THE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE AS A MEDIATED DISASTER IN CHINA: HOW THE MEDIA REPRESENTED AND RECONSTRUCTED THE DISASTER

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by

me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information

which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university

previously.

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YE Xiaojun

2 August 2015

For my late Grandfather

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Summary

This thesis reads the Wenchuan Earthquake as a mediated disaster to explore

the media-society dynamic of China. It takes the multiple-media reality as a

starting point to analyse representations of this earthquake in different media,

including news media (television and newspaper), the Internet, cell phones,

and museums. A wide range of media texts is chosen to include distinct but

interconnected aspects and stages of the disaster relief and reconstruction.

Through textual analyses of these media texts as well as their interconnection,

the thesis first examines how the media was central to the national

mobilization and collective memory through managing the distance between

spectators and sufferers in the Chinese contemporary society.

After the earthquake happened on 12 May 2008, this disaster quickly

monopolized the media attention. Through journalistic realism and cinematic

language, ubiquitous news reports of the disaster shortened the distance

between sufferers and spectators and created a sense of urgency for the

whole nation, which together transformed this excessive but still endemic

earthquake into a national crisis and a cause for collective prey, discussion,

donation, voluntary help on the ground and online. With the media, the

whole nation was synchronized by the disaster time, and this unified

time-space found its extreme expression during the mourning days (19-21

May 2008). Through concerted representation, media spectacle was created

as a rite of passage for the national crisis, symbolizing an official ending of

the emergency stage as well as the national mobilization.

The sense of proximity created in the mediated visibility as a key part of

the national mobilization also infused the sense of uncertainty and crisis into

non-affected population, which is a starting point to understand the rise of

rumors and jokes transmitted via the Internet and cell phones. The relation of

these grassroots texts to the mediated suffering as well as their intertextuality

reveal they were not only the indexes of the preoccupation of the national

public with the disaster but also alternative interpretations and multiple

experience about this calamity.

At the reconstruction stage, the polysemy and ambiguity of media texts

and social experiences, however, were gradually contained and flatten in a

master commemorative narrative framed by a nature-culture divide, in which the disaster was narrated as a linear process from a natural calamity into a cultural/national triumph.

The national triumph was represented and celebrated in ways that hierarchies between affected populations as well as the distance between themselves and outside population were reconstructed. Museums with different locales and sponsors were chosen to show how various sub-narratives within the master frame were produced as the interplay of technologies, intuitions and the tension between affected and non-affected population.

It first reveals that asymmetrical media attention could lead to the disintegration of local communities by transforming victims/survivors into competitors for the outside attention or imposing temporal pressure on their recovery and reconstruction. Also two proposals of action constructed by media representation for spectators, witness of happy ending or judge of wrongdoing, are discussed in terms of their improper distance between spectators/actors and sufferers. They are either too close to see irreducible

"otherness" in vulnerable population, or too far to see the collective

responsibility of the rich population. These kinds of improper distance

brought about corresponding problems in the reconstruction of disaster areas,

which converged in producing the bias of mediation. The bias of mediation

was integrated into the clashes between outside assistance and affected

population in the disaster relief and reconstruction, which in some sense

destroyed the post-disaster solidarity without empowering local

communities.

In general, taking the Wenchuan Earthquake as a mediated disaster

provides a privileged access to see the potential of Chinese society facing

crisis and its inherent problems and tension. The mediated visibility of this

disaster could effectively connect the affected population with a larger

society but also contain potential to disintegrate local communities. The

dialects of mediation expose the disruption and continuance of structural

hierarchies and territorial inequality in Chinese contemporary society. It also

deconstructs the stereotyped understanding of Chinese media by displaying

their various and fluid autonomy at different moments within a disaster event.

In theoretical sense, the thesis offers an in-between approach to break down either/or frames, event/process, representation/reality, media event/media spectacle, and spectators/actors, to capture the complexities of the media-society dynamic. Also the combination of textual analyses and ethnography rejects either semiotic determinism or free-floating agency, which offers a new perspective to media effects study. Last not least, the practical values of this thesis lie in its critical and long-term perspective to the disaster relief and reconstruction, which demand an alternative ethic of solidarity as well as a reflective viewing and acting public facing human vulnerability.

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Introduction: Becoming a disaster

In the days since the ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, message of solidarity with French people flooded all kinds of media in every corner of the world. The tragedy was represented and read as "an attack on all of humanity", as American President Obama put it. Disturbing images from Paris summoned people as an ordinary human being to give love, support to French people and express anger against terrorism. Ironically, there was another ISIS attack in Beirut almost at the same time that was as tragic as Paris's, which were relatively invisible to the global public. Compare to Paris' tragedy, there was no same calibre of coverage and visible solidarity demonstration showing collective grief. It is a display of the irony of our mediated-saturate age: someone's suffering dominates media attention and evokes collective grief in a larger society while others are barely worthy of news coverage and leave no trace in collective memories. It maybe true when souls pass through the grave, and we would stand at God's feet, equal, however, human's suffering definitely has hierarchies in the sense that some

sufferers have been seen and got support from others but the others have not.

To understand such hierarchies, we need to examine there connected questions, what, when and where is a disaster.

I   What, when and where is a disaster

What is a disaster?

A dictionary may tell us a disaster is "a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life". However, this definition could not stop the controversies around the definition of a disaster in reality. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) excludes wars, conflict-related famines, disasters or epidemics in its official definition of a disaster, for it has to follow so-called "neutral" or "apolitical" principle to avoid any involvement of political and diplomatic conflicts. The definition is based on a pragmatic concern that the IFRC's interference in the conflicted-related cases could prolong the conflict especially when their aids buttress the position of the weaker party (Benthall, 1993), although it seriously conflicts with IFRC's humanitarian mission of

preventing and alleviating human suffering. In this sense, defining a disaster

is less a linguistic practice than a political and social issue.

Within the national boundary, defining a disaster is equally complicated

and politicized. Whether perceiving a destructive event as a disaster or not is

closely related to governments' responsibility, officials' career as well as the

social affirmation of victimhood. The conflicts in defining 2003 SARS in

China show the definition of a disaster is an arena where different social

groups are competing for their own interests. This epidemic was a disaster[1]

according to either domestic or international criteria[2], however this epidemic

was defined as a public health event/crisis instead of a disaster, for the

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[1] Among various Chinese counterparts of the concept of "disaster", "灾难" and "灾害" are the most frequent words that are used both in academic and popular discourses. Although sometimes these two words are used interchangeably, "灾害" is more equivalent to a hazard, a potentially destructive agent, emphasizing the cause of a disaster; while "灾难" emphasizes the effects of a disaster. Also there is a nature-culture divide between them: the former is used more frequently to refer to natural disasters (自然灾害), while the latter is more used in the cases of man-made disasters (人间灾难). Similar conclusion on the distinctions between these two Chinese concepts could be found in Li (2011) and Liu (2013). However the current literature fails to explain well why the two words have such distinctions. The answer lies in the meaning of "难/難" in the word "灾难". "难/難" implies difficulty and suffering, which gets meaning from its radical or section header, "堇" that originally means human sacrifices in rituals as responses to drought or other disasters. Hence, with this section header, "难/難" has the meaning of suffering, pains and difficulties, which introduces human suffering into the whole word "灾难". In this sense, "灾难" is used in this thesis as a Chinese equivalent to disaster because it could express more accurately the essential nature of a disaster as a conjuncture of a human population and a potentially hazard. See Appendix V The Chinese Characters of "难/難".

[2] According to the IFRC, for a disaster that could be entered into their database, at least one of the following criteria must be fulfilled: ten or more people reported killed; 100 people or more reported affected; declaration of a state of emergency; call for international assistance.

acknowledgement of a disaster in China's political bureaucracy meant

admitting the intensity of an accident and correspondingly taking on much

greater responsibility and accountability[3]. However survivors, often use

disaster to refer to this epidemic, asking for more outside supports. The

controversies around the question as to what is a disaster reveal that a

disaster is by no means a scientific concept with objectivity and absoluteness

but a social and discursive construct. No matter how destructive an event is,

it needs social recognition to become a disaster.

When and where is a disaster

The question as to what is a disaster is intertwined with the other two

questions, "When and where is a disaster?" The social recognition of a

disaster is related less to its destructivesness than to its time-space. The

discrepancy between Paris and Beirut attacks in terms of global response

shows the place where a disaster happens determines the visibility as well as

social recognition of a disaster. The public perception of these two areas

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[3] See Zheng (2007:154164) for an in-depth analysis about the conflicts among different social forces involved in this crisis,

played an essential role here. Beirut attacks happened in the Middle East where bombs and violence are considered routine, and the attacks was portrayed by the media and the outside population as little more than strategic punishment for Hezbollah's ongoing involvement in this area. While

Within the national boundary, the time when destructive events happened is also essential to their visibility and outside assistance. In the period of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Chinese government did not encourage publicity for its disasters, natural or technological. Deadly earthquakes, such as The 1976 Tonghai (通海) Earthquake, largely fell off the media's radar and the affected population had to entirely rely on local resources for relief and reconstruction, leaving no space in the collective memory(Lei, 2008)[4]. On the contrary, the Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008 was the most publicized earthquake in the history of Peoples Republic of China (PRC) [5] and aid for the beloved Chinese people poured out from

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[4] Thanks to international media reports and movies, The 1976 Great Tangshan Earthquake at the same period is relatively visible in the collective memory.
[5] According to the China Publishers Yearbook 2009, the coverage of Wenchuan Earthquake has broken several records in China's journalism history, especially for the central media as shown in Appendix I.

every corner of the world, which was deeply. etched into the collective

memory of Chinese nationals

In this sense, media representation is essential to understand the

hierarchies of these disasters in different time-space. Borrowing words from

Benthall (1993), it is safe to say that no matter how destructive or massive a

disaster is, it does not exist for a larger society or in the memory of later

generation unless represented by media. Here "media" does not include mass

media but also the Internet, cell phones, movies, museum or other means of

representation. It is not saying that media can control the occurrence of a

disaster but indicates media representation is central to how a destructive

event become a disaster that demands the attention of a larger society and

outside assistance or not.

II   Disasters and mediation: mediated disasters

Mediated experiences have been a defining feature of our modern society. In

our increasingly complicated society, it is impossible for ordinary people to

have direct knowledge about and take part in every event, no matter how

large the event is. More often than not, most people perceive and respond not to the actual events but to the ones mediated by communication technologies.

Disasters, no matter how large, are experienced first at the local level. Even like Wenchuan Earthquake, whose magnitude was so large that a half of China felt it, became a disaster only at a certain locale. For the affected population facing such destructive stress, to make their suffering visible for distant spectators is the prerequisite for the external aids and assistance. Professional relief agencies and governments have gradually realized the necessity of the publicity produced by media coverage and representation in disaster management, relief, and reconstruction. In our age disasters are becoming more frequent and impacting ever-larger population as communities become more vulnerable (Benthall, 1993; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2002), which means there are increasing disasters competing for people's attention and assistance even within national boundaries. The success of appeals or national mobilization launched by humanitarian agencies or governments mainly depends on how well physical distant spectators recognize the emergency of an endemic disaster and transform

their spectatorship into action.

In this sense, the mediation of suffering is crucial to the transformation of a local disaster into a target of public action in a large society. In general language, the term 'mediation' is used for any process of intervention while the concerns here is with the terms specific uses in media research. It derives from the term 'medium', which means a means by which something is communicated or expression. Following Silverstone (2002) and Couldry (2008), I use 'mediation' here to describe the fundamentally but unevenly dialectical process in which institutionalized media of communication, including newspaper, television, the Internet, cell phones and museums, are involved in circulating symbols, signifying and representing social life. Here the "dialectic" feature of mediation is important to distinguish mediation from mediatisation. Although there is considerable overlap between these two concepts, the latter, as argues Couldry (2008), highlights a linear process in which social and cultural experiences are taking on media forms. Implied in this concept is the notion of replication, that is, "the spreading of media forms to spaces of contemporary life that are required to be re-presented

though media forms"(Couldry, 2008:376). However mediation is a dialectic

process in the sense it dose not only concern how media represent the reality

but also how media presentation transforms the reality in which media

representation is produced and understood. Based on Silverstone (2007) and

Couldry (2008), the mediation is dialectical in the sense of where the world

appears and of appearance as such constituting the world.

Correspondingly, the mediation of suffering refers to a dialectical

process in which media representation of destructive events are produced in

particular time-space and reconstructs these disastrous events in turn. In

other words, mediation is an integral part of disasters not only in the sense

media represent the disaster but also media representation is a part of the

disaster relief and reconstruction by connecting or disconnecting spectators

and sufferers. Therefore the concept of "mediated disaster"[6] is used in this

thesis to capture the complexities of disaster-media-society dynamic to see

how mediation and reality is mutually constituted at disaster moments.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore and exam the following different

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[6] In other parts of this thesis, "mediated experience" or "mediated visibility" are also used
to refer to the duality of mediation in relation to disasters.

but interconnected questions arise. In what specific time-space, what kind of destructive events could be recognized and remembered as disaster? How does the spectatorship of others' suffering invoke our compassion and action? How dose the mediation-induced action impact the society in turn?

II   The Wenchuan Earthquake in China

The aforementioned Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008 offers a privileged access to answer these questions around the mediation of suffering. The significance of studying this disaster first lies in its uniqueness of time-space. As mentioned above, China used to have a strict media control on disaster reports. However the Wenchuan Earthquake signified a turning point of the party-state's governance in response to disasters in a media-saturated age. The great publicity of the Wenchuan Earthquake was attributed more to the 2008 Beijing Olympics rather than to its destructive effects. Due to the Beijing Olympics, the whole China was under the spotlight of the world especially after the Lhasa Violence in March 2008, which caused international protests against China. The western hostility towards the

Beijing Olympics led to the rise of the national sentiment among Chinese people home and abroad. In this sense the earthquake that happened at that juncture had been a great chance for the Chinese government to transform the international criticisms on its violation of human rights into humanitarian supports. It was also an opportunity for the party-state to channel the national sentiment into the disaster relief. These reasons together led to the unprecedented openness of the party-state, which made possible cooperation between the media, governments and the public. By signifying a turning point of the media-disaster relationship in China, this disaster offers a chance to see how the party-state's governance was transformed from by coercion to by managing public opinion at disaster moments.

Related to this unprecedented openness was the great range of media representation from the emergency to reconstruction stage of this disaster, which included systematic media reports produced by media agencies at all kinds of level and grassroots-produced accounts on the Internet; printed or audio-visual anniversary reports and multi-media museums. It is a case of "thickenings of media communication" (Hepp and Couldry, 2010) that offers

a precious chance to study the full potential of media technologies including traditional media, the Internet and museums, as well as the convergence and divergence of these media.

The great involvement of the whole nation also offers a third reason to study the disaster, which created a "contact zone" (Chatterjee, 2004) where the party-state and different social groups interacted with each other intensively, which manifested itself in the action in distance (donation), action on the spot (aid mission), rumoring, joking and mnemonic activities. The great complexities and multiplicity of experiences related to the mediated suffering offers a chance to develop a unique peak into the Chinese society.

Last not least, the study of the Wenchuan Earthquake provides us with an opportunity to explore stories after collective action. The media as well as the outside population was greatly involved in the reconstruction and recovery of the affected areas, which could give us a chance to examine long-term effects of the mediation-induced action by linking two ends of the mediated suffering, spectators and sufferers.

In general, the Wenchuan Earthquake as a mediated disaster was a unique historical reference to examine the dynamics among media, disasters and Chinese contemporary society. This thesis tries to capture the complexities among media-disaster-society dynamic by answering the question as to how media represent and reconstruct this disaster. More specifically, they are two distinct but related groups of questions:

1. How did different media represent this disaster at different stages of the disaster relief? How can we understand the convergence and divergence of these texts in relation to the media-society dynamic of China?

2. How can we conceptualize experiences based on the media representation in the context of the existing power structure? How did the mediation-induced action reconstruct the disaster relief and reconstruction temporally and spatially？

Chapter 1 of this thesis starts with the defining complexities of a disaster, showing disaster as a disruption and expression of social orders. Then it

reviews two polar approaches to the disaster-media-society dynamic,

followed by a more specific discussion of their limitations in relation to the

particularities of the Chinese media landscape. Finally, this chapter proposes

an in-between perspective to approach the complexity and contextuality of

this mediated disaster.

The following chapters of this thesis unfold in accordance with the

temporality of disaster relief. Chapter 2 starts with the earthquake, or more

specifically, the first news of this earthquake, and shows how media reports

and representation were integrated into national mobilization by

transforming the complex disaster into a national crisis. Through the textual

analyses of media texts between audio-visual versus print media as well

national media versus local media, this chapter tries to capture better how the

interaction among different media texts together constituted a unified

time-space for national mobilization and organized an exit for the national

crisis.

Chapter 3 turns from official and systematic media accounts to

grassroots-produced narratives, rumours and jokes. This chapter reads

rumours and jokes as an alternative space in relation to the dominant

narrative of the disaster to understand multiple ways of participation and

social experience that were integral to the making of the mediated disaster.

Chapter 4 moves further to the reconstruction stage or after to discuss

the mnemonic representation of this disaster to show how the forgetting was

organized after telling what to be worth remembering. This chapter reads

mnemonic representations of the disaster as interplay of locality, technology

and institution, showing how different social groups competed for the

ownership of the disaster.

The timespan of Chapter 5 is the longest, which is from the first news

about the earthquake in 2008 to 2013 when the affected areas faced another

big earthquake again. This chapter links both ends of the meditated suffering,

spectators and sufferers, and focuses on how the mediated visibility shaped

the disaster relief and reconstruction by exploring alternative stories after the

"happy ending" of national mobilization.

Chapter 6 explores how we can learn from this mediated disaster about

the Chinese contemporary society and then discusses both the significance

and limitations of this study in a broad context of media-disaster studies,

followed by corresponding recommendations for future studies and disaster

relief.

Chapter 1   Approaching mediated disasters: an in-between perspective

Common sense may tell us that a small tragedy in one's own backyard elicits more grief than a catastrophe on the other side of the world, for physical proximity is important for one's involvement in front of other's suffering. However, such mental faculty has been challenged in our media-saturated society, for our perception of "distance" has been greatly shaped by modern communication technologies. Social, cultural, mental and moral distance between people is increasingly uncoupled with physical distance. As shown in the cases of Paris and Beirut attacks, Asian audience were disinterested in their neighbours' tragedy but mourned actively for beloved French people at a distance. The compassion gap in Paris and Beirut attacks shows spectators' involvement is closely related to mediation of others' suffering rather than suffering itself. However in social theory of media-disaster studies, there is no consensus on how to conceptualize mediation of suffering. To risk oversimplification, I try to categorize debates and theories around mediation of suffering into two groups, the approach of media events and media

spectacle[7].

1.1 Media events and media spectacle

The concept of media events is borrowed from the original study of Dayan

and Katz (1992) about special television genre that promotes social

integration. Although their original study does not include disaster into their

typology, "media event" is used in this thesis to refer to a major approach

that reads mediation of suffering as moments of "mechanical solidarity". For

this approach, media representation of disasters could summon a large

audience simultaneously to witness or overcome difficulties together. In

doing so, public traumas are healed and human values are reconfirmed. This

approach is based on a functionalist understating of the relation between the

media and society. More specifically society is a complex system and the

media functions as a part of this system to maintain its solidarity and stability.

Therefore, mediated disasters are like periodic social gatherings or

social-making tools to hold the whole society together and avoid declension

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[7] Chouliaraki (2006) used "the optimistic and pessimistic narrative" instead to refer different approaches to the ethical responsibility of televised suffering.

into fraction or tyranny.

By contrast, media spectacle is a word borrowed from Kellner (2013)[8] to refer to the contrary approach to mediated disaster. It reads mediation of suffering as an aesthetic simulation of community, incorporating fragmental society into a visual unification without real connection. This approach is based on the Marxist-inspired tradition with a more critical stance, which denies the liberating potential of mediation. Frankfurt school, post-Marxists, Debord and Baudrilliard could be discussed within this category. Despite their different focuses, they more or less echoed Adorno's criticism of cultural industry for creating illusory collectivity and community. The discrepancies of two approaches could be dissected from three distinct but connected aspects of the mediation-disaster relation: technology, institution, and audience.

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[8] Media spectacle is coined by Kellner (2003) to conceptualize and criticize mediated reality as hegemonic manipulation. Spectacle was a word borrowed from Guy Debord's book, *The Society of Spectacle*, in which he argued that the consumer society was characterized as proliferation of commodities and immense accumulation of spectacle, where images determined and overtook reality.

Media technologies

Both approaches take medium theory as a starting point, linking media technologies and particular social structure. Medium theory focuses on the shaping power of the formats of media technologies rather than contents these technologies transmitted. In particular, the media events approach accentuates the potential of media technologies in conquering space and integrating segmented societies. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, modern media technologies have capacity to alter our sense of the distance, spatially and temporally and make possible "action at a distance" at disaster moments, which is called "uncoupling of space and time" (Thompson, 1995). At disaster moments, visual media can make spectators witness human suffering by bringing home disturbing images and experience from the affected areas. Spectatorship creates an imaginative but unified time-space and the awareness of simultaneity makes the cosmopolitan sense possible. No matter physical contact is possible or not, the relationship between suffers and spectators has been intertwined with the media at disaster moments. In other

words, mediated visibility does not only re-present the reality but also

transform the reality in a fundamental way by bringing to view the invisible

aspects for naked eyes, such as the sense of simultaneity, national or global

community and so on. Just as Benjamin (1968) puts, the reproduction is not

only as important as the original but also is more important than the original.

In short, for the media event approach, the mediation of suffering could read

as a new mode of participation with progressive and liberating meaning

(Dayan and Katz, 1992:100).

In contrast to this optimistic expectation on mediation, the concept of

"spectacle" challenges the link of mediated visibility with the authentic

experience and the collection with collectivity. This sceptical attitude

towards mediation starts from Plato (1958)'s cave[9], how the mediation

(shadows of lights) chains the human and thus human's self-revelation can

be possible only with the direct access to the lights (the authenticity). Peters

(1999, 2001) accentuates the distinction between presence and absence in the

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[9] Plato used his famous allegory of the cave in The Republic: because of the chain, the human in caves could not turn around their heads and consequently saw only the shadows on the wall before them rather than the real world.

physical sense, and overturns the hierarchies proposed by Dayan and Katz (1992). He emphasizes the ontological and epistemological differences between "being here" and "not being here". He thinks that media events theory does not answer well the repeated questions concerning mediation: "Can the borrowed eyes and ears be agents of truth or authenticity? Or, can the viewing experience really replace the experience of presence? If they can, why are people so excited to attend events when one could get a better view on television at home?" (Peter, 2001:717).

In addition, the mediated reality as a result of visual editing, soundtrack, repetition or fast tracking, argues Robins (1994), could lead to audiences' awareness of the sense of distance rather than intimacy, detachment rather than involvement. What is more, the united coalition created at disaster moments is illusive in the sense that isolated and disenfranchised individuals are sutured into a spectacle of homogenization, which is the nightmare of "aestheticized politics" (Benjamin,1968).

Media institutions

The discussion of technological potential could not be separated from the ways technologies are used, which means technologies are not self-generating and their particular potential would be magnified or minimalized by social groups who use them with certain purposes (Williams, 1990). In this sense, taking media as institution means focusing on "social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and the consumption of communication resources" (Mosco, 2009), which mainly include two large forces, "political" and "economic", and their dialectical interaction. The approach of media events takes a liberal stance to see economic forces as a positive shaping power at disaster moments. Theorists with this approach believe fully commercial media are free agents with distinctive professional standards, which can countervail arbitrary state power. Therefore commercial media had independence and bargaining power, which are instrumental in preventing mediated disasters from being "aestheticized of politics". Due to commercial

interest, the media love disasters. It may be an exaggeration that "journalists are parasites on human suffering" (Benthall, 1999:2), but it is true that disasters are historically a central domain of media headlines. The destructive nature of disasters makes them especially suited to media that prefer dramatic, sensational, tragic and extraordinary events. The first English newspaper, Oxford Gazette is thought to thrive on the disaster news of the Great Plague and the Fire of London (Cohen, 1991). The rise of Cable News Network (CNN) as the fourth Network in America is often linked to its performance in 1991 Gulf War and 9/11 New York Attacks to FOX News. In China, it is also well acknowledged that major disaster always made good copies, but the government control is the major obstacle to make disasters invisible. With media commercialization in China, Chinese government could not easily impose rigid control on the reports of disasters.

