a loss to the industry on the basis that the customer would still have bought the item had the cheap copy not been available (2005, p. 690). For large parts of the developing world this assumption is dubious, and in any case, losses per capita in China are lower than in many developed countries including the USA itself (Schwabach, 2008, pp. 73-74). The terms of the debate over intellectual

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[35] The PRC's trademark and patent laws were introduced in 1982 and 1984, whereas China's copyright law came into force in 1991 (P. B. Potter, 2001, p. 72).

property are thus skewed by participants with particular interests, though they are presented as objective fact.

Beyond such quantitative sleight of hand, the 'piracy problem' can also be critiqued at a more conceptual level. It was, for example, a pirate copy of the latest Tarantino's film *'Kill Bill'* (2003), purchased on the streets of Beijing by a visiting US Commerce Secretary, that was brandished as evidence of rampant piracy in the Chinese market (Pang, 2006, pp. 63-67). However, the choice was somewhat ironic, for as Pang Laikwan points out, Tarantino's film itself more or less openly copies from a number of Asian films, with oblique acknowledgement in the credits. Pang thus proposes a more fundamental objection to the concept of piracy itself: according to the legal framework promoted by the US, one type of copying is defined as theft as it is copying the product, whereas the other is designated a legitimate homage because it is the copying of ideas (2006, pp. 67-68). The element of hypocrisy is reinforced by the fact that the US did not itself acknowledge foreign copyright until as late as 1891, well into its own industrialisation (2006, p. 70). But the Chinese government, although clearly concerned with issues of 'cultural invasion', has rarely adopted such theoretical arguments, knowing that to do so would jeopardise foreign investment flows and opportunities for technology transfer, not to mention breaching WTO rules. As Pang suggests, the conundrum for the authorities is that its own tight ideological control of the film industry fuels the pirate economy which in turn drives the government's anxiousness to appease foreign critics with the enactment of intellectual property laws and enforcement campaigns (Pang, 2006, p. 106). In practice, the various governmental authorities resolve these tensions by enacting their own form of counter-hypocrisy, formally outlawing pirate activities, but only sporadically enforcing action against them.[36]

Audiences, on the other hand, as Wang Shujen's interviews with a number of pirate VCD buyers in 2000 indicate, are driven by pragmatic responses to economic and political circumstances over which they have little control (Shujen Wang, 2003, p. 92). A professor in Beijing who bought pirate VCDs, as well as software, argued that he and his students had little choice as legitimate versions were beyond their budgets (Shujen Wang,

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[36] A pirate vendor in Beijing interviewed by Wang Shujen said that police were more concerned with pornography than piracy (2003, p. 91).

2003, pp. 89-90), whilst a Shanghai engineer bought pirate versions both because they were available more quickly and as they were cheaper. A Taiwanese businessman in Shanghai, on the other hand, was more interested in the wider availability of titles, whereas a peasant family in Zhejiang took advantage of what they would evidently not be able to afford at full cost (Shujen Wang, 2003, p. 91). These are, in essence, the tactics of the weak (Y. Zhang, 2010, pp. 155-156).

Student Attitudes to Piracy

Since Wang Shujen's research into VCD prior to 2003, much of the student audience at least has moved online. Empirical research into this type of internet-based consumer piracy is still something of 'an untouched area' in the PRC (Y. Chen & Zhou, 2007, p. 2155). However, from their survey of 234 college students in southern China, Chen and Zhou found the vast majority admitted they had both downloaded and bought pirate discs. Similar behaviour among Peking University students and a large online sample was found by Bai and Waldfogel (2009, pp. 2-3). The low cost and easy availability of pirate material are obvious factors, but also the anonymity of the internet and the minimal risk of being caught has, according to Chen and Zhou, an influence on attitudes to pirate behaviour (2007, p. 2159). However, over 60% of their sample claimed to be unaware that downloading was illegal (2007, p. 2157).[37] Although China's pre-existing copyright laws did not explicitly cover online activities, subsequent regulations issued in 2005 and 2006 have extended the scope of protection to the internet and currently come close to international norms (Jianfu Chen, 2008, pp. 596-600, 604). But the enforcement of regulations, as well as public attitudes to them, is another matter.[38] Periodic campaigns in China against the physical selling and production of pirate discs, apart from their real life effects in products destroyed and shops closed, may have an educative and deterrent effect (Jianfu Chen, 2008, p. 606), but consumer consciousness of online piracy seems to be rather weaker.

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[37] Other international surveys show many consider downloading after theatrical, but before DVD release, to be acceptable (Einav, 2008, p. 150).

[38] It is a matter of dispute whether this is due to cultural rather than socio-economic factors, but Lu's survey of Chinese university students' attitudes to software piracy did not support the notion that Confucian collectivist beliefs necessarily lead to more sharing and/or copying (J. Lu, 2009, pp. 1376-1377, 1386).

When I raised the issue of piracy with students, their reflections on the matter ranged from confusion and/or outright ignorance about any illegality (i.e. 'if it was illegal, the government would stop it'), to occasional pangs of shame that China should attract a reputation as a centre of fakery. After outlining various types of pirate discs and their prices and quality levels,[39] one of my e-mail respondents, perhaps conscious that I was a foreigner, commented, 'I think what I'm writing now is horrible…someone once told me that *Lonely Planet: Beijing* says the specialty here is pirate DVD...' (*Deng Qing – Em. 6*). But such 'outbursts' were rare.

For most of my respondents, the use of pirate products was simply integrated into the normal pattern of daily life. A law student I interviewed (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*) casually admitted, for instance, that when she was at high school, she would seek out pirate discs in her small home town when she heard that a film had been cut, or banned, in the cinema. Now, like classmates, she downloaded such material to her laptop in her dormitory. Some students also mentioned copying films from their friends' computers as not only convenient but enjoyable. In this respect, Chinese students' practices might be said to be little different to file sharers in more developed countries. Pauli and Shepperd's interviews (2005, p. 3) with young German and UK users found, for instance, that they treated downloading as an extension of their previous offline sharing behaviour and, perhaps as a result, had 'no remorse' about illegal behaviour (see also Einav in Carey, 2008, p. 135). Among my respondents, it seemed they were rarely conscious that piracy was an issue at all. Apart from network speed, the only limitation they might encounter was the regular power cut off to dormitories at 11.30pm, though even then they might watch till their computer batteries ran out.

From August to December 2009, however, the most extensive crackdown so far against unlicensed downloading sites gave the issue of online piracy greater prominence.[40] The initial result was that several hundred websites were shut down, the most well known being BTChina, one of the biggest non-commercial downloading sites (Jia Chen & Wang, 2009, p. 1; Ren, 2009). In addition to copyright issues, authorities

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[39] As my informant described, prices for pirate discs ranged between 5 RMB for poorer quality and 8-12 RMB for near original quality versions. Legal discs ranged from 8-15 RMB for very old films, but 20-40 RMB for recent releases (29th Jun. 2007). (US$1 = approximately RMB 7-8).

[40] This followed regulations issued in Jan. 2008 that required video sharing sites to be both licensed and state-owned, but the latter requirement was dropped for existing sites (IIPA, 2009, p. 91; n. 97).

have evidently been nervous about sites where content can be uploaded and have consequently put considerable pressure on operators to self-censor.[41] The campaign was therefore not solely focused on pirate content, but specifically on unlicensed operators and those offering 'harmful' material (Jia Chen & Wang, 2009, p. 1). Another popular site, VeryCD, which some of my students used, was also rumoured to under threat as it did not have a license at the time and it was closed for a day, though apparently for technical reasons (rumoured to be traffic overload as users rushed to download what they could before any possible closure). Unlike BTChina, VeryCD survived but some users were reportedly shocked and annoyed in the immediate aftermath (Jia Chen & Wang, 2009, p. 1).[42]

In the longer term, the campaign seemed to signal a tightening of control rather than a serious attempt to eliminate illegal downloading. You Yunting, an intellectual property rights lawyer with the Shanghai Zhonghui Law Firm, suggested that apart from issuing a warning to the industry and assessing netizens' reactions, the campaign would consolidate the field as larger more established businesses would find it easier to apply for licenses than smaller, essentially non-commercial operations (Ma, 2009, p. 18).[43] This seems to have been the initial effect, although some sites such as YDY subsequently re-opened under new web addresses, though with a requirement to register in order to share material and perform searches. But the largest brands such as Xunlei, Youku and Tudou which already had licences were unaffected. Some analysts speculated, however, that the timing of the campaign was significant as it coincided with the launch of CCTV's own video sharing site CNTV (http://www.cntv.cn/) which in the longer term might open up a path for Youku and Tudou to eventually sell to or link up with a state partner. This would both protect them from potential government interference and resolve their financing difficulties as even the largest commercial sites have yet to make a profit because of the

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[41] Previously, in June 2008, one of the leading video sharing sites, 56.com, was shut down for over a month for not policing its site carefully enough, severely affecting its business. Competitors like Youku and Yudou have taken heed, employing monitors to clean up their sites and received their licenses shortly after (Epstein, 2009) though pirate material can still be found. YouTube, as it is beyond the Chinese government's jurisdiction, has been blocked online since March 2009 following the uploading of a video showing Tibetans being beaten by police (CNN, 2009).

[42] For a sampling of online reactions, see http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/12/11/china-shuts-down-bt-sites-netizens-distressed/ (accessed 28th Dec. 2009).

[43] Basic running costs are said to be about 50,000 RMB per year (W. Han, 2009).

need to pay expensive fees for extra bandwidth as they expand (Epstein, 2009; G. Lu, 2009; J. Qian, 2009).

Whatever the effect on the industry, the crackdown did not seem to have a major impact on my students' viewing behaviour. Generally, they seemed indifferent to copyright issues or even periodic crackdowns as long as they could still access what they want for free from one source or another (see G. Lu, 2009). When I asked students about their viewing practices (Essay 9), some in fact suggested that they were willing to spend money on purchasing legal DVDs featuring stars or 'idols' they particularly admired, if these were available. In this respect, they were similar to some of Cenite et al interviewees in Singapore (2009, p. 214) whom the authors argued were not merely the 'pirates' as portrayed by the film and music industries (2009, pp. 206-207) but appeared to have their own sense of ethics.[44] In these cases at least, my respondents were obviously aware of the issue of DVD piracy, if only because of the difference in price. For those using the internet, the issue was a little less clear cut, especially as Youku, Tudou and other providers have begun to provide some licensed content alongside uploaded pirate material, though the distinction is not visible to users. Downloaders, however, can see an on-screen disclaimer inserted on many films asking users to delete the file after 24 hours and buy the product if they enjoyed it (see chapter two). Following this line of argument, one student suggested that the downloading websites were essentially benign as they were not only non-commercial but also 'film companies have won a much larger group of potential customers while the audiences obtain a chance to enjoy what they have missed in cinemas. It is a win-win situation' (*Shen Dan – E9/33*).[45] Similar views were found among Einav's interviewees in American universities who saw file-sharing as a form of sampling and 'quality control' that did not necessarily replace cinema-going or buying DVDs (2008, pp. 153-154).[46] However, the idea that downloaders would merely sample

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[44] Cenite et al interviewed a mix of employees as well as students at a communication department recruited by e-mail (and 'snowballing' recommendations). All were experienced downloaders and DVD watchers (2009, pp. 210-211). Similarly, interviews conducted by Einav in a number of American universities suggest that cost was not the main motive for downloading compared to factors such as convenience, sampling content and so forth (2008, pp. 153-155).

[45] Hong Kong directors Wong Kar-wai and Herman Lau have also accepted that piracy plays a positive role in enabling their films to be seen more widely on the Chinese mainland, effectively allowing them to circumvent government restrictions (see Pang, 2006, p. 103), though that is not to deny piracy's detrimental effects on revenues for Chinese filmmakers in their home market.

[46] Whether these responses reflected actual behaviour is harder to assess.

and then purchase was, as another of my essay writers admitted, rather far-fetched in China because 'very few of us would really do so' (*Shu Cuiling – E9/34*).

Instead, the main line of argument that I encountered among my students regarding both pirate DVD and downloading was that legitimate films were unreasonably expensive and also not widely available, implicitly suggesting that piracy was a developmental phenomenon:

> 'I do know it is illegal. But are there any better ways to get the films we want to watch? We cannot find the legal copies of most of them! Also, if the price of the legal ones was the same as that of pirates', I would buy legal ones...' (*Deng Qing – Em. 6*).

Indeed, as the student for whom piracy was a 'win-win' scenario rather pragmatically put it, clamping down on online sites would not necessarily eliminate piracy as such: 'if downloading is not permitted, most of us may turn to pirate DVD again, just like we did five or six years before when the Internet was not as convenient as it is today' (*Shen Dan – E9/33*).

