

**THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: CULTURAL INTERACTION AND
CONFRONTATION AMONG THE HAUNTING GHOSTS OF
RUSSIANS, JAPANESE, AND CHINESE IN HARBIN**

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on a spatial analysis of the cultural memories of Harbin, a city in Northeast China, a former (semi)colony of Russia and Japan, and a habitat of more than forty nationalities from across the world in the first half of the twentieth century. Harbin's history, determined in great part by a large foreign presence, is still a matter of contention in China and elsewhere. By adopting Pierre Nora's concept of "*lieux de mémoire* (places of memory)," Henri Lefebvre's notion of "the social production of space," and concepts and theories of many others, this dissertation investigates the contested memories of Harbin through the lens of architecture, literature, film, and television drama. It conducts interdisciplinary and inter-medial examinations of Harbin as an encompassing *lieu de mémoire*, where various practices demonstrate, individually and collectively, differently yet consistently, the social signification of the city's pasts in the present, enriching the city with ambivalent and contradictory meanings, and contributing to the social production of the memorial space and spatial memory of the city. This dissertation examines Harbin as a contact zone amongst Russia, Japan, and China, and as a periphery of the cultural heartland of China. It attaches importance to memories as an arena for the contemporary Harbiners to negotiate the divergent ideologies, power contests, and economic and cultural concerns. The city itself is a palimpsest, a text which has experienced, and is experiencing, a process of being effaced and "rewritten," translated, and resignified. The city's contested past overlaps with its present, persistently haunting and shaping

the city, while experiencing metamorphosis and resurrection. Overshadowed by the real-and-imagined ghosts of the past, Harbin continues to function as a contested contact zone and frontier that de-territorializes China's homogeneous cultural identity from the periphery. In this way, Harbin describes a local particularism by evoking a future-oriented reinvigoration of its cosmopolitan past in the current context of globalization. In this process, contemporary Harbiners demonstrate ambivalence and paradox in promoting the city's exoticism as much as complying with the state's construction of nationalism.

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on a spatial analysis of the cultural memories of Harbin, a city in Northeast China, adjacent to Russia on land and across the sea from Japan.

Harbin's history, determined in great part by a large foreign presence, is still a matter of contention in China, and elsewhere. This contestation is seen in the contemporary Chinese preservation, representation, and imagination of the city's past. Investigating it through the lens of architecture, literature, film, and television drama, this dissertation addresses the question of how the local officials, professionals, artists and residents of Harbin and elsewhere "reconfigure time by remaking space,"¹ (re)construct and (re)signify the various places of memory, and develop the interpretive rationales they employ. Special attention is given to Harbin as a contact zone amongst Russia, Japan, and China, and as a periphery of the cultural heartland of China. I explore the ambivalence and paradox of contemporary Harbiners in promoting the city's exoticism, as much as complying with the state's construction of nationalism.² I argue that the city constructs local particularism and local internationalism by reinvigorating its cosmopolitan (and colonial) past, in order to adapt to and confront the homogenization of globalization and market economy.

My analysis is situated in the temporal-spatial matrix of here, now, there, and then, which features continuity and discontinuity, and an obsession with the foreign past and oblivion of some part of it. The contemporary Harbin is characterized by a

¹ Abidin Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

² I use "Harbiner" to refer to Harbin people. Harbiners are comprised of both the local Chinese as well as the multi-ethnic diaspora around the world. The latter's publishing efforts are crucial for the world to know the special history of Harbin. However, due to the limited length of this dissertation, I focus on the Chinese Harbiners.

culture of reappearance and disappearance:³ on the one hand, the haunted past manifests itself in the imitation of many demolished European-style buildings, and in the “new remembering” of Japanese imperialist atrocities in museums and cultural productions;⁴ on the other hand, the culture of disappearance is illustrated by downplaying the pre-war economic and cultural contributions of Japanese immigrants to Harbin, and by gentrifying the *lived* space of memory in the Chinese Baroque neighborhood, transforming it into a tourist and business site for consumption. Moreover, many locals do not have any clear awareness whether someone is Pole, Jew, Georgian, or Tartar, *et al.* They are prone to call all the foreign residents *laomaozi* (the old hairy ones), which literally refers to the Russians. The homogeneous memorialization of all White foreign Harbiners as Russians constitutes another layer of the culture of disappearance.

The (un)intentional promoting, transforming, or downplaying of particular memories of Old Harbin is partially due to a discontinuity between the cosmopolitan Harbin, under Russian colonization a century ago, and the present Harbin, as a provincial city of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Harbin was a cosmopolitan and immigrant city, starting with the Russian imperial project of constructing the Chinese Eastern Railway (the CER) across Manchuria in 1898. The Russians and the

³ According to Ackbar Abbas, one connotation of “disappearance” is misrecognition or refusal to see what is there. “Disappearance,” in the case of Hong Kong culture, also refers to the fact that “the way the city has been made to appear in many representations in fact works to make it disappear.” Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 7-8.

⁴ Parks M. Coble, “China’s ‘New Remembering’ of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937-1945,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 190 (June 2007): 398. Arthur Waldron, “China’s New Remembering of World War II: The Case of Zhang Zizhong,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 4 (October 1996): 945-978.

Chinese accounted for the majority of Harbin's population before the Japanese colonial state, Manchukuo, was established in 1932. Immigrants from other parts of China and across the world were pioneers who established the city from scratch. The scarcity of an entrenched cultural tradition made this place an inclusive haven for dozens of nationalities, who escaped totalitarian regimes and wars and who craved chances of earning money. People shared more empathy for than hostility against each other.⁵ Against the backdrop of the search for a better life, the Chinese residents barely had a clear sense of nationalism until the 1920s.⁶ In contrast, today Harbin is a provincial city where 99% of the population is Chinese and no longer reflects the cosmopolitan aspects caused by Russian colonialism and Japanese occupation. Chinese history has been reinscribed to legitimize the communist party's rule over Harbin.

This discontinuity makes inevitable the contestation over the city's identity. A fundamental question is "What cultures does Harbin embody?" To some extent, the modern city of Harbin is comparable to a child born of a Russian mother, with a cosmopolitan gene, changed later to a Chinese citizen. I argue that Harbin's membership within the Chinese national boundaries is not enough to account for the

⁵ Sugiyama Kimiko was a Japanese born in Harbin in 1928. In her memoir, she recalls that "During a tension of the Manchurian Incident, a Chinese man helped her father; both men were so far from their native places that neither had a clear idea what a country or an ethnicity really was." Joshua A. Fogel, "Integrating into Chinese Society: A Comparison of the Japanese Communities of Shanghai and Harbin," in *Japan Competing Modernism: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900-1930*, ed. Sharon Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 62; Kimiko Sugiyama, "Harubin no ki: watakushi ga doko de mita koto, kangaeta koto (The aura of Harbin: where I saw, what I thought about)," *Manshuu to Nihonjin* (The Manchu and the Japanese), 7 (November 1979): 3-20.

⁶ James Carter argues that Chinese nationalism in Harbin grew out of simultaneous opposition to and cooperation with the large foreign presence. One illustration he provided is the Donghua School found by Harbin's early nationalists in 1916. See James Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin, Nationalism in an International City 1916-1932* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 3.

complexity of its identity, given the spectral nature of its international past. To some extent, the cultural identity of Harbin is both/neither Chinese, Russian, and cosmopolitan.⁷ It is characterized by a liminal and floating identity, like the culture of the postcolonial Hong Kong, which is both/neither British, Chinese, and cosmopolitan.⁸ In the contemporary national agenda of China, memories of the cosmopolitan Harbin become secondary. As Wolff argues, “In the borderland, the nation-state’s urge to write its own history is revealed at its starkest, battling with other national and local narratives.”⁹ In contrast, the local officials have been using the cosmopolitan past to promote its profile since the 1980s. The locals’ submission to and rebellion against the national agenda coexist with each other. The examination of the locals’ paradoxical perceptions of the city’s identity provides a chance to understand the peripheral status of Harbin in relation to the heartland of China, and as a cultural and political frontier in relation to Russia and Japan.

Moreover, the fact that Harbin was the habitat of ethnic minorities of Nüzhen and Manchu complicates the understanding of the city’s identity. The current promotion of Sinification, together with Europeanization, of Harbin is more than a postcolonial reconstruction of its indigenous tradition, because the city’s cultural root is by no means Chinese. The Manchu culture is downplayed; only the umbrella term,

⁷ Carter argues that “Harbin has never been typically Russian or Chinese at any point in its history. Yet, to deny its Russian, or Chinese, or Japanese (or Polish, Korean, Jewish) characteristics is to omit entire dimensions of this unique metropolis. Ibid, 4.

⁸ See Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 1-15. Moreover, Yue Meng argues that “The cultural identity of Shanghai is found somewhere between semi-colonialism and cosmopolitanism.” This might also be applicable to the case of Harbin. Yue Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi.

⁹ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 3.

“Chinese,” is emphasized in the PRC. This dissertation aims to de-territorialize the center from the periphery and to deconstruct a homogeneous narrative of Chineseness by using the “minor language” of Harbin to “erode the major language” of China.¹⁰

The increasing memorialization of the cosmopolitan and colonial Harbin since the 1980s has economic, political, and cultural motives. While each of the three aspects are equally important and could not be separated in addressing a memory study of Harbin, I give more attention to the political symbolism because it reveals the convoluted meanings of the city as both physical and imagined space. I aim to explore the power relations involved in the memorialization and representation of the city’s past, and the means by which the foreign past of Harbin confronts and redefines nation-building in China.

Theoretical Framework: Memory and Space

“Cultural memory” and “social space” constitute two major concepts of my

¹⁰ Following Deleuze and Guattari, and Manuel Martin-Rodriguez, Lugo argues that the border region and border theory can erode the hegemony of the privileged center by de-nationalizing and de-territorializing the nation/state and culture theory. Alejandro Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture, and the Nation,” *Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 45; also see Manuel M. Martin-Rodriguez, “The Global Border: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridism in Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Doll Plagues*,” in *Alejandro Morales: Fiction Past, Present, Future Perfect*, ed. José Antonio Gurpegui. (Tempe: Bilingual Review Press, 1996), 86. Moreover, Derrida’s theory of reading and his concept of “deconstruction” are also relevant. Derrida tracks “syntactic and semantic ambiguities to generate multiple, often conflicting, meanings out of a single utterance... [and sees] signifying force in the gaps, margins, digressions, discontinuities, contradictions and ambiguities of a text.” Barbara Johnson, “Writing,” in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: from the European Enlightenment to the Global*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 236.

theoretical framework. This approach is partly inspired by Edward Soja's notion of "the trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality."¹¹ Soja pinpoints "a persistent tendency during at least the past century to over-privilege the dynamic relations between the 'making' of Historicity and the 'constitution' of social practices or Sociality."¹² Moving from the assumption that spatiality had been peripheralized, Soja proposes a method of "thirding-as-Othering" to reassert the importance of spatiality. Differing from Soja's trialectics, the trialectics to be examined in this dissertation is that of spatiality-sociality-and-mnemohistoricity, because the term "history" as discussed in this dissertation refers to Jan Assmann's concept of "mnemohistory,"¹³ which is not concerned with the past as such, but only with the past *as it is remembered*. In other words, "history" is "a demand *for desire*," in Meaghan Morris's terms.¹⁴ Morris argues that "The uncovering of new facts, the endless reordering of the immense detail that makes the historian's map of the past may not be quite what I want...Wanting history, I read for the theory and skip the facts."¹⁵ Taking these arguments into consideration, this dissertation addresses the interconnection between mnemohistory (or simply memory) and space, especially the social production of memory in relation to that of space. Due to the fact the former

¹¹ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³ Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

¹⁴ Meaghan Morris, *Too Soon Too Late: History in Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ Morris, *Too Soon Too Late*, 5; also see Carolyn Steedman, "Culture, Cultural Studies, and the Historians," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (London: Routledge, 1992), 614.

scholarship has given more attention to the commercialization of historical legacies in contemporary Harbin,¹⁶ and that there is a lack of political critique of the city's past in relation to the present, in this dissertation I attach importance to the power relations, political symbolisms, and ideologies involved in the social production of memorial space and spatial memory in Harbin.

The Theoretical Framework of Memory

This dissertation adapts Pierre Nora's concept of *les lieux de mémoire* (the places of memory) as the main theoretical perspective, complemented by Jan Assmann's notion of cultural memory, steering towards a spatialization and culturation of memory in the context of a study of Harbin. But before providing a thorough introduction of these two concepts, a brief literature review of memory studies since the 19th century is in order. This will help situate my discussion of Nora, Assmann, and the memory study of Harbin in a conversation with scholars who have addressed similar themes.¹⁷ The early scholarship devoted to memory reveals a trend of a dialectical understanding of its nature: there were debates about memory as collective or individual, as reflection of the past or construction of the present, and about the connection or opposition

¹⁶ See Yukiko Koga, "The Double Inheritance: The Afterlife of Colonial Modernity in the Cities of Former 'Manchuria'" PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008; Yukiko Koga, *Inheritance of Loss: China, Japan, and the Political Economy of Redemption after Empire*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

¹⁷ For literature review of memory studies in earlier times, see Raphael Samuel, *Theaters of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* Vol.1 (London: Verso, 1994), vii. Moreover, Li Li's book has a thorough literature review of memory studies. Li Li, *Memory, Fluid Identity, and the Politics of Remembering: the Representations of the Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 2-7.

between memory and history. By figuring out the limit of such a dialectical understanding of memory, this dissertation examines *les lieux de mémoire* of Harbin as *overlapping territories* in terms of time, space, individuality and sociality. It proposes breaking the dialectical understanding of memory by foregrounding the approach of thirding-as-Othering, in order to interrogate the liminality of memory.

In his erudite work *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) highlights the importance of social contexts in shaping memory. He argues that “it is in society that people normally acquire memories. It is also in society that people recall, recognize, and localize their memories.”¹⁸ In contrast, Henri Bergson (1859-1941) thought of memory as a purely subjective phenomenon,¹⁹ grounded in the particularities of personal experience.²⁰ David Gross criticizes Halbwachs for his overstatement of social memory, “as if the memories of any particular individual were nothing more than an extension of social memory.”²¹ Andreas Huyssen argues that Halbwachs’s sociological approach to memory is not adequate to come to “grasp the current dynamic of media and temporality, memory, lived time, and forgetting.”²² On the other hand, Jeffrey Olick’s notions of mnemonic products and practices provide an

¹⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

¹⁹ Lawrence D. Kritzman, “In Remembrance of Things French,” in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, by Pierre Nora. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xi.

²⁰ David Middleton and Steven D. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting* (London: Sage, 2005), 7.

²¹ David Gross, *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2000), 84.

²² Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

alternative approach to eschew the opposition between collective memory and individual memory. According to Olick,

Mnemonic products include stories, rituals, books, statues, speeches, images, et cetera, and mnemonic practices incorporate recall, representation, celebration, renunciation, disavowal, and many others. Mnemonic practices are always simultaneously individual and social. Mnemonic products gain their reality only by being used, interpreted, and reproduced or changed. To focus on collective memory as a variety of products and practices is thus to reframe the antagonism between individualist and collectivist approaches to memory more productively as a matter of moments in a dynamic process.²³

Astrid Erll's notion of cultural memory is also helpful to reassess the relationship between collective memory and individual memory. She defines cultural memory as an umbrella term that comprises "social memory," "material or media memory," and "mental or cognitive memory."²⁴ All three aspects are interconnected and mutually influenced; they are practiced both individually and collectively.

Susannah Radstone pinpoints the difference in understanding memory between modern and late modern times. She argues that "memory's late modern associations with fantasy, subjectivity, invention, the present, representation and fabrication appear to outweigh its modern associations with history, community, tradition, the past, reflection and authenticity."²⁵ Memory is now understood as actively *produced*.²⁶ According to Radstone, "equivocations and liminality" are the main features of contemporary research on memory. Memory work occupies the liminal space

²³ Jeffrey Olick, "From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practice and Products," *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara Young (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 158; also see Li Li, *Memory, Fluid Identity, and the Politics of Remembering*, 7.

²⁴ Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young, eds. *Cultural Memory Studies* (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 4.

²⁵ Susannah Radstone, *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7. Emphasis original.

“between forgetting and transformation,” “between identity and its transformation or ‘re-membering’.”²⁷ In this sense, memory entails more reproduction than reflection. The transformation of remembering into “re-membering” involves power control and resistance. It is the construction, if not manipulation, of “re-membering” by those in power that endows collective memory with a political bent, and offers chances for collective memory to become an arena of power and ideological contest.

In regard to the relationship between history and memory, Halbwachs conceives of history as abstract, totalizing, and “dead,” and of memory as particular, meaningful, and “lived.”²⁸ Similarly, Nora suggests that history and memory are opposed to each other, as the former is mediated, and the latter experienced.²⁹ History considers the past to be past—something unrelated to the present. Only memory keeps the past alive.³⁰ Erll proposes to dissolve the opposition between history and memory in favor of a notion of different “modes of remembering” in culture, considering that the past is not given, but continually re-constructed and re-presented.³¹ How to remember is as important as what to remember. Walter Benjamin addresses the question of “how” by highlighting memory as an affective experience. He argues that “Memory is not an instrument that we use to explore the static past. Instead, it is a theater of the past, a dynamic medium of experience imbued with drama and feeling, and invigorated by

²⁷ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁸ Erll, Nünning, and Young, *Cultural Memory Studies*, 6.

²⁹ Marc Andre Matten, ed., *Places of Memory in Modern China: History, Politics, and Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 2-3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Erll, Nünning, and Young, *Cultural Memory Studies*, 7.

the inherently human capacity for narrative creation.”³² In this sense, memory and history are not in a dialectical opposition between subject and object, the dynamic and the static, the alive and the dead. They are in constant interaction and mutual construction.

Les Lieux de m émoire is a seven-volume work edited by the French historian Pierre Nora. The contributors articulated a nationalist concern over the rapid disappearance of French national memory and proposed a pluralist understanding of memory.³³ In the *Grand Robert Dictionary*, *lieu de m émoire* means “a significant unit, either material or ideal, which the will of people or the effect of time have turned into a symbolic element of a given community.”³⁴ *Les lieux de m émoire* do not have to be physical places; they could be historical figures, monuments and buildings, literary and artistic objects, emblems, commemorations and symbols.³⁵ *Les lieu de m émoire* are expected to meet two conditions: they should be symbols and they should show a will to remember. For instance, “An archive is a material site that becomes a *lieu de m émoire* only if imagination invests it with a symbolic aura; a textbook, will, or veteran’s group is a purely functional object that becomes a *lieu de m émoire* only when it becomes part of a ritual.”³⁶ A will to remember is

³² Yiwei Chen, “Reconstructing the Reality: Unwanted Memory in the Courtroom,” in *Memory and Representation: Constructed Truths and Competing Realities*, ed. Dena Elisabeth Eber and Arthur G. Neal (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 87; also see Steven Jay Lynn and David G. Payne, “Memory as the Theater of the Past: the Psychology of False Memories,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 6, no.3 (1997): 55.

³³ Li Li, *Memory, Fluid Identity, and the Politics of Remembering*, 5.

³⁴ Peter Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory in Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de m émoire*,” in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 41.

³⁵ Lawrence D. Kritzman, “In Remembrance of Things French,” x.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

indispensable, for “without an intent to remember, *lieux de mémoire* would be *lieux d’histoire*.”³⁷

Nora insists that the significance of places of memory lies in “the presence of the past within the present”³⁸ or that of memory itself as “the administration of the past in the present.”³⁹ Nora’s approach is characterized less by an interest in “‘what actually happened’ than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents.”⁴⁰ “A history is neither a resurrection nor a reconstruction...but a ‘rememoration,’ history of the second degree.”⁴¹ Raphael Samuel criticizes Nora’s approach as an expression of a coercive national memory of France.⁴² Gérard Namer defends Nora by claiming that “the French national memory conveyed by *Les Lieux de mémoire* does not imply homogeneity or coercion, but openness to new configurations and combinations of coexisting memories.”⁴³ *Les lieux de mémoire* embody contradictory features of totality and fragmentation in representing national and regional memories.

According to Jan Assmann, communicative memory and cultural memory are two important components of collective memory.⁴⁴ Communicative memory is

³⁷ Ibid., 15.

³⁸ Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving,” 42; Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” *Representations* 26, (Spring 1989):20; Pierre Nora, “Entre mémoire et histoire. La Problématique des lieux,” *Les Lieux de mémoire*, I. *La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), XXXVII.

³⁹ Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving,” 42; Pierre Nora, “Comment écrire l’histoire de France?” *Les Lieux de mémoire*, III. *Les France* 1 (Paris, Gallimard, 1993), 25. Nora’s concept here is similar to Assmann’s “mnemohistory.”

⁴⁰ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, XXIV.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving,” 39; Raphael Samuel, *Theaters of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary British Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 11.

⁴³ Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving,” 40; Gérard Namer, *Mémoire et société* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1987), 26.

⁴⁴ Irmgard Schwegler, “chuangshang lishi yu jiti jiyi—zuowei jiaoliuxing jiyi he wenhua jiyide wenxue, (Traumatic history and collective memory – communicative and cultural memory in literature),”

characterized by “its proximity to everyday life, thematic instability, disorganization,...lasting no more than four generations.”⁴⁵ In contrast, cultural memory is “a fixed point, referring to fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance).”⁴⁶ Assmann calls these means of constructing cultural memory “figures of memory.”⁴⁷ Although cultural memory is a fixed point, “every contemporary context relates to it differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation.”⁴⁸ Assmann suggests that “cultural memory exists in two modes: first, in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct act as a total horizon; and second, in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving its own relevance.”⁴⁹

Regarding Nora and Assmann’s fundamental concepts, I attach importance to *les lieux de mémoire* as a symbol and a will to remember. Among the major questions to be examined are “whose will to remember (or forget) what, and why?” and “who endows the place of memory with what symbolic meaning?” The *lieu de mémoire* used in this dissertation, is a hybrid and liminal space, “compounded of the temporal

Tsinghua Journal of Chinese Literature 13 (June 2015): 288; also see Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, no.65 (Spring - Summer 1995): 132.

⁴⁵ Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 126-128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

and the eternal, the collective and the individual,”⁵⁰ “neither simply sentimental nor ethnological,” creating “the possibility for intervention,” transformation and “re-membrance.”⁵¹ By examining different places of memory, including architecture, literature, film, and television drama, I aim to address how tangible, written, and visual memories perform, individually and collectively, fragmentally yet consistently, in defining “the imagined community” of Harbin.⁵²

I explore how *les lieux de m émoire* evoke heterogeneous memories within “the all-encompassing (though elusive) banner of” Harbiness,⁵³ and how it redefines a stereotypical hypothesis of a homogeneous Chineseness. As Xudong Zhang argues, “It remains an unchallenged habit – both inside and outside China – to view everything in the PRC through the imagined totality of the government and its official politics and rhetoric.”⁵⁴ It is important to problematize this habit and unravel the complexity of Chineseness. Among the scholarship that has addressed this issue is that of Lin Chun, Rey Chow, and Yingjin Zhang. In *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, Lin Chun dispels the illusions that “The labels ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ signify static, uniform entities.” Instead, he examines the “unevenness, fragmentation, and diversities” of China.⁵⁵ Rey Chow points out the inadequacy of “the act of pluralizing,” and “the poststructuralist theoretical move of splitting and multiplying a

⁵⁰ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 15.

⁵¹ Radstone, *Memory and Methodology*, 15.

⁵² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

⁵³ Carrier, “Places, Politics and the Archiving,” 37; Li, *Memory, Fluid Identity, and the Politics of Remembering*, 5.

⁵⁴ Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 27.

⁵⁵ Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 16.

monolithic identity from within.”⁵⁶ Yingjin Zhang, in his examination of Chinese national cinema, proposes examining “the ‘national’ as historically constructed, circulated, and contested.”⁵⁷ By adopting Zhang’s and others’ approaches, this dissertation examines the memories of Harbin in relation to China in a historical process of evolution. This method also trumps the criticism that Ann Rigney made against Nora’s notion of *lieu de m émoire*. Rigney argues that *le lieu de m émoire* is rigid and static; she stresses the shift from “memory sites as such to the cultural dynamics in which they function.”⁵⁸ By adopting a chronological approach, this dissertation reveals the memory sites of Harbin in a process of (re)construction, continuation, and transformation.

Secondly, this dissertation applies Assmann’s notion of cultural memory existing in the mode of actuality. His approach of contextualizing memory inspires me to explore not memory *per se*, but how and why particular memory is provoked or erased. Examining the historical, political, and cultural contexts, in which the places of memory come into being, opens the way to understanding how these places relate to the creation of Harbin’s collective identity; and, further, to revealing the various power relations and ideological significations that contribute to the construction of the

⁵⁶ Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 4; Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *Boundary 2* 25, no.3 (1998): 24.

⁵⁷ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 5.

⁵⁸ Mihaela Irimia, Dragoş Manea, and Andreea Paris, *Literature and Cultural Memory* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 100; Ann Rigney, “The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between monumentality and morphing,” *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 345.

space, memory, and identity of Harbin.⁵⁹

The Theoretical Framework of Space

In this dissertation, the notion of space is based on Henri Lefebvre's concept of social space, especially its two layers of connotations. Firstly, social space encompasses both physical (the perceived) and mental (the conceived) space. It is both real and imagined. Secondly, social space is a social production and a network of social relations.

According to Lefebvre, "The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical*-nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols, and utopias."⁶⁰ According to Soja, "Social space takes on two different qualities. It serves both as a separable field, distinguishable from physical and mental space, *and/also* as an approximation for an all-encompassing mode of spatial thinking."⁶¹

Lefebvre opens the way to a trialectics of spatiality, insisting that each mode of thinking about space — the physical, the mental, the social — be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical.

⁵⁹ Matten's edited book adopts Nora's *lies lieux de mémoire* as the theoretical approach to examine the relationship between geographical places and collective identity in China. See Matten, *Places of Memory in Modern China*.

⁶⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 11-12; Soja, *Thirdspace*, 62. Emphasis original.

⁶¹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 62.

No one mode of spatial thinking is inherently privileged or better than the others as long as each remains open to the re-combination and simultaneities of the 'real-and-imagined.'⁶² Based on Lefebvre's argument, Soja suggests *thirthing-as-Othering* as an alternative perspective, to extend the understanding of the traditional dualism between material and mental space. Soja proposes the concept of "Thirdspace," which is analogous to Lefebvre's "social space," to emphasize thirthing as a means of a postmodern thinking of space.

Lefebvre's social space and Soja's Thirdspace correspond to James Donald's notion of city, as conceptual and personal, as both a state of mind and thingness.⁶³ Donald's notion of city "is an imaginary space created and animated as much by the urban representation to be found in novels, films, and images as by any actual urban places." According to Donald, "We never experience the city unmediated. The city we experience – the city as state of mind – is always already symbolized and metaphorised."⁶⁴

Many scholars deem space as a dynamic process rather than a static being. Lefebvre defines space as a social production composed of social relations. For Lefebvre, lived space is a symbolic space; it is vitally filled with politics and ideology, with capitalism, racism, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection.⁶⁵ De Certeau defines space as composed of intersections of mobile elements; space is a

⁶² Ibid., 62, 64, 65.

⁶³ Ibid., x, 8.

⁶⁴ James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 17.

⁶⁵ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 68.

practiced place; there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences.⁶⁶

Benjamin pays attention to the uniqueness and multiplicity of individual buildings and persons and makes it possible to conceptualize the city, not as a single monolithic space but as many places, constructed through use and experience.⁶⁷ Doreen Massey deems space as “constructed out of social relations.” She extends this argument by saying that “since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification.”⁶⁸

By adopting Massey’s, Lefebvre’s, and others’ arguments, this dissertation focuses not on the things in space but *the social production of space as a process*. I examine the powers, meanings, ideologies, and symbolism embodied in the social relations that engage in producing the social space of Harbin. Meanwhile, the interconnection between the real and the imagined (specifically, in architecture, literature, film, and television drama) provides a platform to examine Harbin, neither merely as a geographical place, nor only as a representation or figment of the imagination, but as both. Harbin in this dissertation is liminal, thirding, and at the edge of spatial and temporal overlapping territories.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117-118. In contrast, de Certeau defines place as “the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence.” Place implies stability, whereas space does not. “The street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.”

⁶⁷ Deborah Stevenson, *Cities and Urban Cultures* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), 66.

⁶⁸ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.

⁶⁹ Edward Said uses this term to emphasize that the culture of the US was actually formed by two parts: the literature of the colonized and that of the colonizer. Yue Meng uses this term to refer to the overlapping territories in Shanghai between the Qing Empire and Western Imperialism, and between

Methodological Framework: Translation, Intertextuality, and Articulation

I compare the city of Harbin to a “text,” a site of translations from the colonial and cosmopolitan Harbin to the postcolonial and post-socialist one. I also compare Harbin to a site of “intertextuality” among different art forms. Notions such as text, intertextuality, and translation are utilized metaphorically, instead of referring only to literary texts.⁷⁰ This way, I “read” the textures and textuality of landscapes, cities, façades,⁷¹ as well as films, television dramas, and literature. Textuality, in Roland Barthes’ sense, is “the manifestation of open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and erasure that transgresses all closure.”⁷² To decipher the ambivalent and multifaceted meanings of Harbin as a text, I focus on examining “the text’s social articulation,”⁷³ the diverse discourses and practices that confront and interact with each other in the production of meaning, while bearing in mind the umbrella notion of Harbiness. According to Stuart Hall, this approach aims to

two or more types of histories. I use this term to refer to the temporally overlapping territories of Harbin between the colonial past and postcolonial present and, spatially, between the real and the imagined Harbin. See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxv; Yue Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, xii, 150; Samuel, Raphael. *Theaters of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary British Culture*. London and New York: Verso, 1994.

⁷⁰ See Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

⁷¹ Karl Schlögel, “History Takes Place – Problems of a Topographically Sensitive Historiography.” Paper presented at the seminar “Why People like to live in Cities,” (The Hague: November 2009), 6.

⁷² Johnson, “Writing,” 229. Barthes suggests that “work” and “text” are two different ways of viewing the written word. Unlike work, a text is an open, infinite process that is both meaning-generating and meaning-subverting.

⁷³ Lawrence Grossberg, “History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 157.

“conceptualize the specificity of different practices (analytically distinguished, abstracted out), without losing its grip on the ensemble which they constitute.”⁷⁴ Moreover, Hall emphasizes the importance of a “reading of those linkages [among discourses] and how they articulate, at specific times and places, interests, subjectivities, and social forces.”⁷⁵ Hall’s method of articulation refers to mapping unity in difference and contextual analysis. By adopting Hall’s approach, in this dissertation I explore the connections between the architectural, literary, and cinematic narratives of the city’s pasts *and* the various factors involved in the social production of memorial space and spatial memory in Harbin.

By adopting Barthes’ concepts of dissection and articulation, I organize my analysis in two simultaneous steps: de-composing (dissection) and re-composing (articulation). By de-composing, I mean the dissection of the practices, perceptions, and discourses involved in each case of my selected seven *lieux de m émoire*, in order to reveal the power relations, ideological apparatus, social and economic mechanisms underlying these phenomena. By re-composing, I aim to reveal a totality that encompasses the seven dissections, and to unveil or produce new meanings of the text named “Harbin,” which otherwise could have been ignored. In this way, I suggest a

⁷⁴ Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 122; Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” *Media, Culture and Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 69.

⁷⁵ Radstone, “Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory,” in *The Politics of Cultural Memory*, ed. Lucy Burke, Simon Faulkner and Jim Aulich (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 27; John Trimbur, “Articulation Theory and the Problem of Determination: A Reading of *Lives on the Boundary*,” *Journal of Advanced Composition* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 33-50.

rethinking of the collective memory of Harbin, not as created from the “top” by officials only, but as from “within” by the diverse practices of the people (*including* officials, among many others).

Inspired by Bakhtin, Richard Bauman takes intertextuality to be discursive practice and the relational orientation of a text to other texts.⁷⁶ By adopting Bauman’s approach, I read Harbin as a site of intertextuality, amongst the spatial practices of architecture, literature, films and television dramas. These various practices demonstrate, individually and collectively, the social signification of the city’s pasts in the present. How does each spatial practice tell a similar or different story of Harbin? And how do they interact and work together to enrich the city with meanings of ambivalence and contradiction, open to multiple interpretations? By delineating and comparing the production, interpretation and consumption of the “city text” from these cultural forms, I aim to map a Harbin that exists as an in-between space, haunted by layers of real and imagined past.

Moreover, these diverse places of memories are sites of power contestation, such as those between the government and the public, or between those who are nostalgic for a cosmopolitan Harbin and those who emphasize the Chinese tradition of the city. To decipher the underlying power contention behind the memory phenomena in Harbin, I adopt Robert Young’s notion of translation, which refers to a practice of

⁷⁶ Richard Bauman, *A World of Others’ Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 4; Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 162.

empowerment and disempowerment. According to Young, “Translation involves questions of power relations, and of forms of domination.”⁷⁷ Young suggests that a colony begins as a translation, a copy of an original that is located elsewhere on the map. The colonized person is in the condition of being a translated man or woman.⁷⁸ In Young’s analysis of the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, Fanon’s action of provoking the agency of patients in the hospital at Blida-Joinville is interpreted as “translating the patients from passive, victimized objects into subjects who began to recognize that they were in charge of their own destiny.”⁷⁹

In this dissertation I examine the translation of Russian, Japanese, and Chinese cultural legacies into the contemporary city of Harbin. Histories and memories matter as semiotic reservoirs for cultural translation and resignification. The empowerment and disempowerment of translation are implied in spatial practices concerning architectural preservation and demolition, and in cultural productions devoted to the city’s history. The mistranslation and misinterpretation denote resistance to a colonial history and the efforts to reinvent a Chinese history for Harbin. The “assimilative cultural sympathy” with Russian legacies, and the “agonistic cultural clash”⁸⁰ with the Japanese legacies, suggest political and ideological rationale behind cultural

⁷⁷ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 140.

Other sources that investigate the relationship between (post)colonialism, translation and power include Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds. *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999; Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. California: University of California Press, 1992; Jooyeon Rhee, “Between Words and Images: Gender and Cultural Productions in Colonial Korea.” PhD Diss., York University, 2011.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁰ Homi Bhabha, “Culture’s In-Between,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 54.

practices. Memories become an arena for the contemporary Harbiners to negotiate the divergent ideologies and economic and cultural concerns. The past exists in the present as a phantom, a contention of power, and a symbolic capital to serve the political and economic interests of those in power. The city itself is a palimpsest, a text which has experienced and is experiencing a process of being “rewritten,” translated, and resignified. In this process the text of Harbin becomes “a discursively organized system of power relations.”⁸¹

A Historical Introduction of Harbin

As James Carter argues, “Harbin’s past is not the province of any single nation or people. It is a city that grew up on the geographical and temporal frontier. It was located in space on the edge of Chinese, Russian, and Japanese spheres of influence. It began existence near the violent ends of imperial Russia and China and the equally violent beginning of expansionist Japan.”⁸² Due to its special location and birth at a turbulent historical time, the city was doomed to be contested amongst the three nations and many other Western powers.⁸³ Located on the outlying border beyond the

⁸¹ Rhee, “Between Words and Images,” 19.

⁸² James Carter, “Touring Harbin’s Past,” in *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, ed. Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 150.

⁸³ According to Clausen and Thøgersen, the local history of Harbin is composed of four histories: the Russian, the Western-dominated international, the Chinese, and the Japanese. Harbin was a City of Many Masters. Søren Clausen and Stig Thøgersen, *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), XII. One example of the international history of Harbin is the Inter-Allied Technical Board (IATB) from 1919 to 1922 as a trustee of the CER. “IATB would comprise representatives of China, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the U.S. The IATB was a check on Japanese or Soviet intentions toward the railroad, and prevented the Chinese from making radical changes” in their efforts to restore the administration of the CER. Carter, *Creating*

reach of Han culture, the dominant culture of ancient China, the Harbin area was sparsely inhabited by ethnic minorities of Nüzhen from the twelfth century A.D., and later by the Manchu from the seventeenth century A.D.⁸⁴ Harbin did not grow into a city until the end of the nineteenth century, when the Russians came to build the Chinese Eastern Railway (the CER). Despite the nominal railway concession, the major part of Harbin became a *de facto* colony of Russian empire from 1900 to 1917, before the October Revolution broke out.⁸⁵ In 1907, Harbin became an open port. Around 200,000 immigrants from forty countries inhabited Harbin.⁸⁶ Eighteen countries established consulates in Harbin.⁸⁷ From 1907 to 1917, although Russia was still the leading power, its authority was diluted by the international powers and

a Chinese Harbin, 98, 105; “Memo on the Creation of the Inter-Allied Technical Board.” n.d., Vostrotin Papers, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University, Box 5; Hanson, “Political Conditions in North Manchuria,” 25.

⁸⁴ Zhiliang Li, Fang Shi, and Ling Gao. *Harbin shilüe* (Brief history of Harbin) (Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 1994), 18.

⁸⁵ The colonial control was started by the Russian army who stayed in Harbin and Manchuria from 1900 to 1904, i.e. during and after Boxer Rebellion. In 1908, the Russians established the Harbin Municipal Committee and put it in charge of the administration of the CER zone. The majority of the committee members were Russians; three Chinese representatives were added, due to the Chinese and American resistance to this municipal committee. But the three Chinese representatives “did not have vote and they were assigned with a Russian supervisor.” Blaine R. Chiasson. *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 34. Control was established not only over Chinese in the concession; other foreigners also fell under the CER’s jurisdiction. See Chiasson, 73.

⁸⁶ Harbin Municipal Archive, *Haerbin dang’an jiyi 1726-1949* (Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 2014), ii.

⁸⁷ The Western powers, “above all the United States struggled to contain the territorial ambitions of Russia and Japan. The U.S had in fact advocated the opening of Harbin among other Chinese cities as early as 1903.” Based on the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peking in December 1905, China officially declared the opening of Harbin along with fifteen other Manchurian cities and towns on January 7, 1907. Clausen and Thøgersen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, 35; Michael H. Hunt, *Frontier Defense and the Open Door: Manchuria in Chinese-American Relations, 1895-1911* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 70.

Chinese authorities.⁸⁸ From 1917 to 1931, China gradually restored its sovereignty. However, substantial stretches of time during this period were still characterized by a co-administration between China and Russia (1920-1924), and between China and the Soviet Union (1924-1931). From 1932 to 1945, Harbin was under the Japanese colonial control, in the puppet state of Manchukuo.⁸⁹ In January, 1946, after the Soviet invasion of Manchukuo and the fall of Japan in World War II, the Chinese government restored its sovereignty over Harbin.⁹⁰

According to Mary Louise Pratt, “contact zone” refers to “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples, geographically and historically separated, come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”⁹¹ Harbin was a contact zone, in which Russia, China, and Japan “experienced periods of passing dominance,”⁹² and in which the international communities also played an important role in containing either of the three from growing into a dominant power. Harbin was an arena among many nations, and it belonged to, in Wolff’s term, “competitive colonialism.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Isabella Jackson addresses a similar case in Shanghai, where the de facto colonial administration by the British was situated in the International Concession. Jackson calls the case in Shanghai “transnational colonialism.” See Isabella Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China’s Global City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

⁸⁹ The complexity of the notion of Manchukuo and the different understandings of Manchukuo amongst scholars in China, Japan, and Western Countries will be addressed later.

⁹⁰ Harbin Gazetteer Compiling Committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu* (Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 2000), 48.

⁹¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

⁹² Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 2.

⁹³ Ibid.

The competition between Russia and Japan over the occupation of Manchuria grew intense in the late nineteenth century. Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 rewarded it with the concession of the Liaodong Peninsula in Northeast China. The Triple Intervention initiated by Russia, together with Germany and France, forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China. The assistance of Russia in defending this territory against Japanese encroachment put Russia in a position to be perceived as China's ally. In May, 1896, Tsar Nicolas II's coronation took place. Li Hongzhang, the Qing China's chief diplomat, was formally invited to attend the ceremony. During the ceremony, the Russian Finance Minister Sergei Iulevich Witte proposed to borrow land in Northeast China to build the CER. On June 3, 1896, after a series of negotiations between Witte and Li Hongzhang and a 3,000,000-ruble bribe for Li Hongzhang himself, a Russo-Chinese treaty of alliance was signed by Li, Witte, and the Russian Foreign Minister, Prince A.B. Lobanov-Rostovskii.⁹⁴ With this treaty, Russia and China allied in defense of each other, against further Japanese intervention; China allowed Russia to build its railway through the areas of Heilongjiang and Jilin to reach Vladivostok.

On September 8, 1896, a contract was signed in Berlin between the Chinese government and the Russo-Chinese Bank, stipulating that "the CER Company, organized by the Russo-Chinese Bank, would construct and operate the railway."⁹⁵ The Qing government defined the CER as a commercial enterprise run cooperatively by Russia and China, and insisted on China's sovereignty over the CER zone.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

However, in reality, the CER was run predominantly by the Russians. “Funding, much of it from France and Belgium, was channeled through the Russo-Chinese Bank, but the controlling shares rested securely in the vaults of the Russian Finance Ministry.”⁹⁶ The co-administration of the CER was a “polite myth rarely discussed by either side” before 1917.⁹⁷ The CER zone was a *de facto* “country within another county.”⁹⁸

On April 23, 1898 a group of seventy-seven people, under the leadership of engineer A. I. Shidlovskii, arrived at Harbin to prepare housing and raw materials for the CER construction. They settled in *Tianjia shaoguo* (the Tian’s Distillery), an abandoned liquor factory in Old Harbin, in the present Xiangfang district. The construction and operation of the CER attracted increasing numbers of Russians and other nationalities, together with Chinese immigrants from the South, because of its employment opportunities. Harbin gradually developed into a modern city with

⁹⁶ Ibid. Also see Rosemary K. I. Quedsted, *The Russo-Chinese Bank: a Multinational Financial Base of Tsarism in China*. Birmingham: Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1977; Boris Aleksandrovich Romanov, *Rossia v Manchzhurii 1892-1906 (Russia in Manchuria 1892-1906)*, trans. Susan Mann Jones. Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards, Inc. 1952. The Qing government invested five million *liang* (250,000 kilogram) silver in the establishment of the Russo-Chinese Bank. Harbin Municipal Archive, *Haerbin dangan jiyi*, 29. The treaty has Russian, Chinese, and French versions. “French was used as the language of final arbitration. In article 6 of the treaty, the Russian and French texts note that “The company will have the absolute and exclusive right of administration of its lands (in the railway zone).” In contrast, in the Chinese text, the word employed for administration is *jingli*. *Jingli* is understood as the administration of a business, unlike the word *guanli*, which means political administration. Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 22-23; also see Heilongjiang Provincial Archive, “Zhongdong tielu hetong (The Chinese Eastern Railway contract),” *Zhongdong tielu* (the Chinese Eastern Railway) (Harbin: Heilongjiang Provincial Archive, 1986), 18; John MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919* Vol.1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), 75. The debates over whether the CER was a commercial or political entity, whether Harbin was a colony or not, started from this controversial treaty.

⁹⁷ Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 36.

⁹⁸ Li, Shi, and Gao, *Harbin shilüe* (Brief history of Harbin), 65.

dominant Russian culture. The opening of Harbin in 1907 further facilitated the internationalization of the city.

Harbin was mainly composed of two parts, the CER zone and Fu-jiadian. The CER zone was mainly inhabited by the Russians and the international communities, and was under the administration of the CER before 1917. Dmitrii Khorvat, the Chief General of the CER since 1903, was practically the dictator of the railway zone.⁹⁹ Fu-jiadian was the adjoining Chinese settlement under Chinese administration. On Oct. 31, 1905, the Qing China government ratified the decision to establish in Fu-jiadian the Binjiang circuit (*Binjiang guandao*), which was co-terminous with Binjiang County.¹⁰⁰ A magistrate and a military commander were assigned by the Qing government to manage Binjiang County and communicate with the Russian officials in the railway zone.¹⁰¹ To some extent, Harbin was a dual city.¹⁰² The racial segregation between the CER zone and Fu-jiadian is revealed in the following statistics.

⁹⁹ This is quoted from a report from the U.S. consul. It presented Harbin as virtually a Russian colony in China. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 30; George Hanson, "Political Conditions in North Manchuria," 13-14. United States National Archives -RG59, File 893.00/5420.

¹⁰⁰ Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 22.

¹⁰¹ Fu-jiadian was not a legitimate part of Harbin until 1932, when the Manchukuo government combined Fu-jiadian and other adjacent places into the Great Harbin Area. Fu-jiadian had been officially affiliated with Binjiang County. Olga Bakich compared Harbin to the railway zone, a Russian city. Olga Bakich, "Harbin, a Russian City in China before 1917," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28, no. 2 (1986):136.

¹⁰² James Carter, "A Tale of Two Temples: Nation, Region, and Religious Architecture in Harbin, 1928-1998," in *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space, and Identity*, ed. Thomas Lahusen. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no.1 (Winter 2000): 98-99; Linda Cooke Johnson compares Shanghai to a dual city. *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port, 1074-1858*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

The CER zone was mainly composed of New Town, Pristan and Old Harbin.¹⁰³ In 1913, only one-half of 1% of New Town's real estate was in Chinese hands.¹⁰⁴ Chinese held 14% of the private land and accounted for 43% of the population in Pristan.¹⁰⁵ Before the First World War, there were 1,790 Chinese businesses and thirty-four foreign businesses in Fu-jiadian.¹⁰⁶ According to Dr. Jerzy Sie-Grabowski of Warsaw University, born and raised in Harbin with a Chinese father and a Polish-Russian mother, many Russians who lived in the CER Zone never entered the Chinese district during their lifetime.¹⁰⁷

Many White Russians immigrated to Harbin after the October Revolution of 1917.¹⁰⁸ By 1929, the census listed 274,000 Chinese, 28,800 Soviet Russians, and 314,000 stateless Russians.¹⁰⁹ Japanese citizens constituted the third most important group in Harbin.¹¹⁰ In 1913, the statistician V.V. Soldatov described Harbin as “a composite Russian-Chinese population with a minor admixture of Japanese

¹⁰³ Old Harbin was the present Xiangfang district. It was where the Tian's Distillery was located, and the area where the Russians first settled when they arrived in 1898. However, it gradually deteriorated. Wolff notes that the population of Old Harbin declined 48% from 1903 to 1912. New Town, Pristan, and Fu-jiadian constituted the urban trinity of Harbin. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 94; Shuangping Jin, “Nangangqu zaoqi bufen jianzhu fengge suotan (Exploring the architectural styles of some buildings in Nangang district in the early stage),” *Nangang wenshi* (Nangang literature and art) I, (1989): 124; Stat.op., 55, 4; *spravochnaia knizhka Kharbina*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 92; Stat.op., 8, 55, 57; *Chumnye epidemii*, table 5b. FO371, carton 845, f.214, 227.

¹⁰⁵ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Fang Shi, Ling Gao, and Shuang Liu, *Haerbin eqiaoshi* (The history of Russian immigrants in Harbin) (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 2003), 601.

¹⁰⁷ See Thomas Lahusen's film *Manchurian Sleepwalkers* (2017).

¹⁰⁸ According to Clausen and Thogersen (1995), after the 1917 Russian revolution, Harbin remained dominated by its White Russian community (1917-1926), while at the same time experiencing growing Soviet influence in the years following the 1924 Sino-Soviet treaty concerning the CER.

The Making of a Chinese City, 23.

¹⁰⁹ Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 154; also see Hong Mao, “Haerbin zhong-e renmin shenghuo zhuangkuang (Harbin's Russian and Chinese citizens' living situation),” *Shishi Monthly* 1, no.2 (1929): 116.

¹¹⁰ Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 29.

subjects,”¹¹¹ but the Japanese participation in major trading and industrial companies gave them disproportionate influence.¹¹² After the victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, Japanese business grew quickly in Harbin. “In 1907, both Mitsubishi and Matsui opened branches in Harbin. Dozens of smaller companies established themselves as well. Japanese schools and cultural organizations also were founded, as were a half-dozen Japanese newspapers.”¹¹³ In 1923, there were more than 500 Japanese businesses; imports from Japan accounted for 60% of the total import in Harbin; the exports by the Japanese businessmen in Harbin accounted for almost 30% of the total export. From 1924 to 1931, the total investment by the Japanese in Harbin was over 60 million yen.¹¹⁴

This dissertation focuses on the Russian, Chinese, and Japanese communities in Harbin. However, this by no means suggests that Harbin was only composed of three nationalities. Indeed, the city was inhabited by around forty nationalities during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Jews and Poles were among the major ethnic minorities. In 1909, Harbin’s 5,032 Jews constituted 11.5% of the Russians.¹¹⁵ The Polish residents took up 5.9%.¹¹⁶ Besides, Wolff noted the presence of many

¹¹¹ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 91; Stat.op., 63-64. Brothel keeping remained one of the most prominent Japanese activities. There were still alleged to be 1,254 Japanese women and only 529 males in the town in 1913. Quested, “*Matey*” *Imperialist*, 283.

¹¹² See Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 29; Fogel, “Integrating into Chinese Society,” 45-69.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Harbin Gazetteer Compiling Committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu* (Harbin city gazetteer overview), 200.

¹¹⁵ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 96-7; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Irkutsk”; Sta. op., 51, 63. According to Li, *Fareast Newspaper* reported that on January 17, 1919 there were 7500 Jews in Harbin. Shuxiao Li, *Harebin lishi biannian 1896-1949* (Harbin: Harbin Press, 1986), 82.

¹¹⁶ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 97; According to Jerzy Czajewski, “Poles were up to one-third of the staff of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) from 1903 to 1925.” He delineates a strong sense of Polish

other Russian Imperial “nationalities,” such as Georgians, Latvians, and Ukrainians.¹¹⁷ “Armenians, Germans, Russian kulaks, and even gypsies all rush into the mad hurly-burly [of Harbin].”¹¹⁸ Twenty eight countries competed for interests in Harbin.¹¹⁹ In 1921, the taxation of the Russians in the CER zone accounted for 61.7%, the Chinese 18.5%, the Japanese 14.5%, the British 2.1%, the French 1.2%, the American 0.7%, the Danish 0.4%, and the German 0.4%.¹²⁰ According to Hong Mao, in 1929, there were 3,007 Japanese, 1,350 Koreans, 1,500 Jews, 590 Poles, 160 English, 150 French and Germans, 150 Latin Americans, 60 Italians, 50 Americans, 56 Turks, 50 Czechs, 30 Swedes, 30 Dutch, 9 Greeks, 8 Indians, 6 Hungarians, and 3 Belgians.¹²¹

nationalism in Harbin. For example, Polish aviators Boleslaw Orlinski and Leonard Kubiak were enthusiastically greeted by the local Poles when they landed at Harbin in 1926. After Orlinski returned to Poland, he often said, “Where you look for the spirit of Poland, go to Harbin to feel it.” Jerzy Czajewski, “Gospoda Polska Association in Harbin 1907-1947,” *Foreigners in China Magazine*, no.2 (April 2018): 90. Moreover, Thomas Lahusen argues that the Poles were both “colonizers” of the Manchurians and “the colonized” by the Russian Empire. See Thomas Lahusen, “Colonized Colonizers: Poles in Manchuria,” in *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, ed. Mariko Tamanoi (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2005): 150-164.

¹¹⁷ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 220; TsGADV 577: I, 2, 126.

¹¹⁸ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 115; also see V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Na voinu*. Moscow, 1904.

¹¹⁹ Harbin Gazetteer Compiling Committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu*, 199.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 256; Mao, “Haerbin zhong-e renmin,” 115-123. According to Mariko Asano Tamanoi, in the census of the city of Harbin, the “Manchukuoans” refers to “Han Chinese and Manchus,” and is only one among 32 categories; the population census for the city of Harbin, compiled by the Manchukuoan Police Department in 1933, includes the following categories: the Manchukuoans, Taiwanese, Soviets, Soviets without nationalities, Japanese from Japan proper, Japanese Koreans, British, American, German, French, Italian, Polish, Jew, Greek, Dutch, Turk, Austrian, Hungarian, Dane, Latvian, Portuguese, Czech, Armenian, Belgian, Serb, Swede, Latin, Romanian, Swiss, Indian, and other. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, “Knowledge, Power, and Racial Classifications: The ‘Japanese’ in ‘Manchuria,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no.2 (2000): 255-6; also see Dai Harubin An Nai-Sha, ed., *Dai Harubin An’nai*. Harbin: Dai Harubin An’nai-sha, 1933; Thomas Lahusen, “Remembering China, Imagining Israel: the Memory of Difference,” in *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space, and Identity*, ed. Thomas Lahusen. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no.1 (Winter 2000): 254.

During the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks tried to overthrow Khorvat's leadership of the CER. The fight between the Bolsheviks and the White Russians made the public order in the CER zone chaotic. The Chinese officials used this as an opportunity to restore Chinese sovereignty. The Bolshevik soldiers were expelled out of Harbin on December 26, 1917. This was the first time the Chinese came into power in the CER Zone. The Tsarist military power over the CER came to an end.¹²² After this incident, Khorvat was still the General of the CER, but the CER gradually reverted into an economic enterprise, rather than a camouflaged institute for colonial administration.

On October 31, 1920, the Beijing government established the Special District of the Three Eastern Provinces (*dongsansheng tebiequ*), to replace the Russian-controlled CER concession. The local warlord Zhang Zuolin was the *de facto* leader of the Special District. From 1920 to 1924, the Special District "left most of the Russian institutions intact but inserted a new Chinese supervisory class."¹²³ In 1924, according to the Beijing Treaty and the Shenyang Treaty, the CER began to be co-administrated by China and the Soviet Union.¹²⁴ In 1926, the Beijing government dismissed the Russian-controlled Harbin municipality. On July 10, 1929, Zhang Xueliang (the effective ruler of Northeast China, after the assassination of his father

¹²² Quested, "*Matey*" *Imperialist*, 325.

¹²³ Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 44.

¹²⁴ Beijing Treaty refers to the Agreement on the General Principles for the Settlement of Questions between the Republic of China and the USSR; its official name is *zhong-e jiejie xuanan dagang xieding* (The Sino-Russian outline agreement for resolving outstanding cases). Shenyang Treaty refers to the Agreement between the Government of the Autonomous Three Eastern Provinces of the Republic of China and the Government of the USSR; its official name is *feng-e xieding* (The agreement between Fengtian and Russia). See Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 110-2.