The approach of media spectacle rejects the wishful link between economic independence and freedom. Instead, it argues that liberalization and commercialization cannot keep mediated disasters from hegemonic manipulation or "aestheticized of politics". Instead, media in a fully

developed capitalist society serve as a part of vast institutional and technical

apparatus of contemporary capitalism. It is commercial interests of media

that lead to compassion fatigue (Tester, 2001). For example, media

commercialization could promote a "peek-a-boo' framework of distant

suffering, where a disaster pops into view for a moment and then vanishes.

As a result, deep involvement and active action give away to entertainment

and sensationalism. Moreover, commercial interests are closely intertwined

with geo-political interests. As shown in the study of Tester (2001), there is

connection between media coverage of humanitarian disasters and US State

Department policy decision[10].

Audiences: spectators or actors

The controversies around mediated disasters, no matter whether they invoke

compassion or not, could not be conceptualized without taking the

audience/spectators into consideration. The debate between passive

spectators and active actors is not new at all. The discrepancy in the two

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[10] See Benthall (1993) for how mediated disasters serve as particular political manoeuver, as shown in the coverage on the Kurds' suffering in the 1990 Gulf war and Kellner (2003) for the exaggerated and polarized representation of September 11 attacks in US media that promotes wars (Kellner, 2003).

approaches in this aspect is how to define "active action". The media events

approach has a broad understanding of action, which included reflective

examination and speaking (Boltanski, 1999). It is active and reflective

audience that is instrumental in keeping mediated suffering from being mere

commercial gimmick or political manipulations. The active nature of

audience is shown in the transformation of the apolitical home into a political

salon. Attendance take places in small groups congregated around the

newspaper, television set, and then passive spectatorship gives away to

critical discussion and active participation. In this sense, the home-bound

gathering created by the spectatorship of distant suffering transposes

apolitical home into multiple public sphere, encapsulating the experience of

"not being here", when there is no way of being here.

In sharp contrast to the expectation of active audience and homebound

public sphere is a suspicious attitude implied in the media spectacle approach.

"The domesticity of reception" is used by Chouliaraki (2006) to

problematize the possible reaction of the spectators in the safe milieu facing

the spectacle of suffering. Due to the materiality of a medium, newspaper,

television, cell phone or computer, the scene of suffering is rendered as small

as a paper or screen. In general, the immediate physical place of audiences

constrains their compassion for distant suffering on the pages or screens. As

Tomlinson argues, "it is the dull compulsion of the quotidian' that constitutes

the individual's relevant horizon of feelings and actions. No matter how

compelling suffering on television is, it remains-by virtue of its mediation-a

distant and discontinuous experiences that presses less demandingly on the

spectators' moral sensibilities than events within their own immediate

sphere " (Tomlinson, 1999:178; quoted by Chouliaraki, 2006: 26).

Summary

In short, the discussion on the approaches of media events and media

spectacle are centred on three connected questions as to the tension between

mediation and reality, the possibility of independent media and the

transformation of spectatorship into action. Although each approach offers

different perspectives to the disaster-media-society dynamics, both formulate

theories in either/or terms. The media spectacle approach exposes the

wishful thinking implied in the approach of media events: the

comsmopolitant dream is asserted, but the question of how we get there is

essentially ignored. However, the media spectacle approach completely

denies the fact that mediated experieces have charaterized our contemporay

society and leaves no space for any possiblity of public action at a distace or

mediation-induced action. (Chouliaraki, 2006). Neither the naïve celebration

of social integrtion nor easy deinial of mediation-induced action could

capture well the complexities of the disaster-media-society dynamic,

especially the hierarchies of mediated disasters in terms of social response as

shown in the reality. These two approaches share a flat and static

understanding of disaster-media-society dynamic. Neither social intimacy

nor disinterest could be read as mediated disasters' DNA. Instead they are

complex interplay between technologies, political, financial and social forces.

As Couldry (2012) aruges, the strating point of social theories of media is the

open-endedness of mediation and the embedding of practice in wider social

reltaions. Mediated disasters are arenas where variegated kinds of conflicts,

controversies and struggles in contemporary society put on display

dramatically; they are critical moments in which previously separated social forces and individuals interacted with each other, be it competing, cooperating or negotiating. To catpure the heterogeneity and divesity of mediated disasters, as Chouliaraki (2006) suggests, one has to turn to the relativist epistemologies, that is, approaching the grand theories by means of particular cases without pursuing a general but simplistic and reduced model or super category. Therefore, we first need to go beyond the either-or framework of mediation and turn to the specific time-space where the Wenchuan Earthquake happened, that is, China's context with particularities

1.2 Contextualizing the Wenchuan Earthquake as a mediated disaster

Disasters and society: as event and process

The starting point to go beyond the either-or framework is a dynamic understanding of disaster-society relation. One way to understand the relation between a society and disaster is to take a disaster as a disruption of social orders. In popular discourse, disasters are usually used as a metaphor to refer to events with destructive consequences that destroy normalcy.

Correspondingly in the sociological definitions, disasters are conceptualized by their disruption of normal life or social orders (Briton, 1987; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2001). This kind of understanding is an event framework, which reads disasters as events, or "occurrences that interrupt routine processes, and routine procedures (Arendt, 1970; Quoted by Beissinger, 2002:14). Shared in this event frame are two related implications:

I. Disaster is an event whose beginning could be clearly defined, an expression of difference from the routine.

II. The disruption that a disaster brings about is a temporary departure from the routine, and the affected population will come back to the normal.

Therefore within the event frame, destructive events are often divided into natural and cultural disasters[11], depending on how their beginnings are defined. As shown in the working definition of IFRC, disasters include two generic categories, natural and technological.

"The natural disasters include biological disasters, geophysical

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[11] As shown in the English language dictionaries, disasters and accidents are mutually defined (see Appendix II), and in daily interaction they often overlap. However each concept has nuanced but distinct implications. Accident emphasizes the unexpected and unintentional aspect of damages, while disaster is mainly defined by its intense and destructive effect. In addition, there is a natural-cultural division between disasters and accidents. 'Disaster' is used to describe events with natural triggers, while 'accident' is used in the category of man-made damages as a direct result of human activities.

disasters, climatological, hydrological disaster, and meteorological

disasters; while the technological disasters comprise three groups:

industrial accidents, transport accidents and miscellaneous accidents"

(WDR, 2003:225).

However this division is highly problematic the boundary between

nature and technological disasters are not clear-cut as expected. Any disaster

could not just happen like a bolt from the blue, but as a conjuncture of a

human population and a potentially destructive agent. Consider a big

earthquake that happens in a sparsely populated desert or on the seabed,

which could not be perceived as a disaster. Also every hazard always

includes a human element since in our contemporary society human

activities have greatly transformed the nature. For example, earthquakes

could be facilitated by human activities, for example, by dams. In the case of

the Wenchuan Earthquake, it is not the shaking of the earth but buildings

with bad quality that led to massive death. Therefore the inextricable

relationship between culture and nature in producing a disaster could not be

explained well in the event framework of disaster (Briton, 1987; Hoffman

and Oliver-Smith, 2001).

To overcome the limitations of event framework, one has to read a disaster as a process at the same time (Briton, 1987; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2001), which means disasters are processual phenomena with their own past, present and the future. Key to the process framework is the concept of vulnerability,

> "the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover the impact of a natural or technological hazard. The degree to which someone's life and livelihood is put at risk is determined by the interaction of the physical prosperities of a hazard and cultural, social and psychological factors characteristics of the population occupying the specific location" (based on the definitions of vulnerability offered by Briton, 1987:31; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2001:28)

Implied in the concept of the vulnerability is the locality of disaster. For example, the Wenchuan earthquake physically affected all provincial-level regions except three distant provinces, Xinjiang, Heilongjiang and Jilin

provinces. However the most severely affected population are 237 countries

in the Sichuan province, its adjoining provinces of Shangxi and Gansu.

These areas are so-called Western China, which are thought to relatively

poor and underdeveloped compared to Eastern China. Shared in these areas

were isolated mountainous topography with bad traffic and sub-standard

buildings. In short, an earthquake as a normal energy release from the earth

could become a disaster only in the context with a specific pattern of

vulnerability. Moreover, this condition of vulnerability is not as sudden as

the tremor but accumulative effects of human activities. Day-to-day

behaviour "produces" vulnerability, which is closely associated with the

social order and structure embedded in the routine life. Just as Hewitt (1983)

puts, most natural disasters are better explainable in terms of the "normal"

order of things, that is, the conditions of inequality and subordination in a

society rather than accidental geophysical features of a place. That is why

disaster victims often come from the poorer population of the society, or

other vulnerable sectors of the society (Benthall, 1993; Dreze and Sen, 1990;

Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2002). In addition, structural inequality would

probably reproduce itself in the allocation of relief and reconstructions resources. In general, examining the processual aspects of disasters unmasks the unequal distribution of power within a society that produces different vulnerabilities of groups.

In this sense, taking a disaster as a process is not reading a disaster as an extended event. Instead it tries to save the complexities of a disaster from the nature-culture divide by destabilizing the definitive beginning as well as a happy ending of a disaster. In fact the tension between reading a disaster as event and process is more than a matter of different cognitive patterns. Instead it is a site of conflicts. As shown above, the beginning of a disaster is important in search of causality, on which accountabilities are constituted.

Equally important is how to define the ending of a disaster, including not only the end of emergency but also its influence. In fact, every disaster is a protracted one in the sense that it needs a longer time to recover than expected in both physical and psychological senses (Cohen, 1991; Dyer, 2002; Gunewardena and Schuller, 2008; Moseley, 2002). For example, un geographical sense, the Wenchuan Earthquake actually lasted from 12 May

2008 to 27 May 2009 during which there were 54971 aftershocks and the

biggest one with magnitude of 6.4. It is no exaggeration to say that there

could never be a happy ending of a disaster. Even though the disaster relief

of was effective and long-term, this disaster still has had destructive effects.

Suicide cases proliferated after the earthquake and even after 7 years passed

(2015), some families and communities have not recovered from this trauma

psychologically or economically, which can continue, if not intensify, the

vulnerable condition of this population. In this sense, the combination of the

event and the process frame could help us understand the complexities of

disaster-society relationship, which greatly frames the way people deal with

a disaster as well as its recovery and reconstruction (Cohen, 1991; Hoffman

and Oliver-Smith, 2002).

Media and society: China's media landscape with particularities

Another dynamic understanding of media-society is also needed here to

capture well Chine's media landscape with particularities. Among them is

China's distinct state-society complex in comparison to its counterparts in

liberal democracy. The ideal model of state-society relation in the approaches of media events and media spectacle is based on the differentiation between state and society. Related to this model are two premises:

(i) State represents an oppressive force as opposed to society that comprises economic regime, civil society and private daily life. Hence a strong civil society is perceived as a necessary force to check state power;

(ii) An independent media is integral to an effective and liberating public sphere to bridle the state's intervention, while these two approaches have contrary understanding about the relationship between media commercialization and independence.

This static understanding of the state-society relation can neither help us to understand the state-society at disaster moments nor China's contemporary society. First, the antithesis between the state and the media is long thought as a necessary condition to keep the public life from the intervention of the state (Habermas, 1989), however, at disaster moments,

state intervention is necessary since disasters overwhelm local capacity, and thus cooperation rather than opposition between media/ society and state is preferable and welcomed.

Secondly, much emphasis has been placed on the commercial media in checking the abuse of the state's power rather than vice versa. Little study has been conducted to consider the potential of state in checking the corruptive effects of commercialization. It has been always a big surprise of westerns that Chinese public needs more censorship[12]. It is mainly because Chinese audiences do not necessarily see the party-state as an oppressive forces in the sense that in some cases state control could promote the social and pedagogical responsibility of media or counteract the trivialization as a result of media commercialization in daily practice.

Therefore the differentiation between state and society, which characterize a liberal country, is not applicable in the context of China. However it does not mean China is an authoritarian state with absolute

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[12]See 'Blood and cuts: unusually Some Chinese want more censorship, in The Economist 12 December 2015, http://www.economist.com/news/china/21679842-unusually-some-chinese-want-more-censorship-blood-and-cuts (Accessed on 11 April 2016)

power. In conventional views of state-society relation, authoritarianism is associated with repressive coercion, comprehensive monitoring, and lack of press freedom. The lack of a strong civil society renders the whole society vulnerable to state intervention. In most accounts of authoritarian regime, there are no genuine supports from the public for the goals and policies of their political leaders. Instead the citizens are either coerced into complying with authoritarian rule or are "bought off" by economic means (Stockmann, 2013).

However, in reality there is a great deal of variation among societies under the name of "authoritarianism" in terms of the way of sustaining their leaderships. China is a hybrid regime (Diamond, 2002)[13], which is often considered as a "responsive" or "benign" authoritarianism with pastoral and paternalistic responsibility (Chatterjee, 2004). In other words, the party-state has to take the unavoidable responsibility for taking care of its people. Compared to states in a liberal democracy, the Chinese government cannot gain its legitimacy from a representative system that usually involves

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[13] In 2001, 71 of 192 countries in the world could clearly be classified as authoritarian, and 17 were ambiguous. See Diamond (2002).

periodically held free elections. So the party-state has to deal with the public

needs or sentiment to sustain its legitimacy rather than simply relying on

oppression.

Another related feature of China as a hybrid regime is that its power

struture has never been a monolithic system. Instead its power structure is

filled with tension as a result of conflicts of interest and power struggles,

vertically and horizontally. The seemingly airtight parallel power structure

between governments and Communist Party units actually contains great

possibilities of conflicts (Zheng, 2007), which is thought as "a hodgepodge

of disparate actors" (O'Brien and Li, 2006).

As Zheng puts, "The Chinese state is hardly a fixed ideological entity or

an undifferentiated, unitary, rational actor. The State consists of different

political fractions, party organizations and bureaucratic bodies in the capital

city, and their counterparts at different levels of government" (Zheng, 2007:

14). More specifically, conflicts within the power structure mainly come

from the interplay of the parallel power structure with the territorial divisions.

As a Leninist political system, the Chinese state comprises territorial

divisions at the center, province, city, country, township, and village levels.

It is composed of numerous government and Communist Party units (commissions, ministries, bureaus, and departments) at the national level, which replicate themselves in lower levels of government. Simply put, the power structure in China is a crisscross shape, in which two main vertical systems are intersected with horizontal fractions.

As a result, power units at lower levels have to receive administrative guidance both from the governmental and communist units above, and at the same time they are also subject to the leadership of local governments and communist units to which they belong.

The paternalistic responsibility and the long-chain power structure together leads to the difficulty of the party-state in obtaining societal feedback and public sentiment that are important to a responsive authoritarian ruler (Zheng, 2007). Knowing the public opinion of the ordinary people is crucial to curb systematic corruption and mounting crisis in local governance. Although there are different ways of obtaining societal

feedback[14], knowing and guiding public opinion is an increasingly important and efficient means for the party-state to maintain its control and legitimacy.

With China's integration into the process of globalization, the party-state sees a departure from exercising its power by means of coercion and monitoring, since it requires large expenditure of resources and more costly and ineffective than before (Stockmann, 2013; Zheng, 2008). Instead, the party-state is increasingly relying on channelling public opinion without openly forcing its preferences on citizens, and propagation to enable and mobilize the masses. This fluid and complex state-society relation is a starting point to understand the media landscape of China with particularities in terms of media technologies, institution and audience.

Media technologies

The development of media technologies in China should be understood in the context of national building since 19th century (Zheng, 2007), which means technologies have introduced and developed as an effective tool to

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[14] Other sources to know the public opinion include, for example, intelligence agencies, such as the Public Security Bureau; survey data collected by government agencies, such as the Statistical Bureau; and the petitioning system, See Stockmann (2013).

have a rich nation-state and strong army (or "富国强兵" in Chinese) rather than restricting state power in a liberal context. Correspondingly, in the current context, the development of media technologies as a result of commercialization is also a part of state-led strategies for the continuation of Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s rule. As Zheng (2007) points out the development of technology is of central importance for the party-state to prolong its survival, for it could boost the economic growth on which now CCP's political legitimacy is mainly based. Therefore, the party-state has to promote rapid development of media technologies and industry on one hand and control, manage and minimize undesirable political risks of such development on the other hand.

Such tension reveals itself in the dual tasks of Chinese leadership facing media technology and industry. As Zheng (2007) points out, the state's policies vacillate between encouraging growth and exercising control, which can be roughly divided into two categories, the regulatory regime and the control regime (see Appendix III). The former is designed to facilitate the development of media technologies, which include Ministry of Industry and

Information and Ministry of Commerce. The later which attempts to control media includes Ministry of State Security and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the like. In short, except from the parallel governance from the communist organizations and governmental units, the Chinese media have to be subject to these two different regimes within the governmental units.

Media's infrastructure

The approaches of media events or media spectacle are based on the public/propaganda versus commercial media infrastructure. However in China, the particular state-society relation and its powers structure have resulted in a correspondingly complex media infrastructure, which is characterized by the convergence of a multiple sets of seemingly incongruous functions, including bureaucracy, propaganda, pedagogy, public service, and business (Yu, 2009). Therefore media agencies in China cannot be classified simply by its ownership.

In terms of ownership, the Chinese media are all state-owned, which

are integrated into a political structure at their level of government, from

central government, province, city, country, to township. To obtain a license,

all media have to have a sponsor, whose rank in the political structure

determines the administrative rank of the media. For most of newspaper and

television except satellite televisions, the positions of their sponsors are also

related to their scope of circulations [15] (Stockmann, 2013).

It is true that they are state-controlled but vary in the degree of

autonomy and commercialization. It is true that they are part of the

party-state power structure with corresponding institutional power and actual

capacity of mobilizing administrative resource but at the same time they

have to live on their commercial independence more or less. Even the state's

financial support for state media is dramatically declining. Sometimes media

practitioners use official, semi-official, and commercialized to categorize the

media types in China in terms of the extent to which they have received the

state's financial support, as shown in Stockmann's (2013) study. However,

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[15] There are some exceptions to this rule, for example the *Southern Weekend* selected in this study, which aims to be a national newspaper although it affiliates to the Southern Daily Group at the Guangdong provincial level. More exploration about the selected samples is in Chapter 2. And detailed introduction about the Chinese newspaper types can be found in Stockmann (2013), p.50-72.

this typology still implies a simple equation of market with autonomy, which is the major weakness of the approach of media events discussed above. In fact, the degree of marketization does not necessarily correspond to the degree of freedom. It is true the higher the position a media agency has, the closer relationship to the state it has, but the more administrative power it has at the same time. For example, some media agencies on the state level play as both a regulator and player in practices, for example, Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily and CCTV. The party-state may impose more rigid control on these media agencies in organizational personnel and editorial process but at the same time give more preference to these agencies in terms of policy and financial support to cover particular issues concerning national interest. In short, due to various positions of media in the power structure and degree of marketization different, priorities are assigned to contradictory functions, bureaucracy, propaganda, pedagogy, public service, and business, in different contexts, which needs a case-sensitive perspective.

The complex media infrastructure of China in some sense accentuates limitations of the current media-disaster studies with one-medium focus. The

current studies mainly focus on a certain medium in discussing mediated disaster, which fails to offer a comprehensive picture of our multiple-media reality that has been shaped by a connected range of media rather than single media in isolation. In particular, China's complex media infrastructure renders necessary a perspective of "media manifold" (Couldry, 2012)[16] to examine the interaction between different media in producing media events or media spectacle.

Audiences/users as participators

Also, audience in such complex media system could not be understood well in both the media events and media spectacle approaches, which share a totalizing concept of "audience" or "spectators". Taking the reception population as a whole is problematic in understanding the increasingly fragmented China with the widening social divisions and audience segmentation.

The first challenges facing the undifferentiated construction of audience

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[16] See Couldry (2012:50-51) for a comparison between 'polymedia' and 'media manifold'.

as an analytical category is the blurring boundary between spectatorship and involvement. On one hand, the media spectacle approach conceives spectators as passive audience, for they witnesses distant suffering without "real" action. In other words, only direct participation is taken as "real action". However, thanks to new media technologies, spectatorship is increasingly important. The attention people paid to a certain issue can be measured in terms of the traffic of a website or the amount of comments as well as the circulation. It is very common to visualize and materialize how much attention has been paid to a certain piece of information and how well it has been circulated. The visual and embodiment of attention not only challenge the traditional distinction between spectatorship and participation but also make spectatorship essential in the forming of public agenda. Interactive media allows people to make their attention visible at very low cost by posting comments, circulating information and other online activities, therefore spectatorship could be an important type of participation. Spectatorship, in this sense, is essential to the party-state for it is taken as an index of the preoccupation of the public.

On the other hand, action could not be easily taken as a happy ending of a mediated disaster. As shown in the studies of Chouliaraki (2013), the action of the viewing public could be very problematic in the sense that it is based on a narcissistic self-image rather than real commitment to distant suffering. The action actually has become a part of show business, NGO's branding campaign, celebrity culture, cool activism and so on, through which the viewing public is transformed into ironic spectators without real solidarity with the suffering population.

The nature of audience is central to the conceptualization of a mediated disaster as media event or media spectacle; however, it can not simply take passive spectators as a defining feature of media spectacle, or active actors to justify mediated suffering. The understanding of the complexities of spectatorship and action requires linking two ends of mediated suffering, spectators and sufferers, which are completely absent in the current studies with either approach. In particular in China, the complex media system has led to the advance of media literacy among Chinese audience who are able to differentiate different types of media and "read between the lines" and may

not be easily manipulated by state propaganda (Ma, 2000). As Stockmann (2013) points out, the response of the same group of audience to the same media varied from case to case, depending on their awareness and knowledge about a certain event as well as its nature. In this sense, audience is not a fix but a fluid and temporary construct, that is, an occasional collective based on certain event.

All in all, the limitations of the current studies, such as one-medium focus, simplistic understanding of the state-market complex, totalized conceptualization of audience entail a case-sensitive perspective to address the multiple media reality, deconstruct the concept of state and society as well audience in China.

1.3 Approaching the Wenchuan Earthquake in China

An in-between perspective is proposed in this thesis to avoid the either-or framework characterizing the approaches of media events and media spectacle. It starts with a combination of event and process frameworks in defining a disaster. More specifically, the timespan of the analyses starts

from 2008, when the earthquake happened, to 2013, the fifth anniversary of

this disaster, which includes both the emergency and reconstruction stage of

disaster relief. I took 4 trips in total to the Sichuan provinces during April to

December in 2013, during which the longest visit last more than one and half

month while the shortest visit was a week. The time of my visits included the

Ching Ming Festival (or 清明节 in Chinese, also know as Tomb-Sweeping

Day in English, which is a festival for people to memorize their deceased

ancestors or families), the 5th anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake, a

month after Lushan Earthquake[17], the Children's Day, the biggest landslide

in the summer of 2013 that blocked traffic to Yingxiu town in the Wenchuan

country and buried the Old Beichuan Ruins, and the first winter of the

affected population affected by the later Lushan earthquake.

