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AMERICANIZATION OF CHINESE TELEVISION:
---A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “YEARNING FOR LOVE”

by

Dong Zhao

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Communication Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2009

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ABSTRACT

President Deng's promulgation of "taking bolder steps" in economic reform sanctioned the building a socialist market economy that led Chinese society to experience a sweeping change, while also becoming the site affected by U.S. – led cultural imperialism. In the new climate of social reform, mass media led the way in creating an awareness of commercial identity and branding. One interesting phenomenon in this development is the increasing number of cloned foreign entertainment shows that have seized the entire nation's attention, giving rise to a national cloning mania. To examine the cultural impact of cloned media shows, this paper focuses on one particular television series, *Yearning for Love*, in an attempt to scrutinize the typical capitalist ideological values inherent in the cloned media content and analyze their promotion through televisual presentation. The analysis demonstrates that cloned media shows feature the materialist and individualist elements of capitalist countries, especially the ones that are in tune with consumer culture. Meanwhile, Chinese traditional cultural values, originality and creativity are sidelined by capitalist ideology and the profit-driven pro-west media products promoting them.

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AMERICANIZATION OF CHINESE TELEVISION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “YEARNING FOR LOVE”

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The central focus of this thesis is the popularity of Chinese-version western shows in China after the economic reform of the 1970s that precipitated a boom in both consumer culture and injected western individualist values into Chinese culture. Capitalism was once rejected as a “malignant tumor” by Chairman Mao during the early times of communist China (Yin, 2006). However, today China’s television media, vying for ratings are either Chinese versions of entertainment shows promoting capitalist principles and commercial operations or, soap operas with the main characters enjoying a consumerist life. Along with the promulgation of “economic reform and the goal of building a socialist market economy” (Bai, 2005, p.5), private enterprise, and foreign investments have started boosting the growth of China’s economy significantly. At the same time, however, the traditional cultural essence of China as well as its emphasis on the collective have been undermined by capitalist western cultural values. Based on a careful examination of traditional Chinese cultural studies, a few classical cultural concepts (*he, ren, yi, li, zhi, xin*) can be regarded as the guiding principles whose standard requirements and inspirations have been widely accepted by traditional Chinese people, affecting patterns of thought, social behavior, and life as a whole. Generally speaking, traditional Chinese cultural values promote ethics of devotion to family, loyalty to friends, valuing moral pursuits and moderation rather than material desires and extremes, caring

for other fellow people and self-sacrifice for the well being and the harmonious order of the whole society (Chen & Chen, 2001; Huang & Zhao, 2004; Li, 2001; Lu, 1998; Zhuang, 2002).

In today's China, "to become rich is glorious" (literally *zhi fu guang rong* in Chinese) has become a new slogan. Pursuit of material life seems to be the most important life goal; in all likelihood, fewer and fewer Chinese take the interests of others or the whole society into consideration when making personal decisions. This phenomenon is quite obvious among the younger generation of Chinese, who are so obsessed with name brands and are addicted to emerging new trends of fashion and crazy about pop stars and celebrities who get famous overnight. Increasing reporting on governmental corruption, misappropriation of public funds and exchanging money for rank, political power or fame reveals that an increasing number of Chinese people would rather value their own personal goals, desires and individual achievements over public interests and the well-being of the whole society. For a fair number of people, even public interest can be sacrificed in the hope of gaining an advantage, a benefit, or winning favor from influential people.

With western culture becoming so popular, mass media has been a major actor in the new Cultural Revolution drama. I will argue that the principles and practices of mass media are a major force promoting *cultural imperialism*, steadily providing media content injected with western cultural elements. As reflected in the discourses and images in television media, considerable screen time is taken by infotainment, fashion follow-up reports and promos of entertainment shows, as well as Chinese versions of western

programs (Bai, 2005). Another malignant side-effect emerging along with this process is that the traditional cultural essence of China as a collective society is gradually disappearing and has been undermined by western individualism, consumerism and other features of capitalism. Developments in recent history reflect the alarming fact that different national cultures across the globe have been overtaken by the storm of capitalism since the industrial revolution (Zhang, 2006). In this sense, China is not an exception in following the same old sinister road of cultural westernization.

Research indicates that the framing of media coverage has a profound impact on people's minds and public opinion (Comstock, G., & Scharrer, E., 2005). In the spread of global culture mass media is undoubtedly the most powerful instrument in the conscious dissemination of capitalist values, facilitating the proliferation of westernized media products. Scholars refer to this process as *cultural imperialism*. The accompanying process of cultural homogenization brought about by global capitalism will seriously impair cultural diversity (Schiller, 1992). This argument places a spotlight on cultural imperialism suggesting that the extensive dissemination of consumer capitalist values, and the extensive application of new media technology promoting them, should be held responsible for the degradation of global cultural diversity, difference and heterogeneity.

Following the economic reforms in the late 1970s, China has become the new site revealing the impact of cultural imperialism and mass media have become the focus of attention among many scholars interested in examining the Chinese cultural experiences (e.g., Paek & Pan, 2004; Zhao & Belk, 2008). Among a variety of program forms,

“glocalized” media products (Chinese copies of foreign shows embodying global capitalistic cultural values), produced by commercial media outlets, are popular in China, and are typical examples of culture capitalism. They encapsulate most of the characteristics of pro-west program forms through which a new sense of ideological proximity towards capitalistic culture is established—a profound shift that the media has affected on contemporary cultural identities. However, most studies on contemporary cultural issues have focused on the relationship between mass media and the change of socio-political climate, rather than the promotion of consumer capitalist values based on examining specific media case.

I have selected to study a Chinese version of “Sex and the City,” *Yearning for Love* 2004 (literally *hao xiang hao xiang tan lian ai* in Chinese). As Thomas Lindlof says, it is “the composite ideal of a phenomenon”—a typical example of the materialist values, individualist beliefs and consumer cultural ideology of today’s Chinese people. *Yearning for Love* embodies many dominant ideological trends in contemporary Chinese society, especially in large cities situated as the vanguard of a reform policy “building a socialist market economy” (Bai, 2005, p.5). The four central characters in this television series could live in any big cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou. The characters could be any modern Chinese woman who would be proud of her westernized lifestyle. Since the late 1990s and beyond, structural changes have occurred so that not only more western industrial products have been imported, but also the everyday life of traditional Chinese people has been gradually changed. Western lifestyle has been

promoted as a fashionable way of life for modern Chinese.

This bourgeois lifestyle is termed as “Xiaozi” by Chinese scholars. Simply put, Xiaozi is a literal short-term Chinese translation of the favorable term petty/petit bourgeoisie. Mei Yuan, author of *“Petty bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie taste in the perspective of the culture of appreciation of beauty”* defined Xiaozi as:

They are a combination of western culture and Chinese petty bourgeoisie, mainly existing among white-collar workers and the intellectual stratum in developed cities, characterized by pursuing one’s idiosyncraticized spiritual freedom, exotic taste and refined lifestyle. It (Xiaozi) is also characterized by worshipping western culture and rejecting traditional Chinese culture, being adept in making romantic metropolitanized tone and taste (2005, p.91)

Yearning for Love presents several examples that demonstrate that the four main characters in this show portray the best representatives of pro-west Xiaozi.

Another reason for analyzing this television series is that it specifically focuses on women----a historically stereotyped and marginalized group in Chinese society. It appears that this show is trying to present a new image of modern Chinese women. From the perspectives of traditional Chinese values, however, this show did quite the opposite by displaying extreme materialist, consumerist, and male-centered dimensions of Chinese women.

This study attempts to critically analyze the particular television series, *Yearning for Love* (literally “*Deeply Want to Fall in Love*”), which is the Chinese version of the

popular American show, *Sex and the City*, in the hope of examining: (1) how capitalist cultural values have been folded into specific media products, such as worshipping consumerist lifestyles and promoting individualist ideas; and (2) how traditionalism has been pushed to the background in the show through the derogatory presentation or the intentional omission of conventional Chinese culture. I contend that it is unlikely that contemporary Chinese society could have preserved its own diversity without mass media functioning as an effective instrument to promote capitalist cultural elements and facilitating the universalization of consumerism.

My analysis focuses on the changing nature of values, mode of life, signs, settings and symbolic elements in the show (e.g., individualist values of main characters, signs of global brands, consumerist lifestyle and western-style furnishings). In the chapters below, a critical discourse analysis is based on a review of traditional Chinese cultural values, western ideology, and consumer capitalist elements as well as China's reform policy and its impact on Chinese mass media. The chapters in this thesis will be as follows:

Chapter two is divided into three parts. The first part will be a review of notions relating to traditional Chinese culture that reflects Chinese philosophy, psychological thinking and ideologies about cultural heritage. They are: *he* (harmony), *ren* (benevolence, loving and caring for others), *yi* (morality, faithfulness, righteousness) and *li* (interest, benefit), *zhi* (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness). The second part will be an examination of some development phases and concepts of western capitalist society,

including western ideology in a pre-modern world, modern individualism, different forms of modern individualism, materialism, commodity fetishism, consumerism and globalization, postmodernist/poststructuralist thought, and present-mindedness. And the third part will be a discussion of media effects theory, media reform of China, Chinese “petty bourgeois,” *Yearning for Love* and its social impact.

Chapter three starts from a description of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Next, before introducing concrete methodological steps, I briefly review some relevant media studies that address methodological concerns. The last part summarizes Thomas N. Huckin’s step-by-step outline for CDA.

In chapter four, I conduct a critical analysis of *Yearning for Love* and examine the television show by applying Huckin’s model of CDA. This section specifically focuses on the genre (text type), framing (how the show is presented), special shooting effects and foregrounding/backgrounding (emphasizing/de-emphasizing certain concepts) of the case.

The last chapter summarizes the key findings of my research, followed by references and appendixes A, B, and C.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the great things about the invention of television is that it eliminates space-time differences, and delivers to a large audience, audio-visual experiences otherwise unimaginable (Innis, 1951). With the advent of television, an omnipresent medium superseding books, viewers became empowered with the right of “witnessing” (Ellis, 2001). However, the significant impact of this new medium as an entertainer, informer, and educator is poised on a disputed borderline. On the one hand, modern innovation greatly reduced the information gap between people from different social, political, and economical background, undoubtedly enriched contemporary modern life, and widened people’s knowledge which had hitherto been inconceivable. On the other hand, television and other new media, such as the internet and satellite broadcasting facilitate U.S.-led global cultural and communication imperialism to change the complexion of other cultures and societies, “leading to a homogenous world modeled after the West in general and the United States in particular” (Zhao & Belk, 2008).

2.1 Traditional Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Chinese Society and Social Relations

Studies in traditional Chinese culture have gradually made progress, moving from a superficial understanding of manners and customs through western perspectives, to a comprehensive study of ideological value systems in search of a shifting cultural consciousness within the Chinese context. Traditionally, studies in Chinese culture can be

divided into two groups: 1) considering Confucianism as the holder of lineage whose standard prescriptions and inspiration are the most influential in regard to Chinese cultural tradition (Huang & Zhao, 2006; Liu & Wang, 2005; Shu & Wu, 2002; Yin, 2006; Xu & Xu, 2007); and 2) distinguishing respective cultural effects of three ideologies --- Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (Fu & Liu, 2006; Shao & Qi, 2007; Wang, 2007). Considering that culture itself is a complex whole, no matter which tradition you find more influential, it is generally agreed traditional Chinese cultural values are not merely guiding principles but a pattern of thinking and a way of life deeply ingrained in the fabric of Chinese society. They have had a deep influence on and are central to Chinese cultural studies. As ideological and cultural systems formed and developed in ancient Chinese society, and dominant political frameworks of feudal society, it is no exaggeration to say that the moral values of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have molded generations of Chinese.

A systematic examination of traditional Chinese culture reveals that traditional Chinese cultural values focus largely on human relationships (Chen & Chen, 2001; Ng, 2000, p.47; Oyserman, Voon & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Core values defining traditional Chinese ideology are, *he*, *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *xin*, without which Chinese culture would lose much of its significance (Huang & Zhao, 2004; Ng, 2000; Sun & Lv, 2006; Xu & Xu, 2007; Yin, 2006). All these notions have contributed to our understanding of traditional Chinese culture both in ancient and contemporary times. Therefore *he* (harmony), the Xunzi's conception of *ren* (benevolence, loving and caring for others), *yi* (morality,

faithfulness, righteousness), *li* (rites, propriety), *zhi* (wisdom) and the Laozi's notion of *xin* (trustworthiness) will be further elaborated in this thesis not only because they best represent traditional Chinese culture but also because these four notions are in decided contrast with individualist, consumerist western capitalist culture.

2.1.1 *He*

For Confucius, the term *he*, meaning harmony, is an overarching principle of the world and of all things. In "*The Fundamental Differences between Western and Eastern Civilization*," Dazhao Li described the oriental culture as one that "harmonizes with nature and people in this world" (Li, 1968).

According to Liu and Allinson, harmony is the way to realization of essence (Liu & Allinson, 1988). Citing Liu and Allinson, Rita Mei-Ching Ng describes Harmony in her article, "*The influence of Confucianism on Chinese Conceptions of power, authority, and the rule of law*" as:

It is Confucius's contention that when things and persons fall into proper place, they become related to each other in such a supportive manner that harmony will result (2000, p 45).

From the traditional Confucian point of view, the world will achieve harmony in accordance with a rational order if everything and everyone relates to each other in a cooperative way. Confucius was aware that a final harmony might be unattainable, nevertheless, it is a moral ideal to pursue, which contributes positively to the well-being of society since the goal of traditional Chinese ethics is to maintain and extend stability,

and unity for the feudal society.

As a result of the harmony-oriented culture, the importance of subordinating individual interests to collective ones is emphasized as the most important characteristic of personal morality (Huang & Zhao, 2004). Individuals are expected to consider objectives that conform to the goals of society and cooperate with each other to maintain the harmony of the whole. Under this value system, personal interests should be subordinated to collective ones; the interests of the part should be subordinate to those of the whole (Yin, 2006). In other words, limited interests should be subordinated to overall interests, and minor interests to major ones. Under this ideological system, relationships within a society are intensive and interdependence among people is high.

“Moderation” (or the middle way) derived in part from the concept of harmony, is an important criteria for Chinese people. Once self-interest can be sacrificed to avoid conflicts between personal goals and the collective’s objectives, one must present oneself to others as modestly as possible and avoid conflict with others at all costs (Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988, p. 326) since confrontation between individuals is harmful to overall harmony and is highly undesirable.

Traditionally a good Chinese society is envisioned as a holistic order of being in which everyone has his/her proper place (Xu & Xu, 2007). The sense of being human, in such a society, is one of faithfully performing one’s duties to ensure the order of the whole. In light of the essential notion of harmony, human society is viewed as heading toward a frictionless, coordinated end (Shu & Wu, 2002). This end is a way of shared

human coexistence, in harmony with Nature and fellow human beings, gained by guiding one's conduct and thoughts with moral virtues such as *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (rites, propriety), *zhi* (wisdom) and *xin* (trustworthiness).

Concerned with maintaining a harmonious order, every individual in Chinese society is expected to seek interpersonal accommodation and give up his/her interests for the collective good. Mengzi, a well known Confucian, made a comment revealing Confucianism's emphasis on human interrelatedness: "good timing is not as important as favorable geographical position, and favorable geographical position is not as important as human harmony" (*tian shi bu ru di li, di li bu ru ren he*) For him, maintaining the harmony of interpersonal relationships is prominent and the holistic order of a society an essential outcome.

As a comprehensive concept of humanism, traditional Chinese ideology is based on an understanding that being social is the essential and distinguishing attribute of human beings. Human interrelatedness can be said to exist, "through, and defined by, one's relationship to others" (Ng, 2000). No one can be separated from human society just as no part can be broken away from the whole. The social process is at the core of one's self-growth. A human detached from others is viewed as a "tree without roots" (*wu gen zhi mu*) no longer able to maintain a livelihood from the Confucian point of view.

With human interrelatedness being the prominent notion of traditional Chinese culture, human society is a network of interpersonal relationships. All individuals coexist, cooperating and mutually benefiting from others and society as a whole. Success or

failure of the whole also belongs to everyone in this interrelated human network (Xu & Xu, 2007). Sui Zhuang, a historian and social scholar, defined Chinese culture this way: “the focus is not fixed on any particular individual, but on the particular nature of the relations between individuals who interact with each other. The focus is placed upon the relationship” (2002, p. 50). Similarly, in “*The Fundamental Differences Between Western and Eastern Civilization*,” Dazhao Li noted that: “The culture of the east is one that harmonizes with nature and other people in this world” (Li, 1968).

Of all interpersonal relationships, emotional attachments to family members, especially filial affection for parents is the most important and fundamental social relationships among the Chinese (Chen, 2001; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 1988). Seeking harmony with family members and supporting and seeking advice from the family plays an essential role in the lives of Chinese people. For the Chinese a harmonious society is inseparable from the harmony of its constituent families (Li, 2007). As research demonstrates, the most important relationships are vertical (e.g. parent-child) rather than horizontal (e.g., friendship) in Chinese culture and interdependence between parent and child is maximized. Parents frequently guide children who often consult, and their parents, who include their children in their social events that are important features of a child’s life (Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988, p 325). In China, most people live with their parents and devotion to family is valued. “Four generations under a roof” (*si shi tong tang*) is an old idiom exemplifying the ideal mode of a harmonious family life.

2.1.2 *Ren*

Ren is another core concept in traditional Chinese culture. Starting with the statement that a “benevolent person loves others” (*ren zhe ai ren*), Confucius defined *ren* as a set of moral virtues, including respecting others, leniency, kindness, and caring for others. In short, *ren* means loving people (Huang & Zhao, 2004).

Confucius believed that people should love each other and he also suggested that caring for and loving others is a moral standard that distinguishes a superior man from ordinary beings (Yin, 2006). *Ren*, here, refers to the ability to think for others instead of focusing on one’s self-interest. Based on traditional cultural theory of “man’s nature at birth is good” Mengzi further suggests that “there is kindness to be found in everyone’s heart” (Mengzi in *zhu zi ji cheng*, 1996). The main content of *ren* can be summarized as possessing the following three aspects: first, *ren* means persisting in giving consideration to people’s interests, recognizing the subjective position of people, as well as respecting human values and human rights; second, *ren* carries the connotation of sympathizing with others, caring and helping others; the third meaning of *ren* is being lenient toward others but strict with oneself, continuing a tradition of love with a generosity of spirit, and returning good for evil when dealing with others (Huang & Zhao, 2004). Xunzi, a faithful follower of Confucius, explains the *ren* spirit:

To a superior man, one must get close to other people; be able to pardon incompetent people; be wise and able to pardon ignorant people; have a broad mind and able to pardon shallow people; be guileless and able to pardon malicious people (Xunzi, Ru Jing in *zhu*

zi ji cheng, 1996, p. 22).

These are concrete requirements of *ren* in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. In fact, as a foundation of Chinese moral sense, not only can *ren* be applied to human society but also the natural world and cosmic inventory. Therefore, an implication of *ren* is to love the universe and everything in between, making friends with all creatures and natural objects (Huang & Zhao, 2004). In other words, except for “loving people,” *ren* also refers to “loving nature” because Confucians believe that people and nature are an inseparable whole. Therefore “love for people” can be generalized to “love for nature.” Confucians define “being humanitarian” as viewing people as brothers and sisters; the universe, and all things as friends (Liu & Wang, 2005). According to *ren*, people should not only love family members and fellow people, but the whole world and everything in it.

As relationships are basic to the Chinese, it becomes essential to point out that *ren* is also a form of ethical wisdom used to coordinate interpersonal relationships and the relationship between people and nature, which still has a positive effect on today’s society. According to Rita Mei-Ching Ng, *ren* is defined as a state of personal mind free from self-interest and selfish will (2000). Cited by Ng, Tu defined *ren* as:

Confucian’s notion of *ren* is best described as love based on humanity. Confucius defined humanity as needing to ‘conquer yourself and return to ritual’. This inner transformation is said to free oneself from four things: ‘opinionatedness, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egoism,’ and to be considerate of others. Evidently, for the Confucians, awareness of the other is of great significance in one’s ‘searching for oneself’ (as

cited by Ng, 2000, p. 48).

With interpersonal relationships being placed in a central position, *ren*, the highest quality of being a Confucian superior man, could not exist if it was not situated in a web of human relatedness (Liu & Wang, 2005). From the viewpoint of a hierarchically organized social environment, there are inevitable historical limitations to Confucianism. However, valuing human interrelatedness and maintaining a harmonious relationship with our fellows and all things is a precious cultural essence of Chinese tradition. While the social context has changed over time, the core value of *ren* still plays an important role in handling various social contradictions, balancing interests among different social groups and actively adjusts the relationship between top decision-makers and the masses.