Zhang Zuolin by the Japanese in June, 1928) began to restore Chinese sovereignty of the CER by force, but failed during the military confrontation with the Soviet army. As a result, the two sides signed the Khabarovsk Protocol, on December 22, 1929, and restored the co-administration by China and the Soviet Union. This only lasted until the Japanese intervention in 1932. From 1932 to 1945, the Imperial Japanese Army occupied Harbin under the puppet regime of Manchukuo. In February, 1935, the Soviets sold the CER to the Japanese, at the price of 140 million yen. “Several thousand Russians [and other nationalities] left Manchuria in the late 1920s and the 1930s. By the end of the 1930s, the Russian population of Harbin had dropped to around 30,000.”¹²⁵ After the Soviet Union’s entry into Manchuria in 1945, the Soviet soldiers took over Harbin on September 25, 1945. Shortly after that Harbin’s administration was temporarily taken over by the Kuomintang (KMT). On April 28, 1946, the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) took over control of the city.

The memories of the cosmopolitan Harbin and its former colonizers were obscured during the thirty-plus years from 1945 to 1978, when China was engaged, first, in the Civil War between the KMT and the CCP (1945-49) and then, in the industrial development and various economic vicissitudes of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960).¹²⁶ The political movements reached their peak during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). China did not enter a new stage of economic or social

¹²⁵ Victor Zatspine, “Divided loyalties: Russian emigrés in Japanese occupied Manchuria,” *History and Anthropology* 28, no.4 (2017): 472; Mara Moustafine, “Russians from China: Migrations and Identity,” *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 5, no.2 (2013): 149.

¹²⁶ The USSR helped China’s initial industrial development from 1950-56. This was followed by the Russo-China split between 1956 and 1966.

development until the implementation of the policy of Reform and Opening Up, initiated on the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978. In that particular context, the contested memories of the Russian, Japanese, and cosmopolitan legacies were gradually aroused. At the same time, the Chinese history under the CCP leadership had been emphasized. Consequently, the foreign past of Harbin has become a matter of contestation. As Wolff states, “Even now, when Harbin has become almost exclusively Chinese, the writing of local history still provokes discomfort about the city’s true identity. An emphasis on Harbin’s unique characteristics will always draw a line between Beijing’s unifying version of national history and the Northeast’s historical identity as a zone of contact with non-Chinese.”¹²⁷

At present, the city and provincial archives, storing important materials about the international past, are still very difficult to access and are entirely closed to foreigners. The foreign past still seems to be a threat haunting the city. At the same time, the local government, Harbin architects, and city planners now use this foreign past to promote Harbin’s profile and attract investment and tourism from home and abroad. A number of old Russian/other foreign buildings have been restored (while many have been destroyed). More importantly, the overall architectural style of the new high rises adopts “Russian” stylistic features, for example, topping with kitschy cupolas, like Russian churches. The revival of the Russianized/Europeanized architecture incurs nostalgia from some locals for the once-cosmopolitan Harbin. This

¹²⁷ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 177.

nostalgia occurs alongside many others' criticism of the commercial and fake nature of these buildings. Meanwhile, in eloquent contrast, the former site of Unit 731 – a biological and chemical warfare research unit of the Imperial Japanese army in Harbin during World War II – has been preserved and promoted since the 1980s, after being abandoned for three decades. The designation of increasing numbers of patriotic education sites coexists with the promotion of the city's European and Russian cultural legacies. Since the 2000s, the local tendency of writing the city into the history of China shifted subtly to excavate the international history of Harbin.¹²⁸ The local sense of pride changes slightly from being a Chinese city to being an exotic non-Chinese one.

The Contribution and Scope of This Dissertation

Contribution

This dissertation adopts interdisciplinary, inter-medial, and comparative approaches, which are inspired by the ways that Ackbar Abbas structures *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Abbas examines the cultural transition of Hong Kong around 1997 through the lenses of architecture, film, literature, photography, and “postculture.”¹²⁹ Hong Kong and Harbin have certain similarities in terms of colonial history, and both remain postcolonial cultural contact zones. However, a major difference is the political system the two cities are affiliated with. The

¹²⁸ Writing a Chinese history of Harbin was also resistant to the criticism that Northeast China “lacks history” by historians who tend to ignore the history of non-Han ethnic groups. See Clausen and Thogersen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, 10.

¹²⁹ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 141.

(post)communist political apparatus of the PRC definitely plays an important role in shaping the ways in which the once cosmopolitan and colonial Harbin is reconstructed. It would not likely find its parallel in Hong Kong or other parts of the world. This is part of the rationale I provide in dissecting the political power at work behind the cultural (re)production of Harbin. My political perspective in examining the cultural memories of a non-traditional Chinese city in the PRC contributes to a multifarious understanding of the social production and imagination of China as a whole.

Apart from its political significance, this dissertation contributes to urban cultural studies in terms of approach. In fact, there are very few interdisciplinary studies of the cultural memories of cities in China. Chen Pingyuan and Wang Dewei edited a series of books named *Dushi xiangxiang he wenhua jiyi* (The urban imagination and cultural memories of cities), including that of Beijing, Xi'an, Kaifeng, and Hong Kong. Three of the four are traditional Chinese cities.¹³⁰ By focusing on Harbin, a non-traditional Chinese city by most standards, this dissertation contributes to the redefinition of "Chineseness" in terms of heterogeneity.

Shanghai is a city similar to Harbin, at least in terms of its international and

¹³⁰ Pingyuan Chen and Dewei Wang, *Beijing: dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* (The urban imagination and cultural memories of Beijing). Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005; Pingyuan Chen, Dewei Wang, and Xuechao Chen, *Xi'an: dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* (The urban imagination and cultural memories of Xi'an). Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009; Pingyuan Chen, Dewei Wang, and Aihe Guan, *Kaifeng: dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* (The urban imagination and cultural memories of Kaifeng). Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2013; Pingyuan Chen, Guoqiu Chen, and Dewei Wang, *Hong Kong: dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* (The urban imagination and cultural memories of Hong Kong). Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2015.

colonial histories. However, unlike my focus on *contemporary* cultural memories of Harbin, recent scholarship on Shanghai (such as the erudite works, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, by Leo Ou-fan Lee, and *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, by Yue Meng) has mainly focused on its cultural memories in the first half of the twentieth century.

The major Chinese scholarship engaged in Harbin studies includes *Yige chengshi de jiyi yu mengxiang: Haerbin bainian guoying* (The memories and dreams of a city: Harbin in the past 100 years) (2012), by Zhenwei Fan; *Haerbin jianzhu yishu* (Harbin architectural art) (1990), by Huaisheng Chang; *Haerbin dianying ditu* (The filmic map of Harbin) (2008), by Zhiyuan Shen; and *Heilongjiang wenxue tongshi* (The general history of Heilongjiang literature) (2002), by Fang Peng. However, these works are introductory in nature and focus on the city's past. This dissertation fills the living temporal gap by exploring the impact of historical legacies on the current city, and by researching the social, political, and economic significances of Harbin's contested history to the present. More specifically, this dissertation addresses the problem of a lack of critical interdisciplinary studies of the memories and imagination of Harbin. By filling such gap in scholarship, this dissertation enriches the approach to city studies in and of postsocialist China. It facilitates a "thirding" understanding of cities, one that is simultaneously lived, represented, and abstracted, and that is both traditional and international, both politically bounded and resistant.

The Scope of This Dissertation

The city of Harbin explored in this dissertation refers to both a physical space and a concept city, both lived and imagined. Although the lived and the imagined are intertwined with each other and need to be understood as bound together in a whole, I dissect, respectively, the real and the imagined before arriving at a comprehensive understanding of the city as both. Therefore, I focus on architecture in the first four chapters, to examine the lived space of Harbin, and on literature, film, and television drama in the last three chapters, to examine the city as imagined. The first two chapters focus on the memorialization of Russian architecture in Harbin, while Chapter Three and Four focus on that of Chinese and Japanese architecture, respectively.

Chapter One maps how architecture becomes a site of ideological contention, where nationalism appropriates and reshapes exoticism, a term with cultural, political and economic connotations. This mapping is done by tracing the historical evolution of St. Nicholas Cathedral and the debates over its reconstruction. Interpretations of the city's cultural roots diverge between those who support the reinvigoration of the city's Russian and cosmopolitan past and others who try to reinscribe the Chinese cultural tradition in Harbin. St. Nicholas Cathedral is a site of nostalgia for some, but of amnesia for many others. In the context of the booming tourist economy, the debates over the reconstruction of this cathedral imply not only a conflict over its political symbolism, but also a trend towards the commercialization of materialized memories. Memories are recalled by affective, political, as well as economic catalysts.

Chapter Two continues the discussion of former Russian landmarks of Harbin as

lieu de m'histoire. However, unlike Chapter One's delineation of the diverse public discourses involved in remembering and forgetting St. Nicholas Cathedral, this chapter focuses on the official perception of the colonial Russian legacies of the city, by examining the resurrection of the old Harbin Railway Station in 2018. The new station imitates the demolished art-nouveau Harbin Station, built by the Russians in 1904.¹³¹ As a city arising from railway construction, this railway station symbolizes the city's heart,¹³² from which its life started. The imitation of the old station in this new construction signifies local officials' efforts to revitalize the city's Russian root, an incorporation of the colonial past that develops a unique and non-Chinese cultural identity. The city practices, what Svetlana Boym calls, "restorative nostalgia,"¹³³ a nostalgia for the past for the sake of the future. The local, national, and global contexts in which this reconstruction is located are examined in order to answer the following questions: Why have local officials decided to transplant a European and Russian "heart" in this city in current decades? In contrast, why was the 1904 station demolished in the Mao era in 1959? I argue that the resurrection of Harbin Station 1904, in 2018, conveys a *circular* trajectory of development where the future encounters the past. The overlapping temporal space, symbolized by the resemblance between Harbin Station 1904 and Harbin Station 2018, also suggests a circular *decolonization of the decolonized* in terms of politics.¹³⁴ This chapter also examines

¹³¹ Hereafter, I use "Harbin Station 1904" to refer to the old station and "Harbin Station 2018" to the new one.

¹³² Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 19.

¹³³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

¹³⁴ "The decolonized" refers to the demolition of Harbin Station 1904 in 1959, because it might relate to the dominated Maoist ideology of that time. Therefore, I call the contemporary reconstruction of Harbin Station 1904 (the decolonized) "a decolonization of the decolonized."

the paramount political symbolism of the Harbin Railway Station. It was a perennial site of power: from the Manchukuo Monument, the Soviet Red Army Monument, to the recent Ahn Jung-geun Martyr Memorial Museum on the site of this railway station, Harbin Station implies the political agenda of those times as well as of today.

Chapter Three shifts focus from the “European” Harbin to the Chinese Baroque neighborhood in the Daowai District, the former Fu-jiadian. First, this chapter provides a cultural explanation of what I would like to call “the identity crisis of Daowai.” After 2007, many Chinese-Baroque buildings in Daowai were reconstructed; businesses and tourists replaced the original residents, who were forced to move into apartment buildings in the suburbs, in a classic gentrification pattern, despite this being called “preservation” by the local government. The relocation of these old residents and the commercialization of these old buildings suggest the pervasiveness of capitalist economics and the economic marginalizing of the poor by the rich, causing the disappearance of Old Daowai. I call this process *the recolonization of the colonized*, in economic terms. In other words, it is my contention that the segregation of the Chinese in Fu-jiadian from the Russian and international communities in the CER zone during the colonial era morphed into the displacement of the poor at present. Secondly, this chapter examines the diverse forms of resistance to the disappearance of Old Daowai, including verbal criticism of the gentrification and commemoration of Old Daowai in cultural productions.

The cultural identity of Harbin is characterized by the ambivalence between an ambiguous exoticism and an ever-resurging nationalism. While the city’s promotion

of exoticism is discussed in the previous chapters, Chapter Four examines the spatial practices of constructing nationalism in Harbin. It delineates the consistency between the political narrative that diminishes the Japanese contribution to the city, and remains inactive in collecting records of former Japanese migrants' lives in Harbin, and local officials' emphasis on Japanese war crimes. Through such a selective memorialization of the Japanese, the local officials homogenize and politicize cultural memories of the city in relation to Japan. Historical text, heritage building and museum are the lenses through which I examine the representation of the Japanese in Harbin. (Re)writing history, protecting heritage buildings, and establishing museums are not simply for the sake of preserving memory, "but about governing the social and cultural meanings represented and transmitted at these sites."¹³⁵ These places of memory are prone to be loaded with ideological connotations and speak the political language of nationalism.

Chapter Five examines the local literary canonical figure, Xiao Hong (1911-1942), as a *lieu de m'moire* for Harbin. Xiao Hong held a paradoxical perception of the colonial Harbin in the 1930s: she embraced the consumption of Russian food and dress, but she was averse to Russian colonizers; she felt empathy towards the plight of the common people in Manchukuo under the Japanese occupation, but, at the same time, she was indifferent to politics. Xiao Hong's paradox speaks to many contemporary Harbiners, who are caught between promoting the city's exotic heritage

¹³⁵ Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino, eds., *The Heritage of War* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4; Laurajane Smith, *Use of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2; Chris Ryan, ed., *Battlefield Tourism: History, Place and Interpretation* (Oxford and Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), 1.

and complying with the Central State's call for a nationalist construction of the city. The examination of Xiao Hong's paradox reveals a historical continuity for the cultural and political struggles of the city's identity over time. Moreover, an individual female writer's memory of Harbin contributes to the heterogeneous perception and imagination of Harbin, diversifying official representations of the city.

While Chapter Five focuses on Xiao Hong's writing of Harbin in the 1930s, and the memorialization of Xiao Hong by her colleagues and friends from the 1940s to the early 1980s, Chapter Six finalizes the chronological study of Xiao Hong, as a *lieu de m'énmoire* for Harbin, by focusing on the commemoration of Xiao Hong in the past four decades. I focus on her *lieu de m'énmoire* in three senses: in physical space, in filmic space, and in official discourses. I argue that Xiao Hong is missed as much as she is branded. The commemoration of Xiao Hong suggests, in Boym's terms, both the past-oriented "reflective nostalgia," as well as the future-oriented "restorative nostalgia."¹³⁶ I further complement the analysis of the two different kinds of nostalgia for Xiao Hong with Michel Hockx's concept of "force field,"¹³⁷ according to which Xiao Hong and her works possess literary, economic, and political capital and individual agents pull these various capitals into different directions. By adopting Hockx's concept, I explore the intertwined political, economic, and cultural significance of Xiao Hong for Harbin, and the ways in which Xiao Hong's literary memory of Harbin develops into a lens, through which many other writers, civilians,

¹³⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*.

¹³⁷ Michel Hockx, *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999.

local officials, and film audiences imagine the city. This constitutes an intertextual network between Xiao Hong's Harbin of the 1930s and that of contemporary writers. Xiao Hong manifests herself as a literary ghost who resurrects in present Harbin.

Chapter Seven examines the representations of the Japanese and the Russians in Harbin in Chinese historical dramas and films. A differentiated Other of Russia and Japan is portrayed on the screen of China. In my analysis, I provide evidence of a trend, in Chinese historical dramas, of representing friendly Russians and demonic Japanese. However, I argue that in Harbin there are heterogeneous portrayals of the Japanese and the Russians. Cinematic production is a site where rebellion against homogeneous Chinese nationalism is practiced, where a European and Russian cityscape is promoted, under the camouflage of telling a patriotic story about fighting against the Japanese colonizers.

Chapter One. St. Nicholas Cathedral: A Site of Ideological Contestation

The Social Context of Russian Architecture Revitalization in Harbin

In the early 1980s, Harbin was officially defined as a city of heavy industry.¹ There seemed to be an oblivion, if not repression, of its international history. However, since the 1990s, there has been a trend to revive the Russian and European cultural relics in Harbin.² The local officials make efforts to restore the bygone glory of the city as “Oriental Paris and Oriental Moscow” that characterized the city in the first half of the twentieth century. Many projects have been carried out in recent years to reconstruct a Europeanized and Russianized Harbin, such as the restoration of Gogol Street into a Russian street in 2003,³ and the systematic restoration of architectural façades into classical European style since 2005.⁴ The predominant colour of the city was designed to be creamy yellow. According to Vice Mayor Qu Lei, “Moscow is glowing

¹ For example, in the forward of *Haerbin fengguang* (Harbin scenery), it is stated that “Harbin used to be a collecting and distribution center for goods and materials in Northeast China. Since the founding of the PRC, the city has undergone earth-shaking changes and has become a new type of comprehensive city with mechanical and electrical industries.” The foreign cultural heritage of the city was not mentioned at all. Harbin Municipal Government, *Haerbin fengguang* (Harbin scenery). Harbin: Harbin Municipal Government, 1983.

² See Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 227.

³ In the early decades of the twentieth century, many Russians inhabited Gogol Street. This street was named after the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. It was changed into “Fendou Road” in 1958, to commemorate Chairman Mao’s inscription “fendou” (strive) during his visit to Harbin in 1950. The street reverted to its former name in 2003, when the municipal government of Harbin initiated the project to reconstruct Gogol Street into a Russian Street. Among the many efforts are the expansion of Alexeyev Church Square and the renovation of the Russian Riverside Park, a leisure and entertaining site of consumption. Moreover, street cars operated in Harbin from 1927 to 1987. During the renovation project in 2003, a street car was exhibited on Gogol Street. It resembles a monument in terms of function, putting the repressed history onto display.

⁴ According to the Updated Plan for Renovating the Architectural Façades in Harbin in 2005, five historical districts, six neighborhoods, eight axes of streets, and ten scenic views were on the lists of façade renovation.

in yellow. We wanted to paint Harbin in the image of Moscow.”⁵ The architect, Zhang Lufeng, compares the façade project to plastic surgery, which transformed Harbin into a masked city.⁶ Despite new outlooks on the Moscow model, the internal layouts and residents of these buildings, the Chinese, remain the same.⁷ According to Daping Liu and Guoyou Li, in the new Qunli District in suburban Harbin, numerous buildings have been constructed since the 2000s. The initial plan was to construct modern architecture. However, under the guidance of local government, many buildings ended up being new classical in style.⁸

Indeed, such embracing of Western classical architecture is not unique to Harbin.

⁵ Dan Ben-Canaan, “Engineering History - The Reconstruction of the Harbin Old Synagogue: A Case Study in Interpreting and Engineering a Past.” Presentation in the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, 29 May, 2016.

⁶ Lufeng Zhang, “Jiamian chengshi: dui haerbin jianzhu limian gaizaore de leng sikao (Masked City: Reflections on Façade Renovation in Harbin).” In *Paper Collections of Sino-Russian Forum for Urban Design and Architectural Style*, 2006.

⁷ The fact that the majority of the residents in “Oriental Moscow” are Chinese has similarity with the analogy that the American-born Chinese is like banana - it seems to be “yellow,” but is actually “white” inside. To some extent, the case of Harbin is the opposite - a “white” outside (European/Russian style façade) with a “yellow inside” (the Chinese inhabitants).

⁸ Daping Liu and Guoyou Li, “Cong shishang weimei zouxiang diyu lixing: yanjinzhongde xinshiji haerbin jianzhu chuanguo qishi (From fashion and aesthetics to geographical rationality: the inspiration from architectural designs in the new century),” *Jianzhu xuebao* (Journal of architectural studies), 7(2010): 14-19. Zhang, Liu, and Li’s critiques of the “fake” Russian and classical buildings involves the questioning of translatability, *i.e.*, whether the Russian/European buildings are “translatable” into Harbin. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe compares translation to transplantation of a living plant from its original land to a new pond of water, because Goethe understands the barriers of languages, cultures, and literatures, encountered in the process of translation, as fluid and blurred. According to Goethe, the plant of literature would not demise in transplantation; instead, the foreign culture’s contribution plays an important role in retaining the vitality of literature that is in translation and circulation. In this sense, through “translation” (and the inevitable transformation), Harbin, as an art work, is endowed with vitality, which ensures the dynamic evolution of its Russian and European cultural tradition, although such tradition is a combination of reality and imagination. Aza deh Yamini-Hamedani, “Foundational Metaphors: Goethe’s World Literature; Posnett’s Comparative Literature,” in *Foundational Texts of World Literature*, ed. Dominique Jullien (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 156.

It was “already a national phenomenon by the mid-1990s.”⁹ Sizheng Fan suggests that this phenomenon was mainly provoked by developers rather than architects. The former use European classical style as a “sales strategy” in the housing market. However, this choice also conveys a hierarchical perception of architectural aesthetics. Choosing the Western style implies good cultural taste. “The historical consensus of Western superiority still casts its shadow on the glorious presentation of the imported architecture.”¹⁰

But this choice, obviously, begs the question: When “foreign” buildings and “foreign” cities are mushrooming throughout China, what is the specific, defining feature of the return to “Russianness” in Harbin? The answer is that it is, at least partly, the establishment of local particularism and the attractiveness to tourists and investors. In Jeffrey Cody’s words, this is “recreation by re-creation, and making history pay.”¹¹ However, restoring or recreating Russian façades for the city is not only for tourism. As Svetlana Boym suggests, “The façade is a mere projection of utopian dreams and ideological visions.”¹² Constructing a real or fake Oriental Moscow embodies political signification and ideological contention that require unfolding. Its political signification is manifested even in the renovation of the Jewish legacies in Harbin. The municipal government of Harbin initiated the project of renovating the old synagogue and its surrounding area on Tongjiang Street in 2012.

⁹ K. Sizheng Fan, “Culture for Sale: Western Classical Architecture in China’s Recent Building Boom,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 63, no. 1 (October 2009): 65-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹ Jeffrey W. Cody, “Making History (Pay) in Shanghai: Architectural Dialogues about Space, Place, and Face,” in *Shanghai: Architecture and Urbanism for Modern China*, ed. Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 139.

¹² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 134.

The façade of this synagogue is painted into yellow colour. The building is used as a music hall. The local officials “name the whole site after a Russian musician named Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov, who never set foot on Harbin’s soil and had nothing to do with Judaism.”¹³ According to the local scholar, Dan Ben-Canaan, “the name ‘Glazunov’ suited the political agenda very well, because in 2013 the Chinese decided to ‘warm up’ their strategic relations with Russia.”¹⁴ The municipal government values this heritage more as a symbolic capital, and architectural “input” is transformed into political “output.”¹⁵

Indeed, Harbin has established close relationship and economic cooperation with Israel, due to the fact that Harbin used to be a haven for many Jews, mainly from Russia, who escaped totalitarian regimes and looked for business opportunities. The renovation of Jewish heritage in Harbin is part of the pragmatic plan to put history onto the stage and perform the play of economy. To put it rather prosaically, the renovation and renaming of this synagogue is like killing two birds with one stone: its renaming after a Russian musician fits the political agenda to reconstruct Harbin into Oriental Moscow, while the preservation of the synagogue promotes the connection with Israel, the former Jewish residents of Harbin, and their offspring across the world.

Against such national and local context, this chapter takes St. Nicholas Cathedral

¹³ Dan, “Engineering History,” 25-26.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29. Indeed, the building adjacent to the synagogue, which is part of the renovation project, used to be Glazunov Musical School from 1925 to 1936. It was established by a Jewish couple.

¹⁵ Michael Minkenberg, ed., *Power and Architecture: the Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 3; also see Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell Jr. *Comparative Politics: System, Process, and Policy*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1978.

as an opportunity to explore how architecture becomes a site of political contestation and how cultural hegemony by local officials manifests itself through spatial narratives, and is challenged by affect, particularly nostalgia, from the public.

St. Nicholas Cathedral, a Russian Eastern Orthodox Church, was located in the central area of Harbin. Its construction was completed by December 18, 1900.¹⁶ It was then demolished by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution in August 1966. St. Nicholas Cathedral has been a site of contention from the beginning of its construction until the present. The original plan to build this cathedral was resisted by local Chinese officials because of the geomantic importance of the location. According to traditional *feng shui* (geomancy), it is where the “dragon vein” of Qing China was located. Manchuria, the present Northeast China, used to be “the land of the rising dragon” in Qing China, and Straight Street in Harbin was regarded as the “dragon keel.” St. Nicholas Church was located right in the middle of this dragon keel, dividing it into Eastern Straight Street and Western Straight Street. From this perspective, St. Nicholas Cathedral symbolizes a violation and foreign invasion of the Qing tradition. The contestation of this cathedral was further illustrated by the insurgents’ prevention of its construction during the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), the demolition of this building during the Cultural Revolution, and, finally, by various public debates over its reconstruction, and the emerging models of this church in recent years. Interestingly, nationalists’ resistance to this cathedral contrasts greatly with many local residents’ embracement of it. The latter is partly due to the unique mode of Russian colonialism in Harbin. Wolff (1999) defines it as “liberal colonialism;” Quested (1982) defines Russia as a “matey” imperialist in Manchuria.

¹⁶ Guojun Wu, *Jianzhu yishu changlang* (The corridor of architectural art) (Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 2008), 81.

However, there was a distinction between the political attitude of the Chinese authorities (as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter) and that of the local population, who could profit from their interactions with the Russians.¹⁷ Thus this ideologically ambiguous signifier of Russian culture has been both loved and hated by local officials and commoners.

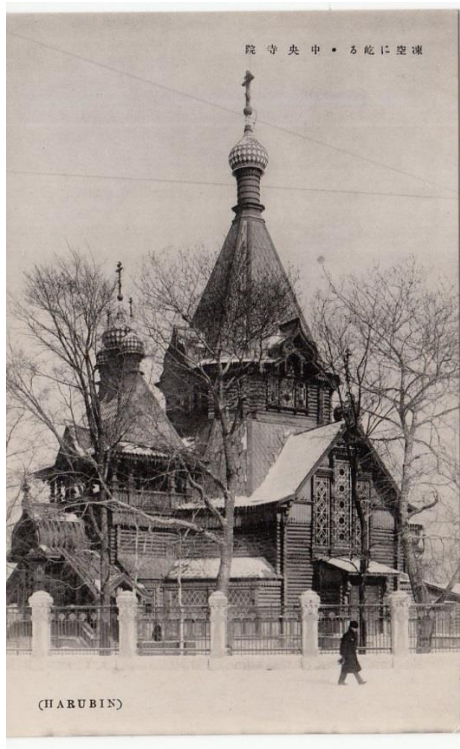


Figure 1. St. Nicholas Cathedral¹⁸

St. Nicholas Cathedral was central to the city not only in terms of geographical location and architectural style but also due to Harbiners' intimacy with it. St. Nicholas Cathedral was culturally appropriated by the local Chinese, who nicknamed it "Lama Tower."¹⁹ Indeed, old Harbiners were more familiar with the name of Lama Tower than with its formal name. According to Yang Shuhua, an old Harbiner who

¹⁷ For the Chinese officials' struggles with the CER for the sovereignty of Harbin, see Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*.

¹⁸ All figures with no indication of origin are from internet.

¹⁹ Ao Wang, *Xiaoshide jianzhu: sheng nigula dajiaotang chuanqi* (The disappeared architecture: the legend of St. Nicholas Cathedral). Beijing: China Central Television production, 2010.

witnessed the demolition of this cathedral in 1966, “It was only then that I got to know that its name was St. Virgin Mary Church. I had only known it as Lama Tower.”²⁰ When St. Nicolas Cathedral was destroyed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, many local Chinese citizens felt sorrow and helplessness for its loss. Tingkui He, the official who was in charge of demolishing the onion-shaped dome of the cathedral, expressed his lament for destroying this building.²¹ Photographers Wan Jiyao from *Heilongjiang Daily* and Song Hui from *Heilongjiang Picture Newspaper* took photos that caught the last moment of St. Nicholas Cathedral. After being “hidden deep in Wan Jiyao’s closet for more than thirty years,”²² the reappearance of these photos in the local *New Evening News* in 2000 evoked Harbiners’ nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral.

The Spatial Politics of the Afterlife of St. Nicholas Cathedral

The destruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral was followed by the construction of a “Working Class Cultural Revolution Memorial.” “This political memorial, on which Lin Biao inscribed ‘Always keep in mind,’ was hurriedly destroyed overnight and replaced by a small hill covered with trees and flowers, upon Zhou Enlai’s visit to Harbin in 1972.”²³ In 1997, the site of the cathedral was revamped

²⁰ Apparently, even then, Yang still did not know the correct official name of this cathedral.

²¹ Wang, *Xiaoshide jianzhu*.

²² Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 71.

²³ *Ibid.*, 77. Also see Fenghui Ji, “Chengshi guangchang (City Square),” *Heilongjiang Morning Newspaper*, May 8, 2002. Lin Biao was Mao’s designated successor since 1969. He died on September 13, 1971, when the plane he boarded crashed in Mongolia. The Chinese official explanation was that Lin and his family attempted to flee, following the coup against Mao. In China, Lin is designated a traitor.

into the Hongbo Underground Mall, covered by a glass octagonal-shape roof, with a gilded sculpture of a snow flake in its center, suggesting the official identification of Harbin as Ice City, promoting ice and snow tourism. The first impression is that the old Harbin as Oriental Moscow has been transformed into a modern city, characterized by its winter tourism,²⁴ and that the memory of the Russian Harbin is being gradually hidden by modern skyscrapers; however, there is more to it than that. The official name of this new building is the Sunshine Hall. Its positive signification contrasts with the negative nicknames given it by the public, such as “crystal coffin,” “glass grave,” “glass bulge,” “glass tent,” *et al.*²⁵ They signify the public’s lament for, and resistance to, the concealed memories of St. Nicholas Cathedral. The four stone buttresses that support the snow-flake sculpture hint at the four historical stages of Harbin since 1946, when the CCP restored the sovereignty over Harbin. The four stages refer to liberation, economic development, reform and opening up, and envisioning the future.²⁶ The Sunshine Hall suggests the official’s attempt to erase the spatial memory of the international Harbin of before 1946, and to inscribe Chinese history into the urban space. As Alexandra Staub argues, “Space is power. The exertion of power is embedded in

²⁴ For tourists, from home and abroad, the Ice Lantern Festival is one of the most famous name cards of Harbin.

²⁵ Hanke Si, “Haerbin: cengjing yuanqu de laojie (Harbin: the disappeared old streets),” August 10, 2012. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_53c032dd0102dxl0.html; also see Lishun Tan and Hongbin Yu, “Fandui fujian sheng nigula jiaotang de shida yuanyin (Ten reasons of resisting St. Nicholas Cathedral reconstruction),” *Life Newspaper*, September 5, 2005.

²⁶ Dandan de Xiangming, “Harbin St. Nicholas Cathedral,” January 19, 2012. <http://club.kdnet.net/dispbbs.asp?boardid=1&id=8058779>

the control of space.”²⁷ This building stands as a political statement on reclaiming the Chinese ownership of Harbin. The colonial and international Harbin before 1946 was spatially erased twice: first, by the Red Guards and, later, by the designer of the Sunshine Hall. The new landmark competes with the haunting phantom of St. Nicholas Cathedral, in that it speaks an architectural language of nationalism *versus* cosmopolitanism. However, to some extent this official concealment of St. Nicholas Cathedral fails in affective terms. Many Harbiners feel strongly nostalgic for St. Nicholas Cathedral. In Jie Yang’s words, “affect can direct people to act in ways that [c]hallenge power.”²⁸ Despite its physical disappearance in 1966, St. Nicholas Cathedral has never left the life of Harbiners. It has existed invisibly, so to speak, in the memory of Harbiners, in postcards and paintings, and in Harbiners’ discussions in everyday life. Naming the Sunshine Hall as “crystal coffin” metaphorically suggests the public’s nostalgia for the “death” of St. Nicholas Cathedral. To a certain extent, St. Nicholas Cathedral has never stopped being the center of Harbin even today, because its replacement, the “crystal coffin”, is a “dead” form. The nostalgic past, according to Linda Hutcheon, “is rarely the past as actually experienced; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire.”²⁹ Old Harbiners’ retelling of the story to their offspring transforms the

²⁷ Alexandra Staub, *Conflicted Identities: Housing and the Politics of Cultural Representation* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 3.

²⁸ Jie Yang, ed., *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2014), 17.

²⁹ Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue,” *Poligrafías* 3 (1998-2000): 20, January 19, 1998; also see Dan Ben-Canaan, “Nostalgia vs. Historical Reality.” This is an expanded version of a paper presented at the International Forum on the History

“death” of St. Nicholas Cathedral into “a sense of loss without firsthand experience,”³⁰ constituting a second-hand and twice-removed nostalgia.



Figure 2. The Sunshine Hall

The longing for the demolished St. Nicholas Cathedral has motivated people to make its physical body morph into various forms and retrieve the lost belonging. In December 2002, Hongbo Underground Mall invested more than 100,000 Yuan (roughly \$15,000) to build a wooden model of St. Nicholas Cathedral, one tenth of its original size. This replica was put inside of the “crystal coffin.” This way, the model’s function becomes ambiguous, because it may be interpreted either as a celebration of the resurrection of the old St. Nicholas Cathedral or as a “memorial marker”³¹ to remind people of its absence. Moreover, next to the Sunshine Hall is a plant sculpture, trimmed into the shape of St. Nicholas Cathedral. The underground wooden model and the plant are overshadowed by the Sunshine Hall,

and Culture of Harbin Jews. Harbin, June 17, 2006.

³⁰ Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 70.

³¹ Ibid., 76. Marilyn Ivy calls “a *memorial* marker, a monument to an absence, to a loss that must be perpetually recovered.” Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 95.

in terms of size, the bustling traffic of this area, and the hustling people, busy with shopping in the underground mall. To some extent, the model and plant are present absence or, in Abbas's words, "historical quotation" and decoration.³²

In July 2007, a replica of St. Nicholas Cathedral was constructed as part of a modern Russian theme park, called Volga Manor in Chenggaozi town in the suburb of Harbin. It was funded by the Harbin entrepreneur, Huang Zuxiang, and supervised by the Russian architect, Nikolai Petrovich Kradin, who brought the original blueprint of St. Nicholas Church from St. Petersburg. The replica of St. Nicholas Church is heatedly debated. While many Harbiners and tourists enjoy the revival of St. Nicholas Cathedral, regret and sorrow coexist, given that it is basically only a scenic site for tourist consumption. This old/new building barely contains any affective memory of the original St. Nicholas Cathedral. The replica's authenticity is questioned by the public.³³

I argue, though, that the replica is incomparable with the original. To be more precise, it is not necessary to compare the two. The replica is a product of the contemporary era rather than a lament for the bygone past. Nostalgia, the major motivation for Huang to build this replica is, to put this in Svetlana Boym's terms, restorative (prospective) rather than reflective (retrospective). In fact, Boym argues that nostalgia is not only "for the unrealized dreams of the past but also for visions of

³² Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 66.

³³ Chong Wan, "'Sheng nigula' chuanyue 43 nian 'fuhuo' le (St. Nicholas Cathedral resurrected after 43 years of its demolition)," *Heilongjiang Daily*, July 10, 2009.

http://epaper.hljnews.cn/web/hljrb/html/2009-07/10/content_412680.htm

the future.”³⁴ Dai Jinhua understands nostalgia as “fashion,” “a positive construction [to] ensure the meaning of modern ‘progress’.”³⁵ The replica of St. Nicholas Cathedral suggest Huang’s nostalgia for the old cathedral but, in essence, it signifies his envisioning of the future, especially when considering that this replica is located in a theme park. The replica presents a trajectory of development, adapting the cultural capital from the past in order to construct the future.



Figure 3. The Replica of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Volga Manor

This intertwinement of the past and the future is also implied in two other proposals to reconstruct St. Nicholas Cathedral. In September, 2010, a fiberglass, two-thirds sized model of St. Nicholas Cathedral was designed by the Planning and Design Academy in the Harbin Institute of Technology. In January, 2015, at the Harbin Political Consultative Conference (HPCC), Yu Kefei, a committee member of the HPCC conference, proposed a model made of “sound, light, and electricity.”³⁶

³⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XVI.

³⁵ Jinhua Dai, “Imagined Nostalgia,” in *Postmodernism and China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, trans. Judy T.H. Chen, 205-221. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 206-9.

³⁶ Xuenan Yang, “HPCC member proposed to restore St. Nicholas Cathedral,” *Life Newspaper*,

Neither of the two was put into the public space. The two plans denote a futuristic and postmodern representation of St. Nicholas cathedral, dressing history up in postmodern clothes. It signifies a transformed memory and inheritance of the past, embodying temporal layers of both the past, the present, and the future. According to Yukiko Koga, the various models and replicas of St. Nicholas Cathedral stand as a reminder, not of “the victim of the Cultural Revolution but as the embodiment of the glorious Old Harbin and Harbin’s future.”³⁷ This selective choice of the past involves forgetting the Cultural Revolution and the imaginary construction of a glorious, exotic past, and of an equally remote and ambiguous future.

Nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral

Why would some Harbiners have such deep attachment to this cathedral? Why is there the longevity of a “foreign” cultural signifier in Harbin? What exactly do people try to remember? What made this past so glorious? Before answering these questions, I must clarify that none of this suggests that all Harbiners are nostalgic for St. Nicholas Cathedral. According to the local painter Wang Wei, the artists of his generation, those born in the 1970s, have paradoxical feelings towards Harbin: they are nostalgic for the demolished old buildings, but look forward to a new city; people of his generation are not as nostalgic as the previous generations, but not as indifferent as the next.³⁸ Wang’s differentiation of the generational perceptions of

January 21, 2015.

³⁷ Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 77.

³⁸ Jing Wang, “Yihua zaomeng, baifu danqing hua cangsang Haerbin (Drawing dreams, hundreds of paintings tell the history of Harbin),” *Heilongjiang Radio and Television Newspaper*, April 21, 2018.

Old Harbin does not apply to all Harbiners. For example, a senior local citizen in his 80s described “the old hairy ones” (Russians) as demonic bullies of the Chinese, and stated that St. Nicholas Cathedral had nothing to do with his life. On the other hand, many of the volunteers engaged in heritage protection are youngsters. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that in recent years there has been an increasingly stronger nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral and the once-Europeanized Harbin.³⁹

Such conflicting views, or different “degrees” of longing, might suggest that, despite lingering on the past, nostalgia relates more to the present. Fredric Jameson asserts that “nostalgia is a form of ideological critique of commodity culture; it is not a yearning for the past but rather a ‘longing for the present’.”⁴⁰ Koga understands nostalgia for Old Harbin as “a displaced form of social criticism of contemporary Harbin.”⁴¹ Ming-Bao Yue goes further by arguing that nostalgia implies “longing for the unfulfilled dreams of a better future.”⁴² The strong nostalgia for the cosmopolitan Harbin suggests Harbiners’ criticism of social problems in the present and a craving for a better future. Many people do not believe that Harbin municipal officials are competent and sincere enough to reconstruct a St. Nicholas cathedral as good as the

³⁹ During “the Call for Public Opinions for Urban Construction” in 2015, 6247 suggestions were submitted. Among the eleven first-level award winners was a commoner, Li Yuzhi, who suggested to reconstruct St. Nicholas Cathedral. This might be a means of opinion-building by the local media, contributing to the city’s overall political agenda of reconstructing the Oriental Moscow. Nevertheless, it also implies the popularity of St. Nicholas Cathedral among the commoners. Jianping Yang, “‘Chongjian sheng nigula jiaotang’ huo renmin jianyi yidengjiang (The proposal to reconstruct St. Nicholas Cathedral won first-level award in Call for Public Opinions),” *Harbin New Evening Newspaper*, January 9, 2015, http://news.my399.com/local/content/2015-01/01/09/content_1417100.htm

⁴⁰ Ming-Bao Yue, “Nostalgia for the Future: Cultural Revolution Memory in Two Transnational Chinese Narratives,” *China Review* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 49; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 279-98.

⁴¹ Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 58.

⁴² Yue, “Nostalgia for the Future,” 50.

old one, because they have already seen a large amount of kitschy reconstruction of fake antiques. Corruption is another problem. Urban development projects that are initiated by local government are susceptible to being interpreted, by the public, as corrupt attempts at bolstering the prestige and reputation of certain officials.

Bureaucracy and failure to work for the people further discredit local officials.⁴³

Take the experience of a local architect, Hu Hong, as an example: Hu was born in 1951 of a Russian mother and a Chinese father. After living in Harbin for decades, Hu worked as an architect in Japan for more than ten years since 1988, and then went back to Harbin. Hu has been nostalgic for the demolished St. Nicholas Cathedral and averse to the Sunshine Hall, which he called “a glass bulge.”⁴⁴ Hu designed a modern sculpture in Baroque style made of steel and iron, and named it “*Nigula jiaotang de fuhuojie* (the Easter of Nicholas Cathedral).”⁴⁵ Over the years, he recommended this design to different officials in charge of urban planning and construction, yet no official took it into consideration. Nor did Hu receive respect. In his first visit to the Municipal Construction Committee, he was made to wait for two hours in the office of the staff, with whom he had made the appointment, the staff ignoring him. This contrasts with the respect and prestige he received as an architect in Japan. Hu felt humiliated and disappointed by the bureaucracy of these officials in Harbin, lamenting that Harbin is not an inclusive and international city anymore.⁴⁶ He wrote a

⁴³ According to Jeffrey Cody, the taxi driver he encountered in Shanghai understood the high rises as “symbols of China’s turning away from the people.” Cody, “Making History (Pay) in Shanghai,” 128.

⁴⁴ Yongde Zhang, “Yiwei Haerbin hunxue zuojia de youshang: cengjing canghai (A mixed-blood Harbin writer’s melancholy: the best Harbin was in the past),” February 20, 2018.

⁴⁵ This sculpture is composed of one onion dove of 38 meters high and four smaller ones, reminiscent of the demolished St. Nicholas Cathedral.

⁴⁶ Zhang, “Yiwei Haerbin hunxue zuojia de youshang,” February 20, 2018.

novel, *Haerbin de youshang (The melancholy of Harbin)* (2014), portraying Russian immigrants' life in Harbin from the 1920s to the 1960s. As implied by the title, Hu retreats, in the novel, to an imagined Old Harbin, in order to create a fictional utopia, in which he eschews the actual, hostile city. Hu's and other Harbiners' nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral and cosmopolitan Harbin constitutes, in Boym's term, a "defense mechanism,"⁴⁷ *i.e.*, a way of resisting the present social problems.

Moreover, longing for St. Nicholas Cathedral signifies local people's desire to construct a unique identity for Harbin, in order to protect themselves against the flattening and fragmenting effects of modernization and globalization. In Xudong Zhang and Ban Wang's words, nostalgia is a "sentimental response to global ideology" and "a resistance as well as alternative to the homogeneous narrative of globalization."⁴⁸ Nostalgia for the cosmopolitan Harbin facilitates the city to construct local particularism and "local internationalism."⁴⁹ That is to say, in order to be competitive in the present global world, Harbin constructs its particularism by evoking the cosmopolitan Harbin of the past. Such re-membering of Harbin's history contradicts the Chinese official discourse, which emphasizes the CCP's role in liberating and administrating Harbin. It confronts both globalization and nationalism, while at the same time carving a niche for Harbin in the national and global markets. Nostalgia is a product of the spreading market economy, as well as a means of

⁴⁷ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIV.

⁴⁸ Yue, "Nostalgia for the Future," 49; also see Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi's Literary Production in the 1990s." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8, no. 2 (2000): 354; Ban Wang, "Love at Last Sight: Nostalgia, Commodity, and Temporality in Wang Anyi's *Song of Unending Sorrow*." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10, no. 3 (2002): 670-71.

⁴⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XVIII.

resisting it.

Apart from the political and economic criticism embodied in the notion of nostalgia, this concept has affective and romantic layers of meaning. As pointed out by Boym, nostalgia is “a romance with one’s own fantasy.”⁵⁰ According to a local painter, WangWei, “What we are nostalgic for is not the old city itself, but ourselves in the old days and the city that witnessed our growth.”⁵¹ It is the inaccessibility to the past that motivates people to linger on it, imagining a collective myth of the irreversible past as a utopia. As situated in the affective locus of nostalgia, the past experiences have been endowed with an aura of romantic fantasy, embellishing the present routine life. As Boym states, it is hard to say “what exactly [people] yearn for – St. Elsewhere, another time, a better life.”⁵² It appears, though, that Harbiners evoke or create dreams of the past to “assuage the present,”⁵³ and navigate the future.

Nostalgia is only one side of the story. Political symbolism and ideological contention, embodied in this colonial building, exist alongside economic concerns. These are major reasons for the heated debate among local officials, professionals, and commoners over the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral on its original site.

Several realistic concerns make the construction of any model of St. Nicholas on its original site difficult. First, that area is the crowded center of Harbin; therefore, there is not enough space nearby to accommodate the cathedral model. There is also traffic pressure in this area. The reconstruction would also be a huge financial

⁵⁰ Ibid., XIII.

⁵¹ Wang, “Yihua zaomeng,” 2018.

⁵² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIV.

⁵³ Dai, “Imagined Nostalgia,” 207.

expense. Moreover, a local architect, Qu Chunxing, also questions the necessity of reconstructing a church, if it will not have the function of a church.⁵⁴ Further, the Sunshine Hall was designed by the wife of the former mayor of Harbin, Wang Guotao; officials presently in office might be concerned that the dismantling of the Sunshine Hall may shame Wang and his wife.

Alongside these practical concerns, I argue that another reason for the contestation lies in the fact that reconstructing a colonial building in the center of the city is likely to evoke its negative symbolic meaning. It is susceptible to the politicized interpretation of being a reminder of the humiliating history of having been colonized. The following is an illustration of the debates over the political and apolitical decoding of this church. In September, 2005, *Life Newspaper* reported a number of active feedbacks from the public about the cathedral restoration. It included ten reasons to support the restoration, and another ten to resist it. In the following, I examine the ideological assumptions behind the debates. I subdivide these debates into two themes: the contention between nationalism and exoticism, and that between Chinese tradition and Russian tradition.

According to John B. Thompson, language is an instrument of power; to study ideology is, in some part and in some way, to study language in the social world; it is to study the ways in which the multifarious uses of language intersect with power, nourishing it, sustaining it, enacting it.⁵⁵ The diverse discourses concerning the

⁵⁴ Tan and Yu, “Fandui fujian sheng nigula jiaotang (Ten reasons of resisting St. Nicholas Cathedral reconstruction),” *Life Newspaper*, September 5, 2005.

⁵⁵ John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 2.

reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral offer a lens through which I both examine how language sustains or challenges power and reveal the ideological tensions behind these discourses. Moreover, examining the social context, from which these discourses derive, is helpful for understanding a social production of ideology and the ways by which architecture becomes an agonistic site for power.

Nationalism versus Exoticism

Among the ten reasons put forward in supporting the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral on its site was an argument that the restoration can illustrate the inclusive nature of Harbin, in a way similar to the preservation and branding of the colonial buildings near the Bund in Shanghai. According to Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren, the Shanghai officials understand these historical buildings on the Bund as “represent[ing] the Shanghai characteristic cultural background combining Oriental and Western culture into a perfect match, while dismissing the idea that this cultural background is ‘semi-colonial and semi-feudal’.”⁵⁶ The pragmatic and depoliticized interpretation of colonial architecture in Shanghai resonates with the supporters of the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral. For example, a local citizen, Si Tuxin, suggested that architecture has no nationality; St. Nicholas Cathedral is art, which transcends religion and politics; so, it deserves to be rebuilt. Si quotes Victor Hugo who once said, “One building possesses two components, function and beauty.

⁵⁶ Edward Denison and Guang Yu Ren, *Building Shanghai: the Story of China's Gateway*, 237.

Function belongs to its owner, while its beauty belongs to the whole world.”⁵⁷ He indicated the universal ownership of building’s aesthetic beauty.

In contrast, one of the opponents, Professor Yan from Heilongjiang University in Harbin argued that the restoration reminds people of its ugly history: St. Nicholas Cathedral is thought to be the product of colonialism and cultural invasion, and is not conducive to encouraging the national culture. Another opponent, Xiao Weilun, made a similar argument: “Taking the money of the Chinese to construct a foreign building is not necessary.”⁵⁸ Yan and Xiao interpret St. Nicholas Cathedral as a signifier of “foreign hegemony,” in Gramsci’s terms.⁵⁹ Yan and Xiao’s aversion to the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral signifies their efforts to overcome the real or imagined subalternity of the Chinese in the past and at present, and break with “foreign hegemony.” The underlying message is “This is our territory. The Chinese are the masters. Your Russian hegemony is over.”

This contrasts with the restoration, in the 1970s, of the Government House in Guam, the American Pacific Island, when the former governor of Guam, Ricardo Bardallo, decided to incorporate Spanish Colonial-style into the local Chamorro architecture. In his analysis of this restoration, Marvin Brown argues that “the Spanish Colonial architecture need not be viewed as a symbol of colonial

⁵⁷ Acheng Wang, *Yuandong beiying: Haerbin laogongguan* (The shadow of the Far East: historical buildings in Harbin) (Tianjin: Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House, 2006), 107.

⁵⁸ Tan and Yu, “Fandui fujian sheng nigula jiaotang.”

⁵⁹ Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: the Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 145; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

oppression. Rather, it declares that such architecture can stand as a symbol of resoluteness, determination [and local people's] stride towards the future. It calls out: 'We are still here. Where are you?'"⁶⁰

Some proponents of the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral contend that this piece of exotic architecture fills Harbin's citizens with a sense of pride, contributing to the unique characteristic of Harbin. In contrast, Professor Yan claimed that, "He always felt sorrow at hearing that Harbin was *yangqi* (exotic)."⁶¹ Yan said, "Exotic architecture is not conducive to encouraging the national spirit; a city's cultural development should be integrated with national history, traditional culture, and revolutionary culture."⁶² Pride and sadness, these distinctive feelings towards exoticism, indicate the struggles that Harbiners experienced in defining the city's cultural identity, somewhere in between a Chinese city (therefore, feeling sad about the exotic non-"authentic" factors in this city) and an "exotic" non-Chinese city (more appealing, mysterious and charming).

I will adopt Paul van der Gripp's notion that "exotics are conceived of as material (art) products representing cultural otherness, and exoticism is seen as the yearning for this kind of otherness."⁶³ Exoticism involves not only aesthetics but also politics. It embodies a hierarchical perception of power between the indigenous and

⁶⁰ Marvin Brown, "How the Past and the Future Have Influenced the Design of Guam's Government House," in *Whose Tradition?: Discourses on the Built Environment*, ed. Nezar Alsayyad, Mark Gillem, and David Moffat (London: Routledge, 2017), 163-4.

⁶¹ Tan and Yu, "Fandui fujian sheng nigula jiaotang."

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Paul van der Grijp. *Art and Exoticism: An Anthropology of the Yearning for Authenticity* (Berlin: Lit, 2009), 10.

the exotic. As Graham Huggan argues, “The exoticist rhetoric of fetishized otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations;” exoticism implies “a hierarchical encoding of cultural difference.”⁶⁴ Harbiners’ sense of pride in the city’s European and Russian architecture can be understood as the Chinese submission to the cultural supremacy of Russia and Europe. As Bin Dai argues, the promotion of exoticism in China conveys the lack of cultural confidence.⁶⁵ On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as a sense of postcolonial resoluteness – being proud of and taking advantage of the legacies inherited from former colonizers rather than feeling threatened. It conveys a triumphant discourse by the formerly colonized and a changed power dynamic between China and Russia.

With regard to the relationship between exoticism and cultural translation, Huggan argues that “Exoticism is, in one sense, a control mechanism of cultural translation which relays the other inexorably back again to the same.”⁶⁶ The city culturally “translates” the real and imagined Russian legacies into its current Chinese social context to produce a Harbin version of “Moscow.” The revitalization of exoticism in current Harbin makes the city both familiar (evoking memories of the city’s cosmopolitan past) and different (from cities with traditional Chinese cultures

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11; also see Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 15.

⁶⁵ Bin Dai, “Lüyou kaifa xuyao gengduo wenhua zixin (Tourism development needs more cultural confidence).” *Global Times*, June 15, 2018.

⁶⁶ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 14; also see Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Si ècle*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991; Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, *Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and Brazil, 1830-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

and from Moscow). The familiar-and-estranged Harbin lauds both its local and international features, contributing to the construction of an identity through local particularism and local internationalism, by which Harbin claims to make itself stand out in the current national and global market.

The Competition between the Russian and Chinese Traditional Harbin

The debates over the restoration of St. Nicholas Cathedral involve divergent ideas about what traditional heritage contemporary Harbin should inherit. A local historian, Duan Guangda, opposes the restoration of St. Nicholas Cathedral by saying that “the existing colonial heritage could be protected but not promoted. Instead, Harbin has a large amount of traditional Chinese heritage, which deserves to be promoted.” Duan suggested to reconstruct Dao-taifu, the office of the Qing magistrate in Fu-jiadian.⁶⁷ Duan’s argument over St. Nicholas Cathedral in contrast with Dao-taifu suggests the competition between the Chinese and Russian traditions in reshaping the current urban space of Harbin.

Indeed, there was such competition decades ago. Before the Russians came to build the CER in 1898, Harbin was initially a fishing village. Russian culture then was the dominated “traditional” culture in the city of Harbin. In the 1920s, a nationalist movement was launched to claim or invent a Chinese tradition of the city. The construction of the Confucian Temple in the 1920s, for example, can be interpreted as an attempt at reinventing the Chinese history of Harbin.⁶⁸ Engraved on the stele

⁶⁷ Dao-taifu was reconstructed in the Daowai District in 2005.

⁶⁸ Carter, “A Tale of Two Temples,” 107.

placed near the entrance of the Confucian Temple is an inscription by Zhang Xueliang, the general of Kuomintang (KMT) in Northeast China: “China is the home of Confucius and Harbin is a place where the Chinese people have gathered together.”⁶⁹ But the Chinese gene was not dominant in the young Harbin before the 1920s. Here, an apparently paradoxical question must be raised: How could Harbin inherit its traditional Chinese culture, if it was born of a Russian mother? Koga comments on the ironic eccentricity of Harbin by saying that “what is foreign, or what is frightening, is the Mao era, while the supposedly foreign Old Harbin with its ‘atmosphere of a foreign country’ is perceived as home-like and accorded the status of authentic origin.”⁷⁰

Harbin’s eccentricity in its process of Sinification did not stop after the Cultural Revolution. The memory boom of the foreign Harbin in recent years is an example. Reinvigorating the cosmopolitan Harbin not only attempts to boost the local economy but also embodies a political symbolism, and implies an affective and cultural tie between contemporary Harbin and the “foreign” Old Harbin.

What traditions the city identifies with is a political and economic decision and it changes over time. “Traditions are never the static legacy of the past, but rather a project for its dynamic reinterpretation in the service of the present and the future.”⁷¹ Claiming the Chinese tradition in the 1920s gave way to the official promotion of the city’s Russian tradition in the 1990s. In 1996, St. Sophia Church, a Russian military

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 79.