In addition to multiple trips, a wide range of texts is chosen in 8 years

after the disaster. Technological, institutional and territorial diversity are all

taken into consideration to capture well the multiple-media reality in Chinese

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[17] It was a big earthquake that happened in Sichuan Province in 2013 that claimed morn
than 100 lives. Although different, the trip after the Lushan earthquake in the same province
compensated me for the experience of chaos in the emergency stage of a big disaster.

media landscape with particularities. In the aspect of technologies, newspaper, television, the Internet as well as museums are all included. In the aspect of institutions, texts are chosen and compared between media with different rankings as well as market-driven and policy-oriented media. Also texts are chosen from news media at the state and city level and museums in disaster areas and non-disaster areas.

In addition to media at different localities, as many places as possible were visited to deconstruct the totalized concept of state and society, which include four cities, three places on a country level and five towns[18]. At the same time, to have a deeper understanding of local communities, the Old Beichuan town and Yingxiu town as the most devastated places were the focus of my fieldwork, where I spent most of time. In order to better capture the general picture of such massive disaster, interviews are conducted with 23 people, which include media professionals, psychologists, seismology experts, volunteers, and local survivors.

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[18] The four cities are Chengdu(成都), Mianyang(绵阳), Dujiangyan(都江堰), Ya'an(雅安). Three divisions on the country level are hey are Wenchuan(汶川), Beichuan (北川)and Lushan(芦山). The five towns include Yingxiu (映秀), Renjiaping(任家坪), Shajiaba (沙家坝), New Beichuan(新北川), and Anxian(安县)

In doing so, an in-between perspective is constructed through the combination of textual analyses and ethnography. Except choosing and comparing media texts between disaster and non-disaster areas, my interviews also focused on the interaction between two outside groups of people involved in disaster relief or reconstruction and local people who they worked with. These two groups are media professionals/volunteers (including journalists, reporters, editors who worked for newspaper, magazines, television and other media) and psychologists/volunteers (including social workers and other people who worked for the reconstruction of local community).

The two outside groups are chosen for their connected but distinct perspectives they represent. Although media professionals were supposed to be important agents to bridge spectators and suffers, theoretically, their major concern is to meet the need of the niche public of their own institution. In other words, their major concern is how to let the outside public know the disaster areas rather than vice versa. Psychologists, although mainly come from the outside population, had a more local-centred perspective.

Theoretically the major concern of latter was to reconnect local people with a large society. In fact they were more concerned about how to empower local communities, who shared similarities with anthropologists in terms of their local perspective and long-term commitment [19]. I am not denying the possible and actual consent and cooperation between these two groups. But the subtle distinction between their concerns and local/outside-centred perspective could lead to greater discrepancies in evaluation of mediation as wells its effects on people in suffering.

The in-between perspective also manifests itself in the multiplicity of roles I took during the research. I used to be a disaster tourist, a helper for Wenchuan Earthquake conference organized by Chinese Academy of Science, a volunteer for the Lushan Earthquake. This multiplicity not only gave me chances to encounter different groups of people, from local villagers who were from the few complete families in Beichuan after Wenchuan Earthquake to volunteers and researchers who were from Hong Kong, Japan

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[19] Although most of them in this group were trained as psychologist, they took multiple roles during the long-term stay in disaster area, a psychologist, psychiatrist and social worker. Among my interviewees of psychologists was a professor who actually was trained as an anthropologist but worked as a psychologist, psychiatrist as well as social worker during her 5-year stay in disaster area. In general, most of them in this group had stayed longer than the media professionalists in the disaster area.

and America. In short the multiple roles helped me adopt an in-between

perspective to link two ends of mediated suffering, that is, the viewing public

and people in suffering.

With an in-between perspective, this thesis tries to have a more dynamic

understanding of disaster-media-society without falling into the either-or

framework with a simple cause-effect model. This perspective, argues

Grossberg (2010), is "the logic of cultural studies" to occupy the middle

ground to open up possibilities. It is not a sense of compromise but a

commitment to the multiplicities, complexities and contextuality. It is a

case-sensitive perspective that takes a radical claim of contextuality and

grasps the questions from the pragmatic perspective of praxis.

Therefore, this thesis has no intention to offer a complete picture of this

disaster including all details, which seems impossible for any individual

study. Rather it is an attempt to offer an alternative story of this mediated

disaster with great complexities and ambiguities by analysing and comparing

a wide range of texts and practices related to this disaster, shedding light on

the invisible parts in the dominant narrative. In addition it should provide a

precious chance to dissect the social structures of Chinese contemporary

society and explore the possibilities of new social formation at disaster

moments. In a broad sense, the in-between perspective of this thesis, as both

a distant spectator and participant-observer, could offer productive

discussion on the ethical role of media in public life, especially at disaster

moments and a better understanding about the mediated historicity of our

society. Practically, it could provide valuable socio-cultural information and

perspectives to improve the outcomes of disaster mitigation, management

and reconstruction.

Chapter 2   Becoming a national crisis: translating nature into narrative

In 2013 before the 5th anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake, there was a

big earthquake in the Sichuan province, the Lushan Earthquake, which

immediately attracted great attention of the nation and a large amount of aid

missions. Undoubtedly this earthquake associated Sichuan province with a

disaster again, which refreshed the collective memory about the calamity

five years before. In contrast to the public's intensive attention on the

suffering of Sichuan people, little attention was paid to Yunnan people who

suffered constant and extensive droughts since 2005, which had cumulatively

impacted thousands of people and even the whole province for eight

years.[20]However the protracted but destructive droughts had never attracted

as much as attention as the Wenchuan Earthquake or let lone provoke public

action in a large society. When the Lushan earthquake put Sichuan province

in the spotlight again, one friend of mine who come from the affected area in

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[20]Yunnan had have a very serious drought since 2005, which lasted for more than ten years.For more details about Yunnan Drought see
http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=XVJK4epSp2xqIpbp9TXSESTTs15F-MOjJIbE61nQ12P4n K6p4g-rD7rN9dtBVRmQ_RqdvYjTMi4-MGSN1OrO-   or
http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=4rZ51JQpjVez6dS4I4LGGICt6ZgOrTTglqcr21pKDuujQk9 fJvQclfRgbCe5szX8sFlsvGE2vvWh4ARn8veYBK (Accessed on 30 May 2015)

Yunnan Province was so upset that she posted a "politically incorrect" appeal on her Sina mircoblog, "No more talking earthquake, please see the drought in Yunnan!"

In this sense, disasters have hierarchies in terms of how well they can attract the attention of the non-affected population and provoke their action. A new earthquake in Sichuan province could easily touch the nerve of the nation, while suffering of Yunnan people could not. The answer to this disparity not only lies in difference between sudden on-set and protracted disasters but also in the difference of these two places in the collective memory, especially for the non-affected areas. The intimacy between Sichuan population as a whole and a larger society was built in the media representation of the Wenchuan Earthquake five years ago, which had been greatly integrated into the national mobilization.

Previous studies about mediated suffering mainly focused on the cases of international disasters, in which there were no pre-exiting bonds between spectators and sufferers (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006). Hence, the distance between the viewing and suffering population managed in the media

representation was thought as an important factor in transforming

spectatorship into action. In contrast, in domestic cases, there are always

communal bonds between spectators and sufferers. However it does not

mean the visibility of suffering within national boundary could easily

invoked public action in a larger society as shown in the cases of Yunnan

droughts or other cases. China as a country with vast territory could not be

simply reduced to an analytic unit without considering physical distance

between different areas as well as the fact of the segmented society. In the

particular case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, there were innumerable events

both on the national and local level competing for people's attention, for

example the Beijing-Olympics at the same time. In this sense, the intensive

action invoked by the Wenchuan Earthquake could not simply be attributed

to pre-exiting national sentiment without taking into consideration concerted

media representation as a part of the national mobilization. However the

media did not merely reflect the national mobilization but also actively

shaped and influence the national mobilization. This chapter intends to

examine how concerted media representation translated the complex disaster

into a national crisis, which was integrated into the national mobilization,

through the textual analyses of media texts between audio-visual versus print

media as well national media versus local media.

2.1 Many disasters, one media event

Disasters in plural form: spatially and temporal complexities

An earthquake could result in multiple disasters. Not all individuals and

communities experience the same hazard in the same way or to the same

degree. Vulnerabilities to the same earthquake vary considerably from

community to community, area to area. Even the affected areas, although

with similar topographical features, might have cultural and social

differences that could result in considerably diverse vulnerabilities. This

sensitivity to social-settings results in the spatial complexities of an

earthquake disaster, which are well studied by scholars in different

disciplines (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 2002; Quarantelli, 1978).

However, the temporal complexities of an earthquake are easily ignored.

In most of disaster studies, an earthquake is always categorized as sudden

on-set event in opposition to protracted hazards, such as droughts or famine.

However, an earthquake is more a process than a single event that is isolated

and temporally demarcated in exact time frames. From the perspective of

seismology, energy released in every earthquake is a long-term accumulation.

As far as the tremor is concerned, aside from the main shock, there could be

foreshocks and aftershocks that can last for a whole year. In addition, the

disasters brought about by an earthquake could come in clusters, with

secondary disasters such as floods, landslides as well as concomitant

increasing vulnerability.

Without exception, the Wenchuan Earthquake presented great

complexities in both the spatial and temporal dimensions. According to the

data from China Earthquake Administration, this earthquake physically

affected all provincial-level regions except three provinces, Xinjiang,

Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces. Aside from the Sichuan province, its

adjoining provinces of Shangxi and Gansu were also severely damaged and

237 countries in total were seriously affected. Temporally, this earthquake

actually lasted from 12 May 2008 to 27 May 2009 during which there were

54971 aftershocks and the biggest one with magnitude of 6.4. This extensive

earthquake claimed 69,195 death and 18,392 missing people, and caused

4.8 million people homeless. Behind these data were immeasurable suffering

and countless stories, which were too complex altogether to be an operative

target of national mobilization. The concerted media representation in

general was therefore an important means to frame the flux of the disaster

into a neat narrative and rendered it a cause of action.

Spatial frame: making a focus

The shaping power of the media representation started with the name of the

disaster, for the first thing needed in translating an immeasurable suffering

into a communicable story that can be shared is naming. By convention, the

name of the place where an earthquake happens is often used as a metonym

for the whole disaster. It is an effective means to anchor an earthquake and

distinguish it from other earthquakes. This seems so natural and ordinary that

little attention in the current disaster studies has been paid to this process.

However, this process is more complicated and problematic than expected.

Even in seismology there is no unified agreement on how to name an

earthquake (Davison,1916). As shown in the record of China Earthquake

Administration, most of the earthquakes recorded are anonymous without

definite names. Instead, they are tabulated with the exact time of the major

quake, the longitude and latitude and a place of the epicenter. It is worth

noting that place name offered is just only a suggestion not a decisive one.

Table 1 the eartqhuake with specific latitude and longtitude

序号 No.	发震 时刻 Time	纬度 Latitude	经度 Longitude	深度 Depth	震 级 (M)	参考地名 Place for reference
80	2008/05/12 14:28:04	31	103.4	14	8	四川汶川县 (Sichuan Wenchuan Country)

Obviously this way of presenting an earthquake could not be utilized and

transmitted effectively by media reports, for these data although

scientifically accurate are too abstract to be understood; their latitudes and

longitudes are devoid of social meanings. Therefore, a place name with

social implication is needed. However, how to choose the place, at which

administrative level? Village, town, country, city, province, or state? The

different choices for the same earthquake go beyond scientific concerns

about the balance between utility and abstraction. Instead the nomenclature of the Wenchuan Earthquake in news media greatly involved the relation (physical/social distance) between the viewing pubic and the suffering population.

No matter in English or Chinese, there is minor difference in the words Wenchuan and Sichuan. In reality, however, these two names refer to very different physical areas and administrative divisions: Sichuan is the province while Wenchuan is the country of the epicenter. As shown in the data from Google trends (Appendix VI), Sichuan Earthquake was used much more often than Wenchuan Earthquake as news headline in English-speaking world. A cursory examination of New York Times reports shows that "Sichuan Earthquake" was used exclusively to refer to the earthquake in 2008 through the whole period[21]. The preference of Sichuan over Wenchuan was a pragmatic choice when taking into account the geographical distance between the affected population and the targeted audience of the New York Times. For most American readers, the Sichuan province is already too far to

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[21] Interestingly, the Lushan Earthquake in 2013 did not have such prestige to be specifically named. Instead it is referred loosely as a quake in Sichuan in China.

know let alone a small country in this province. For the sake of simplicity, the actual place of this earthquake was sacrificed as unnecessary details. Hence what is matter here is cultural distance rather than physical distance between the affected population and target audience. Different choices of administrative divisions reveal the different knowledge of the viewing public about the affected areas.

Although in Chinese the Wenchuan Earthquake is well accepted now, at the beginning the media as well as the outside population were as ignorant of the affected areas as Americans. As suggested in some published memos of news agencies (Liu, 2008), before 12 May 2008, Wenchuan was a small country whose name could not be pronounced correctly by many people in China[22]. It is a country under the jurisdiction of Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Aba) where there is a more famous place than the prefecture itself, Jiuzhai Gou (九寨沟/Nine Village Gully), a popular tourist destination declared as a World Heritage Site. This lack of knowledge is a

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[22] Hanhan (韩寒), a Chinese popular writer and a volunteer in the earthquake, once complained, even until 2013 (6 years after the Wenchuan Earthquake), still many people had no idea of the differences between Wenchuan and Beichuan, which were the most seriously damaged countries in this disaster. Although they are close in the sense of geography, they belong to different municipal divisions. For more discussion, see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

part of the reality that the Great Western regions (大西部地区) is relatively indivisible in both coastal areas and national media. Before 2008, except for some famous tourist destinations or disastrous moments like this, these areas would never be introduced or reported. It is a domestic version of the global hierarchies between places and human life and a replay of unequal flow of information in global communication (Chouliaraki, 2006; Joye, 2009).

For the media in non-disaster areas, including the media at the national and municipal levels, Sichuan and Wenchuan or both were used to refer to this earthquake. Especially in the immediate aftermath, the (Great) Sichuan Earthquake (四川大地震), the (Great) Sichuan Wenchuan Earthquake (四川汶川大地震) and the (Great) Wenchuan Earthquake (汶川大地震) were used interchangeably[23]. After the first anniversary, the (Great) Wenchuan Earthquake as the official name of the earthquake has been well accepted and disseminated in non-disaster areas. However, the final name of this earthquake still does not address the discrepancy between administrative

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[23] The media in disaster areas, for instance, Mianyang Evening never used the Wenchuan Earthquake in their own reports (in comparison to the news from Xinhua News Agency). This earthquake seriously damaged Mianyang city, especially the Beichuan country in this city, which was levelled to the ground. But the Wenchuan country belongs to another municipal division. I will come back to this controversy in the next chapters.

areas and geography.

On one hand, for an enormous earthquake that affected great areas and legions of people, the name of a lower level of administrative division ceases to convey the desired impression, for example, Gansu and Shanxi were almost invisible in this disaster event. On the other hand, the ambiguity in "Wenchuan" as the final name misled the rescue team and relief supplies to the capital town of Wenchuan country rather than the real epicenter town, Yingxiu, at the very beginning. The controversies around the name of this earthquake will be discussed in details in Chapter 5, which elaborates how nuanced differences in the nomenclature of an earthquake could be magnified by the media as a bias of disaster relief.

Nonetheless, this abstraction is inevitable in mass communication whose efficiency is mainly based on simplification of things rather than comprehensive recording of their possible complexity. Either Sichuan or Wenchuan used as the name was helpful to reduce the earthquake with geographical complexities into a package that can be transmitted by mass media. Using a place-name could immediately narrow the focus of the

outside world and channel their attention directly into certain disaster areas.

It was like a focal point, on which a vast array of attention was concentrated.

Various kinds of written and visual techniques were employed to create and

highlight this focus. In written texts, Sichuan or Wenchuan with giant font

size were ubiquitous in various kinds of headlines, banners, the names of

special issues or reports. (Figures 1-4[24]). These two place-names were also

used as a signifier, signifying the affected population, such as, "Wenchuan,

Hold On" (汶川挺住), "Sichuan Don't Cry"(四川不哭), or Sichuan Stand

up (四川雄起) and other slogan-like phrases.

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[24] Among a large number of texts, these cases are chosen mainly because they are using the same picture from Xinhua News Agency, so the comparison between different written titles could probably exclude the inference of the pictures.

Figure 1 Front Page of Nanguo Metropolis (Hainan Province) on 13 May 2008[25]

Figure 2 Front Page of Qilu Evening News (Shandong Province) on 13 May 2008[26]

Figure 3 Front Page of Straits Herald[27] **(Fujian Province) on 13 May 2014**

Figure 4 Front Page of China Business News (Guangzhou) on 13 May 2008[28]

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[25] http://news.qq.com/zt/2008/dizhen/topic_html/meiti.htm(Accessed on 12 December 2013)

[26] ibid.

[27] http://epaper.taihainet.com (Accessed on 12 December 2013)

[28] http://news.qq.com/zt/2008/dizhen/topic_html/meiti.htm(Accessed on 12 December

Correspondingly, visual graphics were also employed to pin down the location of this disaster. The maps used in two national media, People's Daily and CCTV, showed how the majority of visual graphics used in other media looked like. The maps used in various media vary in the degree of abstraction. Figure 5 represents an extreme sample that does not indicate the other two affected provinces, Gansu and Shanxi. In this group of maps, Wenchuan was highlighted with a dot at the central of some concentric circles that covered some adjoining areas within Sichuan. Sometimes it was a dynamic one, in which the dot beside Wenchuan was twinkling as an emission source. Thanks to the time lag, the People's Daily's graphic represents another group of maps, which was more refined in the sense that it offered more details about all the seriously affected provinces. In this kind of maps, areas were often placed in a hierarchical way in terms of their distance to Wenchuan by using different size of fonts or other visual means. Despite of this difference, both kinds of maps placed Wenchuan in the center to signified it as the epicenter. In these visual texts, a group of unfamiliar and

2013)

undifferentiated places were represented as meaningful locations configured

with hierarchies.
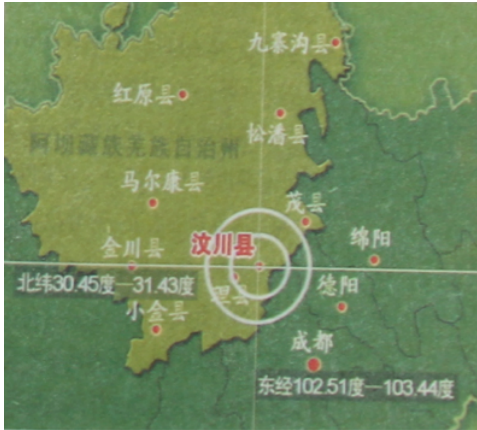
Figure 5 Map used in CCTV News on 12 May 2008
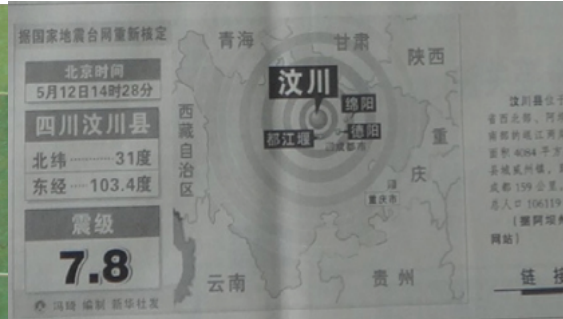
Figure 6 Map used in Pepole's Daily on 13 May 2008

In general, the choice of the names for this disaster was like a process of

zoom in, from higher level to lower level of administrative divisions. So did

the visual representations of the affected areas. Details about the disaster

areas increased as the rescue teams approached. Indeed for such an extensive

earthquake it needed a considerable amount of time to clarify the actual

intensity of each affected areas, which in fact turned out to be oval shape

with multiple centres. However the names of the earthquake and their

repetition by the media may lead to the misunderstanding: Wenchuan in

Sichuan was the most seriously damaged area. On one hand the intensive

repetition instilled proximity into these remote areas for the outside world.

On the other hand, it also introduced a new hierarchy into different affected areas by highlighting some star areas and ignoring others. In this sense names and maps were not only representation of the physical space. They also produced a new topography, organizing perceptions and guiding behaviours and simultaneously transforming the configuration of the disaster, which will be disused in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

However, naming an earthquake with a place name was just a first step. A focal point was valid only when it could attract considerable rays of lights. Even with the extensive effect, the earthquake was still a local disaster in the sense that not the whole nation experienced this earthquake as a disaster to the same degree. To become a national crisis, it still needed to transit the state of emergency and disastrous experience nationwide, in other words, to create a unified disaster moment for the whole nation.

Temporal frame: a clear beginning

The association of calendar time with a particular earthquake is too ordinary

and natural to be an object of reflexive analysis and critique, for the date of

this earthquake seemed absolute and accurate, that is, 14:28 pm on 12 May

2008, in comparison to the various choices of the place-names. However

when the time of an earthquake is forced out of the backdrop into the

foreground of consideration, a complicated social construction will be

revealed.

In effect, there were still many alternative beginnings in the

seismological, biological and social sense. In the seismological sense, as

mentioned earlier, an earthquake is more a process than a sudden-onset even

in terms of accumulation and release of energy. Biologically, it is also

processual experience. Aside from some considerable foreshocks, there were

lots of accounts describing abnormal animal behaviors before this major

shock, however most of them were perceived as rumors and superstition[29].

From social perspective, the vulnerability of one area is accumulated and

embedded in the population long before this earthquake, like poor quality of

buildings and ill preparedness in a disaster-prone zone. However such

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[29] Competing interpretations and discourses around this earthquake will be discussed in
details in Chapter 4.

alternatives could not be considered as a reasonable or "scientific" beginning of this earthquake. Instead they were rendered invisible in the time frame with a clear and definite beginning constructed in the media representation. With a definite beginning, the culprit of this disaster was also determined, that is, the tremor that happened on 12 May 2008.

This calendar moment was repeated and maginified by the media. It was omnipresent in every corner of the media texts, in Front pages, headlines (Figure 1) or logo. In addition, some videos captured by cell phones or some closed-circuit television camera, although with bad quality, were replayed again and again on Televisions. Aside from repeating and extending the moment, "before and after" comparisons were widely used. Pictures of affected areas before and after this time were juxtaposed in both visual and printed media, creating a visual stunt by sharp contrast. Similar strategy also could be found in some of the written reports, which started from a normal and routine life before 14:28 pm followed by the shocking chaotic disruption. In doing so, textual and visual divergences before and after this exact time attached a quality or density to the empty or weightless astronomical time.

Through media construction, this calendar time become an absolute and definite beginning of this earthquake and a marker to distinguish a distinct temporal passage from the stream of homogenous and continuous flow of time.

The clear beginning together with a specific location pinned down and anchored the flux of earthquake as a target. However there was no guarantee of attention and action from outside population. As Dayan and Katz (1992) emphasize, central to the success of a media event is the mutual recognition on the importance/relevance of an event among the organizers, media agencies and the audience. In other words, even with the endorsement of the government and media, audiences still have the power to refuse the invitation to be a part of any event. In the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the success of the transformation of a local disaster to a national crisis lay in the media construction of priority.

A priority has two distinct but connected factors: the order of importance and urgency (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2009). They have different influences on two dimensions: consciousness and action. The consciousness of an

important event does not necessarily turn into urgent actions and vice versa.

Think about the protracted droughts in south-western China and Henan Province, they were important but not urgent in the public's perception. In this sense, different weights attributed to consciousness or action dimension would lead to the hierarchy between mediated disasters. This hierarchy is constituted through various arrangements and manipulation of the time-space of a disaster event. At the high end of the hierarchy is the unified time-space created in the representation of the Wenchuan Earthquake, which took priority over all other matters in the immediate aftermath and offered a prerequisite for national mobilization.