2.1.3 *Yi* and *Li*

In Chinese tradition *yi* (righteousness, integrity, morality, loyalty) is another important moral standard and it is also a measurement to guide interpersonal relationships among people. According to Xi Zhu, cited by Dainian Zhang, there are three layers of meanings implied in *yi*: first, *yi* has the meaning of ‘appropriateness,’ a standard to measure propriety of behavior or conduct; second, as a leading principle and social rule, *yi* itself has to be compatible with social reality and cultural norms; and thirdly, *yi* is also an ethical standard and rational criterion influencing people’s motives, desires, and emotions at a conscious level (1988, p.36). To be specific, *yi* means “filial piety toward parents, loyalty to friends and superiors, a reciprocity of favors, the habit of keeping promises, and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the well being of others”

(Lu, 2000, p.13). While *yi* is the ethical standard, *li* 礼 (rites, propriety) is the concrete behavior that expresses this standard. To behave according to the standards and expectations of *li* demonstrates conformity to appropriate social norms. According to Xing Lu, *li* shows care and “[concern] for the emotional and material needs of family members and friends” (2000, p. 13). In contemporary Chinese interpersonal relationships, the meaning of *li* has evolved over the years into a complex exchange of favors as a way to maintain social relationships (Lu, 1998).

In response to Confucius’ notion of *yi*, Mozi coined another notion of *li* 利 (benefit, profit, interest) and it is believed that *yi* has to be balanced by *li*, which means repaying favors or benefits as a way to maintain interpersonal relationships. However, the positive meaning of *li* of paying back others’ kindness or assistance has been gradually changed into a negative connotation of “cherishing self-seeking motives respectively” (Liao, 1939). Mozi further states that the motivation for human action is to perceive mutual benefits and self-interests (Mozi in *zhu zi ji cheng*, 1996). Chinese philosophers view human activities as driven by either *yi* or *li*. A choice between *yi* and *li* is a test of human thoughts and actions. Mengzi states that,

Even if the whole world would be given to me, I would not do anything if it does not conform to righteousness; even if thousands of horses were offered as personal benefits, I would not glance at it if I had to do something betraying *yi* as an exchange. Never will I give or get a penny for immoral deeds (*zhu zi ji cheng*, 1996).

Xunzi, another famous representative of traditional Chinese philosophy, considers *yi*

to outweigh *li*; that nation outweighs the individual; the whole outweighs the part (*zhu zi ji cheng*, 1996). He also said that a nation will maintain a harmonious situation if people desire *yi* instead of *li*, while if people focus on self-interest (*li*) then its ill-effects will proliferate, the social order will be disrupted, and the public sphere will be poisoned. Based on the impulse to de-emphasize *li*, ascetic discipline and thrift are promoted by Confucius (Quan & Wu, 2002, p.40). “To see all the nations and families of the past, extravagance causes failure and success comes from thrift” (*li lan qian xian yu guo jia, cheng you qin jian bai you she*) is an old saying that has been effectively transmitted among the Chinese, affecting their social values and behavior. As reflected in personal life choices, being thrifty and living simple lives are traditional virtues which have been praised and advocated; whereas, unrestrained expense and extravagance is disdained and prevented. “The *junzi* [gentleman] understands what is moral; The *xiaoren* [petty man] understands what is profitable” (Confucius, 551-479 B.C.), which implies that morally refined people should despise material subjects and value spiritual well-being. It is believed that dignified individuals should subdue personal desire for pleasure and material benefits (Lu, 1998, p.97).

In individualist cultures, the pursuit of individual interests and personal fulfillment is the ultimate life-goal and more emphasis is put on self-reliance and independence (Triandis et al., 1988). In contrast, interrelatedness, integrity, interdependence and emotional attachment are normative in traditional Chinese cultures. There is a difference in the quality of people’s relationships in cultures where individualism or collectivism is

normative. From a traditional Chinese perspective a person who abandons the needs of the whole and sacrifices the interest of others to satisfy his/her own interest, causes irritation and resentment among others (Wang, 2005). Additionally, moral torture of unrighteous deeds is an inescapable ethical punishment which is more feared by traditional Chinese people (Li, 2001, p. 105). Friendships are easily turned into intimate long-lasting relationships accompanied with a set of obligations and moral rules in Chinese society, which is less probable in individualist cultures. Social skills in freely entering and leaving relationships, instead of loyalty to maintaining human relations are more likely in individualist society. “Friends” can be ordinary acquaintances in an individualist culture, whereas in a collective society, intimacy and mutual loyalty are prominent features and ethical obligations are combined with friendship (Triandis et al., 1988).

The ethical concept of *yi* is inherently altruistic in its values. The Chinese rulers since ancient times have tirelessly promoted and praised role models from folk tales or legends who are morally flawless and represented the *yi* spirit. The thought of placing the interest of the state and people above everything else has filtered through each social stratum in the early years of the People’s Republic. “Self-sacrificing for the good of others is glorious” was a crucial part of public consciousness in China during this period. This can be easily seen from some common slogans Chairman Mao especially encouraged: *da gong wu si* (collectivistic interests and selflessness), *wei ren min fu wu* (serve the people), *xian ren hou ji* (put the interest of others first), and *ke ji feng gong* (serve others while

restricting individual desires for interest). Even in Deng's era, many role models and moral examples clearly and notably reflect the spirit of *yi* selected to guide the actions of people.

While *yi* is the ethical rule, *li* (interest, benefit) is the concrete material gain that benefits the lives of people in many ways. Conformity to *yi* demonstrates manners and behaviors which reject the pursuit of materialism and instead concentrate on the pursuit of morality (Huang & Zhao, 2004). In particular, *yi* ignores personal monetary benefit and signifies concern for the moral and material needs of others. In China social relationships between people can last a lifetime and even carry over to succeeding generations. Relationships represented by *yi* are often considered "honest and faithful" and carried out among family members and friends in order to build psychological ties and interpersonal networks. During Mao's era, the notion of *li* was considered to be associated with bourgeois ideology and viewed as detrimental to interpersonal relationships and to society as a whole (Lu, 2000). However, as China continues along the road of economic reform, with the glorification of wealth there has come a new trend of thought; the notion of *li* that was "disapproved" bounced back with a new connotation and was perceived as an "approved" new social norm.

2.1.4 Zhi

Zhi (wisdom) describes the high intellectual capacity of well cultivated and morally refined *junzi*. Since *junzi* is prescribed by Confucius as a group of social elites who could act as moral models for the common people to emulate in ancient feudal society (Lu,

2000, p. 9), they are supposed to be wise in decision making and active thinkers. In Chinese ideology, the notion of *zhi* is appropriated to oppose arbitrariness and ignorance.

Since *zhi* is defined as a personal ability, to understand and make rational judgments, it can hardly be considered a value guiding thinking and behavior and thus it will not be further elaborated.

2.1.5 *Xin*

Xin is another moral pursuit in traditional Chinese interpersonal relations. The literal translation of *xin* is honesty and trust but the word contains a set of cultural implications and social norms perceived as principles in handling human relations such as keeping one's promises and never going back on one's word (Yin, 2006). To break *xin* is regarded as *shi xin* (without trustworthiness). Honoring *xin* is considered a necessary trait for ordinary people and the rulers alike. One who is truthful and able to be trusted is considered as having attained a high moral virtue and such a person becomes a guiding example for others (Shu & Wu, 2002).

In a moral sense, there are three dimensions of the implications of *xin*: first, *xin* is the fundamental principle used to handle interpersonal relationships in life through a reciprocal exchange of trust among people (Xu & Xu, 2007). People characterized by *xin* are always regarded as "sociable" and enjoy a respectable reputation among people. If a person loses *xin*, she/he is considered morally bad, manipulative and disgraced. As a result, this person will be removed from the social network and his/her ethical quality will be called into question.

Second, *xin* is a basic rule of governing the country. Chinese philosophers believe that there should be sincerity, not hypocrisy, large-mindedness and not pettiness among rulers (Shu & Wu, 2002). As a well-known Chinese saying goes “the ruler who wins people’s hearts can win the world” (*de min xin zhe de tian xia*), and this saying summarizes generations of Chinese rulers and sages, who knew that a successful ruler must not lose the trust of his/her people (Shu & Wu, 2002). In this logic, a social ruler is more likely to build a good rapport with people and acquire their trust and support. Laozi, the author of *Tao Te Ching*, uses a metaphor to describe the relationship between the ruling class and the people: “water can carry boats, but it also has the power to overturn boats”. He considers people capable of overturning the ruler. If the ruler does not care about his/her subjects, abuses power and loses *xin*, he/she will finally be removed from power by his/her subjects. According to Laozi, “the most submissive thing in the world can ride roughshod over the hardest in the world” (Lau, 1982).

Furthermore, *xin* is perceived as the ultimate principle of Heaven. The notion of *xin* evokes a basic moral standard that a person should attain. According to traditional Chinese culture, if a person is honest and sincere in his/her treatment of others, he/she receives blessings from Heaven. If a person is morally dishonest and deceitful, it is believed that he/she would receive punishment from Heaven (Zhuang, 2002). According to traditional Chinese people, an individual cannot exist in human society for long if she/he loses credibility. If a person or a ruler defrauds, it will be impossible for him/her to obtain blessings from Heaven and she/he will finally pay for their immoral deeds. From

such a perspective all Chinese people must combine their personal interests with the goal of taking the interests of society and others into consideration.

The sense of *xin* was promoted and encouraged through folklores foregrounding moral deeds, as well as through massive propaganda and the dissemination of ethical concepts. Such concepts are a constant reminder of how Chinese people should associate with others while in different social situations. The morality prescribed through folklore indicates social norms and rules for social behavior. Throughout history there has never been a shortage of advocated stories of people who were honest, selfless, and courteous. Over the years, the ruling class has been conducting propaganda by praising these moral deeds and encouraging the masses to emulate them. For instance, the story “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” is being continually passed down from generation to generation, referring to a boy who lied to villagers several times and was finally eaten by wolves. In elementary school textbooks, Bing-xin, a well-known writer in China who honestly kept her promises with a friend, was praised as a role model for generations of Chinese teenagers. All in all, the Confucian concept of *xin* means to be truthful, taking into consideration the interests of others. Confucius’s emphasis on *xin* encourages everyone to maintain harmonious relationships with others in an interrelated social network.

2.2 Western Capitalist Ideology

After detailing traditional cultural essences of a collective country, it is necessary to define some development phases and concepts of western capitalist society.

2.2.1 Western Ideology in Pre-modern World

When I use the term “pre-modern” in relation to the West, I refer to the time period beginning with the ancient Greeks and extending to the 16th and 17th centuries. Many influential philosophers, such as, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle formulated philosophical concepts and theories in response to the social, political, and cultural contexts of their time. Pre-modern western culture regarded the world as being ruled by an external realization of a rational cosmic order which was conceived of as something brought about, managed, and controlled by certain myth or ritual (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 137). For ancient Greek philosophers order was believed to arise and persist in a hierarchical universe in which all the individuals spontaneously and consciously conform to their communal roles. Natural forces “projected images of cosmic order onto the plane of human existence” (Geertz, 1973, p.90). The essential notion of self is clearly demonstrated in such a precisely ordered community, the cosmos was a hierarchy, a system in which every man knew his place and was content, with “a sense of coherence” as defined by Antonovsky (1979).

Greek philosophers share with Biblical writing the presupposition that a final good or telos of human life is certain, toward which human actions are seen as moving. This telos has been described as the way to the realization of shared human existence. It is not something to be achieved at some future point, but in the way a kind of shared human existence is constructed (Kesten, 2000, p.1). The good life is informed by an idealized view of the world as an integrated order, in which the temporal mirrors the eternal. Every particular item has its due place in the order of things (MacIntyre, 1981, p.173). It was believed that there exists a cosmic order that determines the place of each person in a total

harmonious interrelationship with myth or natural forces represented by a certain set of human qualities as virtues (Taylor, 1989, p. 122). The virtues are all in harmony with each other and harmony within the individual is reproduced in harmony within the community, with the shared aim of the realization of human good (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 158). In this human good there is no concept of a person being separated from the social network; an individual member of such a community can see their own good within and through a meaningful cosmic drama and enjoy being a proper part of the whole order (Kesten, 2000, p.11). This cosmos is tuned to the good of the whole, which is the final good, the one which embodies all partial good.

According to Hadas, the vision of the world should be an integrated universe in which all humans should be members and citizens of one state without distinction of race, or subject only to, and in harmony with, a common law immanent in the universe, and united in one social life, not by compulsion but only by love (Hadas, 1958, p.22).

MacIntyre argues that in the western context the modern outlook is in tune with the classical presupposition that there exists a cosmic order dictating human life as part of the total harmonious cosmos (1981, p.137). This standpoint is quite similar to traditional Chinese culture, which values the interests of the whole, encouraging every individual within the collective society to subordinate their self-interest to the whole. Within this ideology the “self” is only viewed as an inseparable part of human community.

2.2.2 Modern Individualism

The modern notion of “self” was constructed during the transition from the

Aristotelian to the mechanistic view of existence which began in the 16th and 17th centuries. The liberating view of modernism demanded a rather complete departure of people from the bonds that formerly tied them to an ordered outer world which defined who or what constituted that universe. This departure allowed people to construct their own self-conceptions. The evolving self became ever “more individual, more mobile, less constrained by tradition and religion, less confined by role, and less predictable” (Kesten, 2000, p.47). Feudal norms and roles had been destroyed. The feudal regime had been gradually undermined by the new trend of independent thinking and resistance to authority. Once the world was understood mechanistically, such an ideological shift became inevitable. If the vision of the precisely ordered cosmos is destroyed and substituted by an attested scientific interpretation, the former theory of human good and cosmic order has to be transformed as well (Taylor, 1989, p.144).

Human actions and thoughts are confined to minds and disengaged from the outer world. The central idea of “disenchantment” promoted one of the most important developments of the modern era (Kesten, 2000, p. 59). Contrary to the pre-modern view in ordering by human virtues, myth or ritual, social order in the modern west lies in the notion of objectivity and impersonality. Modernism’s liberating vision helped generate a new perception of individual independence. The disengaged human agent is an independent being, in the sense that he was no longer to be understood as a constituent of the ordered cosmos, and not dictated by the cosmic order of which he is an element (Descartes, as cited in Kesten, 2000, p. 31). What goes for the larger order will eventually

be applied also to political society. A new vision of human life emerges in which the would-be sovereign individuals, who see themselves as being set free from attachments to tradition, religion, community or any external authority, is “disenchantment” (Taylor, 1989, p.143). Instead of viewing themselves as constituents of the network and fabric of a meaningful ordered cosmos, individuals saw themselves as quite alienated from one another, and were stripped of the telos once believed to create and include the self (Etzioni, 1996, p. 18). The world was “objectified” by the achievements of early scientists, causing all to be viewed mechanically and functionally as an enormous aggregate of raw materials and natural resources.

A new sense of modern self has been constructed and some prominent scholars such as Heidegger (1977), Foucault (1980) and Taylor (1989) have analyzed its influence on western society. By investigating the modern representation of an intensified concept of self and a set of socioeconomic incentives driving the representation, they argue that the proliferation of modern individualism begun by the Renaissance was not only aroused by but was also a reflection of the change of social structure (Taylor, 1989, p.194). As the western world continued along the road of economic development modern individualism gradually undermined the ideological foundation of the feudal system and contributed to the growth of the capitalist economy. As the limitations of the feudal rules broke down, the modern self was, in theory, free to move around geographically and become involved in the fluid market economy (Kesten, 2000, p. 47).

Thus, there was a significant change in the meaning of both “individual” and

“community”. The modern self was established as entities apart from any traditional authority; they were powerful and autonomous, having priority over any authority and so could freely choose the forms of association to which they would subject themselves. In turn, the community had contributed to the facilitation of individuals’ pursuit of personal goals and desires by being the safeguard/guarantor of the priority of the rights of individuals. Modern communities became an instrument for the less obedient populace and its more sceptical, independent interior--a necessity required so that individuals could pursue their personally chosen purposes in life (Sandel, 1982, p. 147-154).

Individuals were therefore politically free, unencumbered by community, religion, or tradition. They had been set free to construct their own worldview and values to pursue the goals and interests they desired. Individuals would not be persuaded to prioritize the communal goals over their individual needs but were required to respect the rights of other individuals. The relationship of individuals to the outside world used to be stable, and even when the community made costly demands, the individual conformed. On the other hand, in this new culture, interpersonal relations were viewed largely in “contractual” terms, not as in the pre-modern world with its emphasis on interdependence and mutual belonging to the whole community. In an individualist, modern culture, people are more detached from the whole and self-reliance is high (Triandis et al., 1988, p.324-325).

Interpersonal relationships were closer and interdependence was high in pre-modern cultures, whereas there is more disconnection, self-dependence in modern individualist cultures. In pre-modern cultures social relations tended to be long-lasting, spontaneous,

and occur in large groups; in modern western cultures they are more short-term and interest-driven/profit-driven/purposive, occurring in small groups.

Modernism's theory of the self is more de-contextualized, characterized by both detachment from communities and the priority is given to the empowered individual. The individual, once heavily attached to communal goals, has managed to shake off the shackles of communal responsibilities and has become "a self that was isolated, less communal, and more individual – a self that needed guidance; tradition and its moral guidelines were not as available as before. A sense of certainty and truth was lost" (Foucault, as cited in Kesten, 2000, p. 47). It is obvious that in individualistic cultures, people have more rights and fewer obligations in regard to communities and associations. The former understanding of self created and defined by telos was substituted by a new sense that the world has become increasingly complicated, and sources of communal and religious guidance were losing their authority. Wagner says:

Common across these various conceptualizations is the idea that individualistic cultures encourage a definition of self in which people see themselves as being physically distinct and separable from others, and that individuals in such cultures explain behaviors as originating in personal characteristics (2002, p. 317).

There is more detachment, alienation, and self-reliance in modern cultures. Individuals came to be considered isolated beings facing a physical cosmos as a component of a material world without any specific meaning--the world principally supplied social support, resources, and constraints in relation to personal goals and desires.

“A belief that the individual has a primary reality whereas society is a second-order, derived or artificial construct”, is an important aspect of individualism (Bellah et al., 1985, p.334). For the definition of self in culture of this sort, the individual is the central focus and can be understood by examining personal experience (Hamaguchi, 1985; Moore, 1967). As a result, the influence of social constraints and contextual effects are ignored, and instead “the influence of personality traits and similar individual characteristics” are explained as the main factors in social behaviors.

2.2.3 Different Forms of Modern Individualism

It is generally agreed that individualism with an emphasis on the independence of the individual are dominant characteristics of Western culture (Bellah et al., 1985; Oyserman et al., 2002). Defined as the tendency to think of oneself as apart from the larger collective and to subordinate collective pursuits to personal interests (e.g. Triandis et al., 1988; Wagner, 1995), the understanding of modern individualism and its impact on western society has been developed along a shifting socioeconomic structure. Two main forms of individualism are usually distinguished --“utilitarian or instrumental individualism,” and “expressive individualism” (Bellah, et al., 1985; Wilkinson, 1992).

Utilitarian individualism accepts as a given certain personal aspirations and concerns, and portrays human life as an effort by individuals to satisfy these yearnings through individualized pursuits (Bellah et al., 1985). Such a description implies that, utilitarian individualism signifies an emphasis on personal desires and self-interest, and individuals strive to satisfy these interests. The dimension of utilitarian individualism thus portrays

human life as built on the fulfillment of desired satisfaction and distinguishes itself from expressive individualism based on the type of satisfaction being desired (material or emotional) (Wagner, 2002, p.306). In other words, utilitarian individualism entails endeavoring to fulfill personal (material) interests and success (e.g. social fame and high rank) with little concern for others (Billiet, 1995). The concept is closely related to the notion of self-interest and is often viewed as the opposite of the notion of civic duty. “Utilitarian individualism views society as arising from a contract that individuals enter into only in order to advance their self-interest” (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 336). The early ages of utilitarian individualism spurred economic development by joining efforts under industrial capitalism.

“Expressive individualism” is another important form of modern individualism and the Romantic view of human fulfillment is a keyword in understanding “expressive individualism”. This new type of individualism emerged during the Romantic era, which was closer to nature, more personal, and put less emphasis on human rationality (Oyserman, Sakamopo & Lauffer, 1998, p.1607). The Romantic era is generally recognized as having ushered in a higher degree of secularization, replacing Christian salvation with the fulfillment of individual desires on earth. The Romantic era is best known for profusion of art works featuring emotional expressions and human passion. Baumeister argues, “the Romantic concepts of human fulfillment in terms of passionate love and creative work in the context of a rich inner life continue to be our clearest concepts of human fulfillment today” (Baumeister, 1987, p. 167). According to Loosveldt

and Carton expressive individualism refers to the freedom to express oneself. "It holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be expressed" (2002, p. 435). From this expressive standpoint, human life is centered on "self-realization" or the individual expression of personal feelings and emotions.

2.2.4 Materialism

Materialism is defined as the degree to which a person believes that the acquisition and possession of material objects are important to achieve happiness in life or is an indicator of his or her success in life (Chen & Arkin, 2002, p. 389).

In modern industrial societies, the self was split off from all the bonds and restrictions that previously defined them. Individuals, viewed as self-directing, rational sovereigns and managers in charge of their own life's task, became the main actors in the modern drama of self-achievement, measured by economic accomplishments, which were strongly emphasized to a point where one's qualities as a person became directly proportional to one's financial situation (Ewen, 1989, p. 82). Therefore, materialism became a common value orientation among people in industrialized capitalistic cultures (Fromm, 1976).