It is possible to suggest that what such Chinese audiences are adopting here is an attitude of cynical realism towards Western commercialism, as represented by the film studios. For ordinary consumers, as Pang Laikwan points out, the vested commercial interests behind the principles of copyright are obscured by technical jargon and moral pressure, so the basic ethics of the matter seem hard to argue with (2006, pp. 42-43). The illegality of piracy is therefore not denied or challenged at a conceptual level, but practically ignored because the system of copyright is considered unreasonable in current circumstances. So, it is not so much the system producing such unreasonableness that is opposed. Rather, Chinese consumers pragmatically circumvent their own disadvantageous position within the system; a position they hope will eventually improve with the country's economic development, even if in the meantime their current consumer practices sometimes have to operate in a grey area of legality.

Chinese commercial file and video sharing sites have responded to challenges to their 'piratized' business models by exploiting this blurred legal environment. In

February 2008, the MPA, representing major Hollywood studios, filed a lawsuit against Xunlei in a Shanghai court for facilitating illegal downloading. News of the case prompted some nationalist-inflected indignation online, warning of yet another US attempt to impose hegemony: it represented 'the razing of the Summer Palace for the internet age' according to one IT commentator (X. Liu, 2008)[47] though others admitted that Xunlei had perhaps crossed the line between merely providing tools for piracy and actively encouraging it. This distinction was the key to a previous case (concluded in 2007) involving Baidu, the dominant Chinese search engine, which offers a popular mp3 search facility for downloading music (see Justso, 2008). The company was able to successfully fend off a lawsuit tabled by a group of music multinationals by arguing that it was merely providing links to other web pages and was not responsible for their contents or what users did when they accessed them. In the wake of the decision, EMI signed an agreement to license free music to Baidu in return for a share of the advertising revenue its service generated. As it turned out, the Xunlei case was subsequently dropped a few months later (June 2008) on a legal technicality (J. Wei, 2008), but it is likely that Xunlei would have used a similar line of argument, based on the development of its own search engine, 'Gougou',[48] which follows the Baidu model, though there is no guarantee they would have won their case on these grounds as Chinese courts are not obliged to follow precedent.[49]

Film companies, moreover, are perhaps also less likely to be willing to compromise as the music industry appears to have been (Justso, 2008). Hollywood studios, in general, have been cautious about embracing the internet as a means of distribution, fearful that it might damage their existing revenues from DVD which already dwarf box office revenues by US$23 to US$9 billion in the US (Economist, 2008). With DVD sales peaking, some tentative moves have been made towards electronic distribution but obstacles remain. Technical problems with download times, incompatible formats and mechanisms for linking to television, which most people still

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[47] Beijing's old Summer Palace was destroyed by an allied foreign expeditionary force in 1860.
[48] 'Gougou' web pages contain a small link to a disclaimer which states, among other things, that search results may include links to copyrighted material that Gougou respects, and therefore it is for users to determine whether to download and for which the company bears no responsibility (http://www.gougou.com/duty/duty.html, accessed 20th Jul. 2010).
[49] In Jan. 2010, Baidu also won another suit brought by international record companies on the basis that it had no 'reason to know' its links were to illegal downloads (IIPA, 2010, p. 87).

prefer to use for viewing, all remain to be resolved. Equally troublesome for the industry is the general expectation that the internet is a source of free content.[50] However, there is a precedent for the industry, in spite of its rhetoric against pirates, to try to incorporate them within the legitimate industry as Warner attempted with a Chinese distributor it had previously sued (T. Wang, 2007, p. 3). Recent evidence also suggests that domestic licence and copyright holders are in some cases beginning to take rivals to court and in other cases take them over through mergers and buy outs (Economist, 2009; IIPA, 2010, pp. 85-86). In such a way, it may be possible that Chinese online commercial pirates' business practices become incorporated into the mainstream and help create new norms as, in a sense, Hollywood (cf. Yar and Pang Laikwan) has already succeeded in doing.[51]

The relationships, therefore, between transgression and conformity, piracy and censorship are, in the politics of enjoyment, intricate and inseparable. As I suggested in the previous section, film piracy, at least from audiences' perspectives, dilutes some of the impact of censorship, making it more tolerable, but nevertheless allowing the authorities to maintain appearances. This in turn, arguably, also dilutes the political impact of audiences' potential transgression. Looking at the issue from the perspective of its potential subversiveness, Pang Laikwan, as I noted above, debunks the idea that piracy is a 'romantic form of guerrilla warfare to fight hegemony' (2006, p. 109) as it undermines the home market of the domestic industry. To that extent, it is indiscriminately subversive.[52] Zhang Yingjin, in contrast, takes issue with Pang's more jaundiced view of piracy, instead suggesting that it has direct democratic potential as a 'tactic of the weak' against both commercial and state hegemony (2010, pp. 155-156), providing a degree of 'visual democracy' via film downloading sites (p. 168). Nevertheless, in their different ways, both Pang and Zhang emphasise the impact of

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[50] Based on their research into peer to peer (P2P) internet video sharing sites, Pouwelse et al. suggest that existing copyright laws will soon be unenforceable (2008, p. 19).

[51] Mayer-Schonberger argues that Hollywood's battle against downloading technologies is misconceived and that the industry should instead create new business models as the music industry has been doing (2008, pp. 253-254).

[52] As Pang suggests, just as piracy undermines state efforts to enforce political hegemony, piracy cannot be seen itself to represent any kind of unified counter hegemony in an era of 'consumerist indifference and fragmentation' (2006, p. 99).

piracy upon the party-state, 'caught in the dilemma between ideological control and economic activities' (2006, p. 110) as Pang puts it. However, from an audience perspective, I argue that the impact of piracy not only blurs the issue of censorship, but by fostering a duality towards these dilemmas, or by giving people the means to ignore them, piracy can be a potential source of strength for the state. In such circumstances, it is it perhaps not too severe to say that college educated aspirational youth along with the urban (proto) middle classes and the business and governing elite essentially want to maintain the security of social controls but with sufficient loopholes to ensure freedom for themselves. As my respondent put it, it is a 'win-win situation', allowing audiences and authorities to turn a blind eye to each others activities.

Chapter 8.   Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how higher educated Chinese youth use their new semi-illicit media freedom to both reassess established values of morality and responsibility and make them compatible with the adoption of middle class aspirations learned and negotiated through their viewing of foreign entertainment media. In the terms I outlined at the beginning of this dissertation, the dominant 'repertoire' or mode of language used by my students to describe their film-viewing was one of purposeful enjoyment, which combined what I called in chapter five, a 'didactic escapism' facilitated by the digital media. The concept of 'interpretative repertoires', introduced in chapter one, is an adaptation of Foucault's approach to discourse which seeks to place audience responses in a wider context of contending 'regimes of truth' which, through their omissions and inconsistencies, can reveal some of the power relations between contending discursive messages, through the media and elsewhere, that contribute to shaping the attitudes and aspirations of the young generation within a discourse community. Despite a broad consensus, or at least an overlap, in many of my informants' viewing preferences and practices and their responses to the films and series they watched, these repertoires contained certain dilemmas and potential contradictions, as I have noted in previous chapters. This concluding chapter will therefore examine how students' engagement in downloading and DVD-watching suggested a pragmatic reconciliation of these dilemmas, and the conflicting and unstable targets of students' desires that cause them. I will then go on consider the implications of this for what I have termed the politics of enjoyment in which I argue that an apparent process of depoliticisation of popular culture in China itself suggests a political position, even if an unstated one.

Living with Dilemmas
Although new media is widely used to access 'non-official', often pirated, films and programmes, especially in urban China, I have focused on university students, where their use are particularly prevalent. My respondents were an audience segment – essentially a white collar class in training – and I have provided a series of snapshots of their evolving preferences and practices over a particular period, as filtered through my

own research. With all such explorations of popular culture, the content these preferences and practices refers to is transitory (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 209), but, as I have suggested in my introductory chapter, an analysis of it can nevertheless shed light on how an important sector of Chinese society is being shaped by competing discourses that vie for the attention of a middle class in formation.

Not surprisingly, my students told me they watched films primarily as entertainment and leisure, but even though their choices about and responses to what they watched ostensibly followed an escapist repertoire, these conveyed both positive and negative meanings. Film-watching emerged as a way of switching off and engaging with another world but, at the same time, implied a need to escape and perhaps even a certain disillusion with current realities. As I mentioned in chapter one, apart from the strains of communal living, students faced the pressure of deciding their future careers or whether to prepare for postgraduate course entry exams and/or, in some cases, apply to study overseas. These concerns linked to the second most clearly identifiable repertoire used by students, namely a desire for uplifting material that either boosted morale, providing reassurance and encouragement, or that educated them via suggestive images that they identified with in their own desire to become globalised Chinese. Thus, in watching films that could reconcile the escapist, the aspirational and the didactic, my respondents were reassured by the thought that entertainment itself could also have a higher purpose.

There were more than a few such juxtapositions and paradoxes in students' responses, but just as film viewers' repertoires generate their own dilemmas and inconsistencies, these in turn stimulate efforts to resolve them. So, as I discussed in chapter three, the desire for what one might consider the liberal objective of 'self-globalisation' and opening up to the outside world, nevertheless strongly affected respondents' reactions – mostly negatively – to what they regarded as stereotyped representations of China that this openness produced, as exemplified in the trend towards historical blockbusters produced by Chinese directors. Likewise, they generally rejected Korean dramas as excessively nostalgic and indulgent, since they seemed to threaten their path to modernity through hard work and persistence against the odds. Similarly, most were critical of what they regarded as either the frivolous historical irrelevance or the

restrictive 'socialist' didacticism of Chinese films and series in favour of American 'realism' which they felt could both educate and entertain at the same time.

Thus, students rejected a binary structure of didacticism v. escapism that seemed to lock them into an infantile mode in which they were either positioned to receive instruction or, alternatively, to merely play. Instead, they pragmatically reconciled the contradiction between films as an escape into hedonistic indulgence and the wish for some form of reassurance and didactic learning by making a distinction within didacticism itself, as seen in chapter four. For young people brought up with and surrounded by discourses that promote moral virtue, patriotism and hard work, any candid expressions of a need to escape from such pressures would perhaps be tantamount to an admission of weakness, or worse.[1] This strain of moral earnestness may be regarded as a product of the constraints under which such repertoires operate, as well as the position aspirational young Chinese find themselves in, caught between desires for individual enjoyment and those for professional success. The desire for didacticism may also have been a response to the notion that they needed to 'raise their cultural level' – something that Chinese officials, for example, frequently speak of (see Anagnost, 1997: 76) – as well as a response to the way viewing on computer seemed to reinforce the notion of a dual educational/leisure basis to film-watching. But students' desire for moral uplift generally did not include official so-called 'main melody' productions that too blatantly pushed or fell within the limits of the dominant party-state ideology. One might therefore suggest that these students, though tired of unexciting propaganda, yearned instead for a fresher and glossier version of it. Certainly, they sought an alternative, more creative, 'aspirational didacticism' in foreign films and dramas. Foreign films and dramas could thus perform a role, as a new 'main melody', to compensate for the shortcomings of Chinese equivalents.

In spite of the increasing cinematographic sophistication of, for instance, the new Chinese blockbusters, foreign movies were still appreciated, in part, for their technically advanced level, as well as what was regarded as their greater daring and humour – though they were too daring for some. As one student confessed in the preliminary study that I

[1] Gloria Davies notes a similar anxiety about the moral dangers of pleasure in Chinese intellectual discourse as part of a more general stance of patriotic concern over the fate of the nation (2007: 16-17).

undertook at the start of my research, at middle school she and a friend had had to close their eyes with embarrassment during kissing scenes in *'Titanic'*. Most of my respondents may have discarded such reticence, but they still attributed a sense of transgressiveness to US drama series such as *'Friends'*, *'Desperate Housewives'*, *'Sex and the City'* and some other foreign produced material. This suggests a further split in the prevailing yet inconsistent liberal repertoire developed by my informants: as noted in chapter five, my students attempted to resolve the dilemma between liberal tolerance and moral conservatism by accepting transgressions as long as they were somewhat distanced, through their setting in a foreign location or by their exclusion from official media. This, coupled with anxieties over liberalism's effects on an unruly commercialised, yet weakly regulated society led to a pragmatic 'liberal' tolerance that my students extended to the authorities' censorship itself. Similarly, my students reconciled potential conflicts between loyalty to the nation and their desire to enjoy the fruits of media globalisation by attempting to distinguish moderate, responsible patriotism from the excesses of overt media nationalism, even if, as I noted in chapter six, this could sometimes be a problematic distinction to maintain in practice. Breaches of the students' concept of moderation could then either be attributed to the immaturity of angry young nationalists or in the case of foreign producers, their unfortunate and implicitly racist ignorance.