The media first worked on the time dimension, that is, to arrange an occasion to interrupt the homogenous flow of time to distinguish itself from the banal and ordinary: for newspapers, publishing extras or special issues; and for televisions, stopping scheduled programs, live broadcasting. According to the China Publishers Yearbook 2009 and Television Files (Liang, 2008b), in this earthquake People's Daily had special issues and a special website for the first time for an emergency. The Wenchuan

Earthquake Special Issue lasted for more than 3 months. CCTV had the first non-stop program (the Wenchuan Earthquake Special) lasting for 32 days. These unusual breaks of different lengths infused the sense of difference and thus importance to this event. However, they were not merely a natural or innocent response of journalists or reporters. Instead, the interruption of media routines was a ritualized gesture, signifying a sense of importance as well as "being there" in the process of disaster relief.

Both the newspaper and television professionals admit that at the very beginning they did not know more than audience about the disaster. Especially for the hosts in the live broadcasting, they had to deal with embarrassing moments of no more updated news. The live broadcast in CCTV started at 15:20 pm on 12 May 2008, less than an hour after the earthquake, when most of their correspondents were just dispatched for investigation or interviews. On-location reports were impossible at that time when most of the roads to disaster areas were blocked. Therefore at least for several hours what the hosts had to do was to repeat again and again a short piece of news released by Xinhua News Agency, President Hu's important

declaration. Quoted from one of the hosts involved, "No updates, no rehearsals. It is the first time I have hosted a live broadcast in such situation. Sometimes in telephone links I even did not know who was talking at the other end of the line and where he/she was" (Liang, 2008b: 6). Although facing the chaos of ill preparation, they still think it was crucial not to stop the live coverage (Liang, 2008b). For them, the live coverage has twofold implications: first it is more important to be seen "there" (studios or on the way) than to offer news and updated information. Second it is like a "portal" linking "here", where live coverage is running, with "there" where suffering is happening. Therefore the disruption of media routine, a live coverage and other interruptions, actually signalled audience to a start of a different time-space of this disaster.

Maintaining this sense of importance needed the coordination of different times across different areas. Social time is heterogeneous and divergent (Hassard, 1990). Time-perspectives are central in the organization of experience and life but they vary from person to person, area to area. Central to the success of molibizing the public in a large country is to

overcome these heterogeneities of time-space, turning a parituclar event to be a general temporal scheme, which should be accepted by individuals in different places to synchronize and coordinate their activities. In other words, the mobilizing power of the media lies in a mediated but unified temporal beat, or a myth of homogenous time (Anderson, 2006), to overcome geographical distance and close spatial distance between spectators and sufferers.

However the construction of a unified time-space faced various competing events on different levels from the very beginning. The Beijing Olympics was the strongest competitor, which was also a state-led super media event. Before the Wenchuan Earthquake, Beijing Olympics was on top of the agenda of the whole country. It was important to the Chinese government and society at that time because it was thought to be a signal of the rising China as part of the international family, a symbolic event to show the ending of "centurial humiliation" since the Opium War (deLisle, 2008). Chinese government was facing the international pressure on the legitimacy of Beijing Olympics especially after Lhasa Violence on 14 March 2008. The

torch relay in process was a great opportunity to mobilize and show the

public's enthusiasm for the Beijing Olympics at home and regain the support

from the international community. On the exact same day when the

earthquake happened, the Olympics torch relay was running in Xiamen(厦门)

and Quanzhou (泉州). The tension between these two competing events is

visualized in the Figure 7, the front pages of Strait Herald, one of two most

influencing newspapers in Fujian province. However one day later,

Wenchuan Earthquake became the overwhelming concern of all the media in

China. As seen from in Figure 8, the Wenchuan Earthquake is highlighted in

the combination of a large headline and a half-page picture in the center in

contrast to a relative modest headline of the Beijing Olympics.

Figure 7 Front Page of the Strait Herald on 13 May 2008[30]

Figure 8 Front Page of the Strait Herald on 14 May 2008[31]

Nonetheless, the tension between the dismal catastrophe and the happy ambience around the Beijing Olympics persisted, since torch relay was running throughout Mainland China, and could not be just brushed off in the public domain during the disaster relief. An expedient strategy was employed to smooth over this tension: incorporating the torch relay into the disaster event. Beijing Olympic Committee organized minutes of silence and public appeals during the torch relays. Here the media had to be a priest and

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30 http://epaper.taihainet.com (Accessed on 12 December 2013)
31 http://epaper.taihainet.com (Accessed on 12 December 2013)

photographer to guide the public to witness the marriage of the Beijing

Olympics and the disaster relief. These two events were sutured smoothly

into a single story through which the patriotic enthusiasm was channelled. As

shown in the following two cases (Figures 9 and 10), the headlines combine

these two themes, while subtitles indicate the money and materials from the

donation in the torch relay. Likewise, the pictures visualized the

incorporation of these two events. In Figure 9, the flag of the Beijing

Olympics and the banner with the slogan of disaster relief are juxtaposed in

the center of the picture. In Figure 10, the focal point of the picture is a

banner with a slogan "Spread Olympics Sprits, Support Earthquake Relief"

(or "弘扬奥运精神，支持抗震救灾" in Chinese). Basically before the

Mourning Days, both the newspapers and televisions reports followed this

pattern of reporting. The textual and visual suture of these two competing

events eliminated the tension of these two super media events by giving the

priority to the earthquake relief but at the same time left a room for the

Beijing Olympics.

Figure 9 Page 12 of People's Daily on 15 May 2008

Figure 10 Page 12 of People's Daily on 16 May 2008

Except from the national-led events, there were innumerable local events outside the disaster areas competing for people's attention. These events could be more competitive because of their geographical closeness. Geographical proximity is a basic newsworthiness of local-focused media. However it also could in turn promote the constitution and maintaining of the

unified time-space across the nation. The major themes of reports in the media in non-disaster areas were the process of donation and the performance of the rescue teams dispatched by their home city. For example, most of the reports from the Straits Herald were about the performance of the relief team dispatched by Fujian. It was like an replay of "embedded journalism" in war zones of Iraq. Due to the limited resource and manpower, the only way for most of media professionals outside the affected area to access the disaster areas was to be attached to the rescue team dispatched from their home cities. Although these journalists and reporter might not have signed contracts with the rescue team, they basically adopted the perspective of rescuers. In doing so the previously heterogeneous times of media in different places were synchronized by the disaster moment.

Inextricable with this unified sense of importance across the whole nation was the sense of urgency, which was more closely related to action dimension. The abovementioned repetition of the calendar time, 14:28 on 12 May, had not only constituted an absolute beginning for the earthquake but also invited the whole nation to a time-based competition. This accentuated

moment reset the clock of the nation, just like a key to toggle the countdown

on. The "72-hour golden rescue period"[32] was another phrase repeated again

and again in the media texts. It embodied and dramatized the extreme

situation facing the speed of time and the decreasing possibilities of survivals

under the ruins. Slogans related to time hence permeated all kinds of media

texts, written or oral, for instance, "competing against time (与时间赛跑),

"time is life (时间就是生命)", "saving life from time" (从时间手中抢生

命) , and so on. The sense of urgency were transmitted well from the footage

filled with sharp contrasts between the marching rescue teams versus

blocking roads, cliffs and fast-moving water, or exhausted rescuers with bare

hands and dogs versus mountain-like ruins. The hasty and grave narrations of

hosts also intensified the sense of urgency.

Even with an inevitable time lag resulting from their publication cycle;

the newspapers had their own coping strategies to create a sense of urgency.

A similar device of "real-time storytelling" (Chouliaraki, 2006:127) is used

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[32] In disaster relief, there is an informal consensus that any people trapped in the disastrous
areas under collapsed buildings or landslides may have a large chance to survive if they are
rescued in "Golden 72 Hours", although as shown in many cases, people can survive longer
than expected.

to emphasize present temporality. Unlike English, Chinese does not have tenses, however, the disaster relief in Chinese reports are presented in the way similar to the historical present in English, that is, the past narrated in the present tenses. Also the continuance or completeness of the action could be emphasized by the verb conjunctions, adverbs and time phrases. For example, phrases expressing the continuance of action were often used in the names of features "Disaster Relief in Process (抗震救灾进行时)" and articles "Thousands Volunteers are in action (千名志愿者在行动)". Another way to constitute the ambience of urgency was an open ending frequently used in the interviews. The reports often ended with unfinished words from the interviewees who stopped to do disaster relief. Other "to-be-continued" endings included "a blocked road is waiting to be cleared", "some parents are still in disconnection", "some patients are in the operation", or "a girl that was saved whose name is still unknown". Aside from these time-related utterances, direct appeals proliferated in headlines or news tickers, for instance, "Urgent Demand for Medicines\Tents\Cranes Needed Badly(灾区急需大量药品\帐篷\起吊机)" or "Urgent Need for Blood and Plasma

Products". These direct appeals were often accompanied by details of bank accounts and various hot lines encouraging and allowing the passive spectators to take more concrete and effective actions.

In general, the sense of importance and grave urgency were mutually strengthened. In so doing, a distant misfortune was smoothly transformed to be a life-and-death crisis facing the whole nation. The Sword of Damocles was falling faster and faster: the affected population could not wait for a solution—they needed immediate action and urgent rapports. In this sense, the media was closely integrated into the national mobilization of disaster relief. The media was not only a mere part of national mobilization but also greatly shaped its configuration. With the frame of disaster event, the media actively accommodated the disaster with temporal and spatial complexities and uncertainties into an exact and definite time-space: first, introducing the sense of proximity and familiarity to a previously distant location and second using disaster moment to synchronize segmental and heterogeneous social time.

So far, this spatiotemporal specificity constructed by the journalistic

realism has been discussed in relation to the dimensions of cognitions/consciousness. Although not discussed specifically in this section, the emotional engagement of the spectatorship was an integral part of an effective national mobilization, inextricably associated with other two dimensions of priority. Closely related to the emotional dimension was the deployment of more cinematic languages, including the use of the background music, close-up, and slow motion, panoramic and other musical and visual effects. Within the event frame, cinematic machinery together with journalist realism narrowed the social and psychological distance between sufferers and spectators, rending this mediated suffering a crisis facing the whole nation.

Another aspect absent in the discussion so far is a consequential problem to national mobilization, that is, how to end this state of emergency and lead the nation back to the routine. Semantically, implied in a state of emergency is that there should be an end point to complete the frame. Pragmatically, the state of emergency could not last forever. Once a state of emergency was launched, the party-state naturally faced an inevitable problem: how to

negotiate an exit from it. In short, to establish a quit point is as important as a beginning. In this case, the National Mourning Days were invented to guide the national attentions back to the routine life or other national issues. The next section discusses these two related questions in the analysis of the National Mourning Days: first, how national mourning days had been a media ritual and second how emotional triggers had been employed intensely to performing a rite of passage (Turner, 1969).

2.2 National mourning days: performing an invented media ritual

An invented mourning ritual

The national mourning days from 19 May to 21 May 2008 was the first time for PRC to mourn for the victims in a disaster rather than political leaders. During these days, the national flag was lowered to half-mast throughout the whole country to lament the loss of common people. The Beijing Olympic torch relay as well as other public recreational activities was suspended for the duration of the mourning period. There was 3-minute observance at 14:28 on 19 May: tens of thousands of Chinese people gathered around

monuments in their cities to stand in a silent tribute, bowing their head to

express their condolence to families of the dead in this disaster, when car,

trains, and ships horned and air-raid sirens sounded through the whole

country.

Compared to other established rituals, this state-led mourning ritual was

to the public. However the public mourning ritual did not come out of the

blue. Rather it had social and scientific basis. As discussed in the last section,

the ambience of emergency construed by the media was crucial to the

effective national mobilization; however, it also brought about a fair amount

of unexpected problems. One was the excessive enthusiasm of the outside

population for disaster relief. Mountains of relief supplies, necessary and

unnecessary, and volunteers, professional or amateur, continually flooded

into disaster areas, which in turn brought great burden to the transportation

and affected population.

Another unexpected problem related to the psychological proximity

between sufferers and spectators was a wide range of vicarious trauma

emerging in the non-affected population (Liu, Wu & Zhang, 2011). Just as

Boltanski (1999) indicates, a certain amount of distance is required to keep spectators from the suffering; otherwise proximity would present spectators with an approaching threat and cause a panic. Although in this case, psychological rather than physical distance was manipulated for an effective national mobilization, it still brought about a continuant sense of threats to the whole nation. The mediated suffering greatly contributed to the psychological disturbance of spectators in the non-affected zone in the sense the images and words related to massive death and suffering reminded the spectators in the comfort zone of the uncertainties of life and death as our ultimate destiny. Dr. Liu Zhengkui in Chinese Academy of Science, who has been working in the psychological relief of the Wenchuan Earthquake since 2008, mentioned during my interview that their Suicide Hotline were incredibly busy after the Wenchuan Earthquake and there were sharp increase of anxieties and likelihood of suicide among cases who spent much of the days watching and reading disaster-related news.

Facing the excessive engagements, physically or psychologically, the party-state needed to negotiate an exit for this crisis state. Therefore a public

mourning ritual was needed. There was no agreement on who was the first

person to propose National Mourning Days, but one thing certain is that

before the State Council declared a 3-day national mourning, there were a

few public appeals[33]. However even with the psychological and social basis

for a public mourning ritual, without the public's ceremonial participation,

this newly invented ritual would be empty and turn out to be a mere

spectacle (MacAloon, 1984). Here the involvement of the mass media was a

requisite for a public mourning ritual. They played as priest and performer,

preaching a sermon about the importance and significance of this ritual and

showing the "right or relevant action" in the particular moment.

Media ritual is not a new subject in media studies. Dayan and Katz's

study has offered us a useful typology to describe different ritual aspects of

media events. However, to render their typology more universally applicable,

Dayan and Katz clarify the complex layers of each event to a systematic but

flat construction of super categories. Any event is like a set of Russian dolls,

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[33] See Lin (2008), The National Mourning; Tao, Siyong (2008), Facing Disaster, Launch a
Mourning Ritual http://epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2008-05/15/content_204837.htm
(Accessed on 10 June 2014) After this, the public mourning days in a certain population
have been a routine part after a destructive disaster in certain area, for example, the
Provincial Mourning Days after the Lushan Earthquake in 2013 that claimed morn than 100
lives in Sichuan Province.

dolls within dolls. In other words, it has multiple layers. More specifically the meaning of the mourning ritual in this case could only be located with respect to the Wenchuan Earthquake as a disaster event as a whole. The national mourning on media was an interruption within a greater interruption. It was a significant cut from the stream of the whole process of this disaster event in the sense that it was a concentrated expression of the simultaneity and performativity of this disaster event. Not only reasserted the main themes of the whole disaster event but also in the process it gained additional meaning of its own. The following analysis will dissect how this media ritual had interrupted the flow of daily life (syntactically), dealt reverently with sacred matters (semantically) and involved the ceremonial response of the whole nation (pragmatically) (Dayan & Katz, 1992:14).

An interruption within an interruption

19th May 2008 was chosen as the start of mourning days for people who died in the Wenchuan Earthquake. The date did not completely come out from the blue either. In Chinese (at least Han Ethnics) folk tradition, the souls of

newly deceased person are thought to stay in the secular world for forty-nine

days after death and return home every seven days. Therefore the first

Seventh Day (头七) after one's death is the first time for the dead soul to

return home. After this day, the dead soul would gradually realize her/his

death. In other words, from this day on, a person is socially dead, "the final

separation of a person from a human community" (Carey, 1990/2009). Being

socially dead means the death of a person could be culturally and

psychologically acknowledged and accepted by the living person. The

processual acknowledgement of an individual's death is a special function of

the community. As Carey directly put, the prolonged process of death is to

reduce the sharpness of the break between life and death, preserving the

continuity of community existence (Carey, 1990/2009).

Even with this cultural tradition, the party-state still faced the problem of

legitimatizing choosing 19 May as the starting date. As shown earlier, this

earthquake actually brought mini-disasters to different communities and

areas. It is true the massive deaths were claimed by the same earthquake but

definitely not on the same day. A considerable amount of people died after

being buried in the rubrics for a few days without immediate and appropriate rescue. In addition, some died in secondary disasters while the others died in medical operation. Furthermore, at that time most of the disaster areas were still under threats of secondary disasters, such as destructive aftershocks, landslides, quake lakes. More people who were missing would be confirmed dead in the future. In short, 19th May was not necessarily the Seventh Day for all the people who died in this disaster.

Another challenge was diverse death rituals. A major population of the most seriously affected disasters areas, both Wenchuan and Beichuan countries, was Qiang minority ethnic group(羌族)[34] , who has a very different ritual from the majority Hans. The mourning ritual for this minority group is three-day dancing rite after hanging the body at home for a period. Except from the divergence, bodies of the deceased are crucial in both Qiang and some Han Chinese traditions. In particular in rural areas, just like the old Chinese saying goes, if s/he dies, I want to see her/his body(活要见人，死要

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[34] Although in my fieldworks, some interviewees whose official identification are Qiang people now told me they were Han ethnics but converted to Qiang in early 90s in the last century since the local government (Beichuan, 北川) needed to increase the population of minority by policy.

见尸). That was why there was considerable resistance to the government's decision of blockading the ruin where lots of bodies were still buried.

In general, the society might agree to have a public ritual but there would not be a consensus on the choice of the date of public mourning. Against this background, the legitimacy of 19 May as the starting of this public mourning ritual was constructed mainly through the spectacular display of interruption on the media. As discussed in the last section, an interruption of media routine is an effective means for media to instil a meaningless time with the sense of difference and importance. This device was used to an extreme in the mourning days: there was literally a full stop to everything else on the screens and newspaper. From 19 May, the footage from CCTV-News about mourning ritual and the Wenchuan Earthquake monopolized all the channels of CCTV and other satellites televisions for a whole day or at the primary times. Banners, Logos and titles in all the media including the Internet websites were converted into black and white. All advertisements or entertainment news were removed and Game websites were shut down altogether. It is not unusual for a nation to declare national

mourning day for its ordinary people, while a media spectacle with such

orchestrated uniformity could only be found in Chinese media landscape.

These ritualized gestures had infused strong social meaning and

psychological feeling into these days as an interruption within a greater

interruption. The legitimacy of the choice of mourning ritual days was

further reasserted again by the three-minute observance started on 14:28 on

19 May, the absolute beginning of this earthquake constructed before 19

May. Simply put, choosing 19 May as the Seventh Day for this disaster

reaffirmed the culprit of the enormity and diverse deaths again: the

destructive earthquake in a singular form, an unpredictable and unavoidable

natural monster.

Performing a media ritual

Apart from reconstructing the importance of a particular occurrence, the

media also needed to perform and protect the ritual from interference and

interruption. The spatiotemporal uniformity went to an extreme perfection

through the employment of performative media language. Compared to

well-discussed televised simultaneity across the heterogeneous space, the

print media has been relatively ignored in the current literature. However this

obsession on the televised simultaneity ignores the multiple media reality in

our age. Print media is and will be instrumental to the construction and

maintenance of the "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). In spite of the

time lag, the printed media could also constitute the ambience of unanimity

within diversity in a media ritual. The front page of Straits Herald on 20 May

(Figure 11) was a good case in this point. At the centre is a picture of the

digital time with a background of a large group of people lowering their head

under a half-mast flag. Below this picture are ten small pictures capturing

tributes from different places. The locations of these places are identified

with small white words on the bottom of each picture, such as Lhasa (Tibet),

Urumqi (Xinjiang), Heihe (Heilongjiang Province), Shifang (Sichuan

Province), Beijing, Xiamen and so on. In contrast to the televised

simultaneity, a visual sense of unity and wholeness among scattered

individuals across space was consolidated and extended in the still moment

captured by the picture.

Figure 11 Front Page of Straits Herald on 20 May 2008[35]

However it is undeniable that the television is the best media to create the sense of simultaneity across scattered places. Take the CCTV-News's live footage of this three-minute observance as an example. This 5-miniute footage with 13 shots was well planned. Like the locations chosen by Herald Straits, the 11 places this footage covers were based on careful discussion. To risk oversimplification, the 11 places chosen could be roughly categorized into three categories, which share similarities with the choices of the Straits Herald.

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[35] http://epaper.taihainet.com/html/20080520/hxdbA01.html (Accessed on 12 December 2013)

Fist, the landmark with political or social implications: Tiananmen Square, Xinhua Gate (Political Bureau), Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing;

Second, the representatives of the border of China: Train Station in Ha'erbin (The farthest north province), Huangpu River in Shanghai (the eastern border/or maritime boundary), Urmuqi (the farthest western province), Hongkong and Macau;

Third, disaster areas: Dujiangyan Ctiy and Beichuan Country, Baocheng Railway.

Correspondingly 13 establishing shots with wailing siren and horns of cars and ships in the background started from the Tian'an Men Square and end in the Beichuan Country again, among which the Tian'an Men Square and the Beichuan Country show up twice. The length of time for each place and the transition were also carefully calculated (Liang, 2008: 158-159). The use of establishing shots as well as the smooth transition between them not only indicates the places as constituents of the community but also establishes a sense of spatial continuity and specular totality.

Aside from the simultaneity and unity of the ritual, the media had to protect integrity of this ritual. The producer admitted in the memo that they scarified journalist concerns to the perfection of this living broadcasting of 3-minute observance. For example, they gave up the idea of making this live broadcasting on location of disaster areas. Although disaster places had greater significance, the conditions and equipment in these places were not good enough to make a flawless broadcast. Likewise for the same reason, the sound effects of siren and horn were prepared in advance. In other words, what the audiences heard in the live broadcast were not the real sound from the spots but sound effects prerecorded by CCTV (Liang, 2008: 146). All possible uncertainties in the live broadcasting were ruled out in advance.

Aside pursuing perfection, the media also had to create a "model of contagion" (Dayan & Katz, 1992:97) for the viewers before the papers or screens to emulate. Both newspapers and televisions capitalized on this three-minute observance to dramatize the communal nature of this mourning ritual, the common grief "we" shared. Before mourning days, close-up was used to intensify the emotional appeal of the suffering, creating a state of

intimacy (Chouliaraki, 2006). Here close-up together with other cinematographic techniques, such as slow motion, background music were used to magnify and extend solemnness and sacredness of the shared moment. Producers and editors coincidentally dealt with images in a similar way, juxtaposition of the wide short of the crowd standing still (in the mourning siren) and the close-up of tears in people's eyes. Another shared groups of images were about the excited crowd who are raising their hands and yelling, Go Sichuan or singing National anthem, after the silent tribute. In this sense the media did nor report an event, but actively perform it (Dayan and Katz, 1992). That the media was performing the ritual does not mean they organized these expressive behaviors. Instead it means they were protectors of this mourning ritual, custodian of the sacredness and solemnness of this moment by showing and accentuating the appropriate action in particular moment. These devices involved greatly engaged the spectators with strong emotions, and offered the traumatized nationals a psychological and aesthetic healing.

2.3 Sharmanizing a media ritual

The similarity shared between shamanism and psychotherapy, suggests Levi-Strauss (1963), is the provision of a specific form, verbal or visual, of the unintelligible suffering, translating an otherwise alien experience into an understandable story consistent with the sufferer's beliefs. The symbolic manipulation allows the shamans and psychotherapists access to the aliments. The media played a shaman or psychotherapist in the mourning days to heal the national trauma, although to which the media also had great responsibility. As mentioned earlier, the intense mediated suffering was a solemn and real reminder to the living of our ultimate destiny. The shared vulnerability intensely displayed in the mediated suffering removed the Emperor's New Clothes and forced us to face directly the fate of our species. This destructive effect of public calamity is like the visual stunt of Crypt of the Capuchin Monks in Roma made with stacks of human skulls and skeleton, it "strips us of our well-honed psychological ability to ignore—even to deny—the inevitable: Our time on earth is limited"

(Zimbardo & Boyd, 2009:22).