Extrinsically, material assets and acquisitions are recognized as the symbols by which people achieved financial, professional, or personal power over others: the equation for success. Modern individuals were no longer to be viewed as preset atoms in a broader cosmic order; instead, according to the logic of modern capitalism, people are what they own (Ewen, 1989, p. 82).

By definition, materialists view monetary success and material possessions as central to their lives, essential for their happiness, and crucial in the definition of success (Tybout & Artz, 1994). In other words, materialism is a value orientation that has implications for people's desires, decisions, psychological well-being and social behavior.

When a well formed society is defined as "... one in which people are free to pursue their various aims" (Sandel, 1982, p.116), then it is the responsibility of authorities to guarantee the factors required to assure individuals the right to realize their own ends and goals in life, not to set these goals for them. The previous strong sense, or basic consciousness of mutual belonging to each other, and other life goals such as community and social affiliation have been overpowered by the importance of financial success.

2.2.5 Commodity fetishism

According to Paul Ricoeur, commodity fetishism is a "crucial" notion in understanding ideology in capitalist society (Ricoeur, 1986). In an extended discussion in *Capital*, Marx introduced the concept of "commodity fetishism." For Marx, commodity fetishism is the inclination of people to view the consumer goods of human labor in terms of a relationship between things without an awareness of their productive origins, which is social relationships between humans (Marx, 1976). In other words, people see consumer products only in terms of the characteristics of the final commodity while the production process remains obscured and, therefore, unconsidered (Hudson, 2003). The concept of commodity fetishism is closely related to so-called "consumer capitalism" where the satisfaction derived from consumerism would be routinely erased by realizing the real

nature of social relations hidden behind the production of commodities. Billig refers to consumerism as containing “a collective forgetfulness” (Billig, 1999).

2.2.6 Consumerism and Globalization

Consumerism has always existed in modern American society and its identity becomes clear during periods of economic growth, such as in the 1960s (Herrmann, 1970). One of the earliest adaptors of this term, Vance Packard, relates consumerism to schemes for stimulating consumers to quickly intensify their needs and desires by making them “voracious” and “compulsive” (Packard, 1960). In the 1970s consumerism continued to expand in both scope and support and “appear[ed] to be becoming increasingly institutionalized, as evidenced by the formation at all levels in government of new agencies to represent and protect the consumer interest” (Kangun, Cox, Higginbotham & Burton, 1975). In the article *Consumerism—An Interpretation*, Richard H. Buskirk defines consumerism as “the organized efforts of consumers seeking redress, restitution and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in the acquisition of their standard of living” (Buskirk & Rothe, 1970). In a political economy sense, Benjamin R. Barber offers a simple definition of consumerism as “the transformation of citizens into shoppers” and he further notes that “consumerism encourages a kind of ‘civic schizophrenia’” by which he refers to a dysfunctional psychological situation of citizens as they deny engagement in public participation and civic actions (2008, p.73-75).

The above definitions provide insights into our understanding of consumerism. Yet, it would be naïve to portray consumerism as a movement restricted within American society.

It has had a dynamic past in capitalist countries and continues to evolve and expand its influence and broaden its scope throughout the globe. Along with the current thrust of globalization, consumerism and its value system has been represented and promoted by cultural products such as TV shows, movies, and ubiquitous advertisements of globally marketed products in many countries (Beabout, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999). Commercial mass media plays an important role in promoting capitalist industrial models and consumerist values, which helps “set in motion a self-sustaining spiral of expanding industrial production and expanding consumption, which reciprocally stimulate one another” (Martin, Chaffee & Izcaray, 1976). Some critiques of consumerism mention the social concerns of the long-term negative influences of consumerism, the “distortions and inequities in the economic environment and the declining quality of the physical environment” (Day & Aaker, 1970). The forecast of the ultimate end of consumerism related to social concerns is indicated by Yohalem when he suggests moving “toward alleviating pollution of the air, water and soil...toward educating and training the disadvantaged...toward solving these and other problems of a society strictly of an industrial nature” (1969).

2.2.7 Postmodernist/poststructuralist Thought

The term “postmodernism” first appeared in the 1960s, referring to a distinct feature of art and culture. According to Bauman, art should be considered a paradigm of post-modernity (1988b, p.3). Fewer than thirty years later, the word “postmodern” had penetrated almost every aspect of advanced capitalist societies. In the article

"Postmodernism: Roots and Politics" Todd Gitlin notes that:

'Postmodernism' usually refers to a certain constellation of styles and tones in cultural works; pastiche; blankness; a sense of exhaustion; a mixture of levels, forms, styles; a relish for copies and repetition; a knowingness that dissolves commitment into irony; acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed nature of the work; pleasure in the play of surface; a rejection of history (1989, p. 374).

The term "postmodern" later entered the sociological field in an academic debate. In the article *"Postmodern Ghosts in Sociology"* Kharkhordin notes that:

[Habermas] subsumed his French opponents in a debate on the fate of Enlightenment (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard) under the group name of 'Postmoderns' (see also Bernstein, 1986 and Dews, 1986)

The group was named after the title of the seminal work of Lyotard, who claimed that the breakdown of meta-narratives of progress which gave a coherent set of coordinates to ground different spheres of human activity led to the disintegration of this coherent whole into a pluralism of language games which can no longer be included in one general account. Derrida's work on the deconstruction of binary oppositions pervading western philosophy and Foucault's genealogies of different human practices proposed new standards for philosophy and history (Lyotard 1982. See also Norris 1987. Dreyfus 1982). Since then 'postmodern thought' has sent ripples through all terrains of social inquiry (1991).

Fredric Jameson, author of, *"Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"* labels postmodernism as "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism" (1984, p.85). Further, he defines some constitutive features of postmodernism: the depthlessness in contemporary art and culture, the waning of historicity, the "intensities" of emotions, the constitutive relationships of all this to the new technology, the blurriness of the boundary between high culture and mass culture, and the mission of political art in

late multinational capitalism (1984, p. 58; Derrida, 1981, p.64).

Baudrillard describes “postmodern society” in a similar manner as a society of “the simulacrum, and abstract non-society devoid of cohesive relations, shared meaning, and political struggle” (as cited in Best & Kellner, 1997, p.6). For Baudrillard, as cited by Kellner, postmodernity indicates the turning point where dynamics of development and proliferation reach their limits and start to turn inward, causing “an implosive process devouring all relational poles, structural differences, conflicts and contradictions, as well as ‘truth,’ ‘reality,’ and even ‘power’” (1997). In a political science sense, the radical postmodern critique of art and culture gradually became a radical critique of political institutions that embodied them (Ryan, 1983). In support of postmodern-depthlessness, Turner “locates postmodern culture in a context of disorganized capitalism, of consumer society and cultural mass production” (1990). Bauman suggests that “in the present society, consumer conduct moves steadily into position of, simultaneously, the cognitive and the moral focus of life, integrative bond of the society, and the focus of systemic management” (1988a, p.807). Different from the modernist legitimization of power relations and the ruling class, the postmodern era is characterized by a “legitimization crisis.” According to Kharkhordin, “legitimation as an instrument of power has been replaced by seduction/repression, where consumer seduction plays the upper hand” (1991). Fredric Jameson gives a similar account of postmodern society:

If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today

are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies which constrain our existences, but they no longer need to impose their speech (or are henceforth unable to); and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects not only the absence of any great collective project but also the unavailability of the older national language itself (1984, p.65).

Other labels that are regularly used interchangeably with “postmodern society” include “post-industrial society,” “consumer society,” “media society,” “information society,” “electronic society” or “high-tech” society. Every label has its distinguishing emphasis on one characteristic of the new social system. All these words have become associated with a distinctly radical connotation, disobeying the logic of classic capitalism. As Harvey (1990) notes in his discussion of postmodernism: “The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms” (p.156). Accompanying the development in transnational capitalism and political reconfiguration is the decline of cultural variety which is emerging as a result of new technology. Along with a consumer culture with its uncontrollable flow of goods and information, transnational forms of art and design is the large quantity of commodities and services that cross national boundaries, playing an important role in contemporary world culture.

2.2.8 Present-mindedness

As mentioned earlier, the postmodernist standpoint is often associated with an anti-history connotation. According to Stuart Hall: “Postmodernism attempts to close off

the past by saying that history is finished, therefore you needn't go back to it. There is only the present, and all you can do is be with it, immersed in it....What it says is this: this is the end of the world. History stops with us and there is no place to go after this" (Hall, 1996). Harold Innis termed this type of thinking, present-mindedness, which results in unknowableness in contemporary academia (Innis, 1950). As Baudrillard says, "truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist." "Real life" and objects in the real world are replaced by simulated high-tech inventions, such as virtual images, signs or other simulacra. The world of simulacra for Baudrillard is simply a postmodern world of images without depth, roots, or referent.

2.3 Media Reform, Chinese Petty Bourgeois and *Yearning for Love*

2.3.1 Media Effects Theory

Media effects theory recognizes the link between mass media with its subtle levels of cognition, attitude and behavior in human society (Bryant, J. & Thompson, S., 2002). As media effects research shows, television can be effectively used to measure a broad recognition of desired values and the tendency of mass media to reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes (Paek & Pan, 2004). Hans Enzensberger coined the phrase "consciousness industry" to describe media that function to generate the desired consciousness among its viewership, secures a particular power-relationship in society and maintains the desired status quo for the ruling class (1974). Furthermore, there is a probability that certain values may be produced by mass media with demonstrations of its ability to nurture a social environment compatible with inducing social values considered

desirable social norms (Paek & Pan, 2004). Hence, the widespread consumerist values in media content may inspire its audiences to accept such values and adjust their attitudes and behaviors accordingly.

In the contemporary globalization era, based on a comprehensive research of the interplay between media, culture and society, many media scholars have argued that transnational sharing of media representations constitute shared cultural experiences (e.g., Featherstone, Lash, & Robertson, 1995; Robertson, 1992; Tomlinson, 1999). This argument suggests that the global spread of products that are produced and consumed in consumer capitalist countries, and media content encouraging the popularity of them, provoke a homogenized global consumer culture (Beabout, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999). This implies that a great number of people from different cultural backgrounds across the globe are involved in production-consumption patterns that were formerly only available to capitalist societies. Termed by some as cultural imperialism, this phenomenon will be further elaborated in the following section.

2.3.2 Media Reform of China

Emulating American television shows is not novel in China – it is widely recognized that Da Ying's situation comedy *I Love My Home* (*wo ai wo jia*), broadcast live in 1994, introduced Chinese audiences to American popular media's situation comedy format also known as sitcoms. In the early 1990s Chinese mass media, especially television media, witnessed the rapid development of various broadcasting forms. Soap operas, sitcoms, drama, melodrama, artistic performance, and opera, were

delivered to Chinese audiences from developed capitalist countries in growing numbers each year. Although having a novel form, these shows still contain original Chinese features in terms of program content, which are in sharp contrast with shows produced today. In *Media Commercialization, Entertainment, And the Party-state: The Political Economy of Contemporary Chinese Television Entertainment Culture*, Ruoyun Bai defines the early 1990s as “inaugurating the age of entertainment in China” (2005, p.4). In fact the ultimate purpose of these shows during that period is to improve the overall aesthetic appreciation of the masses and solidify Party rule. In the article *Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China*, L. S. Rofel noted:

Both the institutionalization and the ideological contours of state power are implicated in the decision-making process determining what will be aired on television and how a television series such as *Yearnings* becomes constituted as ‘popular’. As with all state-run work units in China, each television station has a party structure that parallels its administrative structure (1994, p.703).

Along with the president Deng’s promulgation of “taking bolder steps” in economic reform and sanction of the ultimate goal of building a socialist market economy of transnational conglomerates, private enterprise, and foreign investors have started to significantly boost the growth of China’s economy. As reflected in mass media, in the second half of the 1990s and beyond, the policy of “opening the whole country up to the outside world” was followed in every respect so that not only did the form of television programs change, also the story lines, characters, subject matters and themes of television programs have changed significantly since that turning point. Chinese

television stations changed due to intensive pressures from advertising by transnational media conglomerates, and other kinds of media adapt themselves to this new societal environment. Ruoyun Bai notes that:

In 1993 and onwards, in the soaring of advertising revenue for several consecutive years, the proliferation of market-oriented institutional as well as journalistic improvisations, the sharp increase of media outlets, the craze of media to increase revenue by diversifying into other businesses, and above all, the changed ethos of the Chinese media. It was recognized that the media not only were the Party's mouthpiece but also had commodity values (2005, p.5).

With media compartmentalization, media outlets which used to be owned and supervised by the Party and state became privatized or started making their own management decisions and took full responsibility for their own profits and losses. In 2001, an important "proposal," widely known as Document No. 17 was released, which "...set forth general principles for media development" such as "building up cross-medium, cross-regional media conglomerates, allowing outside capital to enter the media industry and allowing media conglomerates to get listed on the stock market" (Bai, 2005, p.11 & 45). The main thrust of these principles is to "encourage cross-regional and cross-media expansion" and loosen control over media capitalization (Bai, 2005, p.11). Only two years after the releasing of No.17 document, dissatisfied with the pace of media reform, top decision makers implemented even more aggressive policies for Chinese media which "urges media to build a wall separating business sections from propaganda and public-interest undertakings, so that business sections can

be run as pure commercial entities and opened up to relatively free capital investment” (Ding, 2004).

In light of capital concentration, media commercialization, and privatization, advertising income gradually became the primary concern of privatized media corporations and regional media organizations. As many scholars in North America have shown with misgivings concerning the mass media of capitalist societies, the constant pursuit of profit has a strong impact on the media products that we consume. Since advertising dollars play a principal role in financing media corporations, advertisers become the first master our media serve. Advertisers, vendors, and audiences play an important role in deciding the life or death of a particular media and they make the final decision of what will be broadcast, deciding “what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed” (Altheide, 1996, p.31). With the development of an “opening-up” process, corporations have gradually obtained power over the nation’s print, radio and Internet media, and when it comes to “... advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The advertiser’s choices influence media prosperity and survival” (Durham & Kellner, 2001, p. 289).

Furthermore, “advertisers are not interested in reaching everyone” (James Curran as cited in Williams, K., 2003, p.89). Only these media consumers who are also potential consumers of an advertiser’s particular product, or have more disposable money than others, are the most favorable audience for advertisers, and therefore, for media

producers. Media companies, whose products can well-suit media consumers drawn from the wealthier stratum of society, will survive in the business battlefield. With a stable free market environment being provided, more commercially run media corporations are taking shape to continuously produce programs and shows catering to audiences with entertainment and promoting consumerist culture necessary to keep the wheel of the advertising industry turning. A Chinese media scholar has observed that:

[Some media firms] buy and sell domestic or foreign television dramas that are particularly entertaining, make daily-run funny shows, establish nationwide distribution networks with television stations....set up highly specialized teams in advertising and communication strategizing, develop derivative television and movie products and so on. They show the media the way to industrialization that has been proven true in real estate and thus help the media on to the road of industrialization (Leng, 2002, p. 88-89).

This new climate puts programs promoting Chinese traditions such as living a simple and frugal life, working hard and building up the country through thrift, at a severe disadvantage. Due to a shortage of advertising investment, their production costs tend to be higher, inhibiting sales, and producing less profit to reinvest in improved program quality (deeper content, distinguished guests, more attractive format, bigger promotion, and the like). As a result, traditional cultural values, originality and creativity are thereby sidelined by money-making, pro-west media products, while the program producers make every effort to cater to audiences and please their advertisers.

In the late 1990s, an increasing number of entertainment shows seized the whole nation's attention; from about 26% out of the total hours of programming in 1992, to 39%

in 1996 and 44% in 2000 (Zhang, 2002). If we take a closer look at these popular programs, it is obvious that such a sharp increase can be attributed to many cloned foreign entertainment shows. The successful launch of some game shows such as, *Mei Gui Zhi Yue /Dating with Rose* (a clone of ABC's match-making program *The Dating Game*), *Kai Xin Ci Dian/Happy Dictionary* (a clone of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*), and *Yi Shu Ren Sheng/Artistic Life* (an *Oprah* clone), soon gave rise to a national cloning mania.

Not only game shows, but also other program formats continued to find their prototypes from Europe, Japan and the U.S., including reality shows, and television serials. In terms of program content, these new genres are decidedly different from early copies in which their content is pro-west and feature the "multicultural" elements of capitalist countries. If we also take into consideration the proliferation of infotainment and entertainment-oriented information programs (celebrities, home decoration, fashion, hairdressing, sports, and fitness shows), as well as the transformed image of television media caused by an awareness of its commercial identity and branding, it is clear that Chinese mass media has been gradually internationalized in the new climate of economic reform and media commercialization.

This noticeable change in Chinese media brings cultural imperialism under the spotlight, which is:

The sum processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured,

forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centres of the system (Schiller, 1976, p. 9).

Cultural imperialism involves a shift in the broadcasting, or reportage/coverage of the print media, and re-prioritizes a given culture's own original cultural products towards an emphasis on American-led capitalistic ideology. The phenomenon of cultural imperialism kindles severe protests against perceived negative influence on global cultural diversity, equity, and democracy. Through the development of modern human history an alarming fact is that since the Industrial Revolution many cultures around the globe have been affected by capitalism (Zhang, 2006). De Glazia, author of *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through 20th-Century Europe*, characterizes U.S. consumer culture in a negative light, calling it a "Trojan horse." By shattering Europe's cultural roots and inculcating American consumerism among the masses, the U.S. "established its legitimacy as the world's first regime of mass consumption" (2005, p. 5).

As noted by some Chinese scholars, "television drama is the primary source of revenue for a television station, as they bring in more than half of the total, and the advertising dollars earned by prime-time television dramas amount to about 10 times of the purchase price" (Wang 2003; Zhao & Ma 2003). In this light, "not only do television stations increase television drama screening, but they also increasingly adopt the market's logic when choosing which television drama to air" (Bai, 2005, p. 29). Of various kinds of television programs, television dramas take the lion's share of audience ratings and thus are the program genre which is extensively cloned from foreign

countries. Since television stations self-made television dramas, and those exchanged from other provincial stations, cannot fulfill market demand, most television stations now purchase their dramas externally (Zhao & Ma, 2003). Additionally, borrowing successful program formats and storylines from the west as well as Japan and Korea will significantly cut down production cost and is simpler and faster to be put into media market.

Advertisers are heavily involved in choosing which dramas to purchase. Audience ratings, story plots, star line-up, directors, and potential advertising income are all important factors affecting the final purchase decisions. As a result, “youth idol” dramas (a popular television clone originating in Japan and Korea featuring good-looking youth, wealthy family circumstances and love affairs), urban family sitcoms, and other cloned dramas, seem very popular among the most salient drama genres. Changtian Wang, president of Enlight Media, a leading independent program supply firm, has been closely following major US and Taiwanese production companies in terms of their media strategies, and programs, observing how they package programs and creative elements (Shun & Cai, 2004).

As Chinese mass media employ various formats to provide audiences with more information, they also pay more attention to the content preferences and needs of the audience (Lin & Jeffres, 2001). By using some research mechanisms, mass media establish more effective ways to gather audience feedback and act more responsively to the information needs of the audience (Ku, 2006, p.1). In this light, the popularity of

consumption-related media content also reflects the globalized audience taste and popular culture in contemporary Chinese society.

2.3.3 Chinese “Petty Bourgeois” — Xiao Zi

Originally “Xiaozi” was simply a Chinese translation of petty bourgeois (also *petit bourgeoisie*), referring to a social class intermediate between proletariat and bourgeois (Karl Marx, 1849). According to Lenin, the term refers to a transitional class who do not need to sell their labor force and individuals under this category are largely self-employed and own or rent small means of production (1944). They were not directly involved with the exploitation of surplus value extracted from the proletariat, but yet were viewed as “bourgeois” due to their lifestyle based on upper-class conditions. Marx believed that the petty bourgeois only formed in “countries where modern civilization has become fully developed” and the class would eventually disappear because political forces upon them would cause them to make a clear-cut choice between the bourgeois and the proletariat (1943).

As China continues along the road of being “Open to the outside world,” the label of *petite bourgeois* has been transplanted into China and subjected to changes in meaning due to China’s particular social environment. In contemporary China, the phrase “petty bourgeois” refers to the group of people who “enjoy a way of life associated with the perceived lifestyles of petty bourgeois in the past” (Bao, 2008). Despite differences of opinion as to the features and inceptions of petty bourgeois, it is generally agreed that it has become a cultural phenomenon in Chinese society (Zhang, Wang & He, 2005). A

typical characteristic of petty bourgeois is that of people belonging to this group intentionally distinguish themselves from the masses and who are willing to be labeled as “middle-class” based on their refined taste on quality-of-life issues (Zheng, 2008). Within modern Chinese society, a singular aesthetic taste controls the petty bourgeois to the point where they have become addicted to minute details of quality-of-life issues and cease to have political agency in the social world (Bao, 2008; Chen, 2004; Zhang & Zhu, 2007).