Overall, my respondents' viewing practices can therefore be seen to involve a pragmatic and flexible distancing from the conflicting 'metanarratives' or dominant discourses of China's post-socialist condition, namely those associated with party-state loyalty and those that match the needs of the market economy for a more individualist, consumer-oriented outlook (F. Liu, 2008, p. 198). Whilst not able to escape hegemonic influences in their viewing practices and preferences, whether of official state 'teaching' or Hollywood's own set of messages, audiences are now able to choose between various 'hegemonic options' made available through new media, creating a degree separation between themselves and from the sometimes conflicting discourses to which they are exposed from an increasingly plural range of sources.

The Politics of Enjoyment

What, then, is the political significance of this distancing, given the assumptions I have noted before that the consumer-oriented desires of young people represent a process of

depoliticisation?[2] One approach has been to regard it as part of an overall loss of 'top down' control – a disintegration, a pluralism-in-progress – the effect of which has been for individual desire to escapes the bounds it was previously confined to and to produce a subtle subversion or erosion of the current political order (Cai, 2008, p. 139; Gold, 1993, p. 924; K. Hu, 2005, pp. 182-184; Pang, 2006, pp. 110, 115; Zhong, 2003, pp. 238-239). However, my own research suggests that this is a rather partial view that too strongly evokes the assumptions inherent in the 'repression v. liberalisation' structure of much of the academic debate on China which, in the analysis of its media reform processes, tends to view these two poles as necessarily or straightforwardly antagonistic, as I pointed out in my *Introduction*. Moreover, as I have argued, it hardly reflects how students themselves appeared to see their viewing practices.

In itself, this is not necessarily a conclusive point, for as Hu pointed out (2005, p. 182), subversiveness may be independent of the intentions of those involved. A similar point has been made by Mackinnon (2008, p. 42) on the behaviour of Chinese bloggers who do not necessarily see themselves as victims of oppression. As she put it, '[p]owerful socio-political change can be expected to emerge as a result of the millions of online conversations taking place daily on the Chinese Internet: conversations that manage to stay comfortably within the confines of censorship' (p. 45). However, although the internet is perhaps now the main outlet for a semi-public undercurrent of sceptical and unofficial comment, it is arguably one that can function as much as support for the existing political order as its nemesis.[3] The underlying premises of this are not entirely new, even if the technical means are. Indeed, as far back as 1957, Deng Xiaoping argued that a limited degree of free speech be allowed almost as a vaccination against democracy itself: 'We are not in favour of having greater democracy. It can be prevented, provided

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[2] See, in particular, chapter four and chapter seven.

[3] As I pointed out in chapter two, Zheng Yongnian's study of the internet in China emphasises that its rapid development is itself a government sponsored project and is thus perhaps better seen as 'mutually empowering' of state and society (2008, p. 166). More generally, Wang Jing, argues that the spread of consumer-led leisure and entertainment since the 1990s has, in some respects, allowed the state to withdraw to a regulatory rather than a coercive role from which it can appear to 'serve the people' and thereby reinforce its legitimacy (2001, pp. 71, 94-95).

there is "lesser democracy". Without lesser democracy there would have to be greater democracy, because the masses need to find outlets for their anger' (Deng, 1992).[4]

Anger was not the dominant 'repertoire' in the entertainment viewing which I have focused on. However, my research has shown that access to foreign entertainment could nevertheless function as an antidote to dissatisfactions and doubts within an increasingly competitive marketised society, facilitating the dissipation of some of these frustrations and thereby filling some of the gaps in the officially controlled media structure. That is to say, at least for the young educated generation described by my informants, China has something of a fantasy deficit and is unable to produce a sufficient range of credible imaginative scenarios to satisfy their aspirations and curiosity. This is not because the country does not have the technical capacity to do so – since the 1970s, media technologies have expanded to an unprecedented degree. Indeed, China has a burgeoning and increasingly active media scene. Nor does it lack cultural production, though broadcasters' need for content to supply the expansion of channels and platforms is still strong (Latham, 2007, p. 79). Rather, the major bottleneck is that within its current political system, China's cultural production is necessarily prevented from saying or depicting certain things. But via new media, they can be accessed without disturbing domestic official taboos, despite occasional crackdowns. This access not only allows an outlet for frustrations but, in essence, facilitates the acceptance of contradictions; thus, as Zizek has suggested (2005, p. 55), the process of distancing from hegemonic discourses is not necessarily disruptive of the overall political order but instead arguably provides a *de facto* support.

As I argued previously, a kind of new unofficial, less overtly politicised 'main melody' is in the process of being constructed. In my research, this was at its most explicit with regard to the response to *'The Shawshank Redemption'* and in the particular instance of its use in political/moral education as a lesson in persistence, endurance and the virtues of low-key professionalism, as I discussed in chapter four. That is not to say that the ideological slant of foreign media is always accepted; although achieving healthy ratings, Korean dramas were often disparaged by students insofar as they tended to

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[4] From 'Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping: *The Communist Party Must Accept Supervision'*, a report delivered by Deng at a meeting of cadres in Xi'an, 8th Apr. 1957: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol1/text/a1310.html (accessed 24th Oct. 2010).

present a conservative dream of diligent women fundamentally dependent on men. Chinese costume blockbusters, likewise, expressed a longing for a truly international Chinese film industry to compete with Hollywood and show China to the world, but students dismissed the initial examples of the genre as pandering to the foreign desire to view China as sumptuously but archaically decadent. A series such as *'Prison Break'*, on the other hand, achieved a virtual cult status for the way it expressed a yearning to escape the labyrinth of competitive life, but through the successful application of the competitive spirit itself, as embodied in a new type of professional hero. Other popular series such as *'Friends'*, *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Sex and the City'*, particularly among girls, also expressed a longing for freedom and transgression, though this time through sexual liberation, fashion, modern up-market lifestyles and 'living in dreams', most of which, in reality, could only be acquired – legitimately, at least – through exams, studying and saving up. Nevertheless, the portrayal of foreign middle class lifestyles in these series, even if understood as only semi-realistic, helped to covertly normalise them in the Chinese context: that is to say, redefine what in socio-economic terms might be regarded as the wealthy as, in fact, 'middle' rather than 'elite', and the poor as backward or 'catching up'.[5] In that sense, depoliticisation constituted a political position that largely concealed its political nature.

The role of 'illicit' foreign entertainment media among young educated Chinese is, therefore, full of paradoxes. It provides respite from the pursuit of modernisation, but in the form of modernisation itself via technologies such as DVD and downloading. It provides access to a taste of first world goods and the dreams they represent, but without the need for first world incomes. It provides a sense of travel and mobility without moving, and a sense of freedom from political restriction, whilst reaping the benefits of that restriction – lack of strikes, subsidised urban living, and a greater sense of security for those who hope to benefit from the system.[6] It also provides periodic opportunities for nationalist indignation at distorted portrayals of China, but, simultaneously, offers the opportunity to legitimise a more distanced, coolheaded moderate sense of patriotism in

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[5] Chinese official discourse tends to elide the issue through by speaking of social strata: '*shehui jieceng*'; '社会阶层'. The use of 'strata' rather than 'class' avoids the ideological connotations of class struggle (Anagnost, 2008: 501-502).

[6] The *'hukou'* system of residency permits, although more flexible than before, still restricts the movement of rural dwellers and their right of access to urban services (Fan, 2008, pp. 40-43).

response. In short, it supplies the fantasy resources for a new vision of how the new young aspiring professional subject both wishes to be and be seen. Under these terms, the foreign can be tacitly incorporated as an authentic model, whilst those who do not fit it are perhaps covertly re-designated as aliens within.

Appendices

Appendix 1   **Research Timeline**

Date (d/m/y)	Research	Subjects
14+16/6/05	**Preliminary study** (English dept., Minzu University, Beijing): [a] short oral presentations on film likes and dislikes	Two oral English classes: 1st & 2nd yr
13+15/6/05	[b] *'Film watching'* questionnaire and essay	Two English writing classes: 3rd yr
16/4/06	**Pilot Interview** (Westminster University, London)	Five Chinese Media Studies postgraduates
1/9/06–20/7/07 17+18/3/10	**Main Fieldwork** (English dept., Beijing Language & Culture University [BLCU])	
17/10/06	Class Discussion: of extracts from *'Big Trouble in Little China'* and *'The Last Emperor'*	2nd yr oral class 1
25/10/06	Essay 1: on extracts from *'Big Trouble in Little China'* and *'The Last Emperor'*	3rd yr writing class 2 & 3
1/11/06	Essay 2: *'What films and programmes do you like or dislike?'*	3rd yr writing class 2
10/12/06	Recording 1 *(Song Zijie & Yao Yang)*	2nd yr oral class 1
15/12/06	Recording 2 *(Wen Hongju)*	Minzu Univ.
16/12/06	Recording 3 (*Xiong Zhufei*)	Minzu Univ.
17/12/06	Recording 4 *(Pu Shan & Zha Yingbai)*	2nd yr oral class 1
21/12/06	Recording 5 *(Xiao Tingyan & Tang Zhihua)*	3rd yr writing class 2
14/1/07	Recording 6 *(Zang Jieshan)*	1st yr culture class
15/1/07	Recording 7 *(Zhao Sijing)*	3rd yr writing class 1
18/1/07	Essay 3: *'Patriotism nowadays'*	3rd yr class 2 & 3
24/1/07	Recording 8 *(Yin Yuanchen)*	2nd yr oral class 1
03/2/07	Recording 9 *(Sun Lin)*	2nd yr oral class 4
07/2/07	Recording 10 *(Yang Guozhi)*	4th yr thesis student
8+9/3/07	Essay 4: *'Cultural garbage debate'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2
22+23/3/07	Essay 5: *'Chinese blockbusters'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2
5+6/4/07	Essay 6: *'Cultural distinction'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2
07/4/07	Recording 11 *(Zhang Jie)*	2nd yr oral class 4
08/4/07	Recording 12 *(Ye Rongbai)*	2nd yr oral class 1
19+20/4/07	Essay 7: *'US dramas'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2
19/4/07	Recording 13 *(Zhu Shuangru)*	Minzu Univ.
15/5/07	Group Interviews *(Six groups of 4/5)*	2nd yr oral class 4
14+15/06/07	Essay 8: *'Korean dramas'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2
29/6/07	Recording 14 *(Ren Shuying)*	1st yr culture class
23+25+26/6/07	Class Discussion: of *'American Beauty'*[1]	2nd yr oral class 1 & 4
26/6/07– 24/6/10	Volunteer E-mail contacts	BLCU and Minzu Univ.
17+18/3/10	Essay 9: *'Viewing Habits'*	3rd yr writing 1 & 2

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[1] Chinese subtitled version shown in term two (Mar.-Jul. 2007) in bi-weekly extracts with script study.

Appendix 2a   **Recorded Interviewees**

Main Fieldwork (September 2006 – July 2007 & March 2010)

Location – researcher's flat, BLCU campus.

Duration – 1 hour each approx. (Numbers 1 & 2, 5 & 6, and 7 & 8 in pairs)

Language – English (except Int. 4, in Mandarin)

	Interviewee (Int.) [2]	Sex	Place of Origin*	Year/Class	Date
1.	Song Zijie	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 2nd/1	10/12/06
2.	Yao Yang	F	Heilongjiang [L]	2006-07, 2nd/1	10/12/06
3.	Wen Hongju	F	Guangxi [M]	2006-07, 4th **	15/12/06
4.	Xiong Zhufei	M	Shanxi [M]	2006-07, 4th **	16/12/06
5.	Pu Shan	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 2nd/1	17/12/06
6.	Zha Yingbai	F	Hebei [M]	2006-07, 2nd/1	17/12/06
7.	Xiao Tingyan	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 3rd/2	21/12/06
8.	Tang Zhihua	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 3rd/2	21/12/06
9.	Zang Jieshan	F	Hunan [S]	2006-07, 1st	14/1/07
10.	Zhao Sijing	M	Sichuan [M]	2006-07, 3rd/1	15/1/07
11.	Yin Yuanchen	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 2nd/1	24/1/07
12.	Sun Lin	M	Jilin [M]	2006-07, 2nd/4	03/2/07
13.	Yang Guozhi	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 4th	07/2/07
14.	Zhang Jie	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 2nd/4	07/4/07
15.	Ye Rongbai	M	Tianjin [L]	2006-07, 2nd/1	08/4/07
16.	Zhu Shuangru	F	Guangxi [S]	2006-07, 3rd **	19/4/07
17.	Ren Shuying	F	Sichuan [L]	2006-07, 1st	29/6/07

* Approximate size of hometown [in brackets]:
   L – Large; M – Medium; S – Small; V – Village.
** Minzu University student (all others from Beijing Language & Culture University).
All interviewees were Han Chinese apart from numbers 2 (Tujia), 4 (Hui), 16 (Zhuang).
All were English majors apart from numbers 3 (Journalism), 4 (Tourism Management)
and 16 (Law and English).