Therefore, a healing ritual has to re-instill the certainty and continuity into our life and put on the clothes to pretend that our individual death is still far away. In other words the mourning ritual is a response to the common vulnerability of our space. In Durkheim's words, "Mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group". It is an important means for a society to reaffirm its continuity and persistence. It is the living persons who the ritual really acts on. By bringing together the individuals in the community that is suffering lost, the relations among each other become closer and the individual feelings of helplessness and weakness are dissolved in the collective performances. When they weep and hold together, they feel again the strength and power of their group as a whole. In Durkheim's interpretation, the collective effervesce shown in the rite is an expression of the vitality of the group, which has been symbolized and condensed as the power of the dead that is transformed as a protecting genius after the mourning ritual. Therefore the healing effect of a mourning ritual lies in the symbolical power of

collectivity, as indicates in the Chinese Buddhism story, a single drop of

water could not be evaporated only being put in the river or ocean and will

exist as long as the ocean or river itself exists.

However the mourning ritual of the Wenchuan Earthquake was not a

simple mourning ritual for a dead person in primitive tribe but for tens of

thousands of people in an extended society. Here the media had not only

ceremonially performed but also greatly transformed the mourning ritual.

The sense of solidarity was less gained from on-spot participation than the

spectatorship of unity. Through the media representation, the sorrow and

grief were exalted and amplified from a place to another place within a

mediated unified time-space. Through this media spectacle, people would

re-gain the strength and assurance from the sense of being a part of the

community. An active and alive collectivity, and the nation in this case, was

visualized in the intensified and effervescent expression of common pain,

which offered a narrative solution for the crisis. In this sense, in secular

China now, the nation is the modern religion, offering a sense of infinite

collectivity where individuals get strength and power when facing the fact of

inevitably limited life (Anderson, 2006). Social solidarity were also introduced to this process, as visualized in the slogans frequently repeated in media representations, Today We Are all Sichuan/Wenchuan People (今天，我们都是四川/汶川人) or Go Sichuan Long live China (四川加油， 中国万岁).

One of my interviewees told me he did not shed a tear even when there were a lot of corpses and cries around him in the debris. However, he admitted with a shy smile that he cried "for no reason" when he watched the mourning ritual on television. He is not the only one who had this experience in my fieldwork. In this sense, the key to the success of this public ritual was the spectacle construed by the media. Indeed it reminds us of the Guy Debord's original definition of spectacle: spectacle was a social relation among people, mediated by images. However the media ritual incorporated both the dimensions of spectacle and ceremony. Following the typology of MacAloon (1984), the relationship between the performers and audience was a key feature to distinguish spectacle and ceremony, that is, whether audience response was a part of the performance.

Therefore the active participation of the public in this ritual was the best defense of this stated-led ritual from being a mere spectacle. Not only the support of the public, but also a moral force emerged in these mourning days, where all the members of the community felt the moral obligation to put their sentiments in harmony with the situation. In the chief editor's memo of 21ST Century Business Herald (21 世纪经济报道), a newspaper from the Nangfang Daily Press Group (南方报业集团) that is always thought to have a very critical stance towards Chinese government, he thinks it was natural to suspend journalist concerns and critical reports before the end of mourning days, for "it is inappropriate at this time (before the end of mourning days) to question the government" (Zuo, 2008: 67). Even at that time with loosen state control, they chose to coordinate with the mourning ritual and blind temporally to non-scripted aspects during these periods. On the Internet, where the power of moral force found even more explicit expression, those inappropriate behaviors such as entertainment during mourning days faced great public pressure. The netizens started a manpower search (human flesh search 人肉搜索) to find out and expose the identity of those "wrongdoers"

to public humiliation and criticism.

The media ritual was also a ceremonial conclusion to the state of emergency. In reality there were still rescue work in process, for instance in Yingxiu Town (Zhang, 2013), however the focus of disaster relief had to shift to the reconstruction. In this sense, the media offered a symbolic transition to guide the public (mainly the outside population) back to routine life and towards other national issues demanding attention. On the third day of the mourning days, the media-led donations ended. After the last day of the mourning days, all the colours came back. Although in uneven pace, the intensity of reports in most media was sharply lessened, and the priority was given to the Beijing Olympics again. And the media shifted the focus to the restoration of normal life in disaster areas.

Another thing that had been implicitly brought into an end was the unified time-space construed by the coordination of all kinds of media. The mourning ritual also signalled the end of national mobilization. When external threats had been declining, or metaphorically speaking the Sword of Damocles had fallen down, the honeymoon among the government and the

media as well as among the media itself ended. After the mourning days, greater divergences emerged in media representation and the time-spaces were heterogeneous again.

On the whole, this media ritual incorporated features of spectacle and ceremony at the same time. It was more like a complex of spectacle and ceremony with moral force. It did impose a spectacle with a definite focus monopolistically and predefined a way of response. But far beyond a total spectacle, this media ritual was rooted in the cultural repertoire and functioned as a healing ritual, showing high respects for the ordinary and reaffirming the dignity of life and rights of life and existence. The public active participation constituted the public ceremony, which became contagious with the help of the media, spreading from one place to the other. In doing so this mourning ritual condensed the solidarity since the earthquake broke up, integrated the society in a collective heartbeat and evoked a renewal of loyalty to the legitimate authority. Finally, it finished the frame of this disaster event and led the disaster relief to the second stage.

2.4 Conclusion

An earthquake could not be told without a form, and the form carries
meanings. Although an event is a fundamental unit of human intelligence, or
"category of the understanding" in Aristotle's word, the meanings of any
frame could only be captured in its specific historical-cultural context. In the
case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the media had translated this earthquake
into a disaster event by attaching social implications to a particular
time-space and accommodating the earthquake with its chaos and
complexities through the construction of a clear beginning and ending. In
China's particular context, the distant suffering was transformed as a tool of
social making, a way of organizing collective memory, an articulation of
power relation, and a reference of action. The complexities of this disaster
event could not be comfortable lodged in any super category in the current
studies, such as, media event or media spectacle, or in the typology based on
the study of international communication (Chouliaraki, 2006).

First, compared to distant suffering discussed in the current studies, this

disaster event had a quite different starting point, that it, it was a part of the state-led mobilization. However, even with the inevitable presence of the party-state, it is too early to conclude this disaster event as a merely hegemonic manipulation. It was more like "an end product" (Dayan & Katz, 1992) of the interaction among the party-state, the media and the public. In fact the extensive effects of this disaster event, such as excessive physical and psychological engagements of the outside population, went beyond the imagination of the party-state. Consequently a sense of remoteness had to be reconstructed after the new invented media ritual, changing the camera shot from close-up to a long shot. Correspondingly, the second particularity of this disaster event lies in its distance between sufferers and spectators managed within the event frame. It was more complicated and fluid, first zooming in and then zooming out, in comparison to the fixed distance in the cases of international communications discussed in the current studies.

Chapter 3 Negotiating the meaning of the mediated suffering: rumors and jokes in the Wenchuan Earthquake

During the Wenchuan Earthquake, a very popular news clip on the Internet, in which Mr. Bai Yansong (白岩松), a famous host in the Central Television of China (CCTV), tells a story about the first response of a survivor who was saved by Russian rescue team, "Damn it. I thought the earthquake took me to a foreign country when I saw foreigners". The host used the story to show the strong mind of Sichuan people, while this story finally was proved to be false[36]. However, the circulation of this false story was not taken as rumouring among the public. Instead the host was more like joking but which did not ignite any ethical controversy. By contrast there was strict censorship imposed by the party-state on rumours in the name of maintaining social stability during disaster relief as well as the self-censorship of the public on those immoral behaviors and utterances. Some unverified information was taken as jokes while others as rumours. Some levities were

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[36] During the Wenchuan Earthquake, the Russian rescue team saved only one survivor, who admitted later elsewhere that she was not allowed to open her eyes at the moment when she was saved from the ruins let alone had energy to say any word after being buried after more than 127 hours (Yin, etc., 2009:182-183).

allowed while others not.

There were many other similar instances that showed a discursive space was created during the Wenchuan Earthquake that blurred boundaries between rumors and jokes. People were rumoring jokingly while telling jokes that seemed more like rumors. From present studies there are no useful and ready answer to this in-between space, for jokes and rumors are often analyzed as two distinctive genres of popular discourses. This chapter takes an alternative approach to address the contextuality and intertextuality of rumors and jokes, which is intended to capture the complexities and multiplicity of rumors and jokes in relation to the mediated suffering.

3.1 Re-examining jokes and rumors as a part of media event

Rumors and jokes studies: a brief introduction

Every media event sees the proliferation of jokes and rumors. They appear almost simultaneously with the first piece of news and quickly become well known in the public. However the prevalence of jokes and rumors did not find any space in the Dayan and Katz's studies of media events (1992). In

their theories, audiences followed ideal scripts, like, committed guardians in

conquests, critical judges in contests and royal celebrators in coronations.

Rumors and jokes were simply excluded as "ritual pollution of ceremony"

(Douglas, 1968). In sharp contrast to this ideal picture of audiences is the

reality of unavoidable popularity of rumors and jokes, which represent more

complex and multiple participation and involvement of the participants. The

simplistic understanding of audience found echoes in most of the previous

studies on rumors and jokes, which were framed by dualisms between

rumors versus truth or jokes versus respect.

Rumor studies

Implied in the use of the word of rumor in daily interaction is falsehood that

is closely associated with negative value judgment, although ironically, most

of time when people are circulating unverified information, they trust it and

do not associate it with a rumour. This negative judgment was intensified by

the government's need to monopolize information in wars. Therefore

pioneering studies, for example Allport and Postman's work (1947), were

closely related to government's propaganda projects and effectively

legitimized social control of rumors or even thoughts (Dalziel, 2013a; Shibutani, 1966). Based on the contrast between rumor and truth, behaviorists and psychologists developed a body of literature. For the former, rumors were read as distortion that occurred in a serial and linear or interactive or collaborative communication so their studies were designed to measure efficiency of memory in experimental settings (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). For the latter, rumors were examined as a pathological phenomenon and their studies were preoccupied by questions of repressed complexes or other personal deviation.

Tamotsu Shibutani (1966) takes a different approach to read rumors as a collective making-sense process rather than a fix product imposed from outside. For Shibutani, rumors are produced and transmitted in a more circular pattern to produce people own definition on ambiguous events they are experiencing. In this sense Shibutani also rejected the individualistic bias implied in studies with psychological approach that focused on the individual's effect on rumor content. By emphasizing the rational and pragmatic features of rumors, Shibutani went beyond the dualistic frame

between rumors and truth and rendered irrelevant the truthiness or falsehood of rumors.

The disarticulation of rumors from negative value judgment had greatly developed by sociological studies. Increasingly rumors are studied in relation to the maintenance and destruction of symbolic power and social mobilization and protest (Hu, 2009; Rahimi, 2013; Wooodward, 2013). Some of latest studies promote the counter-hegemonic reading of rumors, while in particular rumors during disasters are still studied in the context of rumor control. For example, the major concern of rumor research in disasters is still what kind of problems rumors are supposed to have on the disaster relief (Dalziel, 2013a & 2013 b; Bernardi & Ruston, 2013). With few exceptions, rumors studied in the context of disasters are those that finally are proved to be false.

Jokes studies[37]

A similar trajectory can also be found in jokes studies. Jokes were easily

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[37] Preston (2011) categorized jokes studies into the broad groups of humour theories in terms of different explanations of functions of jokes: cognitive-perceptual theory, social-behavioural theory, and psychoanalytic theory. For more see Preston (2011). In this thesis, the categories of different jokes studies are based on distinctive value judgments on jokes inherent in different approaches.

viewed as offensive or irreverent in its intention. Therefore the ethics and

aesthetics of jokes have been always a major concern of censorship since the

submergence of so called "high culture" and the proliferation of popular

culture (Davies, 1996). In terms of ethics or aesthetics, disaster jokes were

even worse, for they were often thought as "a sub-category of sick humor",

which refers to "those sick jokes that draw upon and refer to contemporary

disastrous issues or events" (Ellis, 1996: 219). More often than not, this kind

of jokes can very easily provoke anger or attacks especially when they are

published on the media.

However censorship on inappropriate jokes raises more questions than it

can solve, as it is always politicalized as a war between the control of

thought and speech freedom[38]. The authorities may suppress the publication

of jokes but never the circulation of jokes among a large population.

Psychologists may offer an explanation for the popularity of disaster jokes as

psychological responses to traumatic experience. Joking was thought as a

means of distancing ourselves from the trauma or a way of isolating

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[38] As shown in the case of Charlie Hebdo, its publication of a religion cartoon provoked a
chain of violence and chaos that split the French societies.

ourselves from tragedy; joking is a coping strategy of making disastrous experience unreal (Oring, 1987:281).

However, sociologists are not satisfied with individualistic explanation for collective phenomena. Indeed the psychological mechanism can not explain disaster jokes without taking into account their various contents. In other words not all jokes are supposed to have healing effects (Kuipers, 2005). In contrast, sociologists try to politicize jokes and identify the subversiveness of jokes in particular social and cultural contexts. Jokes are no longer thought as bad taste in terms of ethics or aesthetical or mental defense mechanism. Instead, they were read as rebellion against established institutions. This approach to jokes echoes Bakhtin's identification of jokes and their accompanying laughter as a process that both maps ideology and deconstructs it (Bakhtin1984; Preston, 2011).

In particular, disaster jokes were thought as rebellion against obligatory response imposed by the authority or official media in a disastrous situation. In other words, disaster jokes are considered as rebellious attempts against the official discourse about disasters and social time: it is time for grieve for

our lost when humour is inappropriate. Hence, in the studies of jokes about

crisis, disaster jokes were often interpreted as collective critiques of media

culture or established social orders, for example, Cromwell Street[39] (Ellis,

1996), the Challenger (Morrow, 1987; Oring, 1987; Smyth, 1986), 9.11

attacks (Kuipers, 2002 & 2005).

Contextuality and intertextuality of rumors and jokes: an alternative approach

In general, the study of rumors and jokes as popular discourses could not

evade the problem of power as a determine force that "shape the contour of

knowledge in a society through both the ability to categorize

information...and the resources to make such boundary work meaningful"

(Dalziel, 2013:18). Although sociological approach to the problem of power

that defined the boundary of knowledge is gaining increasing importance, it

is still framed in a mechanical and rigid way. More specifically, power is

studied as a product rather than a process, which leads to another extreme

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[39] At the address, the police discovered a large number of bodies by digging up both house and garden, which shocked greatly the English public at that time.
For more to see Bennett, 1995, The horrific secrets of 25 Cromwell Street, *The Independent* http://www.independent.co.uk/news/the-horrific-secrets-of-25-cromwell-street-1576291.html (Accessed on 30 January 2015)

that rumors and jokes are necessarily associated with counter-hegemonic

power. This imposes another value judgment on the analyses of rumors and

jokes.

Counter-hegemony is not necessary a defining feature of rumors and

jokes but a possible effect of their production and circulation. Firstly, rumors

or jokes are not necessarily "weapons of the weak" (Hu, 2009;Tao, 2010),

for various social forces could manipulate them for many purposes,

including cracking down the opposed forces (Shibutani, 1966;Tambiah, 1996;

Woodward, 2013; Lundry & Cheong, 2013). Secondly, not all theorists

welcome the counter-hegemonic reading of jokes/rumors. Among them is

Eagleton who suggested joking functions as form of social control or a

species of safety valve. In his eyes, jokes were "mutual complicity of law

and liberation, power and desire" (Eagleton, 1986:26 quoted by Ellis,

1996:230). Douglas (1968) also pointed out the boundary of jokes in relation

to particular sociocultural context as well as the presence of social control in

the perception and acceptance of jokes.

It is not denying the potential offensiveness embedded in jokes'

semantic construction or their potential symbolic threats to the boundaries of official narrative. Semantically and symbolically, jokes are social pattern of communication that can map the contour of power through working on edges of things. In the psychological sense, the pleasure of joke lies in a kind of economy (Freud, 1963). People are expending energy in monitoring our subconscious as self-control and discipline, but jokes break down the control and save energy from monitoring, which produces sense of enjoyment and freedom. However the strength of attacks on any control should be contextualized in particular sociocultural situations (Douglas, 1968).

In this sense, power should not be mechanical or totalized but dynamic and negotiable. Rumors and jokes should be seen as both process and product. In short, "rumor" and "joke" are not only noun but also verb. Borrowing the words from Shibutani (1966: 8), they are not like bricks that have a separate existence passed among person. Their significance does not lie in the combination of words or other prefixed features. Instead that they are collective sense-making process means their significance is constantly constructed or reconstructed by the communicative activity of the public they

produce.

Another related limitation common in the rumors and jokes studies is an inclination to generalize their findings, that is, to find a universal formula leading to decontextualize rumors and jokes and reduce their complexities and multiplicity into a flat and fix formula. This partly explains the intertextuality between jokes and rumors has not been studied in spite of their simultaneous emergence and omnipresence in any publicized disaster.

An alternative approach proposed here is to address the limitations mentioned above, a mechanical understanding of power, a dualistic frame between process and product and the absent contextuality and intertextuality of rumors and jokes limited by a inclination of generalization. As Carey points out, "in intellectual matters origins determine endings, and the exact point at which one attempts to unhinge the problem of communication largely determines the path the analysis can follow" (2009:17). Therefore this alternative approach takes the "topicality" (Freud, 1960:122) of rumors and jokes as a starting point to understand their significance to particular social-culture context rather than to develop a universal formula to apply to

all contexts.

Borrowing "topicality" from Freud, I try to distinguish rumors and jokes whose life history depends greatly on the contemporary issues or events from the perennial ones that have been fabricated in a form of legend or myth[40]. By topicality, I am neither denying that some of the rumors and jokes may endure and become a part of collective memory, nor ignoring their mobilization of beliefs or symbolic resources pre-existing in the collective memory. Instead the major concern here is their forming process in particular sociocultural context with a dynamic understanding of power. Rumors and jokes are first contextualized in a site of constant conflicts and negotiation. In addition, the rumors and jokes are read as products through examining textuality of jokes and rumors as well as their intertextuality in relation to the mediated suffering that entered at all levels into the production and circulation of jokes and rumors. Topicality of jokes and rumors implies they are symbolic patterns of social experiences occurring at the same time. The

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[40] In this case, most of rumors in the Wenchuan Earthquake studied here might have lost their currency now because as rumors they no longer had immediate relevance to action or perception. Neither did jokes have popularity. They could be still funny but most of them need long commentaries, even though such help could not produce their original effects.

mediated suffering, as indicated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, was a major force in defining and structuring people's experience of this trauma. Rumors and jokes are indexes of the preoccupation of publics created by the mediated disaster, which will be manifest in their intertextuality, convergence or divergence.

More specifically, the questions this chapter tries to answer are how the boundary between truth/knowledge and rumors were built, challenged and maintained; when and how the jokes were perceived and permitted through constant negotiation among different social groups; and how the intertextuality between rumors and jokes tell us about the publics created by the mediated disaster.

3.2   Contextualizing rumors and jokes in the Wenchuan Earthquake

Rumors and its blurry boundary in the Wenchuan Earthquake

Among diverse studies on rumors was something certain on the emergence of rumors: an ambiguous context and absence of official/formal/institutional/trusted media channels (Allport & Postman,

1947; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007; Shibutani, 1966). Take DiFonzo and

Bordia's version as an example. They defined rumor as "unverified, and

instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in the

contexts of ambiguity, danger or potential threat and that function to help

people make sense and manage risk" (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007: 18).

According to the definition, the context of ambiguity and absent of

formal information are two key factors to promote the rise of rumors, which

may partly explain the emergence of rumors during the Wenchuan

Earthquake but not their endurance in vast non-disaster areas during the

disaster relief[41]. As previously indicated in Chapter 2, the Wenchuan

Earthquake was an excessive and extended disaster in terms of its magnitude

and range. Most parts of China felt it on 12 May 2008. Though the tremor of

the earthquake could not last longer than one minute, rumors did not vanish

or decline with the physical shaking. Among various kinds of rumors were

"forecasts" about another coming destructive earthquake in people's

respective or nearby areas where they were living (Shi, 2008; Sun, Jin & Cao,

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[41] The time span of this chapter was within one month after the Wenchuan Earthquake.

2009). In fact, according to their geological histories, the major part of

non-disaster areas had neither real threats from the earthquake or its

aftershock nor any sign of a coming destructive earthquake. In sharp contrast

to the relative safety and certainty of living environment, rumors about a

coming destructive earthquake circulated in dozens of areas almost at the

same time, including Beijing, Shanghai, Fujian, Guangdong, and other ten

provinces (Shi, 2008).

At the same time the Chinese authority (including both the state media,

local media and Chinese Bureau of Seismology) published timely reports of

the earthquake and employed various kinds of abatement strategies[42] to

control the spread of rumors, however, they were not effective as usual and

failed to dispel the ambiguity and reduce the anxiety of the public in

non-disaster areas. Ironically most of the forecast rumors claimed that they

were from official announcements as shown in the Rumours Sample 1-2

(Appendix IX Rumours), which means their veracity were actually easy to

check. As rumors theories expected, people with a less-anxiety level actually

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[42] For example, assembling panels of experts to analyse the possibility of coming
earthquake and issued a point-by-point rebuttal

have rational and deliberative capacity to check (Shibutani, 1966; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Instead, this kind of rumors came and went frequently and widely but there was no sign that people would learn lesson from false alarms. No matter how many times the boy cried wolf, the public in non-disaster areas still preferred to circulate the seemingly-false rumors.

The key factor here for the perpetuation of these rumors was people's perception of the crisis situation. Why were people in a relative safe and stable living environment so anxious? In the context of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the national mobilization led by the party-state should take some responsibility for the perpetuation of rumors in non-disaster areas. As shown in Chapter 2, the effectiveness of the national mobilization was greatly attributed to the concerted media representation on the disaster. The unified time-space created by the ubiquitous and omnipresent mediated suffering successfully manifested itself in creating an urgent sense that unified previously segmented public. Without this urgent sense, people could not be synchronized and mobilized to the disaster relief. On the other hand, the constant flow of images and texts about distant suffering continued to

influence people in non-disaster areas; in these areas the physical shaking

had stopped but the mental experience of the earthquake was continuing. As

discussed in Chapter 2, the psychologists I interviewed asked their clients

with PTSD to keep away from the media or any information related to the

disaster.

Hence, the paradox here is: it is the mediated suffering as a part of the

national mobilization that brought constantly the sense of ambiguity and

uncertainty of disaster areas to non-disaster areas. In some sense it is the

party-state that continuously combated and facilitated rumoring at the same

time. Therefore no matter how great efforts the Chinese authority put on

rumor quelling or rebuttals, the mediated suffering counteracted their efforts

by bringing back ambiguity to non-disaster areas. A rough examination of

the authority's rebuttals on rumors could show rumors died out gradually

with the declining intensity of the media representation on this disaster.

Containing rumors: blurry boundary between knowledge and rumors

Rumors could not be simply seen as a result of collective excitement brought

about by the mediated suffering or as a side effect of the national

mobilization. As collective sense making process, they were actually a means to negotiate with the dominant power to define and understand their situation. The forecast rumors in non-disaster areas could not be simply dismissed as irrational behaviour but actually a rational problem-solving process.

Take abnormal animal behaviors as an example. There were thousands of migrating toads observed to descend on the streets in Shandong province, which was soon explained by experts as a response to local damp and hot weather instead of a sign of a coming earthquake[43]. In fact strange behaviors of animals including migration of toads did happen before many great earthquakes in history, admitted by an earthquake expert in my interview, but it is not necessarily true that the migration of toads forecasts an earthquake. According to my interviewee, there are many other factors that could lead to animals' strange behaviors, for example, the weather, construction work and so on. In other words the current knowledge could neither fully verify nor falsify the association of animals' abnormal

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[43] For more, see Huge migration of toads again in Shandong
http://news.sohu.com/20080529/n257172074.shtml (Accessed on 22 January 2015)

behaviors with a coming earthquake. The tricky thing here is that no one knows whether these forecast rumors are true or false until things really happen or the proposed time ends. Before then, they are like Schrödinger's cat, simultaneously true and false.