⁷¹ Alsayyad, “Whose Tradition?” 3.

church forgotten for decades, was renovated with an investment of “more than ten million *Yuan* (more than \$1.2 million)” and turned into a Harbin Architectural Art Museum. “Suddenly St. Sophia’s was publicly trumpeted as ‘the largest Orthodox Church in the Far East’ and ‘a great architectural product’ that Harbin people should be proud of, according to city officials of that time.⁷²

Similar to the construction of the Confucian Temple in the 1920s, the reconstruction of Dao-taifu in 2005 can be interpreted as an attempt at reinventing the Chinese tradition of Harbin. But the two practices of reinventing Chinese traditions serve different purposes. In the 1920s, the Confucian Temple conveys a nationalist claim of Harbin as a Chinese city, while the reconstruction of Dao-taifu primarily serves as a means to develop tourism and boost the declining economy in the Daowai District.⁷³ On the other hand, the restoration of St. Sophia Church and St. Nicholas Cathedral can be understood as reinventing the Russian tradition of Harbin. The competition between reconstructing St. Nicholas Cathedral and Dao-taifu manifests different understandings of the city’s identity, a nationalist one *versus* an international one.

Moreover, the competition between St. Nicholas Cathedral and Dao-taifu also suggests a tension between the official and the commoners. One proponent of the restoration of St. Nicholas Cathedral deems that the decision on what to restore should depend more on the will and aesthetic values held by the majority of citizens rather

⁷² Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 112.

⁷³ Another factor that subtly contributes to the reconstruction of Dao-taifu is the fact that the former Harbin major Du Yuxin, is the offspring of Du Xueying, one of the Qing magistrates that worked in Dao-taifu.

than on those of a minority of experts and officials. In the case of the Dao-taifu reconstruction, a few officials and experts made the decision, without taking into consideration the opinions of the common people. The reconstructed building turned out to be unattractive to local citizens and tourists. This view echoes Soja's argument that "the social and spatial structures are constituted around an exploitative relation rooted in control over the means of production and sustained by an appropriation of value by the dominant social class."⁷⁴ Marx and Engels associated ideology and class, asserting that the ideas of the ruling class were the ruling ideas.⁷⁵ Gramsci defines ideology as "a material ensemble of hegemonic apparatuses in civil society."⁷⁶ The reconstructed Dao-taifu signifies a materialized representation of cultural hegemony, a hegemony exerted by the officials over the civil society without violence. Meanwhile, the emptiness of Dao-taifu is a form of silent resistance by the commoners to cultural hegemony. As Nezar Alsayyad argues, "hegemonic spatial practices may adopt or reinforce standard configurations of power and authority, while subversive ones may challenge or contest them."⁷⁷ The opponents of the restoration of St. Nicholas Cathedral argue that Harbin has limited financial capacity, which should be efficiently used for more urgent requests, such as education, poverty relief, and healthcare.⁷⁸ Some others contend that it would be better to use the

⁷⁴ Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Press, 1989), 111.

⁷⁵ Michael Freeden, *Ideology: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

⁷⁶ Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, 117, 136; also see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 228-9, 246, 264, 365.

⁷⁷ Nezar Alsayyad, "Whose Tradition?" 4.

⁷⁸ Tan and Yu, "Fandui fujian sheng nigula jiaotang."

funding for protecting the existing historical buildings.⁷⁹ What is involved is the question of whose interests deserve priority. In David Harvey's words, it is an issue of "the right to city,"⁸⁰ which should not only belong to those with power but also to the common and the poor people.

Conclusion

The simmering nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral by many Harbiners represents their longing for the dreamed city that, in Boym's terms, "no longer exists or has never existed."⁸¹ The various representations and reconstructions of St. Nicholas Cathedral illustrate the propensity of many Harbiners to establish a local particularism and local internationalism that both distinguish "their" city from many other Chinese cities and strengthen the connection with the international world. Unlike Shanghai, whose international past has been continued in the present, the cosmopolitan Harbin of the past contrasts with its presence as an inner-land provincial city, experiencing declining economic development. An important motivation for Harbiners to support the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral is to promote the consumption of the reinvented exoticism in the tourist scape of the city, analogous to the practice of producing a given commodity due to a potential demand in the market.

However, exoticism is not only a potential commodity. It also has political connotation. The contradictory perceptions by the Harbiners, in their sense of pride or

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2012.

⁸¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIII.

humiliation towards the exotic nature of the city, manifests the contention between exoticism and nationalism. The competition between the Russian/European tradition of Harbin and its Chinese tradition takes spatial forms. The replacement of St. Nicholas Cathedral with the Sunshine Hall metaphorically signifies the official attempt to erase the international history and reinforce Chinese sovereignty over the city since 1946. However, the public's mockery of this Sunshine Hall, *i.e.* their renaming it the "crystal coffin" suggests the desire to challenge power and cultural hegemony. St. Nicholas Cathedral becomes a political arena, in which the Chinese and international history compete for control over the city's past and the memorialization and utilization of the contested pasts in the present.

Chapter Two. Harbin Station: A Site of Colonization and Decolonization

Here on the platforms and in station square, Harbin's heart pulsed. — David Wolff¹

This chapter explores the changing Chinese official ideologies in Harbin, and the rationales behind such change from the suppression to the promotion of European classical-style architecture, by conducting a case study of Harbin Railway Station. I interrogate a chronological development of the construction, demolition, and reconstruction of Harbin Station from 1904 to 2018. Moreover, by examining the competition among various states over the ownership of Harbin Station, I explore the dynamic power contestation over Harbin by Japan, the Soviet Union, China, and Korea.

The old Harbin Station, an *art nouveau* railway station, was constructed by the Russian-led CER Engineering Bureau between 1900 and 1904. It was demolished in 1959, allegedly, according to the local official discourse, because of its limited capacity to accommodate the increasing number of passengers.² A new station was planned on the Beijing model, but it did not come into being. Instead, a modernist railway station started to be built in 1960, but its construction was suspended due to the economic recession of that time. For three decades, the railway station was composed of only the east and west wings, while its main building was not constructed until 1989.³ Short-lived, it was demolished in 2015 and gave place to two

¹ Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 19.

² Hai Gao and Bingcao Qu, eds., *Harbin Station Gazetteer*, 1999.

³ The construction of the west wing was completed in January, 1962, and that of the east wing, in 1972.

new, connected railway stations, which are scheduled to be completed by late 2018.⁴ Interestingly, this ongoing reconstruction imitates the style of the old Harbin Station built in 1904. Harbin's development as a major center started from the railway construction and the railway station is, in a sense, analogous to the heart of the city. Its geographical and historical importance to the city makes it a "symbolic place that can serve to define a city's vision."⁵ Transplanting the old "heart" into its modern body conveys the local officials' desire to reinvent the Russian and European tradition of the city. Replacing the modernist station with the *art nouveau* one suggests the triumph of Western classicism over modernist architecture, and the triumph of the European over the Chinese tradition in Harbin. The official promotion of the city's European architecture inevitably exerts a side-effect of posing "a potential threat to the founding myth of the Chinese Communist Party."⁶ The new/old *art nouveau* Harbin Station suggests the paradox of local officials' attempts to strengthen Chinese Communist administration while promoting Russian/European culture.

Such an official promotion of exoticism in Harbin Station contrasts with the conservative design of the Sunshine Hall, which was constructed in 1997. The former suggests a reclaiming of the Russian/European root of the city, while the latter metaphorically covers up the colonial and cosmopolitan Harbin of before 1946, reinforcing a purely Chinese history of the city. The distinct official attitudes between

⁴ Zhang Mengyi, ed., "Zong touzi 65 yi haerbin zhan da gaizao (The big reconstruction of Harbin Station with an investment of 6.5 billion RMB)," *Heilongjiang Morning*, June 4, 2016.

⁵ Alexander J. Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 165.

⁶ Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 246.

1997 and 2015 signify that during these two decades the city gradually reclaimed and enhanced its local particularism – or, even, local patriotism – by resurrecting its cosmopolitan traditions. Koga understands the promotion of colonial heritage as a means of boosting the local economy of Harbin.⁷ This is a major reason for the reconstruction of Harbin Station 1904. For example, the new station is claimed to be “the first *art-nouveau* railway station in China.”⁸ It becomes a brand that distinguishes Harbin in the competition with other cities in China. However, this reconstruction has a political connotation. Harbin Station 1904 was demolished in 1959. If this had anything to do with the dominant nationalist ideology in the Mao and Post-Mao era, the modernist station built in 1960 could be understood as a de-colonization from the former Russian colonizer. Then, why was the once demolished colonial station reconstructed in 2018? Why was the modernist Chinese style effaced in the new plan? Harbin Station 1904 was endowed with changed connotations by local officials over time: it represented the end of colonial hegemony in the 1960s, and finally evolved into an exotic heritage that Harbiners should be proud of in the 2010s. As Graham Huggan argues, “The exoticist production of otherness is dialectical and contingent at various times and in different places, it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of rapprochement and reconciliation.”⁹

⁷ Yukiko Koga, *Inheritance of Loss: China, Japan, and the Political Economy of Redemption after Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 2.

⁸ Jie Di, “Guonei shouli xinyishu yundong fengge zhanfang: haerbin huochezhan Xinjian beizhanfang ‘loulian’ (The first Art Nouveau railway station in China: Harbin North Station was built up),” *Heilongjiang Daily*, March 31, 2017.

⁹ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.

Architecture has ambiguous meanings and is open to many interpretations.¹⁰

Whether Harbin Station 1904 is a marker of colonization or a heritage to be proud of is interpreted differently over time by the central and local officials, to whom the meaning of architecture is expected to serve political and economic ends. In Fan's words, "In the course of appropriating the classical style, Chinese builders ignored its ideological implications and replaced them with an ideology of materialism."¹¹ In this chapter, I argue that the appropriation of Harbin Station 1904 in 2018 not only is a means of developing local economy, but also an indication of the changed official ideology in ruling the city. What this highlights is a shift away from an emphasis on nationalism to a celebration of the city's cosmopolitan tradition, *despite* its colonial nature.¹²

I regard the reconstruction of Harbin Station 1904 in 2018 as *decolonizing the decolonized*. This reconstruction suggests a sense of resoluteness *vis-a-vis* the city's colonial history and pride in its colonial modernity, "demonstrating China's confidence in its economic power as well as in ideological accommodation."¹³ Koga identifies such revitalization of the Russian heritage in Harbin as "unarticulated postcolonial unconsciousness;" it represents a "delicate coupling of desire and

¹⁰ See Christoph Baumberger, "Ambiguity in Architecture," in *From Logic to Art: Themes from Nelson Goodman*, ed. Gerhard Ernst, Jakob Steinbrenner, and Oliver R. Scholz (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2009), 293-319.

¹¹ Fan, "Culture for Sale," 69.

¹² See Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 6.

¹³ Fan, "Culture for Sale," 70-71; According to Fan, "Professor Wu Jiahua with China Academy of Art considered the importation of Western architecture to be a continuation of Western countries' colonialist expansion." Also see Wu Jiahua, "Lun kongjian zhiminzhuyi (On spatial colonialism)," *The Architectural Journal*, 1(1995):38.

disavowal faced by many postcolonial societies.”¹⁴ Demolishing the old station in 1959 and reconstructing it in recent years suggests the selectivity in memorializing histories and the political reinterpretation of this new site of memory. Such acts are meant to frame and direct contemporary Harbiners’ remembering and forgetting of the city’s different versions of its past. The officials have inscribed distinctive ideological messages into spatial narratives through the removal and reconstruction of Harbin Station.

Moreover, the complexity of Harbin Station should be examined as a site of power and ideological contention. In the analysis below, three cases are taken into consideration: the construction of the Manchukuo Monument on the square of Harbin Station in 1932, its replacement by the Soviet Red Army Monument in 1945 and the demolition of the latter in the early 1990s, and the construction of the Memorial Museum for the anti-Japanese Korean martyr Ahn Jung-geun in 2014. Harbin Station turned out to be a symbolic landscape of power contention among the tsarist Russians, Japanese, Koreans, the Soviets, and the Chinese. Like Tiananmen Square and People’s Square in Shanghai,¹⁵ which represent power and authority, Harbin Station Square was and is, in Lefebvre’s terms, a “monumental space” that is infused with power relations.¹⁶ Similar to Linda Hershkovitz’s understanding of Tiananmen Square as “a concrete representation of the hegemony of the Chinese state,”¹⁷ whoever sets their

¹⁴ Koga, “*The Double Inheritance*,” 64.

¹⁵ See Elizabeth J. Perry, “Shanghai’s Politicized Skyline,” in *Shanghai: Architecture and Urbanism for Modern China*, ed. Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 104-109.

¹⁶ Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 153; also see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 224-225.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153; also see Linda Hershkovitz, “Tiananmen Square and the Politics of Place,” *Political*

monuments on the Harbin Station Square claims the hegemony over Harbin.

Harbin Station 1904 versus 2018: The Revival of Classicism

The reconstruction of Harbin Station is part and parcel of the comprehensive project to improve the local transportation system, which includes the construction of express railways from Harbin to several other major cities in Heilongjiang Province. Also included is the overhaul of the streets and squares in proximity to the two railway stations, and the renovation of the adjacent Holy Iveron Icon Orthodox Church, which was partly damaged during the Cultural Revolution and abandoned for decades thereafter.



Figure 1. Harbin Station South, courtesy of Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau



Figure 2. Harbin Station North, courtesy of Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau

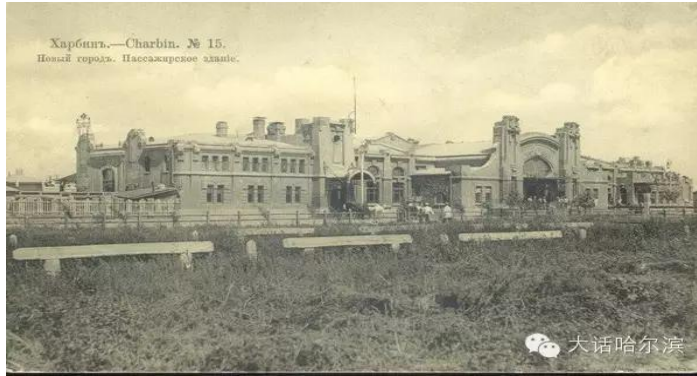


Figure 3. Harbin Station in 1904, courtesy of imharbin.com

Harbin Station 2018 consists of the South Station and the North Station. The two new stations resemble, amplify, and transform Harbin Station 1904. The latter's resurrection symbolizes a trend of going back to the "origin," and the current city officials' identification with the Russian cultural roots of the city. The resurrection of the original station in 2018 is partly a product of the official policy on urban development, *fu gu* (revival of classicism). According to Wu Songtao, a senior official with the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau, *fu gu* in the context of Harbin refers to valuing classical architecture in all styles, such as the Chinese, European, and Russian. In reality, European classicism has been given priority. *Fu gu* is a response to the potential identity crisis that modernity inflicted on the city. As Jianfei Zhu argues, "What is coming into China from the West has been not only architectural post-modernism, but also a broader post-modern conservative culture developed since the 1970s, emphasizing cultural relativism, regionalism and traditionalism, which is in turn associated with a theoretical critique of 'modernity'...and progress."¹⁸

The revival of European classical architecture in Harbin is partly a post-modern

¹⁸ Jianfei Zhu, "Beyond Revolution: Notes on Contemporary Chinese Architecture," *AA Files*, no. 35 (Spring 1998): 10.

critique of modernity and progress, which have put the city in jeopardy of becoming a featureless city or “non-place,” in Marc Augé’s terms.¹⁹

The new Harbin Station is more or less an imitation of the 1904 version, but it is also a mutated representation of the cultural memory of the once-Europeanized Harbin, which is exemplified by absorbing certain elements from such old *art-nouveau* buildings as the Modern Hotel, the former Moscow Mall, and the former Russian Consulate in Harbin. The mushroom windows of the Modern Hotel and former Russian Consulate in Harbin are taken as a reference for Harbin Station 2018. Moreover, the red mansard roof of the former Moscow Mall, a piece of baroque architecture built in 1906, is referenced in the design of the new railway stations. By referencing elements of these historical buildings, Harbin Station 2018 becomes the epitome of old and new classical buildings. It is constituted by a series of enriched temporal layers, as well as a synchronic incorporation of other European architectural styles, telling a different, new, and old story of the European cultural space of Harbin in the past *and* at present. Moreover, Harbin Station 2018 chooses red roof and creamy yellow as its wall colour, in order to be consistent with the dominant yellow colour of the surrounding historical district.²⁰ In close proximity to Harbin Station, several historical buildings in classical style are preserved well, such as the former CER Management Bureau Hotel and the building of the former South Manchuria Corporation Ltd. Harbin Branch. The new station opens up an architectural dialogue across time with the adjacent old buildings, implying local officials’ concerted efforts

¹⁹ Marc Augé *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

²⁰ Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, “Huochezhan gaizao 1904-2016.”

to ensure the historical continuity of the European tradition of the city. Paradoxically, the price for such continuity is the demolition of the modernist Harbin Station, *i.e.*, the rupture and erasure of the non-European history of the city. If the demolition of the old Harbin Station in 1959 was partly due to the Maoist ideology and the attempt to implant a Chinese “heart” into Harbin, then the construction of Harbin Station 2018 is similar to the reincarnation of the Russian and European ghosts into modern bodies. Architecturally, the sense of continuity between Harbin Station 1904 and 2018 signifies the historical oblivion of the Mao and Post-Mao era of Harbin. Colonial modernity is celebrated. This signifies a cautious and strategic rapprochement of Harbin officials with their former colonizers.

Going Back to the Russian Root: Decolonizing the Decolonized

As indicated earlier, replacing the Chinese version of Harbin Station with the original Russian/European one is a process of *decolonizing the decolonized*. By claiming the new station as the first *art-nouveau* station in China, local officials reveal a sense of pride in the colonial modernity they inherited from their former colonizers. Exoticism is embraced in full, in order to establish local particularism and local internationalism. Its political connotation is downplayed as it is built up.

Along with the construction of Harbin Station 2018, an abandoned church nearby has been restored on the new square of the North Station. Holy Iveron Church was a Russian military church built in 1913. It is located on Factory Street, which used to be a narrow and hidden street. As a result, not many people had a chance to see the

church. During the Cultural Revolution, its five onion-shaped domes were demolished. It was abandoned for decades and, in the 1980s, functioned as a warehouse of a clothing factory. After being forgotten for decades, Holy Iveron Church has been brought back to the public's attention. Its surrounding areas were demolished to become a spacious square, on which both the church and the newly established Harbin North Station is located. The five onion-shaped domes have been reconstructed: this renovated church has become a combination of the freshly painted old body of this church and its new/old onion-shaped domes. The latter symbolize local officials' reparation to the mistake made during the Cultural Revolution. As Jacques Derrida points out, inheritance is more than a simple transfer of capital from one generation to another, as secrets inherent in inheritance open up a possibility of betrayal.²¹ As the city capitalizes on its buried European past, the repressed memory of the Cultural Revolution, "the secret inherent in inheritance," is brought to light.²² It is a by-product of the nostalgia industry prevailing in Harbin, a betrayal that "discloses or reveals what should be kept secret."²³ The restored five onion-shaped domes tell the glory of the cosmopolitan Harbin, as well as the trauma it experienced during the Cultural Revolution.

Despite adopting a classical form, this old/new Harbin Station and the Holy Iveron Church are essentially future-oriented. The station, first and foremost, meets the demands of passengers for a modern railway station. It is a symbol of modernity

²¹ Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 38; also see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

and modernization. Memorializing the once-glorious Harbin on this site of memory is not only meant to impart selective knowledge of the city's history to contemporary Harbiners, but also to develop the city on its way to modernization and internationalization. Harbin defines its future by going back to its past. "The past repeats, but never without changing. Repetition is a form of memory within an openness to the future."²⁴ Harbin officials intend to evoke the glorious cosmopolitan past of the city, as a wish for building an equally glorious future. I call this past-and-future-oriented mentality of city-development, "pre-post-erous." This suggests the officials' inability to live in the present. The demolition of the modernist Harbin Station is a case in point. This is similar to the case of Hong Kong before and after the transition in 1997. Struggling with an identity confusion of both/and, as well as neither/nor in terms of culture and language, the people of Hong Kong resorted to the city's colonial past or envisioned a different future for an independent identity. Contemporary Harbiners have a similar propensity to construct a unique identity of Harbin by orienting toward the past-and-future.

Away from Classic Nationalism to Modernist Exoticism and Public Perceptions of the Change

What do local citizens think of the new Harbin Station? There are a variety of answers. Concerning the imitation of Harbin Station 1904 in this reconstruction,

²⁴ Lucy Burke, Simon Faulkner and Jim Aulich. *The Politics of Cultural Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 65.

Wang Dongke, a staff member working with the Harbin Cultural Heritage Management Institute, said that the new station is “looking for the soul of the old Harbin Station, whose physical body is dead.” He does not think that the soul of the “dead” station could be resurrected.

The notion and implications of such “resurrecting” for the contemporary city development of Harbin are both intriguing and problematic. By “intriguing,” I mean that the resurrected architecture arouses Harbiners’ memory and imagined experience of the city’s past, endowing the city with an aura of historicity through imagination. By “problematic,” I mean that the change in size and material from the original station, and the adoption of architectural elements from other buildings make the new station a *malformation* in time and space. This malformation is illustrated in the comments by Liu Songfu, a professor of the Architecture Department at the Harbin Institute of Technology. Professor Liu is critical of the new Harbin Station and says: “Take that ionic column as an example; if the ratio is changed, it will give people a sense of strangeness, because our eyes have already been used to the ratio.” For an alternative form of the railway station, Liu suggests that since its function is to meet the demand of modern transportation, a modern style would be more appropriate. Zheng Qi also agrees that such an “amplified version of the old station is neither fish nor fowl;” it is impossible to rebuild the old one; therefore, an advanced modern station could be a solution.²⁵

On the other hand, there is support from the public for an *art-nouveau* Harbin

²⁵ Zheng Qi is a retired staff from Harbin Railway Bureau and a scholar studying the old buildings related to the Chinese Eastern Railway.

Station. A train passenger, who is a graduate from a local university, prefers the new station because he thinks that it is beautiful and consistent with the other classical buildings in Harbin, such as those on Central Street.²⁶ This expected consistency between the old and the new buildings suggests his and many other Harbiners' desire for historical continuity in terms of urban space, which has been broken into fragments in the process of modernization.

As illustrated by the demolition and reconstruction of Harbin Stations over the past century, the official ideologies behind urban planning have shifted from emphasizing nationalism to emphasizing exoticism, from a preference for modernism to classicism. I would interpret such change in terms of, what Ackbar Abbas defines as, a “culture of disappearance,” which means “the replacement and substitution of one thing for another, rather than a matter of effacement.”²⁷ In the case of the Harbin Station reconstruction, that refers to the *disappearance* of Harbin Station 1960 and its substitution by Harbin Station 2018. However, in a sense, it is a *reappearance* of Harbin Station 1904.

Façade, a Lens to See the Changed Official Ideologies in Regard to Harbin's Russian Culture

The official promotion of European architectural styles in Harbin is not without contention. A few years ago, some local officials were reluctant to recognize that they

²⁶ Central Street is famous for many European-style classical buildings on its two sides. It is called “Open Air Architectural Museum.”

²⁷ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 9.

were imitating the architectural styles in Moscow. A sense of Chinese national dignity is part of the reason. In 2016, when I asked Wu, an official working at the Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, about the reason for painting the façades creamy yellow, he replied that, “It was according to Harbin’s Colour Plan and Regulation. Creamy yellow makes people feel warm in the cold winter of Harbin.” Similar comment was made by the former vice mayor of Harbin, Qu Lei, in an interview with Thomas Lahusen in the summer of 2014.²⁸ I asked whether the new façades relate to the Russian heritage of Harbin, and whether this is part of the efforts to construct a modern Oriental Moscow. Wu retorted that “What you said is totally wrong. It has nothing to do with Russia.” In contrast, when I asked the same questions to Wang Yan, a professor at the Architecture Department of the Harbin Institute of Technology, she said, “Yes, these creamy yellow façades are for building Harbin into Oriental Moscow. The façades are kitschy, given that many residential buildings did not have such creamy yellow façades.”

These statements lend themselves to a speech act analysis. Following John B. Thompson’s interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu, “The utterance of speech-acts involves the implementation of institutionally established relations of power;” “In many cases a speech-act is an ‘institutional act’ which is listened to, believed, obeyed, answered precisely because it is ‘authorized’ by the institution concerned.”²⁹ A speech-act is

²⁸ Thomas Lahusen, “Conflicting Memories.”

²⁹ John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 67; also see Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire: l’économie des échanges linguistiques*. Paris: Fayard, 1982. Emphasis original.

empowered as well as constructed by the institution involved. Wu's answer is representative of local official discourse. The contrast between Wu's and Wang's answers implies the different perceptions of the city's past between the official and the professional. In August 2017, when I called Wu again, he agreed that the façades do help to constitute the Russian cultural space of Harbin. When I asked about his present opinion on the heritage renovation in Harbin, he replied, "Do not listen to the so-called experts. What they say is nonsense." Wu blames local experts for the failure of some of their local heritage preservation projects. He does not have faith in the competence of local experts. On the other hand, local architects, historians, and cultural heritage researchers blame the municipal government for the kitschy quality of preservation and the commercialization of old buildings. There is more hostility than consent between the government and the professionals.

Moreover, Wu's changed interpretations of the façade renovation project demonstrates local Chinese officials' evolved perceptions of the city's Russian and European-style architecture. That is to say, the attitude and actions of CCP officials during the Cultural Revolution are at odds with that of their contemporary counterparts, who promote the colonial heritage of Harbin, although formally they are still the same administrative party in China. The party experienced a gradual ideological change over time and, in this process tension and controversy have characterized the relationship between the conservative and the progressive. Wu's distinctive interpretations of the façade renovation project in 2016 and 2017 visualize the CCP's ideological transformation from that of conservative nationalists to being

more open-minded,³⁰ from classic nationalism some way toward a modernist exoticism.

Harbin Station 2018 versus Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower

A case somewhat parallel to the reconstruction of Harbin Station is the relocation of Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower in Hong Kong. The Clock Tower, forty-four meters high and in the Edwardian Classical Revival style, was part of the terminus of the Kowloon-Canton Railway in Tsim Sha Tsui (TST).³¹ Built in 1913, the main terminus building was demolished in 1978, leaving only the clock tower.³² On the site of TST Railway Station, the Hong Kong Cultural Center (HKCC) was constructed. Its construction began in 1984 and was completed in 1989.³³ The Hong Kong Cultural Center is a modern complex of theaters, concert hall, and galleries. The Clock Tower became the only historical site in HKCC square. The single heritage building, steeped in modern surroundings, is problematic because it may distort people's imagination of the "milieu de mémoire,"³⁴ the real lived environment, which memory helps constitute and in which the Clock Tower was "situated." Such a modern site now becomes secondary, rather than authentic, in preserving the memory of the Clock Tower. According to Abbas, the Clock Tower is a "quotation' from Hong Kong's architectural history, and it is the expression of a sense of historical moment, giving to

³⁰ Such observation of the CCP's ideological transformation over time by no means suggests that the CCP has been a uniform entity. According to Lin Chun, "Mao was known to have cheerfully admitted parties within the party." Lin, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, 3.

³¹ Hong Kong Tourism Board. "Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower (Tsim Sha Tsui)." <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/china/see-do/highlight-attractions/top-10/clock-tower.js>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7-24.

the cultural center a patina of local history. But this patina is no more than decorative, an image of history meant for visual consumption.”³⁵

Despite the problematic nature of situating both the historical building in modern surroundings in Hong Kong and the reconstructed “antique” in Harbin, the Clock Tower and Harbin Station 2018 are memorial markers of the past. I argue that by preserving this historical reminder, the Clock Tower suggests the Hong Kong officials’ efforts to affirm a separate “Hong Kong” identity. Hong Kong’s inheritance of, and identification with, its colonial past strategically integrates its modern commercial buildings into its given historical environment, which differentiates it from other Chinese cities. While modern skyscrapers make Hong Kong look similar to other modern cities, Hong Kong officials promote the city’s profile by preserving its colonial past. The “Russianness” (fake or not) in Harbin would play a similar role.

Harbin Station: A Site of Power Contention

Located in the city’s center, Harbin Station’s importance goes beyond its geographical location. According to Abbas, “Architecture, because it is always assumed to be somewhere, is the first visual evidence of a city’s putative identity. In this regard, the symbolic landscape of center exerts a particular fascination.”³⁶ The central geographical location of Harbin Station makes it an obvious site of political power struggles.

³⁵ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 66.

³⁶ Ibid. Meanwhile, Abbas questions the center’s role as a representative of a city by saying that “Can the architecture of the center, even the whole of Hong Kong architecture, represent the city?”

During the Japanese-led Manchukuo period, a plaque with the name “Manchukuo” was added onto the top of the main entrance of Harbin Station; and the Manchukuo Monument was built in front of Harbin Station to commemorate the nation building of Manchukuo.³⁷ In this way, Harbin Station Square was transformed into a symbolic landscape of power. The Manchukuo Monument is the assertion of the Japanese hegemony over Harbin. Similarly, Benedict Anderson understands the National Monument in Jakarta as “less a part of tradition than a way of claiming it.”³⁸ The spatial claim to one’s authority over the city was further illustrated when the Manchukuo Monument was replaced by the Soviet Red Army Monument in 1945,³⁹ when Russian soldiers invaded Manchukuo and defeated the Japanese army. The changed monuments on the Harbin Station Square are an abstraction and display of the power contention for the leadership of Harbin between Japan and the Soviet Union.⁴⁰

A Place of Oblivion: the Soviet Red Army Monument

The Soviet Red Army Monument was built in front of the main entrance of Harbin Station on November 23, 1945, to commemorate the Russian martyrs in the Anti-

³⁷ Hai Gao and Bingcao, *Harbin Station Gazetteer*, 8.

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 175; also see Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 64.

³⁹ See Harbin Gazetteer Compiling Committee, *Harbin shizhi: shizheng jianshe* (Harbin gazetteer: public construction), 1995.

⁴⁰ See Lawrence J.Vale, “Capital Architecture and National Identity,” in *Power and Architecture: the Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*, ed. Michael Minkenberg (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 42.

Japanese War. It was dismantled in the early 1990s.⁴¹ It is ironic that this monument was preserved in the 1960s, when Sino-Russian friendship worsened, but was demolished in the peaceful era of the 1990s. Indeed, many more monuments and heritage buildings were actually destroyed in the 1990s than in the Cultural Revolution. They gave way to high buildings. Moreover, a strong sense of Chinese national dignity was prevalent among the Chinese officials in the 1990s.⁴² According to Zheng Qi, the dissolution of the Soviet Union partly provided a chance for the municipal officials of Harbin to justify the demolition of this monument. I assume that the special location of this monument was the main reason for its demolition. For one thing, it was located right in front of the main entrance of Harbin Station. Passengers could see it on entering and exiting Harbin Station. As a marker and catalyzer of Sino-Russian relationship, its presence might become embarrassing, after China's detachment from the Soviet Elder Brother and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For another thing, due to the decline of its political function, it was thought to be a road block on the square. In contrast, another smaller Soviet Red Army Monument has survived. It is located near the Sunshine Hall, 800 meters away from Harbin Station. Its location and height are not as conspicuous as the one on the Harbin

⁴¹ According to Li Shuxiao, a well-known local historian, the Soviet Red Army Monument was planned to be relocated to Huangshang Cemetery in the suburb of Harbin, but this plan failed. Changhe, a local volunteer in the protection of cultural heritage, explained that this failure was due to ineffective supervision and management; also see Suan cai bang zi, "Haerbin ren xinmu zhong bugai shiqude sanzuo jianzhu (Three buildings that should not be forgotten by Harbiners)."

http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_11278406_1.html

⁴² One of the examples is the demolition of the old Germanic-style railway station in the city of Jinan in 1992. The officials tried to prove that they could build better modernist buildings, to decolonize the works of the former colonizers.

Station Square. This is part of the reason for its survival from demolition. Such contrast, again, illustrates the geographical importance and political sensitivity of Harbin Station.

Covering up the Soviet Red Army Monuments from public sight happened not only in Harbin but also in several other cities in Northeast China.⁴³ In Dalian, the Soviet Red Army used to be located downtown on People's Square, whose former name was Stalin Square from 1945 to 1993. It was relocated in 1999 to the Soviet Red Army Martyr Memorial Park in an isolated area of the Lüshunkou District (formerly known as Port Arthur). In Shen Yang, the Soviet Red Army Monument used to be located on Shenyang South Railway Station Square and it gave way to subway construction in 2006. The monument was relocated to the Soviet Army Martyr Memorial Park in the north part of Shenyang. Only the Changchun Soviet Red Army Monument remains on its original site, the People's Square. After the removal of the monuments, the former sites have given way to modern construction. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the renewed relationship between China and Russia have also relegated the symbolic importance of these monuments. Having a Soviet Monument located in the downtown of cities in Northeast China does not fit the nation-building agenda of the CCP. I assume the reasons for the "survival" of the one in Changchun might be related to the fact that Changchun used to be the capital city of the Japanese colonial regime, Manchukuo. The Soviet Red Army Monument in Changchun functions not only as a memorialization of the Soviet martyrs, but also a

⁴³ The Soviet Red Army Monuments were built in several cities in Northeast China in the 1940s and early 1950s. Among the major ones are Harbin, Changchun, Dalian, and Shenyang.

physical reminder of the defeat of the Japanese fascist invaders of China.⁴⁴



Figure 4. The Soviet Red Army Monument in front of the Former Harbin Station



Figure 5. Ahn Jung-geun Martyr Memorial Museum in the East Wing of the Former Harbin Station⁴⁵

A Place of Memory: Ahn Jung-geun Martyr Memorial Museum

While the Soviet Red Army Monument was demolished in the early 1990s, the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Museum was built in Harbin Station in 2014 to commemorate the Korean martyr, Ahn Jung-geun, who assassinated the Minister of Japan Privy Council, Ito Hirobumi. On October 26, 1909, conspiring to exploit Northeast China with Russian representative Vladimir Kokovtsov, Ito Hirobumi visited Harbin to

⁴⁴ Darien Rozentals examines the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Vilnius, Lithuania in the 1990s, in relation to the reconstruction of a post-soviet national identity. See Darien Rozentals, "Opacity: Reading Dialogues in Monumental Space," in *The Politics of Cultural Memory*, ed. Lucy Burke, Simon Faulkner, and Jim Aulich (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 133-146.

⁴⁵ In this picture, next to the museum (of yellow colour) is a business-class concourse of the former Harbin Station.

discuss the amendment to the Russo-Japanese Secret Treaty.⁴⁶ On his arrival at the platform of Harbin Station, the Korean patriot Ahn Jung-geun shot him. Ahn was arrested on the site and was sentenced to death in the Lüshun Russo-Japanese Prison on March 26, 1910.⁴⁷

The establishment of Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Museum was supported by the former South Korean President Park Geun-hye. During her visit to China in June, 2013, she emphasized the significance of Ahn's act and made a request to build a memorial museum for him. This request was taken seriously by Chinese government.⁴⁸ This construction also happened one year before the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Anti-Japanese War. The museum becomes a site of "patriotic education" for both Koreans and Chinese.

According to Pierre Nora, "It is memory that dictates while history writes."⁴⁹ The opposition between memory and history is essential. "History" would relate to the site, where Ahn Jung-geun assassinated Ito Hirobumi, but memory would transform the place into a *lieu*, the memorial museum. Because it is artificially constructed, the museum is a symbol and a political act. By monumentalizing the history of anti-Japanese Korean heroism in 2014, Harbin Station becomes a site of memory, embodying ideological partnership between China and Korea in confrontation with Japan not only in the past but also at present.

⁴⁶ Shuxiao Li, *Haerbin lishi biannian 1896-1949* (Harbin historical chronology 1896-1949) (Harbin: City Gazetteer Compiling Office of the Municipal Government of Harbin, 1986), 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Waijiaobu: anzhonggen shoudao zhongguo renmin zunjing (The Foreign Ministry of China: An Jung-geun is respected by the Chinese)." *The Beijing News*, January 21, 2014. <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/world/2014/01/21/302842.html>

⁴⁹ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 21.

In the same vein, the demolition of the Soviet Red Army Monument embodies an equally rich political message. Through covering up and unveiling different pasts of the city, Harbin Station becomes a barometer that suggest the diplomatic relationships between the states in East Asia and Russia. It is a place of memory and oblivion serving the political ends in contemporary Harbin and China at large.

Conclusion

Harbin Station has been speaking an architectural language of politics. From 1904 to 2018, Harbin Station witnessed a circular trajectory of development, which I call “a decolonization of the decolonized.” In contrast to the nationalist ideology that contributed to the demolition of the Russian-built railway station in 1959, Harbin Station 2018 shows an official desire to go back to its Russian and European roots, forgetting the colonial connotation of the old buildings. Through covering up the nationalist past and reinventing the exotic one, local officials manifest a positive revision and utilization of the colonial past to serve both economic and cultural ends. As Abidin Kusno argues, “Decolonization can be understood as both a rupture and a continuation of the existing power relations. It entails the appropriation of symbols and the investment of meanings into the architecture of the colonial era.”⁵⁰

Referring to Indonesia’s architecture and urban design, Kusno further observes that

⁵⁰ Brown, “Design of Guam’s Government House,” 162; Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial*, 5; also see Arjun Appadurai, “Playing with Modernity: the Decolonization of Indian Cricket,” in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 23-48.

“the past returns, in an active form, in the present.”⁵¹ The postcolonial inheritance of the Russian-built *art nouveau* railway station is a strategy for the city to establish a unique local identity, reposition itself in the national and global market, and make a niche in the political arena of China, Japan, Russia, and Korea.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Chapter Three. Chinese Baroque: A Site of Economic Re-colonization and Cultural Resistance

In the first half of the twentieth century, the cultural identity of Harbin has been controversial. Its intricacy cannot be displayed in a simplified, diachronic definition of the city as either Chinese or Russian. For one thing, Harbin was inhabited by multi-ethnic communities from more than forty countries, although the Chinese and Russians were dominant. For another, the Chinese and Russian cultures appropriated and intertwined with each other in Harbin. In this hybrid cultural space, cooperation and competition coexisted and power struggles abounded. The complexity that involves Harbin's Russianness has been examined in Chapters One and Two; Harbin's Chineseness is analyzed in this chapter. Indeed, Harbin's Chineseness is not given but a dynamic construction through intercultural communication, and its meaning evolved from the colonial context to the contemporary context of market economy. Harbin's Chineseness distinguishes itself from that of other cities in China because of its specific hybridity and, what I call, its "double exoticism."

If the CER Zone represents the Russian cultural space of Harbin, Fu jia-dian (1890-1956), the current Daowai District, represents the cultural space of the Chinese community of Harbin in the first half of the twentieth century. The Chinese Baroque neighborhood is representative of Old Daowai, especially its communal way of life. Chinese Baroque refers to an architectural style, which is characterized by a combination of Baroque façades, Chinese decorations, and Chinese courtyard layout. When the Baroque style of architecture was introduced by the Russians to Harbin, it

became complex, because of its cultural layering of the “imagined” European Baroque and the transformed neo-Baroque in Russia, on top of the Chinese style. Many of these buildings were constructed by Chinese merchants in the 1920s, when the Chinese national capitalist economy boomed in Fu jia-dian.¹ After decades of vicissitudes, this neighborhood is disappearing and “reappearing” through preservation and gentrification.

The primary objective of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, this chapter provides a cultural explanation of, what I would like to call, the identity crisis of the Daowai District in its recent renovation. Since 2007, many of these buildings have been reconstructed; businesses and the tourist industry have replaced the original residential area, forcing residents to move into apartment buildings in the suburbs. The relocation of these old residents and the commercialization of these old buildings suggest the pervasiveness of an aggressive market economy and the economic marginalization of the poor. The colonization of Daowai did not end when the Russians and the Japanese left Harbin. Contemporary Daowai has witnessed the *recolonization of the colonized*, in terms of economy.

Secondly, this chapter examines the criticism of the commercialization of the Chinese Baroque neighborhood that has transformed Old Daowai, a *lived* space of memory, into a historical *sight* for consumption. The original residents are caught

¹ According to Koshigawa, the Japanese Oriental Development Company contributed to the construction of many buildings in Fu Jia-dian from 1919 to 1923 by providing real estate mortgage financial services. Akira Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihoa (Harbin Urban Planning)*, trans. Xiliang Li (Harbin: Harbin Press, 2014), 68.

between nostalgia for Old Daowai and preference for the modern living conditions that they can enjoy after displacement to the suburbs.² They paradoxically love and hate the restored Chinese Baroque neighborhood. Additionally, silent resistance to the disappearance of Old Daowai in a variety of cultural productions is analyzed. Photographs, paintings, and memoirs become visual and literary monuments to the loss of Old Daowai, perpetuating the memory of this place. As much as they are memorials to Old Daowai, they are also a denunciation of the gentrification of this historical place. The diverse forms of resistance, in the wake of this renovation, complicate the dynamic process of Daowai's regional identity, in its transition from the old living space to the new commercial one. However, much of the resistance is ineffective, due to the overwhelming power of Capitalist-influenced socialism in China, or "One Party Market Economy."³ In order to explore the struggle between establishing a new market-oriented identity for Daowai and preserving the old one, I examine the tensions among a variety of stakeholders and powers, including the poor *versus* the rich, the original residents *versus* the municipal government, and real estate developers *versus* heritage protectors. These diverse tensions constitute the social production of this old/new place of memory in Daowai.

² In the summer of 2014, I interviewed a tuk-tuk driver in Daowai. He was in his 40s and had been living in the old buildings and would move into a modern apartment offered by the government. When I asked his preference, he replied, "The old, because I had lived there for years and I am attached to it." When I asked "which one do you prefer to live," he said, "The new one. It is modern and convenient." Such a conflict between emotional and functional preference is common among many old citizens there. See Thomas Lahusen, *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*. Chemodan Films, 2017. <https://www.chemodanfilms.com/manchurian-sleepwalkers>

³ Wendy Su, *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 13.

The Introduction of Old Daowai

Before getting into a thorough analysis of Chinese Baroque renovation, this chapter starts with a historical introduction of the Daowai District and the social context, in which Chinese Baroque came into being, because Daowai has been controversial: some historical discourses about Old Daowai speak of the Harbin's identity as exclusively Russian while others, as exclusively Chinese. One of the most sensitive questions has to do with whether the construction of the city was started by the Russians, in the CER Zone in 1898, or by the Chinese, in Fujia-dian (Daowai) in 1905. Some Chinese historical writings claim that Fujia-dian is the origin of Harbin, as illustrated by the title of the book, *The Hundred Years of Daowai—the Annual-Rings of Harbin Extended from Here*. Moreover, according to Chinese official discourse, the establishment of modern Harbin began on Oct. 31, 1905, when the Qing government established its administrative institute in Fujia-dian. That is why in 1998 the proposal for an academic conference for a centennial celebration of Harbin's establishment was refused by the Propaganda Department of China, although it had been approved by the municipal government of Harbin.⁴

Fujia-dian literally means the Fu's Stores, and such name was chosen to honour Fu Baoshan (1864-1973), one of the pioneers, who contributed to the development of Fujia-dian into an urban area.⁵ The Russian construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (the CER) attracted many Chinese immigrants from Shandong and Hebei

⁴ See Thomas Lahusen, "A Place Called Harbin: Reflections on a Centennial," *The China Quarterly*, no. 154 (June 1998): 400-410.

⁵ Shiliang Li, Fang Shi, and Ling Gao, *Haerbin shihua* (Harbin History) (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 1994), 127.

provinces to do labor work for the CER. Many of the Chinese labor workers lived in Fujia-dian and China Street (or Kitaiskaya Street in Russian). The latter was in the Daoli District, which was within the CER Zone and the majority of its residents were Russians. After 1900, the Chinese were not allowed to live in the CER Zone, unless they owned property or business there.⁶ Moreover, the Russian police were in charge of the criminal affairs in the CER Zone, and the Russian security regulation was implemented in the CER Zone in 1911. As a result, there were many constraints on Chinese businessmen there. Therefore, many Chinese moved to Fujia-dian.⁷ These historical facts suggest that the exclusive policy by the Russians in the CER Zone facilitated the growth of Fujia-dian into a Chinese community.

The two communities, the Chinese in Fujia-dian and the Russian in the CER Zone, were separate from each other. An example is given by Elena Petrovna Taskina, the author of *the Russians in Manchuria*, who was born in Harbin in 1927 and left for the Soviet Union in 1954. Taskina stated that Harbin, as a whole, was a Russian cultural space; she had only gone to Fujia-dian once on an invitation from a friend at school, whose father worked in a Japanese company; the company offered a nice apartment for her friend's family in Fujia-dian; but Fujia-dian did not appeal to her. She hinted at the isolation of Fujia-dian from the CER Zone by saying that it was a long ride by streetcar.⁸ Here "racial segregation and European superiority" were

⁶ Olga Bakich, "Harbin, a Russian City in China before 1917," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28, no. 2 (1986): 136. In 1900, the CER Engineering Bureau made urban planning of Harbin. According to this planning, Xiang fang, Daoli and Nangang districts became the residential, administrative, and business area for the CER Zone. Li, Shi, and Gao, *Haerbin shihua*, 125.

⁷ Li, Shi, and Gao, *Haerbin shihua*, 130.

⁸ *Ibid.*

exemplified; according to Blaine Chiasson, “the ease with which racial and cultural boundaries were crossed and flaunted in Harbin was unsettling.”⁹

Chinese Baroque Renovation and People’s Perceptions

Chinese Baroque

Peter Davidson highlights the universal and hybrid nature of the Baroque style. He states that “Baroque is not a term for a period, or as a term defining, or denigrating, a single style, but a cultural system which is supra-national, supra-confessional; it is not a system spreading out from European capitals in washes of dilution and enfeeblement. Each center of cultural production worldwide produces its own Baroque. Baroque inevitably embraces hybridity.”¹⁰ The hybrid nature of Baroque is especially evident in the Chinese Baroque style of Harbin. The term “Chinese Baroque” was coined by the Japanese scholar Yasuhiko Nishizawa in his article “the Features of Contemporary Architecture in Harbin.” According to Nishizawa, the term “Chinese Baroque” refers to those buildings that “Chinese designers constructed based on their understanding of Western classical buildings. The buildings with excessive decorations in Fujia-dian belong to Chinese Baroque.”¹¹

Local architecture professors and graduates, such as Yan Wang, Daping Liu, and

⁹ Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*, 2. Another reason for the quick development of Fu jia-dian is the Russo-Japanese war, when Harbin was the army service station for Russia. Chinese businessmen established enterprises in Fu jia-dian to provide materials for Russian army. According to Akira Koshigawa, Fu jia-dian started urban construction since 1909; by 1916, the population of Fu jia-dian reached 22,613. Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, 75.

¹⁰ Peter Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 12-13.

¹¹ Yasuhiko Nishizawa, “Haerbin jindai jianzhu de tese (The features of contemporary architecture in Harbin),” in *Zhongguo jindai jianzhu zonglan haerbin pian (The general review of contemporary Chinese architecture—Harbin)* (Beijing: China Architectural Industry Press, 1992), 15.

Tong Lu argue that, technically, many of the so-called Chinese Baroque buildings are not strictly Baroque. They contend that it is not accurate to use the term “Chinese Baroque” to refer to all these buildings that combined Western façades with Chinese decorations and a layout of courtyard. They suggest that two main features of Baroque are flamboyant decoration and Baroque structure, but many of these buildings in Daowai are not characterized by flamboyant decorations and the architectural structure itself is not as elaborate or dynamic as that of European Baroque buildings. Wang and her colleagues contend that some buildings have elements of *art-nouveau* and Russian buildings.¹² Therefore, it is more accurate to understand the so-called Chinese Baroque as a combination of an imagined “Baroque,” combined with other architectural styles.

The decoration on Chinese Baroque buildings incorporates many traditional Chinese elements. For example, images of bats are quite common in the Chinese Baroque, because they carry positive symbolic meaning: bringing more happiness to your house (“bat” in Chinese is a homophone with “happiness”). Moreover, the eaves were decorated with bamboo, plum blossoms, copper coins, and the Chinese character of *shou* (longevity), which are all tokens of traditional Chinese culture.

The buildings were usually two to three floors, with the first floor being businesses and the upper floors being residences. The Baroque style was imitated, partly because its massiveness represents wealth. In fact, the Chinese merchants

¹² Yan Wang, Daping Liu, and Tong Lu. “Harbin zhonghua baluoke jianzhu zhiyi (Questioning Chinese Baroque in Harbin).” *Contemporary Chinese Architecture Research and Protection*, no.5 (2006): 694-702. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.

adopted the Baroque style in order to indicate their prosperity.¹³ This innovative, Chinese Baroque creation suggests the cooperative and competitive mentality of the Chinese merchants of that time, in response to the dominant European culture in the CER zone of Harbin.

In spite of the wealthy façade, there was no running water, sewer, or flush toilet in any of these buildings; a shared one was available in each of the courtyards. Such design shaped a communal way of life.¹⁴ The collective way of living was further strengthened after the founding of new China in 1949, when many of the buildings were confiscated by the Communist party from capitalists and rich landlords and re-assigned to the working class. Take No. 19 Courtyard on Second Street South as an example: In 1931, No.19 Courtyard was the location of Renhe-Yong Silk Store. It was closed down in 1944 by the Japanese colonizers. In the 1950s, No. 19 Courtyard became state-owned, and it was used as a fire station from 1956 to 1968. Since 1968, it has been used for residence. It is 1,396.63 square meters, accommodating 51 households,¹⁵ and in this time the internal layout of these buildings was changed. They were further sub-divided into more rooms to accommodate more families, and shabby additions were built on the side of the original buildings. During the

¹³ Shubo Liu and Hanbing Zhang, “Tanfang zhonghua baluoke youlai: yizuo chengshide xuemai yu linghun (Exploring the origin of Chinese Baroque: the bloodline and soul of a city),” *Harbin News Net*, January 18, 2012. Northeast net, January 18, 2012. <http://news.hexun.com/2012-01-18/137381065.html>

¹⁴ Weinan Liang, “Haerbin jindai jianzhude qipa: zhonghua baluoke jianzhu (Chinese Baroque: a unique modern style of architecture in Harbin),” *Journal of Harbin University of C.E. & Architecture* 34, no. 5 (2001): 100.

¹⁵ Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, *Daowai chuantong shangshi baohu* (Protecting traditional Daowai market landscape) (Harbin: Harbin Urban Planning Bureau, 2001), 8.

population boom that took place in the 1950s and 1960s, *diao pu* (suspended cloth beds) were created for the children to sleep in. Due to the lack of maintenance over the past one hundred plus years, many Chinese Baroque buildings have seriously deteriorated and are now even in danger of collapse.

The Chinese Baroque Renovation

The Chinese Baroque Renovation project started in 2007 and is still ongoing. This project is supposed to transform the slum-like neighborhood into a clean and modern one. But many old buildings end up being kitsch reconstructions. This old/new place of memory tells of the loss of Old Daowai culture. History is dressed up as a commodity to be consumed.

The renovation project includes three stages. The first stage (2007-2008) focused on renovating Second and Third Street South. 39 buildings on Second Street South and 28 buildings on Third Street South were targeted in the renovation. 51 original households were forced to be relocated.¹⁶ The second stage of renovation (2010-2011) covered the block made up by Fourth Street South, Jingyu Street, Jingyang Street, and Nanxun Street. During this second stage, 150,500 square meters were demolished and the original residents were compelled to move out. The relocation involved 3,185 residential households, 31 public institutes, and 447 enterprises.¹⁷ The third stage of renovation is presently underway. The old neighborhood has given place

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷ Xiaoyi Wang, "Zhonghua baluoke erqi tiqian shixian jingdi; jiangdui laojianzhu jinxing baohuxing xiufu (Moving out for the second stage of Chinese Baroque renovation was finished in advance; old buildings will be protectively restored)," *Harbin News Net*, April 11, 2010.

to new shops, restaurants, hotels, artisan workshops, and recreational businesses. This project was initiated by the municipal government, to regenerate the culture and economy of this slum-like area, and revitalize Chinese Baroque into a brand of cultural tourism, for recreational and commercial consumption.¹⁸ Good Neighbors, a state-owned real estate company, was entrusted by the municipal government to be in charge of the renovation and redevelopment. The transformation from shabby residential neighborhood to commercial site for tourist consumption manifests “an entrepreneurial style of urban governance and a focus on the middle classes as the new savior of the city.”¹⁹ Consequently, the poor are priced out and relegated to the margins of the city.²⁰

Specifically, Third Street South is the location of cultural entertainment institutes, such as traditional Daowai talk show performances, film shooting locations, painting and sculpture workshops, and hotels. Second Street South is home to restaurants, many of which are old establishments of Daowai. This is part of the official efforts to brand the traditional Daowai culture. Moreover, it attracts many other cultural artisans, whose artworks enhance the cultural and artistic atmosphere of this area.

The original residents of these buildings were forcefully driven out before the

¹⁸ Harbin Urban Planning Bureau. *Traditional Daowai Market Landscape Protection*, 6.

¹⁹ Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, “Globalization and the New Urban Colonialism,” in *The Gentrification Debates*, ed. Japonica Brown-Saracino (London: Routledge, 2010), 52; David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: the Transportation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler* 71B, no.1 (1989):3-17.

²⁰ Reichl compares such urban renewal efforts to “a process of radical surgery that involved cutting out the blighted areas that acted as a cancer on the body of the city.” See *Reconstructing Time Square*, 1-19.

renovation. The municipal government either paid them money or offered them apartments in the suburbs of Harbin. The majority of the original residents chose to accept the offer of new apartments rather than money because to buy an apartment in a good location in Harbin is expensive, and the compensation money the government gives is not enough to buy an apartment in downtown Harbin. To some extent, the Chinese Baroque Renovation created migration within the city: many old Daowai citizens collectively moved to the suburbs, such as the Taoci Residential area and the Qunli District. In contrast, the Chinese Baroque area, the center of Daowai, is and will be inhabited by more and more businessmen, who are able to either afford the expensive rent or buy the buildings, which are 30,000 RMB (6000 CAD) per square meter (The housing price in the suburbs can be 5000 RMB, 1000 CAD). The transformation has also caused the replacement of the original residents with businessmen and tourists. Such redistribution of people with different economic power within the city is a type of economic colonization. As Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge argue, “Contemporary gentrification has elements of [neo]colonialism as a cultural force in its privileging of ...the more class-based identities and preferences in urban living.”²¹

²¹ Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, “Globalization and the New Urban Colonialism,” 52.