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[2] Students' names given here, and elsewhere, are pseudonyms.

Appendix 2b   **Essay Topics and Essay Writers**

Location – written in class, BLCU (25 students per class).

Duration/length – 1 hour / 1½-2 pages (except Essay 9: half hour / 1 page)

Language – English

	Topic	Context*	Date	Yr/Class
1.	Film: 'Big Trouble in Little China' &/or 'The Last Emperor'	Asked to give impressions of either film after viewing extracts in class.	25/10/06	2006-07, 3rd/2
2.	What films and programmes do you like or dislike?	Asked to give concrete examples and reasons.	1/11/06	2006-07, 3rd/2
3.	Patriotism nowadays	No prior discussion.	18/1/07	2006-07, 3rd/2 & 3
4.	Cultural garbage debate	Brief discussion of recent controversies over *'Super Girl'*	8-9/3/07	2006-07, 3rd/1 & 2
5.	Chinese blockbusters	Brief discussion of public reactions to *'Curse of the Golden Flower'* (2006).	22-23/3/07	2006-07, 3rd/1 & 2
6.	Cultural distance	Asked to write about whether foreign films posed any problems for Chinese to understand.	5-6/4/07	2006-07, 3rd/1 & 2
7.	US dramas	Asked to consider why series such *'Desperate Housewives'* and *'Prison Break'* were popular online rather than TV.	19-20/4/07	2006-07, 3rd/1 & 2
8.	Korean dramas	Asked to consider why K-dramas were either popular or unpopular.	10-11/5/07	2006-07, 3rd/1 & 2
9.	Viewing Habits	Asked to describe how they viewed, how they chose and why.	17-18/3/10	2009-10, 3rd/1 & 2

* Pre-discussions for essays 4-5 were brief and intended to raise consciousness of the types of issues that might be written about. Students were told that they might discuss other examples that were not raised in any pre-discussion.

Quoted Essay Writers Third year advanced writing classes 1 and 2: 2006-07, 2009-10.

	Pseudonym	Year/Class	Sex	Place of Origin*
1.	Bai Chuanyan	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Hunan [M]
2.	Bi Yufang	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Yunnan [L]
3.	Cao Jiemei	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Beijing [L]
4.	Chai Haiming	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Beijing [L]
5.	Chen Yuwei	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Hebei [S]
6.	Cheng Zhan	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Zhejiang [M]
7.	Cong Liying	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Liaoning [M]
8.	Ding Weisi	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Sichuan [M]
9.	Dong Shuai	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Henan [L/M]
10.	Fu Rifei	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Shanxi [S]
11.	Ge Zhouru	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Beijing [L]
12.	Gu Yan	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Chongqing [L]
13.	Guo Jing	2006-07, 3rd/2	M	Guangdong [L/M]
14.	Han Yan	2006-07, 3rd/2	M	Sichuan [M]
15.	Hou Fang	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Liaoning [M]
16.	Hu Rutao	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Shanxi [M]
17.	Hua Fangzhi	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Beijing [L]
18.	Huang Nan	2006-07, 3rd/2	M	Sichuan [M]
19.	Li Mo	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Fujian [M]
20.	Liao Yanting	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Beijing [L]
21.	Lu Yue	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Henan [M]
22.	Kang Li	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Beijing [L]
23.	Mao Jianqi	2006-07, 3rd/1	F	Zhejiang [M]
24.	Meng Xiandong	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Gansu [L]
25.	Niu Huifeng	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Inner Mongolia [M]
26.	Pan Jiaxin	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Jiangsu [M]
27.	Peng Huang	2006-07, 3rd/2	F	Heilongjiang [L]
28.	Qin Jinwei	2006-07, 3rd/1	M	Chongqing [L]
29.	Ren Qiangwei	2009-10, 3rd/2	M	Beijing [L]
30.	Rong Haofen	2009-10, 3rd/1	F	Beijing [L]
31.	Ru Shaomei	2009-10, 3rd/1	F	Sichuan [M]
32.	Sha Chaofeng	2009-10, 3rd/2	F	Zhejiang [L]
33.	Shen Dan	2009-10, 3rd/2	F	Beijing [M]
34.	Shu Cuiling	2009-10, 3rd/2	F	Sichuan [M]
35.	Tan Zheng	2009-10, 3rd/1	M	Guangxi [S]
36.	Tao Xuhui	2009-10, 3rd/2	F	Beijing [L]
37.	Wan Jiaying	2009-10, 3rd/1	F	Hubei [S]
38.	Wang Qingxiu	2009-10, 3rd/1	F	Heilongjiang [M]
39.	Wen Jing	2009-10, 3rd/2	F	Hebei [M]
40.	Wu Xiaorong	2009-10, 3rd/1	F	Liaoning [M]

All Han Chinese except number 17 (Tujia), and 25 (Mongolian).
* Approximate size of hometown:
 L – Large; M – Medium; S – Small; V – Village

Appendix 2c   Group Interviewees

Date – 15/6/07

Location – classroom, outside class time (in separately recorded groups of 4 or 5)

Duration – 15-20 minutes approx.

Topics were open-ended, but group six was additionally shown and asked to comment upon extracts from *'Mission: Impossible III'* that had been cut from the version shown in Chinese cinemas.

Language – English

Quoted Group Members

2006-07, second year oral class 4.

Group / Member	Pseudonym	Sex	Place of Origin*
1/1	Qian Xiaoyan	F	Liaoning [S]
1/2	Xin Yongqi	F	Hubei [M]
2/2	Pei Suojing	F	Hunan [M]
2/4	Liu Weihua	F	Shandong [V]
3/1	Pan Jihua	F	Shanxi [S]
3/2	Xu Ruoyun	F	Jiangsu [L]
3/3	Xie Qimei	F	Sichuan [M]
3/4	Peng Jiwei	F	Tianjin [L]
4/1	Xue Yinpei	F	Zhejiang [M]
4/2	Liao Yihua	F	Liaoning [M]
4/3	Qin Yang	F	Yunnan [L]
4/4	Song Luping	F	Beijing [L]
5/1	Wan Chengju	F	Beijing [L]
5/2	Yu Shifei	F	Beijing [L]
5/4	Jing Liming	F	Hunan [M]
6/1	Gong Zhufen	F	Beijing [L]
6/2	Nie Yuntian	F	Beijing [L]
6/3	Su Yuan	M	Beijing [L]
6/4	Qin Dongfeng	M	Zhejiang [M]
6/5	Xiang Dingyuan	M	Shanxi [S]

Groups 1-5: four members each. Group 6: five members.
All Han Chinese except number 1/1 (Mongol), 5/2 & 6/2 (Hui)
* Approximate size of hometown:
L – Large; M – Medium; S – Small; V – Village

Appendix 2d   **Volunteer E-mail Respondents**

In response to my request to first year BLCU students posted on a class website (see appendix 2e) and Translation students at Minzu University contacted through a colleague.

Pseudonym	Sex	Place of Origin*	Year/Class	Date
1. Gan Quan	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 1st	26/6/07
2. Mo Hongping	F	Hunan [M]	2006-07, 1st	26/6/07
3. Chen Qianwei**	F	Zhejiang [M]	2006-07, 2nd/PG	26/6/07
4. Du Mintao**	F	Anhui [M]	2006-07, 2nd/PG	26/6/07
5. Hong Zhu**	F	Heilongjiang [S]	2006-07, 2nd/PG	27/6/07
6. Deng Qing	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 1st	29/6/07
7. Kong Yuguo **	F	Shandong [M]	2006-07, 3rd	17/7/07
8. Wei Jinmao**	F	Henan [L]	2006-07, 3rd	19/7/07
9. Fang Liu**	F	n/a [M]	2006-07, 3rd	14/8/07
10. Cai Minjia	F	Heilongjiang [L]	2006-07, 1st	24/8/07
11. Lang Wenyu	F	Beijing [L]	2006-07, 1st	15/10/07
12. Zou Yun**	F	n/a	2006-07, 3rd	n/a
13. Lin Yuan**	F	Shandong [M]	2009-10, 1st/PG	10/2/09
14. Xing Zhangcai	F	Hebei [M]	2009-10, 3rd	24/6/10

All students were Han Chinese. PG = postgraduate (Translation Studies)
* Approximate size of hometown:
 L – Large; M – Medium; S – Small; V – Village
** Minzu University students

Appendix 2e   **Questions for Volunteer E-mail Respondents**

Chinese Audience Research

I would like to ask if you could help me with some research.
- I am currently looking into the **film-watching** habits of Chinese audiences (as part of the globalisation of culture) and I have prepared the following set of questions, divided into four sections.
- It is **not** necessary for you to answer all of them – just any that seem **interesting** to you. If you wish, you can also combine the questions in one section and answer them together in a single paragraph.
- From my point of view, it is **better** that you write one or two **more detailed answers** than 10 short ones. (You can answer in English or in Chinese or both). I would, however, ask you to briefly **complete section 5** about your background.
- Then send your answers by **replying** to me… (There is no deadline for this).
- Anything you send will, of course, only be used **anonymously**. Thank you very much for taking part.

Many thanks for your interest and cooperation.

FILM-WATCHING QUESTIONS

1. HABITS
a. Do you mostly watch films on TV, at the cinema, downloaded films or on DVD?

b. How do you choose what to watch? (Friends recommend? / Hear or read about?)

c. Are your film-watching habits different to before? (If so, please explain)

2. FILMS
a. Can you think of a film you have you watched recently and what you thought of it?

b. Do you watch mainly Hollywood / American films? (Explain why / why not)

c. What's your feeling about Chinese films?

d. Do you feel there is a distinction between Chinese and foreign films? (Please explain)

3. TV SERIES
a. What about American TV series such as 'Lost', 'Prison Break', 'Sex in the City' etc? (Which, if any, do you like or dislike? Please explain. And why do you think they are quite popular online in China?)

b. Some people also watch Korean dramas – do you like them? (Why? / And why do you think they are quite popular in China?)

c. What about Chinese series? (Please explain your views)

4. IMPACT
a. Can you think of something you have watched (i.e. film or series) that significantly affected you or changed you views in some way? (Please explain)

b. Can you remember any discussion you had about films or series? (e.g. with friends / online / in a classroom? Please explain what it was about)

c. What view of foreigners do you get from watching foreign films or series?

d. What view of China do you think foreigners probably get from watching Chinese films?

5. PERSONAL
a. What's your background (i.e. brought up in a large city, medium city, small town or village?)

b. Are there any other comments you have about your experiences of film-watching?

....
Please confirm the following:

I have volunteered to take part in this research by Magnus Wilson on Chinese audiences and agree that my answers or parts of them may be anonymously quoted or published.

Name _____ Pinyin _____ (Male / Female) Date _____

E-mail _____   Thank you very much for taking part.

Appendix 3   **Data Analysis Procedures**

[a] Interviews

1. All recordings transcribed.

2. Annotated and classified (coded) into themes (i.e. repertoires: what topics raised; how they were treated)

3. Summarised (i.e. attitudes of the speaker with particular attention to dilemmas, points of contradiction or tension within the scripts and the positions taken up by the speaker).

4. Compared thematically with other interviewees and writers (i.e. 'data units' of similar thematic material filed together) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207-208).

[b] Written essays

1. Read and annotated.

2. Summarised (i.e. major arguments made on the topic, with quotations).

3. Selected (i.e. essays representing i) common/shared and ii) exceptional/different responses to the topic were chosen for scanning or photocopying).[3]

4. Compared thematically with other interviewees and writers (i.e. 'data units' of similar thematic material filed together) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207-208).

[c] E-mailed responses

1. Read and annotated.

2. Summarised (i.e. major arguments made on the topic, with quotations).

3. Compared thematically with other interviewees and writers (i.e. 'data units' of similar thematic material filed together) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207-208).

In analysing my data, I paid attention to which topics were (and were not) raised and how they were described (and not described) (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 225). Where relevant, I analysed coded categories according to the types of interviewees involved to see if there was any correlation (2005, pp. 226-228). Thereafter, I began to build up hypotheses to explain the findings and any contradictions within them. In some cases, evidence from other studies were used in support my data or as a contrast (2005, pp. 236-240).