In such situation it is natural for anyone to feel an urgent need to act before information can be checked when checking is constrained or just impossible (Shibutani, 1966; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Any delay in such situation may have adverse consequence should the rumor prove true. Even those who were sceptical still preferred to act on and further circulated the rumors, for they sensed that they had to act quickly as taking time to check rumor veracity might jeopardize their interest or the people who they were concern, for example, losing the opportunity to evacuate.

Ironically, the government sometimes did the same thing. There were many cases in which the information that the government's action was based on could not be verified, like prediction of an earthquake. For example, in Beichuan country, the information about a possible destructive earthquake was used to evacuate and transfer local residents, which happened to be

recorded by CCTV. In this well-known news footage of CCTV, a famous

reporter, Ms. Li Xiaomeng (李小萌) was deeply touched by a peasant who

insisted on going home in spite of the official warning of a coming

destructive aftershock. The intention of the footage was to show the deep

attachment of local peasants to their hometown as well as the humanity of

the reporter. However the official forecast of a coming earthquake finally

proved wrong.

In fact it is acknowledged officially by seismologists that the short-term

forecast of a coming earthquake is currently and scientifically impossible.

What scientists can do now are long-term and mid-term predictions. A

short-term prediction of a coming earthquake with an exact time and location

goes beyond the scientific reign in the sense that forecast of earthquake is

also intertwined with social, economical and political concerns, which

together makes the short-term forecast is a very complicated and impractical

issue[44]. Of course, due to the great cost as well the practical difficulty of

transfer, transfer in the name of drill based on a short-term forecast could not

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[44] See Qian (1986) for more discussion about practical concerns about the short-term
earthquake forecast

be used so frequently; especially considering some of them would be proved

to wrong at last. Facing the uncertainty of the knowledge, rehearsal was a

eulogy used by the authority to avoid the possible embarrassment brought by

scientific predictions they acted on. This strategy was used for a long time,

which was once mentioned by the experts in studying the Great Tangshan

Earthquake (Qian, 1986). In this sense one of rational responses to an

uncertain risk that goes beyond the range of current knowledge is to take it as

real.

The great evacuation of the Mianyang City(绵阳) in late May is a case

in this point. At that time this densely populated place was facing one

destructive threat, that is, the possible landslide caused by the biggest

earthquake lake that was located just above the city. As described by a report

in Mianyang Evening, "the quake lake and its possible dam-break make it

the Sword of Damocles, hanging on the people living in the Mianyang city."

After days of rain shower, the local government transferred 2 millions

citizens in the name of dam-break drill. In fact local people believed it as a

real transfer because at that time no one knows whether the dam would be

broken or not.

It is true that scientific prediction is not the exact same with rumors. However the cases discussed above shared a similarity that people had to act on the Schrödinger's cat-like information that was impossible to verify or falsify. In some sense like rumors, the scientific predictions were full with uncertainty and had great relevance to action. These cases showed the boundary between truth/knowledge and rumors could not be definitive and clear as expected and how the public and the governments were competing for the power in defining the boundary.

Jokes as permitted levity during the Wenchuan Earthquake

Joking during the Wenchuan Earthquake

As discussed earlier in this chapter, previous studies of jokes took jokes as products and interpret them as "a sceptical incredulity towards dominant, media endorsed and/or media engendered, explanations of the contemporary issues or events (to) which they relate " (Ellis, 1996: 219). This counter-hegemonic reading of jokes can partly explain some jokes that

emerged during the Wenchuan Earthquake.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, during the national mourning days, almost major televisions channels in China presented the same footage of CCTV-1/NEWS of the mourning ritual. Someone did not appreciate or understand this orchestrated uniformity and tried to joke on it on SMTH (水木清华) BBS on the first day of mourning day[45], "My foreign neighbour thought his television was broken when he saw the same picture on all the channels!" However shortly the joke disappeared from the website and no more joke appeared any more on that day. In fact the Wenchuan Earthquake saw a more critical public than before in the sense that there were strict self-censorship on speeches and behaviors in the public domain during the disaster relief. The public initiated effective and frequent human hunts, or human search engine[46], on the immoral behaviors and people during the disaster relief. Among them were frivolous pictures about disaster areas and

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[45] It is the first and one of the most popular bulletin board system sites among the universities in China, whose users include most of the students from Tsinghua University. See Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMTH_BBS Accessed on 20 April 2015.

[46] Human search engine or 人肉搜索 in Chinese refers to a grass-root collective activity on the Internet to identify people and expose their private information as a punishment for their wrongdoings or misbehaviours.

Mr Smile Tan (or 谭笑笑 in Chinese [47]), which all began with someone

captured with inappropriate smiles in the field.

Sensitivity to public laughter reached its peak during the mourning days.

As a mediated ritual, it showed the pubic condolence to the great loss of the

society but at the same time it also functioned as a rite of passage (Tuner,

1969), signifying from one stage to another, and in this case, from an

interruption back to the normal. This was the starting point to understand the

popularity of disaster jokes during the Wenchuan Earthquake. The date of all

the samples of jokes posted on the Internet that one now can find were later

than 21 May, 2008, the end of mourning days[48]. So were jokes published on

the media. It may be true that the jokes could have emerged immediately

after the earthquake happened as indicated by their contents, but the social

and psychological space for the public laughter was gradually forming after

the mourning ritual. The ending of the national mourning days marked the

shifting of focus from national mobilization to other national issues, in this

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[47] Tanli（谭力），as then the leader of Mianyang, was captured smiling on the field, which invoked public anger.

[48] Thanks to the Internet, it is easier to check the date of the samples I collected. Although some samples were posted many years after the Wenchuan Earthquake, they all have sufficient evidence showing the texts were saved from the time within one month after the Wenchuan Earthquake.

case, the Beijing Olympic games. What the party-state needed then was a gradual exit for the crisis state. Since the situation in the disaster area was still serious, public attention could not easily to be completely steered away, however a space of joking or serious levity (Ellis, 1996) was allowed and welcomed to help people complete the transition from a urgent state to the normal. Nevertheless the bottom line was the boundary of this space could not challenge the official narrative of disaster.

The forming of the tentative space for jokes could not be attributed to the permission of the governments but the collective efforts of the publics. As Freud argued, "A Joke...*must* be told to someone else "(Freud, 1963:143; italic was original), which means a joke is not completed without communication. Without mutual acknowledgement from the public, this tentative space could not be formed. After the mourning days, some jokes started to appear on the public domain, which did not ignite people's anger but their active responses, including circulating, collecting and reproducing more jokes. It was collective efforts that made jokes go viral and become omnipresent overnight. The official space for public laughter was formed

after the media participated in the circulation of disaster jokes. Unlike disaster jokes in earlier mentioned cases, the jokes during the Wenchuan Earthquake had got unprecedented support from the media agencies including the state media that were supposed to have a high standard of morality and aesthetics. Instead of dismissing this kind of humours as bad taste, offensive or immoral sick humours, the dirty words in Sichuan dialect was even used in live broadcasting as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. In short, the process of the permitted space for disaster jokes shows the particularities of disaster jokes in the Wenchuan Earthquake, which could not be explained in the current literature that read jokes as a rebellion against the official discourse imposed by the mainstream media.

Jokes as permitted levity

As shown above, the space of permitted levity was a dialogical process among different discourses through competition and negotiation, which also manifested itself well in the self-explanations of people who collected and circulated jokes.

Joke Sample 1: A comment on jokes

The pains brought by 12 May Earthquake go beyond description. I am so

upset. For many reason, most of us could not do anything more helpful to the

people in suffering except making a little donation. I have kept an eye on

every piece of news about the disaster area and find something, super funny

(in Sichuan dialect), *posted by people in suffering themselves*[49]. These texts

show greatness in mundaneness and here I share part of them with you. Let

us pray together for people in disaster areas. At the same time, I hope you

can have more jokes that can share with us. This is *a psychological means of*

coping with trauma, not only for people in disasters areas but also for all of

us.

Among various self-justification was that these jokes were for a similar

purpose: a psychological means to cope with our shared grief and suffering.

The stress of a psychological meaning served to keep the poster from the

possible antagonistic attacks due to some offensiveness and irreverence that

jokes/laughter that could have. This was also a sign of the tentativeness of

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[49] Italic is added by the writer of this thesis. See Appendix XI for its Chinese original
version

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the space for public laughter at that time: after the mourning ritual, some

people tried carefully to explore the space for public laughter.

Another shared feature in these disclaim-like comments was an

identification/allusion of Sichuan people in suffering as the authors of these

jokes. In fact, it was actually very hard to verify original authors, for one of

the major features of topical jokes was that they were collectively produced

and anonymously circulated (Freud, 1960: 142). The presence of collective

creators could be shown in the variation and evolution of similar jokes. Here

highlighting the authorship of Sichuan people who represented all people in

suffering in disaster areas, like the stress of psychological function, helped

protect circulators from possible attacks. These posters tried to justify the

circulation of jokes with the intension of respecting the "Sichuan people" as

a whole, who showed strong mind and good sense of humor in response to

such great trauma. In doing so, joking (collecting/circulating) and jokes were

taken as a weapon to overcome the difficulty and pain brought by the deadly

disaster. As shown in other comments, the posters expressed their respect to

sufferers with no reservation: their strong mind and optimistic feelings

motivate us ("他们的坚定意志、丰富感情感染了我们") or "They love life

very much! ("他们那么地热爱生活").

In previous studies, disaster jokes were often juxtaposed as the opposite

of reverence or respect. In contrast, in the context of the Wenchuan

Earthquake, joking itself was seen as a way to respect and support people in

suffering. This kind of reading of jokes was greatly helpful in negotiating a

public/official space without touching the public nerve and challenging the

official narrative. Instead, they could be used as a way to keep the public's

attention without adding more oil to the collective excitement. Meanwhile, it

could also be incorporated into the heroic narrative of disaster relief

promoted by the state media[50], in which the Sichuan people with the strong

mind were reduced as an abstract heroic figure in response to the great

calamity.

A rough comparison between jokes on the media agencies and jokes on

the Internet finds a selective process used by the former in containing the

offensiveness and subversiveness of jokes. For example, they excluded

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[50] See Chapter 4 of this thesis for the ritualized and heroic narrative

selectively the jokes that parodied media reports to attack directly and strongly the earthquake experts or government. This is related to the question about the strength of the attacks of the jokes as permitted levity, since one cannot deny the potential offensiveness embedded in jokes' semantic construction and their potential symbolic threats to the boundaries of official narrative, which will be discussed in the next section.

So far the power involved in the circulation of rumors and jokes has been contextualized in relation to the mediated suffering. They are not only read as a safety valve of collective anxiety or excitement but also as a dialogical process of negotiation with the power. However their significance as well as their strength of attacks could not be fully answered without a more elaborate analysis of their textuality and intertextuality.

3.3 Ways of negotiating the definition of the mediated suffering

Rumors: sharing a semiotic structure with scientific discourses

As mentioned earlier, within the national boundary, forecast rumors were the most common and widely spread, since this kind of rumors had the greatest

relevance to action than other categories. They oriented people on how to act facing the uncertain situation. In terms of their relation to orientation and action, forecast rumors and other institutional news reports shared much more similarities than differences. That is why rumors were defined as a kind of "improvised news" (Shibutani, 1966:16). However another great similarity shared by rumors and news that Shibutani ignored is their semiotic structure. As will be shown, these two seeming-contradictory discourses actually pool the same intellectual resource: the scientific discourse.

As shown in the samples of forecast rumors (Appendix IX 1-2), a semiotic formula that is necessary to this kind of rumors is

"An authorized news resource+ an description of abnormal phenomena +a coming earthquake with an exact time and location + warning" (based on the formula proposed by Shi, 2008 Appendix X).

The authorized sources of these rumors included institutions (the Chinese Earthquake Administration or its local branches or the United States Geological Survey), the media, insiders and experts (for example, Chinese

famous geologist Li, Siguang[51]). In the semiotic sense, this kind of rumors had nothing different from any piece of forecast news on the media about a coming storm or other disaster. The only difference was whether their sources of information were verified or not: in rumors authorized sources as well as the exact time and place were made up to increase their credibility.

No matter how difficult it is to verify due to scientific and practical reasons, common people in Chinese society preferred to believe that the prediction of a coming earthquake in short term was currently and scientifically possible. This deep conviction was partly responsible for the persistence of forecast rumors. It was a deep conviction that could not be easily shaken. In retrospect, there was once a successful forecast, the Liaohai earthquake(辽海地震) in Chinese history, which was well publicized as a triumph of people's power and a major contribution of PRC to the seismology[52].

This deep conviction should be understood with the modernization

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[51] Mr. Li Siguang was the founder of China's geomechanics and held the positions of vice president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and minister of geology after1949.
[52] For more see http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?id=86198756 (Accessed on 21 April 2015)

process of China, which has imposed scientific rationality as a part of the structures of feelings of Chinese contemporary society. As an integral part of scientific rationality, prediction on nature or society even on human themselves is thought to be possible as long as the law behind the phenomenon could be found. Through prediction, people can make rational control of the future and evolve linearly into a more advanced society. This linear vision based on scientific rationality also characterizes Chinese official discourse about current issues, that is, the problems will be solved with the development of science or knowledge. Therefore in a society that worships scientific legitimacy, although the authority and experts insisted current impossibility of short-term forecast, there was a considerable amount of population who blamed government officials for not taking serious the forecast of the earthquake.

A similar mechanism of attribution was also shared by another category of rumors, which was about the origin of the earthquake and the disaster. In terms of their interpretations, there were two sub-categories, man-made factors and mysterious power. In the first sub-category, the Chinese authority,

the incompetence of the earthquake experts or government officials and the

media should be held responsibility for the disaster, while in the second

sub-category, people pooled different myths or legends to explain the

occurrence of this trauma, for example, Kama or the unbreakable curse from

a supernatural power. Among them was a well-circulated explanation about

all the "bad luck" of China in 2008:

Rumor Sample: The ominous 8

Anything that contains three 8 in their dates would become disaster

in 2008. The date of great disaster that happened and will happen in

this year shows a link with 8. For example, the Snow disaster (25

January: 2+5+1=8); the Tibetan Violence (14 March:1+4+3=8) and

last the Wenchuan Earthquake (12 May:1+2+5=8). And the date of

the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics would be 8 August

2008... (Shi, 2008)

This rumors about digital 8 was supposedly spread maliciously by the Fa

Long Gong group to attack the coming Beijing Olympics, but its well

acceptance proved its consistence with collective belief of some mysterious

power among a certain population at that time, for before then digital 8 in

Chinese culture used to have auspicious implication due to its similar

pronunciation with Fa (发 in Chinese means getting rich).

In spite of their various interpretations, they shared a similar frame of

interpretation: a stable causal attribution. More specifically, what these

rumors convey together was there must be some forces and people that could

be certainly found and clearly defined as culprits for this earthquake/disaster.

In this sense, they shared a similar structure with the scientific discourse: a

law (man/superpower) is out there waiting for revelation, although their

difference lay in whether the disaster is escapable or not. The scientific

explanation of this disaster is the result of a sudden release of energy in the

Earth's crust that creates seismic waves, while in the rumors some

supernatural power.

Jokes: destabilizing the structure

By contrast, some jokes with same motifs, forecast and accountability, tried

to destabilize this structure, exposing the arbitrariness of and infusing

uncertainty and absurdity into these cause-effect links. As discussed above,

the pleasure of jokes was thought to come from their semiotic and symbolic

attacks on control. A joke is a play upon forms, which associated

disparate/incongruous elements into a way that exposes the arbitrary

boundary of concepts or subjective aspect of classifications and categories

that shape human thoughts. That is what Douglas (1968) thought as the

origin of the subversiveness of jokes, suggesting that any particular

interpretation of experience may be arbitrary and subjective (363). In this

case, one of the targets of disaster jokes was the necessity of different

cause-effect links that shaped most of the forecast and accountability rumors

as well as institutional information (news/scientific reports).

As discussed above, the association between animals' ability and

forecast was one of important features that increased the validity of forecast

rumors. However, the validity of association was challenged greatly in some

jokes. One of the most popular jokes that occurred repeatedly in my

collected samples was an unfortunate pet dog. There were some variations of

this joke and the most complete one is chosen here:

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Joke sample 2: An innocent dog

"*An editor in Chengdu Business Daily* read a piece of news about how

a pet dog dragged its master out of the room before the earthquake

broke out. He became angry and complained with his colleague that

his dog was even snoring at that time. Then he went home and beat

his dog up. " [53]

As Douglas (1968) suggested the non-articulate part of jokes itself is a

part of direct source of pleasure. Therefore only in the context of mediated

suffering where rumors were spread and believed could the humor of these

jokes be perceived. In a daily context, people would find these jokes weak or

not funny at all, except some sarcasm in some jokes. The non-articulated part

of the joke was the deep belief of animals' sensibility to the coming

earthquake among frightened people, which led to the nightmare of an

innocent dog.

A more direct attack on the casual link between the animals' behaviors

and coming earthquake is shown in a parody of news interview on a large

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[53] See Appendix XI for the original Chinese versions of the following jokes. All titles are added by the author of the thesis.

group of migrating toads.

Joke sample 3: An interview of toad migration

(Host in studio: At present, lots of toads are migrating over all the country, which has touched the nerve of the nation. The reporter has a live interview from the field)

Reporter: Why do you migrate together?

Toad A: It is breeding season. We are coming for dates

Reporter: Why so many coming together?

Toad A: Dude, girls are not enough!

Reporter: Would you please tell me why you migrate with so many others?

Toad B: Summer is coming. I need to change to a cooler place.

Reporter: Why so many coming together?

Toad B: The rent of previous caves has increased. We cannot afford anymore.

Reporter: (speechless)

Toad B: This is not a live broadcast, is it? If it is, please don't forget

to blur my face. I would not take any responsibility for what I said.

Reporter: (Comment) The migrating of toads is merely internal conflicts within toads and has nothing to do with the earthquake.

Reporter: Why do you migrate with so many others?

Toad D: We are migrating from Sichuan. It was so scary that I was almost buried.

Reporter: Why so many coming together?

Toad D: An earthquake happened in Sichuan and we mobilize fellows to donate blood for Sichuan victims.

Again the non-articulated part of these jokes was the necessary association of animals' behaviors with a coming earthquake as indicated in many forecast rumors. Through anthropomorphism, the associations were rendered casual (dates), banal (hot weather) or faddish links (donation). In other words, the validity of rumors based on causal links was exposed to arbitrariness and absurdity.

Likewise, the same absurdity is also infused into the association between supernatural power and the earthquake in some of the jokes that I categories

misunderstanding of the earthquake, as shown in the following two samples.

Joke sample 4: Fishing

My hometown is in Danling of Sichuan. One of my friends who worked there told me, when the earthquake happened, an uncle who was fishing got a big fish under the water. When seeing the mountain shaking and water boiling, the man exclaimed, "Dear, Run! A dragon is coming out!"

Joke Simple 5: A violent washing machine

My mom was alone in Suining (遂宁, a city in Sichuan*)* when the earthquake happened and I could not contact her until half an hour later. She told me immediately, "I was playing on the PC when the washing machine worked. All bottles on the desk fell apart to pieces, so did the mirror of the wardrobe. My mouse fell off. What kind of washing machine did you buy for me? Why did it have to work so violently? "

The humor behind these jokes came from people's "stupidity" in the sense they did not recognize it was an earthquake at the very beginning.

People in shock creatively offered all kinds of reasons, including supernatural power (dragon), mysterious forces (aliens or UFO), crimes (a mob of fighting or robbery) and daily/ordinary things (road roller or broken washing machine). In other words, the stupidity of people came from the irrelevance of their first interpretations of the earthquake. Although indirectly, these jokes echoed the rumors about supernatural power that brought about the earthquake, suggesting that the interpretations of the latter were the irrelevant, subjective and inadequate.

As discussed so far, the causal attribution structure was a target of some jokes, which devalued its causality, certainty and rationality. However this does not characterize all jokes related to forecast and interpretation of the disaster. The causal attribution structure was not the only target of all the related jokes. In some other jokes, they instead took the authority (including governments, experts and the media) as their targets, and more specifically, the impotence of the authority in forecasting the disaster or other aftershocks.

In general, these jokes presented variety in terms of their strength of offensiveness. The weakest discontent was expressed as an embarrassment

caused by false alarm or other suggestion recommended by the authority. As shown in the Figure 12 and 13, they are DIY instruments for earthquake prediction, some of which were suggested by experts in their interviews. The public was told that the "mechanism" of these instruments would help people sense in advance any shaking from the earth, which in reality it barely worked. Hence people parodied Chengdu's city slogan as "Chengdu, a city with handstand beer bottles in every house. Chengdu, a city once you come you will never want to leave—Chengdu is a city where the earthquake come and will never leave."

Figure 12 DIY Instrument A[54]   **Figure 13   DIY Instrument B**[55]

The discontent was escalated to distrust in the second group of jokes. In the

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[54]   source: Sina News http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-06-12/105614006756s.shtml poste at10:56 on 12 June 2008. Accessed on 21 April 2014.
[55]   source: Sina News http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-06-12/105614006756s.shtml poste at10:56 on 12 June 2008. Accessed on 21 April 2014.

following samples, distrust was implicit or explicit in people's responses to

an expert's forecast of aftershock.

Joke sample 6: Scary things

One thing that is scarier than the earthquake is aftershock; one thing

that is scarier than aftershock is forecasting aftershock. One thing

that is scarier than forecasting aftershock is there is no aftershock

after it was forecasted.

Joke sample 7: Sleeping

After the warning about a big aftershock was announced, a friend

texted us, "run?" My sleepy husband replied, "I am sleeping at

home. When the earthquake happens, remember to come here to

save me."

Anger may be the strongest expression on the scale of discontent. In

some jokes the anger towards the authority were expressed directly as shown

in the following Chinese couplet.

Joke sample 8: A couplet

The First line: Nowhere found a warning of 8-magnitude earthquake,

jeopardizing thousands of people's lives

The second line: Everywhere finds the forecast of 6-magnitude

aftershocks, disturbing millions of people's nights

Streamer: Whatever or wherever

In general, the structural analysis of rumors related to forecast and

accountability reveals they actually shared a semiotic frame with the

authorized news or reports. This framework asserted rationality, certainty

and necessity, which was congruent with scientific rationality that has deeply

rooted in the structure of feelings in Chinese contemporary. However the

stability of this semiotic structure was disturbed or destabilized by jokes

either with the attack of authority or the casual, arbitrary and even absurd

associations.

3.4   Transgressing the generic boundary: rumor-joke as "Duanzi"

A nebulous genre: rumor-joke

So far I have not fully discussed some texts that shared an in-between space

between jokes and rumors, although some of them have been mentioned

earlier. For example, the television host took the joke about the survivors as a proof of Sichuan people's strong mind. In every sense, he was rumoring (by definition: circulating an unverified information). There were other texts showing the existence of a nebulous form, in which the generic boundary of rumors and jokes was not applicable. Based on my ethnography and textual analyses, "duanzi" would be a better word used here to refer the nebulous genre that could not be defined simply as rumors or jokes.