Figure 1. The Old Chinese Baroque Neighborhood



Figure 2. The Old Neighborhood under Renovation

The Center versus the Margin, Recolonizing the Colonized

In comparison with the Daoli and Nangang Districts, Daowai used to be the suburb of Harbin at the beginning of the twentieth century; in Bakich's words, Fujia-dian (the present Daowai District) was outside of Harbin.²² Due to the current urban expansion, Daowai has become one of the geographic centers of Harbin. For example, the Chinese Baroque neighborhood is three kilometers from Central Street (the center

²² Bakich, "Harbin, A Russian City," 136.

of Daoli District), and four kilometers from Harbin Station (the center of Nangang district). Consequently, living there has become more expensive. Some occupants with poor economic status in Daowai have lived at the margins, from childhood to their senior years. In other words, first, the Chinese were pushed out of the Nangang and Daoli Districts by the Russians; now, the poor Chinese are marginalized by the rich Chinese. The marginalization of the poor Chinese in Daowai has never stopped since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The original residents' reluctance to move out is not only due to their emotional attachment to the old buildings and old ways of living; it is also because of economic concerns. In the summer of 2016, when I met Mr. Han, a retired worker who had lived in the Chinese Baroque building for many years, he was selling his old tools on the street, because he expected to move into an apartment building, where many of the tools, like axe and bow, would not be of use anymore. He was indignant about the municipal government, because he thought their policy of compensation was unfair. "The government gave privilege to those whose houses were less than 20 square meters. The compensation money for a house of 15 square meters could be, for example, 300,000 RMB (60,000 CAD); but my house of 40 square meters will only get me 400,000 RMB (80,000 CAD)." In contrast, his wife, who was helping him to sell the old tools said, "You should not complain. The government had very good compensation for us. As long as you can move into a modern apartment, you should be satisfied. Without the help of the government, you will be stuck in the old

buildings forever.”²³

The Chinese writer Pingwa Jia wrote about a similar situation in his novella *Feidu* (The ruined city): The Earth City has thousands of years of history. The local officials plan to revitalize this city by demolishing old houses and constructing modern buildings. Qiu Laokang is an old man, who made a living by transporting water from a well to local residents. But the well will be buried in this modernization project, and Qiu will lose his job, because running water will be available. Qiu complains about this project. In contrast, many local residents support it. When Qiu reminds a local young man, Jiu Qiang, that he should not forget that theirs is an ancient city, Jiu retorts, “It is not an ancient city anymore; it is *ruined*.”²⁴ The conversation between Han and his wife, and the debate between Qiu and Jiu, reveal the paradox of modernization: nostalgia for the old way of living coexists with many local residents’ wish to enjoy better living conditions in modern buildings. In Yingjin Zhang’s words, they “live in space but think in time.”²⁵

Another middle-aged man could not wait to tell me his story, asking me several times, “Since you are abroad, can you help me to report the problems here? With your help, our problem might be solved.” He complained about the relocation of these original citizens from the city center to the suburbs, but said that if the new apartment

²³ The government policy of giving more compensation for those who have small houses is to ensure they are able to buy a new apartment although it is in the suburb.

²⁴ Pingwa Jia, “Fei du (The ruined city),” in *Jiapingwa huojiang zhongpian xiaoshuo xuan* (The awarded novellas of Jia Pingwa). Xi’an: Northwest University Press, 1992.

²⁵ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 178; also see Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 135.

was close to his old house, he would accept it. Moreover, his house is collectively owned. Even if he accepts the offer to move into a new building in the suburbs, he has to pay the government first for the ownership of his house. He said it would take him 200,000 RMB (40,000 CAD) and he was unable to afford it.

The economic situation of another man I interviewed was even worse. He was only able to rent an old house on Second Street North. His complaint about the officials' corruption was the strongest. He had been marginalized since he was young. According to this poor man, when his parents immigrated to Harbin, because they were poor and did not have the Harbin *Hukou* (household register), his two sisters married local Harbiners who were disabled, and he married a woman who suffered from mental illness. In Kusno's words, this is "not because they were less fortunate, but because they formerly lived according to unjust traditions,"²⁶ implying a historical continuity of Daowai as a habitat for the subaltern. Indeed, poverty was an issue for many people in Daowai. Many of the poor people rented the shabby houses in Daowai because the rent was cheap. The evacuation of the inhabitants for the sake of gentrification is harmful to these poor tenants because their living expenses will increase in other parts of the city. David Harvey argues that the city is a cultural expression of capitalist accumulation, and that "urbanization has always been a class phenomenon of some sort, [given that] control over the use of the surplus typically lies in the hands of a few."²⁷ The poor's rights to the city are limited.²⁸ "Problems are

²⁶ Nezar Alsayyad, "Whose Tradition?" 5.

²⁷ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XV.

moved rather than solved” in the process of gentrification and displacement.²⁹

In contrast with the three residents mentioned above, who criticized the municipal government and were reluctant to move out, many others have moved into new buildings. Chen Qihui, a scholar with the Harbin Cultural Heritage Managing Institute and an original resident of Daowai, said that many of the original citizens in Daowai, who moved to Taoci area, do not talk about the old days. According to Chen, only when he initiated a topic about Daowai, were the original citizens moved to reminisce. Many of them seemed to be more open to the new life but, subconsciously, were nostalgic for the old days, even though they did not realize it. The “forgotten” past could only be brought to life when an outsider stimulated that part of their memory.

Moreover, the marginal status of Daowai is, to some extent, implied in its name. In Chinese, “Daowai” literally means “outside of the railway,” in contrast with “Daoli,” which means “inside of the railway.” Indeed, the railway, which runs north-south, marks the division between the two districts. Apart from the arbitrary division by the railway, there is no reason to call one “inside” and another “outside.” The reason it was called Daoli is that it used to host the Russian community; that area was wealthier and cleaner than Fujia-dian, a relatively poor and dirty zone inhabited by the Chinese. Based on these historical facts, the Chinese government named the former Russian settlement “Daoli” in 1946; Fujia-dian was renamed Daowai District in 1956.

²⁹ Rowland Atkinson, “Measuring Gentrification and Displacement in Greater London,” *Urban Studies* 37, no. 1 (2000): 163.

Such naming of the two districts illustrates, what Prasenjit Duara calls, a “spatial visualization of social stratification.”³⁰

The Chinese Baroque renovation project speaks to Alexander J. Reichl’s argument that “preservation has often translated into gentrification, a process by which higher-income people reclaim and revalue older inner-city residential neighborhoods.”³¹ Neil Smith and Peter Williams define gentrification as “the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle-class neighborhood.”³² The gentrifying nature of the Chinese Baroque preservation project is one major reason why many local scholars, cultural heritage volunteers, and common citizens regard it as a failure. Many of the renovated buildings turned out to be fake antique because the builders dismantled the majority of the old buildings and in imitation of the old style built replicas of the original buildings. Chen Qihui witnessed the demolition of many of the old buildings. He photographed these buildings before the renovation. In the beginning, many of the building façades were kept but, later, they were torn down. According to the Urban Planning Bureau, the façades of thirty-one buildings on Second Street South have been preserved and repaired, and eight buildings have been newly constructed.³³ Chen argues that the majority of these buildings have been

³⁰ Prasenjit Duara, “Local Worlds: the Poetics and Politics of the Native Place in Modern China,” in *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space, and Identity*, ed. Thomas Lahusen. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no.1 (Winter 2000): 37.

³¹ Reichl. *Reconstructing Times Square*, 12; Shirley Bradway Laska and Daphne Spain, eds., *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1980.

³² Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds., *Gentrification of the City* (Boston: Allen & Unwin 1986), 1.

³³ Harbin Urban Planning Bureau, *Daowai chuantong shangshi baohu*, 14.

demolished, despite government promises.

Moreover, without residents, these new buildings lack vitality and they resemble a person's body without a soul. The renovation project is similar to dispersing the souls while renewing the bodies. It conveys the end of the old way of life. The intended resurrection of these old buildings has turned out to be the demise of the real Daowai culture.



Figure 3. Chinese Baroque Neighborhood after Gentrification

Another factor that adds to the problematic nature of the gentrification is the commercial concern of the new inhabitants, the businessmen. To a certain extent, shop owners and artisans in the gentrified and tourist-oriented Chinese Baroque neighborhood *perform* in order to attract consumers. They do so by means of either strategically selling products or creating paintings and sculptures in front of visitors. They become part of the spectacle and commodity, and speak to Rey Chow's concept of "being looked-at-ness."³⁴ In contrast, the original residents lived their lives without

³⁴ In *Primitive Passions*, Chow considers China as the object of gaze and argues that "being looked-at-ness, rather than the acting of looking, constitutes the primary event in cross-cultural representation."

such concerns. Following David Crowley's interpretation of Henri Lefebvre's notion of degraded space, "the tendency to make reductions of this kind – reductions to parcels, to images, to façades that are made to be seen and to be seen from – is a tendency that degrades space."³⁵ The gentrified Chinese Baroque neighborhood is degraded from *lived* space to a *sight* for consumption. Old Daowai is a landmark in a social and affective sense; it is a lived space of memory. In Crowley's analysis of the citizens of Warsaw's nostalgia for a demolished grocery store, Supersam (a popular one during the socialist period in Poland), he suggests that Supersam embodied the ordinary citizen's everyday experience. People missed "the smells, tastes, and journeys across the city, often made in childhood."³⁶ Similarly, what people are nostalgic for in the case of Old Daowai is the community way of life, the intimacy between neighbors, the rustic yet appealing local specialties. While Old Daowai remains "a rich and textured space of memory,"³⁷ a space saturated with people's experience and affect, the new Daowai is fabricated into an image for visual consumption. In Abbas's words, "The preservation of old buildings gives us history *in site*, but it also means keeping history *in sight*."³⁸

Daowai is bittersweet, given that it is less developed in comparison with the Daoli and Nangang Districts. However, it is rich, because of its special culture and

Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 180.

³⁵ David Crowley, "The Ruins of Socialism: Reconstruction and Destruction in Warsaw," in *Power and Architecture: the Construction of Capitals and the Politics of Space*, ed. Michael Minkenberg (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 218.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 66. Emphasis original.

history and because of the fact that people in the neighborhood all know each other. In comparison, the dominant residential buildings in the Daoli and Nangang Districts are apartments. People who live in apartment often do not know their next-door neighbors. The close relationships among neighbors from Old Daowai disappear in apartment living.

Stanley Kwan suggests a similar situation in the case of Hong Kong in his film, *Rouge* (1988). In the 1930s, the courtesan, Fleur, and Chan, a playboy from a wealthy family, meet in an opium house in Hong Kong and fall in love. Due to the fact that their romance is not socially accepted, they decide to commit suicide by opium overdose. Fleur dies and Chan survives. After waiting 53 years in the afterlife, Fleur comes back to Hong Kong in the 1980s to look for Chan. But Fleur gets lost in the new cityscape. Kwan metaphorically juxtaposes two temporalities by making Fleur revisit her city after decades. The uncanniness Fleur feels in the modern Hong Kong, including in the high rises that distance people from each other, suggests Kwan's critique of the modern city, in terms of its scarcity of close connection among people. Kwan represents the sense of estrangement between individuals through the spatialization of time; that is, through Fleur's distinctive spatial experiences of Hong Kong over time. Similarly, the sense of estrangement that the original residents of Old Daowai experienced after relocation into apartment buildings conveys the negative impact of modernity on the traditional, communal way of life.

The original way of living and people's practice of everyday life produced the

authentic Daowai culture.³⁹ In contrast, the spatial restructure and control of this area by the local government, and the commercialization of the gentrified neighborhood turn this area into a theme park. The Chinese Baroque neighborhood ‘has come to embody the Disney model of public space as an orderly, controlled, and themed environment.’⁴⁰

The failure of this renovation is also implied by the high vacancy of these renovated buildings. Three old citizens who enjoyed drinking tea outside of their old houses on Third Street North, which is to be renovated soon, suggested that the low occupancy rate is due to the fact that the properties are state owned; the officials are not concerned how many buildings have been rented or sold out. Even if nothing were sold out, the officials’ interests would not be affected. According to the three citizens, if the officials set high rent and housing prices for these renovated buildings, they could obtain a commission; the officials do not plan a sustainable development for this area. The three citizens suggested that market law should be taken into consideration: in the beginning, the rent should be low to attract businessmen and, only later when this community becomes popular should the government gradually raise the rent. The low occupancy of the renovated neighborhood reveals the disadvantages of state-owned business. It also illustrates the potential problems of “One Party Market Economy,” struggling between the collective ownership of

³⁹ I follow Reichl’s definition of “authentic public space,” by which he means the space “where the physical environment supports a diversity of uses and users, thus creating an area for genuine, or relatively unrestricted, social interaction.” Reichl, *Reconstructing Time Square*, 177.

⁴⁰ Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 175; also see Sharon Zukin, *Cultures of Cities*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995.

property and the free market. As a result, a corrupt, speculative bubble seems inevitable.

Silent Resistance in Cultural Productions

The sense of crisis for a disappearing Daowai is not only implied by the messy remnant of those empty old buildings and by the characters *wei* 危 (danger) and *chai* 拆 (demolition) on the walls, but also in various cultural productions, such as paintings, photography, newspaper report, memoir, and blogs.⁴¹

As Yomi Braester argues, demolition resembles the bodily and psychological scarring of a city.⁴² These cultural productions are visual and literary monuments to the scars and loss of Old Daowai. The public perpetuates the disappearing Old Daowai in the “time capsules” made of photography, paintings, films, memoirs, and blogs.⁴³ The local painter Huandi Wang, now in his 70s, told me that he can only race with demolition through his painting. Wang criticized the renovation project, which erases the historical texture and grain of these buildings; the renovation transforms the deteriorated yet lively neighborhood into manufactured, or even virtual “historical” streets. Wang lived in Daowai for ten years. There, he experienced hardship as well as happiness. His family of five people used to live in a house of eleven square meters. He is nostalgic for Old Daowai, and has felt compelled to keep coming back to memorialize his life there, through painting old buildings and people’s daily life. In

⁴¹ The rampant replacement of old buildings with modern ones in China is suggested by the word “chaina.” “*Chai*” means demolition in Chinese.

⁴² Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 257.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 227.

his words, “the paintings disclose a story of time; I am coming back to my home that is located deep in the past.”

Literature memorializing old Daowai and trying to seize/cease the last moment of these old buildings is booming. For example, a social media site called Seek Harbin was created by Hong Gao, who is the art director at the Harbin Tianyi Digital Art Company. She and her team spare no effort to find the stories behind these old buildings in Daowai.⁴⁴ Many local citizens write blogs, expressing their nostalgia for their childhood, community way of life, popular restaurants, and brands of stores in Old Daowai. Interviews with eight old citizens in their 70s and 80s were organized from 2014-2015 by Zhang Peng, a journalist working for the *Heilongjiang Morning*, and the interviews were reported in this newspaper. One of Zhang’s interviews was with Sun Youlian. It was held in August, 2014, when Sun was 80 years old. Sun died of heart failure in 2016. According to Zhang’s report, Sun was an orphan, who was born in Hebei province in 1934, and immigrated to Daowai to join her aunt in 1948. After taking 8.5 years of school, Sun decided to work to reduce the financial burden on her aunt; so she became a cashier in Tongji Store.⁴⁵ Sun moved to her parents-in-law’s house at No. 201 Eighth Street South in 1958, when she got married; she lived there for 59 years. Thirteen households lived in this courtyard, when she moved in. The majority of her neighbors either ran small business or did labor work in Harbin.

⁴⁴ For example, Hong Gao, “Daowai bei sandaojie: lao jianzhu beihou de gushi (Third Street North: Stories behind Old Buildings).” Imharbin.com, Nov. 9, 2016. <http://imharbin.com/post/28408>

⁴⁵ Tongji Store was one of the biggest companies in Daowai. It was established by Wu Baixiang, a Chinese nationalist businessman. Tongji Store represented the Chinese-run business prosperity in Daowai before the 1980s.

Sun and her husband had three children. Together with Sun's parents-in-law, a family of seven lived in a house of twenty-plus square meters. Such a crowded condition of living was common in Daowai before the 1980s. Her children moved to modern apartments after they got married in the 1980s, but Sun got used to living in her old house, so she insisted on staying there.⁴⁶ Her attachment to the old house rings true for many other senior citizens. Sun's life story reflects the old way of living in Daowai. The report of Sun's story in the *Heilongjiang Morning* bears witness to this newspaper's efforts to record the disappearing Daowai culture, whose end is symbolized by the death of Sun. The paintings, photographs, and news report store many memories and nostalgia for Old Daowai, but they also suggest lament for, and silent resistance to, the gentrified Daowai.

While the public expresses its nostalgia for the loss of old Daowai, the local government, real estate developers, and businessmen see the promising future of the new Daowai. That is why after the first and second stages of renovation, the third one is underway. But there is a tension between the two sides. While the former gives priority to preserving heritage buildings and traditional life style, the latter gives priority to economic interests; the former is past-oriented, whereas the latter, future-oriented. They manifest a tension between the preservationist and developmentalist.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Peng Zhang, "Nan badaojie 81sui laoren wang youlian koushu: cong leting chuang guandong dao haerbin de chennian wangshi (The oral narration by the 81-year-old Sun Youlian, a resident on Eighth Street South: old stories of immigrating from Leping to Harbin)," *Heilongjiang Morning*, October 19, 2014. <http://imharbin.com/post/27134>

⁴⁷ Also see Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 114.



Figure 4. The Old Chinese Baroque Neighborhood in a Painting

Chinese Baroque versus Central Street, an Issue of Exoticism

Central Street is an icon of Harbin. The majority of tourists usually visit Central Street when they come to Harbin. Central Street is a 1450-meter pedestrian street and it is characterized by the prevalent European-style buildings on its two sides. However, in comparison with Central Street, Daowai is regarded by many local people as representing a more authentic Old Harbin. The first reason is that Central Street is over-commercialized. In contrast, Daowai is in the early stage of tourism development. There is more everyday life of the common people in Daowai than on Central Street. Its vernacular flavor appeals to visitors, who enjoy being “voyeurs” of the authentic Old Harbin. Second, the prevalence of the “exotic” European buildings in Harbin provokes people’s interest in the Chinese Baroque, another different kind of “exotic” style. What makes Central Street exotic is its European architectural style, which is different from the styles in many other Chinese cities. However, since “European”-style buildings fill up Central Street and many other parts of Harbin, it is

possible for people to become bored with too many “European” elements. As a result, they might get attracted to traditional Chinese buildings. Thus, in the case of Chinese Baroque, exoticism means “different from both Central Street and from the European part of Harbin.” Being exotic in Harbin does not necessarily mean being non-Chinese. Chinese Baroque is even more exotic than Central Street for the city of Harbin, because Harbin has more European-style buildings than Chinese-European combined buildings. If Central Street is considered exotic, Chinese Baroque is twice exotic, or the exotic of the exotic. In Giovanni Careri’s analysis of the hybrid nature of Baroque in America, he understands the American Baroque as “a site where images are both stratified and joined, at the level of both form and content, in such a way that in the end a third term appears, neither European nor indigenous, and outside the categories of either.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Chinese Baroque speaks a third language of architecture, representing a Harbin, which is neither European/Russian (like Central Street) nor Chinese (like the Confucian Temple or Dao-taifu). In this sense, the twice exotic nature of Chinese Baroque manifests the *in-between* identity of Harbin, in between Russian, European, and Chinese, yet belonging to neither of these categories.

Conclusion

Historically, Chinese Baroque was both an appropriation of the intruding culture and a resistance to it.⁴⁹ It shows the Chinese constructors’ agency and a pragmatic

⁴⁸ Giovanni Careri, *Baroques* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 24; also see Davidson, *The Universal Baroque*, 8.

⁴⁹ According to José Lezama Lima, “Latin American Baroque is an art of conquer-conquest.” José Lezama Lima, *La Expresión Americana*. Madrid: Alianza, 1969.

mentality, which is “to absorb whatever is good for the sake of strengthening oneself.”

The same mentality applies to the preservation and gentrification of this neighborhood. Behind the pragmatic revitalization of Old Daowai is a contradictory embodiment of “the historical layering of the space, the heritage value of the place and the cosmetic nature of its face.”⁵⁰ The gentrification of Chinese Baroque neighborhood into an old/new place speaks to Jameson’s concept of “commodity fetishism and the atrophy of ‘real’ history.”⁵¹ In this process, new Daowai witnesses a continuation of colonization and segregation, although that between international communities and the Chinese has been changed into the one between the rich and the poor. The atrophy of “real” history is seen through the transformation of Old Daowai, a lived space of memory, into a site/sight for consumption, leaving the former only to the twice-removed memories and imagination of later generations through cultural productions, the permanent monuments to the loss of Old Daowai.

⁵⁰ Cody, “Making History (Pay) in Shanghai,” 139.

⁵¹ Susannah Radstone, *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 8; also see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

Chapter Four. Memory and Amnesia: The Japanese Architecture in Contemporary Harbin

By adopting Assman's notion of cultural memory (discussed in the Introduction Chapter), this chapter explores three kinds of "figures of memory" in relation to the Japanese in Harbin in the first half of the twentieth century; they are, respectively, historical texts, heritage buildings, and the sites of war and museums. These figures of memory are examined in their "mode of actuality."¹ That is to say, I analyze the social context, which produces the cultural memory of the Japanese residents in Harbin. Historical text, heritage building, and museum are the lenses through which I examine the construction of Harbin's identity, with reference to the *mirror of the Other: the Japanese*.² Writing and re-writing history, protecting heritage buildings, and establishing museums are not actions carried out simply for the sake of preserving memory but are also "about governing the social and cultural meanings represented and transmitted at [these] sites."³ Local officials are mainly in charge of deciding what kind of Japanese cultural memories are to be preserved in Harbin. "They 'code' these artifacts in a way that makes the desired 'decoding' by the public possible."⁴

¹ Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 126-130.

² It is my contention that there is not an essentialist culture of one's own or that of the others, nor a clear boundary between the two. "Us" and "Other" are expedient terms for the sake of critique. "Us" and "Other" should be understood through the double refraction of each other. They constitute the construction of each other. Freud promotes the examination of the uncanny, because he argues that we are ourselves "foreign speakers." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Crossing Borders," in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: from the European Enlightenment to the Global*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 395; also see Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works*, trans. Alix Strachey et al (New York: Norton, 1961), 17:221.

³ Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino, eds. *The Heritage of War* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4; Laurajane Smith, *Use of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2; Chris Ryan, eds., *Battlefield Tourism: History, Place and Interpretation* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), 1.

⁴ Gegner and Ziino, *The Heritage of War*, 3; Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 1992), 128-38.

I argue that the contemporary “memory map” of Harbin is characterized by an absence of apolitical narrative of the Japanese contribution to the city,⁵ and by the overemphasis on Japanese war crimes during World War II. Through a selective memorialization of the Japanese, the local officials homogenize and politicize cultural memories of the city in relation to Japan. In “Shanghai’s Politicized Skyline,” Elizabeth J. Perry notices that in the Shanghai History Museum there is a lack of narration regarding “Shanghai’s having been the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party.”⁶ Instead, its exhibition focuses on the cosmopolitan Old Shanghai.⁷ In contrast to the downplaying of the communist history in the Shanghai History Museum, Harbin has witnessed increasing spatial practices that emphasize the city’s communist’s history, such as the hanging of plaques to commemorate the former site of the Communist revolution, and the establishment of a new Unit 731 Exhibition Hall. To use a chromatic metaphor, I argue that Harbin is on its way to becoming red and yellow. “Red” suggests the emphasis on the CCP’s role in leading the city. The creamy yellow is the dominant colour of many old and new buildings in European and Russian styles. With the official efforts to promote the European and Russian tradition, as well as reclaiming the Communist revolutionary history, exoticism and nationalism coexist in the urban space of Harbin.

⁵ Mariko Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: the State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009.

⁶ Perry, “Shanghai’s Politicized Skyline,” 107.

⁷ In Perry’s words, “Facsimiles of foreign-owned mansions and enterprises stand alongside replicas of more humble Chinese shops and dwellings, [exhibited] to educate the younger generation about their city’s colourful past.” Ibid.

The History Writing of Manchukuo and Harbin

In July, 2015, before the publication of *Zhongguo jindai jianzhu yanjiu yu baohu shi* (The research and protection of the contemporary architecture in China, volume ten), a collection of sixty-three conference proceedings, the editor Liu Yishi of Beijing sent an email to Chen Jianzhong, a scholar from Taiwan and the co-author of the article “Manchu Architecture Association under Japanese Imperialism,” and copied the other sixty-two authors, including me. In his article, Chen used “Manchukuo” and insisted on keeping this term, arguing its historical importance in his discussion about the Manchu Architecture Association. Nevertheless, Liu replied that “the Propaganda Department of the PRC is vigilant and censors such terms as ‘Manchukuo.’ You have to add ‘illegitimate’ before ‘Manchukuo.’ Otherwise, editors, and even the publisher, the Tsinghua University Press, will be questioned.”

Although Chen tried to convince Liu that “it is contention rather than consistency that makes academia valuable,” Chen finally compromised by changing “Manchukuo” to “the illegitimate Manchukuo.” The debate between Chen and Liu illustrates two different points of view about historical writing in mainland China and Taiwan. To some extent, this implies different attitudes of the two regimes towards Japanese occupation.⁸

⁸ The Taipei government no longer emphasizes the atrocity of the Japanese fascists, such as the Nanjing Massacre. The hostility of the Taipei government towards the PRC and the CCP overshadows that towards the Japanese. According to Edward Vickers, “There has been a tendency for ‘nativist’ narratives of the Taiwanese past and Taiwan substituted for ‘China’ as the national subject.” However, it appears that there is no consistent discourse in Taiwan with regard to the Japanese

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The emphasis on the Japanese occupation in Northeast China is revealed in many official history books in the PRC. As Shepherd and Yu argue, “The CCP continued the historiographical tradition in China, which emphasized not truth but morality, and focused on highlighting the just and the unjust, the good and the bad.”⁹ Likewise, William Shaw Sewell contends that the narration of Northeast-China history by the PRC and Japan is characterized by “either black or white.”¹⁰ While Chinese historians emphasize the atrocities of the Japanese imperialists, the Japanese historians have asserted the more positive aspects of their rule.¹¹ Sewell argues that in between the black and white, there is a “grey zone” which deserves attention.

occupation of Taiwan. In the National Museum of Taiwan History (NMTH), “the section on the Japanese period is entitled “The Great Transformation and the New Order (though ‘Great’ is omitted from the English translation).” “Scientific administration” and “modern technology,” shown in the exhibition of NMTH, imply a recognition of the positive Japanese influence on Taiwan. Nevertheless, such narrative in NMTH is “not satisfactory, neither to the Blue nor to the Green.” Edward Vickers, “Transcending Victimhood: Japan in the Public Historical Museums of Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China,” *China Perspectives* 97, no. 4 (2013): 17-28. Similarly, Hsiao-Hsien Hou’s film, *A City of Sadness* (1989), suggests the Taiwanese ambivalent nostalgia for the era under Japanese control and their hostility towards the KMT, who oppressed the Taiwanese when it replaced the Japanese to become the new authority of Taiwan in 1945. For example, this film portrays the friendship between former Japanese residents and local Taiwanese. Taiwanese criticism of the KMT is shown when the characters claim that “rice was available in the era under Japanese control, but after Chen Yi (an official of the KMT) took office, the rice price has increased 52 times.” An independent Taiwanese identity is illustrated by such statements as “We islanders were first colonized by the Japanese, then by the Chinese. No one cares about us. We are the most pitiful.”

⁹ Robert J Shepherd and Larry Yu, *Heritage Management Tourism and Governance in China: Managing the Past Serving the Present* (New York: Springer, 2013), 13-15; Don Fowler, “Use of the Past: Archeology in the Service of the State,” *American Antiquity* 52, no.2 (1987):238.

¹⁰ William Shaw Sewell, “Japanese Imperialism and Civic Construction in Manchuria: Changchun, 1905-1945” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2000), 347.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Among the many history books that have a negative “all black” narration of the Japanese in Northeast China are *Wei manzhouguo shi* (History of the illegitimate Manchukuo), *Harbin shilüe* (Harbin history), and *Harbin dangan jiyi 1726-1949* (Harbin archival memory 1726-1949). The first two books are structured in a similar way, including the use of keywords such as “the fascist administration and oppression,” “economic exploitation,” “enslavement education,” “the miserable life of the people,” “the resistance by the CCP and the people.”¹² The atrocities of the Japanese imperialists are emphasized in these books.

This by no means suggests that the business and life of the former Japanese residents in Harbin are excluded from any Chinese history source. *Harbin shizhi zongshu* (Harbin city gazetteer overview) (2000), *Harbin zhinan* (Harbin guidance) (1922), and *Harbin lishi biannian (1896-1949)* (Harbin historical chronology 1896-1949) (1986) are three relevant examples. Although all three books record the Japanese people’s commercial activities and other aspects of their life in Harbin in the first half of the twentieth century, they present subtle differences in the way they address the sensitive issue as to whether the Japanese were colonizers or not before 1932.

Harbin City Gazetteer Overview heavily criticizes the Japanese as invaders. For example, it claims that “the Japanese imperialists’ plan to invade Northeast China was conceived of long before the actual invasion.” The book makes the point that the

¹² *Harbin History* covers the Kuomintang’s resistance to Japanese imperialism. *History of the Illegitimate Manchukuo* covers the resistance by the Japanese communists, peasants, and working class.

Japanese made various excuses to extend their influence in Northeast China, whenever it was possible. The following is a case in point: “At the beginning of the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, eight Japanese came to Harbin, pretending to be contractors.”¹³ The underlying suspicion is that “some Japanese immigrants were spies.”¹⁴ Moreover, *Harbin City Gazetteer Overview* states that after the establishment of Manchukuo, many Japanese migrated to Harbin in order to establish “a fascist control over the Chinese.”¹⁵ It suggests a homogeneous politicized understanding of the Japanese migrants in Harbin.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the leadership and heroism of the CCP is evident in this gazetteer. As indicated in its preface, “this gazetteer is partly to answer the call from the former president of the PRC, Jiang Zemin, who proclaimed that compiling new socialist gazetteers is an important part of the construction of two civilizations;¹⁶ it is a systematic engineering of socialist construction, a transitional project that benefits the contemporary and future generations.”¹⁷ Moreover, this gazetteer compiling project is “under the guidance of the party and the government,”¹⁸ and is a document to assist “governance, pedagogy, and preserving history.”¹⁹ As implied in

¹³ Harbin gazetteer compiling committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu*, 63. All the quotations from Chinese sources in this chapter are my translations. Moreover, Professor Dan Ben-Canaan, an Israeli citizen who married a Chinese woman and has been living in Harbin for almost twenty years, also suspects the political motivations of the Japanese residents in Harbin. In our personal conversation in December 2017, Dan said that “In most cases Japanese residents of the city were part of their country’s attempt to create what they termed ‘sphere of influence’. And most did not come here by choice.”

¹⁴ This is true in the Nakamura Incident in 1931. The Imperial Japanese Army Captain, Shintarō Nakamura, pretended to be an agricultural expert, in order to visit with his entourage the militarily-sensitive border area between Taonan and Solun in Manchuria. They were executed in Solun.

¹⁵ Harbin gazetteer compiling committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu*, 64.

¹⁶ Material civilization and spiritual civilization.

¹⁷ Harbin Gazetteer Compiling Committee, *Haerbin shizhi zongshu*, ii.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the order of the three words, governance and pedagogy have priority over preserving history.

The political discourse underlying the Japanese attempt to invade Northeast China, beginning in 1898, is noticeable in the *Harbin City Gazetteer Overview* (2000). In contrast, *Harbin Guidance* (1922) portrays a sense of being threatened by the Japanese in terms of economy. *Harbin Guidance* mentions the prevalence of Japanese businesses in the city. It states that

after the First World War in Europe, Russian businesses declined, and Japanese businessmen took their place. There are only hundreds of Japanese businesses, but their products account for sixty to seventy percent of the city. Their means of running business are predatory and sinister. They may dominate the market, exploiting the businesses which had been run for ten years by the Chinese. We Chinese businessmen had better unite and encourage each other to prevent the appropriation of profits by the Japanese.²⁰

This implies that, in 1922, the Chinese sense of being threatened by the Japanese had to do with economic concerns rather than with issues of political sovereignty.

Mitter and Coble pinpoint that “the events contemporary audiences strongly associate with the war, such as the Nanjing Massacre, were not strongly emphasized during the war itself.”²¹ By the same token, the Japanese are critically portrayed as invaders in contemporary Chinese history publications, such as *Harbin City Gazetteer Overview* (2000); while, on the other hand, in the 1920s, the political threat from the Japanese

²⁰ Zuo Shan and Xianfeng Yin, ed., *Haerbin zhinan* (Harbin guide) (Harbin: Dongchui Business Newspaper, 1922), 745.

²¹ Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, “China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 2, (March 2011): 237; Parks M. Coble, “China’s ‘New Remembering’ of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937-1945,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 190 (June 2007): 394-410.

did not seem a major concern in the Chinese press. Contemporary people, as Michael Prince says, tend to “see and recall things the way we wish them to be [and turn] insentient and anonymous history into a waking dream, filled with designs of our own making.”²² History is dressed up,²³ if not made up, to serve those in power at present.

Li Shuxiao’s *Harbin Historical Chronology (1896-1949)* (1986) records the diverse Japanese business and community life in Harbin. The reference to such content seems to be in antithesis to my argument that the Japanese contribution to Harbin was absent from Chinese historical narration. However, in the preface, Li states that this book informs readers about Harbin as a cradle of revolution. According to Li, another objective of this work is to improve education about three objects of love, which refer to love study, work, and (our) country. Li also emphasizes the contributions of communist leaders in the Anti-Japanese War. Li’s preface illustrates a historical narrative that is under the surveillance of the CCP. Nevertheless, the major part of his book presents a multi-perspective, historical narration, which is not geared only toward a patriotic education. Li recorded the establishment of Japanese cultural organizations, businesses, schools, and newspapers in Harbin. For example, Li noted the construction of a Japanese Hongan-ji temple in Harbin in 1901, and the opening of the Mitsui Group Harbin Branch, the South Manchuria Railway Company Harbin Office, and the Association of Japanese Immigrants in 1907. Li’s book manifests the

²² Michael K. Prince, *War and German Memory: Excavating the Significance of the Second World War in German Cultural Consciousness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 23.

²³ See Ben-Canaan, “Engineering History,” 5.

diverse contributions made by Japanese immigrants in Harbin in the early decades of the twentieth century. These historical facts are not supportive of patriotic education, as he stated in the preface. Therefore, I argue that although the preface seems to support the CCP's leadership, it is in fact a strategy to bypass censorship. The presentation of this book in the preface as educational material is an example of local historians' strategic maneuvering in the ideologically-charged cultural system of China in the 1980s. On the other hand, under the camouflage of "patriotic education" and "compliance with the CCP's policy," dissident voices (about the Japanese immigrants in Harbin) could be heard in the interstices left open by the ideological overhauling of the Reform and Opening Up in 1978.

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The Japanese book, *Harubin An'nai* (Harbin guidance) (1925), presents an international Harbin by providing the statistics of multi-ethnic groups, in terms of demography, official institutions, and businesses from 1898 to 1924. Moreover, one section of *Harbin An'nai* presents in detail the Japanese institutes, schools, newspapers, banks, and other businesses in Harbin. Many advertisements of Japanese businesses are included as well. The last section of this book presents everyday conversations in Russian, Japanese, and Chinese for pedagogical purposes. This could be for local residents as well as tourists, especially those from Japan. Many of the trilingual daily conversations illustrated in this book are related to business. For example: "What do you want to buy today?"; "Is this a local product or a foreign

one?"; "Businessmen in the rural area are dishonest about pricing, those in the city are not."; "Show me the food menu."; "Are you OK with Russian food?" To some extent, this implies that the Chinese, Russians, and Japanese were influential communities in Harbin, and they intermingled and made business with each other, which necessitated learning some basic language skills from each other.

Harubin Kankoo Boryumu Shikkusu (Harbin Sightseeing Volume Six) (1936) and *Harubin* (1941) are Japanese books, introducing tourist sites in Harbin. These two books concern primarily Russian culture. For example, they introduce several church buildings, the religious customs of Russian Orthodox Christians, Russian art, music, and cinema; even the portrait of a Russian girl becomes an attraction to be incorporated in *Harbin Sightseeing Volume Six*. In *Harbin*, the Jewish population and a synagogue are introduced, but there is not much reference to Harbin's Japanese culture, except for two monuments of Japanese martyrs.²⁴ Such an overview of Harbin implies that the author is attracted by the city's multi-ethnic culture. Similarly, contemporary Chinese city officials also celebrate the exotic architecture and culture of Harbin. I will further discuss the rationale behind the preference for Western architecture by the Chinese and the Japanese in the second part of this chapter.

Haerbinde chengshi guihua 1898-1945 (Harbin urban planning 1898-1945) was written by Akira Koshigawa in Japanese in 1989, and the Harbin Urban Planning

²⁴ Both books introduce the statue of Ito Hiroumi, the Minister of Japan Privy Council. *He was* assassinated by the Korean nationalist Ahn Jung-geun on October 26, 1909 at the Harbin Railway Station. Harbin introduces the monument to two Japanese martyrs, Oki Sosuke and Shozo Yokogawa. They were Japanese spies during the Russo-Japanese War, and were killed by Russian soldiers. Rixin Foreign Firm, *Harubin* (Harbin). Harbin: Harbin Railway General Bureau, 1941.

Bureau organized the translation of this book into Chinese in 2014. Koshigawa points out the modernity of Harbin's urban planning during the Manchukuo period.²⁵ He delineates the contributions of several Japanese urban planners to the city's development in terms of the installation of hydraulic facilities, such as running water and drainage, as well as the addition of green spaces and parks, and the construction of the new city center.²⁶ Moreover, Koshigawa states that the amended city-planning law in Japan in 1968 was similar to that in Manchukuo, the latter having come into being twenty-five years earlier.²⁷ He further argues that the Japanese practice of urban planning in Manchukuo became a model for Japan. His argument is similar to Sewell's, who claims that Manchukuo was "a practical laboratory to create idealized urban milieus."²⁸ Elaborating on Koshigawa's and Swell's argument, the case of Harbin and Manchukuo make it possible to redefine the hierarchical relationship between the center and the periphery, between the colonizer and the colonized.

The Harbin Urban Planning Bureau wrote a preface for Koshigawa's book. They claimed that Harbin is a meeting place for a diversity of architectural styles, including "baroque, classicism, art-nouveau, romanticism, eclecticism, renaissance, traditional Chinese style, Islamic, and Jewish style. This earns Harbin the nickname of Oriental

²⁵ Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, 164.

²⁶ For example, Koshigawa states that before the Mukden Incident in 1931, there was no drainage system in Harbin and only limited running water available in the Port District; citizens obtained water from wells, many of which contained ammonia, and even smelled bad. Rubbish, including excrement, was transported by manual labor to the dumping ground near Taipei Bridge in Daowai District. This rubbish was not burned, and remained there for twenty years. According to Koshigawa, the Japanese engineer, Numata Soyaosu, led a systematic plan of running water and drainage installation in Harbin from 1934 to 1937. The underlying tone is that "the Japanese brought modernity to Harbin." Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, 150-151.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁸ Sewell, "Japanese Imperialism and Civic Construction in Manchuria," 2.

Paris and Oriental Moscow.”²⁹ Interestingly enough, the Japanese style is not mentioned at all.³⁰ This is ironic because a major part of this book addresses the Japanese urban planning in Harbin.

In contrast, Koshigawa’s preface begins as follows: “Many Japanese who were born before 1939 are nostalgic for Harbin. Even in contemporary Japan, fewer cities have such well-organized planning and beautiful streets as Harbin.”³¹ The nostalgia for Harbin by its many former Japanese residents contrasts with the indifference to the Japanese heritage by the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau, who claims that “Koshigawa’s thesis does not represent that of the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau. The purpose of translating and publishing Koshigawa’s work in Chinese is only to enrich academic materials about Harbin urban planning.”³²

The different narration about Old Harbin between Koshigawa and the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau is further manifested by their distinctive attitudes towards the Russian heritage of the city. While the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau is proud of

²⁹ Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, i.

³⁰ Similarly, when Nie Yunling, the former vice mayor of Harbin, wrote a preface for *The Preserved Buildings in Harbin* (2005), he stated that “Harbin’s architecture in the early decades was composed of diverse European styles, including baroque, Byzantine, classicism, and eclecticism. These decorate the city together with the Chinese Baroque, industrial architecture with Soviet imprints, and traditional Chinese architecture.” Nie did not mention the Japanese style. Yunling Nie, ed., *Haerbin baohu jianzhu* (The preserved buildings in Harbin). Harbin: Heilongjiang People’s Press, 2005. Several other books briefly mentioned the Japanese buildings in Harbin. Huaisheng Chang, *Harbin jianzhu yishu* (Harbin architectural art). Harbin: Heilongjiang Science and Technology Press, 1990; Songfu Liu, “Haerbin jindai jianzhude fengge yu wenmai (The styles and cultural context of the contemporary architecture in Harbin).” *Huazhong Architecture* 10, no.1 (1992): 51-55; Harbin Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, *Haerbinshi chengxiang guihua fazhan baogao* (The annual reports of the planning and development in the urban and rural area of Harbin), 2009.

³¹ Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, i.

³² *Ibid.*, i.

Harbin's nickname, Oriental Moscow, Koshigawa foregrounds the colonial nature of this term and the Russian imposition of this nickname on Harbin. He states that "The Russian invaders lived in Harbin and called the city Oriental Moscow."³³ Interestingly, no nickname, such as "Occidental Tokyo", was ever coined by the Japanese.

Yamamuro Shin'ichi delineates Manchukuo as much more complex than just a puppet state, as defined by China, or a utopian ideal, as claimed by some Japanese. He compares Manchukuo to a chimera, with the Kwantung Army as the head of a lion, the state of the emperor system as the body of a sheep, and the Chinese emperor and modern China as the tail of a dragon.³⁴ He reveals the different sources behind the formation of Manchukuo, including "Manchurian regionalism and Qing restorationism from the Chinese side; and experimentalism, racial harmony, antiwarlordism, agrarian idealism, Asianism (liberation of Asia), Buddhism, and anticapitalism from Japanese officers and civilians."³⁵ The Japanese occupation of Northeast China is one among many diverse aspects examined by Yamamuro and the others, but it is by no means the dominant one, as emphasized by the official Chinese history narratives.

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³³ Ibid., ii.

³⁴ Yamamuro Shin'ichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 8.

³⁵ Ibid., 111.

Similar to Yamamuro, Western scholars (such as Rana Mitter, William Shaw Sewell, Edward Vickers, and Prasenjit Duara) pinpoint the complexity of Manchukuo. For instance, Mitter states that representing Manchukuo as a puppet state is “by no means incorrect, but it is incomplete.”³⁶ Sewell argues that modernity was one of the factors that motivated the Japanese to build Manchukuo and the achievement in Manchukuo also had a positive impact on Japan.³⁷ Vickers argues that

Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria was strongly ‘developmentalist’ in that it sought not only to extract resources and dominate local markets, but also to integrate these territories - their agriculture, industry, and commerce, as well as their culture, language, and administration - with the imperial metropolis. The post-war industrialization of China’s North East was built upon foundations bequeathed by Japanese industrialists and administrators.³⁸

Duara determines that the complexity of Manchukuo’s history is not limited by its “puppet” character or “falseness,” which by no means diminishes the colonial and criminal character of Japan’s domination. But it was not a colony in the traditional sense. Duara analyzes how the discourse of civilization, especially Asian civilization, was utilized by the Kwantung Army and a variety of other stakeholders to fabricate the legitimacy of Manchukuo. As Duara states, “The tacit alliance that the Manchukuo state formed with Chinese landed groups, local elites, autonomists, and

³⁶ Rana Mitter, “Manchuria in Mind: Press, Propaganda, and Northeast China in the Age of Empire, 1930-1937,” in *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, ed. Mariko Asano Tamanoi (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 25.

³⁷ Sewell, “Japanese Imperialism and Civic Construction in Manchuria,” 2.

³⁸ Vickers, “Transcending Victimhood,” 19; Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003; Andrew Hall, “The Word is Mightier than the Throne: Bucking Colonial Education Trends in Manchukuo,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no.3 (August 2009): 895-925.

redemptive societies, as well as modernizing bureaucrats and modernizing elements in the Concordia Association, shaped the rhetoric of its sovereignty claims.”³⁹

Moreover, Duara points out that the discourse of “Asian civilization” used in constructing the legitimacy of Manchukuo is traditional and modern (the “East-Asian Modern”), and anti-Western. Manchukuo was a fascist type of state but promoted *minzu xiehe* (Concordia of nationalities). The regime wanted to create a “New East,” socially egalitarian and progressive. At the same time, it used traditional Chinese spiritual and ethical principles, supporting redemptive societies like *Daodehui* (Morality Society), *Hongwanzihui* (Red Swastika Society), and the Concordia Association.⁴⁰ In this way, Duara argues that in between the two faces of Manchukuo, as a puppet state and a developmental state, there are many other factors that have contributed to the construction of Manchukuo.

By juxtaposing three versions of the history of Harbin and Manchukuo, I aim to reveal the complexity of the historical narrative of Harbin and Manchuria, and the social and political reasons that contribute to the different narrations.

Memory and Amnesia: Japanese Buildings in Harbin

While the city of Harbin promotes its buildings of Russian and European styles, the Japanese ones are downplayed, except those related to war crimes. Indeed, there were much fewer Japanese buildings than Russian and European ones in Harbin; Harbin was a lesser part of Manchukuo’s modernization, since it was built by the Russians.

³⁹ According to Duara, “There is considerable scholarly consensus that the most significant basis of Chinese support for the Manchukuo regime came from the landed classes who tacitly promised support in return for stability and anticommunism.” *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 64-5.

⁴⁰ See Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 60-79.

Two major reasons for the relatively low number of Japanese buildings in Harbin are: firstly, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Japanese official institutes and businesses preferred to construct European-style buildings in Harbin.⁴¹ For example, the Toshihisa Mizuue, a Japanese department store, was designed by a Russian architect, A.A. Miaskovsky. It was constructed between 1916 and 1918 in Baroque style. The Kondo Forestry Company invited another Russian architect, B.X. Svildov, to design the Harbin New Hotel in Art-deco style in 1936.⁴² Secondly, when the Japanese occupied Harbin in 1932, they confiscated many buildings to serve their own interests. For example, the Yamato Hotel was originally the Hotel of the CER Management Bureau, built between 1901 and 1903. S.V. Ignatzius designed it in *art nouveau* style. In 1936, the Japanese changed it into the Yamato Hotel. Obviously, such change suggested the new status quo, in which the Japanese replaced the Russian colonizers as the new authority of Harbin.

The Japanese buildings in Harbin can be categorized into the following three categories: European-style buildings, which used to be owned by the Japanese;⁴³ Japanese minimalist buildings constructed during the Manchukuo period; and barracks and other sites used by the Japanese army.

Many of the buildings in the first category have been designated as heritage

⁴¹ European classical-style architecture was also popular in Japan of that time.

⁴² There are several other Japanese institute buildings in European architectural styles including the Harbin branches of the Manchurian Railway Corporation Limited (eclecticism, with Baroque as the main feature, built in 1924-25); the Yokohama Specie Bank (neo-classical style, built in 1912 and reconstructed in 1937); the Japanese-Korean Bank, (eclecticism, built in 1916); and the Oriental Development Company, (eclecticism, built in 1919). The Japanese architect Yoshida Yuio designed the Harbin Assembly Hall in Art-deco style in 1936; it is the present Harbin Drama Theater. The Japanese architect, Shuzo Otani, designed the Russian-style Riverside Restaurant in 1939. It was restored like the original and opened in 2017 as the new Riverside Restaurant.

⁴³ The majority of these buildings were constructed in the first two decades before Manchukuo.

buildings because of their European architectural styles. The Official Residence of the Japanese General Consulate is an example. It was built in 1920 by the designer Y.P. Ridanov in eclectic style. Although the plaque on the wall of this heritage building marks the fact that this building was inhabited by the Japanese, it is one among many European-style buildings that contribute to the official project of rejuvenating Harbin's bygone glory as Oriental Paris and Oriental Moscow. In contrast to the promotion of its architectural style, the local officials silence the poignant fact that this building was used as "the hub for transporting Chinese for human experiments at Unit 731."⁴⁴

Whereas the cultural heritage of Russian immigrants (as well as of Jews) is widely promoted in various ways, including television programs and exhibitions,⁴⁵ similar commemorations of the former Japanese immigrants have never happened. In contrast, the Japanese atrocities that took place between 1932 and 1945 have been repetitively emphasized at different venues and through different channels, such as the exhibitions in Northeast China Martyr Memorial Museum,⁴⁶ the Museum of the CCP's History, as well as Unit 731 Crime Evidence Exhibition Hall. What local officials are doing with regard to the Russian and Japanese heritage is analogous to

⁴⁴ Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 21.

⁴⁵ The municipal government of Harbin organized an exhibition named "Harbin, the Memory of the Russians" on the Central Street in Harbin in December 2017. The event was geared toward tourists, given that December is a popular season for tourists to appreciate ice and snow in Harbin. A news report of the Russian culture in contemporary Harbin is available on the following link. <http://video.tudou.com/v/XNjk1MjY4MDMy.html?from=s1.8-1-1.2>

⁴⁶ This building was originally the Eastern Province Library. It was constructed in 1931, and later became the former Police Institute of Manchukuo. Many anti-Japanese Chinese were tried and tortured here. The changed function of this building from the Police Institute of Manchukuo to a martyr memorial suggests a triumphant discourse by the Chinese officials.

the use of a remote control: the local officials stay tuned to the channel of the Russian contribution to the city, while the channel broadcasting the Japanese contribution is muted. Yes, it is there, but it takes the audience themselves to figure them out.

With regard to minimalist buildings constructed during the Manchukuo period, the majority have been demolished. Only a few are preserved, such as Hongbao Newspaper Office⁴⁷ and Qiantian Jewelry and Watch Store.⁴⁸ Two other Japanese minimalist buildings, Wanshang Department Store and Dengxihe Store, which used to be huge and popular stores in Harbin, were demolished in 1997. A neoclassical commercial building was constructed on the site of the Wanshang Department Store.⁴⁹ This is an example of how Japanese minimalist buildings are being replaced with European neoclassical building. This change mirrors the officials' efforts to reconstruct Oriental Moscow/Paris, while erasing the Japanese minimalist architectural memory in the city.

According to a local architecture professor, Liu Songfu, many old buildings, whether they were Japanese or European style, were demolished and gave way to modern buildings. The old buildings are just victims of the market economy. The disappearance of these old buildings happens in the context of "bulldozing their past in the country's rush to modernity; there is or was not a conspiracy campaign in regard to Japanese assets or memory in Harbin."⁵⁰

If this is true, I wonder whether a potential political concern in the demolition of

⁴⁷ Established in 1938, it is the present Heilongjiang Daily Office on Jingwei Street.

⁴⁸ Built in 1918, it is the present Xinhua Bookstore on Stone Street.

⁴⁹ It is the present Golden Sun Shopping Mall.

⁵⁰ Personal conversation with Ben-Canaan in December 2017.

the Japanese buildings could be under the camouflage of aesthetics. According to Dong, Ding, and Liu,⁵¹ the demolition is due to the fact that the buildings are simply not beautiful; they are plain in style and, therefore, deserve no preservation. This implies a hierarchical perception of the aesthetic beauty of architecture. The grand and elaborate styles, such as *art nouveau* and Baroque, are regarded by the local people as more beautiful than the minimalist.

Coincidentally, in his 1989 book *Harbin Urban Planning (1898-1945)*, the Japanese author, Koshigawa, also claims that “the Western architecture built by the Russians in the end of the 19th century is the most beautiful in Harbin.”⁵² Exoticism plays a role for some Chinese and Japanese, who prefer Western architecture to the Eastern. But, aside from the economic value of real estate, is such aesthetic disparagement of the Japanese minimalist architecture the fundamental reason for demolishing its works? One is left wondering whether aesthetics has been unconsciously politicized and influenced by the dominant official discourse in China, which defines the Japanese during World War II as homogeneous invaders. Perhaps, there are not definite answers to these questions.

Nevertheless, ideological appropriation does manifest itself in the preservation of Japanese barracks and the former site of Unit 731. Two barracks, a watchtower, a prison, and a warehouse of the former Japanese army were officially designated as immovable cultural relics in October, 2012.⁵³ In 2017, the municipal government of

⁵¹ Dong works at the Harbin Cultural Heritage Management Institute. Ding works at the Harbin Urban Planning Bureau. Liu was mentioned above.

⁵² Koshigawa, *Haerbinde chengshi guihua*, 44.

⁵³ This is part of a national project, the Third National Investigation of Cultural Heritage. It happened between 2007 and 2011.

Harbin created plaques for these relics. For example, the statement on the plaque of a barrack says “Immovable Cultural Relics of Harbin – This was a barrack of the Japanese invaders.”⁵⁴ The residences and businesses there have been relocated. Professor Liu Songfu’s team is engaging in the renovation of these barracks, which when completed will be for commercial use.⁵⁵ The historical and commercial values of these buildings are intertwined and in tension.⁵⁶ While the interior renovation or reconstruction transforms these two barracks to accommodate future businesses, the concern for their historical significance survives mainly on the plaques, which are hung on the walls of the barracks. To some extent, the plaque is more important than the building itself, given that it enables the architecture to “speak.” It is a “voiceless curator,” who tells the stories behind the building. As Bourdieu argues, “Heritage might be understood as a form of state-sponsored social control, a complex construction of social entities that are dominated by the narratives and representations of elite groups.”⁵⁷ The plaques of the barracks are indispensable for representing the

⁵⁴ This is my translation.

⁵⁵ There is a tension between the historical significance of this building as memory of war and its commercial function at present. Heritage buildings are always faced with the threat from bulldozers, due to the booming of real estate market in China. The Japanese barrack used to be a complex, constituting one building on Maimai Street and several buildings behind it in the courtyard. Before this complex became a heritage site, the courtyard got demolished; only the two on Maimai Street are preserved.

⁵⁶ According to Zeng Yizhi, a local volunteer for cultural heritage protection, “The interior structure and windows of another heritage building, the former Japanese Kenpeitai Office, Daoli Branch, was destroyed.” The protection of heritage buildings is not taken seriously. Maybe the symbolic capital of these buildings is what the officials care about rather than the building itself. Yizhi Zeng, “Youyichu qinhua rijun zuizheng yizhi haerbin riben xianbingdui daoli fenbu juzhi bei weifa pohuai (Another site of the Japanese Imperialist Army: the Kenpeitai Office Daoli Branch was illegally destroyed).” Blog, July 29, 2014.

⁵⁷ Gegner and Ziino, *The Heritage of War*, 3; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge, 1984.

narratives of the groups in power, the municipal government of Harbin.

Since the 2010s, the memories of the Sino-Japanese War in China have been emphasized more intensely than before. Establishing the Nanjing Massacre National Memorial Day in 2014 is the most obvious example. Before that, memorialization of the Nanjing Massacre was conducted mainly in Nanjing.⁵⁸ In Harbin, since June 8, 2011, dozens of plaques indicating “the Site of Revolution” have been hung on the buildings that were previously used by the CCP to conduct its revolutionary activity, including the resistance to the Japanese fascists during World War II.⁵⁹ According to a local news report, these plaques are to promote patriotic education, develop Red tourism, and to strengthen the interpretation of Harbin as a historically and culturally famous city.⁶⁰ These plaques signify the official efforts of “consignation” (the gathering together of signs).⁶¹ They crystalize the triumphant discourse of the CCP.