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[3] Essays with similar lines of argument were first grouped together. One or two examples were chosen from each group for copying and marked as 'mainstream' or 'minority' as appropriate.

Transcript Summaries

(i) *Summary of Interviews (individual and paired)*

The following table indicates how I coded the main themes based on summaries made of each of my interviews (see below). These were then compared with codings for other interviewee and written responses. All interviews, except where indicated, began with a general question asking students what they liked to view.[4]

Western films & dramas	*Interviewee (Int.)*
Learning about/from the West	3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16
Praises plot (over spectacle)	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
Regards as 'open', direct (incl. sex)	4, 5, 11, 13, 16, 17
Praises films encouraging persistence	3, 4, 5, 6, 14
Praises 'realism'	4, 12, 13, 16, 17
Praises individualism, fighting for dreams	5, 6, 12, 13
Praises universal themes	4, 6, 10, 12
Critical of some depictions of China	5, 6, 7, 16
Praises freshness, difference, creativity	4, 8, 13
Praises technical skill	1, 13
Classic Hollywood fan	7, 11
Puzzled by Christianity in films	4, 10
Disappointed by *'The Graduate'*	12
Disappointed by *'American Beauty'*	14

US dramas	*Interviewee (Int.)*
'Desperate Housewives' fans	1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 13
'Sex and the City' viewers	5, 11, 13, 16, 17
'Prison Break' fans	1, 2, 7, 8, 13, 16
'Friends' viewers	10, 14, 16, 17
'Heroes' fan	15, 16
'Justice' fan	7
'CSI' fan	10
'Lost' fan	13

Korean dramas	*Interviewee (Int.)*
Naïve, childish, 'Cinderella' stories	12, 15, 17
Slow, (over-)emotional	13, 16
Worrying for parents	15

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[4] *Interviewer*: 'So just tell me the sorts of things you watch' (Recording 5: Interviewees 7 & 8).

Chinese films & dramas	*Interviewee (Int.)*
Criticises historical blockbusters	1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14
Criticises Chinese dramas	5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 17
Criticises commercialism	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8
Bored with 'main melody'	4, 14, 16
Wishes for modern focus	11, 12, 15
Criticises Chinese audiences	5, 6
Praises Ang Lee	1, 2
Praises 6th generation directors	5, 6
Praises Feng Xiaogang	1, 2
Praises *'Hero'*	10, 16
Praises *'Not One Less'*	9
Praises *'Farewell my Concubine'*	10
Fan of history and literature	9
Fan of children's cartoons	10

Censorship & control	*Interviewee (Int.)*
Aware but not necessarily in particular cases	5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16
Critical of censorship	5, 6, 10, 13
Some limits accepted	9, 15, 17
Prefers education and guidance	15, 17
Mainly opposed to censorship	12, 16

Recording 1 (*Song Zijie & Yao Yang – Int. 1 & 2*)
Familiar with mainstream international pop culture
Mention *'Harry Potter'*, *'Lord of the Rings'*, *'The Da Vinci Code'* etc. Impressed by, but not satisfied by, spectacle and special effects.
Feminist spirit
Criticise *'The Da Vinci Code'* for downplaying the female role.
Fans of 'Prison Break'
Like clever plotting, hero's high IQ and success in adversity.
Anti commercial
Criticise commercialism but defend Feng Xiaogang's films as popular.
Criticise recent Chinese blockbusters
Zhang Yimou's *'Hero'* lacks plot. Criticise commercial motives and special effects. Praise Ang Lee (*'Brokeback Mountain'*, *'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'*). Disparage Chinese films' tendency towards melodrama.
Moralistic
Judge stars in moral terms (Brittney Spears criticised; Christina Aguilera praised).
Fans of 'Desperate Housewives'
Debate favourite characters: moral character valued over beauty. Consider Chinese reality to be different.
Key themes: Tensions between asserting and denying the value of popular commercial culture. Criticise Chinese blockbusters; Praise 'Desperate Housewives' and 'Prison Break'.

Recording 2 (*Wen Hongju – Int. 3*)
DVD and downloading
> DVD for films because of slow download speed; downloads cartoons and music.

'Curse of the Golden Flower'
> Heard critical review of the premiere on the radio; 'nothing interesting'.

'The Shawshank Redemption'
> Watched the film in three classes ('Moral Cultivation', Law, and English), as motivational teaching, English practice and insight into a legal system. Admits she perhaps now knows more about American prisons than Chinese ones.

Encouragement
> Surprised by the portrayal of official corruption and illegality in prison in *'The Shawshank Redemption'* and by a freed prisoner not being able to adjust to life outside. Describes the film as 'encouraging' because of the hero's intelligence and persistence.

Key themes: Influenced by critical views of Chinese blockbusters. Encouraged by 'Shawshank Redemption' shown in class.

Recording 3 (*Xiong Zhufei – Int. 4*)[5]
Moral Cultivation class: 'The Shawshank Redemption'
> Shown to illustrate the theme of persistence (and as a relief from theory). Appreciated by students. Film about Mao's guard, *'Zhang Side'*, less well received by students than *'SR'*. Also shown a film on Christianity, intended to teach about Western culture but students lacked background to understand it.

'Cast Away'
> Inspiring, universal theme showing how to survive on a desert island.

Foreign realism v. Chinese idealism
> Actors swear on film; everyday reality is depicted, unlike Chinese films. Foreign films are therefore fresh.

Key themes: Appreciates 'Shawshank Redemption' compared to 'main melody' films; Appreciates foreign realism.

Recording 4 (*Pu Shan & Zha Yingbai – Int. 5 & 6*)
Appreciate individualism and seek quality
> Fans of Felini, Tim Burton and films with Johnny Depp, Julia Roberts. Pay attention to magazine reviews and film awards.

Criticise recent Chinese blockbusters and Chinese audiences
> Too commercial and spectacular. Trying to ape Hollywood but failing. Trying to win awards. Praise Jia Jiangke and sixth generation directors. Criticise elder fifth generation. Chinese audiences have a lower cultural level than foreign audiences. 'Real fans' (like themselves) only a small group.

Inspiration through persistence
> Praise *'Big Fish'* by Tim Burton for its portrayal of persistence and adventure. Puzzled by the effortless ease of the hero's colourful life in *'Forrest Gump'*.

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[5] In this case, I asked the interviewee before the recording whether had been shown *'The Shawshank Redemption'* in his classes.

No border
>	Deny any national division when watching films. Chinese lack of freedom taken for granted.

Appreciate US series
>	Fans of *'Prison Break'* and its clever plotting. Chinese series lack creativity. US series more open about sex (*'Desperate Housewives'*; *'Sex and the City'*). Complain that Chinese men insist on girls' virginity.

Dislike Disney's 'Mulan'
>	Not faithful to Chinese tradition; Disney version too trivialised. (Contrast to 'no border' attitude above)

Against censorship but not always aware of it
>	Unaware *'Mission: Impossible III'* and *'Pirate of the Caribbean'* cut. Disapprove of banning of *'Memoirs of a Geisha'* and other Chinese films.

Key themes: 'Real fans'. Anti-commercial. Admire stories of individualism and persistence. Critical of Chinese older directors' lack of creativity. Deny borders, but wary of tampering with Chinese tradition.

Recording 5 (*Xiao Tingyan & Tang Zhihua – Int. 7 & 8*)
Brad Pitt in 'Legend of the Fall'
>	TZ attracted by the hero's maverick, strong desire for justice; coy about mentioning his good looks.

Learning from US series
>	XT likes *'Justice'*; admires the talent and persuasive skill of lawyers. Both like *'Prison Break'*; admire the suspense and plot (XT compares to Hitchcock). TZ likes *'Desperate Housewives'* for its 'decent' fashion and lifestyle and learning about everyday middle class US life.

Chinese series and blockbusters criticised
>	Dramas considered uncreative, predictable (yet illogical). Blockbusters condemned as unfaithful to history and over-commercial (seeking foreign prizes).

Anti-Chinese stereotype: 'Once Upon a Time in America'
>	Criticised by XT for a negative depiction of New York Chinatown.

Key themes: De-emphasise escapism. Learn fashion, lifestyle and professionalism from US dramas. Criticise Chinese films and dramas as uncreative, unfaithful to history and over-commercial.

Recording 6 (*Zang Jieshan – Int. 9*)
History and literature
>	Likes *'Dream of Red Mansions'* drama series. Patriotic: moved by history of the Long March shown in high school. Her own grandfather was a veteran of the march. Feels the film taught students not to complain about their poor conditions.

Zhang Yimou's 'Not One Less'
>	Inspires her to work harder. Moved by the poor situation in the countryside as her primary school was in a poor area.

Chinese historical blockbusters
>	Dislikes; not faithful to history.

China can learn from the West
> Believes Hollywood films show foreigners handle disasters better and show
> Western women are strong. Young Chinese are therefore influenced to be bolder.

Accepts censorship
> Mostly unaware of specific examples, but assumes good reasons for censorship:
> teenagers are vulnerable. Considers Chinese people too ill-disciplined for a film
> classification system to work (and unaware of the debate over it).

***Key themes: Sympathy for the countryside. Patriotic lover of history, but not Chinese
historical blockbusters. Appreciates how Western films can teach the young to be
bolder, but accepts censorship as necessary as China is disorderly.***

Recording 7 (*Zhao Sijing – Int. 10*)
Prefers plot to action
> Looking for good stories, universal themes. Not generally a (Hollywood)
> blockbuster fan.

Cartoons, nostalgia
> Recently downloading cartoons (Chinese and Japanese) familiar in childhood.

Downloading
> Two or three films a week; most easy to find. Internet cannot be totally censored.
> Download speed sometimes an issue. Checks reviews and box office data.

Appreciates 'Farewell My Concubine'
> Contradicts Chinese textbook history. Personalises history.

Cultural distance – religion
> Religious films dull ('*The Ten Commandments*', '*The Passion of the Christ*').

Dislikes recent Chinese blockbusters
> Lack of story; images distract from plot. Excessive use of money and pursuit of
> Oscars. Only *'Hero'* appreciated for its innovative approach to plot.

'Friends'
> First US series watched. Full of jokes, humour, free about sex (heard it is a US
> false stereotype) and breaks some taboos in Chinese society. Later got bored of it;
> now watches *'CSI'*.

Chinese dramas and sit-coms
> Used to enjoy some but says there have been no good ones for ten years.

***Key themes: Mainly intellectual tastes; desires universal themes. Somewhat anti-
government. Critical of Chinese blockbusters (except 'Hero'). Regards 'Friends' as
mildly taboo, but ultimately dull.***

Recording 8 (*Yin Yuanchen – Int. 11*)
Classic Hollywood fan
> Fan of Hitchcock and Ingrid Bergman films (downloaded). Dislikes 'bloody'
> films; likes elegance and suspense. Attracted to Bergman's 'self-contradictory'
> character (identifies with dilemma between desire and propriety).

'Desperate Housewives'
> Likes the fashion. Believes it is unrealistic, but students are attracted to its middle
> class lifestyle; perhaps naively. Assumes Chinese copy of 'DH' would only attract
> older women. Admits escapist element to viewing 'DH'.

'Sex and the City'
>Too explicit and unrealistic. Copied from roommate but told it was too explicit for her. Accepts that it teaches about sex, but denies it is suitable for Chinese and a Chinese version would be impossible

Dislikes recent Chinese blockbusters
>Too focused on the past, but denies her interest in classic US films is backward looking as they deal with romance, not history.

Key themes: Classic Hollywood fan. Identifies with dilemmas between desire and propriety. Appreciates elegant lifestyle of 'Desperate Housewives' but denies its realism. 'Sex and the City' too explicit and unreal, but teaches nevertheless.

Recording 9 (*Sun Lin – Int. 12*)

Learning about the world
>College students should learn about other cultures, cities and lifestyles through films.

'The Graduate'
>Disappointed and puzzled by its fame. Liked the song, but expected a beautiful story and saw only ordinariness. Not as uplifting as expected.

'Narnia'
>Teaches about life – 'good can conquer evil' – but in a relaxing way.

'Mona Lisa Smile'
>Teaches how to fight for one's dreams, not just family expectations.

Criticises Chinese blockbusters
>Uncreative, waste of money. Praises American films for their attention to universal themes. Chinese films should focus on modern life.

Praises Western freedom
>Chinese lack freedom to wear or go where they want and should have courage to change.

Appreciates Korean culture, not dramas
>Likes Korean culture, but Korean dramas too naïve; just for fun.

Against censorship in most instances
>No reason to ban *'Memoirs of a Geisha'*. *'Mission: Impossible III'*: government should not ban a film if it is truthful, but if not, banning may be reasonable.