"Duanzi" has no English counterpart. It must be one of the most pervasive and, until recently, least discussed expression of folklore in Chinese culture. One of the reason is it is very difficult to define what is "duanzi" since the common-sense use of "duanzi" almost includes all kinds of short folklore but with complete meaning, for example, rumors, jokes, gossips, parodies, ballad, poems, couplets, news comments and the like. In addition, its functions also include informing, entertaining, maintaining relation or value and so on. What is more, "duanzi" in Chinese context occupies a very ambiguous space that is hard to impose any singular moral judgment on. They could be used to propagate government policy(or "红段

子" in Chinese) or attack the authority (or "灰段子" in Chinese), to show

obscenity (or "黄段子" in Chinese) or moral judgment. While the study of

"duanzi" goes beyond the scope of this thesis, the concept of "duanzi" is

helpful to access the particularity of jokes and rumors during the Wenchuan

Earthquake, that is, some texts as well as the way they were circulated

transgressed the generic boundary between rumors and jokes. They were

rumor-jokes in terms of their syntax, functions and the mechanism of

circulation, and it was the ambiguity that endowed their strength of attacks as

well as the effectiveness in the negotiation with the dominant narrative.

With the help of duanzi, we can re-examine some of the texts that have

been presented. For example the stress about the authorship of Sichuan

people as a whole in joking. Theoretically in the context of the Internet, the

circulation of jokes through cuts and pastes should be as precise as possible

without any information lost or added. However more often than not, a

similar joke had different variations. How to understand the variation needs

the help of rumors studies. In circulation, some parts of rumors will be lost

while others accented and highlighted (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007:135). In the

cases of jokes (the italic parts in joke sample 2, 4, 5, 7 and 10), the

information that can help identify the Sichuan people was all kept as much as

possible, even in some cases the identification seemed unnecessarily surplus.

It was a similar mechanism used by rumormongers to enhance their

credibility. They tried to show that the stories did come from trusted sources,

family, relatives, friends or witnesses. These attributions to a credible source,

according to rumors studies, were a part of the typical rumor formulation,

which also has been discussed above in the part of forecast rumors. They

were important structural factors that gave the appearance of veracity to the

information circulated (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007).

In current studies, rumors and jokes could be easily distinguished in

terms of the relation to action, plausibility and levity. However, except the

forecast rumors, other kinds of rumors that did not have great relevance to

action could be lumped with jokes in some sense. In fact telling rumors like

jokes was a mechanism to reduce the seriousness of rumors and their

offensiveness, which in turn was an effective way to circulate and extend

their persistence. In their narration, my informers would like to add

something like "is it funny" or "funny enough" when they were trying to tell

me some negative stories about "public figure" (people in power or heroes in

the media). For example the malperformance of government officials or

some negative gossips of heroes in the disaster relief. Sometimes, the way

they told these rumors gave me an impression that they did not take these

stories seriously or importantly[56]. Even sometimes rumors like these in their

group chat could receive people's smiles as a response, like saying we all

knew about their dirty secrets (government officials/heroes). In short, joking

with rumors offers a roundabout way of negotiating with the official

narrative by softening their offensiveness. It is true the rumors related to

heroes, villains and governments might be a safety valve of public discontent

or anger toward delinquency of government. However, they were also small

narratives that actively negotiated with the grand heroic narrative.

Negotiating with the ritualized official narrative: an alternative story

Reducing accountability of circulators does not capture all the significance of

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[56] The stories of Mr. Simile Tan and Bottle Boy are cases in this point, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

the nebulousness of this particular kind of texts. It also could be read as an effective way of negotiating the ritualized official narrative. As will be shown in Chapter 4, the mnemonic narrative of the disaster was consolidated into a national triumph/myth, which started by the official media after the ending of crisis status. This frame actually started to build as early as the disaster relief when the guideline of positive reports (or 正面报道 in Chinese) was imposed by the party-state. At that time all the media were asked to put a stress on the brighter side of this trauma, including all kinds of heroes or heroic deeds. People who survived long-time burial were incorporated into this frame as a celebration of a miracle or greatness of life.

However this ritualized narrative was disturbed greatly by the veracity brought by rumor-jokes. In other words, the effects of jokes were amplified by its veracity. In a group of jokes that I categorize as wrong response, people's calmness and indifference together exposed the arbitrariness behind the miracle of life. Within this group, there were stories about people who put their safety aside when the earthquake came and continued roll call, lecture in classroom or playing games other than running away. The humor

behind these jokes came from people's "absurdity" that they did not take priority of their own lives over other trivial or minor things.

Joke sample 9: Kebab

When a girl in Chengdu city hung out with her friend, she went directly to a barbeque stall and suggested, "let's have kebab first, otherwise we cannot survive for more than 100 hours if we are buried"

Joke sample 10: Mah-jongg

Four elder ladies were playing mah-jongg. When their table started to shake, they stop to put some paper boxes under the feet of table to cushion the shaking and continue. They are must be the strongest ladies in the Chongqing city.

These two samples also occurred repeatedly in different places and used to be listed as the best "duanzi" about the earthquake by some websites. The reason for their popularity partly lied in the non-articulated parts that were the proliferation of media reports about persistent survival after long-time burials as well as the heroic deeds of putting others' lives over their owns.

Another reason lies in their credibility. In the public imagination, eating

kebab and playing mah-jongg must be the most common scenes that

immediately associated with Chongqing and Chengdu. The employment of

familiar scenes increased the veracity of these stories and at the same time

the sense of absurdity and fatalistic attitude of people in suffering face the

abrupt life or death event.

Another group that can be categorized by anti-hero was "duanzi" about

heroic deeds of average persons. Most of them conveyed controversies

around the "heroes" who received extensive media coverage and then all

kinds of rewards and privileges. In these "duanzi", heroes were not destined

to be heroes as depicted in the media representation; instead they happened

to be captured as heroes. Most of heroic deeds seemed little different from

what others did when the earthquake happened. In fact after first panic and

shock, the most common reactions of people in disaster areas were self-help

and mutual assistance. Since the destructive earthquake destroyed the local

infrastructure as well as sociocultural structure simultaneously, distinctions

among social groups were broken down, followed by the development of a

kind of camaraderie sprit among survivors. This may seemed fresh to the

journalists and reports who just flooded from a fragmental society into the

disaster area. The "duanzi" that took these "lucky" people as target actually

expressed a "cynical" attitude towards arbitraries of media attention[57].

In general, based on textual analyses and ethnography, this section

examines the textuality and intertextuality of rumors and jokes in terms of

how they effectively and creatively negotiated the meaning of the mediated

suffering. The intertextuality between rumors and jokes presented

complexity and multiplicity of these popular discourses in relation to the

official or dominant discourse. The forecast rumors shared a similar semiotic

structure with authorized information but at the same time showed a distrust

attitude towards the authority. Such distrust or cynical attitude also could be

seen in the forecast jokes as a whole, while some of them went further and

present a more radical attack on the uncertainty of knowledge, whose

subversiveness was packed well in the celebration of Sichuan people's

optimism. In addition, the nebulous forms between jokes and rumors should

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[57] How the arbitrary media attention reshaped the post-calamity solidarity is discussed in details in the Chapter 5 of this thesis.

not be seen also an effective and artful way to negotiate with official/dominant narrative with a heroic or epic framework.

3.5   Conclusion

The exclusion of rumors and joke in typical definition of media events (Dayan and Katz, 1992) exposed their mechanical understanding of the audience/participants as well as media events as genres, although their obsession on the "cleanliness" of media events was modified later (Dayan, 2008). Likewise taking rumors and jokes as distinct genre also decontextualized these popular discourses and failed to see their intertextuality.

Rumoring and joking are integral parts of people's daily life. In particular, in a crisis situation, they are indices of preoccupation of the public that actively participates in the defining and interpreting an inadequately defined situation. The contextualization of jokes and rumors in relation to the mediated suffering reveals a more dynamic process in which how power was not static but paradoxical and negotiable. As shown in the cases of forecast

rumors, the boundary between rumors and truth were blurred and arbitrary, which was a site of constant conflicts. Also as shown in the analysis, the permitted space of public laughter and the meaning of media events as well as the roles of participants were not preordained as Dayan and Katz (1992) expected. Instead the meaning of any media event including the mediated suffering is under constant negotiation between different social groups.

The textual analyses of rumors and jokes further exposes and maps the contour of the heroic narrative of the mediated suffering that the authority tried to construct and maintain. Even though some texts shared a semiotic structure with the authorized narrative, they still infused distrust into the authority. While some texts with symbolic inversion challenged the stability of the structure, the strength of attacks was smoothed over by being incorporated into the dominant narrative. The dynamic between different discourses also presented its complexity in the existence of the nebulous forms or "duanzi" that rejected any definitive classification. The conceptual ambiguity created an in-between space in which popular discourses could effective negotiated with the dominant discourse by mapping and disturbing

the contour of dominant narrative.

In general rumors and jokes during the Wenchuan Earthquake disorganized the official narrative of the disaster. Their polymorphous kinetic play showed a multiplicity of social experience involved in the disaster rather than merely loyalty or rebellion discussed in the present literature. The diversity in the patterns of participation in some sense challenged the concept of audience as well as a linear understanding of communication framed by encoding or decoding processes. In fact, the public created by the crisis could be more active than expected not just in the sense they were mobilized into the disaster relief but also in the sense they actively negotiate the meaning of the mediated suffering. And these ways of negotiation were integral to the making of a media event.

However, rumors and jokes were rendered invisible in the master commemorative narrative that shaped most of the mnemonic media texts, including anniversary reports, museums and memorials. Corresponding, the complexities and multiplicity of experiences related to the mediated suffering were gradually flattened into a linear story about the national

triumph. In this sense, the next chapter will discuss how the media organized

forgetting after telling what to be worth remembering at the reconstruction

stage.

Chapter 4 Commemorating a difficult past: remembering to forget

"Happy the people whose annals are vacant in history"

--Thomas Carlyle, French Revolution, Book II, 24

"The misfortune of a nation is a fortune of its poets, for when one writes of national calamities, one inevitably writes well". (国家不幸诗家幸，赋到沧桑句便工)

--Zhaoyi (赵翼, a poet in Qing Dynasty of ascent China)

A few months after 12 May 2008 when the Wenchuan Earthquake did not hit the headlines anymore, this calamity provoked realms of poems, essays, memoirs and academic articles. At the same time, people who withdrew from the frontline of disaster relief rushed to deliver public lectures that were organized by the party-state to commemorate and commend the heroes.

During 2008-2013, numerous museums, memorials and relic parks had been built one after another in the name of remembering the earthquake. However the boom of the earthquake memory was haunted by the anxiety of forgetting. Parents whose children were dead in this earthquake still waited for the promised memorials with their children's names[58]. Facing the intense competition among disaster areas, residents in Yingxiu and New Beichuan

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[58]For the news stories the anxiety of being forgotten among the earthquake survivors, see Mu Jiang, "Beichuan, rainstorm and the former earthquake"(北川，暴雨和曾经的地震), Life Week (18 July, 2013); and Yin Ying, "The 5th anniversary of the Wenchuan Earthquake: different lives of five re-united families" (汶川地震五周年：地震重组家庭的五味人生)",Chinese News Service, (16 May, 2013).

town complained the declining numbers of tourists. The Red Cross that was still in credibility crisis caused by Guo Meimei scandal[59] hoped the public could remember their pervious efforts in disaster relief[60]. In short, with time goes by, some parts of this disaster are highlighted and saved while others forgotten and abandoned. The tension between remembering and forgetting started with the first media report and developed in a master narrative where the difficult past was commemorated and consumed. This chapter explores how the master narrative took shape, within which what was forgotten in the name of remembering.

4.1   Collective memory, collected memory and contested memory

The contemporary uses of the concept "collective memory" are largely traceable to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who gives theoretical weigh to the term previously unknown. Common sense tells us that memory is

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[59] It began with a 20-year-old girl named Guo Meimei(郭美美) who claimed to be the general manager of a company called Red Cross Commerce which had been verified officially by Sina Microblog. She flaunted her wealth, showing off her Maserati and Lamborghini cars as well as Hermès handbags. The furious netizens began to question how Ms. Guo financed her lifestyle and whether she used the money which had been donated to the Red Cross. They started a manpower search (human flesh search 人肉搜索) to find out the identity of Guo Meimei and her connection with the Red Cross Society

[60] For more, see Valli (2014), "China red cross still feeling impact from 2011 scandal" , http://www.voanews.com/content/china-red-cross-still-felling-impact-from-2011-scandal/1972844.html (Accessed on 16 October 2014)

fundamentally individual, irreproducible and dies with each person. By contrast, Halbwachs emphasizes the social character of our memories. As he puts, "it is society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories" (Halbwachs, 1992). Memories are not only mediated by social arrangements but are structured by them. It is society/groups to which individuals relate that provide them with the "frame" [61] for memories, both enabling and constraining remembering and forgetting. This is called social framework approach to memories.

Ironically many contemporary studies have taken little from Halbwachs's studies except the term "collective memory". Even so, the term is casually used without clarification. More often than not there is some confusion between "collective memory" and "collected memory". "Collected memory" is an aggregate of individual memories, with which memory surveys for particular events or oral history projects are conducted (Kansteiner, 2002). Despite some advantages, this concept implies an

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[61] See Goffman (1974) for the relationship between social experience and cognitive frames.

individual and behaviourist approach that reduces collective memory into a

simple composite of individual memories or an extension of autographical

memory.

The second confusion exists between "collective memory" and "history".

In spite of intricate relationship and shared objects, they are different in

relation to the present. Both are products of the interaction between the past

and the present, however, collective memory is not history in the sense that it

still actively, continuously constructs the past. As Olick puts, "history is the

remembered past to which we no longer have an 'organic' relation...while

collective memory is the active past that forms our identities" (1999: 335). In

comparison to achieves or historical records waiting for interpretation,

collective memory manifests itself in the action and statement of

collectives/individuals and through the publicly available commemorative

symbols, rituals and technologies. In short, collective memory has a

pragmatic dimension here and it is closely related to popular mnemonic

practices. In this sense, the social framework approach to collective memory

could not be mistaken as anti-individualist approach, rejecting the existence

of people's agency. Instead it entails a dynamic understanding of the tension between social structure and individual agency: there is no individual memory outside social context nor is there any collective memory without individuals participating in communal life or involved in public mnemonic activities. It is the tensions between society versus individual and representation versus reception that open collective memory to changes and contestation. Therefore there should be collective memories in plural form, corresponding to different social frameworks in a divided and hierarchical society.

Related to the absent definitional clarity is an insufficient attention to the interrelation and interaction between various mnemonic processes and practices. Collective memories are multimedia collages, including images, discourse, documentaries, statues, memorial sites and buildings. However, due to the colossal amount of work, no collective memory study could take the entire constellation into consideration. In addition to the realistic consideration, disciplinary boundaries between subfields of collective memory are based on media technologies, such as films, memoirs, museum,

which prevents further studies about the intertextuality and interaction of various mnemonic texts. As discussed in Chapter 1, any public media has two dimensions, institutional and technological. As technologies, they have embedded different spatial and temporal biases (Innis, 1951). However the comparison are almost absent in current studies with one-medium focus that accentuate the institutional differences of their texts. Therefore this chapter not only compares texts within the same medium but also pay attention to the connection between texts from different media technologies, more specifically journalism and museums.

Compared to museum as a legitimate carrier of collective memory, journalism has been often ignored in the studies of collective memory for it is thought as a purveyor of the present. In fact journalism is an active agent of memory (Zelizer, 2008). Journalism as "the first draft of history" is more involved in the construction of collective memory in our mediated society than before (Thompson, 1995). Media events, argued Dayan and Katz (1992), are forms of collective memory. [62] Social events are registers of human

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[62] See Dayan and Katz (1992:211-213) for a detailed exposition on the effects of media

agencies and memories, lying at the heart of the search of an intelligible and

coherent picture of the world. They are products of collective life and

consciousness, constituting shared memories among people. However as

discussed in Chapter 1, in our complicated society, not every occurrence

could attain the status of an event worthy of attention and remembering, and

therefore the production and recognition of social events are greatly shaped

by the mass media in our age. Although they are interconnected, it is media

events rather than individual experiences of social events that mark the time

and provide shared reference points for members of the same generation.

What is more important is that these media events are discursive sources that

provide meaning to each other. They could "quote" from earlier events or be

quoted in media reports of current events in journalism, giving meaning and

perspective to on-going history (Zelizer, 2008). In other words, journalism

works as triggers of memory, continuously bringing the past into the present

and reconstructing the past within a framework of cotemporary interests.

Therefore journalism not only edits but also reedits collective memory. In

events on collective memory.

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this sense, journalism is an evitable point of reference to examine the making

as well as the metamorphosis of collective memory.

In comparison to journalism's sensitivity to time on particular event,

museums attach themselves to space that is more resistant to time. Although

objects on display could be rearranged and replaced, architectural texts of

museums could not be easily changed with time. It is the spatiality and

materiality of museum that give collective memory a place and body.

However the role of museum in housing collective memory has received

extreme comments. The material objects, argues Benjamin (1968), could

preserve true pictures of the past that could not incorporated fully by the

intellect (historical narrative), while in the eyes of Nora (1989), museums

bury real memory for prosthetic artefacts are deprived of their origin

contexts. Critics of museums think objects collected by museums would lose

authenticity as they are reinvented and reconstructed in the space of

museums.

The debates about museums and memory lead us back to the discussion

between representation and reality in Chapter 1. It is safe to say that as a

representation technology of memory, a museum could save memory by giving a shape of the memory and contain memory in a particular way. Rather than simple approval or denial, the ability and limits of museums in persevering a past should be examined as condensation of multiple social relations, the end product of political, aesthetic, and financial bargaining (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 55) in particular time-space. In other words, their mnemonic texts should be been examined in the context where they are produced and consumed. In the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the mediated disaster was the starting point: journalism was greatly involved in the formation of collective memories of this disaster.

In general, following Halbwachs, "collective memories" are used in this thesis to refer to collective commemorative representations and mnemonic traces[63] (Olick et al., 2011) within a master narrartive. In the following part of this chapter, the textual analyses of mnemonic texts shows how a master commemorative narrative took shape, which turned the tragedy into a national triumph. Also comparisons are conducted within museums that seek

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[63] Collective memory used by Halbwachs has another meaning: socially framed individual memories, which are beyond the scope of this chapter.

different balance in the struggle between the tragedy and triumph narrative to

explore various sub-narratives within the master frame. Then the importance

of journalism in the forming of collective memories of this disaster is

discussed in general.

4.2   A master narrative: Turning a tragedy into a triumph

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word "tragedy" comes

from Ancient Greek "tragōidia" (tragos+ ōidē), in which "tragos" means

reason remains unexplained. This origin implies that it is unexplained

reasons that make an event a tragedy. In this sense, to minimize tragic

implication of an event, the event had to be made explainable within an

intelligible frame. The cultural-nature dualism is an important frame to

contain tragic meaning of a destructive event. The dualism has stood central

in the relationship between human and nature since the age of Enlightenment

in the Western culture (Oliver-Smith, 1992). This culture-nature dichotomy

juxtaposes the order, certainty and safety of human culture and civilization

with the disorder, uncertainty and danger of nature. This opposition between

culture and nature, shows Hoffman (1992), is the base of the disaster

symbolism that help survivors explain, understand and cope with suffering.

In their symbolic expressions, the disaster they experienced is interpreted as

a phenomenon from the nature that is characterized as danger and

uncontrollable forces, which saves human (culture) from responsibility of the

disaster.

Although the culture-nature dichotomy did not exist in ancient China, it

has gradually replaced the philosophy of human-nature integration (天人合

一)and dominated the contemporary society with the process of

modernization. The dichotomy is a key to understand the master

commemorative narrative of the Wenchuan Earthquake, which includes two

interconnected parts: anointing the earthquake as the only culprit of this

disaster and constructing a linear process of turning a natural tragedy into a

cultural triumph.

Anointing an enemy from outside

The symbolic construction of the culture-nature divide started with the

consolidation of the absolute beginning, 12 May 2008 in the media. As

shown in Chapter 2, 14:28 pm on 12 May 2008 was accentuated in news

media to define the earthquake as the target of national mobilization. This

calendar time is important in the sense the beginning of a disaster is always

closely linked to its causality. However, the legitimacy of this absolute

beginning of the disaster was shaken with the end of the honeymoon between

the government and the media during the national mobilization. When the

media control was still loose in the first month after the earthquake, there

were voices that questioned the mass death of school children in many media

when their journalists cooled down from the first shock and sentiments (Qian,

2009). However with the increasingly rigid control of the party-state,

discussion about the man-made factors in the disaster was closed and the

definitive beginning of the disaster was consolidated[64].

The beginning of the earthquake is cemented as the beginning of the

disaster via various embodiments: being inscribed on the statuses, walls and

floors or frozen in all kinds of broken clocks, watches and other time marker

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[64] The controversies around the school buildings are elaborated later in this chapter and
chapter 5 of this thesis.

collected by museums. As shown in Figure 14, the stone sculpture

materializes the calendar time; while in Figure 15 in the public cemetery of

Beichuan victims, the calendar time is accentuated by yellow flowers[65]

against green. In contrast to public museums, private museums that do not

have such large space to embody the beginning employ other ways to

materialize this date. The 5.12-6.12 Diary Museum (Diary Museum) uses the

date in its name (Figure 16) and displays this time on every step in its

entrance (Figure 17). In addition, many broken clocks with the frozen time

collected from the debris are on display as shown in Figure 18 and 19.

With the consolidated beginning, the earthquake functions as a metonym

of the actual disaster, which encompasses all the technological and social

construction of vulnerability that brought about such destructive effect and

massive death. At the same time the earthquake is an abstraction of the

disaster, in which this massive disaster is reduced to a natural disaster, an

enemy outside, removing all culture factors from this disaster, such as

endemic poverty, bad building quality, and malfeasance.

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[65] Yellow and white chrysanthemums are often used in mourning rituals in Chinese culture.

Figure 14 A Huge Broken Clock in Xuankou

Middle School Ruins in Yinxiu Town[66]

Figure 15 The Public Cemetery in Beichuan

Figure 16   Stone at the exist of Diary Museum

Figure 17 Staircases in Diary Museum

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[66] All photos used in this chapter were taken by the author of the thesis.

Figure 18 A landing clock with its arms
staying at 2:28 in the Diary Museum

Figure 19 A landing clock with its arms
staying at 2:28 in the Diary Museum

Arranging a linear process towards a cultural triumph

The consolidated beginning not only buries any related past that could

possibly evoke the questions on the massive death but also make possible a

cultural (human/Chinese nations) triumph over a nature disaster. The main

timeline of the master commemorative narrative is a linear move from

disequilibrium to a new equilibrium (Todorov, 1977). The stories of this

disaster are organized in a chronological but not even order, in which some

time periods are shorten or invisible. In reality the disaster relief never was a

smooth and linear story. For example in September 2008 when the

earthquake faded out from the public attention, a big landslide broke out in

Beichuan country, which buried most of the towns that had survived from the 5.12 earthquake. In stories told by the affected population, this landslide that destroyed their homes was more memorable than the earthquake itself (interview in July 2003)[67]. Numerous events like this in the zigzag disaster relief, although equally devastating, do not get a place in the timeline of the master narrative. In other words, the zigzag disaster relief and reconstruction is ironed flat and smoothly developed towards a happy ending, a national triumph.

The narrative of the national triumph tries to continue the national sentiment employed in the disaster relief. Premier Wen and President Hu used slogans like "多难兴邦" (much distress regenerates a nation) and"任何困难都难不倒英雄的中国人民"(No difficulty can beat the Heroic Chinese People) to encourage the whole nation at that time. The sentiment is transformed into a claim of triumph in the commemorative activities. In some sense claiming the triumph of disaster was one of the main reasons behind the large-scale commemorations. As shown in the introduction of the

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[67] Most of their new houses were built on the remains of the old ones, and their remains were still kept in the ground floors. (Interview in July 2013)

Diary Museum, the main aim to commemorate the disaster was not to lament

the loss of massive death but "...to record the Wenchuan Earthquake, pains

and efforts of all relief participators and great courage and humanistic love of

Chinese nation in great disasters." (Emphasis is added)[68] Consider The

Great Tangshan Earthquake that was thought as a blemish in CCP's

leadership due to its rejections of the International supports and strict media

control (Benthall, 1993). Its commemoration by local governments was as

late as 1986, 10 years after the Tangshan earthquake when the core

leadership of CCP had been changed. The Tangshan Earthquake Monument

(唐山抗震纪念碑) was built at its 10th anniversary when the reconstruction

of Tangshan city was completed, when a happy ending was available to bury

the difficult past.