To quote Noam Leshem, “The official public sign, in its various forms, holds great significance in the construction of the [h]egemonic collective memory. Signposting is... a means of establishing presence and control over a given space and

⁵⁸ The Nanjing government started to commemorate the massacre in 1996. Since then, the local official release an air defense alert on December 13 each year.

⁵⁹ This project was initiated by the Committee for the Protection of the Site of Revolution in Harbin.

⁶⁰ Zhenyu Zhao, “Hashi dierpi shige geming yizhi guapai biao zhipai shouci yong erweima (The second batch of ten revolution sites were attached with official plaques; quick response code is used on the plaques for the first time),” *Dongbei Net*, Jan. 1. 2013. “Red tourism” refers to transforming the historical sites, at which the revolutionary history of the CCP happened, into tourist sites.

⁶¹ Noam Leshem, “Memory Activism: Reclaiming Spatial Histories in Israel,” in *The Politics of Cultural Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 160. Derrida argues that consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony, in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. *Ibid*; also see Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

its inhabitants.”⁶² By reinscribing the martyrdom and heroism of the CCP into space, these plaques hung on the sites of revolution are political statement of survival, resilience, and pride. The systematic signposting engenders a collective identity through reinforcing the atrocities of the demonized Other, the Imperial Japanese Army. In this sense, these plaques commemorating the revolution not only tell a story of the past but also a contemporary story of the nation’s strategic use of its history to serve political ends.

When a building has various historical layers, the memorialization of the CCP’s history is always prioritized. For example, the Modern Hotel is a national heritage building, and there are six plaques on its wall. One of the plaques states:

Constructed between 1906 and 1913, the Modern Hotel is an *art-nouveau* building of three floors. From September to November, 1948, the preparatory conference for establishing the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was held in the Modern Hotel.⁶³

The adjacent plaque notes that “The Modern Hotel is a patriotic education base; it opens to youngsters from 9:00 to 11:30 and from 13:30 to 16:00.”⁶⁴ According to another plaque, the Ministry of Commerce of China entitled the Modern Hotel a “Time-honoured brand in China.” These plaques emphasize the political importance of the Modern Hotel in relation to the CCPCC, and claim this hotel as a Chinese brand, even in the past. In contrast, numerous citizens know the Modern Hotel because of its architectural beauty, as well as the fact that it was originally established

⁶² Leshem, “Memory Activism,” 168.

⁶³ This is my translation.

⁶⁴ This is my translation.

by a Jewish businessman, Joseph Kaspe. Such disconnect exemplifies the contrast between the ideological appropriation of historical buildings by the officials and the affective memorialization of these historical buildings by the public. According to John B. Thompson, ideology not only “expresses” but also “represses,” excluding certain issues from discussion and creating a “public unconsciousness.”⁶⁵ However, the different memories of the Modern Hotel between the officials and the public suggest that the officials’ attempt to “repress” and to be didactic turns out to be a failure. Affect challenges power, in Jie Yang’s words.⁶⁶ The plaques on the wall of the Modern Hotel reveal the cultural hegemony exerted by the Chinese officials, who inscribe the Modern Hotel *into* the history of China, while silencing its foreign origin. On the other hand, the public’s different memories of and intimacy with the Modern Hotel signifies their anti-hegemony in terms of affect.

Another similar example is the present Scala Club on Factory Street, which was the original Japanese Peace Plaza Cinema built in 1933. All three plaques hung on the wall of this building emphasize that this was the site for the Sixth National Labor Conference in 1948. According to one of the plaques, “China’s National Labor Union was resumed at this conference, which confirmed the important status of the working class. It is significant in the history of the working class movement in China.” The only thing mentioned in relation to Japan is that “This building is in Japanese style.” Probably local people are more familiar with this building as the former Japanese

⁶⁵ John B Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 85.

⁶⁶ Jie Yang, ed., *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2017), 17.

Peace Plaza Cinema than as the site for a labor conference of the CCP. As more and more sites of revolution have been marked and (re-)branded, Harbin is on the way to reinscribe nationalism into space. Meanwhile, this hegemonic reinforcement of nationalism is challenged by the public, who have affective memories of these historical buildings. As Pierre Nora argues, “History and memory are opposite to each other. History is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present.”⁶⁷ The public *memory* of the Modern Hotel and the Japanese Peace Plaza Cinema confront the officially reconstructed Communist *history* of the two buildings. These two sites manifest the tension between history and memory, between the officials and the civil, between politics and affect.

The New Remembering of Unit 731

Unit 731 was a biological and chemical warfare research and development unit of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Pingfang District of Harbin. Officially established in 1936, Unit 731 operated until Japan’s defeat in World War II.⁶⁸ Unit 731 primarily conducted germ-warfare research and lethal human experimentation, such as bacterial inoculations, vivisection, frostbite, and poison gas. The majority of the 3,000 victims

⁶⁷ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 8.

⁶⁸ What became Unit 731 was formerly the Togo Unit, a site based in Beiyinhe, a village about 100 kilometers south of Harbin. Human experimentation began there in 1933. See Tsuneishi Keiichi, “Unit 731 and the Japanese Imperial Army’s Biological Warfare Program.” in *Japan’s Wartime Medical Atrocities: Comparative Inquiries in Science, History, and Ethics*, ed. Jing-Bao Nie, Nanyan Guo, Mark Selden, and Arthur Kleinman (London: Routledge), 24.

used in the human experiments were Chinese, but there were also Russians, Mongols, Koreans, and Allied prisoners of war. When the Japanese officials responsible for the unit realized the inevitability of their country's defeat, they blew up large parts of Unit 731 before retreating to Japan, but some building ruins remain.⁶⁹ "The former site of Unit 731 had been long abandoned and most of it was demolished in the late 1960s. It was only in 1982 when the Japanese writer Morimura Seichi visited the site to complete his *Akuma no hoshoku* (Devil's feast), a disturbingly graphic portrayal of the biological experiment that might have happened at the site, that a movement started..."⁷⁰ This movement established the first *zuizheng chenlie guan* (Crime Evidence Exhibition Hall) in 1985 in the former headquarters of Unit 731.

Thereafter, the Chinese officials have been emphasizing the memorialization of Unit 731. This site became one of the One Hundred National-Level Patriotic Education Sites in China in 1997,⁷¹ and then a fully protected national heritage site in 2006. A new exhibition hall was constructed on the site in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the victory in the anti-fascist war. Historical artifacts were

⁶⁹ Twenty-three of the ruins have been designated as National Cultural Heritage Sites in China. See Yanjun Yang, *Guandongjun di qisanyi budui shilu* (Documentation on Unit 731 of the Kwantung Army) (Beijing: Foreign Language Press), 122.

⁷⁰ According to Koga, "In 1958, the demolition of the remaining buildings started with the Great Leap Forward in order to salvage steel from the structure. In the spring of 1969 during the Cultural Revolution, about three thousand people participated in further destroying the rest." Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 20.

⁷¹ Among the one hundred National-Level Patriotic Education Sites, twenty sites relate to anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), twenty-four to the civil war between the CCP and the KMT (1927-1949), and one site to Russian invasion (1858). Zheng Wang, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 2008): 796.

relocated from the original headquarters to the new exhibition hall.

Architecturally, the new exhibition hall resembles in shape the “black box” used in airplanes. Metaphorically, this shape suggests that this museum has the function to reveal the “truth” of history. From a bird’s-eye view, the black box appears to have a “crack” through its middle, “as if it is cut by a scalpel.”⁷² This surgical allusion is intentional. The “wounded” building itself is meant to tell of the atrocities that occurred within Unit 731 under the Japanese military. The harsh crack or cut speaks an architectural language of trauma and denouncement; the building was conceived as “an evocative entity that is in dialogue with its content.”⁷³



Figure 1. The New Unit 731 Crime Evidence Exhibition Hall⁷⁴

Two twisted and withered trees outside the museum symbolize *maruta* (“log” in Japanese, a term used to refer to the subject of human experimentation). They create a

⁷² Jingtang He, “*Pingjing de taidu: qinhua rijun di qisanyi budui zuizheng chelie guan* (Tranquil attitude—the Exhibition Hall of Evidences of Crime Committed by Unit 731 of the Imperial Japanese Army),” *Arch Daily*, June 13, 2017.

⁷³ Michaela Giebelhausen, ed., *The Architecture of the Museum: Symbolic Structures, Urban Contexts* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 7.

⁷⁴ The red building behind this new museum is the old exhibition hall.

somber “mood of memory” before visitors enter the building.⁷⁵ In fact, visitors are made to enter the first exhibition room through a dark corridor, to heighten within them “a sense of foreboding” and imply the start of a gloomy journey into Unit 731’s history.⁷⁶ To further underline the somber mood, the exhibition hall in its entirety features no natural light with the exception of the final room, the Contemplation Room. In terms of size and lighting, the first exhibition room is small and dark, while the last one is big and bright. Such a layout provides “contrasting vocabularies of light/spaciousness and darkness/constriction [, relating] a story of hope in the face of despair.”⁷⁷ It proffers visitors not only the embodied experience of a violent past but also a space to envision a better future.

To evoke the imagery of blood or bloodiness, some internal walls and exhibition boards are rust-coloured: the bright red of any victim’s blood imagined as sedimented over time into the colour of rust. Moreover, in the section titled Human Experiments, an electronic screen is incorporated into the reconstructed scenario of vivisection in a lab. The juxtaposition of the cloth curtain with an electronic “curtain” in this re-imagined space of the lab is meant to suggest the coexistence of Unit 731 and its modern, technological recreation. It suggests a sense of historical continuity in

⁷⁵ Kirk A. Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 149; also see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: the Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), 168.

⁷⁶ Emma Waterton and Jason Dittmer, “The Museum as Assemblage: Bringing Forth Affect at the Australian War Memorial,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29, no.2 (2014):129.

⁷⁷ Dvora Yanow, “Space Stories: Studying Museum Buildings as Organizational Spaces while Reflecting on Interpretive Methods and Their Narration,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 7, no.3 (September): 223.

memorializing Unit 731. The blurry image of a person's face projected on the electronic "curtain" signifies the hidden yet unveiled atrocities of Unit 731, and is likely to trigger in visitors the ambiguous feelings of both fear and curiosity, catching them in their attempts to walk toward yet step away from the figure and all it suggests about the past and the present of Unit 731. The new exhibition hall uses lighting to conspire with image to mediate visitors' visual experience of the vivisection located within Unit 731. Besides, gloomy music hovers over this reconstructed scenario. The bleak music contributes to the production of an "auditory geography" that might augment visitors' sensations of empathy and identification with the victims.⁷⁸ The gloomy music contrasts yet also cooperates with the somber silence in the other rooms, evoking an auditory remembering or imagining of the vivisection and other atrocities conducted in Unit 731.

In a reconstruction of the Japanese military poison-gas testing of victims in a field, the screen showing the victims tied to crosses is accompanied by the spoken testimony of a former Japanese member of Unit 731, and is placed close to actual crosses that visitors can touch. Such constructions enable visitors to experience an *in situ* feeling of victimization visually, aurally, and tactually. After the variously embodied experiences of the atrocities committed in Unit 731 in the major sections of this exhibition hall, visitors finally reach the bright Contemplation Room. Here, relief is provided from the oppressive mood, evoked in the other rooms. Nevertheless, the structure of this room carries an ideological message. Three independent showcases in

⁷⁸ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1995), 82.

this room respectively display a medical book, a scalpel, and a piece of brick from the crematory of Unit 731. They suggest a silent denouncement: medical knowledge is not supposed to be used for unethical human experimentation and war.

At the end of the journey through the museum, a visitor notebook is available for tourists to sign. When I visited Unit 731 in June 2017, I saw that many notes admonished, “Do not forget the national humiliation” (*wu wang guo chi*) and reminded that “to not forget the past is to be master of the future” (*qian shi bu wang hou shi zhi shi*).⁷⁹ Here, at the end of the journey, the individual “I” has affectively transformed into the collective “we”. The sentiment of humiliation plays a role in unifying the Chinese nation. The trauma of the three thousand victims’ families seems contagious, spreading to transform into a shared memory of “national trauma.”⁸⁰

The visitors’ patriotic notes illustrate the success of the apparent political agenda of the Chinese state to engineer “emotionally charged state-sponsored nationalism” in the Unit 731 Crime Evidence Exhibition Hall.⁸¹ The museum’s framing through spatial layout, lighting, colour, and sound turns out to be ideologically loaded. These

⁷⁹ Also see Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Q. and A.: Gao Yubao on Documenting Unit 731’s Brutal Human Experiments,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2015.

⁸⁰ See Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 160; Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3. In Emma Hutchison’s analysis of the 2002 Bali bombing, she examines how media and other discourses represent this transnational trauma as a national trauma of Australia.

⁸¹ Patrizia Violi, “Educating for Nationhood: A Semiotic Reading of the Memorial Hall for Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* 4, no.2 (Autumn): 66; also see Kirk A. Denton, “Horror and Atrocity: Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums,” in *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China*, ed. Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 250.

techniques, according to Thrift, “are not only being deployed knowingly, they are being deployed politically (mainly but not only by the rich and powerful) to political ends.”⁸² The spatial design in the new exhibition hall helps to engender a collective identity through facilitating visitors’ embodied experience of China’s dark moment in history and emphasizing the demonized Other, the Imperial Japanese Army.⁸³

Unit 731 represents, in Amy Sodaro’s terms, a “politics of regret”, which means “focusing on remembering the most violent, atrocious, darkest moments of the past in a way that attempts to come to terms with the past and learn from it.”⁸⁴ This is indicated in the concluding statement of the exhibition in the new exhibition hall: “Being the largest site of germ warfare in the world, Unit 731 witnessed the anguish of human beings. The site of Unit 731 has the responsibility of recording that history and praying for peace.” This representation of the politics of regret has been in place

⁸² Nigel Thrift, “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no.1 (2004): 58.

⁸³ A similar case to the new Unit 731 exhibition hall is the House of Terror in Budapest, Hungary. This museum was opened in 2002, initiated by the right-wing party, Fidesz. It exhibits the crimes of both Fascist and Communist occupiers, and highlights the rhetoric that “Fascism and Communism both lie outside what Fidesz calls ‘authentic Hungarian history.’ It promotes a vision of history in which Hungary is a perennial victim, and Fidesz its long-awaited savior.” The museum was a tool for Fidesz to win voters in the 2002 elections. Jacob Mikanowski, “The Frightening Politics of Hungary’s House of Terror.” *The AWL*. March 30, 2012. <https://www.theawl.com/2012/03/the-frightening-politics-of-hungarys-house-of-terror/> Similarly, István Rév argues that by exposing the hidden history of terror, “the House was nothing but an ideological and political construct.” István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 292.

⁸⁴ According to Sodaro, the opposite of “the politics of regret” is the “politics of nostalgia,” which means “focusing on celebrating the heritage and culture of the groups that were victimized.” Sodaro argues that the Jewish Museum in Berlin focuses on a celebration of German-Jewish culture and history rather than the tragedy of the holocaust. Amy Sodaro, “Memory, History, and Nostalgia in Berlin’s Jewish Museum,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no.1 (March 2013): 87. In this sense, the case of China/Japan is both different from and similar to that of the Jews/Nazi. The case of Unit 731 also opens up a problematic parallel to that of the holocaust.

since the 1980s, when modern China history shifted from “victor narrative to victim narrative.”⁸⁵ Since then, a “new remembering” of the Sino-Japanese War has been provoked.⁸⁶

In the Mao era, the atrocities committed by Japanese imperialists were downplayed, partly because their evocation did not fit well into the discourse of heroic resistance and victory.⁸⁷ Mao did not bear a deep grudge against the Japanese imperialists. He said that “our ancestors once quarreled, fought with each other. All this can be forgotten now! All this should be forgotten because it is unpleasant stuff. What use is it to keep it in our minds? You have apologized. You cannot apologize every day, can you?”⁸⁸ Mao also stated that “The Chinese owed ‘thanks’ to the Japanese imperialist Army,”⁸⁹ in the sense that the latter made it possible for the former to unite in the fight for sovereignty. Mao’s statement is similar to that of Chalmers Johnson, who argues that the “Japanese invasion evoked a nationalist response which resulted not only in Japan’s ultimate defeat but contributed to the rise of the CCP.”⁹⁰ In the Mao era, the CCP did not have to construct a foreign enemy to

⁸⁵ Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 135; Peter Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 43-52.

⁸⁶ Coble, “China’s ‘New Remembering,’” 398; Waldron, “China’s New Remembering of World War II,” 945-978.

⁸⁷ Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 133-134.

⁸⁸ Nie et al, eds., *Japan’s Wartime Medical Atrocities: Comparative Inquiries in Science, History, and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 130; Zedong Mao, *Selected Essays of Mao Zedong on Foreign Affairs*, ed. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC and the Research Office of Historical Literature of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (Beijing: The CCCCP Literature Press and World Knowledge Press, 1994), 226.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Nie et al, eds., *Japan’s Wartime Medical Atrocities*, 130; Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

legitimize its rule, especially in the first years after 1949; the party and the charismatic figure of President Mao enjoyed great support from the people. Nevertheless, after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Reform and Opening-Up (1978), the CCP was faced with “what Jie Chen called the ‘three belief crises’: crisis of faith in socialism, crisis of belief in Marxism, and crisis of trust in the party.”⁹¹ The CCP then emphasized the victimhood of the Chinese, and reconstructed a foreign enemy to strengthen nationalism and to legitimize its rule.

The Contestation of the New Exhibition Hall as a Lieu de Mémoire

A museum staff member, Gao Yubao, defended the necessity of this new exhibition hall to me by claiming that “the former headquarters is no longer able to accommodate the increasing historical sources of Unit 731 that we have collected over time. It also protects the headquarters from potential damage by a large number of visitors.”⁹² Such a view is questionable because while the former headquarters may need protection, the new exhibition hall potentially puts this old building in jeopardy of isolation, because removing the artifacts from their original context takes away from their *in situ* meaning. There is also the potential danger of erasing the authenticity of Unit 731. Here, I mean authenticity, in Walter Benjamin’s sense, whose prerequisite is “the presence of the original.”⁹³

⁹¹ Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation,” 788; also see Jie Chen, “The Impact of Reform on the Party and Ideology in China,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 4, no.9 (1995): 22-34.

⁹² This is taken from my interview with Gao Yubao, the head of research in Unit 731 Crime Evidence Exhibition Hall, in June 2017.

⁹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 220.

Authenticity has long proven a concern in the preservation of historical sites. Proposals for the reconstruction of gas chambers in Auschwitz, for example, have been criticized by opponents, who suggest they would “render Auschwitz into a theme park, and make visitors into voyeurs.”⁹⁴ Likewise, an opponent has disparaged the American Holocaust Memorial as “a fake Auschwitz.”⁹⁵ By the same token, the modern construction on the site of Unit 731 invites questions of whether the historical and sacred aura of the original site is damaged or even lost, and whether it might transform and possibly distort people’s imagination of the *milieu de m émoire* (real environment of memory) in Pierre Nora’s sense.⁹⁶ In that case, might visitors’ memories, and understandings, of Unit 731 be based more on historical reconstruction through a current lens than the original history of Unit 731? Might the latter one day be completely forgotten, with only its simulacra (and the embodied, ideological reconfiguration) remembered?

The exhibition hall and the former headquarters represent two different kinds of *lieux de m émoire*. In Jane Kramer’s terms, the headquarters constitutes the “real *lieu de m émoire*”:⁹⁷ It has *been* there and functions as a “historical testimony,” from which its authenticity and authority are derived.⁹⁸ In contrast, the new exhibition hall

⁹⁴ Jane Perlez, “The Decay of a 20th Century Relic: What is a Fitting Future for Auschwitz?” *The New York Times*, January 5, 1994.

⁹⁵ Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996), 277.

⁹⁶ Nora, “Between Memory and History.”

⁹⁷ Jane Kramer pinpoints Berliners’ concern about Lea Rosh’s proposal to establish the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. She states that “they worry that monuments are slowly replacing the real *lieux de m émoire* — the camps themselves.” *The Politics of Memory*, 272.

⁹⁸ Dark Dalton, “Encountering Auschwitz: A Personal Ruminations on the Possibilities and Limitations of Witnessing/Remembering Trauma in Memorial Space.” *Law Text Culture* 13, 2009, 198; also see Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 220.

embodies history *as a reconstruction*. It lacks the ambience of the former headquarters and seems “out-of-place.”⁹⁹ The new exhibition hall signifies a modern intervention and a constructed history that says more about the current interpretation of Unit 731 by Chinese officials than about the unit’s history. While the former tends to cultivate the sentiment of humiliation and value the pedagogical significance of this place, the latter focuses more on violence *per se*.

Indeed, the relocation of individual exhibits in 2015 was not the first occurrence of its kind. According to Kirk Denton,¹⁰⁰ “In 1995, a new building to house the exhibits was constructed down the road from this site, but then in 2001 the exhibit was brought back to the original site.” Denton suspects that this is because “the new museum building lacked the power and authenticity of a site where the atrocities described in the exhibits actually took place”.¹⁰¹ If this is true, I wonder whether the exhibits in the new exhibition hall will be relocated back to the former headquarters in the future. Contemporary museum officials corralled the history (or “ghosts”) of Unit 731 several times to locate and relocate them between their original sites and the modern museum structures. Every one of these relocations entailed a reframing and retelling of the history of Unit 731, complete with edits, reorganizations, and possible deletions and additions.

When I visited the Unit 731 complex in June and December of 2017, dozens of visitors crowded the new exhibition hall, but I did not see anyone in the historical site,

⁹⁹ Dalton, “Encountering Auschwitz,” 198.

¹⁰⁰ Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 149.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

except some seniors, who were jogging on the square of Unit 731. As Yukiko Koga argues, “The past is confined to the museum, so that the present outside can forget the past.”¹⁰² This might explain why the traumatic history of Unit 731 has been forgotten, or ignored, on this square, which has been transformed into a place of leisure for local residents. The new exhibition hall also outdoes the former headquarters in attracting visitors, isolating the latter. It is the visitors who endow the historical site with vitality and create the presence of the past through their embodied experience, carrying it into the future. With fewer visitors, the former headquarters resembles an “archive,” in Aleida Assman’s words.¹⁰³ It passively preserves memories of the past, rather than actively keeping the past present. In this sense, remembering history at a distance, or in the constructed space of a museum (rather than through its original buildings), puts the real site of memory in jeopardy of oblivion. What is remembered is a simulacrum housed in a modern building, rather than the embodied history of the original site. We can see the new exhibition hall as paradoxically and simultaneously communicating both historical continuity and a loss of memory.

When I asked a museum staff member, who initiated the construction of this new exhibition hall and who provided the funding, he hesitated to answer. Eventually, he said that “this is a sensitive topic, especially because your readers are international. I do not recommend you include this part in your paper.” Nonetheless, he told me in a few words that the initiative to construct a new museum came from the central

¹⁰² Koga, “The Double Inheritance,” 21.

¹⁰³ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 98.

officials and was supported by the Unit 731 Institute. He added that the funding was from the municipal, provincial and central governments, but he implied that the municipal government of Harbin was the major patron. If this is true, the pragmatic use of Unit 731 by the municipal government of Harbin is obvious. The local officials aim to develop local economy and culture under the guise of answering the call from the central government to strengthen nationalist memory and patriotic education.

The trauma that Unit 731 embodies has a different connotation and significance for the central government of China, the municipal government of Harbin, and the Unit 731 institute. On the one hand, the central government intends to use the trauma embodied by Unit 731 to “create a common memory, as a foundation for a unified polis.”¹⁰⁴ The central government’s concern is about the pedagogical and political connotation of Unit 731, and its significance in dealing with the diplomatic relationship between China and Japan. Moreover, Denton argues that the emphasis by the Chinese on the Japanese atrocities has ethical and economic implications. China seeks a kind of moral upper hand in Asia in its economic and political competition with Japan.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, the local government plans to use Unit 731 to hold sway over the economic, cultural, and social development of the city. According to Sun Huijie,¹⁰⁶ “The government of Pingfang District set the goal for Unit 731 to apply for UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. This application is conducive to drawing international

¹⁰⁴ Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 136; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Sun is an urban planner in Harbin Urban Planning Bureau.

attention to Harbin, and to the development of the city in economic, cultural and social terms.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, with Red Tourism gaining momentum, the Harbin municipal government attaches growing importance to Unit 731 not only as a site for patriotic education but also as a commodity to be consumed in the city’s tourist scape.

In contrast, the Unit 731 Institute gives more consideration to the heritage site *per se*. For example, Gao stated that “our museum first and foremost serves as an exhibition of crimes. This is not for putting additional pressure on the Japanese. We prepare what we can for Unit 731 to be designated by the UNESCO.” The Institute also has pragmatic concerns, such as using the popularity of Unit 731 as a means for its officials to boost political prestige. Moreover, according to Gao, the original planning by the Unit 731 Institute was to open the new exhibition hall in 2017, a date that would have allowed for a detailed preparation of the exhibition. However, top officials wanted the whole project to be ready by August, 2015. Obviously, a pedagogical and political manipulation of Unit 731 by the top officials is at work here.

There is no denying that the concerns from the three sectors are intertwined with each other. Nevertheless, there is a subtle difference between the purposes of preserving and promoting Unit 731. Within a so-called “centralized” regime of China, there are many heterogeneous concerns in the local area. In this sense, a centralized China is in the process of, more or less, being de-centralized in many ways, including

¹⁰⁷ Huijie Sun, “Cong 731 jiu zhi baohu guihua tantao mingcheng baohu xin geju (Examining the new pattern of protecting culturally famous city through the case of Unit 731 heritage site preservation). *Heilongjiang History Journal*, (December 2014): 31-34.

in heritage site preservation and museum construction. The new exhibition hall tells of the contemporary stake holders' various motivations, in terms of politics, economy, and museology, as much as of the history of Unit 731.

Conclusion

In June, 2017, the International Conference of Former Foreign Residents in Harbin was organized by the Foreign Affairs Office of the Municipal Government of Harbin. The invited guests and their offspring came from many countries, including Russia, Israel, Poland, Lithuania, Canada, the U.S, and Australia, but no Japanese attended this conference. When I consulted Dan Ben-Canaan, who was a member of the organizing committee, about the reason for the absence of the Japanese in this conference, he replied that “this is a very sensitive political issue today, not just for Harbin. The Japanese occupation of China is an ongoing matter of conflict between the two countries, due to the Japanese lack of admission, remorse, and retributions. Personally, I would have liked to see here former Japanese residents (even if they would not fall into the same category as others) and hear their stories. But this is an ongoing political issue, here.”¹⁰⁸

I see a homogenizing perception of the Japanese in Ben-Canaan's and the organizing committee's concern. In the contemporary context of the precarious relationship between China and Japan, the former Japanese residents of Harbin might always fall into a different category from the other nationalities in the city. This is

¹⁰⁸ This is from my personal conversation with Ben-Canaan.

even more perplexing when the distinctive Japanese and Western versions of the histories of Manchukuo and Harbin are taken into consideration.

“Images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order and are used to justify present policy. It is in this manner that the control of memory is a type of political power.”¹⁰⁹ Memory of the past is analogous to the dusty furniture under the coverage of cloth. While the local officials of Harbin unveiled some furniture, such as the Japanese barracks and Unit 731, they swept the others under the carpet, such as the absence of the original Japanese residents in the 2017 conference. Such contrast reveals the politics of hypervisibility and invisibility. Inscribing the nationalist ideology in history books, old buildings, and museums, and putting aside memories of the everyday life of the Japanese residents in Harbin is essentially a process of “construct[ing] the body of knowledge that is accessible to the inhabitants of a specific landscape, control[ing], and measure[ing] the exposure to it, and block[ing] out unwanted or competitive knowledge.”¹¹⁰ The presence and absence of the Japanese in the cultural memories of Harbin tells more about the cultural and identity construction of the city at present than about the history of the Japanese there. They serve the political agenda of the CCP. Here, we have nationalism manifesting itself in spatial practices.

¹⁰⁹ Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23; also see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30; Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 332; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 209.

¹¹⁰ Leshem, “Memory Activism,” 168.

The different significances of Unit 731 to the central government of China, the municipal government of Harbin, and the Unit 731 Museum exemplify Assmann's argument that cultural memory exists "in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance."¹¹¹ The cultural memory of Harbin's Japanese in its mode of actuality implies a Chinese politicization of such memory that serves the CCP's agenda to deal with Japan at present. It also demonstrates Harbin's pragmatic utilization of this dark history of Japanese occupation to boost local tourism and communication with the international world. In this sense, the memorialization of Japanese atrocities in Harbin has economic connotations and suggests a concern for building a unique, local identity that goes beyond the construction of nationalism.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Chapter Five. Xiao Hong's Paradoxical Memories of the Colonized Harbin

Literature fills a niche in memory culture, because like arguably no other symbol system, it is characterized by its ability... to refer to the forgotten and repressed as well the unnoticed, unconscious, and unintentional aspects of our dealings with the past. — Astrid Erll¹

There is no doubt that literature is a medium of cultural memory.² Astrid Erll suggests that literary works are “collective texts” that create, shape, and circulate cultural memories.³ Andrea Paris further pinpoints the parallel between literature and cultural memory, by stating that “the literary realm becomes a mimesis of the memory discourses of the time.”⁴ Anh Hua addresses the necessity of understanding fiction as an important means of cultural memory, when she compares fiction to “emotional geography [that] can be utilized as a site of public memory to commemorate and record voices repressed or suppressed by official history.”⁵ However, not all literature plays a positive role in arousing cultural memory. According to Aleida Assmann, “remembering has an active and a passive side. The institutions of active memory preserve the past as present, while the institutions of passive memory preserve the past as past” She refers to the former as “the canon” and the latter, “the archive.”⁶ A

¹ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 153; also see Cynthia Sugars and Eleanor Ty, eds. *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

² See Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, “Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction,” *European Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 2 (August 2006): 111 – 115.

³ Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 164.

⁴ Andrea Paris, “Literature as Memory and Literary Memories: From Cultural Memory to Reader-Response Criticism.” In *Literature and Cultural Memory*, ed. Mihaela Irimia, Dragoş Manea, and Andrea Paris (Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2017), 98.

⁵ Anh Hua, ““What We All Long For”: Memory, Trauma, and Emotional Geographies,” in *Emotion, Place and Culture*, ed. Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron, and Liz Bondi (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 135.

⁶ Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll, Ansgar

local writer in Harbin, Xiao Hong, fits in the category of the canon.

Xiao Hong (1911-1942) was a prominent writer in China. After her death, Xiao Hong's friends and colleagues wrote many memoirs about her. Since the 1980s, there has been a boom in Xiao Hong studies, and many commemorations of her – such as establishing Xiao Hong research institutes, organizing Xiao Hong commemoration conferences, founding Xiao Hong poetry-reading seminars, and putting Xiao Hong's house on display – were set in Harbin and Hulan. Monuments and films about Xiao Hong were also produced in the 2000s. To some extent, Xiao Hong and her literary works have been canonized in the region and even in China, as a whole. Xiao Hong's capacity to “keep the past as present” is the first reason why incorporating her literary framing of the cultural memory of Harbin is in order.

Moreover, I argue that Xiao Hong is the epitome of Harbiners who hold paradoxical perceptions of both exoticism (embracing Russian and European culture) and nationalism. My following analysis of her works, and her friends' memoirs, shows that Xiao Hong is both an originator of exoticism and a patriotic writer. She was averse to Russian colonizers in Harbin but, at the same time, Russian material culture – food and dressing – appealed to her; Xiao Hong expressed her compassion towards the plight of common people in Manchukuo, yet she was indifferent to politics. In relation to the major thesis of this dissertation – *viz.*, that contemporary Harbin is characterized by the paradox between promoting the city's exoticism and complying with the state's construction of nationalism – the analysis of Xiao Hong's

Nünning, and Sara Young (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 98.

ambivalent perceptions of Harbin offers a lens to see a meaningful, intriguing historical continuity in the cultural and ethnic identity struggle of the city.

My methodology to study Xiao Hong in relation to the memories of Harbin is inspired by Stephen Knight, who understands “the myth of Robin Hood as a site of memory.”⁷ In his chronological study of Robin Hood from the fifteenth century to the present, Knight explores the diverse ways of remembering Robin Hood and the “contextual desires, or ideologies” that contribute to the various memories and representations of Robin Hood.⁸ By adopting Knight’s approach, I examine Xiao Hong as a *lieu de m'énmoire* for Harbin, and conduct a chronological and contextual examination of this site, which I categorize into three stages: Xiao Hong’s literary memory of a Russianized Harbin in the 1930s; her friends’ and colleagues’ memories of Xiao Hong in relation to the Russianized Harbin, from the 1940s to the 1980s; and the diverse re-imagining of Xiao Hong in Harbin by contemporary writers, film producers, and local officials. I address the first two stages in this chapter and the third stage in Chapter Six. In short, I focus on Xiao Hong’s memory of an exotic yet colonized Harbin and the commemoration of Xiao Hong, as both an exoticist and nationalist. I understand Xiao Hong as a hinge that connects the cultural memories of the Chinese, Russian, and Japanese legacies in Harbin. This hinge evokes contemporary people’s imagination of the once multi-ethnic yet contested Harbin,

⁷ Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, “Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction,” 114.

⁸ Stephen Knight, “Remembering Robin Hood: Five Centuries of Outlaw Ideology.” *European Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 2 (August 2006): 149.

which continues to shape the city's present identity.

Xiao Hong and Harbin

Xiao Hong was born in 1911 in Hulan, a small town near Harbin. In 1927, she studied in the First Municipal Girls' Middle School in Harbin. After her graduation from this school, her father prevented her from continuing her studies and arranged a marriage for her with Wang Enjia, the son of a wealthy warlord in Hulan. Being a progressive woman, pursuing knowledge and freedom, Xiao Hong escaped from home and, in 1930, she went to study at the Beiping Women's Normal School. Her fiancé, Wang, joined Xiao Hong in Beijing, providing her with financial support. Later, due to the cut off of financial support from Wang's family, Xiao Hong and Wang left Beijing and stayed at the Dongxingshun Hotel in Harbin in 1931. Xiao Hong became pregnant half a year later, and Wang Enjia abandoned her. When this happened, they owed the hotel a rent of CNY 600, which she could not pay. As a result, Xiao Hong was locked in a warehouse of the hotel, becoming a hostage. Xiao Hong wrote letters to *Harbin International Newspapers*, asking for their help. Xiao Jun, one of the editors from this newspaper, was assigned to visit Xiao Hong in the hotel. Xiao Jun was attracted by Xiao Hong's poems and paintings and they fell in love and, eventually, lived together for a time.

Harbin was both a city of opportunity and of darkness for Xiao Hong.⁹ It was the

⁹ Yingjin Zhang, "The Texture of the Metropolis: Modernist Inscriptions of Shanghai in the 1930s," *Modern Chinese Literature* 9, no. 1 (1995): 11-30.

imagined haven Xiao Hong resorted to, when she escaped from her oppressive family environment; the scene of bittersweet memories of her cohabitation with Xiao Jun; and the inspirational site for Xiao Hong's becoming a modern, female writer. The significance of Xiao Hong for Harbin will be addressed in Chapter Six.

Market Street is a literary autobiography by Xiao Hong, portraying her life with her lover Xiao Jun (Langhua and Sanlang, in *Market Street*) in Harbin from 1932 to 1934. Published in Shanghai in 1936, *Market Street* is composed of forty-one short essays, which depict disconnected details of the couple's life in Harbin. Xiao Hong's fragmented narration reveals her non-linear and episodic reflection of modern life; it should be interpreted as opposed to "the grand narrative of modern Chinese history" and national identity-building that dominates early twentieth century Chinese modern literature.¹⁰ Indeed, fragmented everyday practice in modern cities finds its place in the works of several women writers of that time, such as Su Qing and Eileen Chang's writings of Shanghai.¹¹ In Rey Chow's terms, "femininity-as-detail" is a means by which some woman writers have produced city literature in modern China.¹²

Unlike Eileen Chang, who was born and grew up in a wealthy family in Shanghai, Xiao Hong was a poor migrant, who moved to Harbin from a culturally and economically stagnant town. Therefore, if Eileen Chang's literary recreation of Shanghai offers a bourgeois insider perspective, Xiao Hong's writing on Harbin lends

¹⁰ Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 291.

¹¹ See more details in Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, 256.

¹² Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 84-120.

itself to be read as from a poor outsider's point of view. A large part of *Market Street* records the narrator and her lover's sufferance of hunger and poverty in Harbin. Therefore, a sense of desolation and *otherness* is prevalent in *Market Street*. In the following, I examine how Xiao Hong's layered sense of desolation and otherness is conveyed through her perception of the colonized, uncanny, and gendered space of Harbin.

Xiao Hong's Repulsion for the Colonized Harbin

Harbin as a Colonial Russian Space

In *Market Street*, one chapter recalls Xiao Hong's short stay in the Russian-run Europa Hotel. As Chen Jieyi argues, Xiao Hong is critical of the Russians, whom she thinks of as the invaders of Harbin. After the Russian attendant takes away the bedding because Xiao Hong and her lover cannot afford its rent of fifty cents a day, "the room looked as though it had been pillaged."¹³ Chen argues that Xiao Hong uses the word "pillage" as a metaphor to indicate that the Russians in Harbin resembled robbers.¹⁴ "Pillage" conveys the narrator's criticism of the Russian colonizers. Here the Europa Hotel becomes a miniature of Harbin. Xiao Hong's sense of confinement in her room within the Europa Hotel alludes to the Chinese nationals' subjugation in the Russian-dominated, colonial city of Harbin. Xiao Hong identifies herself as an

¹³ Xiao Hong, *Market Street*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁴ Jieyi Chen, "Lun xiao hong shangshijie sige zhongyaode kongjian yixiang (The four important spatial images in Xiao Hong's *Market Street*)," *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature Research*, 2 (1998):128.

outsider in the Russian hotel, as well as in the city. Using a simile to demonstrate Xiao Hong's layered, spatial description of her isolation, I argue that Xiao Hong is like an "alien" atom in the molecule of the Europa Hotel within the organism of Harbin, where "the alien" does not feel at home.

Xiao Hong's portrayal of Harbin as a colonial Russian cultural space is further illustrated by her description of how she slips down in front of a movie theater. In *Market Street*, the narrator and her lover walk home in a cold winter night, because they do not have money for transportation. The narrator suffers from a stomachache and coldness. She slips on the ice and falls down in front of a movie theater, which symbolizes a Russian cultural space in Harbin.¹⁵ Xiao Hong's description of her fall signifies that she is excluded from the Russian space in Harbin. There is a contrast between the warm and privileged interior and her position as an outsider. Moreover, Xiao Hong's fall reemphasizes her inability to go to a movie theater, which she mentions in a previous chapter: after returning home from watching a movie, Xiao Hong's neighbor asks whether Xiao Hong has seen that movie. When Xiao answers "no," her neighbor pities her, saying that the movie is about a great romance. Xiao's fall outside the movie theater evokes this earlier experience and reemphasizes her suffering from a double-sense of isolation in terms of ethnicity and poverty.

A similar message is conveyed in a Chinese film *sanmao liulang ji* (*An orphan on the streets*) (1949). When the orphan, Sanmao, sees a children's band parade on the street celebrating Children's Day, he joins the parade. However, his barefoot and

¹⁵ Movie theaters in Harbin before the 1930s were mainly run by the Russians.

ragged clothes contrast with the other children's uniforms and "a gendarme throws him out of the ranks." In Yomi Braester's words, "Sanmao's experience, limited to being an onlooker from the sidelines, stresses the spatial demarcations of class."¹⁶ By the same token, Xiao Hong's falling down outside the Russian-run movie theater signifies "the spatial demarcation" between the rich and the poor, and the colonizer and the colonized. Falling down outside the Russian cinema metaphorically signifies Xiao Hong's status as an outsider in the colonial city of Harbin.

The Uncanny Harbin

In *Market Street*, the narrator's hesitation to be involved in the city life also indicates that Harbin is an uncanny space for her. In his analysis of the uncanny in architecture, the art historian Anthony Vidler has noted that the uncanny arises "from the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not so."¹⁷ "The uncanny emerged in the late nineteenth century as a special case of many modern diseases, from phobias to neurosis, variably described by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and philosophers as a distancing from reality forced by reality...its symptoms included spatial fear, leading to paralysis of movement."¹⁸

Following Vidler's argument, and the German word, "*Unheimlichkeit*," I define "the uncanny" as a sense of unhomeliness. In the case of Xiao Hong, she used to be familiar with Harbin because that is where she enjoyed her middle school life from

¹⁶ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 62-3.

¹⁷ Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 181-2; also see Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 6-7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

1927 to 1930; but such a familiar city turned out to be a cold place for Xiao Hong from 1931 on, when she escaped from her family and lived a vagrant-like life in Harbin. Feeling unhomey in Harbin, a place that she ended up considering unfamiliar and even frightening, explains her misery and the sense of desolation pervasive in *Market Street*. Elaborating on Leo Ou-fan Lee's view that, "The sense of real or imagined 'unhomeliness' was a mental state caused by living in a metropolitan island of capitalist splendor in a sea of rural cultural feudalism,"¹⁹ I argue that Xiao Hong is struggling between the colonial, metropolitan city and her roots in a feudal town, and that such struggle is caused by the tension between one's life in a modern city and an unconscious sensibility that is shaped by the traditional rural culture.

In regard to the uncanny in architecture, Lee argues that Shanghai's buildings and spaces in the foreign concessions could be a perfect setting for the metropolitan uncanny.²⁰ As discussed in Chapter One, Harbin resembles Shanghai in terms of its multi-ethnicity and diverse styles of architecture. The Europa Hotel is uncanny to Xiao Hong not only because she is culturally shocked at seeing its foreign tenants, such as "the odd-looking couples of gypsy woman and moon-faced and beard men,"²¹ but also because the European-style architecture itself makes Xiao Hong feels unhomey.

The following are a few more examples from *Market Street* that highlight Xiao Hong's sense of unhomeliness in Harbin. When Xiao Hong and her lover move into

¹⁹ Ibid., 183.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Xiao, *Market Street*, 11.

their new home at 25 Market Street, “the bedframe looked like a skeleton...what a bed! How could I even think of touching that icy steel!”²² The comparison of a bedframe to a skeleton indicates Xiao Hong’s fear towards her new home; and her unwillingness to touch the icy steel of her bed implies the distance she keeps between herself and the new home (which looks like an eerie, sinister place). Xiao Hong compares her stay at home to that of “a duck that had fallen down a well.”²³ Again, the similitude with a duck trapped in a well vividly implies the narrator’s fear and loneliness. The uncanniness of this new home is further hinted at when Xiao Hong compares it to “a public square at night, totally devoid of light and warmth.”²⁴ Here John Welwood’s term “psychological space” can be applied to explain Xiao Hong’s spatial description of her feelings. According to Welwood, psychological space means “space-as-experienced, or lived space.”²⁵ This scholar states that one kind of psychological space is *feeling space* (also called *affective space*), referring to “the spatial quality of the felt environment we create around ourselves.” In regard to her affective space, Xiao Hong feels cold, dark, and isolated, and homogenizes the domestic and the public spaces. She feels unhomeily at home.

Another experience that reinforces Xiao Hong’s sense of unhomeliness is the loss of companionship with her lover, Langhua, as he becomes busy as a martial arts tutor and middle-school Chinese literature teacher. The narrator feels that he does not

²² Ibid., 30.

²³ Ibid., 31.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Welwood, “On Psychological Space,” *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1977): 98.

care for her as much as before. She compares Langhua to “a bird she’d been trying to catch for a long time, only to have it fly away as soon as she had it in her grasp.”²⁶

The narrator compares herself to a disabled person, given that she “has a mouth, but no one to talk to, legs, but nowhere to go, hands, but nothing to do. Her view is blocked by the walls and can’t see a thing.”²⁷ For one thing, such similes emphasize the spatial constraint on the narrator that causes her immobility and provokes the reader’s contemplation of the politics of immobility, especially the relation between immobility and poverty. For another thing, the comparison to the mute and blind demonstrates the narrator’s loneliness and longing for companionship with Langhua. This shows that Xiao Hong’s desolation is due not only to the scarcity of food but also to her lover’s coldness. She feels emotionally unhomey.

Moreover, Xiao Hong uses sound to delineate her sense of desolation in relation to Russian and male colonizers. One night, when the narrator and Langhua are still living in the Europa Hotel, their neighbor plays an accordion with a mournful tune. Xiao Hong interprets such mournful music as being “dedicated to the misery of life.”²⁸ The mournful tune reflects as well as deepens Xiao Hong’s melancholic psychological state. Accordion music was commonly played by the Russians, in Harbin and, to some extent, the accordion could be regarded as a symbol of Russian recreational culture there.²⁹ In this sense, the narrator plays the role of a silent listener to the Russian music that deepens her own misery.

²⁶ Xiao, *Market Street*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ In the first half of the twentieth century, many Russians were seen on street playing accordion, in contrast with the Chinese who tended to visit local Chinese theater.

The accordion is mentioned a second time. After a happy dinner outside when Langhua finds a job as a tutor, the couple go to bed. When they turn off the lamp, the accordion in the next room plays plaintive music. With that musical accompaniment, Langhua begins to tell stories about his former lover, Minzi. He enjoys the sweet memories of the time he spent with Minzi, missing her beautiful face and red lips. This scene is characterized by an obvious hidden tension between the narrator, a silent woman listener, and Langhua, a talkative man, who relates his previous love story.

The accordion music reminds Xiao Hong of her identity as the *double Other*: both ethnically, as the Other of the Russian, and affectively, as the Other of man. When the musical instrument is mentioned for the first time, Xiao Hong is overwhelmed by its melancholic melody, which is a token of Russian culture; the second time she hears it, she is overwhelmed by Langhua's story about his previous lover. Xiao Hong ends with sadness in her heart, her own voice unheard. She has been playing the role of a silent listener and gets overwhelmed by the powerful player and the story-teller, namely, the Russian colonizers and her insensitive, narcissistic partner, to whom she obviously defers and submits, in terms of gender expectations. Xiao Hong's narrative voice is that of a woman in a colonial city. She represents the colonized of the colonized, the subaltern of the subalterns.

Harbin under Japanese Hegemony

There is another reason for Xiao Hong's sense of being colonized: the oppressive administration by the Imperial Japanese Army in Manchukuo. The sense of horror is

prevalent in the essays “The Book,” “The Drama Troupe,” and “Pale Faces” in *Market Street*. Xiao Hong recalls that a book published by the couple got confiscated by the Japanese MPs (military police). A drama troupe the couple belonged to was questioned as well. One of its members, Xu Zhi, was arrested. Xiao Hong’s sense of fear and mockery is revealed when she states that a local student was also arrested because the Japanese MPs found a copy of *War and Peace* in his dormitory.³⁰

To save themselves from any trouble with the Japanese officials, the couple check all their books at home for any negative references to “Manchukuo,” and burn those that do. They even burn a photo of Maxim Gorky. Xiao Hong portrays her feeling of fear by writing that “I was throwing things into the fire as fast as I could, as though the Japanese MPs were on their way to arrest us at that very moment.”³¹ Even after burning all stuff that might enrage the Japanese MPs, the narrator is unable to sleep. She keeps her eyes wide open and barely dares to breathe.³² At night the couple get “frightened by the rattling of the metal gate of their home. Every time they heard the sound, they rushed out into the entryway to take a look.”³³ They feel uneasy in their own home.³⁴

Xiao Hong’s indignation towards the Japanese colonizers is indicated by her labeling them “an evil totally alien to us,” “Japs, running dogs,” and “God-damned Manchukuo.”³⁵ The couple plan to leave Harbin and to not return, as long as it is

³⁰ Xiao Hong, *Market Street*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³² *Ibid.*, 105.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-7.

under the regime of Manchukuo. But the idea of leaving also “brought a sense of sadness.”³⁶ It suggests Xiao Hong’s complex, ambivalent, affective identification with Harbin as home, although she did not experience Harbin as home until the moment she left it.

In her novel *the Field of Life and Death*, Xiao Hong portrays the Japanese atrocities in a village near Harbin. Golden Bough, a village girl, is another example of women experiencing double colonization by Japanese colonizers and by men. When she is seventeen, Golden Bough gets pregnant by a fellow villager, Cheng Ye, and later they marry. Cheng Ye turns out to be a violent and overbearing husband. He is not caring of Golden Bough and scolds her as being lazy, in spite of the fact that she has been busy with housework even during pregnancy. Cheng Ye also blames Golden Bough and the baby for their suffering poverty, and when Golden Bough fights against him for the first time, his anger reaches a peak – and he kills their baby. Later, Cheng Ye dies in the Anti-Japanese War. The Japanese rape and kill women in the village. Golden Bough has no choice but to escape to Harbin. When she stands outside the window of a Russian pastry shop and sees its displayed piglet, “her hatred for the Japs flared up again. If not for the Japs wreaking havoc in the village, her own sow would long ago have given birth to piglets.”³⁷ Xiao Hong portrays the atrocities of the Japanese military by showing the life-and-death struggle of human beings and animals.

³⁶ Ibid., 115.

³⁷ Xiao Hong, *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Boston: Cheng and Tsui Company, 2002), 80.

In Harbin, Golden Bough is raped by a man when she is hired to do needle-work for him. While the hope to survive from the Japanese occupation motivates Golden Bough to come to Harbin, the humiliation by her male employer pushes her back to her village. Harbin turns out to be a city of darkness for a helpless rural woman. When Golden Bough returns to her village, her neighbor persuades her to go back to the city because “Harbin must be a lot better than here in the countryside. The Japs are getting worse and worse. Now they’re slitting open the bellies of pregnant women.”³⁸ If the village symbolizes colonization by the Japanese, then Harbin symbolizes colonization by men. Golden Bough wants to escape both. She plans to be a nun. However, the nuns have abandoned the temple and run for their lives. She states “I used to bear grudge against men. Now I resent the atrocious Japanese... Actually, I resent nobody other than the Chinese.”³⁹ Xiao Hong’s fictional portrayal of people’s suffering during the Japanese occupation has led to her being canonized as one of the left-wing, patriotic writers in China. Nevertheless, Xiao Hong’s repulsion for the colonized Harbin contrasts with her embrace of the city’s Russianized (colonial) cultural space.

Xiao Hong’s Embrace of the Russianized Harbin through Eating and Dressing

Xiao Hong enjoyed Russian food and fashion. In the following, I create a “memory map” of Xiao Hong’s and Xiao Jun’s consumption of food and dress in Harbin and

³⁸ Ibid., 83.

³⁹ Xiao Hong, *Market Street*, 168.

during their displacement in several cities,⁴⁰ such as Qingdao, Shanghai, Wuhan, Linfen, and Chongqing, in the 1930s and 40s. This memory map is based on the published commemorative articles for Xiao Hong by her writer friends in the 1940s. Through this mapping, I aim to explore the impact of Harbin's Russian material culture on Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun, and the symbolic function of food and clothes as regards the couple's identity as Harbiners. I argue that the couple's practice of home-city culture during their displacement can be interpreted as an attempt to be affectively connected with their home city. Food and clothes are the "tangible expression of [their] cultural identity"⁴¹ as Russianized Harbiners.

In her writer friends' memories of Xiao Hong, there are numerous descriptions of Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun's choice of Russian-style food and clothes, such as sausage, khleb, and the Cossack shirt. All these are a typical expression of the material culture in Harbin in the 1930s. Through tracing a pattern of Xiao Hong's and Xiao Jun's food and dressing habits during their displacement, I argue that the Russian food and dress culture in Harbin had been internalized by the couple; this, in turn, illustrates Xiao Hong's and Xiao Jun's identification of Harbin as home city. Both khleb and the Cossack shirt, for instance, became "visible representations and manifestations of the couple's imaginings of, and personal relationships [to,]"⁴² their home city, Harbin. By preserving and practicing the food and dress culture of Harbin, Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun became representatives of Harbin, when they were in other places.

⁴⁰ Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: the State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan*.

⁴¹ Anna Pechurina, *Material Cultures, Migrations, and Identities: What the Eye Cannot See* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

Moreover, Xiao Hong's attachment to khleb and Russian restaurants in Shanghai, for example, implicates her nostalgia for the semi-colonial/international environment of Harbin. Such nostalgia is partly due to the fact that Harbin is where she had her romance with Xiao Jun. Her longing for Harbin is strengthened by the fact that the couple's romance did not last long after they left Harbin; it seriously deteriorated in Shanghai by 1935, and they finally broke up in 1938. Besides, the Japanese occupation of Harbin expelled Xiao Hong from her home city, strengthening Xiao Hong's "sensation of a lingering belonging to a place to which there is no hope of return."⁴³ To practice the food and dress habits of Harbin in other places is a way for Xiao Hong to commemorate the bygone love and the home city that she cannot return to. Such commemoration of Harbin by Xiao Hong in Other places solidifies her identity as a Harbiner. As Pechurina argues, "people recreate the feeling of belonging to their 'imagined community' with the help of material objects, whether this is intentional or not."⁴⁴ Xiao Hong lived with "Harbin" by consuming the city's specialty. Xiao Hong's nostalgia for the real or imagined Harbin also speaks to Ackbar Abbas' concept of *Déjà à Disparu*, which means "the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of cliché or a cluster of memories of what has never been."⁴⁵ The Harbin, to which Xiao Hong maintains, despite its uncanniness, a perpetual sense of belonging, has

⁴³ Lital Levy, "Self and the City: Literary Representations of Jewish Baghdad," *Prooftexts* 26, no. 1-2 (2006), 195.

⁴⁴ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 4.

⁴⁵ Ackbar Abbas, "The New Hong Kong Cinema and the 'Déjà Disparu'," *Discourse* 16, no.3 (Spring 1994): 67; "Déjà Disparu: The Art of Hong Kong in The 1990s," *Culture Trip*, January 27, 2016. <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/hong-kong/articles/d-j-disparu-the-art-of-hong-kong-in-the-1990s/>

been changing and even disappearing. Therefore, her choice of sausage, khleb, and Cossack shirt are the “cliché,” by which Xiao Hong reminisced and kept alive “her” Harbin.