Key themes: Liberal, urban outlook. Films offer learning and relaxation. Seeks inspiration from films that have universal themes and depict individualistic uplifting struggles against conservatism. Against censorship in most but not all cases.

Recording 10 (*Yang Guozhi – Int. 13*)

Prefers Western films
>Downloads mainly Hollywood films. Denies watching Chinese films as the lifestyle they depict is uninteresting.

Watches US drama
>*'Lost'*, *'Prison Break'*, *'Desperate Housewives'* etc. Describes them as more 'advanced' than Chinese dramas. Prefers American directness and openness to Chinese 'masks'.

Korean dramas
>Too long and emotional.

Against censorship
>When asked, mentions *'The Da Vinci Code'* was banned (pulled from cinemas) as well as Jia Zhangke's films. (But not obviously perturbed by censorship). When asked, sees no reason for cuts to *'Mission: Impossible III'*, not any other film, except for children.

'Sex and the City' acceptable
>Suggests that critics take the series too seriously. Yet denies it is unrealistic, for some, at least. Also denies that Chinese version of the series is worth watching: too realistic to the Chinese lifestyle.

Western films teach the pursuit of freedom
>Mentions 'teen film' where teenagers make a pornographic film to earn money; and a girl who joins a football team by dressing as a boy. Very un-Chinese, in her view.

Key themes: Liberal individualist outlook. Focuses on Western films and dramas and their free and open lifestyle. Regards Chinese films/dramas as the restrictive and ignores them. Against government censorship but not passionately; mainly ignores it.

Recording 11 (*Zhang Jie – Int. 14*)[6]

'American Beauty'
>Depressing and a bit vulgar. The characters' lives were rather 'disgusting', but this was not shocking as Chinese people already knew that America had social problems.

Prefers encouraging films
>*'Braveheart'* appreciated for its exotic music and atmosphere and its message of persistence and encouragement. Needed encouragement because of frustrations: e.g. not able to get a post in the Student Union because of a rigged election. Also like US 'teen films' for the upbeat endings.

'Friends'
>Showed a different sense of humour to China; more action-based and sexual which took time to get used to.

Chinese 'revolutionary' films
>Not 'encouraging' because they were hard to take seriously.

Girls learn bold fashion
>Girls wearing more revealing clothes because of what they see in the Western media. Parents might worry but interviewee relatively relaxed.

Critical of Chinese blockbusters
>Too superficial; focus on image, not plot. Just copying *'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'*. Should follow own path instead.

Key themes: Seeking encouragement because of local frustrations. 'American Beauty' too dark. 'Friends' a little vulgar at first; Western media teaches openness. Chinese films either too serious (revolutionary) or too superficial (new blockbusters).

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[6] This interview started with a question about *'American Beauty'* as I had shown it to the interviewee's class (second year oral class 4).

<u>Recording 12</u> (*Ye Rongbai – Int. 15*)
DVDs and downloading
>Downloads series (to be up to date), but watches films on DVD as download speeds are too low.

Fan of US series 'Heroes'
>Eager to download latest episode. Forward-looking, technology-based fantasy (unlike Chinese historical focus: e.g. *'Hero'*). Therefore 'real' not 'artificial'.

Media globalisation inevitable
>American 'invasion', but not a threat if there is 'guidance'. Brings change in values: more tolerance of consumption, buying on credit, etc. but too much individualism makes people more difficult for the government to 'manage'.

Guidance necessary
>Programmes should be discussed in the home (as in his intellectual family) but this may not happen in most families.

Korean dramas
>Pure and childish; popular with girls. Parents worry as Korea is a culturally close example and may be followed. Chinese government restricts domestic versions.

Chinese and Western heroes
>Western heroes prevent disasters; Chinese heroes are loyal to the country.

Ambivalent about censorship – education preferred
>Blocking is ineffective; teaching how to evaluative is more effective. Some dissent is useful. But censorship is needed at present.

Key themes: Fan of technology-based fantasy ('Heroes'), not Chinese focus on the past. Globalisation welcome, but requires 'guidance' or perhaps censorship as Western productions encourage individualism and Korean dramas cause parental anxiety.

<u>Recording 13</u> (*Zhu Shuangru – Int. 16*)
Emphasises beauty
>Likes films with songs (but not opera); even Indian films. Liked Zhang Yimou's films (e.g. *'Hero'*) for their colour.

Western films faster and more realistic; Chinese films teach
>Western films more direct; show people as sometime selfish. Chinese films do not show reality; too idealistic and beautified.

'Friends' etc.
>Seemed puzzling and 'crazy' at first. After getting used to it, can laugh at the jokes. Now also watches, *'Desperate Housewives'*, *'Prison Break'*, *'Sex and the City'*, *'Heroes'* etc.

Korean dramas
>Sometimes watches: make girls (sometimes even boys) cry.

'Sex and the City'
>Appreciates the openness about sex, though other students find it too explicit or unromantic. Also likes its fashion. Parents wish their children to avoid sex/romance and instead study.

Censorship
>When she and others hear of censorship, they go to buy pirate DVDs.

Concerned about China's image: 'Mission: Impossible III'
> Also heard Chinese radio mention that Russians think China has a low standard of living. Upset that parts of *'Mission: Impossible III'* (on uncut downloaded version) showed China as poor and backward, not its reality.

Key themes: Appreciates beauty, but also prefers Western realism to Chinese films. Likes 'Friends' but puzzled at first. Likes 'Sex and the City' for its directness and its fashion. Avoids censorship but sensitive about depiction of China as backward.

Recording 14 (*Ren Shuying – Int. 17*)[7]
A strong 'Sex and the City' fan
> US dramas a trend among 'intellectuals' and 'white collars'. Introduced to the series by a friend.

Korean series
> Too predictable; 'Cinderella' stories. Viewers look down on themselves.

Feminism and the virginity issue
> *'Sex and the City'* shows women do not need to be dependent. Girls discuss (disapprovingly) Chinese men's insistence on no pre-martial sex for women. Traditional attitudes to sex reflect girls' lack of education.

Chinese version of 'Sex and the City'
> Not popular, not 'hot'. Not 'open' enough.

Realism
> Irritated by American teacher who denied the realism of *'Sex and the City'*. Regards it as realistic for some parts of New York at least.

'Friends'
> Initially humour was puzzling, even humiliating.

Ambivalence about censorship and openness
> Education more effective, but cutting sometimes justified; i.e. against something anti-Chinese. Shows government's disapproval, even if it can be circumvented through piracy. Excessive consumption and promiscuity should be discouraged; 'true love' should be protected, but pre-marital virginity not necessary.

Key themes: Feminist. Evangelical about 'Sex and the City'. Korean dramas, just 'Cinderella' stories. Rejects pre-marital virginity, but still against promiscuity. Believes people should be educated to resist temptations, but censorship sometimes necessary.

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[7] The interview started with a general question about US dramas as the interviewee said before the recording that she liked them.

(ii) *Summary of Group Interviews*

The following table indicates how I coded the main themes based on summaries made of each of my group interviews (see below). These were then compared with codings for other interviewee and written responses. All interviews, except for group 6, began with a general question on what students liked to view.[8] With group 6, the theme of censorship was raised by the interviewer after showing cut scenes from *'Mission: Impossible III'*.

US dramas & films[9]	*Group*	*Korean dramas*	*Group*
Open (incl. sex)	3, 4, 5	Escapist	2, 3, 5
Realistic	2, 4, 6	Slow / long	1, 2, 5
Different to China	1, 3, 4	Unbearable	1, 2
Fresh / exciting	2, 3, 5	Over-emotional	1
Suspenseful and logical	1, 2	Harmless	3
New lifestyle	4	Romantic / beautiful	3
Learning	4	Pressure release	2
Non-didactic	2		

Chinese dramas & films		*Censorship & control*	
Unrealistic	2, 3, 4	Not directly opposed	5, 6
Serious	3, 5	Aware but not necessarily in	6
Slow	2, 6	particular cases	
Didactic	3, 4	Some limits accepted	5
Too rural	5	Critical of censorship	6
Too commercial (Hong Kong)	6		

Group 1
New lifestyle in 'Friends' and US dramas
> Regarded as something distant but attractive. Carefree atmosphere in *'Friends'* and suspense in other US series. Seen as containing insights into ordinary American reality even if ultimately not realistic.

Indulgent Korean and Chinese series
> Such series have more long term plotting and storylines but disparaged as indulgent weepy romantic fantasies.

Group 2
Western realism
> Western films with their flawed heroes described as more truthful than Chinese equivalents. Western films could also teach history better than recent unreliable

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Chinese films. Western series described as logical, suspenseful and thought-provoking.

Korean & Chinese series – emotional, escapist

For some, Chinese series are too emotional and long. Korean series likewise. But for others their focus on love is compelling and a relief from pressure.

Group 3

'Friends' – fresh, relaxed, open (but later a little dull)

Regarded as 'very different, very fresh' at least at first. The characters were seen as open about sex unlike Chinese tradition and generally having a relaxed attitude. Seen as ideal friendship without tension. But, for one, after the initial thrill *'Friends'* was regarded as superficial.

Korean dramas – escapist

A Korean drama lover speaks of them as 'Cinderella stories' and just for fun. Others dismiss as just for young people and housewives. At the end, critics defend the fan's interest as harmless and knowing.

Chinese dramas – serious but either too propagandist or becoming escapist

Chinese dramas described as serious though some also criticised for following the Korean style. Seriousness could sometimes be regarded as a deficiency, tending to idealise society.

Group 4

'The Apprentice' – aspirational education

Mentioned by one student as a vehicle for learning how to compete and learn about work: originally recommended by a postgraduate.

'Desperate Housewives' – lifestyle education

Described as dealing with 'open' and sensitive topics: it satisfied a curiosity for 'sex, women's lives', relations 'between husband and wife, lifestyle in foreign countries' (about 'their house, home, families').

US dramas more realistic than Chinese series

US series tackles topics avoided in Chinese series which tend to be idealised or didactic. When watching foreign series, one is more open to new experience.

'Sex in the City'

Bold compared to Chinese equivalents.

Group 5

Chinese films and dramas – rural focus

US dramas popular; Chinese films and dramas not showing China's modern face.

Chinese dramas considered serious (both positively and negatively)

Parents' generation interested in historical topics. Chinese dramas defined as 'serious', both positively and negatively, but also 'old' and not good for teenagers. Korean and Japanese dramas described as encouraging, but too long and naïve.

Western films and dramas – fresh, but sometimes too open

Western films and dramas defined as open, exciting, and unpredictable: cultural gaps not generally defined as bad, but arousing curiosity. Westerners regarded as open about sex; sometimes too open (e.g. *'American Beauty'*).

Government control – acknowledged but not opposed in principle
> Government control of Chinese media acknowledged but not explicitly opposed. *'Desperate Housewives'* not seen as breaching limits on sexual openness.

Group 6[10]
Unaware of censorship in 'Mission: Impossible III'
> No knowledge of the film cuts in *'Mission: Impossible III'*. One had downloaded the full version. Others had heard of it, but not the fact it had been cut.

Unworried by the cut scenes, but aware of possible reason
> No reaction that cut scenes portrayed Shanghai negatively, but guessed what the reason for the cuts might be.

Most against but also unconcerned about government control
> One took a critical view of the cuts but the others were less obviously concerned though not necessarily in agreement with it.

Against commercial Chinese films
> Preferred Western films and series. One criticised Chinese films as slow and wanted material that 'made him think'. Hong Kong films dismissed as 'commercial'.

Desire for realism
> Students wanted Chinese films to be 'closer to our lives'. When asked whether US material that they liked was close, they responded 'closer to American life' (i.e. realistic).

Gap between Chinese and Western series
> Refused the interviewer's proposition that *'Desperate Housewives'* could be transplanted to Shanghai, merely changing actors and languages.

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[10] The group was first shown approximately five minutes from *'Mission: Impossible III'* on a laptop. The scenes, mainly images ostensibly of Shanghai, included those cut from the cinema released version in China after requests from the Chinese authorities.

(iii) *Summary of Essays*

Essay writers were given a specific topic to write about, but not specific titles (except essay 3). Pre-discussions were kept to a minimum other than to ensure students understood the task. All essays were read. Essays expressing typical views were chosen and copied for analysis; essays expressing an alternative or minority view were also selected. These were then compared with codings for other interviewee responses.

Key Themes:

Essay 1: 'Big Trouble in Little China' or 'The Last Emperor'
- *'Big Trouble'*: inaccurate, insulting representation of China.
- *'The Last Emperor'*: historically accurate, therefore somewhat more acceptable.
- *'Big Trouble'*: reflects Chinese superstition and submissive spirit (*minority view*).