Zhiyuan Cui, professor of *Qinghua University*, introduced to many, a newly explored institutional framework, namely that the petty bourgeois has a set of desirable characteristics and a ‘well-off’ society” is [petty bourgeois society] (as cited in Cao, 2004). According to him, “petty bourgeois” can be equated with middle class, and he further distinguishes it as a transitional class between a “new middle-class” and an “old middle-class.” Different from the traditional sociological sense of “new middle-class” including university graduates, professors, engineers and white-collar workers; “old middle-class” consisting of “artisans, shopkeepers and peasants” (1943), Cui includes peasants in Chinese petty bourgeois because most Chinese peasants possess small production properties (e.g. farming tools).

Emerging in the changing climate of contemporary China, the Chinese petty bourgeoisie, as a social class, is still taking shape and is continually enriched with new cultural elements and characteristics. Though it is difficult to describe with exactitude, in the article *Shanghai Weekly: globalization, consumerism, and Shanghai popular*

culture, Yaming Bao pictures a general image of several aspects of petty bourgeois tastes and manners:

Many of them have a 'global' professional background, such as working in foreign enterprises or joint ventures involved in international services and communication. Some may have no actual experience related to foreign enterprises, but they admire, and would like to lead, a cosmopolitan or international lifestyle (2008, p. 560).

Mei Yuan, author of "*Petty Bourgeoisie and Petty Bourgeoisie Taste*" in the *Perspective of the Culture of Appreciation of Beauty*" states:

They are a combination of western culture and Chinese petty bourgeoisie, mainly existing among white-collar workers and the intellectual stratum in developed cities, characterized by pursuing one's idiosyncraticized spiritual freedom, exotic taste and refined lifestyle. It (Xiaozi) is also characterized by worshipping western culture and rejecting traditional Chinese culture, being adept in making romantic metropolitanized tone and taste (2005, p.91).

Mei Yuan also clearly points out at the end of the article that it is also necessary to realize the negative effects of "petty bourgeois taste" on the cultural identity of Chinese society because the pro-west lifestyle immediately rejects traditional Chinese values and collectivist thoughts (2005).

Zhongquan Chen, a writer and scholar for the Party School, the propaganda institution of the Communist Party of China, categorized petty bourgeois taste as "a cultural concept of aesthetics, which consists of some special life habits. Petty bourgeois taste is a romanticized lifestyle superior to a realistic standard." He further explores this concept through cultural perspectives concluding that petty bourgeois taste is a

“beautification of daily life, materialization of aesthetic pursuit”. He defines the Xiaozi phenomena as a “Capitalization of modern aesthetics” because the former high spiritual activity is “secularized” and its aura is removed by penetrating into every details of daily life. He accuses consumerism of splitting aesthetics from the petty bourgeois phenomena, “lapsing into a superficial feeling of material life” (Chen, 2004, p.22).

In the article *Cultural Analysis of Xiaozi in the Contemporary Communication Community*, Jian Zhen adds the prefix “post-modern” to Xiaozi and contextualizes this category within the framework of “globalization, marketization and urbanization”, describing it as a cultural phenomenon characterized by “consumerist and materialist inclinations/preference/tendency” (2008, p.41).

2.3.4 *Yearning for Love* and its Social Impact

A Chinese version of *Sex and the City*--*Yearning for Love* (literally *hao xiang hao xiang tan lian ai* in Chinese) is chosen as the study focus. This popular television series is directed by Xingang Liu, who was a photographer of Xiaogang Feng’s comedies. *Yearning for Love* inspires my study is because, as Thomas Lindlof says, it is “the composite ideal of a phenomenon”(2005); a successful clone of the American television series, *Sex and the City*, not only in terms of characters and plots, but more importantly in that of the explicit individualist, consumerist, utilitarian and materialist values contained in the show. I will attempt to demonstrate how the phenomenon of program cloning has, at least in part, given rise to the high degree of pro-American values and beliefs that are widely spread in Chinese culture.

Another reason for choosing this show is because it embodies many dominant ideological trends in contemporary Chinese society, especially in the large cities poised at frontiers of “opening to the outside world” and it specifically targets women and objectifies women through promoting a male-centered perspective through the entire series.

The *Yearning for Love* television drama premiered on South Television Station (TVS-4), November 2004, and was one of the highest-rated television shows. Beginning as a “program for the few” (Tong & Wei, 2004), it was broadcast on regional television stations. The show quickly rocketed to a rating of 5.5% points in Guangdong province alone. Based on a quantitative report of television series on 156 channels in 33 cities in 2004, a total of 1598 Chinese television series broadcast from 17:00-24:00 were selected and the average rating for these was 2.74% (Bi, 2005). *Yearning for Love* leapt into the forefront of the nation’s popular media culture, and was featured on goo network - the biggest online video channel in Japan - with a new name, *Love and the City*, a more proximate translation of its western version. The viewer response and impact set the highest record in contemporary television shows in China. It was reported by TVS that “quite a few audiences phoned in and asked for rebroadcast in the daytime (the show was normally broadcast in the evening), or at least two episodes everyday so as to avoid eagerness (for what would happen in the next episode)” (Sun, 2004). After its debut on a provincial television station *Yearning for Love* quickly became one of the most watched series, has broadcast on other regional television stations, and eventually

Central Television. The series was described by a professor of Ji'nan Univesity as “a romantic period” (Tong & Wei, 2004), by the *Yangcheng Evening News* as a show that is “love encyclopaedia of woman” (Tong & Wei, 2004), and the *Nanfang Daily* as selling the right to broadcast at a “sky price” [a Chinese idiom, referring to a very high price] (Sun & Cai, 2004).

As an influential television drama within the emerging pro-west social climate in China, *Yearning for Love* had a significant impact on ongoing social reform debates and added new dimensions to our understanding of contemporary popular culture within changing Chinese society. It also provides an intriguing picture of a traditional culture being situated in the overwhelming U.S.-led global cultural capitalism.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

As media research has demonstrated, television can be an effective instrument enabling a broad recognition of socially desired values (Paek & Pan, 2004). Hence, in devising the most suitable methodology it is necessary to select one that allows me to identify media devices employed by program producers who articulate and disseminate particular values resetting the desired social norm. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed to explore discursive practices aimed at revealing how the often opaque power relationships are formulated in social discourse perpetuating stereotypical social inequities and injustices (van Dijk, 2000). CDA offers a reminder of the extent to which discourses in many a field may be directly and indirectly shaped to serve the interests of the ruling class and social elites. It strives to identify the hidden socio-political connections, which proponents of CDA believe actively constructs society on some level.

As an academic approach that moves fluidly between different disciplines and incorporates methods of other studies, it is quite hard to give a clear definition of CDA. As one of the earliest to adopt the term, Fairclough provides a classic theorization that includes the most important qualities of CDA:

[CDA is the study of] often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power (1995, 132-133).

By this definition, language is viewed as “a form of social practice” by proponents of CDA (Fairclough, 1989; 2001) and its aim, as elaborated by Batstone is:

...to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert, they are elusive of direct challenge, facilitating what Kress calls the ‘retreat into mystification and impersonality’ (1995, p. 198-199).

Social texts always involve power relationships and ideology because people often subconsciously place themselves into some historical, socio-political environment and their knowledge base and social positions vary. This not only explains why social relationships and power inequities are significant in social discourse, but also the reason why texts are interpreted differently by individuals from different backgrounds.

The exposure of “covert perspectives” is especially significant for media studies as “there is a tendency of mass media to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them” (Paek & Pan, 2004). Biased opinions and stereotypical thinking in the contemporary media community enable such covert presentations that are further enhanced by new production technologies and techniques. This is potentially more perilous as texts can be “biased” in ways that are subtle, preventing easy identification of evidential traces of that bias held by privileged social groups and the ruling elites. Relating this social perception with media theory, the desired values disseminated by mass media can function to maintain power imbalances among its viewership and perpetuate the status quo.

With this in mind I have chosen to apply CDA as the methodology to analyze a popular Chinese version of *Sex and the City*, *Yearning for Love*, which has sparked a nationwide “petty bourgeois” zeal and achieved extraordinary ratings. Before introducing concrete methodological steps, it is necessary to briefly review some relevant media studies

that have been done. The first one, entitled “*Narrating a Happy China through a Crying Game: A Case Study of Post-Mao Reality Shows*,” was completed in 2006 by Hui Xiao. He analyzes a Chinese version of *American Idol*, *Super Girl Singing Contest*, from a critical viewpoint. The work addresses how television shows triggered audiences’ emotional investment and intensified sentiments, and how the show articulates a nationwide mania achieving extraordinary ratings as well as being a phenomenal commercial success. He specifically details how melodramatized sentiments aroused by this show contribute to socioeconomic discourses.

Drawing from Stuart Hall’s notion of “popular culture” in his work *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (1996), Xiao attempts to illustrate how the *Super Girl Singing Contest* fulfilled the dreams of Chinese intellectuals for pro-west democracy through the use of global flows of ideoscapes, or the notion of “the Enlightenment worldviews in which democracy is a central term” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 37). The show constructs a sense of “self” and a marketable individual seeking a distinct personality more than anything else, all in perfect conformity with the neoliberal market economy of post-Mao China. Xiao attempts to demonstrate that by impressing the audience of 400 million people, the televisual representation of intensified emotions involves audiences in a “message voting” process, which has been flaunted as a typical sign of pro-west democracy (Yu, 2005; Zhao, 2005 & Zheng, 2004, as cited by Xiao, 2006). Applicants ranging from four-year-olds to eighty-nine-year-old females, in the five large cities of Guangzhou, Zhengzhou, Changsha, Hangzhou and Chengdu participated in the first round competition of the show, which spread a sense that everyone could be a star to its wide viewership. By re-contextualizing audience reception of the *Super Girl Singing Contest*, a projection of instant fame fantasies is constructed through television mediation.

According to Xiao, the emotional dialectic of excessive tears and joys aroused by this popular show are not simply a phenomenological account of the event; it is primarily a discursive strategy illuminating how emotional involvement is used to construct a sense of democratic participation and legitimate “the subject-making forces of the alliance of globalizing market economy and state ideology” (2006, p.60). Message voting, or other active reactions evoked by melodramatized televisual representation, is a means through which one-night fame fantasies are simulated. Several representative selections of the show were extracted to exemplify how the unique game rules engender a nationwide movement of democracy fantasy and “modern political enlightenment.” Xiao describes this in terms of “democratized melodrama and melodramatized democracy”, which is the “most bizarre yet most popular with both average TV audiences and elite intellectuals.”

A critical perspective is used to examine the extent to which media technology can project the fantasy of modern citizenry and create emotional involvement among wide audiences. Xiao’s analysis of melodramatic effects situates the study of media representation within a critical frame of media analysis. Of all the new television spirits projected onto the melodramatic narratives, the one of “self” seems the most popular with the younger generation of Chinese audiences. New connotations created by this narrative of self have far reaching implications beyond the original meaning. Drawing upon the concept of Christine Gledhill’s “individual ego and performance,” Xiao introduces Linda Williams’ analysis of the reliance on personality in the melodramatic mode and illustrates how a “super girl” competitor’s distinct personality is constructed or melodramatized from the very shallow televised representation of her physical looks and exteriority, promoting a new standard of value. How they look and the individual embodiment of their unique characteristics become “the measure of all things” (Williams, 1998).

Ruoyun Bai's comprehensive examination of contemporary Chinese television entertainment culture in 2005 uncovers the interplay of the dynamics between entertainment culture, media commercialization and state ideology. A critical framework is used to examine the way television strategies mediated the shows. Akin to American cultural values, in both the representation of modern Chinese popular culture and in its overwhelming acclaim of American capitalist culture, commercial mechanisms underlie the television media.

In news reporting a dramatic storyline and a human interest angle are extensively used. Another side effect of infotainment shows is media commercialization: the result of media reform since the late 1990s. Chinese media, as opposed to Western media conglomerates, must serve both the Party, and the advertisers. In this light, entertainment shows seem to be a favorable choice for the Chinese media since they "please the Party best when they perform well in the market" (Bai, 2005). Since China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) the commercialization of mass media is made partly in accordance with WTO rules, and perhaps even more importantly, attributed to the wide recognition of the neo-liberal market economy that justifies the shallow media culture in favor of entertainment without seemingly violating the one-Party ideology or the market economy principle.

The key purpose of this research is to study the ways in which the commercial mechanism of entertainment media culture works: specifically, how pro-west media content is promoted to present a new image of modern Chinese culture and the impact this media culture has in supporting the arguments of one-party proponents. The point of this study is to demonstrate that such a culture change, including the extensively cloned programs and some game-centered shows, on the surface seems to conform to the historical

trend of the times and satisfy the needs of the Chinese people. In fact, the commercialization of modern Chinese media is more open to economic and political functions when analyzed through a “party-state” framework, than when it is limited to the more common critiques of media regulation and objectivity principles.

In another study based on analyses of some popular television series, e.g. *Meteor Garden* (*liu xing yua huan*), which achieved unprecedented ratings as well as phenomenal commercial success, researcher Tao Liu, in his article *Reflections on the Development of Chinese Youth Idol Plays*, looks into the cultural background within which popular television shows emerged and developed. This study concentrates on the overwhelming power of post-modern industrial civilization as an essential element of the cloning and formulization of media culture. The case studies are representative television shows taken from China Central Television Station (CCTV): *Miss Pinky* (*fen hong nv lang*), *How to Save You? My Lover* (*na shen me zheng jiu ni, wo de ai ren*) and *Time Flows like Water* (*si shui nian hua*). All three examples are based on popular novels and were commercially financed to be televised. This study centers on identifiable pro-west features of Chinese media discourse embodied in televisual representation through re-contextualizing and analyzing these media products under China’s new cultural climate. The study shows how re-contextualization affects both the meaning of original work and the cultural values contained in the media representations.

The study concludes that the commercial mechanism underlying the media community is inseparably connected to the culture of capitalization inherent in the logic of contemporary Chinese media discourse. The media production process is viewed as an imbalanced form of mass production in which first-world countries exercise control by directing media content, by influencing mainstream elite culture and constructing

ideologies that entail commodity fetishism: the core value of capitalism. This power allows U.S.-led global capitalism to affect cultural values carried by mass media, thereby indirectly affecting the socioeconomic discourses of other cultures. This critical framework is employed to examine media change, or strategic mechanism by which this occurs, which is done through a rigorous examination of several media shows.

These studies have contributed to our understanding of critical analysis, taking the lead on the application of a critical analytical framework in television media. However, print media is still the predominant site for applying CDA and contemporary mass communication scholarship has tended to deemphasize the necessity of linking CDA with audio-visual media products. This phenomenon is partially reasonable because written texts of print media are relatively more accessible for discourse analysis compared to the spoken language and the semiotic symbols of televised media. A detailed analysis of television media products would require much more work and the addition of analytical tools that need to be applied to both the spoken language and visual semiotic signs that are too ambitious for the analysis of a complete television series. Therefore, instead of elaborating the complex details of every single episode of the entire series, I will critically analyze some fragments of the show, *Yearning for Love*, directed by Xingang Liu and scripted by Qiang Li, that may be taken as typical of the consumer capitalist discourse in Chinese media today. The author will also be responsible for providing a close translation from Chinese to English of the lines and voiceover under analysis. This television series is chosen because it embodies many of the ideological tendencies toward capitalist culture in Chinese society and also because it is typical of a production mode in most popular Chinese television today: cloning successful media products of developed capitalist countries such as America and Japan. By restricting the analytical observations to a few typical clips, this

study attempts to identify the devices of capitalist cultural imperialism hidden in popular media products.

This study is significant in many ways. First, it will further research the complex dynamics between mass media and popular culture and explore the significant impact of consumer capitalism on China. Second, this study will certainly enrich the body of Chinese research in the field of Chinese television media. The findings of this study may also provide thought-provoking insights into the broad debate over the emergence of feminism in modern China. Finally, the majority of media studies on cultural imperialism have been done in countries with a past colonial history in terms of post-colonialism: for example, India. There are few studies about cultural imperialism in modern China and its impact on and interaction with the Chinese mass media. This thesis will attempt to bridge this gap by examining the capitalist cultural elements disseminated by mass media and therefore reveal the phenomenon of cultural imperialism in contemporary China.

The subject matter of this study is a popular television series, *Yearning for Love* (Simplified Chinese: 好想好想谈恋爱; pinyin: hao xiang hao xiang tan lian ai; literally “Deeply Want to Fall in Love”), which is defined by the director as a Chinese version of “*Sex and the City*.” CDA will be employed to reveal how media texts are articulated so that latent capitalist values and beliefs can be covertly expressed. According to Thomas N. Huckin there are four steps of critical discourse analysis, of which some of the levels are multi-faceted, and the first two are most important and will be applied in this research:

1. General Strategy:

- Step 1: Read the text uncritically

- Step 2: Raise questions and look at the text critically and in detail

2. The Text as a Whole:

-
- a). Categorize the text genre (text type)
 - b). Framing: how the content of a text is presented; the perspective the writer takes. One particularly powerful way of framing a text is through the use of visual aids such as long-shots or a close-up
 - c). Foregrounding: emphasizing certain concepts by giving them textual prominence
 - d). Backgrounding: de-emphasizing other concepts. One ultimate form of backgrounding is omission: leaving certain things out of a text
 - e). Presupposition: the use of language in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there is no alternative
- (1997)

Huckin's step-by-step outline for CDA analysis is a framework to analyze television media language through a systematic set of analytical steps that disclose what is hidden and unveil the institutionalized stereotypes presented in the formulation of media discourse. Relating Huckin's analytical model to my own research is a valuable framework for performing a critical analysis of media text. Before starting my analysis, the first step is to watch the television series as a typical audience member and comprehend it as a whole. In this preliminary stage, the focus is upon the panoramic view of the show, identifying the major storylines and main plot developed through the interactions between characters. After a long primary period of uncritical viewing, I will step back from the show and look at it critically by raising questions on the genre, framing, foregrounding/backgrounding and any angles presented, the particular emphasis or intentional omissions, or the presuppositions that are taken for granted.

In this analysis the focus will be on 1) the genre of *Yearning for Love* and observing how the show conforms to it; 2) how the main characters and plotlines of *Yearning for Love* are presented, what kind of perspective or bias the producer is taking; 3) certain cultural values that are emphasized or de-emphasized by televisual prominence or omissions; and 4) the use of televisual presentation in a way that appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if

that is the natural way of thinking. Due to the special nature of television media, some additional questions pertaining to spoken language and semiotic aspects also need to be examined such as turn-taking, topic management, metamessages, intonation, politeness and so on (Tannen, 1990; Levinson, 1983).

Other than scientific research, CDA does not offer a specific answer to analytic problems. It is nothing more than a manner of questioning some ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a text or behind the choice of text type, wording and certain ideas taken for granted. Simply put, CDA provides us with a way of discourse interpretation while keeping post-modern theories in mind, which equate every interpretation with reality (Kellner, 1994).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The analysis of a television show falls under two main dimensions, the visual and audio. The visual comprises television scenes displaying the daily activities of the main characters, the background settings of their lives, work place, and social interactions captured through the use of techniques such as slow motion, tracking shots, close-ups, and so on. The audio dimension includes dialogue, inner monologues, voiceovers, background music and lyrics. I will focus on these two primary dimensions to highlight how they construct the typical consumer driven American individualist televisual text with audio effects.

Drawing from Thomas N. Hucking's critical discourse steps, I will closely analyze the television series *Yearning for Love*, starting with features associated with the show as a whole (its genre, framing, foregrounding/backgrounding, omission, presupposition, etc.). In this chapter, the lines and voiceover under analysis are closely translated from Chinese to English by the author.

4.1 Genre

In the article *Communications, Values, and Popular Television Series—A Twenty-Five Year Assessment and Final Conclusions*, James W. Chesebro notes:

These producers [of these primetime dramatic network programs] intentionally formulate and portray certain values as more desirable than others. In this sense, certain kinds of characters and plot developments are designed to foster and to reinforce certain value judgments but not others (2003, p368).

The television series, *Yearning for Love*, presents a number of characters, of whom four are prominent, professional women Ailin Tan, Minglang Li, Na Mao and Chun Tao. The show explores their inner world and emotional pursuits through a series of stories. Hence, the main characters and the values they present will be, for most audiences, interpreted as “foreground values”, while negative characters, their opinions, and thoughts will be “background values”.

In *Yearning for Love* the producer chooses to foreground four independent modern professional women and their restless search for loving partners; their social lives and daily activities are prominently contextualized. The show, in particular, focuses on narrating the main characters’ emotional experiences with various male partners and their views and opinions on relationships between men and women, rather than how they achieve successful careers or their filial relationships with parents or relatives. Indeed, except for introducing their job titles as personal background information in the first episode, their work achievements are only rarely mentioned in the fourth episode.