Food

The following addresses the details in the memory map of Xiao Hong’s and Xiao Jun’s food and dressing habits, “drawn” by Xiao Hong’s writer friends. Liang Shanding (1914—1997) was a famous writer in Northeast China. In “The Shiny Star on *Night Post*,”⁴⁶ Liang recalls that the first time he met Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun was in their home on Market Street in Harbin in 1933. Liang remembers Xiao Jun wore a Russian-style skirt with a belt and a small hat. According to Liang, this was a typical fashion in Harbin then; Russian sausage was common for lunch and they had dinner in a Russian restaurant in a basement on Central Street with two other writer friends, Luo Feng and Bai Lang.⁴⁷ Another writer, Li Rong, also recalls that during his first visit to Xiao Hong’s place on Market Street in March 1934, Xiao Jun bought back

⁴⁶ Haining Zhang, ed., *Xiao Hong yinxiang: jiyi* (Xiao Hong impression: memory) (Harbin: Heilongjiang University Press, 2011), 140; also see Shanding Liang, “Yeshao shang de liangxing (The shiny star on *Night Post*),” *Changchun* 6 (1980). The *Night Post* was a literary supplement to the *Datong Newspaper*, a Manchukuo official newspaper, but *Night Post* collected literature with ambivalent, anti-Japanese, symbolic meanings. Xiao Hong published several writings in the *Night Post*, such as “Two frogs” and “The old mute,” to make readers aware of the hard life of the common people in Northeast China under Japanese colonial control. The *Night Post* ran from August 6, 1933 to December 24, 1933. Japanese officials closed it, due to its political criticism of Manchukuo.

⁴⁷ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 144.

sausage, khleb and kwas.⁴⁸ Moreover, according to Huang Shuying,⁴⁹ when Xiao Hong was confined in Dongxingshun Hotel in 1932, the Songhua River overflowed its banks and flooded Harbin; as a result, people had to use boats in the streets; Xiao Jun swam to the hotel, with sausage and khleb, helping Xiao Hong to escape from the hotel.⁵⁰ These are among the examples that illustrate how Russianized Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun had become in terms of food culture.

This echoes Xiao Hong's essay "Black Khleb and Salt" in *Market Street*. Xiao describes in detail that during the poor couple's honeymoon, the only food they had was black khleb and salt. The narrator laughed at Sanlang, who dipped too much salt so that he had to gulp down some water. Sanlang replied, "This is no good, no good at all. This sort of honeymoon will get us both pickled."⁵¹ Black khleb signifies the happy days the couple had in Harbin, although they were poor. As Ma argues, "Khleb and salt were both the line of life and of emotion" for Xiao Hong.⁵²

The Russian cultural space of Harbin is revealed in some writers' memories of

⁴⁸ Kwas is a kind of Russian soft drink. Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 201; also see Li Rong, "Chongjian xiaojun yi xiao hong (Meeting Xiao Jun and Reminiscing about Xiao Hong)," *Creation Communication by Heilongjiang Writers Association* 4 (1981). Li Rong first met Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong in 1934. Li Rong saw Xiao Jun again in 1946, in Jia-musi. This article is about Li's memory of Xiao Hong, after seeing Xiao Jun in 1946.

⁴⁹ Huang is the wife of Pei Xinyuan, the vice-editor of the *International Newspaper*, Literature and Art section. Pei is the one to whom Xiao Hong wrote when she was confined in Dongxingshun Hotel, when she could not pay the 600-Yuan rent. When Xiao Hong escaped from the hotel, she lived in Pei's house for a while before she moved to the Europa Hotel with Xiao Jun.

⁵⁰ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 150.

⁵¹ Xiao, *Market Street*, 36.

⁵² Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 203; also see Yun Ma, *Zhongguo xiandangdai zuojia zuopin yanjiu* (The study of modern and contemporary Chinese writers and their works). Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2007. "Khleb and salt" were traditional food items for Russians. They were used to greet newcomers and visitors, and also for wedding ritual.

Xiao Hong. In his article “Meeting Xiao Jun and Reminiscing about Xiao Hong,” Li Rong depicts the streetscape he saw on his way to Xiao Hong’s place on Market Street in 1934. Being a youth from a small town, Li is impressed by the metropolitan features of Harbin. In particular, he is struck by the Russian fashion on Central Street. According to Li, more Russians were seen on the streets when he passed New Town Street; Russian men were in leather clothes, and women wore shirts and felt caps. Li recalls that Central Street had both Chinese and Russian name-boards. The east side of Central Street was called Chinese Streets, the west, Foreign Streets.⁵³ Such street names appear in the work of another writer, Sun Ling, when he commemorates Xiao Hong. Sun states that in the winter of 1932 he visited Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun when they lived on Foreign Fourth Street, which refers to Market Street. Sun remembered the last time he met Xiao Hong was on China Thirteenth Street.

It is rare that in a Chinese city a street is named “China Street.” Such a street name suggests that Harbin was once a colonial and cosmopolitan city. China Thirteenth Street is the present Daoli Thirteenth West Street. Foreign Fourth Street was the unofficial name of Market Street. It is the present Hongxia Street. The young generation of Harbiners rarely know the former names of these streets. Li and Sun’s memoirs of Xiao Hong evoke memories of Old Harbin and draw readers’ attention to the politics of street naming.

In the first two decades of the last century, many streets in Harbin were named after foreign nations and cities, such as Korean Street, Japan Street, Belgium Street,

⁵³ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 204; also see Li, “Chongjian xiaojun.”

Romania Street, Kazakh Street, Albazin Street, and Warsaw Street. Some of these streets acquired such names because they were the location of the corresponding consulates of the foreign nations. The street names indicated the multi-ethnicity of Harbin then. Nevertheless, there was by no means a street called Russia Street, although Russians constituted the major population of Harbin. The “Russianness” of the city was so dominant that it needed no particular naming.

Another example of the political significance of street naming in Harbin is Khorvat Street. Named after the Russian director of the CER, it was the main road adjacent to Harbin Railway Station, which was located in the center of the city. To name an important road in the center of the city Khorvat Street implies the colonial authority of Khorvat and the Russians in Harbin. The name was changed to Railway Station Street in 1925, when the Chinese government established the Eastern Province Special Zone in Harbin, which took over the administration of the CER from the Russians. In 1932, after the Japanese took over the city, the name Railway Station Street was changed into Three Officers Road, referring to Kenji Doihara, a general in the Imperial Japanese army, Jirō Tamon, a lieutenant general in the Imperial Japanese Army, and Jinghui Zhang, the Prime Minister of Manchukuo.⁵⁴ The changed street name suggests that the Russians had given place to the Japanese as the new authority in Harbin. In 1946, part of this road was changed to Yat-sen Road, (*i.e.*, it was renamed after Sun Yat-sen), and another part was changed to Red Army Road in 1949. Such changes symbolize the Chinese government’s assertion of their ownership of the

⁵⁴ Guangyuan Yu, “*Xuanya: laizi haerbin huor wate dajie de gushi (Cliff: a story from Khorvat Street in Harbin)*,” January 21, 2012. club.kdnet.net.

city. Street (re)-naming is a gesture that displays power and is an arena for Russian, Chinese, and Japanese officials to demonstrate their own authority over the city. In Noam Leshem's words, street (re)-naming is a "symbolic enactment of ownership" and "a script of position," which transforms a street into a "political-ideological battlefield."⁵⁵ The plaques with street names that people encounter in everyday life function as a voiceless constructor that shapes residents' perceptions of the city's political and cultural identity. Therefore, street (re)-naming already affects people's seeming 'apolitical', everyday life, even before it is explicitly used as a means to politicize and control urban space.⁵⁶

The uniqueness of Harbin was also illustrated by Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun during their displacement. Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun became moving symbols of Harbin, given that they carried with them the typical food and dress culture of Harbin when they moved to other cities. In "Commemorating Xiao Hong," Mei Lin recalls that Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun worked together with Mei at the *Qingdao Morning Newspaper* in 1934 after the couple escaped from Harbin. Xiao Hong used to cook borscht and fried bread in Qingdao.⁵⁷ Borscht is a kind of popular, Russian soup. Fried bread was also a particular food in North China. The eating habits Xiao Hong acquired in Harbin were continued in Qingdao and other cities. As Miller and

⁵⁵ Leshem, "Memory Activism," 243.

⁵⁶ In his analysis of walking in the city, de Certeau argues that "proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings. They 'make sense.' They are the impetus of movements... these names create a nowhere in places; they change them into passages." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 104. To some extent, walkers are not only directed but also controlled by street names.

⁵⁷ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 15; also see Mei Lin. "Yi Xiao Hong (Remembering Xiao Hong)," *Meilin wenji* (Collection of Mei Lin's works). Shanghai: Chunming Bookstore, 1948.

Pechurina argue, “Food can help define the feeling of being at home for people living in societies characterized by high mobility and migration, since through practices of cooking and eating, migrants reproduce and reinvent cultural traditions and reconstruct home as a ‘sensory totality’.”⁵⁸ Borscht and fried bread became “mediators that represent the attachment and feelings” of Xiao Hong towards Harbin.⁵⁹

When Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun moved to Shanghai in November 1934, their new writer friends included Lu Xun and his wife, Xu Guangping, and Hu Feng and his wife, Mei Zhi. Mei recalls that Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun invited her and Hu Feng for dinner in a Russian restaurant. According to Mei, when Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun and Mei were in Lu Xun’s place, Xiao Hong asked Xiao Jun to buy a gift for Lu Xun’s son, Haiying, and what Xiao Jun bought back was a string of khleb.⁶⁰ Mei complains that Xiao Jun did not take Xiao Hong’s request seriously and bought something at random, but his choice of khleb is, nonetheless, an indication of his food habit. According to Xu Guangping, once when Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun visited her family, they brought black khleb and sausage as gifts.⁶¹ As mentioned before, khleb and sausage were representative foods in Harbin. Choosing food from the home city as a gift to their important host family suggests Xiao Hong’s and Xiao Jun’s identification with the food culture of Harbin.

⁵⁸ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 115; also see Daniel Miller, ed. *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors*. Oxford: Berg, 2001.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

According to Mei Zhi, Hu Feng saw that Xiao Hong frequented a Russian restaurant by herself in Shanghai. Mei implies that Xiao Hong suffered an emotional crisis with Xiao Jun, so she went by herself. Harbin was similar to Shanghai in terms of multi-ethnicity and diversity of commodities. “Many Russian immigrants moved to Shanghai from Harbin in the 1930s.”⁶² A new Russian cultural space thus appeared in Shanghai. Being at a Russian restaurant in Shanghai must have evoked Xiao Hong’s memory of Harbin. According to Pechurina, “the practice of going to Russian restaurants can be defined as a specifically diasporic activity through which migrants maintain their identity and re-establish their sense of belonging to their imagined community.”⁶³ Xiao Hong’s visit to a Russian restaurant in Shanghai implies her nostalgia for the old days in Harbin, and for the bittersweet time with Xiao Jun. Xiao Hong tried to re-experience those old days, by eating the same food that they used to eat and by visiting restaurants, similar to the ones that they had frequented in Harbin. In this sense, black khleb, sausage and Russian restaurants in Shanghai became symbols of Harbin, its food culture, and the memory of love between Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun. Similarly, it was during this period of emotional crisis between the couple that Xiao Hong wrote *Market Street* in Shanghai. *Market Street* recalls the details of the couple’s life in Harbin. “What a writer writes is what he/she attaches importance to.”⁶⁴ In the deteriorating relationship with Xiao Jun, Xiao Hong consoles herself by

⁶² Heran Jiao, “Xiaohong de xiaoshuo sanwenji qiao yu minguo shiqi haerbin chengshikongjian (Xiao Hong’s novel and collection of short essays, *Bridge*, and the urban space of Harbin in the Republic of China),” *Journal of Yibin University* 17, no.2 (February 2017): 24.

⁶³ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 129.

⁶⁴ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 200; also see Ma, *Zhongguo xiandangdai zuojia*.

going back to the happy days in Harbin through writing.

Clothes

Liang Shanding, Mei Lin, and Xu Guangping all recall that Xiao Jun often wore a Cossack-style shirt in Harbin, Qingdao and Shanghai. Xu states that such a shirt was quite common in Harbin.⁶⁵ Cossack shirts became a signifier of the dressing culture in Harbin. Xiao Jun also recalls his Cossack shirt in his memory of Xiao Hong.

According to Xiao Jun, the couple were extremely excited to receive a letter from the eminent writer, Lu Xu, who agreed to meet with them in Shanghai in November, 1934. Xiao Hong made Xiao Jun a new plaid shirt in order to meet Lu Xun. The model she used to make this new shirt was one of Xiao Jun's old Cossack shirts from Harbin. Moreover, Xiao Jun wore a yellow scarf together with this new shirt.

According to Xiao Jun, the scarf was embroidered in Russian letters. This was a gift Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong received from their Russian teacher when they left Harbin in March, 1934.⁶⁶ Such dressing implies the deep influence Russian fashion exerted on Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun, even after they left Harbin. Wearing this new shirt, Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong took a photo before they met Lu Xun.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁶ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 227; also see Xiao Jun, "Women diyici yingyao canjia luxun xianshengde yanhui (At the invitation of Lu Xun, we attended his banquet for the first time)," in *Huainian Xiao Hong* (Commemorating Xiao Hong). Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Press, 1981.



Figure 1. Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong

Li Huiying, a writer from Jilin province in Northeast China, states that he met Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun in Shanghai in 1937 after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.⁶⁷ A group of writers planned to create a work together in support of Shanghai, objecting to its occupation by the Japanese. Li comments that Xiao Hong was slim and white, embodying the notion of beauty and fashion current among Harbin girls.⁶⁸ The style of dress in Harbin was known to be modern and *yang qi* (exotic); this was partly due to the persistence of Russian fashion in Harbin.

Moreover, according to Sun Ling, Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun did not stop learning Russian after they left Harbin. Sun recalls that when Xiao Hong returned to Shanghai from Japan in January, 1937, several friends had dinner to welcome her back; during the dinner Xiao Hong sang a Russian song, which she had learned from a Russian

⁶⁷ On the night of July 7th, 1937, the Japanese and Chinese army exchanged fire in Wanping, a county in the Southwest of Beijing, because the Japanese claimed that one of its soldiers had disappeared and they thus were required to enter Wanping, to search that soldier – such request was declined by the Chinese army. This Marco Polo Bridge Incident is the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

⁶⁸ The dressing style in Harbin was commonly regarded as fashionable and exotic. Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 100; also see Huiying Li, *Sanyan liangyu* (A few words). Hong Kong, Hong Kong Literature Research Institute, 1975.

film when she was in Japan.⁶⁹ Moreover, during a banquet arranged by Lu Xun, together with six other writers in Shanghai in 1934, Xiao Jun talked about some customs in Northeast China and said that he wanted to buy several Russian books.⁷⁰ Russian became an identity marker in terms of language that tied Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong to Harbin, the original place where they acquired Russian. As Collins and Pechurina argue, “Encounters with familiar language exemplify migrants’ efforts to reconnect living ‘here’ with lives ‘at home’.”⁷¹

Aside from the practice of home-city culture and language, Xiao Hong voiced her homesickness during her displacement. According to Gao Lan, when Xiao Hong was in Chongqing, a city in Southwest China, she asked him: “Don’t you miss the snow of our hometown? I miss it a lot.”⁷² According to Mei Zhi, when the group of writers moved from Wuhan in Central China to Linfen in North China, Xiao Hong was excited. Mei Zhi understands that this was because Xiao Hong liked North China, the snow and hot *kang* (bed) there.⁷³ Sun Ling also recalls that a group of writers, who escaped from Harbin to other Southern cities, talked about going back to Harbin after the victory in the Anti-Japanese War. As Gupta and Ferguson argue, “As

⁶⁹ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 104; also see Ling Sun, “Daonian Xiao Hong (Commemorating Xiao Hong),” *Wenxue bao* (Literature newspaper). Shanghai, 1942.

⁷⁰ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 224; also see Xiao, “Women diyici yingyao.”

⁷¹ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 21; also see Francis Leo Collins, “Connecting ‘Home’ with ‘Here’: Personal Homepages in Everyday Transnational Lived.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 6(2009): 840.

⁷² Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 81; also see Lan Gao, “Xueye Yi Xiao Hong (Remembering Xiao Hong in a snowy night),” *Northeast China Civil Newspaper*, December 6, 1946.

⁷³ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 33; also see Mei Zhi, *Huajiao hongle (The pepper turns red)*. Beijing: the Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 1995. Lin Fen is more similar to Northeast China than Wu Han. *Kang* is a special bed used in Northern China. It is made of bricks. It gets heated by burning wood under the bed.

displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, ‘imagined communities’ come to be attached to imagined places.”⁷⁴ Imagined communities, according to Anderson, “are not necessarily based in one locality or place.”⁷⁵ In this sense, for the displaced Harbin writers, including Xiao Hong, Harbin did not only mean a geographical place, but also an imagined home, in which their souls dwelled, and an affective haven they yearned for. Home becomes “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination.”⁷⁶

Yuan Yin, a student in Fudan University in 1939, remembers meeting Xiao Hong in Chongqing. Both sought refuge in Chongqing from the Japanese occupation of their home cities. Xiao encouraged Yuan, saying “Don’t be sad. Sooner or later we will go back home.”⁷⁷ Xiao Hong has been looking for “home.” This is not only revealed in her nostalgia for snow and North China, but also in her complaint of being alone: “I am always alone. It is true when I was in Northeast China, in Shanghai, Japan, and in Chongqing. I am destined to be alone.”⁷⁸ In this sense, the home Xiao Hong craved was not only a physical place but also an emotional belonging.

Harbin was represented not only in the Russian food and clothes Xiao Hong embraced, but also in the writings she produced during her displacement, such as *the Field of Life and Death* in Qingdao, *Market Street* in Shanghai, and *Tales of Hulan*

⁷⁴ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 4; also see Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference.” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no.1 (1992): 6-23.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 21; also see Collins, “Connecting ‘Home’ with ‘Here,’” 840; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Connecting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996.

⁷⁷ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 177.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 20.

River in Hong Kong. Xiao Hong's physical journey began when she left home from Hulan, to Harbin, Qingdao, Shanghai, Wuhan, Chongqing, and finally to Hong Kong; but her literary journey conveys an attempt to go home. At the end of her life, she was in Hong Kong (ironically another "colonial" space) but she returned home in another way – by writing *Tales of Hulan River* in Hong Kong, a novel about her "original" hometown, Hulan.

Xiao Hong's life seems to be a journey away from "home", but it is actually a journey of returning home. My analysis of Xiao Hong's food and dressing habits, as well as of her literary production during her displacement, leads me to argue that Xiao Hong never left "home," which to her means a sense of belonging. Hulan and Harbin, the memories of her original Chinese hometown and of an adoptive, (semi)colonial, Russianized Harbin were always with her, wherever she went. In other words, Xiao Hong performed "a simultaneous experience of 'home and away',"⁷⁹ telling a cyclical story of leaving and returning. Her life and writing always involve the concept of "home," which could be signified by Hulan, Harbin, North China, and even snow, but she has to leave home before she even develops the consciousness of "home." Her writings about home have to be in and from other places. As the writer Zhang Kangkang said, "Xiao Hong is the daughter of Hulan, but if she had not left Hulan to go into the big and black world, she would not have become the Xiao Hong that we know."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Pechurina, *Material Cultures*, 17; also see Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora', exemplified by South Asian religions," *Diaspora*, 6(3) 1999: 277-300.

⁸⁰ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 358; also see Kangkang Zhang, "Zaibeifang, youyike xianrenshu

The rootedness to the land and place of Northeast China is also addressed by another local writer, Shanding Liang, in his novel *Green Valley*. The main character, Lin Xiaobiao, is a youth in the village in the valley of Langgou. Later, he moves to the city of Nanmanzhan (a station of the South Manchurian railway) with his mother and stepfather, a comprador of a Japanese company in the city. Xiaobiao “regards the valley as his true mother against the one who remarried and left for the artificial and corrupt city.”⁸¹ In the end, he decides to return to the valley. Xiao Hong’s literary returning home by writing *Tales of Hulan River*, at the end of her life in Hong Kong, tells a message of identification of home with Northeast China, similar to what Shanding’s *Green Valley* does. By focusing on the locality of Northeast China, *Tales* and *Green Valley* are native place literature (*xiangtu wenxue*), denoting and evoking a sense of “cultural authenticity” of this region,⁸² and telling of Xiao Hong and Liang Shanding’s literary journey to their home in the Northeast.⁸³

Conclusion

Xiao Hong’s ambivalence between repulsion for the Russian and Japanese colonizers and her embrace of the Russianized Harbin, alongside her indifference to the politics

(There is a cactus tree in the North),” *Nüzuojia* (Woman writer), 1985.

⁸¹ Duara, “Local Worlds,” 29.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸³ Also see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), 79-80, 233 (H53-54, 188). Heidegger’s notion of being-in (as in being-in-the-world) reworks the spatiality of such “in-ness” into a lived spatiality of be-ing-at-home – with the accompanying notion of “uncanniness” (*un-heim-lich-keit*, “un-home-li-ness”) always lurking throughout.

of Manchukuo, represents the dilemma of Old Harbin. Xiao Hong, as a writer and a person, is both a nationalist and an originator of exoticism. Xiao Hong's plight – having no “home” to return to – speaks to the identity-confusion of Harbin. Located at the periphery of China and adjacent to Russia and Japan, Harbin was a contact zone, which embodied hybrid cultural and political traditions. Consequently, Harbin was home to many people who, like Xiao Hong, held contradictory attitudes towards the Russian and Japanese residents, regarding some as hostile and others as friendly. Indeed, the nationalist consciousness in the Northeast was not as strong as represented in the present Chinese official discourse. As Rana Mitter argues, “In China – nation or social reality – the imagining of community is that much harder when the periphery is at a great distance, as in the case of Manchuria...The concept of loyalty to a nation with its capital at Nanjing [1927-37] was that much vaguer to those living in the Northeast.”⁸⁴ The historical fact that the Northeast “had been keen to keep as autonomous as possible until 1931” partly explains Xiao Hong's and many other Harbiners' ambivalent sense of nationalism and contradictory perceptions towards the Russian and Japanese colonizers of that time.⁸⁵ How the self-divided Xiao Hong and the ambivalent nationalist tradition in Old Harbin shape the city's contemporary identity is to be explored in the next chapter.

⁸⁴ Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 187.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

Chapter Six. Xiao Hong in Writings, Films, and Official Discourses

The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival. — Mikhail Bakhtin¹

To continue the last chapter's argument that Xiao Hong is a *lieu de mémoire* for Harbin, this chapter examines the commemoration and representation of Xiao Hong by contemporary writers, film producers, and local officials. In other words, this chapter examines Xiao Hong, in relation to Harbin, in three overlapping senses: there is the sense of Harbin as a *physical place* (where Xiao Hong used to live, a site to which contemporary writers pay homage); the sense of Xiao Hong's Harbin, in *filmic space*; and the sense of Xiao Hong's relation to Harbin in the *official discourses*.

It is my contention that Xiao Hong is memorialized, as much as she is branded and consumed. In Bourdieu's terms, some locals support "the autonomous principle (for example, art for art's sake)," and are nostalgic for Xiao Hong and the Harbin portrayed in her works; in contrast, others stay with "the heteronomous principle," which favours those who dominate the field economically and politically,² and define Xiao Hong as the representative of the cultural capital that contributes to the

¹ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990), 39; also see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Works*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 173.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art, Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 216.

city's economic and social development. This chapter frames the memorialization of Xiao Hong in Harbin in Svetlana Boym's concepts of *reflective nostalgia* and *restorative nostalgia* and Michel Hockx's concept of *force field*.

First, the memorialization of Xiao Hong by contemporary Chinese manifests both reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia. According to Boym, "restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* [, which] proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory maps, while reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss. [It] lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time."³ Reflective nostalgia is past-oriented, an emotional lingering on the fantasy of the past, having no necessary impact on the actions at present. In contrast, restorative nostalgia is present and future-oriented. It uses nostalgia to serve the present and the future. This also relates to the distinction between nostalgia as an individual affect and nostalgia as a commodity or, in Dalia Kandiyoti's words, "commodified nostalgia."⁴

Second, to complement my analysis of the two intertwined yet different types of nostalgia for Xiao Hong, I adopt Michel Hockx's concept of *force field*, which derives from his critique of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *literary field*. Unlike Bourdieu, who highlights the reverse relationship between the literary and economic capital of a writer and his/her work,⁵ Hockx understands the Chinese literary field as "structured

³ Boym, *the Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

⁴ See Dalia Kandiyoti, "Consuming Nostalgia: Nostalgia and the Marketplace in Cristina García and Ana Menéndez." *MELUS* 31, no. 1(Spring, 2006): 82; William Cunningham Bissell, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (May, 2005): 215-248.

⁵ Here, "reverse" means that if a writer's literary capital is high, then his economic capital is low, and vice versa.

around three principles: the literary, the political, and the economic,” and he argues that although individual agents highlight each of the three capitals differently, the three capitals are not necessarily reverse to each other.⁶ Xiao Hong is an example of an artist whose work possesses, at once, all three types of capital. I adopt Hockx’s concept of the *three-dimensional force field* to examine the intertwined literary, economic, and political significations of contemporary nostalgia for Xiao Hong and her work in Harbin.

Situated in the methodological framework of Boym’s notion of nostalgia and Hockx’s concept of force field, my examination of the commemoration of Xiao Hong by contemporary writers, film producers, and local officials is structured as follows. In the first part of this chapter, I explore the ways in which four contemporary writers conduct imaginative dialogues with Xiao Hong about Harbin and Hulan. I examine how they contemplate the relationship between the historical and contemporary Harbin in terms of physical space and literary texts. The writings of Wang Binggen and Hong Ke are characterized by reflective nostalgia for Xiao Hong, lingering on the romantic fantasy of an imagined Harbin across time that belongs to both Xiao Hong and themselves. In contrast, Qiu Subin and Ji Hongzhen manifest restorative nostalgia for Xiao Hong, because Qiu and Ji use nostalgia as a lens through which they address in critical terms issues of modern urban development, such as moral decline and the replacement of heritage sites by modern constructions in Harbin and Hulan. Wang and

⁶ Michel Hockx, eds., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999), 17.

Hong focus on Xiao Hong's symbolic capital (the literary), while Qiu and Ji underscore her political and economic capital (the non-literary).⁷

In the second part of this chapter, I compare two recent films about Xiao Hong, *Falling Flowers* (2012) by Huo Jianqi, and *The Golden Era* (2015) by Xu Anhua (Ann Hui On-wah). I focus on two different representations of the ethnic space of Harbin and the role of films in producing the social space of Harbin. *Falling Flowers* is an outsider film, which means that it amplifies the beautified and idealized imageries of the city, in order to attract tourists and investors. *Falling Flowers* reconstructs a Russianized Harbin, shrouded in an atmosphere of romanticized desolation. Initiated by the Propaganda Department of Heilongjiang Province and the municipal government of Harbin, *Falling Flowers* contributes to the city's overall plan to revitalize its cosmopolitan tradition, in order to develop the city's cultural economy. It hints at the film producers' restorative nostalgia for Xiao Hong, the nostalgia that is utilized for developing the present Harbin.

In contrast, *The Golden Era* aims to "faithfully represent history."⁸ It creates a vernacular flavour of people's everyday life. Both films are created for consumption. Nevertheless, *The Golden Era* suggests a sense of reflective nostalgia for Xiao Hong. This is illustrated by director Xu's claim that she had dreamed about producing a film about Xiao Hong for forty years before she finally made it.⁹ While *Falling Flowers*

⁷ See Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field*, 3.

⁸ Zi Chuan. "Zhuanfang Xu Anhua: Huangjin shidai bu tuichong 'minguo faner' (Exclusive interview to Anhua Xu: *The Golden Era* does not promote the style of the Republic of China," *BBC Chinese net*, August 26, 2014.

⁹ Yunyun Tang, ed., "Xu Anhua cheng Xiao Hong hen wanqiang: tade shidai qingsong you canku (Xu Anhua states that Xiao Hong was perseverant: her era was both relaxing and cruel)," *Nanjing Daily*,

craves for the economic capital of Xiao Hong, *The Golden Era* values more of her literary capital.

In the third part of this chapter, I analyze the cultural and economic discourses embodied in local officials' branding of Harbin as the home city of Xiao Hong. Xiao Hong is identified by local officials as a cultural heritage to be rejuvenated and consumed at present and in the future. They highlight the economic capital of Xiao Hong. The common question that all three parts answer is, "How does the nostalgia for Xiao Hong influence people's perception and construction of Harbin at present?" I argue that Xiao Hong and Harbin are mutually representative of each other. They are each other's "identity marker."¹⁰ The memorialization of Xiao Hong suggests the cooperation and contention between the literary, economic, and political capital that she embodies. The nostalgia for Xiao Hong is both past-oriented and future-oriented.

"Dialogue" with Xiao Hong in the "*Lieux de Mémoire*," Harbin and Hulan

Many contemporary readers of Xiao Hong visit Harbin and Hulan to "go beyond their intellectual exchanges with texts and long for some kind of material contact with the author of those texts or the places where they originate."¹¹ The physical space where

April 17, 2014.

¹⁰ Levy, "Self and the City," 184.

¹¹ Harald Hendrix, eds. *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory* (New York, London: Routledge, 2008), 1. Hendrix summarized the previous scholars' insights on the various motivations for people to visit the places where famous writers used to live, including "the admiration for 'illustrious men' that since early modern times, was integrated into a discourse of "first local, and later national" pride; the romantic interest in personality, especially in genius, and the desire to identify with such extraordinary persons; the need to get in touch with the world of the past and of the imagination directly and physically, in the places where history was made or ideas were conceived." Hendrix, ed., *Writers' Houses*, 7.

Xiao Hong lived is a substitute for her own physical presence. Harbin and Hulan may also trigger contemporary readers' affective connections with Xiao Hong. As Boym argues, "Nostalgia depends on materiality of place... locale is not merely a context but also a remembered sensation and the material debris of past life."¹² In this sense, Harbin and Hulan become *les lieux de m'énmoire* of Xiao Hong, for contemporary readers and such *lieux*, supposedly, allow them to be in touch with her intellectually, physically, and affectively. Several writers have produced articles about their pilgrimage to the places where Xiao Hong lived in Harbin and Hulan. In this way, the two cities are sites not only for commemorating Xiao Hong, but also for producing new meanings. Memorialization through a place looks to the past, as well as producing the social spaces of the present and future.

What follows is my analysis of four contemporary writers' memorialization of Xiao Hong in Harbin and Hulan. Their works speak to Xiao Hong's writings in one way or another, constituting an intertextuality across time. According to Kristeva, intertextuality proposes "the text as a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products."¹³ Intertextuality requires that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical.¹⁴ Shaped by Xiao Hong's writing of Harbin, contemporary writers imagine Harbin into a snow world, a hybrid between black soil culture and the

¹² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*.

¹³ Maria Jesus Martinez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept," *Atlantis* 18, no. 1/2 (1996): 268; also see Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," *Desire in Language: Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980): 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

modern, European culture;¹⁵ in their works, one can detect nostalgia for Old Harbin, and melancholy over the perceived present moral decline and loss of the city's poetic nature and material heritage. Xiao Hong's portrayal of Harbin, and these contemporary writers' imagining of Xiao Hong in Harbin through reading her works (such as *Market Street*, *the Field of Life and Death*, *Tales of Hulan River*), constitute "dialogues" across time between the literary, the imagined, and the physical city. These dialogues manifest an ongoing process of a textual production of the city into a real and imagined space. In this way, literature is not a memorial reservoir. Contemporary writers' rewriting of Xiao Hong's Harbin contributes to the literary inheritance and (re)imagination of the city.

Wang Binggen — Harbin as a World of Snow

In *Xue li Xiao Hong: qinlin zuojia guju* (Xiao Hong in snow: visiting the writer's house), the author Wang Binggen recalls his visit to Harbin and Hulan in 1999. Wang imagines Harbin to be a snow world. As he states, "The snow world occupied more than half of Xiao Hong's short life; although she left the world of snow, snow is always falling in her works."¹⁶ For example, in *Tales of Hulan River*, Xiao Hong depicts how "after the harsh winter has sealed up the land, the earth begins to crack and split."¹⁷ Wang was born and grew up in Fujian province in South China, where it

¹⁵ Black soil culture refers to the indigenous culture of Northeast China. Its literal name is because of the fact that this region is characterized by black soil. See Jingyang Yan, "Heitu wenhua de xingcheng he fazhan (The formation and development of black soil culture)," *Fendou* no.7, 2017. <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/5cd158ef3086bceb19e8b8f67c1cfad6195fe91f.html>

¹⁶ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 403.

¹⁷ Xiao Hong, *The Field of Life and Death and Tales of Hulan River*, trans. Howard Goldblatt. Boston: Cheng and Tsui Company, 2002.

rarely snows. Wang states that his impetus to visit Harbin is to see land cracks in cold winter and light snow as described in *Tales of Hulan River*, and to visit the street in Harbin at night as portrayed in *Market Street*.

Wang intertwines his experience of Harbin with Xiao Hong's. In the imagined space, Wang crosses the boundary of time, going back and forth between the real Harbin and the one in *Market Street*. The Harbin he describes in "Xiao Hong in Snow" is both contemporary and of the past, both of his and of Xiao Hong's, and both of the real and the imagined. As Xiao Hong portrays in *Market Street*, she suffers hunger and coldness, waiting for Lang Hua to come back home. "The snow made me uneasy, terrified me...A litter of piglets falling into a pit of snow. Sparrows frozen to death on telephone wires."¹⁸ Such description by Xiao Hong shapes Wang's imagination of Harbin. As he states, "These words fall onto Harbin like freezing snow... Hunger and coldness are all what Xiao Hong tells me about Harbin."¹⁹

In *Market Street*, Xiao Hong depicts a sense of fear and strangeness about night. In order to feel close to Xiao Hong, Wang goes into the cold and snowy night in Harbin. The snow falling under his collar reminds him of the light snow portrayed in *Market Street*. Wang further intertwines contemporary Harbin with the historical one, in which Xiao Hong lived. When he is on the bank of the Songhua River, Wang imagines that the river bursts its bank and floods the city, and Xiao Hong is trapped in Dongxingshun Hotel, as in 1932. Wang uses the Songhua River as a means to provoke the memory of Old Harbin and Xiao Hong in 1932. His writing is about the Songhua

¹⁸ Xiao, *Market Street*, 41

¹⁹ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 404.

River in both 1932 and 1999. Songhua River becomes the means to bridge the temporal gap and to tie together Xiao Hong's Harbin of the past and Wang's of the present, constituting a simultaneous temporality in the literary space of Harbin.

Similar to Wang's approach, another contemporary writer, Zhang Kangkang, creates intertextuality between her writings of Harbin and Xiao Hong's. Zhang records her visit to Hulan in 1985 in her article "There is a Cactus Tree in the North." In this article, Zhang imagines the historical space of Hulan in the 1930s by means of her "dialogue" with the sixty-year old cactus tree in Hulan, which has witnessed the historical changes of Hulan since Xiao Hong's era. In this way, the old cactus tree becomes the tie that connects Xiao Hong's *Tales of Hulan River* with Zhang's "There is a Cactus Tree in the North." Zhang's and Wang's writings of Xiao Hong are "double" in Kristeva's terms, *i.e.*, they live "within the literary space of [Xiao Hong], and within the space of texts across time."²⁰ Snow, the Songhua River, and the cactus tree are the interfaces, through which the old literary spaces of Harbin and Hulan mingle with their new physical space, to produce Harbin and Hulan as a renewed literary imagination, enriching the temporal and spatial layers of the two places.

Hong Ke — Harbin as a Hybrid Space

Hong Ke is a writer from Shanxi province in Northwest China. Hong Ke visited Harbin in the winter of 2007 because of his affection for Xiao Hong's writings and for snow, and he wrote the article, "Zai Xiao Hong de chengshi (In Xiao Hong's city)."

²⁰ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," 65.

Hong Ke identifies Harbin as a multi-ethnic, exotic, and romantic city. Hong Ke's impression of Harbin is based on his visit to Central Street, St. Sophia Church, and the Ice Lantern Entertainment World, which are all important landmarks and tourist sites of Harbin. Hong Ke offers a historical reading of these sites. He considers Harbin as a hybrid place, being both a frontier of modernity and a place with unique, traditional, cultural features. Hong Ke emphasizes what he considers the unique hybrid culture in Northeast China, *i.e.*, a combination of European culture, black soil culture, fishing and hunting culture, Manchu, and Shaman culture. After visiting the Ice Lantern Entertainment World, Hong Ke suggests that it is snow and ice that enrich people's imagination; the cold climate is another contributor to the unique culture of Harbin.

Hong Ke sees Harbin as being both modern and indigenous, international and local, down-to-earth and romantic. He tends to argue, quite deterministically, that it is this unique culture and climate that produce the great works of Xiao Hong. He states, for instance, that both black soil culture and modern art prevail in *Tales of Hulan River*. However, I argue that the opposite could be true as well – Xiao Hong's portrayal of Harbin's exotic space, black soil culture, and cold climate, shape Hong Ke's perception of Harbin. According to Parkins and Haworth, "Subjectivity and space are mutually constitutive."²¹ The physical and the imagined space of Harbin intertwines with each other, working together in the continual social (re)production of the city's (social) space, as lived and abstract.

²¹ Ilya Parkins and Lara Haworth, "The Public Time of Private Space in 'Dior by Dior,'" *Biography* 35, no. 4 (2012): 673.

Qiu Subin — Moral Decline in the Contemporary Harbin

“Xun bujian guilu de Xiao Hong (The Xiao Hong who could not find the way of returning)” is an article by Qiu Subin, published in the journal, *Zuojia* (Writer), in 1997. This article is in the form of an imagined dialogue between Qiu and Xiao Hong. Qiu tells a story of contemporary Harbin and Hulan to Xiao Hong, and tries to re-experience the Harbin of Xiao Hong’s time. Qiu tells Xiao Hong that she sees “Golden Bough” in Harbin – she is the village girl who makes a living by sewing in *the Field of Life and Death*. According to Xiao Hong, Golden Bough is sexually harassed by her male client. In contrast with the naïve Golden Bough, who escaped from Harbin to her village after the humiliation, in Xiao Hong’s novel, the “Golden Bough” that Su sees is well-off and settles down in Harbin. According to Qiu, the contemporary “Golden Bough” is comfortable with her sexy and revealing clothing and her job as sex worker. Here, Su satirizes the moral decline and worship of money that she noticed among contemporary women in cities.

The Golden Bough of Xiao Hong’s work is reproduced by Qiu in her writing of contemporary Harbin. According to Kristeva, the “literary word” (in this case, “Golden Bough”) is an “intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings.”²² The imaginative dialogue between Qiu and Xiao Hong breaks the boundary between the past and the present, between the literary space and the physical space of Harbin.

²² Alfaro, “Intertextuality: Origins,” 268; also see Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” 65.

Moreover, Qiu tells Xiao Hong that many writers of Xiao Hong's generation have given up writing and engaged in business. Wang Enjia was Xiao Hong's fiancé, who abandoned her when she was pregnant. Qiu says that in Harbin she sees many "Wang Enjia," who enjoy sexual pleasure with several women. Qiu's article implies a nostalgia for Xiao Hong's era. As Koga argues, "Nostalgia for Old Harbin is a displaced form of social criticism of contemporary Harbin."²³ Qiu's nostalgic narrative should be read in Koga's terms, as an indictment against the worship of money and the moral decline of man and woman at present.²⁴

According to Qiu, Xiao Hong's tomb in Hulan is locked within a fence.²⁵ She argues that Xiao Hong fought to shed the fetters imposed by "feudalism" on family, gender, and marriage; however, her fellow townsmen lock Xiao's tomb in the name of loving and protecting her. Qiu argues that fence and lock are symbolic fetters for Xiao Hong's soul. Qiu also satirizes the fact that Xiao Hong has become a brand and a money tree for her hometown to attract visitors and consumers. Qiu criticizes this commercialization of Xiao Hong, which might distort people's imagination of her *milieu de m'énmoire* (real environment of memory).

Ji Hongzhen — the Disappeared Material Memory of Xiao Hong

Ji Hongzhen, the author of *Xiao Hong zhuan* (Xiao Hong's autobiography), visited

²³ Koga, "The Double Inheritance," 58.

²⁴ Similarly, William Cunningham Bissell proposes regarding nostalgia as a means of measuring the present. Bissell, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," 226.

²⁵ A wisp of Xiao Hong's hair is in her tomb in Hulan. Her remains were buried in Yinhe Cemetery in Guangzhou and St. Stephen's Girls' College in Hong Kong.

Harbin and Hulan in 2009, and wrote her experience there in “Xiao Hong guli (The hometown of Xiao Hong).” Ji evokes the memories of the changed political situation in Harbin by pointing out the changed names of the middle school where Xiao Hong used to study. The name of the school changed many times: from Worshipping Morality Women’s Middle School in 1924, to First Municipal Girls’ Middle School in the Eastern Province Special Region in 1926, to Harbin No. Seven Middle School in 1949, to the present Xiao Hong Middle School, since 1992. Moreover, Ji states that Xiao Hong used to be regarded as a rebellious student, who was scolded and even expelled by this school. However, ironically, such a “bad” student becomes the model for the contemporary students in Xiao Hong Middle School. The changed attitudes towards Xiao Hong over time reveals the changed expectations of womanhood in China. Ji suggests that naming the school after Xiao Hong is also a symbolic political act that implies the school’s respect for women and an embrace of liberalism, equity, and freedom.

Moreover, seeing the disappearance of the material legacy of Xiao Hong in Harbin, Ji conveys her nostalgia for Xiao Hong’s Old Harbin and her melancholy over the transformed urban space of the city: “The cinema and pawnshop that Xiao Hong visited exist only in old photos; the rickshaw which took Xiao Hong to hospital before she delivered a baby is transformed into a sculpture on the side of Central Street.”²⁶ Ji comments that “Xiao Hong becomes a legend of the city, but the material memory of

²⁶ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 382; also see Hongzhen Ji, “Xiao Hong guli (The hometown of Xiao Hong),” *Sanwen* (Short essay), 2009.

her disappeared.” Similarly, in her visit to the town of Hulan, Ji argues that the poetic nature of Hulan has disappeared, due to the prevalence of urbanization and market economy.²⁷ By pinpointing the poetic nature of Hulan embodied in *Tales of Hulan River*, Ji conveys nostalgia for the pastoral life of Xiao Hong’s time and criticism of modernization. These contemporary writers’ and readers’ imaginations of Xiao Hong and of the Old Harbin in Xiao Hong’s writings is not only nostalgic for the past, but also a modernist revision of it. This is a process of objectifying Xiao Hong, her literary works, and her Old Harbin, as the Other. Such revision of the past tells more about the present than about the past itself. Xiao Hong and her Harbin become a means for contemporary writers to express their critique of the city at present.

Xiao Hong on the Silver Screen: *Falling Flowers* versus *The Golden Era*

Falling Flowers (2012) and *The Golden Era* (2015) were produced partly to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Xiao Hong’s birth. The two films have similar structure, presenting chronologically Xiao Hong’s life story in several places, from Hulan to Beijing, Harbin, Qingdao, Shanghai, Wuhan, Chongqing, and Hong Kong. In the following, I explore how the Harbin of the 1930s is imagined differently in the two films, especially in terms of the city’s ethnic space. I argue that although both films represent Harbin in the 1930s as multiethnic, *Falling Flowers* reconstructs a Russianized and upscale Harbin and, in contrast, in *The Golden Era*, Old Harbin is constructed as a cultural space dominated by the Chinese. I examine how complex

²⁷ Ibid., 378.

historical, political, economic, and architectural factors shape the different imaginations and representations of Harbin. Films, here, are utilized as “rich maps of social-cultural, political, economic, and architectural discourses” in representing (or not representing) the Chinese and the Russian ethnic space of Old Harbin.²⁸

The presence of St. Sophia Church and snow in both films illustrates, to some extent, how branding Harbin as Oriental Moscow and Ice City shapes film directors’ imaginations of the city. In turn, the two films contribute to “fuel an emerging urban discourse” of the exotic, romantic, and cold Harbin by “reinforcing stock images,” such as St. Sophia Church.²⁹ Harbin in film is a lens, through which I examine how film production in and about a city is influenced by the physical cityscapes, the strategies of the city’s branding, and its economic concerns. Furthermore, I examine the heterogenic memories of the city’s past on the screen, and how a film is integrated within and impacts on a society, and contribute to the social production of Harbin.

The Usage of Snow and Church in the Cinematic Harbin

In recent years in Harbin, ice and snow have become increasingly appealing to tourists. Ice lanterns and snow sculptures are among the city’s icons. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that both films, discussed in the previous section, choose winter as a major season to shoot Xiao Hong’s life in Harbin. Snow is recognized by both film directors as an indispensable element that represents Harbin. This is partly due to the

²⁸ Richard Koeck and Les Roberts, eds. *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 19.

²⁹ Braester. *Painting the City Red*, 229.

climate of this city, but the branding by local government of Harbin as Ice City also contributes to the high profile given to snow in the two films. Winter is the hot season for tourists to visit Harbin. Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival is an annual winter festival that officially starts on January 5th and lasts a month. The city's snow and ice culture draw attention from local, national, and international news reports and television programs. In 2017, part of the National Spring Festival Gala was held in the Ice Lantern Entertainment World, a theme park in Harbin.³⁰ Ice and Snow are cultural signifiers as well as tourist sources of Harbin. They are incorporated in many films about Harbin.

Falling Flowers and *The Golden Era* present snow in differing ways: the foregrounding of snow is obvious in *Falling Flowers*, whereas snow functions more often as a background in *The Golden Era*. That is to say, scenes of falling snow are shown in *Falling Flowers*, whereas there are several shots of public space covered by snow in *The Golden Era*. Snow itself is a spectacle, shaping audiences' imagination of a mythic and romantic Harbin. Snow in the two films is also a potential visual advertisement to the audiences who might, in turn, become tourists visiting Harbin in winter.

Specifically, Huo uses a lot of images of falling snow, especially at night. Snow becomes a “*jie pai qi* (metronome)” in Dai Jinhua's term,³¹ functioning as a link that connects the cinematic narrations of Xiao Hong's life experiences in Harbin. Huo utilizes snow to create a sense of romanticized desolation. In other words, snow

³⁰ Watching this gala with family is a tradition on the Chinese New Year.

³¹ Dai Jinhua, *Dianying piping* (film critique) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2015), 64.

signifies romance as well as cold and difficulty. In *Falling Flowers*, when Xiao Hong returns to Harbin from Beijing with her fiancé Wang Enjia, the first image of Harbin is the streetscape outside a classical building under heavy snow, in the dim light of road lamps, together with a horse-drawn carriage passing by. Such imagery adds a poetic atmosphere to the city, whereas the voiceover endows the scene with a sad tone: “Wang and I used up all the money in Beijing, having no choice but to go back to Harbin. Our two families canceled the arranged marriage, and they broke up with Wang and me. We are unable to return home, living half a year in Dongxingshun Hotel.”³² The tension between the poetic images and the melancholic voiceover indicates the “double faces” of Harbin for Xiao Hong, a mythic world and a dark hell at the same time. In this sense, Huo endows snow with a paradoxical connotation.

The sense of romanticized desolation is also spatially created by Huo when the small and tender world of the couple is situated in a larger context of desolation: an abandoned factory. In *Falling Flowers*, after Xiao Jun finds a job, the couple celebrate this success by dancing in front of St. Nicholas Cathedral and outside of an abandoned factory. In the following shot, the couple go into this empty factory. When Xiao Jun tries to kiss Xiao Hong, Xiao Hong runs away and Xiao Jun chases her. The next shot is a close-up of a wide hole on the wall of the factory, through which snow falls. Due to the strong light outside, the hole is nothing but a bright, white emptiness. Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun end up kissing each other under this bright stream of snow.

³² Snow as a metaphor of difficulty is presented in another scene, in which Xiao Jun walks sadly on his way home in a snowy night, because he fails to find a job or borrow any money for food. In another shot, several prostitutes are relaxing on the balcony, while Xiao Hong walks in the heavy snow.

For one thing, the cold atmosphere in the abandoned factory is strengthened by the falling snow and a kiss in snow “expresses Xiao Hong’s passion and love.”³³ For another thing, the bright stream of snow that surrounds Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun creates a small romantic world for the couple. It could be a visualization of the couple’s psyche, symbolizing the light, hope, and romance they feel with each other. The stream of snow, in which the couple are bathing, contrasts with the empty and desolating space in the abandoned factory. Such a panoramic view of the empty factory offered to the audience contrasts with the limited vision of the couple, to whom the mythic world created by the stream of light and snow is everything. This scene lends itself to be read in metaphoric terms: if the stream of snow signifies the romance and love between the couple at this moment, then the desolating space that surrounds the snow stream in the abandoned factory hints at the possible unharmonious relationship between the couple in the future. This hidden problem between the couple is instantly revealed in the next shot, in which the voiceover by Xiao Hong introduces their new home on Market Street and Xiao Hong’s fear that Xiao Jun might have an affair with their neighbor, Wang Lin.

³³ Min Wu, “Song Jia: yan xiaohong wo fangfu yanle yibeizi (Song Jia: playing the role of Xiao Hong seems to take my whole life),” *Southern Daily*, March 2, 2013.
http://epaper.southcn.com/nfdaily/html/2013-03/02/content_7169631.htm



Figure 2. The Poster for *Falling Flowers*

Unlike the many shots of falling snow in *Falling Flowers*, several scenes of Harbin after snow are shown in *The Golden Era*, and snow serves as a background for the filmic narration of Xiao Hong in Harbin. For example, the first shot depicting Xiao Hong's arrival in Harbin shows a back view of her walking in a public space that is covered by snow. Later, a snow-covered park, the locale where Xiao Hong says farewell to her brother, is shown. In another scene, her fiancé goes to an opium house, located in the courtyard house in Daowai. There is a close-up shot of the snow-covered stairs in this courtyard. The only shot of falling snow in *The Golden Era* is the one in which Xiao Hong walks onto the top floor of the Europa Hotel and watches the heavy snowflakes through the small skylight. Her face shows excitement. Then, from Xiao Hong's point of view, a panoramic shot of the city is presented. In this

case, director Xu uses snow to create a cheerful atmosphere and a sense of hope, signifying Xu's interpretation of Xiao Hong's positive character. This contrast with *Falling Flowers*, where snow is a source not only of romance but also of melancholy.

St. Sophia Church is shown in both films, even in the same chronological order – after Xiao Hong escapes from Dongxingshun Hotel and before she delivers a baby in a hospital. However, a slight difference in the representation of St. Sophia Church in the two films is indicated in the following: in *Falling Flowers*, doves are shown flying across the dome of St. Sophia Church; in *The Golden Era*, the shot of the church in falling snow is accompanied with the clamour of the church bells. In this way, the same church signifies different meanings in the two films. In *Falling Flowers*, the doves flying across the dome of St. Sophia Church can be read as a metaphor of Xiao Hong, who gains her freedom from the confinement of Dongxingshun Hotel. In *The Golden Era*, the sound of church bells from St. Sophia Church is juxtaposed with the cry of a baby, indicating Xiao Hong's delivery of a baby – a ritualized symbol of time and the beginning of a new life. St. Sophia Church covered by snow demonstrates two popular tourist sources in Harbin, namely the European style architectural heritage and winter tourism. In both films, the inclusion of St. Sophia Church and snow, either as background or as foreground, is partly due to the fact that they are the icons of Harbin. This church and snow shape the two directors' imaginations of Harbin. To film Harbin, St. Sophia church and snow are too indispensable to be omitted. Moreover, in *The Golden Era*, the representation of Harbin as a place covered by snow creates an image of the city as peaceful and clean, whereas in *Falling Flowers*,

the representation of Harbin as a place where snow is always falling creates a sense of romanticized desolation. In either case, snow facilitates the audience's imagination of Harbin as peaceful and romantic. Such cinematic imaging, in turn, may motivate some audiences to become potential tourists to visit Harbin in winter.

Different Representations of Harbin's Ethnic Space

Both films present Harbin as a multi-ethnic city. The mixed ethnicity of the Chinese and the Russians is hinted at by the bilingual plaques in Russian and Chinese in the two films. Nevertheless, *Falling Flowers* shows a more Russianized and modern Harbin, while *The Golden Era* presents Harbin mainly as a Chinese cultural space. The different representation of Harbin's ethnic space is illustrated in the Europa Hotel. The adaptation of "the Europa Hotel" from *Market Street* in the two films differs. In *Market Street*, Xiao Hong describes how, when she and Sanlang move into the Europa Hotel, a Russian hotel attendant walks into her room, followed by a Chinese attendant, and takes away all the bedding because the couple cannot pay its rent of fifty cents per day. This event is presented in both films, but in *Falling Flowers* only a Russian attendant comes to take the bedding, while in *The Golden Era*, a male Chinese attendant is followed by a female Russian attendant, and it is the Chinese attendant who takes away the bedding. In *Market Street*, Xiao Hong states that "the room looked as though it had been pillaged."³⁴ The different portrayals of the ethnicity of the servants who take away the couple's bedding in the two films

³⁴ Xiao, *Market Street*, 5.

could be interpreted as Xu's and Huo's different understandings of who the "pillagers" are in terms of ethnicity. Moreover, in *The Golden Era*, when the couple enter the Europa Hotel, a Chinese receptionist asks the couple to check in, but such a scene is absent in *Falling Flowers*. The Europa Hotel becomes a contentious place, in which the power relationship between the Russian and the Chinese is interpreted differently in the two films. This inconsistency conveys the different understandings of the ownership of the Europa Hotel: while *Falling Flowers* suggests the Russian ownership of this hotel, *The Golden Era* portrays its Chinese ownership. Such difference metaphorically suggests different representations of the ownership of Harbin.

Both films show the streetscapes in which the couple walk on their way to the Europa Hotel after Xiao Hong delivers a baby, but the streetscapes differ. *Falling Flowers* presents an exotic, clean, artistic, and gentrified streetscape, while in *The Golden Era*, the couple walk in a decaying Chinese neighborhood. Automobiles and rails of street cars, signifiers of modernity, are major props in *Falling Flowers*, but they are rarely seen in *The Golden Era*. Instead, in the latter bicycles and carriages are major props. Moreover, in contrast to the pedestrians in western uniforms in *Falling Flowers*, in *The Golden Era* pedestrians wear plain cotton-padded jackets, a style unique to the commoners in North China in winter. It portrays a vernacular flavour of Chinese commoners' everyday life and creates a *lived* space of memory, capturing the native city - "ugly, rough, beautiful, [and] exciting, all at once."³⁵

³⁵ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 224.

In *Falling Flowers*, the prevalence of Westernized store names constantly reminds the audience that Harbin was an international city. For instance, there are the Chinese-Russian, bilingual plaques of “*Yalishanda zhubaodian* 亚历山大珠宝店 Александр ювелирный магазин” (Alexander’s Jewelry store), “*Beila rihuadian* 贝拉日化店 Белла косметический магазин” (Bella’s cosmetic store), and “*Liliya huadian* 莉莉娅花店 лилия цветочный магазин (Lilia’s flower shop).” There is also a Chinese-English, bilingual plaque “万福珠宝 Lucky Jewelry,” implying the multi-ethnic nature of Harbin.