Essay 2: 'What films and programmes do you like or dislike?' [11]
- Enjoy films that encourage persistence, self-belief.
- Enjoy films that encourage social tolerance, freedom.
- Learning *and* relaxing: films allow travel to other places, cultures and times.
- Enjoy films that boost faith in the sincerity of love (implicitly in doubt).

Essay 3: 'Patriotism nowadays'
- Distinguish from radical nationalism ('angry youth'): avoid aggression or boycotts. Don't envy or protest; learn and work hard. New patriotism not incompatible with self-interest.
- Patriotism need not be heroic; now is the age of ordinary patriotism.
- Government allows radical nationalism online (*minority view*); economic growth and education will gradually temper it.

Essay 4: 'Cultural garbage debate'
- Pop culture is a potential ambassador (e.g. Zhang Ziyi) for the nation or a means to promote classical culture (implicitly not valuable in itself).
- *'Super Girl'*: 'Let tastes be' but teach and guide the young.

Essay 5: 'Chinese blockbusters'
- Misleading: foreigners may get false impression of China. Blockbusters have nothing to do with the modern world
- Should maintain a Chinese essence: acceptable to learn foreign techniques but should not only pursue Oscars or box office success.
- Anti-didactic: films do not need to teach, so directors should not be criticised (*minority view*). Directors should be free of government control.

Essay 6: 'Cultural distinction'
- Gaps are narrowing: young Chinese are familiar with Western life, even if different. Even films with a religious background could be understood.
- *'American Beauty'*: Chinese may find it hard to accept the film's 'weird' lifestyle and breaking of dreams.

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[11] Essay writers interpreted the topic as writing about their positive preferences.

Essay 7: 'US dramas'
- New heroes: *'Prison Break'* redefines the hero for modern society. Unlike Chinese heroes, they are human, flawed, but also smart and independent.
- More honest and advanced: *'Desperate Housewives'* shows China is too conservative, still developing. Government should not block what the young generation wants to see. Instead should educate people to evaluate material.
- Danger: Asia and the West are different. The popularity of US dramas may mislead the young; more government control needed.

Essay 8: 'Korean dramas'
- Indifference: few watch them (Resistance to the topic: some write instead on Korean government's attempt to register 'Dragon Boat' racing at UNESCO).
- Filling a moral vacuum: Chinese society has lost its moral traditions following the Cultural Revolution and modernisation. Korean dramas fill this gap (*minority view*).

Essay 9: 'Viewing habits'
- New media preferred: convenient (i.e. 'on-demand'), has more resources and is free. With broadband, less need for DVD. Piracy and censorship rarely mentioned and only a few TV or cinema fans.
- Online viewing: Youku and Tudou popular sites, though definition (and adverts) an issue for some. Downloading: (Xunlei, etc) also popular, though speed and disc space an issue for some.

(iv) *Summary of E-mailed Responses*

Volunteer e-mail contacts responded to my request to first year BLCU students posted on a class website and Translation students at Minzu University contacted through a colleague. Respondents could choose from a set of topics and questions to answer (see appendix 2e). I received eleven responses[12] as well as two e-mails (*Em. 12 & 13*) in response my specific question on the popularity of *'Gone with the Wind'* and one e-mail (*Em. 14*) on subtitle translation groups (see below). The following table indicates how I coded the main themes based on summaries made of each of e-mailed responses (see below). These were then compared with codings for other written and interviewee responses.

Western films & dramas	*E-mail (Em.)*
Praises US dramas	2, 3, 9, 10
Regards as 'open', direct (incl. sex)	4, 8, 10, 11
Learning about/from the West	7, 9, 10,
Praises films encouraging faith / persistence	9, 10, 11
Praises focus on entertainment	1, 10
Praises independent films	2, 10
Criticises Hollywood blockbusters	2
Praises individualism, fighting for dreams	11
Praises universal themes	1
Westerners individualistic	3
Westerners imaginative	7
Good at popularising 'main theme'	6
Praises *'Brokeback Mountain'*	2
Praises *'Notebook'*	4
Praises *'Forrest Gump'*	3
Praises *'Pursuit of Happyness'*	7
Praises *'Terminal'*	9

Chinese films & dramas	*E-mail (Em.)*
Criticises Chinese dramas	4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
Criticises historical blockbusters	2, 3, 6, 9, 11,
Praises rural focused films / dramas	6, 9
Criticises commercialism	2, 10
Chinese films too serious	1
Praises Feng Xiaogang	11
Chinese films should be distinct	6
Chinese portrayed as violent but persistent	10
Chinese portrayed as conservative	7

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[12] One e-mail was discarded as it was filled out by a teacher and another as it was off topic.

Korean dramas	*E-mail (Em.)*
Waste of time	1, 2, 9, 11
Naïve, childish, 'Cinderella' stories	10, 11,
For housewives, mothers	1, 11
Slow, repetitive	3, 10
Delicate and romantic	4, 8
Show beautiful values that China lacks	5
Addictive	2
Hates	11
Liked by those under pressure	11

US dramas	*E-mail (Em.)*
'Friends' viewers	7, 9, 11
'Prison Break' fans	3, 8
Some too explicit	8, 11
'Desperate Housewives' fans	9
'Ugly Betty' fan	7

Habits	*E-mail (Em.)*
Downloads (at university)	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
Watches DVD	5, 6, 9
Watches films to keep up with peers	11
Reads viewers' comments online	2
Downloads to avoid TV censorship	1
DVD piracy: necessary evil	6

E-mail 1 (*Gan Quan*)[13]
Viewing habits
> More choice online than on TV because of censorship system.

Prefers Hollywood
> Chinese films too serious (social problems). US films focus on entertainment.

Hates Korean dramas
> Waste of time; popular with housewives because they reflect their lives.

E-mail 2 (*Mo Hongping*)
Viewing habits
> Chooses by reading viewers' online comments.

Independent films
> Wants to see the 'real world' and form her own views.

Criticises blockbusters
> Criticises commercialism: 'meaningless films' (Chinese and Hollywood).

US dramas
> Well made and fresh, if a little exaggerated.

Liberal
> Praises *'Brokeback Mountain'* as 'touching'; people should respect homosexuals.

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[13] Responses from Minzu University are marked with an asterisk.

Korean dramas

Addictive. Wants to give them up; take too long to watch.

E-mail 3 (*Chen Qianwei*)*

Viewing habits

Used to go to the cinema, but now downloads.

Korean dramas

Beautiful actors but plots 'almost the same'.

Chinese films

Distance between Chinese and Western films 'shortening' but Chinese blockbusters 'disappointing'.

'Forrest Gump'

Made an impact by showing the importance of persistence over intelligence.

US dramas

Praises 'compact' plot of *'Prison Break'*.

View of foreigners and Chinese from films

Foreigners are individualistic; Chinese are 'plain' and 'constrained'.

E-mail 4 (*Du Mintao*)*

Viewing habits

Used to go to the cinema or watch on TV, but now downloads.

Likes Korean dramas

'Delicate' in depicting love or family relationships; popular with women.

'Notebook'

A romantic comedy (2004). Made a deep impression: 'love can last for ever'.

Chinese dramas

Plots too predictable.

Foreigners in films

More direct than Chinese at expressing feelings.

E-mail 5 (*Hong Zhu*)*

Viewing habits

Used to go to the cinema, but now too expensive. Instead views on DVD.

Korean dramas

Unrealistic, but depict beautiful moral values that China lacks.

Chinese dramas

Too political and unrealistic.

E-mail 6 (*Ding Qing*)

Viewing habits

Watches DVD or downloads. Beijing's reputation for piracy is 'horrible' but inevitable as legal copies too expensive. TV lacks choice and cinema is expensive.

Chinese films should be different

Moved by Chinese films about the countryside. Chinese films should be creative but maintain their own style. Should avoid commercialism and pursuit of Oscars. Dislikes Chinese and Hollywood blockbusters.

Hollywood's popular didacticism
> Hollywood is good at making its 'main theme' of liberty popular. Chinese films fail to popularise their 'main theme'; too 'educational' (contradicting above?).

E-mail 7 (*Kong Yuguo*)*
Viewing habits
> Downloads.

Seeks films with moral lesson
> Motivated to 'fight' against dissatisfaction after watching *'Pursuit of Happyness'*, the story of a self-made millionaire.

Chinese films and dramas
> Too familiar, uncreative, 'fettered by tradition'.

US dramas
> Such dramas fill the gaps in students' education. Likes *'Friends'* and *'Ugly Betty'*; relaxing but also encouraging.

Korean dramas
> Favourite genre. Feel part of a family when watching, 'won't feel lonely'.

View of foreigners from films
> 'Open-minded', 'humorous', imaginative and energetic.

E-mail 8 (*Wei Jinmao*)*
Viewing habits
> Downloads.

US dramas
> Fan of *'Prison Break'*.

Korean dramas
> Likes their romantic and 'implicit' style. Perhaps 'naïve and ideal' Romeo and Juliet type stories, but suited to Asian tastes. Western dramas are too explicit.

Chinese dramas
> Too slow. Unrelated to modern life.

E-mail 9 (*Fang Liu*)*
Viewing habits
> DVD and downloading has become the main method of viewing among students, especially downloading as it is convenient and up-to-date.

Hollywood inspiration and learning
> Themes are popular: 'good deeds bring rewards'. *'The Terminal'* restored faith in people's 'good nature'. Can also show what the US is like.

Chinese films
> Dislikes blockbusters: unconnected to society. Other films 'very Chinese' about rural issues, teaching family values etc.

US dramas
> Can experience real American life. Very popular in dorms. *'Friends'* a 'classic' for learning English. *'Desperate Housewives'* fan. Good plot and shows 'dark side' to everyone.

Korean dramas
> A waste of time (or a way to pass time). Focus on beauty, fashion and romance.

Chinese dramas
> Some 'fake and unnatural'; some closer to real life with a rural focus.

E-mail 10 (*Cai Minjia*)

Viewing habits
> DVD previously, now downloads; do not choose according to friends' advice.

Hollywood for entertainment
> Hollywood for 'innocent' escapism; other films for 'contemplation'.

Chinese films
> Two types: either plain rural focus or kung fu pictures with 'distorted gimmicks' to attract foreigners. Differences due to Chinese stage of development.

US dramas
> 'Attractive', 'suspenseful'. Curious about developed nations' lifestyle or thinking.

Dislikes Korean dramas
> Boring 'Cinderella stories', higher level lifestyles. 'Seem fake'.

Chinese dramas
> Either 'main theme' patriotism, or merely entertainment. Hong Kong dramas: too commercial. Taiwanese: 'idol' dramas just copy Japan.

View of foreigners from films
> 'Open', under pressure but 'pursue freedom'.

Foreign view of Chinese from films
> 'Rude, rely on violence' but persistent.

E-mail 11 (*Lang Wenyu*)

Viewing habits
> Web access restricted by parents; now downloads. Cinema too expensive.

Chinese blockbusters
> Superficially Chinese. Real Chinese films (e.g. Feng Xiaogang's) do not travel.

US dramas
> Like *'Friends'*; 'individualism' is popular, but *'Sex and the City'* is too explicit.

Hates Korean dramas
> Waste of time, 'fairy tale-like'. Popular with mothers and those under pressure.

Keeps up with peers
> Watching films means you are not left out.

As noted above, E-mails 12 and 13 were follow ups on the topic of *'Gone with the Wind'* which students in my preliminary study at Minzu University mentioned. E-mail 14 was a contact with a BLCU student who was a volunteer member of a subtitle translation group.

(v) *Transcript Sample*

The following transcript (with coding) is of one of my shorter group interviews.

Date – 15/6/07   **Duration** – 15-20 minutes approx.

Location – classroom, outside class time   **Language** – English

Group Interview 5 (Transcript) (INT = Interviewer)	**Coding**

INT: I've been asking everybody, what do you like watching?
G5/1: Watching.
INT: Yes.
G5/2: In films?
INT: Yes, TV or anything you like.
G5/1: Eh.
G5/2: I know *Prison Break* is now very popular among the   **US dramas: popular**
students, and eh, *24*, *Heroes*.
G5/3: *Desperate Housewives* and *Lost*.
INT: Why do people watch them?
G5/4: Partly because everybody watch[es] that kind of movie
or television show; we don't want to lose (*unclear*) so we
watch that kind of movie or TV programme.   **Peer pressure?**
INT: What if you don't watch it?
G5/4: Just curious.
INT: Oh I see.
G5/4: I['m] just think[ing] about why so many people watch...
G5/2: And also I think for the purpose of entertaining
ourselves because after a long day's work or study, we like to
see some drama shows or movies to...   **Entertainment: to**
G5/4: Relax.   **relax**
G5/2: Relax ourselves.
INT: So why not watch Chinese ones?
G5/1: We can relax ourselves while listening to English.   **Learning**
G5/2: But we still watch some Chinese programmes, yeh.
INT: Such as what?
G5/2: Such as CCTV news.
G5/2: And also some movies, eh, in Hong Kong, produced by   **HK films**
Hong Kong directors.
INT: Eh, are the Chinese ones and Hong Kong ones different?
G5/4: Eh yeh, there's something different.
INT: Such as?
G5/4: Hong Kong will involve a lot of fights.
INT: Fighting.
G5/4: Yeh fighting and maybe the background is different

from Chinese movies because a lot of Chinese movies is I think related to farmers [*laughter*] and the workers and eh and they think all Chinese live in the countryside, not live in cities. There are not so many Chinese movies about the cities. I think the directors pay much more attention on the countryside or the farmers.