In the third and sixth episodes, scenes accompanied by voiceovers of the publication of Ailin Tan’s book, and a book signing are used to lay the groundwork for future plots. The primary focus of the episodes is still on the dynamics between men and women. Ailin Tan and Yuefeng Wu’s parents only show up once, separately in episode three and episode sixteen, they are met unexpectedly by main characters on the street, and walk away after a casual chat, or appear in a few scenes accompanied with voiceovers briefly describing their marriage as an ideal model for Ailin Tan. Minglang Li’s mother and Na Mao’s

cousin take up relatively more plot time in episode one and eighteen, but they still function as supporting roles and both Tan and Mao have quarrels with their family due to conflicts related to personal issues (See Appendix A).

Although Chun Tao is described as traditional, expecting women to be dutiful wives and devoted mothers, her family is never mentioned through the entire series. Supporting characters and some negative roles are therefore “backgrounded” for their minor importance while their “defects” are sometimes emphasized through exaggeration. The director also chooses to depict the four women through favorable terms such as “intelligent,” “independent” “successful”, and so on; and most of the “other” characters are cast in unfavorable terms such as, “cynic,” “gold digger”, and “toady.” Traditional Chinese cultural values are completely left out because a petty bourgeoisie lifestyle based on material wealth is emphasized. Consumer culture and individualism in particular, are promoted, directly conflicting with the harmony-oriented, collectivist, Chinese cultural norms.

4.2 Framing

The television program formula described above obliges the producer to attach unequal importance to different characters through intentional portrait sketches and plot arrangements, with the main characters and their stories serving to create a frame for the show. In *Yearning for Love* the producer clearly chooses to frame the four main characters as a group of open-minded, independent modern Chinese women who are talented, achieve career success, and enjoy leading a cosmopolitan life. Every episode is based on

the relationship dynamics between the main characters and a diverse range of men engaging in different occupations such as, a real estate developer, musician, actor, architect, college professor, television program host, athlete, and artist. The age of the supporting characters varies and they come from different family backgrounds, but most of these characters belong to the white-collar stratum with high incomes, as is the case for the four main characters. The entire television series is devoted through dialogue and voiceover to details of the main characters' social lives in high end settings. This framing succeeds in restricting television content to Chinese upper-class discourse and drawing attention away from the more "down-to-earth" aspects of the real lives of Chinese people, such as work and family life, which are not valued in this show.

4.3 Special Shooting Effects

Close-up and slow motion are the most frequently employed strategies to set up the frames just discussed and foreground certain values. Examples and details will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Foregrounding/Backgrounding

As mentioned above, *Yearning for Love* foregrounds four independent, freethinking professional women and their consumption-based upper-class lifestyle and in so doing, it "backgrounds" labor and the ordinary lives of the working-class and emotional attachments with the family. Enumerated below are examples of devices the show deploys to implement the overall frame that foregrounds the consumerist lifestyle and individualism of the main characters, while backgrounding practical work and family life.

4.4.1 Foregrounding Bourgeois Lifestyle

As mentioned in the literature review, a typical petty bourgeois lifestyle is a consumption-based way of life. Examples of televisual representations of this lifestyle include: television discourse such as characters' lines, off-screen voiceover and monologues advocating consumerist leisure and expensive taste based on material wealth; brand-name personal belongings and ever-changing looks of characters show the latest fashion trends. Representations also include special visual effects or repetitive scenes detailing materialist consumption such as a lush dining room, fashionable costumes, luxury accessories, and so on, and elitist gatherings for fashion shows, art exhibitions and literary discussions among social elites. Thus, some plots, scenes, television dialogues and voiceover are chosen from the fourth episode to exemplify how life based on material consumption is foregrounded in *Yearning for Love*. The subtitle of episode four is *Secret Lover* and its main plot is:

Ailin Tan and Yuefeng Wu have their first official date but Tan suspects Wu is keeping her a secret from his friends. Mingling Li meets a famous actor--Yuan Gao, for a romantic relationship, which turns out to be rather unglamorous since Gao is hiding Li from his social circle. Chun Tao secretly keeps her "office affair" with her boss, but he soon ends this illicit relationship (Li, 2004, episode 4).

In contrast to the simple narration, the televisual representation is much more glamorous and abundant in the details of the main characters' lifestyle. Ailin Tan and Yuefeng Wu's first official date starts at a bowling alley and they share a candlelight

dinner after the games. The television camera slowly moves from some foreign wine bottles and stemmed goblets towards the two characters eating western cuisine with forks and knives while sipping red wine from elegant goblets. Later, Yuefeng Wu asks Tan if she wants to go horse-riding with him, which is an expensive new form of entertainment in China.

The romance between Minglang Li and Yuan Gao begins with a dinner in an elegant restaurant. As with the previous characters, they eat with forks and knives instead of the chopsticks most Chinese people use. Later, they meet in front of a theatre where Gao rehearses his role. When the two characters are talking, the camera keeps zooming out till a full view is displayed of the theatre's Romanesque architectural style. Minglang Li feels upset for being hidden as an "unpresentable" lover and talks with Ailin Tan about this over dinner. Again, forks and knives are used and each individual has her own portion of food placed in a round plate in front of her, which is different from the Chinese tradition of sharing from a common dish, usually placed in the middle of the dinner table. After the meal, Yuefeng Wu dates Ailin Tan in a fashionable bar. Ailin Tan is cross and storms out of the bar when she suddenly realizes that she is only one of Wu's many female partners. Although there are only a few interactions taking place in the bar, western elements are easy to spot in the background setting of a cabinet stocked with bottles of foreign wine, with an up-tempo electronic score playing.

After seeing Wu, Tan goes to another bar for a "discussion on literature" and when a man asks her what she'd like to drink she immediately tells him, "Jack Daniel's." Tan has

a discussion with a couple of people who claim they are from a “literary circle”, a word suggestive of high-brow culture, though their conversation seems to be flirtatious. Chun Tao’s “office affair” is mainly recounted through voiceovers, but in one of the few shots of them, Tao is asked by her boss to acquire information about a new type of software developed by Microsoft.

This is a typical episode of *Yearning for Love*, and through the entire episode, main characters drift in and out of various expensive restaurants and stores, socialize with upper-class socialites, and experience new and exciting modes of entertainment in varied leisure spots. The glamorous lifestyles of the main characters, as presented through television camera shots, repeatedly send a message of happiness based on material wealth.

Audiences of *Yearning for Love* are constantly bombarded with scenes representing a bourgeois way of life; so many in fact that almost every minute detail of their social activities and personal belongings is “Euramericanized”, even their living spaces. From some random shots, it is clear that Ailin Tan lives in an elegant apartment with western-style furnishings. There is a scene in this episode of Ailin Tan, Na Mao and Chun Tao having a chat in Tan’s apartment, sitting in front of a decorative fake fireplace with several picture frames on the mantelpiece (episode 4). Minglang Li is portrayed as the most career-driven character in this show and while the interior decor of her apartment is not as fashionable as Tan’s, it features a functional modern style with a fashionable bar counter added to her kitchen. Partly due to Na Mao’s open attitude towards relationships

and her occupation as a fashion stylist, her private space is quite unique with an indeterminably vague decor. However, western visual elements are still noticeable through a variety of cosmetic bottles, strewn on Mao's dresser, with English letter/alphabet words on them. Several giant posters and photographs of occidental fashion models are also prominent. High quality furnishings can be found in Chun Tao's home, contrasted with feminine objects such as plush toys, colored glass framed in Rococo style windows, and a four poster bed with a white canopy, signifying her romantic "fairy-tale princess" fantasy in tune with her "dutiful wife and devoted mother" trait. Chun Tao uses a poster of a French movie, *Amelie from Montmartre*, a modern-version "Cinderella story" (Lianhe Morning News, 2002), to decorate her room.

Besides these visual details, voiceovers are another technical device to complement the characters' "western" background or lifestyles. Chun Tao has an "international" professional background involving the most recent development in information technology. Although the other three characters do not have a personal contact with western countries, they all maintain personal relationships with people who have experiences in English-speaking countries. For example, in episode ten, Na Mao falls in love with Hanwen Chen who comes back to China from America for a hometown visit, and she tells Ailin Tan that she may move to America; in episode seven, a friend of Chun Tao, Xiaozhen Wang arrives with her boyfriend, Xindong Zhou, as "overseas returnees" from Canada, a term referring to some Chinese people who come back to China after living in foreign countries; in episode sixteen, Ailin Tan feels upset with Yuefeng Wu

because he suddenly decides to move to America without asking for her opinion; in episode twenty-nine, Chun Tao's fiancé, Kai Deng, introduces his American friend, Mike, to Tao and her three best friends, and Mike seems to have a crush on Na Mao when they first meet.

Throughout the show characters hardly hold back their admiration for Western (American) culture and intentionally show the enjoyment or satisfaction derived from an Americanized lifestyle. Their distinguished bourgeois-taste saturates every detail of their life: they use French or American cosmetics, read *Vogue*, care very much about new fashion trends in the west, watch Hollywood movies and American soap operas, dine in western-style restaurants, using forks and knives, sip American brand wines from goblets, and keep up to date with high-tech products such as, mobile phones and laptops.

Yearning for Love has been criticized for copying the American television show *Sex and the City* since its premiere, and interestingly, audiences can find several scenes in which television sets have *Sex and the City* on. For example, in episode One, Na Mao watches *Sex and the City* in her cousin's home, and later they have a quarrel instigated by opposite views towards the four characters of the American show. In this episode, Minglang Li's television is simultaneously playing *Sex and the City* in the lower right corner when Minglang Li makes lemon tea and talks with Yuan Gao. The director of the show, Xingang Liu, freely admits that "not only is *Yearning for Love* plotted according to *Sex and the City* but the storylines and characters are also copied from it" (Emphasis mine). He defines *Yearning for Love* as a Chinese-version of *Sex and the City* (Hua, 2008,

p.64). Candid as he is, it is still quite audacious of him to insert the original show into his cloned version and even have the main characters discussing the American show. In so doing, the show's pro-America slant is highlighted by the direct transplantation of a typical American lifestyle with people watching American shows and discussing its characters in a Chinese social environment. This infusion of "American ingredients" adding to the normalization of a cultural transformation is, in my opinion, one of the more insidious implications of a cloned television show. The invasiveness of the "foreign" culture disappears into the social background. What ordinary Chinese audiences become transfixed by are the consuming lives of capitalist countries, and the bourgeoisie with their glamorous lifestyles. Imagine, if people from these two countries watch the same shows, discuss the same plots, eat the same food, think the same thoughts, worry about the same ideas, and are happy when they buy the same things. What would happen to cultural diversity and heterogeneity?

4.4.2. Exaggeration of Commodity Fetishism

Another way to promote capitalist values is to foreground commodity fetishism and promote a vision of life that views satisfaction as something that can be fulfilled through material consumption. For example, in episode twenty-two, commodity fetishism is practiced by Chun Tao in a morbid manner:

Scene one: Chun Tao standing in front of a shop window staring at a Louis Vuitton handbag (Voiceovers: Chun Tao cannot help staring at this handbag and it is the seventeenth time she 'visits' it).

Tao: I love this bag so much. What do you think, Kaiwen?

Deng: It should be good if you like it.

Tao: I do love it. But I have too many bags; I should not waste [money].

Deng: Stop looking at it then (Voiceovers: In fact, Chun Tao was hoping that Deng would say you can buy it if you really like it and uses his words as good reasons for shopping).

(Li, 2004, episode 22)

Within this scene, commodity fetishism subjugates and controls the character to the point where she becomes addicted to a luxury product and “cannot help” becoming obsessed with it. The television cameras rolling behind the shop window offers a lovesick expression on Tao’s face, and the voiceover complements the scene with an impressive description. The continual “visiting” to the storefront and her wistful glances cast on the bag prove that Tao’s strong yearning for material commodities is far beyond reason.

It bears mentioning that Tan hesitates to buy the bag and pretends to feel guilty for her uncontrollable fetish. However, this trick is not based on a moral sense of the traditional Chinese cultural value of thrift until Tao’s inner monologue unmasks Tao’s expectation that a positive answer from her male partner will serve as shopping excuse. In *Yearning for Love* spurious guilt is often used in dialogues devised for characters, which disguises their inner desire for excessive consumption. For example, in episode fifteen, after spending half of the four friends’ monthly salary in “the most luxurious” restaurant, Ailin Tan feels guilty and reflects on their vanity; in episode twenty-eight, after going on a shopping spree with Ailin Tan, Minglang Li expresses her guilty feelings for being the same as “some superficial women.” In *Yearning for Love* characters blame themselves for over-spending but they never stop shopping. Continual commodity consumption proves

their temporary moralizing to be meaningless.

Returning to the episode being discussed, Tao fails to hear the expected answer and casts a wistful glance to the luxury item when Deng pulls her away, but her desire for the bag does not cease and when the two characters walk by the store another day, Tao starts staring at the bag again for the eighteenth time. Deng is finally overcome by Tao's commodity fetish and impelled by her morbid manner purchases the Louis Vuitton handbag for her:

Deng gives the bag to Tao: Here you go. You will suffer from schizophrenia if you cannot have it.

Tao is surprised. She pretends that she does not intend to buy the bag.

Deng smiles: I feel relieved after purchasing it [for you], otherwise I would feel like suffering from watching a person to die.

(Li, 2005, episode 15).

Chun Tao achieves the ultimate goal of owning the desired product but even after this, she still fakes her real feelings and feigns guilt to obscure her vanity. Deng "relieves" himself and while satisfying Tao's material need by buying the bag and his humorous metaphor is of a vivid portrait of an addicted consumer who suffers from a consumption disability, thus helping to solidify the belief in the link between consumption and the satisfaction it brings to humans. At the end of the episode, Chun Tao holds the bag tight in her arms and her commodity fetish is finally cured by obtaining the bag she desires; exaggerated descriptions of the feeling of satisfaction attest to this voiceover: "a feeling of warmth ran through her body."

When it comes to shopping and consuming, the other three friends are no different:

Minglang Li and Ailin Tan cross a street holding several shopping bags in their hands.

Li : My account is overdrawn again.

Tan: Me, too.

Li: When can we quit the bad habit of impulse buying?

Tan: I cannot. I feel like being insulted if I walk on a street without buying anything.

Li: When it comes to shopping, I am not different from some superficial women. In my closet, there are a lot of clothes only worn once.'

Ailin Tan smiles: "[You] may never wear them but you have to own them."

(Li, 2004, episode 21)

In this example Ailin Tan uses the word "insulted" to describe her sense of being a non-buyer, which is strongly linked to the cultural logic of capitalist countries that says one's quality as a person is directly proportional to one's ability to buy (Ewen, 1989, p.82). Those lacking purchasing power are therefore undesirable and somehow shameful, while people who have buying potential are desirable and successful. In the last line quoted above, Tan's words imply that products are symbols of financial, professional, or personal power over others, that is, "the equation for success" (Ewen, 1989, p. 82). For Tan, purchasing and owning products are the ultimate solution to acquit shameful charges and reinforce her self-esteem. As mentioned above, verbal admission of over consuming averts others' admonition for overt consumerism, but the characters' practices of commodity consumption keep inspiring audiences to consume. Although Li defines women who keep buying things as "superficial", her frequent consuming activities demonstrate the impossibility of her resistance to commodity fetishism.

Besides, commodity consumption is exaggerated to serve various functions as presented in the show. For instance, in episode eight, Na Mao includes “going on a shopping spree” as one of three effective ways to relieve people from the painful feeling of disappointment in love. In episode six, Yuefeng Wu’s remark reveals another magical effect of buying things for Ailin Tan---eliminate tiredness and pressure: “Whenever you feel unhappy you will go shopping” (Li, 2004).

Once commodity consumption is exaggerated as soothing and a source of happiness, it is reasonable to further prove that material consumption is a weapon to overpower others:

Ailin Tan is invited by Qianqian Zhang, her ex-boyfriend’s wife, to attend a television interview program (Voiceovers: In order to beat her rival in love, Ailin Tan goes on a shopping spree and purchases many clothes. She asks Chun Tao to be her image consultant).
(Li, 2004, episode 22)

In this example, a psychological fulfillment is achieved by excessive spending on clothes and beauty supplies in the hope of improving self-appearance and competing with another woman’s attractiveness. This plot is more problematic since it not only overstates the effects of commodities on personal qualities but it also objectifies women by having female characters competing with each other in appearance.

These examples demonstrate material consumption is overstated as the panacea that can cure various psychological problems and commodity fetishism subjugates characters to such an extent that they become objectified as attractive “things” decorated with

commodities with even their personalities and characteristics judged by their appearance.

Additionally, not only are the main characters the practitioners of never-ending material consumption, supporting roles also indulge in luxury lifestyle featuring extravagant spending. Sometimes the expensive tastes of supporting characters is overblown to an extent that strays so far from reality and even the term, “bourgeoisie lifestyle” is an understatement for their overspending. Consequently, excessive consuming of the main characters is toned down in comparison with them:

Scene one: Jianhao Xu holds a bundle of roses standing in front of a deluxe car waiting for Ailin Tan. Tan slowly walks out from a long passage in an elegant manner and smiles at Xu. After a short talk, Tan accepts Xu’s roses and enters the car (Television camera cuts to the Mercedes Benz car logo for two seconds) (Li, 2004, episode 1).

From the short description of the beginning scenes of the first episode, materialistic values are emphasized by camera shots of Xu’s suits, Tan’s designer clothing and stilettos, roses, the Mercedes Benz, and a sense of high social rank by hiring a chauffeur. The voiceover accompanying these scenes serve as a complementary device to send “messages” to audiences of Jianhao Xu’s family background as a son of a wealthy businessman and of the skyrocketing share prices of stocks under his name. In order to court Ailin Tan, the Hong Kong businessman flies to Beijing to accompany Tan for a candlelight dinner or a concert and flies back to Hong Kong the same day, and then shows up back in his office the next morning (Li, 2004, episode 1). The scene that follows shows a lush private dining room where Xu and Tan have a candlelight dinner and then cuts to a series of shots of an

airplane taking off, implying that Xu flies back to Hong Kong after the date. As a matter of fact, in China, people normally prefer travelling by train since it is much cheaper. Therefore, these scenes are automatically symbols of wealth for Chinese audiences, and the voiceovers further emphasizes that Xu flies between Hong Kong and Beijing frequently, simply to attend a concert or have dinner with Ailin Tan and thus create a high class romantic atmosphere based on extravagance.

However, the materialistic fairy tale does not end when Xu returns to Hong Kong. The next morning, Ailin Tan is woken up by the doorbell and she opens the door to sign for a package. Audiences are simultaneously informed that Tan always receives expensive gifts after dating Xu. The camera slowly rolls as Tan opens the package and clearly displays the gifts piece by piece: a gracefully packaged watch, a leather handbag, and luxury brand-name gifts: a Prada purse and something unknown wrapped with a MaxMara packet. The last gift is a gold bank card.

The problem with these scenes and the voiceover is that they give a consumption-based materialistic life a dominant position and commodities are again shown as symbols of superiority over others and equaling success. The bank card gift is evidence that the power of commodity fetishism reaches a point that people are themselves commoditized by consuming and can be bought and valued by money in the social world. Ironically, Xu particularly emphasizes that “I am not buying you with materials”, which is a clearly contrary to his deeds.

Although in the end Tan refuses this admirer for “having no feelings” and is defined

by him as a “non-utilitarian”, she admits that she cannot be indifferent to his [superior and wealthy] condition and is melancholic over ending the “Hollywood-style romance.” The story of Xu and Tan indicates that commodities and material wealth alone is not enough to overcome a lack of love but they are very desirable as *Yean for Love* shows. Thus, the positive image of Tan is set by rejecting material temptation. This short episode and the way it is presented on television inspires audiences in many ways. In a later in-group discussion, Chun Tao thinks Tan’s choice is an “irrational” impulse and pities her, which solidifies the link between happiness and the economic potential to own products.

In episode fifteen, fetishizing foreign-brand commodities is presented by another character, Kaiwen Deng, Chun Tao’s boyfriend:

Kaiwen Deng brings Chun Tao a cup of coffee: Have a taste. The coffee is made from fresh ground coffee beans.

Chun Tao: Smells good. [Is it made from] Columbian coffee beans?

Deng: no, [Coffee beans are] Brazilian. Did you smell my new fragrance?

Deng sniffed his perfume delightfully: I am wearing a new type of Versace perfume. I simply cannot go out without wearing perfume now, it makes me feel naked.

(Li, 2004, episode 15)

In this episode, Kaiwen Deng displays western tastes and a superior attitude by using imported products and foreign-brand commodities. His thoughts seem to be in tune with Ailin Tan’s “insulted” feeling for not consuming. More specifically, failing to use a certain kind of commodity can cause a shameful feeling. It is worth mentioning that both coffee and perfume are typical kinds of commodities that are related to an exotic taste and

westernized lifestyle. As a country with a long history of tea culture, coffee drinking is still a new phenomenon for the traditional Chinese, but is highly promoted among the “petty bourgeoisie” and viewed as “fashionable” (Yuan, 2005, p. 91). As with coffee drinking, wearing perfume is also a typical sign of a western taste which is unfamiliar to traditional Chinese. However, these “foreign” things are absorbed into characters’ daily lives and shame becomes a key mechanism to keep them consuming.