The dominance of Russian cultural space is further illustrated in *Falling Flowers*, when some famous Russian stores (to some extent, cultural icons) of old Harbin are presented. For example, among the props are *huae daosheng yinhang* 华俄道胜银行 Русско-Китайский банк (the Russo-Chinese Bank) and *aoliante shudian* 敖连特书店 книжный магазин (the Orient bookstore). The Russo-Chinese Bank Harbin branch was established in 1898 and closed in 1929. The prop of the Orient Bookstore must be adapted from “*aoliante dianyingyuan* 敖连特电影院, восток кино” (the Orient Cinema), which was a Russian-run cinema established in 1908 in Harbin.

The Russo-Chinese Bank and the Orient Cinema are known to many local people at present. Representing these old cultural icons in *Falling Flowers* demonstrates Huo’s intention to provoke the contemporary audience’s cultural memory of the Russianized Harbin. Moreover, the fact that the Russo-Chinese Bank was closed in 1929 but is a prop in a film about the Harbin of 1932 demonstrates the representation, and even fabrication, of Old Harbin as a Russian-dominated social space in *Falling*

Flowers. I assume that one of its purposes is to answer the local officials' call for restoring the bygone glory of Harbin as Oriental Moscow in order to develop local culture and economy.

In contrast, a Chinese cultural space, in a multi-ethnic Harbin, is the focus in *The Golden Era*. Many store names are from a Chinese cultural background, such as “*Dexin shizadian* 德信食杂店 (Virtue and honesty grocery store),” “*wushenghao yaodian* 五盛号药店 (Five prosperity pharmacy).” Moreover, another prop, “*wenquan yuchi* 温泉浴池 (hot spring public bathhouse)” suggests Japanese cultural flavour and its localization in Harbin. It also serves as a hint of the Japanese-controlled Manchukuo era, the historical time when the story of Xiao Hong is narrated. Images of frozen cabbages stored outside residential buildings represent this particular local phenomenon that was prevalent until the late 1980s. By using indigenous props, *The Golden Era* might provoke local audiences' memories of the old way of living. In this sense, this film becomes a site of memory not only of Xiao Hong but also of the Chinese commoners in Old Harbin.

The vernacular flavour of everyday life is portrayed not only through streetscape and buildings but also through the internal space of a restaurant, where Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong have a dinner to celebrate Xiao Jun's success in finding a job. This restaurant is frequented by rickshaw drivers and workers. Right outside the entrance of this restaurant is a stove, where a man is selling steaming potatoes. Such vending was popular among local Chinese in Old Harbin. The restaurant is small, shabby, and crowded; its staff and customers are Chinese. Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun have to share a

table with many other customers. A focus on the customer next to Xiao Hong shows that he has a patch on his clothes, indicating his poverty. In *The Golden Era*, Xu presents the details of Chinese commoners' everyday life, and she set the venue in deteriorating buildings. Harbin in Xu's film is endowed with vernacular flavour and a sense of vitality, embodied in lived experience. I argue that *The Golden Era* is an insider film; its narrative perspective is that of a local commoner, and it expects the audience to identify with the authentic representation of everyday life on the screen. In contrast, *Falling Flowers* is an outsider film, highlighting a Russianized cultural space, and provoking the audience's imagination of an exotic Old Harbin. Sandra Tawake's analysis of the fictional narrations about the Pacific and Pacific Islanders, who are depicted as exotic objects of European desires, pinpoints a Euro-centric perspective.³⁶ In contrast, *Falling Flowers* tends to show a Europeanized Harbin that is an "object of [Chinese] desires" for the director of the film and the municipal government of Harbin.

As mentioned above, in *The Golden Era* Xiao Jun's success in finding a job is celebrated in a shabby restaurant, frequented by Chinese rickshaw drivers and workers. In contrast, in *Falling Flowers* the couple dance in celebration in front of the replica of St. Nicholas Cathedral. The magnificent church contrasts with the dilapidated restaurant. This reveals that Huo aims at constructing Harbin into a Russianized and romantic cityscape, while Xu aims to represent a Chinese working-

³⁶ Sandra Tawake, "Transforming the Insider-Outsider Perspective: Postcolonial Fiction from the Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 155.

class space in an everyday life context. The St. Nicholas Cathedral presented in *Falling Flowers* is the replica constructed in 2007. As we have seen, this replica has been criticized by some local audiences as being too modern and anachronistic in a film telling a story of the 1930s. However, I can imagine the rationale for Huo, and the film producer, the Propaganda Departments of Heilongjiang Provincial Government and of the Harbin municipal government, to present this old/new landmark of Harbin in *Falling Flowers*. Putting the reconstructed St. Nicholas Cathedral on the screen suggests local officials' desire to display Harbin as a romantic, Russianized city. This new cathedral could be compared to a commercial advertisement embedded in a historical film. It functions more as a selling point for promoting contemporary Harbin than as a historical background, in which Xiao Hong's life in Harbin is represented.

The flood of 1932 is an important memory of Harbin and, as expected, it was included in both films. However, the streetscapes in waist-deep water after the flood are portrayed differently in the two films. In *The Golden Era*, an upbeat background music highlights a scene, in which children splash water on each other; police patrol leisurely, riding horses; and a foreign photographer take photos for the pedestrians. In contrast, in *Falling Flowers*, within solemn background music, the streetscape is inserted into a melancholic scene, with gloomy sky and pouring rain. In *The Golden Era*, Xiao Hong is happy to take advantage of the flood and escapes from Dongxingshun Hotel, where she had been confined, whereas in *Falling Flowers*, anxiety and panic are shown on Xiao Hong's face, when she sees the deep water on

the street. Also, there are more Caucasian pedestrians shown in *Falling Flowers* than in *the Golden Era*.³⁷

This by no means suggests that no Chinese elements are included in *Falling Flowers* or no Russian elements in *The Golden Era*. Indeed, both films represent a mixed ethnic space in Harbin, although they have different emphases. It would be too simplified to argue that Huo presents a romanticized and exotic Harbin, while Xu presents a messy, but lively, Chinese cultural space of the city. However, it is safe to conclude that Huo amplifies the non-Chinese cultural elements of 1930s' Harbin, while Xu pays more attention to the Chinese neighborhood. The texture of daily life constructed in *Falling Flowers* is not as rich as in *The Golden Era*. *Falling Flowers* represents a mythic, modern, Russianized Harbin, a utopia shrouded in a desolate, romantic, and poetic atmosphere. It is analogous to an exhibited art work, expected to be observed at distance. In contrast, *The Golden Era* constructs Harbin as a vigorous living space, dominated by Chinese commoners, which is expected to resonate with and be imaginatively experienced by Chinese audiences.

The similar yet different cityscapes of Harbin constructed in the two films reveal the complex factors that shaped their production, such as the funding institutes' expectations and directorial taste. Moreover, the unique history of Harbin (the connection and contention between a Russian Kharbin and a Chinese Haerbin) is another important factor that shapes contemporary film producers' different

³⁷ In Xiao Hong's work and memoirs, there is no record about how she escaped from the hotel. According to the narration of Xiao Hong Digital Museum, it was Xiao Jun and a few other friends who helped Xiao Hong to escape from the hotel when Harbin was flooded. Xiao Hong Digital Museum, "Shengping jianjie (The bibliographical introduction)," January 11, 2013. <http://xiaohong.dbw.cn/system/201301/102882.html>

imaginations of this city's past. The different construction of ethnic space in the two films echoes the historical debates on whether Harbin was a Russian city or a Chinese one in terms of culture throughout the first two decades of the 20th century.³⁸ It also suggests the continuation of this debate up to the present. The contentious history of Harbin has been haunting and shaping contemporary people's construction of the city, both physically and intellectually.

The emphasis on a Russianized cultural space in *Falling Flowers*, and a Chinese one in *The Golden Era*, finds a parallel with the competition between St. Sophia Church and the Confucian Temple and, again, between the reconstruction of Dao-taifu and St. Nicholas Cathedral, discussed in Chapter One. Both film and architecture reveal the continued competition in claiming the Chinese or non-Chinese tradition of Harbin. In this way, film and architecture constitute a set of layered dialogues between the physical and the cinematic space of the city, between the Harbin of the early decades of the twentieth century and the one at present, contributing to a transmedia and cross-time production of Harbin as real and imagined.

The Official Memorialization of Xiao Hong in Harbin

Xiao Hong was downplayed in the official discourse for decades in China before the 1980s. Ironically, it is the American scholar, Howard Goldblatt, who played an important role in drawing people's attention to Xiao Hong and initiating the boom of Xiao Hong studies in China, beginning in the 1980s. Goldblatt published *The*

³⁸ James Carter, "A Tale of Two Temples: Nation, Region, and Religious Architecture in Harbin, 1928-1998," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no.1 (Winter 2000): 97-115. Duke University Press.

Biography of Xiao Hong in 1976, and the Chinese translation of this book has been available in China since 1980. Goldblatt was one of the earliest to write a biography of Xiao Hong after Luo Binji's *Xiao Hong xiaozhuan* (Brief biography of Xiao Hong) in 1947. Another important event that initiated the contemporary Xiao Hong studies was the academic conference in 1981 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Xiao Hong's birth in Harbin. Since then, commemorative conferences have been held every ten years in Harbin and Hulan. Numerous publications and research institutes, dedicated to Xiao Hong, have come into being since the 1980s. This trend reached its peak around 2011 during Xiao Hong's 100th birth anniversary. I will not go into the details about the memorial activities. Instead, I will analyze the cultural and economic discourses embedded in the commemorative activities for Xiao Hong.

The Cultural and Economic Discourses of Memorializing Xiao Hong

The 1981 conference on Xiao Hong was approved by the Propaganda Department of the CCP, who defined Xiao Hong as a Left-Wing, patriotic writer. 1980 was not long after the Cultural Revolution was officially declared over in 1976 and the official launch of China's Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978. For these reasons, strict censorship and high sensitivity to the political ideology of literary works were still dominant. A more diverse interpretation of Xiao Hong's works did not begin until the 1990s.

The central and the local governments differed in their motivations to commemorate Xiao Hong. While the central government of China defines Xiao Hong

as a patriotic writer, the Heilongjiang provincial government defines Xiao Hong as a cultural symbol and a brand to develop local culture.

In July 2009, the Heilongjiang Provincial Literature Research Institute was renamed Xiao Hong Research Institute. At its opening ceremony, the former director of the Heilongjiang Party Committee Propaganda Department, Yi Junqing, and the secretary of the Chinese Writer Association, Li Bing, delivered speeches. Yi said that they would take Xiao Hong as the literary archetype, to develop local literature in Heilongjiang Province. They plan to develop the brand of Xiao Hong as the primary cultural project. Two attitudes toward the past are, as Hargreaves suggests, “simply to remember it” and “to glorify the past for the benefit of the present.”³⁹ Yi’s speech is an illustration of the latter. Memorialization of Xiao Hong is “not innocent.”⁴⁰ The commemoration of Xiao Hong is no longer “a merely transparent expression of the past. Instead, memory had become a cultural enterprise that needed to be actively produced, represented and contested.”⁴¹ In this sense, the memory of Xiao Hong is (re)produced to serve the cultural and economic agenda in Harbin.

Li Bing’s speech at this opening ceremony further emphasizes the pragmatic concern of memorializing Xiao Hong in Harbin. Li said that Xiao Hong is the daughter of black soil and brings repute to Heilongjiang province. The establishment of this research institute can not only increase wider attention to the literature of

³⁹ Alec G. Hargreaves, eds., *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 94.

⁴⁰ Jeannette Marie Mageo, ed., *Cultural Memory: Reconfiguring History and Identity in the Postcolonial Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 29.

⁴¹ Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial*, 14.

Heilongjiang, but also can improve the local people's taste for literature and motivate contemporary local writers to develop Heilongjiang regional culture and formulate the uniqueness of Heilongjiang literary writing. Li Bing emphasizes Xiao Hong's being a writer of native place literature (*xiangtu wenxue*) in Heilongjiang province. The commemoration of Xiao Hong, according to Li Bing, is not past-oriented but future-oriented. Xiao Hong is incorporated into the project of local identity-construction.

Apart from the political and cultural agenda in reviving Xiao Hong, the intention to use Xiao Hong in promoting the local economic development is also revealed. In 2011, at the commemoration conference for the 100th anniversary of Xiao Hong's birth, Zhang Xiaolian, the director of the Propaganda Department of Heilongjiang Province, delivered a speech, in which he said that "by highlighting such a 'name card' as Xiao Hong, we wish to strengthen the regional culture and increase the cultural reputation of Heilongjiang, motivating the cooperative development between culture and economy in Heilongjiang province."⁴² Henceforth, the Heilongjiang Provincial Propaganda Department initiated the program of "Creating a Cultural Brand of Xiao Hong". At present, Xiao Hong has become a heritage to be revitalized and consumed. As Anders Hogberg argues, "Heritage is what we make of it today and how we choose to give meaning to the past in the present. In this sense, heritage is more of today than of the past."⁴³ Xiao Hong becomes a cultural capital of the city.

⁴² Xiaogeng Song, "Huigu yu zhanwang: jinian Xiao Hong danchen bainian xueshuyantaohui zongshu (Reflecting and envisioning: a review of the conference commemorating the 100th anniversary of Xiao Hong's Birth)," *Xuexi yu tansuo* (Study and exploration), 4 (2011): 262.

⁴³ Peter F. Biehl et al., eds. *Identities and Heritage: Contemporary Challenges in a Globalized World* (New York: Springer, 2014), 74.

To a certain extent, she initiates a cultural industry that constitutes part of the economic and cultural development of Harbin.

Criticism of Developing Xiao Hong Cultural Industry by the Public

Some aspects of the official promotion of the Xiao Hong cultural industry are criticized by the public. For example, Xiao Hong's renovated house has been open to the public since 1986. Several visitors claimed that it is too tidy to be true. Ji Hongzhen contended that "the pig trough is too clean; it is like a picture designed by a computer."⁴⁴ Xiao Fuxing argued that it becomes a place for those who have a pretentious interest in art; Xiao Hong's house was refashioned into a tourist site rather than for the sake of this heritage building itself. Xiao Hong "had become not only a literary, but also a tourist celebrity."⁴⁵ "The architecture of the past in the present is not an issue of inheritance. Instead, it is a symbolic act that helps construct a collective desire for a new time."⁴⁶ This claim by Kusno about the heritage building in Indonesia is, to some extent, true in the case of Xiao Hong's house. Preserving Xiao Hong's house denotes the collective official (and many commoners') desire to restore this region's cultural tradition and to construct a unique local identity, in order to adapt to as well as confront contemporary market economy and globalization. However, for the many others, such as Ji Hongzhen and Xiao Fuxing, one of the problems in "inheriting" the legacies of Xiao Hong is that Xiao Hong's house is

⁴⁴ Zhang, *Xiao Hong Impression*, 382; also see Hong zhen Ji, "Xiao Hong guli."

⁴⁵ Hendrix, ed., *Writers' Houses*, 45.

⁴⁶ Abidin Kusno, *The Appearances of Memory*, 126.

turned into a spotless museum, a *lieu de m'histoire* that effaces the actual memory of Xiao Hong herself.

Moreover, Xiao Fuxing contrasted the popularity of Xiao Hong with the decline of *Northern Literature*, a local magazine established in 1950. Xiao argues that *Northern Literature* is also a brand of the city, but it has been ignored by the local government. According to Xiao, the *Northern Literature* is faced with a strong financial crisis, such that its staff did not get paid for salary eight months in a row. There is an obvious imbalance in the local official's support for the development of different cultural undertakings in Harbin.

The preservation of certain pieces of cultural heritage, while ignoring the others, entails more complex issues than just financial concerns. One of the reasons for the boom of Xiao Hong studies is the fact that Xiao Hong and her works appeal to many contemporary readers. Many volunteer to do research on Xiao Hong. Zhang Haining and Ye Jun are two examples. Both moved to Harbin from distant cities, due to their interest in Xiao Hong. Zhang Haining was a journalist in Jiangsu province before he came to Harbin, where he fully devotes his time to Xiao Hong research. His personal collections of Xiao Hong studies constitute most of the material of the Xiao Hong Literature Institute. He is also the initiator of the Hulan River Reading Group and one of the major organizers of the activities commemorating Xiao Hong in Harbin. Ye Jun is a literature professor at Heilongjiang University in Harbin. His hometown is in Hubei province in Central China. His major reason to move to Harbin also has to do with Xiao Hong research. Zhang Haining and Ye Jun identify Harbin as the

hometown of Xiao Hong; Harbin for them is the authentic place to do Xiao Hong research, shortening the physical and affective distance from Xiao Hong.

Conclusion

The memorialization of Xiao Hong in relation to Harbin crosses temporal and media boundaries. While some people are nostalgic for the loss of Xiao Hong, Old Harbin, and Hulan, others use Xiao Hong to “manufacture” nostalgia as a product and a calling card for the contemporary city. As Bissell argues, “We need to engage with [nostalgia] as a social practice that mobilizes various signs of the past in the context of contemporary struggles.”⁴⁷ Memorialization of Xiao Hong capitalizes upon her literary capital, as much as her political and economic capital. By juxtaposing Boym’s and Hockx’s concepts – *reflective and restorative nostalgia* and *force field* – this chapter reveals the intertwining and tensions of the literary, political, and economic significance, of memorializing Xiao Hong. The memorialization and representation of Xiao Hong tells more of contemporary story-tellers than of Xiao Hong *per se*. Xiao Hong remains a ghost who haunts the city in one way or another, not only reminding of Old Harbin but also functioning as an engine that channels the city, in constructing its cultural identity in the future.

In the diverse *lieux de m émoire* analyzed above, a multifaceted Harbin is revealed, *i.e.*, the physical, the represented, and the imagined; its ethnic and cultural space has been contested, as it is perceived to oscillate between the Russianized and

⁴⁷ Bissell, “Engaging Colonial Nostalgia,” 218.

the Chinese; it has experienced divergent ideologies of development between past-oriented and future-oriented, and between culturally-privileged and economically-privileged. Harbin has undergone immensely diverse tensions. It is these tensions across time-and-space and across literary, political, and economic boundaries that contribute to the social production of a dynamic Harbin, as real as it is imagined.

Chapter Seven. The Tension in Constructing a Nationalist versus Local

History of Harbin on the Screen: Russia and Japan as the Others

This chapter continues the examination of literature, film, and official discourses as *lieux de mémoire* in relation to Harbin. In this chapter, the focus is on the analysis of several historical dramas and films about Harbin. This is to explore the contemporary cinematic construction of the city, particularly from the perspective of Russia and Japan as two Others. The power contestation and ideological negotiation involved in the relationship between Harbin and the two Others, are explored as well. The rationale for focusing on historical dramas and films about Harbin is that such art forms offer the possibility of seeing Harbin through a space-time kaleidoscope. Historical dramas and films offer visual perceptions of the city as a palimpsest by means of a temporalization of space and spatialization of time on the screen.¹ By focusing on Russia and Japan in relation to Harbin, the importance of the “significant others” and the “dialogical” process of identity-making for the non-typical Chinese city of Harbin can be highlighted and comprehended.²

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Russia and Japan have played paramount roles in the identity-making of Harbin and Manchuria at large. On the one hand, the Russians and the Japanese were among the pioneers who constructed the urban space of Harbin from scratch. On the other hand, the Russian and Japanese

¹ See Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, 128, 163.

² Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 32; also see George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

imperialists, as they are defined by the Chinese official discourse, facilitated the growth of Chinese nationalism.³ The indispensable role of Russia and Japan in shaping the identity of Harbin was not only a factor in the early decades of the twentieth century but also at present. The history of the Russians and the Japanese in Harbin has haunted the city. The tension and interaction among Russians, Japanese, and Chinese in Harbin are represented in several contemporary Chinese films and television dramas. How is the history of the Russians and Japanese in Harbin, from 1898 to 1945, represented and imagined in contemporary Chinese films and television dramas? How do such works contribute to the imaging and reshaping of Harbin in cinematic space, and how do they redefine the identity of the city? These questions, much as those related to Xiao Hong's memorialization discussed in the previous chapters, are crucial because historical films and television dramas not only reflect the city's past but also reconstruct it, to serve the interests of film producers, local officials, investors, and censorship institutions.⁴ As pointed out by Ban Wang, historical dramas in China are not "historical." They are "predetermined from a hindsight" and characterized by a "strong moral element," "appropriating historical data in the service of entertainment, often in the form of cathartic release of

³ See Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*; Chiasson, *Administering the Colonizer*.

⁴ According to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television of The People's Republic of China, a film is not allowed to enter into production without putting its script outline into the official file. Unless a film passes censorship, it is not allowed to be distributed, screened, and exported. If the main characters and plot of a film involve diplomacy, ethnicity, religion, military, public security, historical and cultural celebrity, the film producer is required to provide three copies of the script, and to seek advice from relevant administrations at the provincial or central level. http://www.sarft.gov.cn/art/2006/5/28/art_107_4597.html

emotion.”⁵ Nevertheless, history on the screen does not exist only for consumption and to meet the emotional needs of audiences. Its ideological connotation requires unfolding.⁶ As Braester argues, filmmaking is a form of negotiation with power;⁷ filmmakers in China confront the same obstacles that architects are acquainted with as “planning in the face of power.”⁸ The production of Chinese historical dramas and films are both shaped by, as well as resistant to, the shackles of politics.

In the first part of this chapter, I map a cinematic reconstruction of Old Harbin as a contact zone, full of ambivalent inter-ethnic relationships, which cannot simply be reduced to either Self or Other, enemies or friends. This mapping is done through an analysis of two Chinese television dramas, *Yu Huo Wei Cheng* (Fire Saves the City in Danger) (2012) and *Ma Die Er Bin Guan De Qiang Sheng* (The Gunshot at the Modern Hotel) (2011). These are two representative historical dramas that discuss the power contestation between Tsarist Russians (later the Soviets), Chinese, and Japanese in Harbin. While mapping the main features and contradictions of the nationalist discourse in the selected dramas, I focus on the portrayal of Russia and Japan as differentiated Others, and on the heterogeneous reconstruction of the Russians and the Japanese as both political and apolitical figures. In this way, I explore how politics and ideology relate to the imaging of the ethnic space of Old

⁵ Ban Wang, “Trauma and History in Chinese Film: Reading ‘The Blue Kite’ against Melodrama.” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 125-7.

⁶ See Tina Mai Chen, “Propagating the Propaganda Film: The Meaning of Film in Chinese Communist Party Writings, 1949-1965,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003):157; Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

⁷ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 14.

⁸ *Ibid*, 6; John Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Harbin on the screen and its present political implications.

In the second part of this chapter, I compare two sets of works: first, two versions of an anti-Japanese film set in Harbin, *Zhao Yiman* in 1950, and *Wo De Mu Qin Zhao Yi Man* (My Mother Zhao Yiman) in 2005; then, another television drama, the 1984 *Ye Mu Xia De Ha Er Bin* (Harbin under the Night Curtain), with its 2008 remake. By comparing films and television dramas in different eras, I aim to explore the evolving representations of the Japanese “demons” and the Chinese nationalist heroes, in relation to the cinematic imaginations of Harbin over time.⁹ The turn to romance and femininity and the spotlight on the exotic urban space of Harbin suggest a turn towards visual consumption and market economy in the cinematic memorialization of anti-Japanese history in Harbin and China at large.

At the end of this chapter, I present the Japanese memories of and nostalgia for Harbin and the positive memories local Chinese have of Japanese Harbiners. They contrast with the demonization of the Japanese in Chinese historical dramas and films. Such contrast problematizes the memorialization of a nationalist Harbin on the screen, and reveals the political ideology embedded in the cinematic representation. It provides an alternative, if not radically different, understanding of the dichotomy

⁹ Among the many contemporary Chinese historical dramas and films that represent the power contestation among the Chinese, the Soviets, and the Japanese are *Gong Xun* (Immortal Feats) 2007 by Hao Cheng, and *Yuandong 1932: fengyun madieer* (Fareast 1932: The Vicissitudes of the Modern Hotel) produced by Xinwu Zhang in 2012. Among the many anti-Japanese historical dramas shot in Harbin are *Meili de qiutu* (A Beautiful Prisoner) (1986) by Jianhua Lu and Zhongxiao Yu, *-38°C* (2013) by Kaiyang Jiang, *Xuanya* (Cliff) (2012) by Jin Liu, *Hei tai yang 731* (Men Behind the Sun) (1988) by T.F. Mou, *731 da kuitao* (the Escape of Unit 731) (1992) by Yan Chang, *Haerbin wangshi zhi fenglei dong* (Old Stories of Harbin: Action of Wind and Thunder) (2013) by Kaiyang Jiang. Moreover, *Eluosi guniang zai haerbin* (Russian Girls in Harbin) (1993) by Sha Sun is a Chinese TV drama about a group of Russian girls making businesses in Harbin, and about the heroine Olya's love story with a local Chinese man. *Huayuan jie wu hao* (No.5 Garden Street) (1984), by Shusen Jiang and Shi Zhao, takes the residential house of a former Russian duke as that of the contemporary governors of the city. This location symbolizes the power contest between tradition and modernization in various ways.

between Self and Other, between victimizer and victim in the Chinese official discourse. It also encourages or confuses the audience's idea of a friendly as well as hostile ethnic space in Harbin and contributes to the construction of the ambivalent identity of the city.

It is my contention that the heterogeneous images of Russia and Japan embedded in the nationalist discourses imply both conformity with and dissent from power.¹⁰ The selected works suggest a tension between reconstructing a Chinese Harbin and a non-Chinese one, in terms of ideology and culture. Specifically speaking, on the one hand, the nationalist discourse in the selected films and television dramas showcases the CCP's efforts to *reclaim the territory of history*, to re-present the history of Harbin (1898-1945) *into* China.¹¹ On the other hand, the emphasis on the foreignness of Harbin in the selected works denotes a strategic countermeasure by "local patriots"¹² and pragmatists, who want to promote a unique identity of Harbin, making the city competitive in attracting audiences, tourists and investors from home and abroad.¹³ The once-suppressed memories of a cosmopolitan Harbin cooperate and compete, on

¹⁰ As Deleuze and Guattari argue, "In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata or territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification." Applying this insight to the Chinese cultural context, Berry explains that "there are systems of order and there are areas or zones that work against the repressive structures of an order to open up difference and heterogeneity." Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: the Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

¹¹ See Clausen and Thogersen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, 10.

¹² Lahusen, "Manchurian Conflicting Memories," 26; Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth*, 2. Lahusen uses the term "local patriotism" to refer to the resistance to the collective Chinese memory.

¹³ As Yu Hongmei suggests, the conversion from propaganda to consumerism is one of the most crucial steps toward postsocialist ideological consolidation. Yu, "Visual Spectacular, Revolutionary Epic, and Personal Voice: The Narration of History in Chinese Main Melody Films," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25, no. 2 (2013):166-218.

the screen, with the communist version of the city's past, telling a contradictory history of Harbin, as well as an equally ambivalent official ideology in developing the present city.

The motifs of nationalism and apolitical interpretation of history in films and dramas are relevant to the analysis of the cultural memories of Harbin, because in China both cinema and the city are producers as well as products of postsocialist politics. Cinema in and about the city is a means of seeing the political and ideological connotations that are embedded in the memories and the memorialization of Harbin.

My exploration of the relationship between nationalism and the city is inspired by earlier scholarship. James Donald (1999) understands “the city” as a historically specific mode of seeing. One of the modes of seeing is that of Michel de Certeau, who observes the city ‘from above and down below.’¹⁴ The former suggests an “imaginary totalization,” such as seeing the city through the eyes of urban planners, while the latter refers to the regard of the practitioners of everyday life.¹⁵ De Certeau presents both a “Concept City” and a lived one, an “anthropological experience of space.”¹⁶ This chapter takes the camera as a metaphorical “eye” that sees the reconstructed Old Harbin from both “above” and “below”. More precisely, by “above”, I mean that the camera presents a grand narrative of nationalism that dominates the selected works; by “below,” I focus on individual characters and their practices of everyday life:

¹⁴ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*, 69.

individual characters tell apolitical stories in their communication with the ethnic Other, especially in interethnic romance and marriage. In other words, the city of Harbin, on the screen, is constructed as both a Concept City of Chinese nationalism as well as a lived one, inhabited by individuals whose urban practices manifest a multiethnic cultural space of Harbin that has nothing to do with politics. The two perspectives contradict each other, revealing ambiguity and contradiction in (re)defining the ethnic and cultural identity of Harbin.¹⁷ Similar to what Robert Burgoyne argues in his analysis of historical films' role, *i.e.*, that they both unify and divide social unisonance in Oliver Stone's *JFK*, the selected historical dramas and films of Harbin both convey "a desperate need for history as the foundation of national identity"¹⁸ and reveal a fracturing historical narrative, which suggests "the absence of a unified national narrative."¹⁹ Such contradiction suggests the pragmatic concern of local officials and film producers who aim to construct an exotic and multi-ethnic narrative of Harbin for visual consumption, despite the fact that their works are disguised as nationalist stories.

Harbin: An Arena amongst Russia, Japan, and China

According to Zhang, in the 1990s "Chinese ethnographic cinema showcases exotic

¹⁷ Yu contends that "Postsocialism is an ideological map to read the ambiguities, contradictions, and uncertainties at this particular historical moment." Yu, "Visual Spectacular," 170. The ambiguous and contradictory imaging of the Japanese and the Russians in Harbin (1898-1945) in the "repressive structure" of Chinese nationalist films and TV dramas and its relation to the identity of Harbin are the main issues to be addressed in this chapter.

¹⁸ Robert Burgoyne, "Modernism and the narrative of nation in *JFK*," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, 113-125, 119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

landscape and architecture and exhibit sexuality and gender oppression,”²⁰ catering to international audience. Zhang suggests that a case in point is Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern*. I classify such ethnographic cinema as *Othering China*.²¹ I argue that this ethnographic turn of Chinese cinema does not only happen on the national level, as illustrated by Zhang Yimou’s work, but also on the provincial or local level. Unlike the filmic practice of “Othering China” on the international stage by Zhang, films and television dramas about Harbin showcase a reverse trend of inducing the exotic Other into the identity of the city, catering to domestic audiences. The Russians and the Japanese are the two popular Others that are commonly seen in films and television dramas about Harbin.

Russia and Japan as the Evil Other?

Fire Saves the City in Danger (2012) is a Chinese television drama directed by Deng Yinghai. This work was co-produced by the Propaganda Department of the Harbin Municipal Government and the Central China Television (CCTV) Administrative Center for TV Drama. It tells the story of the defeat of the plague by Doctor Wu Lienteh in Harbin in 1910. This television drama is partly based on an actual historical event – the 1910 plague. Wu (1879-1960) was a Malayan-born Chinese and a

²⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 286; also see Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 220-39.

²¹ A similar term with “Othering China” is “reversed Chinese Orientalism” in Xiaoying Wang, “Time to Remember: The Reinvention of the Communist Hero in Post-Communist China,” *New Literary History* 34, no.1 (Winter 2003): 136.

graduate from the University of Cambridge. In 1910, when a plague epidemic broke out in Northeast China, Wu was selected by the Qing government as Chief Medical Officer and entrusted with the control and elimination of the epidemic. Wu arrived in Harbin on October 25, 1910, and the plague was eliminated by January 8, 1911. Based on these historical facts, Deng enriches the narrative of this drama by adding the tensions between the Russian consul, the Japanese consul, and the Chinese officials in Harbin. The three sides strive to be the dominating power in Harbin under the pretext of plague control. The narrative is further complicated by a love triangle involving Wu Lien-teh, Lida, and Polynov. Lida is a Russian female doctor who loves Wu. Polynov is the director of a Russian hospital in Harbin and a plague expert, and he loves Lida. At the end of this series, Wu and his team achieve victory, eradicating plague and crushing the plan of Russia and Japan to invade Harbin.

Put Plague Control on Stage to Perform the Play of Politics

In this television drama, plague is represented as an arena, in which the three ethnicities compete in both the medical and political fields. Before Wu's arrival, it is mentioned that there is only one professional Chinese doctor. In comparison, the Russians and Japanese have modern hospitals. The assumed impotence of the Chinese in terms of medical research is accentuated when Polynov and the Japanese doctor, Shibata, look down upon Wu at first. Shibata refuses to shake hands with Wu on their first meeting because of Shibata's assumption that Chinese doctors have but a limited understanding of the epidemic. Later, Wu manages to change their prejudice

and turns out to be the only one who figures out effective solutions to control the plague. The resulting changed attitude of Polynov and Shibata towards Wu conveys a fluidity of power in the medical arena among the three, and signifies a triumphant discourse of the Qing China.

Moreover, due to the fact that the Chief Medical Officer has the power to deploy soldiers to Harbin, it is metaphorically implied that whoever controls the plague epidemic can get the upper hand in the leadership of the city. The political tension is illustrated by the competition for the position of Chief Medical Officer between Doctor Wu and the Russian-supporting, French Doctor Masny. When the Qing government agrees to assign Masny as the new Chief Medical Officer, due to the pressure from both the Russian and the French consulates, Wu appeals to the Japanese consul in Harbin. The latter says “China and Japan are similar in terms of culture and race. We will support you as the Chief Medical Officer.” In the next shot, the consul tells his assistant, Kawasaki, that he wants war between the Russians and the Chinese, from which Japan will be the beneficiary. Behind a cooperation agreement, a strategy of divide and rule and mutual containment is revealed.

The tension among the three sides is visualized at a meeting, attended by Eugene from the Russian consulate, Kawasaki from the Japanese consulate, and Wu’s assistant, Lin.²² At the meeting, Lin hints at the primary role played by Wu by saying that “neither of our three sides has created the vaccine for the plague yet, but Wu has controlled the plague effectively. Thanks for your support!” Such an ironic thanks

²² Wu is absent because he is infected with the plague, but he recovers soon.

implies that it is the mutual containment of the Russian and the Japanese consulates that facilitates Wu's progress in controlling the plague. Eugene replies, "We did invent the vaccine, but it was destroyed when someone (the Japanese) set our hospital on fire." Kawasaki replies with anger, "Even if Wu dies, Polynov will not be the next Chief Medical Officer. Japan is the plague control leader in Manchuria." The victory of Wu and his team in controlling the plague is a political message conveyed by film director Deng, hinting at the victory of the Chinese in claiming their leadership of Harbin. Deng presents the war on plague in a way that resembles the political competition between the three nations in Harbin. A nationalist discourse has been illustrated throughout this series by demonizing the Russian and Japanese consuls in Harbin.

Nevertheless, *Fire* shows different portrayals of the two Others: Japan is an absolute demon, while Russia changes from a demon into an ally of China. By the end of the series, Polynov no longer wants to get involved in the competition with Wu. He plans to go back to Russia. Before he leaves, Polynov assists Wu with the plague control.²³ In contrast, Kawasaki attempts twice to assassinate Wu. Wu survives thanks to his bodyguard Zhu Jiang. Zhu Jiang and Kawasaki die in their fight. The underlying message of this ending is that Russia and Japan are (and should be) differentiated in their degree of evilness. The Japanese imperialists as represented by

²³ In order to eradicate the plague, Wu proposes cremation for the deceased patients, but is faced with the resistance from the Chinese citizens and the Russian Orthodox Christians, for whom cremation is disrespectful to the dead. Wu resorts to Polynov's help, and Polynov convinces the Orthodox Christians to agree on burning the corpses. Metaphorically, Polynov's help suggests not only the rapprochement, even alliance between Chinese and Russians in the power contest over the authority of Harbin, but also the fact that religion compromises to support science and modernity.

Kawasaki are the true “demons,” whereas the Russian imperialists as represented by Polynov eventually cooperate with the Chinese. The Russians are “matey imperialists” in Manchuria, in Quested’s terms.²⁴

But why are the Japanese portrayed as more evil than the Russians, despite that arguably not being true in 1910? The Japanese implemented relatively tolerant policies as well as major investment in commerce and industry in Manchuria in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As stated by William C. Summers,

In 1906, Goto was the president of the South Manchurian Railway (the SMR), a central vehicle for state policy [of Japan] in Manchuria. Goto’s approach to Manchuria was, in outline, good relations with the local peoples, recruitment of young, highly qualified personnel, and a heavy dose of ‘research’. The SMR infiltrated the towns and villages adjacent to its lines by the construction of roads, sewage systems, bridges, water supplies, hospitals, parks, and cemeteries.²⁵

Having said that, contemporary cinema and television representations of the Japanese in Manchuria show a trend towards erasing the positive memory of the Japanese and accentuating the negative. I argue that memories of the Japanese atrocities during World War Two may influence the onscreen image of the Japanese in 1910 as more evil than the Russians, although their atrocities in Manchuria did not become widespread until 1932. The demonization of the Japanese is not entirely based on historical fact, but on a contemporary Chinese perception, or stereotype, of the Japanese. As Tamanoi argues, “memory is always imbedded in a time, a society

²⁴ Quested, “Matey” *Imperialist?*.

²⁵ “The Japanese cultural invasion of Manchuria began in earnest when Goto established the Research Office of the SMR in Dairen and Tokyo in January 1908.” William C. Summers, *The Great Manchurian Plague of 1910-1911: the Geopolitics of an Epidemic Disease* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 45.

and a culture, and is influenced by other memories.”²⁶ The prevalence of anti-Japanese films and television dramas in contemporary China may contribute to a homogeneous image of the demonic Japanese, which are not differentiated over historical times. Historical films tell less about history *per se* than about the film producer’s society. History in historical films and television dramas is essentially an “in-between space that innovates and interprets the performance of the present.”²⁷

Whose History? Whose Harbin?

One of the posters advertising *Fire* states that “This TV drama faithfully represents a historical disaster.” Is this television representation “faithful”? If not, what is the motivation for misconstruing this historical event? I argue that the political tension involved in the plague control as well as the contribution of Wu are amplified to serve a nationalist discourse. There is no denying the fact that the 1910 plague was likely to become a diplomatic matter. According to Shi Zhaoji, who at the time was secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Qing government, “Russian and Japanese authorities threatened that unless the Chinese Government adopted stringent measures to control the epidemic, they would send their own medical officers to take over the management.”²⁸ According to Roger Greene, the American consul in Harbin in 1910, “the Chinese fear that if they invite Russian sanitary assistance, it will result in

²⁶ Lahusen, “Manchuria: Conflicting Memories,” 2; also see Mariko Tamanoi, *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 19-20;

²⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 7.

²⁸ Lien-teh Wu, *Plague Fighter: The Autobiography of a Modern Chinese Physician* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1959), 280.

Russian police control in Fu chia-tien.”²⁹ Although the Chinese were sensitive to the threat from the Russian and Japanese authorities, the process of plague control was not as politically charged as reconstructed in *Fire*. More medical cooperation than political tension was recorded in Dr. Wu’s autobiography.

According to Wu, “The Russian authorities cooperated heartily.”³⁰ Collaboration between Wu and Russian doctors, such as Dr. Boguchi and Dr. Zabolotney, is recorded.³¹ Wu also received a loan of twelve train wagons from the CER General Khorvat to be used for quarantining the patients. Wu states that a Japanese doctor was assigned by the South Manchuria Railway to come to Harbin from Mukden to assist Wu with the plague control, but this Japanese doctor was not very helpful, because he believed that the plague was caused by rats, disagreeing with Wu, who claimed that this was a pneumonic plague. Later, the Japanese doctor disappeared.³² With regard to the responses of the consuls, Wu felt an attitude of indifference among the many consuls in Harbin, including the Russian and the Japanese, who “appeared too politically-minded, though both spoke as if they were aware of the need of the Chinese medical mission.”³³

In *Fire*, Wu is represented as the major contributor to the eradication of the plague; Polynov, Shibata, and other non-Chinese doctors are not very helpful. This is

²⁹ Summers, *The Great Manchurian Plague of 1910-1911*, 63; Greene, “Consular Report No. 115, 15 December 1910,” file 158.931/56, RG 59, NA.

³⁰ Wu, *Plague Fighter*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25; Yu-lin Wu, *Memories of Dr. Wu Lien-teh, Plague Fighter* (Singapore: World Scientific, 1995), 44.

³² Wu, *Plague Fighter*, 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15. Besides, British and French consuls gave Wu little welcome or offer of help. The only helpful one was the American consul Roger S. Greene in Harbin.

not consistent with Wu's account of the "substantial assistance"³⁴ he received from Russian doctors. Moreover, according to Summers, the plague control in Manchuria was achieved by "hodgepodge efforts."³⁵ He also emphasizes the role of the Russian doctors in controlling the plague: "In Harbin, anti-plague measures were undertaken quickly because the local Western physicians, mostly associated with the Russian railway company, at least had knowledge if not direct experience with small plague outbreaks in villages along the railroad in Transbaikalia."³⁶

In comparison with these historical accounts, the political tension between Russia, Japan, and the Qing China, as well as the heroic contribution of Wu, are amplified in *Fire*. Through such exaggeration, this television drama contributes to "patriotic education."³⁷ As already mentioned, the drama was jointly produced by the Propaganda Department of the Harbin Municipal Government and the CCTV Administrative Center for TV Drama, and was first broadcast on the Central China Television, targeting audiences across China. Both the producer and the media, on which *Fire* was broadcast, imply the affiliation of this series with official political ideology at the central and municipal level. As Brian Henderson argues, "Finally the operation of a myth – both its construction from actual conflicts and its impact on audiences – always has to do with the time [in] which the myth is told, not with the time that it tells of."³⁸

³⁴ Wu, *Memories of Dr. Wu Lien-teh*, 68.

³⁵ Summers. *The Great Manchurian Plague of 1910-1911*, 149.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁷ Yun Gao, "Yuhuo weicheng 1910 chongwen haerbin wangshi (*Fire Saves the City in Danger: reviewing the old story of Harbin in 1910*)." *New Evening Newspaper*, December 7, 2012.

³⁸ Brian Henderson, "The Searchers: An American Dilemma," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*,

The Spirit of Harbin

Fire presents Wu's figure as larger than life. Wu takes on an iconic stature, symbolizing courage, intelligence, perseverance, and dignity. These virtues are summarized as "the Spirit of Wu Lien-teh" by director Deng. According to Deng, "Many people out of the medical field do not know the history of the plague in Harbin. This TV drama aims to sing high praise of Wu, the city's hero. The Spirit of Wu Lien-teh belongs to Harbin. It should be carried on." In this way, the Spirit of Wu is claimed to be a special legacy and characteristic of Harbin. Wu's virtues are presented as symbolic of Harbin. Moreover, Wu is portrayed as a Chinese nationalist who defeats the foreign invaders. In this way, the Spirit of Wu becomes a nationalist symbol that exceeds the boundary of Harbin. In other words, by presenting Wu Lien-teh as a nationalist hero and a representative of Harbin, *Fire* remolds Harbin's history into a component of the nationalist narrative of China. By the same token, the Chinese triumphant discourse in *Fire* suggests the producer's efforts to represent Harbin as a Chinese-leading city, not only now but also in the past. The politicized representation of plague control in *Fire* suggests that history is not only to be remembered, but also to be reproduced and renewed for the present.

A Television Drama Of and For Harbin

In *Fire*, Harbin is represented as "exotic," combining a hybrid cityscape (a mixture of

ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 434; Yu, "Visual Spectacular, Revolutionary Epic, and Personal Voice," 166.

the Chinese and the European) and indigenous cultural elements, such as *kang*, furry hat, dialect, bandit culture, and heavy snow. It is important to note that the local dialect and bandit culture are not purely Chinese. The dialect in Northeast China is usually mocked by people from other parts of China; it is thought to be rustic, which suggests that this dialect is not from mainstream Chinese culture. Indeed, the Northeast was rarely impacted by traditional Chinese cultural standards. Unlike the central and southern parts of China, where traditional Chinese culture has been entrenched for centuries, the Northeast, or Manchuria, was outside *zhong yuan* (central plain), one of the literal meanings of *zhong guo* (China). To some extent, the non-Chinese Harbin itself is one of the main characters in *Fire*.

At the end of the film, Deng creates a synthesis between the past and the present by juxtaposing photos of some buildings that no longer stand with those of the classic buildings that have survived; the photos of European-style buildings are combined with those of the Chinese, especially the ones used during the plague control in Fu chia-tien. Through such montage, Deng merges the old Harbin cityscape with the present one, blending the European part of Harbin into the Chinese part. The current cityscape is situated in “a cinematic dialogue with the visual precedents.”³⁹ In this way, Deng crafts a miniature of a historical Harbin into the cinematic space, in which the 1910 plague is memorialized and integrated as part of the present. Harbin becomes a “‘filmic simultaneous city’ in which time and space implode into a geographical urban montage.”⁴⁰ The simultaneity of time and space and the juxtaposition between

³⁹ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 192.

⁴⁰ Graham Cairns, “Berlin on Film: A Mediated and Reconstructed City,” in *Filming the City: Urban*

past and present create the effect of a spatialization of time and temporalization of space, representing the city on the screen as a time-space palimpsest that embodies both continuity and rupture with the actual city.

Deng's synthesis of the city's past and present is further illustrated by the voiceover that concludes this series: "Wu Lien-teh belongs to China as well as to the world; he belongs to history, as well as to the present." In the context of Harbin, emphasizing the significance of Wu to the city suggests Harbiners' present efforts to glorify the city's past, to use the heritage (the Spirit of Wu) to construct the city's contemporary identity. Director Deng, Screenwriter Xiu, and many members of the crew are Harbiners. To some extent, *Fire* is made in, about, and for Harbin by Harbiners. Harbin itself is a spectacle, on which *Fire* puts a spotlight.

A Triumph of Chinese Masculinity or a Deconstruction of Ethnic Boundary?

The tensions among the Russian, the Japanese, and the Chinese are by no means clear-cut, as illustrated by the interracial romance between Lida and Wu. By blurring the ethnic boundaries, this romance provides a heterogeneous signification of the nationalist discourse that dominates this series.

Lida is a Russian female doctor who loves Wu and assists him in the plague control. Meanwhile, Polynov, the director of a Russian hospital and a plague expert, is in love with Lida. Polynov and Wu are rivals in plague control and in romance.

Documents, Design Practices and Social Criticism through the Lens, ed. Edward M. Clift, Mirko Guaralda and Ari Mattes (Bristol: Intellect), 145-161.

Polynov tries to convince Lida to marry him. “You are so beautiful and elegant; how can you fall in love with an inferior Chinese, of the most stupid race in the world.” Lida slaps Polynov, saying “I do not allow you to vilify him. He is benevolent, fighting for the people in plight. I admire him. As long as Wu can defeat the plague, I would like to sacrifice all, even my life.” Lida’s response signifies Wu’s triumph over Polynov in what Lu describes as the “libidinal arena.”⁴¹ Relevant historical documents do not mention any romance between Wu and Lida. The fictional nature of Lida’s affection for Wu is not only designed to cater to the audience but also to signify the imagined triumph of Chinese nationalism through the lens of masculinity. According to Lu, “The victory that Chinese men are able to score with foreign women symbolizes not only the resurrection of Chinese masculinity but also a triumph of the Chinese nation itself.”⁴² Even when Lida is infected by the plague, she continues to work as much as she can. When Wu asks her to rest and to not worry about him, Lida replies, “OK, I comply with your instruction for all things.” This indicates not only the romance but also a masculine discourse, the symbolic relationship between the Chinese masculine leader and the Russian female subject. A sense of supremacy of the former is conveyed.

The triumphant discourse of Chinese masculinity is further constructed in Wu’s decline of Lida’s request to be his wife, because Wu is already married. Returning a book to Wu, Lida finds a jade in the book. She asks, “Could you give it to me as a

⁴¹ Sheldon H. Lu, “Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity,” *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

gift? I want to take it as my amulet.” Wu replies, “I’m sorry. This is from my wife. Whenever I miss her, I have a look at this jade.” Later, Lida is infected with the plague. Near the end of her life, Lida hopes to propose to Wu, but Wu declines, although he feels affection for her. Lida requests cremation after she dies to support Wu who had suggested that patients’ corpses be burned to eradicate plague. Before the cremation, Wu cries and puts the jade into Lida’s hands. The melding between Lida and Wu’s heart, as symbolized by her cremation with Wu’s avatar of love, the jade, suggests the deconstruction of the racial boundary as well as that of Russia as a monolithic and evil Other. There is a paradox, though, in the platonic romance between Lida and Wu: this romance constructs Chinese nationalism through Chinese masculinity – a Chinese man wins the love of a Russian girl – but this romance, at the same time, deconstructs nationalism through presenting international and interracial love and friendship.

The romance between Lida and Wu echoes the historic fact that many interracial marriages between Chinese men and Russian women happened in Harbin. According to Konstanty Symonolewicz, a high official of the Polish consulate in Harbin during the 1920s and 1930s, “I saw foreign women, who sincerely loved their Chinese husbands and usually found in them some hidden qualities. As to the reverse, to enjoy a Chinese woman is a matter of taste.”⁴³ The paradoxical meaning of the romance between Wu and Lida suggests the struggle of director Deng and the Propaganda

⁴³ Lahusen, “Manchuria: Conflicting Memories,” 10; also see Konstanty Symonolewicz, *Moi Chinczycy; 18 lat w Chinach* (My Chinese: 18 Years in China) (Warsaw: Biblioteka Polska, 1938), 12.

Department of Harbin Municipal Government, in defining the history of Harbin: Did the prevalence of such interracial marriage transform Harbin into a nationalist city, flaunting the charm of Chinese masculinity, or did it make it a “stateless” city, where race and politics did not matter?

From Invader to Comrade

The Gunshot at the Modern Hotel (2011) is a television drama, co-produced by Guangxi TV station, Heilongjiang Tonglida Film, and Television Investment Company Limited. This television drama was created to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of the establishment of the CCP and commemorate the Chinese and Russian veterans of the Second World War.⁴⁴ Such a political motivation explains why *The Gunshot* is characterized by a nationalist discourse, a representation of the Soviets as friends and of the Japanese as demons. This is further implied by the fact that the Chief Consultant of *The Gunshot* is Xiaolian Zhang, the Minister of the Propaganda Department of Heilongjiang Province. Within such a political context, this section explores the tension in *The Gunshot* between consenting to and dissenting from the Chinese official discourse. I understand this tension as a disruptive force that complicates and reconstructs the nationalist framework of representing anti-Japanese history in Harbin. To achieve this goal, I first analyze the nationalist discourse of the CCP heroism, and address the alliance between the Chinese and the Soviet communist

⁴⁴ Si Si, ed., “Madieler lvguande qiangsheng yangba shoubo guangxi shiyue jiangbo (*The Gunshot at the Modern Hotel* to be broadcast first on China Central Television-8, then on Guangxi Television in October),” *Sina Entertainment*, September, 19, 2011.

party through the lens of romance. Then, I explore the imaging of the Japanese, which is somewhat more nuanced than a monolithic, demonized Other. Further, I understand the Modern Hotel as a miniature of the city, a hybrid space, through and in which I analyze the cinematic highlight of an exotic and contested Harbin for visual consumption.

In *The Gunshot*, in 1938 the Japanese officials plan Operation Bear: the assassination of Joseph Stalin in Matsesta, Sochi. The Chinese communist spy, Gao, whose code name is “Manchurian Fox” and who works with the Tokumu Kikan (Special Service Agency) in Harbin, reveals the Operation Bear plan to the Soviet Communist in order to prevent the assassination. But the telegraph code used between Chinese and Soviet Communists is deciphered by the Tokumu Kikan. The main story of this film plots how the Soviet communist, Ivanovic, meets the Chinese communist, Sun Bowen in Harbin to inform the latter of the new telegraph code. Two groups of Japanese, the Tokumu Kikan and the Kenpeitai (the military police), compete to arrest Ivanovic and Sun.

Martyrdom in Constructing a Nationalist Discourse

As Yang argues, “Martyrdom has been a crucial trope in PRC accounts of revolution. Revolutionary martyrs define perfectly the communist virtues of sacrifice, loyalty, and heroism. In Mao Zedong’s words, they have ‘great lives and glorious death’.”⁴⁵ The

⁴⁵ Haosheng Yang, “Myths of Revolution and Sensual Revisions: New Representation of Martyrs on the Chinese Screen,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24, no. 2 (2012): 181.

CCP's martyrdom is highlighted in *The Gunshot*. Sun Bowen is assigned by the CCP to meet Ivanovic at the Modern Hotel to acquire the telegram code, and Zhao Shirong, a senior communist member, volunteers to be Sun's guard to ensure his safety in meeting Ivanovic. Zhao knows this means death for himself, because the Japanese know the plan of this meeting and are ready to ambush him at the Modern Hotel. "Songhua River," the Communist party leader, agrees that Zhao should be Sun's companion. This is an extremely difficult choice for "Songhua River," because Zhao is her husband! – but she accepts Zhao's request to die for the CCP. Moreover, in order to save Gao from being identified as the communist spy by the Tokumu Kikan, Sun kills himself during a firefight with Gao, making it appear as if Gao had shot him. In this way, Gao wins the trust of the Japanese and continues to work as a spy for the CCP.

The exaggerated emphasis on the sacrifice of numerous individual communists for the victory of the revolution is part and parcel of the means used by the CCP to legitimize its rule and its efforts in "controlling national memory in China."⁴⁶ Clausen states that the role of Harbin's CCP in leading the revolution since 1921 "become an all-important part" of the city gazetteer writing in the 1990s.⁴⁷ He argues that "Considering the relative insignificance of CCP's presence in Harbin prior to 1946 – as compared to other large Chinese cities – the emphasis is striking."⁴⁸ Mitter makes a similar argument, and defines the promotion of the idea of the

⁴⁶ Soren Clausen, "Autobiography of a Chinese City: The History of Harbin in the Mirror of the Official City Gazetteer," *Historiography East & West* 2, no.1 (2004): 169.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

demonized Japanese and the great sacrifice of the CCP as “resistancialism,” which in this scenario means “exaggerating the role of the CCP in resisting the Japanese imperialists.”⁴⁹ *The Gunshot* and many other anti-Japanese television dramas reveal an attempt to construct the CCP as the savior of Harbin, by accentuating the martyrdom, intelligence, and benevolence of communist heroes in winning the war against the Japanese, the homogeneous and demonized Other.

The Marriage between China and the Soviet Union

The ideological alliance between the Soviet Union and China is delineated in *The Gunshot* through the romance between Ivanovic and Zhang Yiping, a Chinese girl. Ivanovic and Zhang are a couple and both are members of the Communist International in the Soviet Union. Zhang finally decides to stay in Harbin and work with the Chinese communists. Ivanovic protects Zhang from being shot by the Tokumu Kikan, and in so doing dies himself. The romance between Ivanovic and Zhang as well as his death for Zhang symbolize the friendship between Chinese and Soviet communists. When Ivanovic is dying, he tells Zhang, “We should remember the Chinese communists. The anti-Japanese guerrilla died to protect me.”⁵⁰ And he tells Sun, “Let’s be comrades again in the next life.” The history of the Soviet Union being China’s “elder brother” is suggested by the fact that Sun used to be Ivanovic’s student in the Soviet Union. The ideological alliance between Soviet and Chinese

⁴⁹ Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth*, 188.