PRC films: too rural

INT: Would you say...so is that why you watch so many foreign ones?
G5/4: Maybe because the story is much more exciting...because we don't know, we don't know something.

Foreign: exciting, unknown

INT: Does it never seem strange?
G5/4: Strange, what do you mean?
INT: The way people behave.
G5/1: Sometimes.
G5/4: It's hard to understand.
INT: Such as?
G5/4: Such as...
G5/1: *American Beauty*.
[*General laughter*]

***American Beauty*: strange[14]**

G5/1: I think there are a lot of strange people in that.
INT: But there's a difference between something strange which you understand and something that's strange that you don't understand, ok?
G5/3: Eh yeh, maybe our cultural background is different.

Cultural difference

G5/2: And also the way people [are] doing things or thinking in a movie or series, we sometimes don't understand, why they choose this, or why don't choose that, so it's kind of, sometimes I mean, kind of a confusion for us to understand the theme of the movie or...
INT: Do you think there is a different between what your parents like to watch and what you like to watch?
G5/2: Of course.
INT: Such as what kind of difference?
G5/4: My mother would like to watch that kind about the history.

Older generation: interested in war

G5/2: So is my father.
G5/4: That is the Second World War.
INT: Second World War.
G5/2: Yeh.
INT: Chinese in the Second World War?
G5/2: And also the other countries in the Second World War.
INT: Oh really?
G5/2: My father is very interested in those historical records.
INT: But he wasn't...he's too young to be...
G5/2: Mmmm no.

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[14] The class had been shown *'American Beauty'* by me as part of their speaking course.

INT: He's too young to be in the Second World War, isn't he?

G5/2: No, he wasn't...you mean...

G5/3: Our parents were born in [the] 1960s.

INT: So he has no memory of that period.

G5/2: Yeh, no he...because my grandparent had experienced the war and also some of the Japanese even came into our town, so they have the real experience of the Second World War, and maybe sometimes they told my father and so my father had this interest in the war.

G5/3: The environment is very important...I mean people around you always tell you that the Second World War is terrible and the Japanese are [*laughter*] so rude or something like that so maybe this will affect us, maybe it will affect us to choose what kind of programme to watch. **Japan: sensitive topic**

INT: Eh, do you ever watch any Japanese things?

G5/1, 2: Yes.

G5/3: Cartoons.

G5/1: Some films. **Japanese cartoons, films**

INT: Films or TV dramas.

G5/1, 2: Films.

G5/4: Also TV dramas.

INT: Do you think the Japanese ones are in some way different?

G5/4: Yeh their programme will sometimes give you hope, because I think Japanese people is the kind of people who eh, in their mind they are so eager to achieve something, achieve **Encouraging** something, so they try their best, they encourage you to try your best to do everything...yeh.

INT: What about those Korean ones?

G5/4: I seldom watch that kind. **Korean dramas: 'long', 'not real'**

G5/2: Some Korean serials are too long.

G5/1, 3: Yes

G5/2: And they always focus upon something about family, relationships and eh and love between young people...it's not real, I think sometimes it's not real...

G5/1: Too idealistic.

INT: You couldn't believe it?

G5/1: Yeh.

INT: So Chinese ones are not like that?

G5/1: A lot of teenagers watch Korean shows and Korean dramas I think.

INT: And do Chinese dramas...in what way are they different to Korean ones or Japanese or Western ones?

G5/4: The topic is too old and maybe many teenagers won't **Chinese dramas:** like them – the topic always about divorce, about... **serious, 'old' topics**

INT: Divorce?

G5/4: Yeh.

G5/2: I think Chinese mainland movies and dramas are often focusing on the very practical and realistic issues like...

G5/4: Very serious.

G5/2: Like wars or family, morals or etc, but these Korean and Japanese dramas and movies they are very good at trying to get people to believe that there are fairy tales existing in society and in our real work. I think it's the main difference between our issues and foreign issues. **Korean/Japanese: 'fairy tales'**

INT: I'm going to have a cough now, ehmm...what would you like, if I was a film director or TV director in China, what would you like to say to me...if I had power to decide what films and TV you could see, what would you want?

G5/2: I think both [i.e. Chinese and foreign] are ok because, as for me, I like difference because if for a rather long time I just watch one kind of show or drama, I'd be tired of watching it so I will switch to another topic or another kind of movie so I think both are ok if they are good enough; I mean, the topics, their things are very attracting, I think both are ok. **Desire variety**

INT: Is there anything you think should be *not* shown?

G5/3: Not shown...

G5/1: Sex...I think sometimes...

INT: Where do you draw the line...you understand what I mean?

G5/1: I know...I'm not sure, but you know, sometimes on the screen there are two naked people and I think that's too much; we can not accept it...I mean kiss or give a hug is ok but too much. **Sex on screen: should be limited**

INT: Anything else?

G5/1: I think the Chinese films are controlled by the government, so in Chinese films there is seldom sex in it; we are more conservative, we are not open like those Western people. **Government control: Westerners 'open', Chinese 'conservative'**

INT: But you still watch some of these things like *Desperate Housewives*. Is *Desperate Housewives* too open? **Desperate Housewives: not too open**

G5/1, 2, 3: It's ok.

INT: It's ok...have you ever watched anything you thought 'that's too much'?...you did... **American Beauty: 'too much'**

G5/2: [*Laughter*] *American Beauty*

[*General laughter*]

INT: Eh, let's stop there.

Appendix 4a   **Preliminary and Pilot Studies**

[1] Preliminary Study

Dates – June 14 & 16 (presentations) and 13 & 15 (essays), 2005.

Purpose – feasibility study

Type

(a) Mini-presentations on film preferences (15 minutes in groups of three or four; notes taken) (two classes, 1st year English majors – 50 students)

(b) Questionnaire (see below) plus open ended essay (1 hour) on any aspect of the questionnaire (two classes, 3rd year Law and English majors; 50 students)

Location – Central University of Nationalities (Minzu University), Beijing (in class)

Method of analysis – thematic coding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207-208).

Conclusions – (i) doubts about the value of a questionnaire beyond raising the consciousness of respondents of the scope of possible answers (ii) essay writing seemed to produce deeper and more reflective insights than either presentations or questionnaires.

[2] Pilot Study

Date – April 16, 2006.

Purpose – [1] methodology piloting [2] interview practice

Type

Group interview (5 Chinese postgraduate media studies students at Westminster University) (1½ hours). Semi-structured questions based on preliminary study questionnaire (students also asked to comment on selected Minzu students comments)

Location – Westminster University students' residence common room, Harrow, London.

Method of analysis – thematic coding (as above) and comparison with preliminary research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 203, 207-208, 226-228).

Conclusions – (i) using other students' comments during the interview was quite effective in allowing the researcher to maintain distance from judgements embedded in questions but (ii) an interventionist, relatively structured approach left interviewees with less opportunity to set their own agenda.

Appendix 4b   **Preliminary Study Questionnaire**

Film-watching in your free time
Do you have much free time? What kind of things do you do for entertainment?
Which of the following is important to you in your free time?
[a] computer games [b] films [c] internet [d] going out [e] music [f] playing sport [g] reading
[h] shopping [i] TV [j] other
Do you have access to TV__ , the internet __ or DVD _____? (If not, which of them do you miss?)

Film-watching habits
Is there a wide choice of films easily available to you?
How many times per month do you usually watch films?
    [a] at the cinema ____ [b] on TV ____ [c] on DVD or VCD ____ [d] on the internet ____
If you can, please name a film you have watched recently?
If you watch DVDs, do you usually buy, borrow or rent them? (Where from? / Are they usually pirated?)
What are the advantages or disadvantages of DVD for you? If you had a TV, would you still watch DVDs?

Film-watching choices
Do you usually choose a film because –
    [a] it stars an actor you admire [b] it's easily available or cheap [c] it's new or recently advertised   [d]
    it's recommended by a friend [e] it's well-reviewed or a 'classic' [f] the director is well-known [g] it's
    similar to one you've seen before [i] other reasons
Do you prefer (or avoid) certain genres?
    Drama / Romance   *Comedy*   *Action / Adventure*   *Family / Cartoon*
    Crime / Mystery   *Science Fiction / Fantasy*   *Horror*   *Historical / Political*   *Other*

Film-watching experiences
Is watching films mainly a way to help you –
    [a] feel excitement or emotion   [b] keep up with trends   [c] kill time / forget reality
    [d] learn about life or the world   [e] relax or calm down   [f] be with friends   [g] other reasons
Do you tend to watch alone or with others? (Which would you prefer?)
Do you ever discuss films during or afterwards?
Do you ever watch a film more than once – if so, why?
Do you think a film has ever influenced your opinions or attitudes about something?
Are there any films that you think (a) should be banned (b) everyone should see?

Chinese v. Foreign film-watching
Does it bother you if films are dubbed or have subtitles?
What percentage of the films you watch are Chinese language, and what percentage foreign?
Is it easier to identify with and understand the characters in a Chinese film than a foreign one?
Do you feel you can experience things in foreign films that you cannot in Chinese language films?
In your experience, is it possible to like foreign films even if you dislike the country they come from?
Do you think Hollywood films help you understand America? What impression of the USA do you get from them?
In your view, someone who prefers Chinese films is probably..................than someone who doesn't.
In your view, someone who prefers foreign films is probably.................than someone who doesn't.

Appendix 5   **Glossary**

aiguo　爱国

aiguozhuyi　爱国主义

Baidu　百度

bubo　布波

Chacha　察察

chanquan　产权

chanye　产业

Chaoji nüsheng　超级女声

chenggong xue　成功学

chengxin　诚信

chuanboxue　传播学

chuangyi gongye　创意工业

dapian　大片

Di dao zhan　地道战

Feicheng　费城

fengfu de dandiao　丰富的单调

fengxian　奉献

fenhong dianshiju　分红电视剧

Fenhong nülang　分红女郎

fenqing　愤青

gaige kaifang　改革开放

gexing　个性

gongxin jieceng　工薪阶层

Gougou　狗狗

Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju　国家广播电影电视总局

guoqing　国情

Ha-Han　哈韩

Han liu　朝流

Haoxiang haoxiang tan lianai　好想好想谈恋爱

houshe　喉舌

Huazhong　华中

hukou　户口

Jingjing　警警

jingye　敬业

Juewang zhufu　绝望主妇

jupian　巨片

kaifang　开放

Kankan　看看

Kewang　渴望

Leiyu　雷雨

Linai　丽奈

Linaite　丽奈特

Meili zhufu　美丽主妇

mingli　明理

minzuzhuyi　民族主义

mozhe shitou guo he　摸着石头过河

Mulan　木兰

Nanfang　南方

Qiling　罄灵

Qingchun lizhi pian　青春励志片

qinjian　勤俭

ruan guanggao　软广告

shehui jieceng　社会阶层

shiye　事业

shoufa　守法

Sixiang daode xiuyang　思想道德修养

sixiang gongzuo　思想工作

Taobao　淘宝

ti-yong　体-用

tuanjie　团结

Tudou　土豆

wuxia　武侠

Xiaoao jianghu　笑傲江湖

Xin xing　新星

Xinhua　新华

Xinwen chuban zongshu　新闻出版总署

Xunlei　迅雷

yinmi liuxing　隐秘流行

youchang xinwen　有偿新闻

Youku　优酷

youshan　友善

yuan　元

Yuanmingyuan　圆明园

yueguo changcheng, zouxiang shijie　越过长城, 走向世界

Yuwang dushi　欲望都市

Zhang Side　张思德

zhongceng jieji　中层阶级

zhongchan jieji　中产阶级

Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi　中国人民政治协商会议

Zhongxue wei ti, xixue weiyong　中学为体, 西学为用

Zhongyou　中友

zhu xuanlu　主旋律

ziqiang　自强

zuguo　祖国

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