In *Yearning for Love*, characters are preoccupied by a westernized lifestyle based on material consumption and are particularly affected by quality-of-life concerns. By situating themselves closer to an “idealized” lifestyle, they feel “delighted” and dignified, which quite suits the cultural logic of lifestyle-based cultural imperialism. Constantly bombarded with scenes representing the “desirable” life, audiences may be shamed by their own reality inspiring them to follow suit, and consume luxury items, otherwise they will be undesirable as *Yearning for Love* shows.

4.4.3. The Naturalization and Justification of Materialism

Another move to promote capitalist values is through generalization and naturalization of consumption habits and vanity as common frailties. Consumerism and materialistic thoughts are usually associated with vanity and commodity fetishism. They are not only explained away in terms of a “natural inclination” towards beautiful things, they also are generalized as something that is widespread and excessive consumption is justified as “natural” qualities. For example, in episode ten when Chun Tao’s boyfriend feels upset over her shopping habits the voiceover explains that “women have natural

inclination towards beautiful things.” Later in the same episode, before the four friends go shopping together, the voiceover expresses, with an approving tone, that “women are creators of fashion.” Thus vanity and commodity fetishism are legitimated in terms of a “natural inclination” and are generalized as an aesthetic pursuit of all women. These lines connote that consuming activities are not only practiced by the main characters in the show, but that a shopping frenzy is even “natural.”

Besides self-sufficiency is another explanation to legitimate characters’ consumption-based lifestyle. In episode fifteen, Chun Tao purchases an expensive skirt only one week after getting her Louis Vuitton handbag:

(Voiceovers: Tao spends her own money [on the skirt] but is nagged by Deng for one hour and a half).

...

Tao: I spend my own money [not yours]. Why are you so upset?

....

(Voiceovers: Chun Tao does not understand why she is denounced as a criminal for spending her own money).

(Li, 2004, episode 15)

Spending one’s own money thus becomes a noble reason for extravagance since characters can afford to live as non-stop consumers. Spending money on unnecessary luxuries and shopping habits are therefore justified as personal preferences which should be freed from the judgment of others. Financial independence becomes a good explanation and an extravagant lifestyle is defined as a personal choice which should be irrelevant to the opinion of others. Since living is defined as a personal affair, ultimately in this show: “Chun Tao cannot stand the fact that she spends her own money” while being criticized by

other people. She describes the feeling of living as being “trampled under” and finally breaks up with Deng.

4.4.4. Backgrounding Thrift

Ascetic discipline and thrift are promoted by Confucius (Quan & Wu, 2002, p.40). As reflected in personal life choices, being thrifty and living simple lives are traditional virtues which have been praised and advocated; whereas, unrestrained expense and extravagance is disdained and discouraged. It is believed that dignified individuals should subdue personal desire for pleasure and material benefits (Lu, 1998, p.97).

Apart from foregrounding materialistic lifestyles and commodity fetishism, backgrounding thrift is another device for a positive self-presentation of the highly “multi-culturalized” main characters. Obviously, for these capitalist lifestyle followers traditional collective cultural values within Chinese society are the most threatening “anti-Capitalist” factors that need to be defeated.

In the previous example, Kaiwen Deng is portrayed as a thrifty man who criticizes Chun Tao’s extravagant lifestyle and tries to persuade Tao to quit the habit of spending money on unnecessary things. But his opinion does not seem persuasive since his comments are expressed as an annoying chatter with a guttural intonation:

Kaiwen Deng: You have so many skirts and you still keep buying. You are not attending a fashion show. Can these skirts improve your intelligence or enrich you with nutrition? Or will you have calcium deficiency if you are not wearing them. They are so expensive and you can buy many things [with the same money]. Do you hear me?
Chun Tao cannot hold her temper anymore: You’ve been chattering for

one hour and a half!
(Li, 2004, episode 15)

In this example Deng is portrayed as a thrifty man who never rests from nagging Chun Tao for wasting money on unnecessary things. Deng's lines are wordy chatter and he seems to be wandering off the point in some irrelevant metaphors. His image as a thrifty person is marginalized for its unfavorable stance and Tao's impatience and disgust is deemed reasonable because Deng has been nagging "for one hour and a half"--- a time span that is far beyond an understandable limit.

Later in the same episode his image is further disparaged by a sudden change of view towards bourgeois taste and lifestyle. As I mentioned earlier, Deng is suddenly westernized by drinking coffee and wearing perfume and his vanity is revealed by the shameful feeling of not consuming. In the first half of the episode, Chun Tao is criticized by Kaiwen Deng for buying pricy teacups, whereas Deng brings two exquisite teacups to Tao:

Deng: You can buy whatever you want in the future... my aesthetic taste has gone through a big change. I was so old-fashioned and did not know that elegant things are tasteful and they are refined.
(Li, 2004, episode 15)

A traditional way of life is degraded as "old-fashioned" which means not only cherishing consumption-based cultural values but also implying that he feels shame for how he lived before. This is a serious breach of traditional Chinese tradition which implies that morally refined people should despise material subjects and value spiritual well-being.

“To see all the nations and families of the past, extravagance causes failure and success comes from thrift” (*li lan qian xian yu guo jia, cheng you qin jian bai you she*) used to be a well-known saying that has been effectively transmitted among the Chinese, affecting their social values and behavior. However, in *Yearning for Love*, these traditional cultural essences are overwhelmed by the force of capitalist consumerism and are considered to be unrefined and a moribund way of life.

Deng has gone through a big change in his character, but his chatter does not change; the only difference is that his wordy comments start pointing to unrefined things:

Tao and Deng date in a restaurant. Deng comments on a course: Red wine should be used in cooking the chicken curry. How could [they] put cooking wine instead? Culinary skills of today’s cooks are getting worse and worse, too vulgar to be compared with before.
(Li, 2004, episode 15)

All of his comments are geared towards achieving a refined lifestyle that is utterly consumerist. He abandons the traditional Chinese virtue of being thrifty and “catching up” with the way of life ascribed to capitalist countries. Comparing the exaggerated televisual presentation of Deng’s vocal expressions and ostentatious gestures with Tao’s moderate attitude and manner, Tao is presented as being a reasonable consumer with an ordinary requirement for taste.

Ironically, materialistic as Deng is, he still fails to fill the endless material needs of his new girlfriend and feels unable to satisfy her expensive tastes:

Deng looks at Tao miserably: [If she keeps spending money in such an

extravagant way], I will have to rob or steal..... Spending money on her is the only way to express my affection. She is young and very pretty. There are many men who would beg her to spend their money, but she refuses. She spends my money because she loves me.
(Li, 2004, episode 21)

As a thrifty man, Deng is first suddenly revised to be an utterly western consumerist then denigrated as a victim of vainglorious consuming. Along with the unfolding of these plots, Chun Tao's former negative image as a materialist is mitigated by comparing Deng to his new partner, and a positive image of the main character as a rational consumer is established.

Additionally, Deng's sharp change from his "anti-commodity fetish" stance to an extravagant spender plots a scheme that resonates with hyperbole. A sharp reverse of habitual thoughts for adults normally takes years. The producer of *Yearning for Love* compresses the process within a few days of televisual life in an episode. Though the lifestyle of Chun Tao and her three girlfriends should already be viewed as living in excessive spending, the producer creates a fastidious man and his female partner, who are extremely vainglorious, compared to Chun Tao's "moderate" consumption, which appears rational. Thus hyperbole and antithesis artfully function together as a joined device for the self-glorification of the main characters.

In fact, Kaiwen Deng can hardly be considered as one of the cultural traditionalists in *Yearning for Love* because he is finally tamed by consuming. But in episode ten, Xiaoqing Han's anti-bourgeoisie attitude remains strong till the end of the episode and during this time Han is described as an unbearable cynic and his image is presented as negative in the

voiceover:

Voiceover: In order to shed the miserable image as a single woman, Chun Tao arbitrarily finds a male partner, Xiaoqing Han. He is a cynic and Tao cannot accept his fondness for heavy metal music.
(Li, 2004, episode 21)

This role is not acceptable at the beginning and his unacceptable characteristics are further exaggerated in the following scenes when Han shakes his head wildly in rhythm with heavy metal music. The camera cuts towards Han's face in close-up with a particular elevation angle which produces a distorted visual effect. The music is so harsh and loud that Tao must ask him to turn it down, but Han shakes his body more wildly and even turns the music up. Tao simply puts wads of cotton in her ears. When Tao brings Han to a widely patronized restaurant, Han expresses his anti-bourgeoisie views in an intolerably rude manner:

Han suddenly throws down his fork: I don't understand why so many people like this restaurant.

Tao stops eating and looks at him: Maybe it's because of the nice atmosphere.

Han: Is petty bourgeoisie style nice? People who come here must be vainglorious. They pretend to be respectable and high-toned....Look, it is so ridiculous that [they are] putting up clothes that have been saved for being worn in such occasions and behaving as if they were middle-class. This is so absurd. Are they tired of this?

Then he turns to another side and starts judging a man: It's quite easy to tell that he is poor, but he dates a young woman and pretends to be having high taste. He actually feels painful for spending so much money and he will eat instant noodles after this dinner.

When he sees a lady coming in [the restaurant]: Look at that woman; she must come here to seduce men.

(Li, 2004, episode 10)

Han has a strong aversion to western lifestyle and bourgeois taste. However, his progressive anti-consumerist view is erased by his irresponsible, offensive remarks and intolerable behavior. Being introduced as a “cynic”, a term immediately giving audiences an unfavorable impression, and in the following plots, hyperbolic facial expressions coupled with unreasonable and insulting remarks, further denigrate Han’s characteristics as a cultural traditionalist. After Ailin Tan’s arrival, the narrow-mindedness and stinginess of Han are exposed in front of television audiences:

Han: Did Chun Tao say some bad words about me? I am joking.

....

Tan notices that there are just two small dishes on the table and later Han makes excuses to leave.

(Li, 2004, episode 10)

Narrow-mindedness, miserly manners, and gracelessness along with avoiding paying for the meal, are enumerated as “faults” which help to exaggerate the negative picture of a thrifty man, whereas the main characters are presented positively as broad-minded, rational, and tolerant bourgeois. The exaggerated descriptions convey that excluding and marginalizing traditionalists are somehow based on a fact that their intolerability has been proved beyond doubt and thus manipulate audiences: anti-bourgeois traditionalists are disparaged because of their own defects, excluded, and marginalized in terms of “cynicism”.

This is only one step further from the self-glorification of the main character and the producer does not hesitate to take that step by presenting Tao’s generous, kind and

forgiving nature towards Han. Although the “absolute truth” clearly reveals Han’s unacceptable personality deficiencies, in the private discussion between the two friends, Tao still emphasizes the positive aspects of Han’s character:

Chun Tao: He [Xiaoqing Han] is cynical because he is morally lofty and upright and he never follows others. He is special. He has to speak out against what he thinks is wrong. He is so critical but he never speaks badly about me, which means I am one in a million.
(Li, 2004, episode 10)

The producer achieves the ultimate self-glorification of the main bourgeois-taste of the characters by disparaging the “over-thrifty” anti-bourgeois.

4.4.5 Omitting Traditional Chinese Cultural Values

With its emphasis on the importance of human relationships, traditional Chinese culture focuses on a few classical notions, such as *he* (harmony), the Xunzi’s conception of *ren* (benevolence, loving and caring for others), *yi* (morality, faithfulness, righteousness), *li* (rites, propriety) and the Laozi’s notion of *xin* (trustworthiness).

The following discussion will illustrate how the core values are treated in *Yearning for Love*. *He* (harmony) is the overarching principle of traditional Chinese culture, however, in *Yearning for Love*, certain value dimensions of *he*, such as subordinating personal interests to collective ones and cooperating with each other to maintain the harmony of the whole, are omitted from the series. The show could have included the guiding principles of traditional Chinese ideology in resolving personal as well as social issues by directing personal goals towards social betterment and in harmony with the

interests of others. The primary focus of the show is the four lead characters and their love stories and the society as a whole is backgrounded, serving only as a specific location where the melodramatic repertoire is contextualized. Moderation as a behavioral criterion is rarely practiced since *Yearning for Love* creates an enthusiastic viewership through the simultaneous creation of hope for the contented fulfillment of yearning along with forebodings of impending confrontations between individuals and their eventual frustrations. Of the thirty-two episodes, twenty-eight contain scenes of conflicts between the main characters and their male partners, social acquaintances, family members, and even the group of four leads. For example, in episode one:

Lei Liu is surprised to see Minglang Li in a sexy dress: Is this your dress?

Li: Does it look like what I borrow from other people?

Liu: No, I didn't mean that. I haven't seen you in such a feminine dress before. Maybe I am used to seeing you in formal suits.

Li: I see. A successful woman must be lacking in womanliness, vague in sex.

Liu: You can wear it if you want.

Li: Really? What an exception. You think that I am not feminine so that I can be successful. All successful women are not women. Do men always divide women into two categories: either A or B. I think that I am very feminine and successful, don't you think so?

Liu: I agree.

Li keeps asking: How about others?

...(Episode 1)

In this example, the tart remarks and caustic wit of Minglang Li are put to good use to intentionally create a confrontation in order to persuade Lei Liu to admit that she is both feminine and successful. Liu tries to avoid conflict but his short perfunctory replies seem

inadequate to appease the questioner. Traditionally, “moderation” (or the middle way) as a behavioral criterion requires people to present themselves to others as modestly as possible and avoid conflict with others at all costs (Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988, p. 326) since confrontation between individuals is harmful to overall harmony and is highly undesirable. In *Yearning for Love*, however, except for aggressive questions, serious offence against harmony-oriented culture and moderation criterion such as quarrels and insulting remarks are always shown. Typical examples are:

Chun Tao: Whose music is this? It is bullshit! [It is] Completely noise.

[It] Sounds worse than crying.

Xiaoqing Han: This is *Guns n' Roses*.

Tao speaks even louder: I am cursing this band.

Han is cross and storms out of the room.

Tao: Garbage! (Episode 10)

In this example, Chun Tao cannot adapt to Xiaoqing Han's personality and taste in music and she directly expresses her aversion with scurrilous remarks. If Minglang Li is defined as “career-minded and cynical about relationships and men” (Hua, 2008, p. 65), which can partly account for her aggressiveness, Chun Tao is portrayed as the most womanly one cherishing the dream of becoming a traditional “dutiful wife and loving mother”. In this example Tao's insulting remarks seriously violate the basic Chinese cultural tradition of *he* and the criterion of Chinese modesty. For other characters, quarrels and confrontations are more common. For example, in episode sixteen, Ailin Tan flings a stream of abuse at Yuefeng Wu for a sudden decision without asking for her opinion. In the last episode, Ailin Tan and Minglang Li even curse at each other and neither one

compromises with the other until the end of the show, (See Appendix A).

Of all interpersonal relationships, emotional attachments to family members, especially filial affection for parents is the most important and fundamental social relationship among the Chinese (Chen, 2001; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 1988). It is obvious that this tradition is overturned in *Yearning for Love*, the interactions between characters and family members are rarely shown in the series. Except for a few casual encounters and occasional appearances, family members of main characters receive little plot time in the entire series. In episode one, Na Mao has a quarrel with her cousin, and in episode eighteen, Minglang Li has a confrontation with her mother. Both of the conflicts are related to personal issues—Na Mao feels unpleasant with her cousin's comments on her desired lifestyle and Minglang Li refuses to accept her mother's opinion on her personal choice, even though her mother says it as her dying wish. These plots seriously challenge the spirit of *he* in seeking harmony with family members, especially filial affection for parents. In other words, emotional attachments and filial affections for parents are either omitted or violated in *Yearning for Love*. Traditionally, supporting and seeking advice from the family plays an essential role in the lives of Chinese people and the vertical relationship between parent and child outweighs a horizontal relationship between friends (Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988). However, in *Yearning for Love*, these traditions have lost their appeal and are acted against by leading characters.

Confucius defined *ren* as a set of moral virtues, including respecting others, leniency, kindness, and caring for others (Huang & Zhao, 2004). However, from what is discussed

above, the frequent interpersonal conflicts are self-evident truths revealing a lack of respect, leniency, kindness and caring for others. Although some examples of *ren* can be found in *Yearning for Love*: such as, giving consideration to people's interests, caring and helping others, most of these *ren*-inspired behaviors are restricted within the four leads and their boyfriends. In every episode, the four main characters share their experiences and opinions with each other through intimate discussions. Disagreements may exist at times, but most often, mutual respect and caring can be discerned from their interactions. The four women keep in touch on an almost daily basis and, as substitute family members, become the most dependable and trustworthy people for each other. In episode four, Ailin Tan feels guilty for not contacting her three friends and in order to atone for her carelessness she invites them to dine in an expensive restaurant. Ailin Tan apologizes: "... I know that I am wrong. You are my family members anyways."

Then the four women start sharing their recent experiences and happiness of the career successes of Minglang Li and Na Mao, as well as Chun Tao's romantic love stories. However, in contrast to the spirit of *ren* which requires humans to love others and nature, the loved ones of the main characters are either close friends, male partners or material possessions. As discussed in the last section, Chun Tao is generous, kind and with a forgiving nature towards Xiaoqing Han. However, this can hardly be considered an example of returning good for evil when dealing with others because the temporary kindness of Tao is aimed at self-glorification and her broad-mindedness and tolerance are eliminated by her later insulting remarks toward Han.

According to Chinese tradition, *yi* (righteousness, integrity, morality, loyalty) is another important moral standard and it is also a standard guiding interpersonal relationship among people. Specifically, *yi* means “filial piety toward parents, loyalty to friends and superiors, a reciprocity of favors, the habit of keeping promises, and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the well being of others” (Lu, 2000, p.13). In *Yearning for Love*, filial piety toward parents is omitted. Reciprocity of favors, the habit of keeping promises and a willingness to be self-sacrificing mainly exist in the intimate relationships such as friendship and romance. Take the third episode for instance, Ailin Tan intends to publish her book and approaches the famous publishing company--- Lulin Press. When she chats with the manager of the publishing company, a beautiful woman writer comes into the manager’s office and lays her hands on his shoulders, saying in an intimate way that the manager is responsible for promoting her popularity. Later on, the manager indirectly implies that if Tan were to have an affair with him, he would publish her book. Tan is not willing to exchange herself for fame. Next, in order to help Ailina Tan, Na Mao invited a wealthy man to dinner and employed the “*Mei Ren Ji*” (literally means ‘beauty trap’--- a woman using her beauty to ask for a favor) to ask him for RMB¥ 20,000 for Tan’s publication. The plan works. By using this money as a publication fund, Tan’s book achieves great success.

In this episode, Na Mao’s deeds can be considered as *yi* for her friend’s career—she keeps her promise and is willing to sacrifice personal interests for Ailin Tan. Mao says at the end of the episode, “I would rather destroy my reputation for you[r] success.”

However, the traditional value of *yi* is not practiced through *li* 礼 (rites, propriety) rather, it is practiced through *li* 利 (interests, benefits). The publication fund is accrued through unscrupulous means, deviating from the *yi* principle becoming an exchange of ulterior motives. This plot strategy is sinister because it stimulates audiences to accept the benefit-driven “interest-exchange,” or bribery, as social norm and accept underhand methods to gain their ends. A similar example can be found in episode twenty-two, when during a meal in a restaurant, a man sitting beside Na Mao suffers a heart attack. Na Mao makes an emergency call and helps a doctor save the man’s life. However, the secret motive of Mao’s kind deed is revealed in a later discussion between the four characters:

Mao: The man [doctor] is so attractive. My good deeds will rebound on myself. I did a good thing and get a man...

Li: Is he a peerless charming man.

Tan: [He is] A doctor.

Li: That’s a nice job.

...

Li: Why are doctors always attractive? I mean male doctors.

Mao: They are so sexy when they are rescuing a patient. It’s irresistible.

(Episode 22)

From this discussion, Mao’s kind deeds are negatively related to a self-seeking motive of searching for a male doctor. The moral virtues of *yi* and *li* 礼 (rites, propriety), and the concrete behavior that actualizes *yi*, are presented more in terms of *li* 利 (benefit, profit, interest) because the ethical concept of *yi* is inherently altruistic in its values and is concentrated on the pursuit of morality (Huang & Zhao, 2004). Although Mao does not receive any monetary benefits, a secret cause of searching for a man removes the moral

dimension of her deeds. Self-interests and mutual benefits play an important role in the social relationships and interactions. Besides, male-centered perspectives are obvious in these plots as often the conversations of the main characters all revolve around men and both their social and private lives are focused on the searching for the perfect man, even in a medical emergency situation. This plot strategy perpetuates the historically stereotyped and marginalized image of women by highlighting the male-centered dimensions of the main characters' thoughts.

Zhi (wisdom) describes the high intellectual capacity of a well cultivated and morally refined gentleman. Since *zhi* is defined as the personal ability to understand and make rational judgments, it is not a value that guides social relationships and behaviors and thus it will not be further elaborated on.