⁵⁰ In the first episode, in order to protect Ivanovic in Hufengkou, where Ivanovic enters China from the Soviet Union, a group of anti-Japanese guerrilla are killed by the Kenpeitai.

Communists against the imperialist Japanese is emphasized.

The Heterogeneous "Demon," Japan

The Gunshot does not homogenize all the Japanese. It reveals the internal conflicts among the Japanese and the sentimental aspect of Ryoko, a female Japanese intelligence agent. The internal conflict on the Japanese side is epitomized in the relationship between the Tokumu Kikan and the Kenpeitai. While the Tokumu Kikan wants to discover who the "Manchurian Fox" is, the communist spy in its group, and therefore implements Operation Bear, the Kenpeitai contends that the priority should be given to Operation Zero, which means arresting Sun, a communist leader in Harbin, as part of the plan to further the military occupation of South China. In other words, this series presents the cleavage within the Japanese imperialists and their hesitation about whether they should attack the Soviet Union⁵¹ or expand their occupation in China. Through the description of Operation Bear and Operation Zero, *The Gunshot* portrays an evil Japan, in opposition to both China and the Soviet Union.⁵² Meanwhile, the Japanese Other is by no means a united front.

⁵¹ It is symbolized by the plan to assassinate Stalin.

⁵² The assassination team is composed of several White Russians who bear grudge against Stalin and the Soviet. Although both the White Russian assassin candidates and the Japanese are in the "enemy" camp, *The Gunshot* shows sympathy towards the White Russians, many of whom are killed by the Japanese leader of this team, when they fail in the training. The Japanese are blamed for all the sins. The demonization of the Japanese is illustrated in many details: in order to test whether Gao is a communist spy, the Tokumu Kikan bury alive, in front of Gao, a White Russian, who fails in the training, as well as a common person who accidentally happens to see this training. Showing no sympathy towards the victims, Gao passes the test. The communists are represented as benevolent, the Japanese imperialists as inhumane.

The film director avoids a homogeneous presentation of Self and Other by constructing certain communists and Japanese as ambiguous in terms of ideological belief. For instance, Jiang Feng used to be a communist spy inside the Kenpeitai, but he betrays communism and then works for the Kenpeitai. Hashimoto in the Tokumu Kikan turns out to be a spy for the Kenpeitai. Through the creation of various spies, *The Gunshot* metaphorically blurs the boundaries between friend and enemy, between Self and Other. The Self is *in* the Other, and *vice versa*. Meanwhile, Jiang Feng's betrayal signifies turning the Self into the Other. Harbin is portrayed as a city of spies; it suggests that the city is a contact zone, where ethnic and ideological boundaries are by no means rigid.

Gao, Ryoko, and Hashimoto are the three senior assistants of Yamura, the head of the Tokumu Kikan in Harbin. Yamura suspects that one of the three is the communist spy, "Manchurian Fox." Hashimoto likes Ryoko, while Ryoko likes Gao. Ryoko has been on the side of Gao, suggesting to Yamura that Hashimoto is the spy. Ryoko is portrayed as two-faced: On the one hand, she is a cold-blooded killer, when it comes to persecuting communists. On the other hand, she is a sentimental and brave woman, who loves Gao and does not care that he is Chinese.⁵³ Gao is calm and smart, revealing no flaw, which makes Yamura suspect him of being the spy. Hashimoto turns out to be a spy but for the Kenpeitai. He also suspects Ryoko of being the "Manchurian Fox." Ryoko kills Hashimoto in revenge for slander. In this way, director Jiang not only displays the conflict between the Tokumu Kikan and Kenpeitai

⁵³ Ryoko and Hashimoto are Japanese.

but also within the Tokumu Kikan itself. Meanwhile, through the presentation of Ryoko's affection for Gao, the boundaries between the Japanese and Chinese, between enemy and friend, are further blurred. In the last episode, Gao, the "Manchurian Fox", kills Ryoko in cold blood. Such an ending suggests that Jiang's efforts to explore the heterogeneous voices within the oppressive structure of the CCP narration, nevertheless, end up with an uncompromising nationalist discourse of victory.

The Modern Hotel—Telling a Story of the Cosmopolitan Harbin with Ideological Connotation

The Modern Hotel is an icon of Harbin. It is an *art nouveau* building constructed in 1906, originally owned by a French-Jewish businessman, Joseph Kaspé. The kidnapping of his son, Simon, by fascist Russian criminals in Harbin in 1933 was an intimidating incident still known to many locals. The Modern Hotel embodies the history of international Harbin. The history and the architectural style of the Modern Hotel endows *The Gunshot* with a sense of exoticism, fantasy, and tension. This building is the epitome of the cosmopolitan Harbin. By putting the Modern Hotel in the spotlight, as suggested by the title of this drama, the producers attempt to highlight a Europeanized cultural space of Harbin for the audience's visual consumption.

Moreover, the Modern Hotel is a major setting where gunfights happen. The hotel symbolizes an arena where the Chinese and Soviet Communists forge an alliance against the Imperial Japanese Army, and where they contest the authority of the city. The competition to occupy the Modern Hotel is further illustrated in *The Gunshot*, when both Sun and the Japanese Kenpeitai ask Rosschild, the Jewish designer of the Modern Hotel, for the blueprint of the hotel. Later, Rosschild is killed

by the Japanese soldiers, when he tries to protect Sun from being arrested. The cinematic representation of an inclusive Harbin and the interethnic friendship is limited to that between the Chinese and the Westerners, with the exclusion of the Japanese.

Something similarly occurs in another film, *Fareast 1932: the Vicissitudes of the Modern Hotel*, which features the Modern Hotel as its major venue. This film takes the Lytton Commission's investigation of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1933 as its historical background. In *Fareast 1932*, the Modern Hotel is where the representatives of the Lytton Commission reside, when they come to Harbin for this investigation. The Japanese Kwangtung Army creates excuses to expel these representatives and prevent any Chinese communists from getting information and seeking help from them. As a result, the Modern Hotel is portrayed as a place of tension and resistance. The Chinese communists obtain compassion and help from the international representatives, and the Japanese Kwangtung Army is highlighted as a demon against China and the League of Nations. The Modern Hotel on the screen is represented as a contact zone for China, Japan, the Soviet Union, the League of Nations, and the demonized Japan. Such ideological differentiation between allies and enemies was by no means based on historical facts. Rather, it implies contemporary Chinese film producers' submission to the CCP's highlighting the Japanese atrocities during the war.

Evolving Representations of Japanese “Demons” and Chinese Heroes

In August 2012, widespread anti-Japanese protests took place in many cities in China, due to the controversy between China and Japan over Diaoyu Island. With a bicycle lock, Cai Yang, one of the protesters in Xi'an, smashed the skull of the owner of a

Japanese car. In a news interview, Cai's mother commented that "When we turn on TV, most of the dramas are about the Anti-Japanese War. How would it be possible not to hate the Japanese?"⁵⁴

Anti-Japanese television dramas are very common in China today. As part of the former Japanese-occupied Manchukuo, Harbin is a popular location to shoot these dramas. Before providing a detailed analysis of the case in Harbin, some brief background information about the production and reception of anti-Japanese dramas and films in China is in order. The prevalence of anti-Japanese television dramas and films is partly a result of the "complicity between market and state ideology."⁵⁵ Such complicity underscores the political slogan of the CCP: "Never forget history, and take it as a lesson for the future." The triumphant and glorious discourse of the CCP in defeating the "atrocious" Japanese imperialists presented in television dramas and films serves to legitimize the CCP regime; also, it strengthens nationalism by "input[ing] all wrongs and sins"⁵⁶ to the Japanese and emphasizing a homogeneous Japan as an evil Other. Moreover, the triumphant discourse of the CCP in defeating the "little Japanese" caters to the audience's psychological satisfaction in taking revenge on the Japanese for the plight they inflicted on "us", an imagined homogeneous Chinese community; such discourse serves the purpose of compensating for the trauma of the Sino-Japanese War, which continues to affect

⁵⁴ Suisheng Zhao, "Beijing's Japan Dilemma: Balancing Nationalism, Legitimacy, and Economic Opportunity," in *Uneasy Partnerships: China's Engagement with Japan, the Koreans, and Russia in the Era of Reform*, ed. Thomas Fingar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 77.

⁵⁵ Yu, "Visual Spectacular, Revolutionary Epic, and Personal Voice," 211.

⁵⁶ Chris Berry, "'Race' (民族): Chinese Film and the Politics of Nationalism," *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 2 (Winter 1992):51.

the young generation today (who experience imagined or secondhand trauma). The fight and tension, which are usually entangled with romance in these anti-Japanese dramas, are visually and emotionally appealing to the contemporary audience, who view the onscreen war as a commodity to be consumed. Such films and television dramas “repackage nationalism in the age of post-socialist commercialization”.⁵⁷

By mapping the city of Harbin through the films and television dramas from the 1950s to the present, a trend towards the construction on screen of a modern and Europeanized Harbin, as well as of a fashionable and bourgeois imaging of the communist heroes, becomes obvious. The movies before 1990 focused on portraying unnuanced, heroic characters. In contrast, the films after 1990 show more details of the heroes’ personal lives and romance. Apart from the motivation to attract audiences, there are more reasons for the altered account of the CCP revolutionary history. I explore them by comparing *Zhao Yiman* (1950) and *My Mother Zhao Yiman* (2005), as well as the two versions of *Harbin under the Night Curtain*, respectively produced in 1984 and 2008. By adopting de Certeau’s method of interrogating urban practices in everyday life,⁵⁸ I examine the urban practices of a particular group of Harbiners: the on-screen Chinese communist heroes and Japanese “demons.”

From the Mother of the CCP to that of Ninger

Zhao Yiman is a black and white film produced by the state-owned Northeast China Film Company in 1950. Based on the real story of the anti-Japanese communist

⁵⁷ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 286.

⁵⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

martyr, Zhao Yiman, this film highlights her role in leading the workers and farmers to fight against the invading Japanese in Harbin and its surrounding area in 1933. *My Mother Zhao Yiman* was directed by Sun Tie and produced by Fujian Film Company in 2005. This film retells the story of Zhao Yiman from the point of view of Ning'er, Zhao's son, emphasizing Zhao's affective relation to her son. In the 1950 version, Zhao is characterized by "impersonal ascetic heroism,"⁵⁹ and is presented as devoting her life to leading workers and peasants in the fight against the Japanese colonizers. Her personal life is not mentioned. The night before she is sentenced to death, Zhao tells her young comrade, Han: "Today is July 1st, the 'birthday' of the CCP. Please do not forget to join the revolution when you are released from prison."⁶⁰ Zhao's emphasis on the "birthday" of the CCP before her death suggests her love and commitment to the CCP. In contrast, in the 2005 version, on the journey to be sentenced to death, Zhao writes a letter to her son, expressing her love and sadness for leaving him forever. This contrast between the two portrayals of Zhao before her death suggests the changed values of the two eras in which the two films were produced. The 1950 version portrays Zhao as a self-sacrificing, motherly figure to the CCP, while in the 2005 version she is presented as an individualized mother to her beloved son. The grand narrative is revised into an individualized narrative, through which Zhao is portrayed not as a larger-than-life communist hero but as a caring mother.

⁵⁹ Yang, "Myths of Revolution and Sensual Revisions," 203.

⁶⁰ The CCP was established on July 1, 1921. Here, Zhao Yiman uses "birthday" to refer to the anniversary of the CCP's establishment.

From “Demon” to “Gentle Demon”

The representations of Japanese imperialists as demons have been prevalent in Chinese films from the 1950s to the present; however, the image of the demonic Japanese changes over time. In *Zhao Yiman*, the Japanese officials are caricatured with buckteeth, moustaches, and thick-frame black glasses, creating an impression of slyness and evil. At the beginning of the film, a Japanese man with buckteeth and cunning eyes is juxtaposed with the cityscape of Harbin, similar to a predator coveting its prey. Caricatures portraying vilified Japanese and anti-Japanese slogans are another means of constituting propagandist discourse in this film.⁶¹

In her comparison of the representations of Japanese and Nazi demons in American films in the 1940s, Wang argues that the Japanese fascists were presented as more evil. While the Nazis wear glasses with metal frames or no frame, the Japanese wear thick glasses with black frames. This creates a sense of stupidity and ugliness and a metaphor of being “near-sighted both physically and culturally.”⁶² Wang states that such difference in the portrayal of the Nazis and the Japanese by the Americans in the 1940s is due to racism. Racism is also one of the reasons for the Chinese demonization of the Japanese. As Suisheng Zhao argues, a very important reason for the intense anti-Japanese nationalism is “the humiliation that China experienced as a result of repeated defeats by a former ‘student’ that the Chinese

⁶¹ For example, in one caricature, Japan is portrayed as a glutton that gobbles Northeast China, and in another caricature, the Japanese are bullying Chinese workers. Sha Meng, *Zhao Yiman*, 1950.

⁶² Xiaofei Wang, “Movies without Mercy: Race, War, and Images of Japanese People in American Films, 1942-1945,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 18, no. 1(2011): 20.

dismissively called dwarfs (*wo ren*) or little Japan.”⁶³ The double shame felt by the Chinese contributes to a mocking and demonizing representation of the “little Japan” on screen.

But why do the demonic Japanese look nicer in recent Chinese films? In *My Mother Zhao Yiman*, the Japanese officials are “gentle demons.” With polite manner, tidy suit (sometimes kimono) and handsome face, the top official Ouno Tarou, played by Shunsaku Kudô, is presented as a gentleman, despite his evil nature.

I argue that the representation of the Japanese imperialists as “gentle demons” in recent Chinese films is essentially the result of the present perception of the Japanese as civilized and courteous people. The perception of the China-Japan relationship as master and student fades into history and, with it, the image of the Japanese as atrocious imperialists. The rise of Japan after World War Two contributes to a modified perception of it by the Chinese. The social and cultural environment, in which the film is produced, shapes the filmic representation of history. The traces of the present society are embedded in historical films.

Femininity Turn and Western Way of Living in Harbin

In post-socialist China, where the main ideological narrative on anti-imperialists and class struggles has been replaced with the “reform policy” agenda of capitalist economic development and diverse cultural entertainment and consumption, cinema “offers up-to-date revolutionary myths.”⁶⁴ Consequently, the former representation of

⁶³ Zhao, “Beijing’s Japn Dilemma,” 74.

⁶⁴ Yang, “Myths of Revolution and Sensual Revisions,” 183.

Zhao as an asexualized communist hero gives way to that of Zhao in her full femininity, demonstrating, in Rey Chow's words, the "fetishization of women."⁶⁵ In *My Mother*, Zhao dresses like a modern woman of the gentry class: she has permed hair, red lips, wears cheongsam and high heels, and reapplies makeup when it is necessary. She frequents Western cafes and restaurants. In contrast, in *Zhao Yiman*, Zhao's simple dresses, plain hairstyle, and face without makeup do not accentuate Zhao's femininity. Before the 1980s, the representation of women in literary works was utilized by the Chinese officials for government and nation-building. According to Yue Meng, "On the one hand, the state's political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce and familial relations, and on the other, it turned woman into an agent politicizing desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self and all private emotions."⁶⁶

In Lei Wang's analysis of the changing images of woman figures on the cover of Chinese Woman Magazine from 1949 to 2008, she argues, "In the past sixty years, the media representation of Chinese women changed from 'masculine' to feminine; the women figures of this magazine changed from 'production idol' to 'consumption idol,' from socialist producers to consumers."⁶⁷ As Xiaoying Wang states, "At no

⁶⁵ Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 148.

⁶⁶ Yue Meng, "Female Images and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 118. Also see Duara, "Embodying Civilization: Women and the Figure of Tradition within Modernity," in *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 131-69.

⁶⁷ Lei Wang, "cong 'zhongguo fun ü' 60 nian fengmian renwu kan guojia yishi xingtai kongzhixia meiti n üxing xingxiang bianqian ji guojia huayu zhuanbian (The change of female images and national discourses on media under state ideology demonstrated by the cover figures of *Chinese Women Magazine* in the past sixty years)." *People's Net*, February 14, 2012.

time in the history of PRC cinema have so many female characters appeared so uniformly and predictably feminine as they do now.”⁶⁸ The representation of Zhao as quasi-bourgeois illustrates “the projection of postcommunist values onto the communist past.”⁶⁹ Wang argues that such a revised characterization of communist heroes was gradually brought into being “after the identity of the Communist Party was reconceived as no longer representing the working class but instead China’s advanced productive forces, China’s advanced culture, and the interests of the majority of the Chinese people.”⁷⁰ If the communist hero’s living a bourgeois lifestyle represents advanced productive forces, then China’s advanced productive forces might be identified as “capitalism with Chinese characteristics,” rather than “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” In Abbas’s words, “What we will find will not be two systems (socialist, capitalist) but one system at different stages of development – difference in times and speeds.”⁷¹

The 1950 version begins with overlapping images of Harbin’s cityscape and Japanese soldiers, the purpose of which is to highlight the Japanese occupation. In contrast, the cityscape in the 2005 version highlights the exotic cultural space of Harbin, which becomes part of a spectacle to be consumed. For example, in *My*

⁶⁸ Wang, “Time to Remember,” 150.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷¹ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 6. “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is a complex and contradictory issue. According to Lin Chun’s literature review, among the different academic understandings of this system are the following: being close to a “market socialism,” a hybrid of state socialism and private capitalism, a repressive and pathological adventure of “bureaucratic capitalism” and “market Stalinism,” and “third world” capitalism. Lin, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, 5-6.

Mother the meeting between Zhao and her comrade Cao is scheduled first in a church, and then, in a Russian café where there is a feature shot of Zhao, when she speaks Russian with the white waitress. An intelligent and fashionable woman in a Russianized urban space of Harbin is presented.

This film also reveals the changed official discourse on religion. In *My Mother*, there are two feature shots of a *Bible*, into which Zhao puts a photo of Ninger and herself. This implies the sacred nature of the mother-son relationship. Moreover, before Zhao and Cao leave the church after their first meeting, there is a close-up of the choir, who are a group of Chinese youth. It suggests an embrace of Christianity in China. There are also Western worshippers. The church is presented as a mixed cultural space, suggesting the image of a multiethnic and religion-inclusive Harbin of that time.

Romance as a Rebellion against Politics?

Harbin under the Night Curtain tells the story of a group of underground communists and their resistance to the Manchukuo regime in Harbin in 1934. The main character, Wang Yimin, is an anti-Japanese leader with a nominal teaching position in Harbin's No. 1 Middle School. Another main character, Ichiro, is the nephew of Yuichi (a cruel senior Japanese official in Harbin). He is a Sinologist who engages in promoting the cultural communication between the two countries. He is also the Vice-President of Harbin No. 1 Middle School. Wang and Ichiro are colleagues. The female heroine in the 1984 version is Lu Shujuan, the daughter of Lu Yunqi, the Chair of the Harbin

Chamber of Commerce. She falls in love with Wang, although Ichiro has affection for Lu as well. In the 2008 version, the female heroine's name changes into Lu Qiuying. She used to study in Japan, and Ichiro was her classmate. They love each other, but Lu declines Ichiro's proposal, due to Lu's fear of the resentment from her family and many other Chinese in the city, who would denounce her as a traitor, should she marry a Japanese. In the 1984 version, Ichiro is shot dead by his uncle, as he protects Wang from being arrested by the Japanese soldiers. In the 2008 version, Ichiro commits suicide. The two major reasons are that he cannot get married to Lu, due to the hostility between China and Japan of that time, and that his uncle forces him to join the army against his will.

Romance is a major lens, through which the directors of the 2008 version, Zhao Baogang and Wang Ying, tell the story of the Sino-Japanese War. As Zhang states, "Human emotions, hitherto a sensitive subject in socialist cinema, were explored to the full."⁷² This is partly to attract audience. Moreover, the interracial romance in the context of Sino-Japanese War showcases Zhao and Wang's efforts to reinterpret the war by delineating an unfixed boundary between friend and enemy, "Us" and Other.

In Ichiro's dream, he gets married to Lu in front of St. Sophia Church, a landmark of Harbin. The wedding is attended by Lu's father, Ichiro's uncle, Wang, and the Chinese and Japanese soldiers. All of a sudden, the soldiers and Wang take out guns to target the couple, and Wang shoots the couple. The wedding then ends with the death of the bride and the groom, suggesting that it is the Sino-Japanese War

⁷² Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 208.

that kills the couple. The dream of the bloody wedding is a visualized presentation of the political connotation behind the romance between Lu and Ichiro. Nevertheless, by presenting the Chinese-Japanese hostility in a dream, directors Zhao and Wang imply ambivalence over whether such hostility and its impact on the Chinese-Japanese romance is true or not.⁷³

The Symbolic Meaning of the Railway Bridge

The Railway Bridge on the Songhua River appears several times in this television drama. The bridge is an icon of Harbin. Completed in August 1901, its former name was the Sungari Railway Bridge, one of the earliest projects of the CER. On the cover of Viktor Petrov's novella, *Gorod na Sungari* (The city on the Sungari), the author juxtaposes St. Nicholas Church and the Sungari Railway Bridge.⁷⁴ This railway bridge stands as one of the signifiers of the city's origin and a witness of its history. When Lu and Ichiro declare their love for each other in front of this bridge, a black freight train passes through, with loud noise and wind in the background. The frightening atmosphere hints at the barriers that the couple will be faced with. Later, when Ichiro plans to go back to Japan, the two say farewell again by the side of the

⁷³ A parallel to this is a bloody scene at the end of Jiang Wen's film, *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000). Ma Dasan and his fellow Chinese villagers save the life of a Japanese soldier, Kosaburo Hanaya. Instead of appreciating the villagers' help, Hanaya's captain orders all the villagers to be killed. Soon after that, the war is over, and the Japanese soldiers become POWs. Ma seeks revenge for his villagers by killing many POWs. At the end of the film, at the command of Major Gao, a local commander of the Chinese Army, Hanaya executes Ma. As Ma's head falls to the ground, it rolls nine times, blinks three times, and smiles. From the point of view of Ma's fallen head, the film ends with the shot of a blurry and upside-down view of the surrounding, in which the execution is carried out. The final shot and Ma's smile metaphorically suggest the ambivalence and complexity of the friendship and hostility between Ma and Hanaya and between China and Japan.

⁷⁴ Lahusen, "Manchuria: Conflicting Memories," 5; also see Viktor Petrov, *Gorod na Sungari. Ocherki i rasskazy*. Washington: Izdanie Russko-Amerikanskogo obshchestva, 1984.

railway bridge. The choice of this location implies the different journeys and lives they will have.

At the end, Ichiro commits suicide on this railway bridge, becoming a martyr of war and love. Ichiro's plan to go back to Japan fails, because Yuichi forces him to go to battle, as a punishment for disclosing confidential military information to Wang. Ichiro does not want to be involved in the war, but he has no choice. The day before he is to join the army, he commits suicide by throwing himself in front of a train, wearing a Japanese military suit. This military suit suggests one of the reasons behind Ichiro's suicide. Although this television drama showcases its efforts to break the homogenized imaging of the Japanese by presenting the humanitarian Ichiro, Ichiro fails to bridge the hostility between the two nationalities. The narration of a peace-loving Ichiro starts with a rebellion against politics and ends with a resubmission to its power.⁷⁵ In his analysis of Kidlat Tahimik's *The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), Fredric Jameson understands Tahimik's use of bridges as conveying a sense of postmodern hyper-geography. "Throughout the film reference is made to efforts at 'bridging' – rural and urban, earth and moon, nature and culture."⁷⁶ In *Harbin under the Night Curtain*, the bridge links the past and present of the city, the Chinese and the Japanese, politics and affect, life and death. All these links "are then in constant

⁷⁵ The concept "rebellion from and resubmission to power" is quoted from Jinhua Dai, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso, 2002), 13-48; also see Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 237.

⁷⁶ Stuart C. Aitken and Deborah P. Dixon, "Imagining Geographies of Film," *Erdkunde* 60, no. 4 (2006): 330-331; Fredrick Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 197-8.

decomposition, dissolve[ing] the self-contained character of each locale.”⁷⁷ A bridge is a metaphor for linking and disconnecting, success or failure in filling the gap. The death of Ichiro on the railway bridge suggests the failure in bridging the hostility between China and Japan. In her analysis of the Fifth Generation Chinese films,⁷⁸ Chen argues that they are “dominated by the repugnance for the ideological mainstream; anything apolitical was thus turned political, and vice versa.”⁷⁹ By the same token, the romance between Ichiro and Lu showcases Zhao and Wang’s efforts to construct an apolitical relationship between the Chinese and the Japanese. Nevertheless, this romance turns out to manifest a political message.

The “Authentic” Harbin

The 2008 *Harbin under the Night Curtain* not only takes Harbin as a background for the anti-Japanese campaign, but it is also a film about Harbin. As the director Zhao states, “*Roman Holiday* reminds people of Rome, *Harbin under the Night Curtain* is designed to be a representative of the city in TV dramas.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, *Roman Holiday* is an American movie, and thus an American representation and imagination of Rome. By the same token, director Zhao is from Beijing, and thus his creation of an “authentic” Harbin turns out to be based on an outsider’s imagination of Harbin.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The Fifth Generation refers to a group of Chinese filmmakers who rose in the 1980s. The most representatives are Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige.

⁷⁹ Xiaoming Chen, “The Mysterious Other: Postpolitics in Chinese Film,” in *Postmodernism and China*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 227.

⁸⁰ Xiaoyue Sun, “Xinban yemuxia de haerbin jinwan yangshi shoubo (The new version of *Harbin under Night’s Curtain* will premiere tonight on China Central Television),” *Dongbei Net*, August 25, 2008.

Indeed, in this television drama, Zhao presents quite a Europeanized Harbin. Among the many pieces of European-style architecture and cityscape incorporated into this drama are St. Sophia Church, Central Street, Harbin Xiangfang Railway Station, the former house of Kowalski – a Polish-Russian businessman – and Harbin Railway Bureau. In other words, Zhao equates a Europeanized Harbin with authenticity. By claiming the authenticity of *Harbin under the Night Curtain* in representing Harbin, Zhao shapes contemporary audiences' twice-removed imagination of Harbin's cityscape as Europeanized in the past and at present.

At the end of this series, Lu's family plan to leave Harbin due to the oppression of the Japanese officials. Lu distributes salaries to her servants before leaving. One of the servants is a Russian cook, to whom Lu gives more money than to the other Chinese servants. There is a close-up of the money. The friendship between the Chinese and the Russian is accentuated to contrast with the hostility between the Chinese and the Japanese.

The Japanese Memories of Harbin

Winter Jasmine versus *Harbin under the Night Curtain*

In comparison with the tragic ending in *Harbin under the Night Curtain*, *Yingchun hua* (Winter Jasmine) expresses a positive message about the Sino-Japanese romance. *Winter Jasmine* is a 1942 film by the Japanese director Yasushi Sasaki, produced by the Manchukuo Film Association. This film portrays a peaceful life in Manchukuo as well as a harmonious relationship between the Japanese and the Chinese. It supports

the Japanese policy of “co-prosperity in Asia” and “the kingly way” in Manchukuo.

The main plot of *Winter Jasmine* is a love triangle between a Japanese man, Murakawa, a Japanese woman, Yae, and Baili, a Chinese woman who can speak Japanese. Murakawa comes to work in the city of Fengtian in Manchukuo. Baili is his colleague. Yae is Murakawa’s cousin. Both women have affection for Murakawa, but Murakawa loves Baili.

When Yae finds out that Murakawa loves Baili, she gives up and tries to be the matchmaker for Murakawa and Baili. On the other hand, Baili encourages Murakawa and Yae to be a couple. In the end, Yae goes back to Japan, and Baili leaves Manchukuo for Beijing. Such an ending suggests the mutual concern between Yae and Baili for each other. In this sense, *Winter Jasmine* conveys the friendship between Yae and Baili, between the Japanese and the Chinese, a theme rarely seen in Chinese films and television dramas.⁸¹

In 1995, the Japanese film historian, Yamaguchi Takeshi, tried to donate his newly discovered collection of films of the Manchurian Film Association, including *Winter Jasmine*, to the Chinese government “as an act of ‘goodwill,’” in order to give

⁸¹ Xianglan Li, whose original name is Yamaguchi Yoshiko, stars as Baili in this film. Li is a Japanese born in Fushun, Northeast China. The Manchukuo Film Association that Li worked with in her early career concealed her Japanese origin. After the Second World War, Li returned to Japan and was known as Yamaguchi Yoshiko in Japanese movies, “fail[ing] to continue her wartime success as Li Xianglan.” According to Shelley Stephenson, “Yamaguchi’s movement re-inscribes the boundaries between screen and off-screen, nation and race, as firmly as these boundaries were once blurred in the elusive career of Li Xianglan.” Shelley Stephenson, “A Star by Any Other Name: The (After) Lives of Li Xianglan.” *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 19 (2002): 12; Yiman Wang, “Between the National and the Transnational: Li Xianglan/Yamaguchi Yoshiko and pan-Asianism.” *IIAS Newsletter*, no.38 (September 2005): 7.

the people in China, who helped make these films a second chance to see them. The Chinese government refused to accept the films, for the reason that doing so would have appeared to be an official recognition of Japan's former Manchukuo regime."⁸² These films were denounced as "legal proof of [Japanese] cultural invasion" by *renmin ribao* (The People's Daily),⁸³ one of the major official newspapers in China. "Japan's difficulty in accurately remembering the past and China's difficulty in forgetting it" produce a ghost of war, haunting the two countries in different ways.⁸⁴

Harbin as Home

Kumiko Muraoka was born in Harbin in 1936 and went "back" to Japan in 1946. She identifies Harbin as her home place, and Japan as a foreign country, and living in Japan as a misunderstanding and a nightmare.⁸⁵ Kumiko left Japan in 1966 for Paris and has stayed there ever since. When Thomas Lahusen interviewed Kumiko in September, 2016 for his documentary film *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*, Kumiko was suffering from dementia and staying in a nursing home near Paris. Nevertheless, Kumiko had clear memories of Harbin. She said. "Harbin was the most important of my life, because [in Harbin] people were together. Here, the others are together, as if I

⁸² Tamanoi, *Crossed Histories*, 121; also see Yamaguchi Takeshi, *Aishuu no Manshuu eiga: Manshuukoku ni saita katsudoo-ya tachino sekai* (Melancholy Manchurian film: the film world that flourished in Manshukoku) (Tokyo: Santen Shoboo, 2000), 15.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Zhao, "Beijing's Japan Dilemma," 77. Another similar example is Unit 731. In 2011, some Japanese civilians donated the Monument of Apology, No War, and Peace to Unit 731. It is positioned in an isolated corner on the site of Unit 731. In contrast to the official emphasis on the Japanese atrocities in Unit 731, this monument is rarely known to the public.

⁸⁵ Lahusen, *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*.

am abandoned. One day, I want to return. I never forget it.”⁸⁶ When she was asked “Is Harbin still your place?” Kumiko replied, “Yes, it is my place, yes.”⁸⁷ Her love of Harbin and resentment for Japan is revealed in her writing *L’orme plus grand que la maison*: “When I was a child, I lived by what I felt with my tongue or by the pleasure of sweet smells...”⁸⁸ “I owned the passport of a country [Japan] for which I did not stop feeling, and for which I still feel, at every moment, violently, loathing, revolt, rancor and anger, and fear.”⁸⁹ Kumiko regards her leaving Japan for France as “a revenge and a way to heal her pain, but if China’s door was still closed, and I could not find Harbin again, curiously, this was not important anymore.”⁹⁰

Another former Japanese resident in Harbin, Sugiyama Kimiko, had similar memory to that of Kumiko. Sugiyama was born in Harbin in 1928.

Sugiyama remembers being thoroughly confused in mid-August 1945 when she was warned by her uncle, an employee at the Japanese consulate, that she should leave Harbin for ‘home’ immediately. Harbin *was* home. In the aftermath of the Manchurian Incident, a Chinese man helped her father; both men were so far from their native places that neither had a clear idea what a country or an ethnicity really was... She, of course, knew she was Japanese, but the primary ‘ethnic’ affiliation she felt was as a Harbiner; Returning to Japan was a truly perplexing experience, because it was alien terrain. Yes, Japan had lost the war, Manzhouguo had dissolved, and Japanese had to withdraw to their ‘mother’ country, but what, she still wondered, did any of that have to do with her.⁹¹

Politics and ethnic difference are not the concern of Kumiko and Sugiyama. For them, Harbin means “togetherness.” Fogel’s argument that “[s]ince there was no

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Fogel, “Integrating into Chinese Society,” 62; Sugiyama, “Harubin no ki,” 3-20.

population ‘native’ to Harbin, everyone was a pioneer and shared common difficulties”⁹² might partly explain the reason for this kind of “genuine friendship of the peoples”⁹³ that was exclusive to Harbin, not even present in Shanghai.⁹⁴

The Japanese Romantics and Victims

In *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*, one of the three Japanese interviewees, Yuzawa-san, says that he was a fourteen-year-old member of the Volunteer Agricultural Corps, when he went to Manchuria in 1944, and stayed for one year in Harbin before returning to Japan. Manchuria had been a fantasy of Yuzawa. This originated from his reading of the novel, *Three Hundred Miles behind Enemy Lines*, by Minetaro Yamanaka, when he was ten years old. He kept feeling for his whole life that Manchuria was a large and wonderful place. He felt excited and his blood danced in the veins at hearing the name “Manchuria.”⁹⁵ According to Yuzawa-san, many of the Volunteer Corps died miserably in Manchuria. They did not have parents or brothers around them. Due to the cold weather in winter, their corpses could not be buried and were even stripped of all clothes by the local poor people.⁹⁶

Kubota-san was a fourteen-year-old member of the Kanaka Village Separate Village Group who went to Manchuria in 1944 and returned to Japan at the end of

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lahusen, “Manchuria: Conflicting Memories,” 4.

⁹⁴ Fogel compares Harbin to a melting pot, whereas Shanghai could be compared to a mosaic society, where the inter-ethnic connections were not as dense as that in Harbin. For more comparison between Harbin and Shanghai in terms of inter-ethnic relationship, see Fogel, “Integrating into Chinese Society,” 45-69. In *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*, several other former residents of Harbin, including the Russians, Poles, Germans, expressed their happy memories of and even nostalgia for Harbin.

⁹⁵ Lausen, *Manchurian Sleepwalkers*, 2017.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

1945. Kubota-san has painful memories of Manchuria, because he killed many Japanese during the mass suicide. He does not feel like visiting Manchuria when he thinks of his fear and terror.⁹⁷ Unlike the Chinese official discourse, which represents the Japanese as a homogeneous victimizer, Yuzawa-san and Kubota-san's memories show that many innocent Japanese commoners were also the "victims of empire."⁹⁸ Yuzawa-san's romanticized imagination of Manchuria illustrates one of the many reasons that the Japanese came to Manchuria. As Mitter argues, "Certainly the period 1932 and 1945, when the Northeast was occupied by the Japanese, is now firmly situated in mainstream Chinese historiography as a time when China's national territorial sovereignty was most egregiously violated. This view is by no means inaccurate, but it is becoming increasingly clear that it is incomplete."⁹⁹ This flip side of the story, *i.e.*, the complex motivations for the Japanese to go to Manchuria, could probably never be seen in the Chinese official discourse.

While Chinese official discourse conveys such ideological silence, some Harbiners have positive memories of the Japanese immigrants. For example, in the memoir of Zhang, a Harbiner who was born in 1933, he recalled a harmonious relationship with his Japanese neighbours in the early 1940s. In 1942, Zhang and his family moved into a house inside the courtyard of a Japanese business at the intersection of Jingwei Fifth Street and Anguo Street. The Japanese household had a

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Lahusen, "Manchuria: Conflicting Memories," 16; also see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 409-411.

⁹⁹ Tamanoi, *Crossed Histories*, 25.

dog, and they were afraid that their dog might harm Zhang, so they invited Zhang to feed the dog with them. The dog later became Zhang's friend. On the other hand, Zhang hated Russian and Korean children, so he trained the dog to bark at those children. Zhang also recorded that the Japanese neighbours and Zhang's family greeted each other when they met. Another old Harbiner, Wang, recalled that in 1939 when he was a child playing in the street, he hurt his feet. A Japanese soldier wrapped his wound and gave him one thousand *yen* to get him to see a doctor. Such positive memories of the Japanese are rarely seen in Chinese films and dramas due to censorship. As Braester argues, filmmakers in China should "think professionally and act politically at the same time."¹⁰⁰ In order to escape censorship, filmmakers have to present a seemingly nationalist history, though they might try to introduce a more nuanced picture.

Conclusion

Historical films and television dramas in contemporary China tend to turn into ethnography, exoticism, femininity, and romance. A major motivation behind this trend is the culture of consumption and commercialization. The political nature of Chinese films in the 1950s seems to have given place to market-oriented films. Nevertheless, as it turns out, politics is always there. It is a bit frustrating to find out that the heterogeneous images of the Russians and the Japanese are still, in the end, overshadowed by a nationalist discourse, as illustrated by the death of Ichiro. The film

¹⁰⁰ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 6.

producers are caught between “rebellion from and resubmission to power.”¹⁰¹ These politicized onscreen representations of the demonized Japanese are even more shocking, when the stories of Kumiko, Sugiyama, Zhang, and Wang are taken into consideration.

In the context of Harbin’s cultural space, the prevalence of nationalist discourse in films and television dramas implies the CCP’s efforts to reclaim the territory of history. As Braester argues, “Since the dominant ideology was communism, the productions may be said to have *painted the city red*.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, why is the Europeanized cityscape and the non-Chinese culture of Harbin emphasized on screen, if the purpose is to claim the city as Chinese? What is the suggested meaning of shooting a nationalist film in a “foreign” city? There is a tension between the CCP, who wants to Sinicize the history of Harbin, and local patriots who resist a collective Chinese memory, and want to promote a unique identity of Harbin by glorifying its non-Chinese history.

St. Sophia Church is an indispensable image for almost all the films and television dramas shot in Harbin. The exotic Modern Hotel and the international Harbin itself are selling points for *The Gunshot at the Modern Hotel* and other similar cinematic works. Zhao Yiman, the once asexualized communist hero, is portrayed as a modern lady who frequents church and café and speaks Russian. Many film producers, whose works I discussed above, are pragmatists, if not local patriots. That is to say, they promote and sell a Europeanized Harbin in the name of telling

¹⁰¹ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 237; also see Dai, *Cinema and Desire*, 13-48.

¹⁰² Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 7. Emphasis original.

nationalist stories. In order to disguise their purpose of reconstructing a non-Chinese history of Harbin,¹⁰³ these producers have to portray a hostile Other to ensure the political correctness of the dramas, so that they can pass censorship. Unfortunately, the Japanese become the scapegoat. The demonization of the Japanese military on the Chinese screen not only becomes an emotional catharsis for many Chinese audiences, who experience retrospective (imagined) trauma and humiliation inflicted by the Imperial Japanese Army, but it also becomes a shield against censorship. Under such political camouflage, an exotic Harbin is brought to light on the screen, contributing to the audience's imagination of both a Chinese and non-Chinese cultural space of the city.

Conclusion

The city of Harbin, as the encompassing local *lieu de m émoire* and part of the *lieux de m émoire* of all of China, embodies fragmented yet consistent memories of its Russian, Japanese, and Chinese cultural histories among urban planners, architects, writers, film producers, and residents. Individual memories of the city in diverse forms constitute a collective memory of a both exotic and nationalist Harbin. At the same time, these individual memories challenge collective memory. “Harbiness” *per se* is plural and unsettled, filled with paradox and ambivalence in relation to Chinese nationalism and Chineseness.

Harbin — A City of Ambivalence and Paradox

The ambivalence of Harbiners, oscillating between nationalism and exoticism, is illustrated in various art forms, including architecture, literature, and film and television dramas; and such ambivalence – and even contradiction – is not something new. It is an ongoing historical process.

The city experienced a circular process of development – repressing certain memories and later revealing the repressed. This is illustrated by the demolition of St. Nicholas Cathedral during the Cultural Revolution and the (re)construction of various replicas of this church in recent years. However, the process of reviving and revitalizing the repressed is full of tensions between the conservative officials and the progressive ones, and between the public who cares about the cultural value of the

church and those who focus on its political connotation. What to remember and forget, to some extent, is a political decision in Harbin and China at large.

The ideological contestation between the Chinese and non-Chinese Harbin is demonstrated in urban spatial practices. The Sunshine Hall (built in 1997) and Harbin Station 2018 suggest distinctive official attitudes towards the European and Russian histories of the city: While the Sunshine Hall mainly memorializes the city's history from 1946 when the Chinese administration of the city started, the new Harbin Station, located only 800 meters apart from the hall, conveys an official effort to go back to the Russian roots of the city. The last twenty years from the late 1990s to the present witnessed a change in the official ideology from one, which primarily highlighted the Chinese history of Harbin, to another, which has reinvigorated its foreign/international history through spatial practices.

This ideological ambivalence is common not only among local officials but also among the public. For example, the distinctive interpretation of "the exotic Harbin" involves a sense of pride or a feeling of humiliation. The debate over whether to prioritize the reconstruction of St. Nicholas Cathedral, rather than Dao-taifu, continues the competition between the Russian and Chinese traditions of the city. Evidence of these opposing ideals is further found in the revitalization of St. Sophia Church in the 1990s, in contrast to the Confucian Temple built in the 1920s. The city's dilemma between claiming Chinese and non-Chinese tradition is a historical process, continuing into the present. Indeed, it is the competition and cooperation between the two ideologies and two forms of urban practices that

characterize the city's identity. Such identity cannot be reduced to either Chinese or Russian/European. In fact, this ambivalence suggests that Harbin is *essentially* a hybrid, battling and balancing in-between Chinese and Russian/ European.

The contested nature of Harbin's identity is not only manifested in the physical urban space but also in literature, films, and television dramas. Xiao Hong is the epitome of the contradictory Harbiner, caught in-between exoticism and nationalism: she both embraced Russian culture and was repulsed by the Russian colonization. The case of Xiao Hong suggests the historical continuity of the city's struggle in defining its ethnic and cultural identity. The reconstruction in *the Golden Era* of the 1930s' Harbin as a vernacular, Chinese-dominated living-space contrasts with the romanticized, Europeanized cultural space of Harbin in *Falling Flowers*. These two films speak a cinematic language of paradox in representing the cultural space of Old Harbin, and constitute a parallel with the ideological ambivalence shown in the architectural debates mentioned above.

Romance is another lens through which the paradox and ambivalence between exoticism and nationalism is seen. For example, the nationalist discourse in *Fire Saves City in Danger* is blurred by presenting the romance between Wu and Lisa. This romance signifies both the triumph of Chinese masculinity over Russian woman *and* the breaking of ethnic boundaries by love. *Harbin under the Night Curtain* expresses a similar message by applying the love between Ichiro and Lu to bridge the hostility between China and Japan, though the suicide of Ichiro symbolizes the failure of such affective bridging. The ambivalence between the construction and deconstruction of

ethnic boundaries on the screen demonstrates Chinese film producers' consent to and dissent from the nationalist agenda. They essentially construct a nuanced (a)political narrative of inter-ethnic relationship and promote a multi-cultural and Europeanized cityscape of Harbin, disguised as nationalist history.

The exotic and modernist representation of Harbin's historical cityscape also has to do with the film producers' concern for economic profit and audience expectation. In the last five decades, the cinematic representation of nationalism in Harbin and China at large has experienced a turn to the feminization of nationalist heroines, and to the modernization and Westernization of the cityscapes, in which the stories are narrated. For example, in *Zhao Yiman* (1950), the cityscape functions as a background, in which the importance of an asexualized, communist hero, Zhao Yiman, is accentuated. In contrast, in *My Mother Zhao Yiman* (2005), the cityscape is represented as modern and exotic, and becomes part of the spectacle to be consumed. Moreover, Zhao is represented as a modern bourgeois woman, living a Western way of life in Harbin. The juxtaposition of an exotic cityscape and Communist heroes' Western way of living suggests the film producers' desire to reconstruct a unique cultural space of Harbin both for visual consumption as well as for city imaging.

Architecture, literature, film, and television dramas cooperatively reflect and produce the ambivalence and paradoxes of Harbin's cultural identity in the past and at present. It is the ambivalence and paradox that contribute to the simultaneous production of both local particularism *and* local internationalism, by means of which the city adapt to, as well as confront, globalization and its potential side-effect of

homogenizing cultures.

Harbin — A Site of Power Contestation

Harbin has witnessed a power contest between Russians, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans for the hegemony and counter-hegemony over the city. This is illustrated by the historical evolution of the Harbin Station Square. Harbin Station used to be the symbolic power center of the city, and administrators had a penchant for displaying their power there. For example, the assassination of Ito Hirobumi by Ahn Jung-geun, occurred there in 1909, and the Manchukuo Monument (1932), the Soviet Red Army Monument (1945), and the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Museum (2014) were respectively established on the Harbin Station Square, each to replace its predecessor. When I consulted a middle-aged Harbiner about the reason for the disappearance of the Soviet Red Army Monument in the early 1990s, he replied, “Please forget that monument. Harbin Station has been a sensitive place. The Korean assassinated the Japanese colonial official there; the Japanese and the Soviets claimed their authority over the city there. It only seemed to have nothing to do with us Chinese.” His intentional forgetting of the foreign history of Harbin Station partly answers my question about the mysterious disappearance of the Soviet Red Army Monument. Through the perennial process of establishing and erasing monuments, the Harbin Station Square signifies a site of political and ideological contest among foreign and local powers.

Old Harbin as a site of power contest is manifested not only in physical urban

space but also in historical films and television dramas. *Fire Saves the City in Danger* represents the plague of 1910 as an arena for the Chinese, Russian, and Japanese to compete for the leadership of Harbin. *The Gunshot* and *Fareast 1932* reconstruct Harbin as a contact zone, where the allies of Chinese and Soviet Communists and the International communities resist the Imperial Japanese Army. In this way, Harbin is portrayed as an inclusive, cosmopolitan city, with the demonized Japanese falling into a different category.

Apart from political contention, Harbin is a site of economic power contest. Take the preservation and gentrification of the Chinese Baroque neighborhood in Daowai as an example. The original residents were priced out and forced to move out to the modern buildings in the suburbs. Being the former Chinese neighborhood outside of the Russian controlled Railway Zone a century ago, Old Daowai witnessed the segregation between whites and Chinese. Now, racial colonization has been transformed into economic colonization of the poor during the gentrification of Old Daowai. This phenomenon involves the *recolonization of the once colonized* in terms of economy. In contrast, the resurrection of the Russian-built Harbin Station in 2018 symbolizes a *decolonization of the decolonized* in terms of politics. Contemporary Harbin officials strategically “forget” the colonial history and reinterpret the Russian and European architectural heritage as cultural capital that Harbiners should be proud of. Such strategic reinterpretation of the colonial heritage implies the official attempt to commercialize the city’s colonial cultural heritage.

Moreover, another form of power contention is that between the local official

establishment and the public. The latter uses memories of Old Harbin to criticize present social problems and to problematize the homogeneous, nationalist memory constructed by the Chinese officials. Firstly, many contemporary Harbiners' strong nostalgia for St. Nicholas Cathedral and Old Daowai signify their displaced criticism of the featureless modern city, the bureaucracy and corruption of local officials, and the market economy, which has changed a *lived* space of memory into a tourist site for consumption. Such criticism is also revealed in contemporary writers Ji Hongzhen and Qiu Subin's nostalgia for Xiao Hong and "her" Harbin of the 1930s. In this sense, St. Nicholas Cathedral, Old Daowai, Xiao Hong and her literary works are similar signifiers of Old Harbin. These ghosts, either taking architectural or literary form, haunt the city and contribute to the social production of the present Harbin in its battle between different versions of tradition and modernization, and between memory and amnesia. They pull the city back to its old days, in order for it to dive into the future.

Secondly, against the nationalist conceptualization of Harbin by Chinese official discourse, there are heterogeneous memories by the public that suggest a more nuanced definition of Harbin's cultural space. For instance, the tension between the official labeling of the Modern Hotel as a site for patriotic education contradicts the public's affective memories of this hotel as a former Jewish property and a landmark that they feel intimate with. Moreover, the demonization of the Japanese army in official discourses is problematized, when old Harbiner Wang recalls his memory of obtaining help from a Japanese soldier in 1939. Similarly, Zhang's memoir recalls the days when he became friends with his Japanese neighbors in the early 1940s. The

politicization of the memories concerning the Japanese in Chinese official discourses is further problematized by the fact that many former Japanese residents of Harbin felt nostalgia for the cosmopolitan Harbin. Such contrasting memories of Harbin might confuse contemporary people's understanding of the ethnic relationship in Old Harbin, revealing the city's contested history and its equally contentious and ambivalent cultural identity at present.

Remediating the Approach of Intertextuality

This dissertation adopts interdisciplinary and inter-medial approaches to map the discursive yet consistent memories and memorialization of Harbin through architecture, literature, film, and TV drama. The necessity of applying an inter-medial approach in examining *le lieu de m'histoire* of Harbin is clearly stated by Erll and Rigney, who argue that "particular media offerings become agenda-setters for collective remembrance and it is then through the inter-medial reiteration of the story across different platforms in the public arena that the topic takes root in community."¹⁰⁴ The layered mediation of memories is also implied by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who highlight the concept of "remediation", or "the mediation of mediation".¹⁰⁵ The two authors argue that media have continually been "commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other and this process is integral to media."¹⁰⁶ In this dissertation I examined the remediation among architecture,

¹⁰⁴ Erll and Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, 2009, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Bolter and Grusin describe the logic of new media refashion prior media forms. *Understanding New Media*, 1999, 273.

¹⁰⁶ Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, ed., *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*

literature, film, and television drama, and their complement for or challenge to each other. These media work cooperatively and competitively to produce the social space of Harbin as a *lieu de m'énmoire*.

Among the most popular images of Harbin seen in historical films and dramas are St. Sophia Church, the Modern Hotel, the Railway Bridge, Central Street, the Old/new Chinese Baroque neighborhood, and the city in the snow. These images contribute to the representation and social production of a Europeanized Harbin, embellished with some Chinese vernacular flavour of Old Daowai. As Braester argues, “It is rather films – in direct interaction with political decisions and architectural blueprints – that forge an urban contract and create the material city and its ideological constructs.”¹⁰⁷

With regard to the inter-medial dialogues between the seven *lieux de m'énmoire* that I examined in the seven chapters of this dissertation, the replica of St. Nicholas Cathedral is shown in *Falling Flowers* as a background for Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun to sing and dance in celebration of Xiao Jun’s successful job-hunting. The original cathedral is mediated first by its replica and then, by this cinematic representation. Presenting the new cathedral in the constructed cinematic time of the 1930s to its contemporary audiences erases (imaginatively) and reiterates (in actuality) the historical fact that the original church was demolished during the Cultural Revolution. It also signifies a symbolic resurrection of the demolished church in the cinematic

(Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 3; also see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation, Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 55.

¹⁰⁷ Braester, *Painting the City Red*, 13.

space.

In *Harbin under the Night Curtain*, the surviving Xiangfang Railway Station is used as a prop to refer to the Harbin Station of 1904, because the former is a Russian-style building and somewhat similar to the latter. Despite a cinematic “misrepresentation” of the old Harbin Station, the Xiangfang Station in this television drama functions as a general, symbolic signifier that evokes the audience’s imagination of the Russianized Harbin. By the same token, instead of shooting on the site of Unit 731, *The Gunshot* uses a “lab” and a “prison” to refer to Unit 731, in which the arrested Chinese Communist, Sun Bowen, is tortured. Through this filmic mediation, Unit 731 is presented as a symbol of Japanese atrocities. Such a simplified representation both complements and limits the audience’s imagination of the history of Unit 731.

The memorialization of Xiao Hong constitutes an inter-medial dialogue between contemporary writers, film producers, and local officials of Harbin. Local officials’ branding of Harbin as the home city of Xiao Hong is complemented by the film, *Falling Flowers*. On the other hand, Qiu Subin’s writing suggests her criticism of the officials’ commercialization of Xiao Hong. Moreover, in *the Golden Era* many shots were taken in Old Daowai. Such a choice conveys the director’s nostalgia for Xiao Hong and the bygone era, as suggested by the title of this film. Xu’s filmic nostalgia for Xiao Hong finds a parallel with the photographs, paintings, memoirs, and news reports that commemorate the disappearing Old Daowai in the process of gentrification. Together with many other cultural productions, *the Golden Era* stands

as a “monument” to the loss of Old Daowai and a denunciation of its gentrification. It is by the remediation in and through architecture, literature, film, and television drama that the both real and imagined Harbin is produced.

Translation of the Past and the Other

In the metaphorical translation of the Russian, Chinese, and Japanese heritage into the present Harbin, Russians are interpreted as ideologically ambivalent and even friends of the Chinese, whereas the Japanese are presented as demons. The (mis)translation of history is a process of empowerment and disempowerment. On the one hand, the promotion of the Russian and European heritage signifies an empowering retranslation of the once-downplayed history of the cosmopolitan Harbin. On the other hand, the (mis)translation that emphasizes the atrocities of the Imperial Japanese Army witnesses, and simultaneously brings about, a disempowerment of the former Japanese residents, who contributed to the economic and cultural development of the city.

Moreover, *le lieu de m'histoire* of Harbin is in a dynamic process of changing: since the 1980s, the once “forgotten” memories of the Japanese atrocities have been aroused; since the 1990s, the foreign past, repressed during the Cultural Revolution, has been resurrected and promoted. Through the dynamic process of selective translation, (mis)interpretation, and (re)imagination, *le lieu de m'histoire* of Harbin embodies both nationalism and exoticism, provokes memory as much as amnesia. It reveals the historical, political, and economic context, in which memories of the past

are constructed rather than the past, *per se*.

The interdisciplinary and inter-medial examination of Harbin as an encompassing *lieu de m'histoire* presents the city as overlapping territories between the temporal and the spatial, between the real (practiced and lived) and the imagined (abstract, conceptualized, and represented), and between the Self and Other in terms of ethnicity. Like a palimpsest, the city's contested past overlaps with its present, persistently haunting and shaping the city while experiencing metamorphosis and resurrection in the present. Overshadowed by the real-and-imagined ghosts of the past, Harbin continues to function as a contested contact zone and frontier that de-territorializes China's homogeneous cultural identity, from the periphery, and re-territorializes itself, describing a future-oriented reinvigoration of its cosmopolitan past in the current context of globalization.

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