Xin is another moral pursuit in traditional Chinese interpersonal relations. The literal translation of *xin* is honesty and trust but the word contains a set of cultural implications and social norms perceived as principles needed in handling human relations such as keeping one's promises and never going back on one's word (Yin, 2006). To break *xin* is regarded as *shi xin* (without trustworthiness). In *Yearning for Love*, *xin* as a moral pursuit is not directly mentioned, however, breaking *xin* or *shi xin* are often presented as a common social phenomenon. In episode three, Minglang Li introduces her boyfriend Haojun Yan to her boss and helps Yan obtain the position of program music editor. However, Yan steals from Li's company. Similarly, in episode twelve, Na Mao introduces pub singer Zijie Zhang to the public relations manager of a record company. After the

introduction, Zhang quickly abandoned his devotion to Mao and ingratiates himself with the manager. Interestingly, during conversations between the in the four women, these immoral deeds are considered more like a common phenomenon than a despised act:

...
Na Mao: I don't sympathize with you at all. He's been taking advantage of you since the beginning. I knew it.

Chun Tao: He is too handsome for you. He uses his charm to fulfill self-interest.

Ailin Tan: Should we make use of physical appearance?

Mao: Women have the right to achieve purposes through charms.

Minglang Li: Such as being a gold digger and having affairs with people in authority?

Mao: This is called necessity to earn a living or a means in competition.

(Episode 3)

Li: Quite likely. This kind of person has spent so many years at the bottom of society. By all means available will they seek even the slimmest chance of getting ahead. Ingratitude is just a small case.

(Episode 12)

Disobeying *xin* is presented as a common phenomenon and the cause of *shi xin* can be observed as a social competition or "necessity to earn a living," and therefore these immoral deeds are not deserving of public outrage. The show does not challenge the failure to preserve valuable traditional cultural values; instead, the breaking of cultural tradition is explained and legitimated as an understandable life choice. As a popular television series produced and aired in China, there are no explicit lines or plots representing traditional Chinese cultural values, such as *he*, *ren*, *yi*, *li*, *zhi* and *xin*. The omission of traditional Chinese cultural values partly due to the "pirated" (Hua, 2008, p.

65) nature of *Yearning for Love*, as it simultaneously eliminates the possibility of exhibiting traditional cultural values which are contrary to the capitalist values embodied in this show.

4.4.6 Legitimizing Classism

The four main characters in *Yearning for Love*, Tan, Li, Mao, and Tao are clearly separate from the masses, with their social life restricted to high society. By my account, nineteen out of twenty-three male partners of the main characters are white-collar workers engaging in various high-income occupations such as college professors, real estate developers, IT business owners, television hosts and so on. As well, there are two celebrities and several socialites. Most of them are introduced as “successful” and their romance with the four female leads always starts in places such as a high-class indoor sports center, a fancy restaurant, a fashionable clubhouse, or a high end shopping mall. In episode eight, the four friends even go to some high end venues to find their dates:

Minglang Li brings her three friends to a fencing house in a sports center and explains: ...this is an advantageous spot to meet single men. The members [of this club] are all white-collar workers and socialites.
(Li, 2004, episode 8)

The four main characters are willing to meet “elite singles” who are either wealthy socialites or successful businessmen. Among the main characters, Ailin Tan is both a successful writer and a small business owner who runs a book bar and is praised as “one of the top-ten beauty writers”; Minglang Li is a “successful” television producer besieged by advertisers; Na Mao is known as a “famous” fashion stylist and works for several

celebrities; and Chun Tao, a software designer works in a joint venture researching the latest IT products.

This show could have included struggling stories of many ordinary urban settlers, real living conditions of many wage-earners. Labour is omitted from this show as with soap operas in most western shows. In this program labour appears unnecessary for people's material consumption. It seems that there is no practical work involved in the life of the main characters. In this light, the show could also have included how these people can afford to live such a material life by simply doing nothing but getting tangled in love affairs, and so on. I would argue, that in order to secure a large number of commodity consumers for advertisers (also fundraisers of television series), the plots and characters represented in the show are more about entertainment and flagrant consumption, rather than genuinely representing real people and their struggles.

Laborers are backgrounded in this show. Except for a mentally ill character, there is only one blue-collar worker, Xiaodong Ma, who is a taxi driver. And there are hardly any scenes of manual labor presented in *Yearning for Love*. Although the income state of main characters is not specially shown, it is obvious that the main characters are portrayed as high-income consumers with the economic ability to afford their extravagant living, and concrete work is omitted from the show. Repeated camera shots and close-ups focus on the social activities of the characters and their materialistic lifestyle is made prominent.

Throughout the show, the producer clearly chooses to frame a bourgeois lifestyle based on material wealth as the desirable modern way of life, which embodies De

Grazia's view of cultural imperialism: that most post-modern forms of capitalized media content are lifestyle-based and *consumer culture* inspired (2005), while simultaneously fueling the global economy. As is the case for *Yearning for Love*, an international lifestyle is practiced and glorified by the characters and they never cease consuming which is the central aspect of their lifestyle.

Other characters in *Yearning for Love* perform less "decent" jobs, like the cartoonist Kaiwen Deng and the mobile phone merchant Xiaoqing Han. Partially due to financial restrictions, these two characters do not thoroughly embrace bourgeois-taste and consumerist lifestyle, a scenario closer to the lives of the masses. However, their image as progressive alternative thinkers in this show is disparaged by the use of offensive remarks, that make the economically underprivileged people appear unreasonable and unacceptable.

The massive consumerist elements in *Yearning for Love* not only inspire modern urban life to fit the cosmopolitan life model, but also categorize people into different classes by their different consumption levels. It is obvious that the scenes and the luxury items shown in popular television series, such as *Yearning for Love*, are not attainable to all urban settlers, let alone people living in rural areas. Those who do not have purchasing power to live the lifestyle presented in the popular media are disparaged for their "low" taste and excluded and marginalized on the basis of their purchasing power. These popular shows are set as the benchmark of urban living and audiences are inspired to assert their social status and rank on the basis of their economic condition.

4.4.7 Glorification of Individualism

In *Yearning for Love*, not only do characters live a consumption-based capitalist way of life, they also hold explicitly individualist views, which have long been viewed as the most prominent ideology in western capitalist countries. In contrast to the traditional collectivist cultural values of China, the core element of individualism is the assumption that individuals are independent from one another (Oyserman et al., 2002), emphasizing personal autonomy, self-fulfillment, individual freedom and self-interests (Hofstede, 1980). Drawing from different definitions, an individualist worldview centralizes the individual — personal goals, individual uniqueness, and personal control --- while marginalizing the social (Bellah et al., 1985; Hsu, 1983 & Sampson, 1977).

Since the founding of the People's Republic, mass media have been used as an important vehicle for spreading political ideas and morally refined role models. "Self-sacrificing for the good of others is glorious" was a crucial part of public consciousness promoted in Chinese mass media during this period. This can be easily seen from some common slogans Chairman Mao especially encouraged: *da gong wu si* (collectivistic interests and selflessness), *wei ren min fu wu* (serve the people), *xian ren hou ji* (put the interest of others first), and *ke ji feng gong* (serve others while restricting individual desires for interest). In the early 1990s Chinese mass media, especially television media, witnessed the rapid development of various broadcasting forms such as soap operas, sitcoms, drama, melodrama, artistic performance, and opera. Although having a novel form, these shows still contain original Chinese features in terms of program

content, which are in sharp contrast with shows produced today. The stories of characters, personal relations and daily family life were always tied up with collective elements and broad social, historical background. A typical example is *Yearnings*, a television show aired in 1991 about “the intertwined lives, loves, and tragedies of two ordinary families... as the vicissitudes of their joys and sorrows unfold over the two decades from the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) through the late 1980s” (Rofel, 1994, p.700). Yet this television drama, along with all television shows during that period, has its melodramatic repertoire, including coincidence of fate, main characters, romance and tragedy, contextualized with its specific cultural and historical location.

However, as shown in *Yearning for Love*, the personal yearning for romance among the main characters serves as the dominant theme from which various subplots and stories of individual characters are derived. Social context, as a whole, is reduced to a few general descriptive sentences and some pointless scenes of crowds of urban residents, buildings, and cityscapes are interspersed in the show. A series of storylines and the televisual details surrounding the narrative of the plots evolve around leisure and the resulting disappointment in personal relationships. The overall content of the show is centered on the four individuals, their personal desires, and all sorts of dysfunctional relationships, whereas, the social context is backgrounded as something irrelevant and unimportant.

The show glorifies the main characters constantly using approving terms such as, “independent,” “autonomous,” and “having a mind of her own/inner-directed” etc.:

Minglang Li: I enjoy living alone. What happens to you is your own doing, in the long run you can only count on yourself (Li, 2004, episode 11).

Na Mao: Only these women who depend on themselves get ahead in their life. I am proud of being an independent woman and enjoy my single life (Li, 2004, episode 1).

Ailin Tan: Well, being a modern woman you must stand alone...(Li, 2004, episode 22)

Chun Tao: I am fabulous as an independent woman. If a woman wants something done right, she's got to do it by herself (Li, 2004, episode 17).

The independent-minded, individualist thinking represented by secondary characters is even more conspicuous, especially in the intimate relationships:

Yuefeng Wu (hereafter Wu): ...I think even if we get married, we should live in two separate places instead of staying together every day. We have different things to deal with, different leisure time and different friends, so we should be independent from each other without interrupting each other's lives. This is the way to keep our relationship "fresh" and we will not be tired of each other in the long run. Don't you want our relationship to be long-lasting? (Li, 2004, episode 15)

Wu: Things change, people change. It is unstable to tie your future with another person. You can only depend on yourself. The reason why I am staying being single is because I cannot shoulder the responsibility of another person's future. I do not want to get involved with another person's fate....That is life and we all have to be this way (Li, 2004, episode 16).

In these lines, through constant foregrounding and generalized individualism, self-reliance and independence are highly rated and described as a natural way of thinking. Detachment and alienation from others and society are encouraged and self-reliance is valued.

In this vein, another typical attribute as shown in *Yearning for Love*, in personal

relationships in many social ingroups (e.g., coworkers, clubs, classmates, etc.) is that they tend to be contractual, short-term and unstable (Triandis et al. 1988, p.324), as the four leads freely enter or withdraw from various social groups such as the literary circle of Ailin Tan (Episode 4), gym club of Minglang Li (Episode 17). Whereas in collectivist societies, interpersonal relationships are closer, and interdependence is highly valued, social relations tend to be long-lasting, spontaneous, and occur in large groups.

This attribute of individualist cultures is also noticeable in *Yearning for Love*. Most interpersonal relationships are short-term in this show and the main characters are close only to few others and cherish their freedom to act independently of others. Of the seventy supporting roles, fifty-five are short-term male partners of the four main characters, and another eleven depicted are shown as temporary companions of the main characters such as colleagues and neighbors. Only three supporting characters appeared in more than three episodes and only one of them, Xiaodong Ma, maintains a relatively long-term relationship with Minglang Li.

Generally speaking, except for the group of the four closest friends, there are more than sixty people who come and go in their lives through different episodes. These characters assume various social identities, such as colleagues, previous classmates, and so on. The majority of interpersonal relationships between main characters and other characters are short-term and it seems quite easy for them to enter and leave new relationships within different ingroups. At the same time collective bonds and mutual obligations between individuals and society as a whole are omitted and traditional

emphasis attached to human interrelatedness are backgrounded.

According to Chinese tradition, most people live with their parents and devotion to family is valued. “Four generations under a roof” (*si shi tong tang*) is an old idiom exemplifying the ideal mode of a harmonious family life. However, in copying from the American television show *Sex and the City*, none of main characters in *Yearning for Love* lives with their parents or other family members in accordance with Chinese tradition. Through the entire series, there are only four episodes with scenes that include the characters’ family members and two of them depict dysfunctional relationships with families. In episode one Na Mao has a quarrel with her cousin over different opinions on marriage and relationships. The quarrel continues for three and a half minutes with no one compromising and ends with Mao’s cousin storming off into her bedroom. In episode eighteen, Minglang Li has a quarrel with her mother over personal issues regarding her ex-boyfriend Xiaodong Ma. After the quarrel Li’s mother suddenly has a heart attack and when she wakes up from a coma Li is still not able to acquiesce, even though her mother says it as her dying wish.

Due to the great importance attached to harmony traditionally the Chinese present themselves to others as modestly as possible in order to avoid conflict with others at all costs. Whereas, in *Yearning for Love*, confrontations between main the characters and others, even parents, are major causes-effect factors used to stimulate the development of the plot. In two examples, the Chinese traditional value of *he* (harmony) is violated through dysfunctional relationships with family members. In the entire series, family

harmony is either de-emphasized or omitted, which is not in tune with traditional Chinese life where “everything will go well if you have a harmonious family” (*jia he wan shi xing*).

For the other two examples, the characters’ parents are only shown in supporting roles with very few lines. The primary focus of the episode is still on the main characters and family life with family members is entirely omitted. Thus vertical relationships such as the parent-child bond used to be the most important emotional connection in Chinese society. In the show, however, a friend-friend horizontal relationship is foregrounded as the most important source providing the four modern individuals with emotional support and security, which is also a typical characteristic of an individualist society (Oyserman et al. 2002, p.325).

Although the main characters proclaim themselves as independent professional women, when it comes to romantic relationships, their positive image as the progressive avant-garde feminists is completely erased by their emotional reliance on men:

Chun Tao: Women always want to be saved by men, no matter how silly or how clever they are. All women want to be saved by men (Li, 2004, episode 22).

Ailin Tan finally realizes her relationship with Yuefeng Wu is the same as slave and slaveholder (Li, 2004, episode 20).

Na Mao is portrayed as the most open-minded independent woman in the show, but after an emotional depression derived from a disappointing relationship she ultimately changes her mind and decides to pursue her happiness by marrying a man in order to

avoid feeling like “an isolated island.” She makes a sudden decision to get married and writes a letter to her three friends:

I finally understand that no matter what kind of woman you are, your law is men and your sky is men. This is as unchangeable as the universe. Every woman has to conform to this supreme arrangement. Women are born for men...I feel old and cannot afford playing around anymore. This is the first time in my life that I yearn for anchoring in my life and spirit in a man... (Li, 2004, episode 32)

4.5 Presupposition

The show presupposes that the fancy lifestyles of main characters are a common way of life for modern Chinese people or, something admirable that everyone aspires to. Their material life is portrayed favorably. Another presupposition in this show is that traditional Chinese culture is of little importance compared to fancy consumerist material indulgence. The way the show is framed presupposes that the most widely accepted cultural values are consumer capitalist cultural values such as consumerism, individualism and consumption-based materialism, not traditional Chinese cultural essences. The show also presupposes that bourgeois or Chinese middle-class as shown by the main characters are more rational and desirable in their thoughts and conduct; more acceptable in their appearance and expressions, than alternative-view holders shown who are portrayed as undesirable and intolerable.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSIONS

According to Sut Jhally, mass media outlets are vital institutions that, far from providing a free marketplace of ideas, instead “work to legitimate the existing distribution of power by controlling the context within which people think and define social problems and their possible solutions” (1989, p. 67). In contemporary globalism, mass media plays an essential role in the process of U.S.-led global cultural imperialism by presenting pro-west media content from influencing audiences’ perceptions of social norms and developing their world view. Along with the introduction of chain stores, fast food outlets, the popularity of Hollywood films, the familiarity of pop stars among Chinese audiences, the spread of fashion trends, the adoption of name brand marketing, and the broad diffusion of a commodity culture, the United States uses its media practices as an effective instrument to universalize its consumption-based capitalist model of society.

This critical analysis of the popular television series *Yearning for Love* shows the typical plot structures, shooting strategies and lexical devices that are deployed in, on the one hand, worshipping capitalist cultural values such as consumerism, individualism and leisure-based materialism, and on the other hand, diminishing the traditionalism of Chinese culture. This analysis demonstrates how audiences are inspired to emulate social representations that are consistent with a pro-west capitalist ideology. The overall scheme of *Yearning for Love* is the synthetic application of various televisual methods in the positive presentation of its main characters who emulate western-style bourgeois-taste,

individualism and a consumption-based lifestyle, while negatively presenting and even omitting Chinese cultural conventions and traditions. Although cultural imperialism has been designated a diffusionary hegemony by communication scholars, the employment of many of the production techniques of commercial media has also changed the external appearance of Chinese media in a positive way: for example, by the use of skillful shooting techniques, artistic camera presentations, and smart plot structures. These techniques have all greatly enhanced the popularity of Chinese media among mass audiences. These western media practices are now being broadly used in various kinds of other Chinese media including newspapers, magazines, radio and the internet.

In *Yearning for Love* the principal presentation means are the foregrounding of consumerism, materialism: for example, the exaggerated representation of the consuming habits and commodity fetishism of the main characters through dialogical expressions, numerical descriptions, and habitual shopping activities; the irresponsible remarks and intolerable manners of the other “traditional” in disapproving term such as “cynic”; and the emphasis of the contrast between the bourgeois main characters and the more traditional others. Semantically and lexically, the others are thus linked not simply with “difference”, but rather with deviance. Interestingly, glorification of a consumption-based bourgeois lifestyle and individualist values is always combined with dialogical criticism of materialistic consumption, which is proven to be pointless through the utterly antithetical actions of the main characters. For example, in episode fifteen, after spending half of the four friends’ monthly salary in “the most luxurious” restaurant, Ailin Tan feels

guilty and reflects on their vanity; in episode twenty-eight, after going on a shopping spree with Ailin Tan, Minglang Li expresses her guilty feelings for being the same as “some superficial women.” In *Yearning for Love* characters blame themselves for over-spending but they never stop shopping. Continual commodity consumption proves their temporary moralizing to be meaningless. Other ways to set a positive image of a bourgeois-style way of life of the main characters are the mitigation of their deficiencies (extravagance) by comparing them with extreme materialist and consumerist fictional characters, and the euphemization of their vain-gloriousness in terms of an inherent nature (“natural inclination”). Social norms of worshipping consumer capitalist culture and devaluing Chinese cultural traditions are thus represented and reinforced through polarization and discursively sustained and reproduced by denigrating others who do not follow the pro-west Chinese “petty bourgeois” group. Chinese traditions such as living a simple and frugal life, working hard and building up the country through thrift are put at a severe disadvantage. The show omits and violates traditional Chinese cultural values still observed in contemporary social life of Chinese.

Having concluded that the principal means by which consumption-based capitalist logic is absorbed into Chinese media products, it is reasonable to argue that the impact of cloned media products is one of the interlocking key factors that boost the institutionalization of the free market model in Chinese society. As a typical media product presenting the contemporary pro-western culture in China, the television soap opera *Yearning for Love* and similar Chinese versions of western shows, function as a

powerful instrument to reproduce capitalist consciousness and have a significant cultural impact on the ongoing debates of petty bourgeoisie culture, open-door policy, and the so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. Indeed, it is also due to such media products that on all these counts, current legislation of media commercialization is exploring new forms of regulations that are loosening restrictions on the pro-west tendency of mass media. Cultural imperialism could not have been possible without the on-going societal reform that is opening Chinese media and society to the capitalist world.

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APPENDIX A

Plot Lines of *Yearning for Love*

[Li, Qiang, (2005, May). *Hao Xiang Hao Xiang Tan Lian Ai (Yearning for Love)*. Tianjin People's Press.]

Episode 1

We are searching for love, or is love looking for us:

Ailin Tan is courted by a wealthy admirer: Jianhao Xu, a rich businessman, who travels frequently between Hongkong and Beijing so he can date Tan and win her heart. Minglang Li sacrifices her love with a land agent for a lovelorn male colleague. Li believes that no one can live without friends. Chun Tao has a crush on a new co-worker, Yiwei Wang, and she asks Na Mao to seduce him as a test of his loyalty to love. Mao plays her charm card but it does not work on Yiwei Wang. Tao believes that Wang is the right person that she has been waiting for, but her passion is destroyed when she realizes Wang prefers cohabitation over legal marriage (living together without marriage is illegal in China).

Two Camps:

Tan's girlfriend Xiaona Yu comes home from her honeymoon and asks her out for dinner. Tan tells Yu about her husband's flirtation with her, but her kind intention is misunderstood by Yu. As a birthday surprise, Minglang Li's co-workers send her to a date-match program where Li decides to ruin this favor. Chun Tao's college friend, Mei

Xiao, tells Chun Tao about the evils of marriage destroying Tao's dream for marriage. Na Mao has a quarrel with her cousin over their differing views on man-woman relationships and Mao thinks that her cousin envies her because her cousin is trapped by marriage and not able to fully enjoy life.

Episode 2

Fall in Love with Friends' Friend:

Na Mao accidently falls in the street and falls in love with the man, Yuefeng Wu, who volunteers to take her to the hospital. But Mao quickly finds out that Ailin Tan also has feelings for Yuefeng Wu and that Tan is intentionally avoiding Wu for Mao's sake. Because of this circumstance, Mao decides to keep her reputation intact as a "trump card" by backing out of competing with her best friend for a man. Meanwhile, Minglang Li's friend, Xin Zhao, introduces Li to his handsome friend Haojun Yan, and Li experiences love at first sight when she sees Haojun Yan.

Episode 3

Lust for Women and Men:

Ailin Tan's book is published with the help of Na Mao. Minglang Li introduces Haojun Yan to her boss and tries to help Yan obtain a position of program music editor. However, Yan steals from Li's company. Yuefeng Wu and Ailin Tan continue to bump into each other during social events.

Secret Saver:

Tan and Wu have their first official date but Tan suspects Wu is keeping her a secret from his friends. Mingling Li meets a famous actor--Yuan Gao, for a romantic relationship, which turns out to be rather unglamorous since Gao is hiding Li from his social circle. Chun Tao secretly keeps her "office affair" with her boss, but he soon ends this illicit relationship.

Episode 4**Wholeheartedness:**

Tan and Wu begin dating on a regular basis. Many advertisers go to Minglang Li, for her program is popular and is broadcast during prime time. Na Mao becomes a famous fashion stylist attracting many celebrities. Chun Tao bumps into Yuefeng Wu while he is dating another beautiful woman, and Tao tells Tan the truth. Minglang Li falls in love with Yuan Gao again after bumping into him. Chun Tao breaks up with Hui Kang.

Episode 5**Jealousness:**

Na Mao starts dating an architect, discovering that he is the first man who is not jealous of her close relationships with other men. However, Mao is used by the man to recall his wife's love. Chun Tao only feels jealous when another woman gets married. Minglang Li meets Yuan Gao's friend Yi Shang. Tan finds out that Wu was married once

already.

Episode 6

Love You and Love Me:

Chun Tao meets an English instructor during a business trip to Shanghai and becomes involved in a “long distance relationship”. Ailin Tan is unhappy when Yuefeng Wu leaves her in the hospital for a business trip. After witnessing a fight on the street, Minglang Li begins waiting for Yuan Gao so that she can accompany him home. Chun Tao gets frustrated with her relationship with the English instructor, who she finds stingy.

Some romantic affairs:

Gede Publishing House invites Ailin Tan for a book party, but the day is also Yuefeng Wu’s birthday. Tan is hurt when she hears of Wu’s affair from Na Mao. Chun Tao has a crush on a handsome new colleague and she employs Na Mao’s “affair strategy” to nurture this relationship. Minglang Li makes up an “imaginary admirer” to rebuild her relationship with Yuan Gao.

Episode 7

How far does “forever” go:

Chun Tao’s friend Xiaozhen gets married and she tells the four friends that she married her husband after notarizing his commitment in a notary public office. Tan feels upset when Yuefeng Wu tells her that he never wants to get married again. Na Mao is

drunk with her new date. Yuan Gao tells Minglang Li that he loves her, but it barely means anything to her.

Episode 8

The Rule of Break-Up:

Tan realizes that her relationship with Yuefeng Wu is unworkable and breaks up with him. Yuan Gao starts dating right away, while Minglang Li is still in the “curse phase”—keeping saying bad things of her ex-boyfriend. Li wants to relieve herself from tiresome city life and her heartbreaking past. Unfortunately, Li bumps into Gao learning that he is seeing another woman. Ailin Tan starts her new life by accepting the fencer, Yue Dong. Na Mao falls in love with Ming Qu, which her three friends cannot understand. Tan finds out that she still has feelings for Yuefeng Wu after accidentally seeing him.

Episode 9

Intimacy with Distance:

Chun Tao’s new boyfriend, Zhen Guo, brings her back to her “first love”, but this relationship is a failure after Guo discovers that his past and privacy involves Chun Tao. Tan feels happy when she sees that Yuefeng Wu appear at the anniversary party for her book bar, and she realizes that she is still in love with him. Tan starts seeing Wu again.

Lovers as Strangers:

Na Mao dates a well-known broker who is actually a “peeping Tom”. Minglang Li

falls in love with the artist, Xiaoge Song, but his secret hobby turns Li off. Chun Tao gets fed up with an immature man who is younger than her.

Episode 10

Singles:

Ailin Tan makes a horrible presentation when doing a television interview, and is a bad representative of single women. Chun Tao dates a cynical young man so as to drop her social identity as a single woman. Na Mao has a humiliating experience. Minglang Li turns down a good man's love by indicating she is having sexual relationships with other men.

Episode 11

The Funeral of Love:

A friend of the four girls, Yi Wang's, commits suicide, casting a shadow on the hearts of the four girls. Tan starts to "officially" date Yuefeng Wu again. Minglang Li realizes the fragility of life and purchases several different kinds of life insurance for herself. Na Mao has sympathy for Yi Wang's boyfriend, who is utterly isolated by others.

Episode 12

Lies and Cheats:

Minglang Li is entranced by a brilliant television program host, Liang Tao. But he has a “Korean-style fetish” and insists that Li must dress like a Korean girl when they are dating. Chun Tao dates a net friend “Da Li Fei Dao” and does not tell him her real age. Ailin Tan falls in love with Yuefeng Wu again after they spend a romantic and nostalgic time together.

Love at First Sight:

Ailin Tan tries to leave her mark at Yuefeng Wu’s place by leaving some feminine items behind. This is the heyday of their love history. Minglang Li is frustrated by her inability to attract men’s attention. Na Mao experiences the most terrifying “love at first sight”. Chun Tao meets a guy who truly understands women and they start building a real relationship.

Episode 13

The Golden Age in Love:

Ailin Tan and Yuefeng Wu hold hands together and enjoy a time of their life in public places. Wu wears Tan’s necklace around her neck and calls her his girlfriend for the first time. Tan tries to get Wu to meet the girls, but his absence disappoints Tan. Minglang Li runs into Xiaodong Ma, a taxi driver, and she is impressed by Ma’s genuine love. Ma and Li’s golden age in love just arrives. Chun Tao goes to psychic to see which kind of man is the best for her. As the psychic predicts, Tao starts dating a long-haired cartoonist, Kaiwen Deng.

Episode 14

The Leopard Can't Change His Spots:

Xiaodong Ma is perfect for Minglang Li but their conflicting schedules become a problem in their relationship. Li is deeply impressed when Ma quits his job for her. Chun Tao feels satisfied when she gets Keaiwen Deng to cut his long hair. Yuefeng Wu sleeps at Tan's place for the first time and they both learn each other's different living habits and tastes. Tan decides to adapt herself to the bossy Yuefeng Wu as she is very much in love with him.

Episode 15

The Economics of Love:

Ailin Tan is disappointed when Yuefeng Wu refuses to lend her 10,000 RMB. Na Mao likes to control and she enjoys spending their money. For Chun Tao, a woman is authorized to spend a man's money only if they are married.

Step by Step:

Yuefeng Wu returns the feminine items left by Tan in his house. Chun Tao gets fed up with Kaiwen Deng's feminine inclination and turns to her psychiatrist friend for help.

Episode 16

Slaves of Love:

Ailin Tan starts wondering if she really loves Yuefeng Wu, or if she just obsesses

about the painful feeling of not being able to have him. Tan drinks too much alcohol and behaves disgracefully the first time in her life. Minglang Li feels lucky to meet Tu Ha, a man who has a miserable past and treasures everything in his life. In order to please her new boyfriend, Chun Tao begins dieting. For Chun Tao, becoming malnourished for a man shows a traditional woman's obedience.

Episode 17

The Game Rules:

Ailin Tan gets fed up with Yuefeng Wu's inability to pay attention to her and breaks up with him again. Tan turns into a big eater and alcoholic after her sad ending with Wu. Minglang Li starts dating her gym instructor who is young and has a perfect body. Na Mao uses Mahjong to match her with new dates, Mahjong-mate first, soul mate after.

Episode 18

Women:

Minglang Li's mother believes that Xiaodong Ma would be the best son-in-law and she persuades Li to accept Ma, otherwise she will treat Ma like a son. Chun Tao is forced to make a tough decision when it is either her or her manager who will lose their jobs.

A Small Reunion:

Minglang Li spends time with a single father Yunxiao Liu, but his daughter keeps making trouble in the relationship. Ailin Tan dates a new boyfriend who works at a news

publishing house and this fling turns into a complicated social issue. Chun Tao gets frustrated with her new boyfriend's unforgettable love history with his ex-wife. Na Mao's ex-boyfriend bumps into her current boyfriend.

Episode 19

Love Expert:

In order to change her fate of love, Chun Tao finds a geomancer to rearrange the geomantic pattern of her house. An entertainment journalist tries very hard to please Na Mao. Ailin Tan decides to choose a smart boyfriend in a choice between two men. Mingliang Li is fooled by people who pretend to be wise.

Episode 20

Love First Competition Second:

Chun Tao dates a stock broker, Linge Shen, and she tries to match Linge Shen's co-worker, Yong Gao with Mingliang Li. Mingliang Li finds this more hurtful than kind. Na Mao accidentally meets a famous star in a bar and she wants to use her attractive appearance to entrance him. Ailin Tan confronts her past with Yuefeng Wu when she runs into him.

Episode 21

Friendship and Love:

Na Mao's neighbor cannot get over a severe depression after breaking up with Na

Mao. Minglang Li meets Xiaodong Ma again and she begins to be interested in his “taxi driver stories”. Chun Tao plays the role of an understanding big sister for her ex-boyfriend. Ailin Tan wears her favorite dress to have dinner with Yuefeng Wu: a handshake marks a new start to their friendship.

Episode 22

Salvation and entertainment:

The four girls have a “girls’ night” together drinking and having fun in a bar. After having fun that night, Na Mao helps a night-shift doctor Fangchen Cai to carry a patient into hospital and saves a person’s life. Yuefeng Wu’s wife, Qianqian Zhang, invites Ailin Tan to attend her television show. Minglang Li bravely goes to the hospital alone for surgery. Chun Tao finally finds her “prince charming”, who is a successful cosmetics agent.

Episode 23

The Most Precious Thing is the Unretrievable Past:

Tan is reluctant to accept Shaobo Long, a sales agent for sports equipments, because she may still have feelings for Yuefeng Wu. Minglang Li likes being beloved by Xiaodong Ma, but she does not want him to live at her place. Chun Tao goes on an arranged date. Na Mao breaks up with doctor Cai.

Episode 24

It is Impossible to Break Free from Love:

Ailin Tan is waiting for romance: will Yifan Zou become her boyfriend or just a friend? Always setting herself up as a lady, Chun Tao is bothered by personal insults. Minglang Li gets upset when she realizes that Xiaodong Ma is a male chauvinist. Ailin Tan obsesses about her perfect relationship with Yifan Zou.

The Drama of Love:

Ailin Tan enjoys intimacy with Yifan Zou, but she still cannot get used to such a “peaceful” relationship. Minglang Li makes more time for Xiaodong Ma in her life. Na Mao falls in love with a performance artist, but this fling turns out to be like a painful memory. Chun Tao finds a perfect man to marry: a lawyer from a good family.

Episode 25

A Memorable Love:

Na Mao’s new neighbor becomes her new admirer. She sets a record in her love history by dating an overweight man. Yuefeng Wu tells Ailin Tan that he is leaving his wife.

Sense and Sensibility:

Minglang Li officially breaks up with Xiaodong Ma. Chun Tao falls deeply in love with Kai Zheng after only a few weeks of dating and is convinced he is “the one”. Kai Zheng proposes to Chun Tao in a car. Ailin Tan confronts her past with Yuefeng Wu when

she runs into Qianqian Zhang, Wu's wife. Tan struggles to control herself by reason rather than emotions.

Episode 27

Considerations of Gain and Loss:

Na Mao hurts her ankles. Na Mao has no one to turn to when she is injured at home and she becomes doubtful about being an independent woman. Chun Tao wants to marry Kai Zheng so she is not one of the four singles. Minglang Li has a strong feeling that something different will happen to her. Ailin Tan feels guilty for meeting Yuefeng Wu and she feels that she is losing Yifan Zou.

Episode 28

An Adventurous Trip:

Ailin Tan falls in love with Yuefeng Wu again and she wants to quit her affair with Wu. Na Mao feels that she is being followed by someone. An operator from the editing room starts courting Minglang Li, but Li feels offended. Ailin Tan negotiates the terms of a prenuptial agreement with Kai Deng's mother.

Episode 29

Four Women and A Wedding:

Minglang Li keeps seeing other men through newspaper date matching and she begins a new relationship with a soldier. Na Mao decides to try an “international relationship”. Yifan Zou struggles to accept the truth of Ailin Tan’s affair with Yuefeng Wu. The three friends throw a bachelor party for Chun Tao.

Episode 30

Love Exists Somewhere Else:

Na Mao is attracted to a man who owns a seafood restaurant. Ailin Tan realizes her relationship with New York City is as dysfunctional as her relationship with men, so she decides to distance herself from her former life in New York City. Minglang Li tries to relax herself by the sea. Chun Tao deals with Kai Zheng’s infertility problems.

Episode 31

Return Evil For Evil:

Chun Tao tries to adjust herself to the fact that she will never be able to be a mother. Minglang Li takes a Bodhisattva statue to her home and turns to religion for spiritual help. Na Mao finally meets her Mr. Right: a property manager. The girls are surprised by Na Mao’s change, but her love fails this time and Mao bursts out crying. Ailin Tan feels guilty when she hears of Yuefeng Wu’s divorce. Tan builds up her courage to have a frank talk with Qianqian Zhang, Wu’s ex-wife.

Episode 32**The Core of Question:**

Chun Tao decides to break up her marriage with Kai Zheng. Ailin Tan gets in a fight with Minglang Li because they have jabbed at each other's emotional wounds. Ailin Tan leaves Yuefeng Wu but she doubts whether she made the right decision. Minglang Li yearns for love while she struggles to accept Xiaodong Ma as her man. Na Mao writes a letter to inform her friends of her marriage.

APPENDIX B

Overview of Main Characters

[Hua, Jianhui. (2008). Cong 'Xing' Dao 'Qing': Nv Quan Zhu Yi, Shu Zhen Shu Jia?---- Biao Jiao Dian Shi Ju *Yu Wang Du Shi He Hao Xiang Hao Xiang Tna Lian Ai* (From Sex to Love: Feminism, True or False? ----A Comparison between *Sex and the City* and *I Want to Fall in Love Very Much*). Journal of Hubei Radio & Television University, Vol.28 , 064-065.]



Figure C1: Carrie Bradshaw vs. Ailin Tan

Ailin Tan is called “one of the top-ten beauty writers” in this show and she runs a small business---“a book bar”. Observing different kinds of men from her unique perspective, her love stories serve as the primary focus of *Yearning for Love*. Similar to Carrie, who works as a writer and lives in an international metropolis, Tan is portrayed as a successful professional woman in a modern city who has her book published and becomes well-known. Her love story with Yuefeng Wu is also copied from Carrie’s romance with Mr. Big, an entanglement with a man who is not willing to make commitment in a complicated relationship.



Figure C2. Miranda Hobbes vs. Minglang Li

Minglang Li is a typical white-collar professional woman. Similar to Miranda, Li is also career-minded and is cynical about relationships and men. As a successful television program producer, she is characterized with little feminine traits. Likewise, Miranda is also portrayed as a woman with masculine personality and a successful highly-paid career.



Figure C3. Charlotte York vs. Chun Tao

Chun Tao works as a software designer and she holds conventional thoughts of a woman being “a dutiful wife and devoted mother”. She maintains the most positive views on emotional love and has a passionate desire for marriage. Through the entire television

series, Tao never rests from her search for “Mr. Right”. Quite like Charlotte, who also holds a traditional attitude toward relationships, Tao preserves her conventional views and is always teased by her three friends for her romantic dreams of marriage. In later episodes, Tao enters into marriage as she wishes and encounters the same problems as Charlotte, of not being able to become a mother.



Figure C4. Samantha Jones vs. Na Mao

Na Mao is a fashion stylist. Compared to her friends, she is the most sexually confident and is called the “magic weapon for men” (meaning that every man will be dazzled by her charm). One of Mao’s best qualities is her loyalty to her friends. The show portrays Mao as having many admirers and various relationships. All these qualities are similar to Samantha in *Sex and the City*.

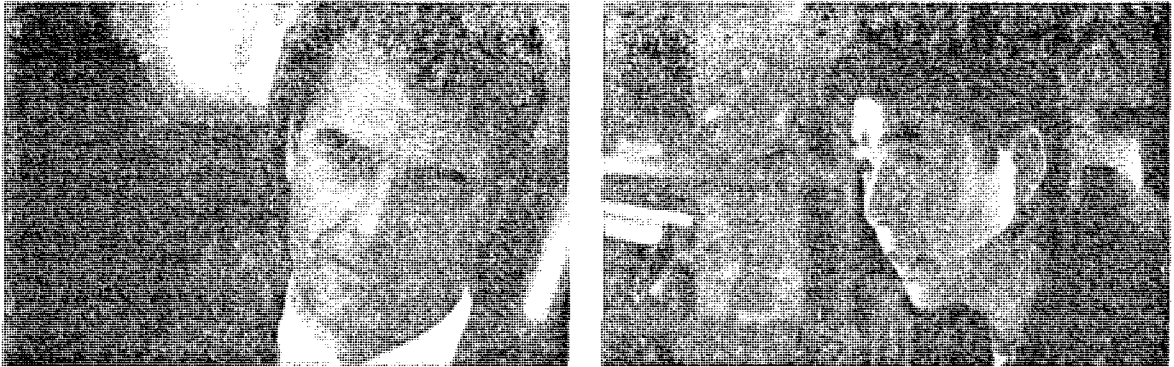


Figure C5. Mr. Big vs. Yuefeng Wu

Yuefeng Wu is a wealthy businessman who is the reason for Tan's many emotional breakdowns, as he is never ready for a long-term relationship. Although his failed marriage ruins his hope of a fully committed relationship, he suddenly marries Qianqian Zhang and quickly ends this marriage after an affair with Tan. The developments of the relationship between Tan and Wu are simply repetitions of Carrie's love story with Mr. Big.

APPENDIX C

Appendix C. 1

[Musical Selection List in Credit Titles of *Hao Xiang Hao Xiang Tan Lian Ai* (*Yearning for Love*).]

Thanks to Music Copyright Society of China

Special Thanks to Composers, Singers and Copyright Owners of the Following Musical

Works

Le set

Karma

Norbu

Opera

Lost Boys Calling

Perfect Day

Burled Love

Whispering Steppes

Paper Trippin

Don't Be That Way

Abrazame

Come Together

Appendix C.2

[Acknowledgement List in Credit Titles of *Hao Xiang Hao Xiang Tan Lian Ai* (*Yearning for Love*).]

Acknowledgements

MaxMara Store, Beijing Oriental Plaza

(Thanks for providing Liwen Jiang's costumes)

Moushi

(Thanks for providing Ying Na's costumes)

Odbo GERMANY, odbo black & white, Feng Lian Plaza

(Thanks for providing Jing Liang's costumes)

BOTAO

(Thanks for supplying costumes)

Mayangli Design

(Thanks for supplying costumes)

Xiamen Overseas Chinese Electronic Co., Ltd.

Zhengzhou Sanquan Foods Co., Ltd.

Kweichou Moutai Co., Ltd.

Rongcheng Vineyard Co., Ltd.

Beijing Xinting (La Maison de Domitille) Home Supplies Co., Ltd.

Nokia (China) Telecommunications Co., Ltd.

Beijing Chaoqun Anteng Technology Co., Ltd.

TianJin Otsuka beverage Co., Ltd.

Xishan Villa

Hou Xian Dai Cheng (Postmodern City)

Langqin Garden Phase III

Zhujiang Dijing Guoji Huayuan (Regal Rivera International Garden)

China Resources Land Limited EZ Homes

Jindi International Garden Club

Kabuqinuo Jiuba (Cappuccino Café)

Yida Xicanting (Yi Da Western-style Restaurant)

Beijing Miracle Love Marriage Photo Ltd.

Avic Hotel Beijing

Blue Zoo Beijing

Pricesmart Membership-shopping Warehouse Club

Beijing Liangshan Hospital

Zhongfu Radio Telephone Store

Pacific Department Store at Beijing Pacific Century Place

Peking University Hospital

Shijijintan Buyecheng (Century Jintan Sleepless Town)

Qiji Weilai Tiyu Fazhan Youxiangongsi (Miracle Future Sports Development Co., Ltd.)

Mirage Western-style Food Bar

Kechuang Yiyuan Hualang (Kechuang Yiyuan Gallery)

D-COW Designing Office

Beijing Aixiu Catering Co., Ltd.

Shiyi Zhoumo Xicanting (Romantic Weekend Western-style Cafe)

Tsinghua Unigroup Ltd. Department Head Office

Beijing Full Link Co., Ltd.

Henderson Sino Land Co., Ltd. (Beijing Henderson Centre)

Being Café in the West Sea on the East Coast Co., Ltd.

Jacky's Café

Beijing Ireland Bar

Beijing Graapa's Italian Restaurant

Club Deep Qianzou Bar

Fencing Hall of Olympic Sports Center Gymnasium

Catch Chance and Achieve Victory (CCAV) Chuanmei Guangchang

Kingdom Garden

South Beauty Catering Co., Ltd.

VITAAUCTORIS

Dong Zhao was born on November 10, 1983 in Lanzhou, Gansu, P. R. China. She graduated from No. 33 High School in 2002. From there she went on to Jinan University where she obtained a B.A. in Journalism in 2006. She is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in Communication Studies and Social Justice at the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Spring 2009.