This linear narrative finds its visual expressions and embodiments in the

museum texts, including aesthetic and architectural aspects of buildings,

organizational layout of the exhibitions, wall texts, catalogue entries, and

brochure descriptions (Ravelli, 2006). Visitors are oriented in the order from

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[68] See the official website of Diary Museum (Chinese) for the complete introduction
http://www.jc-museum.cn/cn/m3.html (Accessed on July 2014)

the earthquake, disaster relief to reconstruction. Compared to written texts,

signs and brochures, architectural texts are more implicit but influencing in

orienting and communicating the linear story towards triumph. In some

museums, the motifs are organized on different floors: the earthquake on the

first floor or the ground floor while disaster relief and reconstruction on the

upper floor. For the museums that place earthquake and disaster relief on the

same floor, their illuminations for different motifs are designed from lower

to higher level. The spatial oppositions, downward versus upward or dark

versus bright, symbolize and embody the hierarchies between nature and

culture. The relief/reconstruction in the higher or brighter halls symbolizes a

happy ending of the disaster: a better life through human efforts. Through the

hierarchized spatial structure, the earthquake itself and disaster

relief/reconstruction are narrated with a temporal progress from a natural

disaster to a cultural triumph.

The nature-culture divide characterizes most of official commemorations.

The establishment of 12 May as National Disasters Prevention and

Reduction Day (or "国家防灾减灾日" in Chinese) is an implicit but

concentrated effort to reconstruct this disaster within culture-nature dualistic

frame. It is hard to negate the positive effects of the establishment of this

memorial day in improving disaster preparedness. However, the

nomenclature of this memorial day and its practices not only legally and

formally instils a special meaning to this calendar day but also reconfirms the

"otherness" of disasters. The memorial day is named in a way disasters

(hazard exactly) are emphasized rather than people who died in this

earthquake. Implied in this nomenclature is the culture-nature dichotomy:

disasters are the objects to be prevented and reduced through human efforts

and practices. Although it encourages a positive reaction to disasters, the

dualist construct of two connected entities, as indicates by Olive-Smith

(1992), exaggerates the human rationality and prevents further investigation

and understanding of the cultural genes of disasters.

4.3 Variety within the master narrative: Freezing different
moments of the disaster

Despite the shared beginning and ending, timelines of various

commemorations do not necessarily have the same timescale. They extend

different moments and thus highlight distinct faces of the multi-faceted

disaster. This section shows various sub-narratives through comparisons

between different museums: the Disaster Relief Museum, the Dairy Museum,

the Wenchuan Earthquake Ruins Museum (Wenchuan Museum), and the

Beichuan Earthquake Ruins Museums (Beichuan Museum) [69].

Spatial representation

The Disaster Relief Museum and Diary Museum are located in the Jian

Chuan Museum Cluster (建川博物馆群落) in the outskirt of Chengdu city,

the capital city of Sichuan Province. They are neighbours but the former is a

state-sponsored museum with free admission and the latter is a private

museum that needs tickets. Within the master timeline, their differences are

embedded in every layer of museum texts.

How one understands realities reflects how one constructs it (Baic,

2010). The huge discrepancy between Disaster Relief Museum and Diary

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[69] The English names of these museums on their official websites are not exact translations of their Chinese names and fail to differentiate each other. For the sake of clarity, my own translations are used in the thesis.

Museum show how differently the disaster could be presented. The Disaster

Relief Museum is a miniature of the Great Hall of the People located in

Tiananmen Square. The front gate of this museum, which faces a spatial

square, is decorated with 56 high stone pillars that represent 56 ethnics of

Chinese nation (Figure 20). A huge Chinese map with the highlights of

affected areas is inscribed on the stone front door (Figure 21 & 22).

Figure 20 Disaster Relief Museum, Chengdu Jian-Chuan Museum Cluster

Figure 21 The left door of the

Disaster Relief Musuem

Figure 22 The right door of

the Disaster Relife Museum

Near to this stately and magnificent building is the Dairy Museum with a

rather moderate architectural style. It is in a 3-stories building which includes

other two earthquake museums: the Earthquake Art Gallery and the

Earthquake Popular Science Hall. The whole building is very unnoticeable.

The facades of the building are tiled in dark red. In addition its front door is quite small behind a large dense tree (Figure 23), which faces a display of large-quality earthquake relics, such as vehicles used in the disaster relief (Figure 24) and animals that survived the disaster (Figure 25).

Figure 24 Construction Vehicles in Diaster Relief

Figure 23 The Diary Museum

Figure 25 Hero Pig (猪坚强) survived in the earthquake

Correspondingly different aesthetics are presented in the internal space of two museums. The Disaster Relief Museum has high-ceilinged, spacious and bright halls. The exhibition mainly includes display boards with pictures and texts, media clips and earthquake relics, which are all placed in an orderly way with highlighted illuminations (Figure 26).

Figure 26 Display Room in Diaster Relief Museum

Figure 27 Display Wall in Disaster Relief Museum

Only in the Earthquake hall, some of the display boards telling the devastating effects of the earthquake have irregular shapes, conveying a fragmental sense (Figure 27). However they are all organized in a very orderly way like the other display boards with regular shapes. Likewise the relics are presented safely and orderly in transparent glass cabinets and separated from visitors' route with clear signs. There are clear and huge signs as well as sufficiently firm stairs to orient visitors to go through one hall to another. In general, the internal space as well as its organized exhibitions echoes its architectural exterior, containing the uncertain,

dangerous and chaotic disaster.

In contrast, the Diary Museum tries to preserve the uncertainty, danger, and chaos of the disaster as much as possible. The ceilings of its main rooms are so low that I, a 165 centimetres girl, could easily touch it with my stretched arms. The rooms are chronologically arranged. The first rooms that represent the first days of the earthquake, missing person notices in black are shown on the grey and dirty ceilings (Figure 28). In such a low and small room, the ceiling with huge black words is so obvious that visitors cannot easily ignore it. In addition, the floors are made of glasses, under which are the relics collected by the museum (Figure 29 & 30). Compared to the relics placed orderly in the glass cabinets in Disaster Relief Museum, these relics under the glass floor are chaotic as it was in the ruins. It feels like walking in a real ruin. Although I read the warning at its entrance, I still had a thrill of fear at the first sight of the reflection of the glass floor in these dim rooms. Even after a few visits, I still could not stay in these rooms too long. No matter whether one experiences an earthquake or not, it is easy to feel depressive and insecure in these rooms.
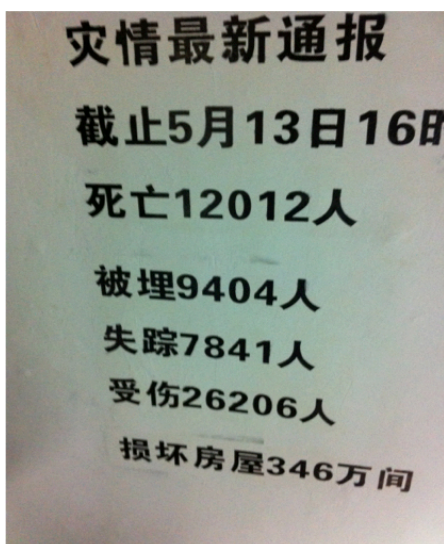
Figure 28 Ceiling of the Diary Museum

Figure 29 Glass floor of the Diary Museum

Figure 30 Glass floor of the Diary Museum

The other way to deal with the relics in this museum is embedding the

relics directly into the main structure (Figure 31 & 33). There is only a small

tablet or no signs at all to indicate the relics and separate them from the

visitors. The fixtures collected in the ruins are used to decorate the museum

(Figure 32). These relics are not only as exhibitions but also parts of the

internal structure of the museum. In addition, there is some noise when

people walk through the dark green steer stairs (Figure 17) or links, which

creates the atmosphere of insecurity for the visitors. That is what the Disaster

Relief Museum tries to remove and avoid.

Figure 31 Relics in the 5.12 Dairy Museum

Figure 32 Windows made of relics in 5.12

Dairy Museum

Figure 33 Relics in the 5.12 Diary Museum

Textual reconstruction

Triumph without tragedy

In spite of a linear process toward a happy ending, the focuses of these two

museums are quite different. As shown in the Table Motifs of the Disaster

Relief Museum (Appendix XII), the focus of this museum is disaster relief

(rescue and reconstruction work) rather than the disaster itself. This echoes

a common journalist strategy in disaster reports: focusing on heroism of

rescuers and rapid government response instead of the great loss caused by

disasters and their social origins, (灾难不是新闻，救灾才是新闻), which

has been discussed a lot in the literature (Dong and Cai, 2009). Little

attention has been paid to the inherent tension between tragic disasters and

heroic narratives, for a celebration of heroic deeds could not be separated

from a description of a disaster/crisis/danger. The Disaster Relief Memorial

offers a typical example, showing how to deal with the tension by

celebrating the heroic deeds while reducing the tragic nature of a disaster.

Scientific discourse

The destructive nature of the Wenchuan Earthquake is contained well within

the scientific discourse. The major hall of its Forward Part is a huge sandbox

showing the wide geographical influence of the earthquake in terms of the

intensity, in which the fault, epicenter and earthquake lake are highlighted.

Except for a few pictures showing the physical destruction of the earthquake

on architectures, the loss of this disaster is presented in abstract numbers, like, the number of people confirmed dead is 69226. Through inhuman scientific terms, the great loss of the earthquake is presented in an exact but less evocative way. This way to contain the tragic nature of a disaster is used to an extreme in the Wenchuan Museum, which will be elaborated later.

Core leadership and national solidarity

Emphasized in the disaster relief is the effective leadership at all levels of governments within the party-state. The arrangement of the exhibitions from Part 1 "Strong Leadership" to Part IV "Social Solidarity" (Appendix XII) is like an epitome of the Chinese political culture. Part 1"Strong Leadership" is like an extended group picture of the Politburo Standing Committee of CCP at that time, showing their visits to the disaster areas. The order of displays corresponds to their rank within the CCP at that time rather than real temporal order of their visits. Premier Wen was the first among them to go to the disaster area, while his pictures are placed after Hu Jintao (then the General Secretary, President) and Wu Bangguo (then Chairman and Party secretary of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress).

Figure 34 Display boards in the Disaster   **Figure 35 Display boards in the Disaster**

Relief Museum   **Relief Museum**

Likewise in Part II "Disaster Relief", the performance of disaster relief is

presented in groups, in this case, the organizations at the national level.

There are seven groups of people in focus: People's Liberation Army, armed

forces, militia reservists, policemen, medical team, scientist and journalists.

The group identity of the people rather than their names is highlighted. In the

cases of the group pictures on display, institutions are emphasized in the

captions and descriptions in a way the abstract agent is moving, leaving

individual person anonymous in the pictures. So are the tools used in the

disaster relief. In the cases of pictures with individual focus, an introduction

of institutions is added before personal identity. For example, the description

of Journalist Xuzhuang reads "After disaster, more than 150 journalists of

the Xinhua News Agency departed soon to the disaster area. Journalist

Xuzhuang sent out the first report and picture of the Wenchuan." (Emphasis

is added)

The story in the next part (Self-rescue) moves from the response of institutions at the national level to the leadership at the local level, party-governments in disaster areas, including the Sichuan Province, Shanxi Province and Gansu Province. This part of exhibitions also starts with the effective leadership of the party: the rapid response of leaders from provincial and municipal party-governments to lower governments. Unlike the provincial and municipal of governors, most of the cadres below the country level are represented anonymous and even invisible in a way similar to the rescuers from national aid agents in Part II. Compared to active officials, common people are depicted barely passively waiting for help from party-governments. There are a consider amount of pictures telling visitors it was local party-governments that organized people to transfer, self-rescue and even watch televisions.

Similar hierarchy goes through the displays of national and international solidarity in Part IV "Social Solidarity", which is about supports from other parts of the nation and world. In domestic part, the order of displays starts

from provincial party-governments to common people in other provinces. In

the international society, it starts from leaders, institutions to individuals.

Victims as Heroes

The last part of the museum is to worship heroes and heroic deeds in disaster

relief. In such massive calamity, it is very hard to define who are heroes and

what are heroic deeds, for everyone could be a hero, victim and villain at

once. It is true that people who put others over themselves could be defined

as heroes, but in the calamity they were also facing danger and needed helps.

Sometime their inappropriate moves could even cause more or further

damage. For example, local cadres who were recognized as heroes were

victims at the same time. When facing the excessive destructions, most of

them had to make a difficult choice between themselves/their own family

and others. There was not an easy answer to such life-and-death question.

Any answer to the question as to who should be saved first could draw great

controversies. The complexities around heroic deeds could also be found in

the controversies about the massive arrival of fervent but inexperienced

volunteers that brought about great pressure rather than resources to disaster

areas.

It is true that choosing one's own interests over duties would definitely draw great criticism. Fan Run Run (范跑跑)[70] is a case in this point. He was a mid-school teacher who did not feel sorry that he fled to safety zone ahead of the entire class when the earthquake broke out and finally lost his job due to public pressure. By contrast, those who put others before themselves received exaltation from the public but could not be necessarily forgiven by themselves or their families. Fengxiang (冯翔) who got promotion due to his outstanding performance in the disaster relief committed suicide one year after the earthquake, for he was not relieved from the death of his only child who he did not choose to rescue first. Such suicide cases proliferated after the earthquake, for the heroes who scarified their own interests could easily be haunted by guilt, and some were thought by others to get promotion through scarifying their own families (Interview in May, 2013). However the dark side behind heroism is sideswiped aside in the Disaster Relief Museum. Let alone the controversial cases in which people refused to scarify

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[70] Fan run run was a nickname used by netizens to call Fan meizhong (范美忠)

themselves for others. The scarifies of the heroes exalted in the hall are considered a virtue, a part of great spirit in disaster relief (抗震救灾精神).

The controversies around the mass death of school children are also completely invisible in this museum. Instead, the school children who behaved bravely are exalted as Young/Litter Hero. In so doing the school children who were supposed to be victims become heroes in the stories told by the museum (Figure 36).

Figure 36 Young Heroes

In general, the Disaster Relief Museum is an embodiment of an official narrative, which is a counterpart of the People's Daily in the museum field. That means the political culture and structure of Chinese society play a vital role in its reconstruction of this difficult past. The museum texts, architecture,

aesthetic and exhibitions, all play down the tragic nature of the disaster and celebrate a national triumph under the core leadership, great efforts of different systems and national solidarity. It again proves the legitimacy of CCP' leadership by showing how it led the Chinese people to overcome one challenge after another.

Triumph with tragedy

The Diary Museum was designed Mr. Li Xinggang (李兴刚), the chief Chinese designer of the Beijing National Stadium. Unlike traditional display mode with sections used by other earthquake museums, this museum takes the format of diaries to organize stories from May 12th to June 12th in the Wenchuan Earthquake. Indicated in its Chinese Name, "震撼 5.12-6.12 日记馆" (Shocking May 12th to Jun 12th Diary Museum), the Diary Museum tries to remain and represent the shocking effect brought by the earthquake. Unlike the Disaster Relief Museum, this museum accentuates the disaster itself rather than disaster relief through several thousands of pictures and more than 40,000 relics of the earthquake.

As shown in the warning at its entrances, some of the pictures and relics

on display in this museum are really disturbing. In the dim and small rooms, there are evocative pictures on every wall of the rooms and every side of balustrades, like helpless and panic people, rows of schoolchildren' s bodies and person in great grief (Figure 37); and dirty and bloodied relics coming from everywhere, under your feet or over your head. Unlike the physical sense brought by earthquake simulators in the Disaster Relief Museum, the feelings evoked by the Diary museum are deeply emotional. The museum tries to reconstruct those feelings that people have when facing a devastating disaster by turning itself into a huge earthquake simulator, dragging every visitor into a vivid earthquake site.

Figure 37 Banisters with pictures in the   Figure 38 School bags in the Diary Museum
Diary Museum

With the chronological outline, the Diary Museum breaks down the political structure that organizes the exhibitions in the Disaster Relief

Museum. The leaders and heroes here are not any more a part of political structure or organizations. Instead they are themselves, as an individual in a complicated and controversial disaster relief. In other words, the Diary Museum glorifies individuals rather than institutions or organizations. The political leaders are not any more listed in order in terms of their ranking. Instead it only includes then Primer Minister Wen and President Hu who among the Politburo visited disaster areas during May 12th to June 12th. The pictures ton display show the emotional aspect of leaders, in which these top leaders are not represented in a deadpan way as an abstract symbol of high authority; instead they have worried looks or even tears.

The attempt of remaining the humane aspect of leaders involved also can be found in the presentations of heroes. They are not any more anonymous atom in a huge institution or organization. They are individuals with names as well as their confusions, difficulties and controversies. As shown in Figure 39, diaries, letters of people in rescue teams exposes their mingled feelings: helplessness faced with massive victims, deep regrets for the families and victims they could not save, gratitude for others' help, which

together accentuates the complexities of theses "super heroes".

The refusal to a simple hymn about heroes also can be found in the stories of Feng Xiang and Fan Run Run in this museum, who are completely indivisible in the Disaster Relief Museum. To incorporate the tragic stories of Feng, the Diary Museum extends the time scope it claimed. It tries to remind visitors of the fact that the first anniversary of the earthquake was also the peak period of survivor suicides. The controversies around Fan Run Run are also presented with details, showing both affirmative and negative comments around his behaviors. The reasons to present these controversial cases, says the curator Fan Jianchuan (樊建川), are to respect the speech freedom of Mr Fan and his supporter and show the diversity of contemporary society. In short, the suicide of heroes and anti-hero that are juxtaposed with heroes add the tragic sense to the triumph of disaster relief, reminding people of how complex and cruel the disaster could be.
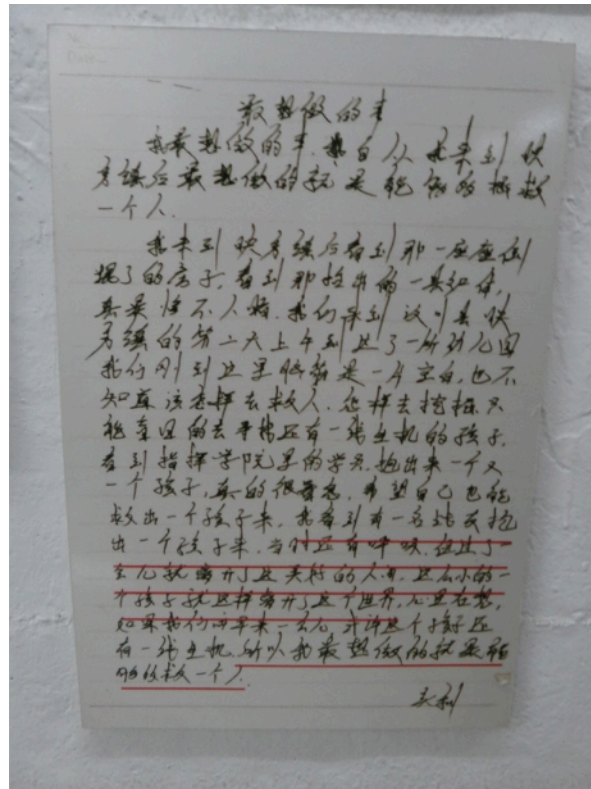
Figure 39 Journals of Rescue Team Memeber

A similar strategy is employed in organizing the exhibitions of Young

Heroes. The stories about schools are presented in a separate room on the

ground floor, which is as dim as the first rooms. The names of Yong Heroes

are listed on a red display board (Figure 40), which is surrounded by school

children's personal stuff collected from the ruins and pictures with small

bodies (Figure 41) and grieved parents that are too tragic to be look at. In

addition to the juxtapositions, the Diary Museum use artistic works to

accentuate the tragic nature of the massive death of school children. The

dirty schoolbags collected from ruins are hung from the ceiling with thin

strings in different length (Figure 38). And at the entrance of this room is a

two-floor high picture wall, on which dozens of a picture of parents

protesting at a ruined school are duplicated and placed together (Figure 42).

Both the hanging school bags and duplication of grieving parents are highly

evocative, conveying a shocking effect brought by the massive death of

school children.

Figure 40 Little Heroes

Figure 41 Relics From Schools

Figure 42 Picture Wall

This is not to say that the Diary Museum does not respect these heroes.

Instead its refusal of a simple glorification of heroes shows the complexities

behind the greatness of scarified sprit, the real crudeness of a disaster and

great difficulty that people once faced. The bloody color of this tragedy

could not just be easily bleached as in the Disaster Relief Museum. These exhibitions as well as the way of display reveal the complexities of people involved in disaster relief: heroes, victims and villain at the same time.

Another difference in these two museums lies in their ways to represent the common people. Although small in proportion, the Diary Museum gives a room to active average person. There are tools made by peasants to help rescue teams, motorbike used by Wu Jiafang (吴家方) to take his wife's body home. The Museum also highly praises the resilience of life, people or animal, as shown in its list of long-term survivors and the story of Hero Pig (Figure 25). The pig is hailed as a hero after surviving for more than a month trapped in the rubble. Its story is presented in the last room of the Diary Museum, the brightest room where natural lights from the linked balcony shine through. The pig itself is kept in the pigpen outside the museum, fat and grumpy. When the Disaster Relief Museum acclaims the strong leadership and national resilience in its reconstruction part, the diary museum exalts a hero pig, a humorous way to glorify the resilience of life.

In general, the Diary museum and the Disaster Relief Museum give

quite different answers to the questions: Who and what should be remembered in what way? The Disaster Relief Museum tries to abstract tragic factors from the national triumph, while the Diary Museum tries to bring tragic sense back. The former was built and financed by the Sichuan party-government as a place for patriotism education, which take priority over the aesthetic or professional consideration. The latter is a private-financed museum, which has to seek a balance between political permission and professionalism. It could not challenge the boundary demarcated by the party-state but at the same time it should maintain aesthetic considerations to attract visitors to sustain itself financially. That is why all the differences unfolded in the Diary Museum are coated with a positive color as shown in its brochure as discussed above and in the nomenclature of school exhibits, that is, "The Rescue and Reconstruction of Schools". On the other hand, since Chengdu was not a serious disaster area, the Diary Museum has no spatial authenticity in comparison to other museums built directly on the earthquake relics. Therefore, it has to employ strategies to bring the earthquake back to attract visitors: not only the

earthquake relics but also the sense of uncertainty, chaos and danger that people have when face a disaster. To sum up, within the master commemorative narrative the two museums represent two extremes, between which other museums unfold their own stories of the difficult past.

4.4 Stories in between: Commemorating and consuming disaster

Built in disaster areas, the public museums in the Wenchuan and Beichuan country have a more complicated situation than other museums. They are mainly sponsored by local party-state governments. Although lacking financial pressures, the popularity of Wenchuan and Beichuan Museums is closely linked to economic prosperity of local areas, for they have been a crucial part of local economy that is relied on the traffic of disaster tourism. After the disaster, local governments organized peasants who lost their farmland into the tourism industry. Not only the towns where the Wenchuan and Beichuan Museums are located but neighbouring towns are also involved in disaster tourism: town residents rend their rooms, sell foods or souvenir to visitors, pick up/send outside visitors or work directly for the

museum. In addition, as museums that are built directly on the earthquake relics, they serve as a place for local people to mourn for their beloved families and friends. As shown in the proposal of the Beichuan Museum, the museum is designed for contradictory purposes including commemorative, public, propagandist, pedagogical, scientific and economic functions (Shanghai Project Team, 2009). In short, the museums in disaster areas are value-laden products, seeking a fragile balance between competitive values.

Saving tragedy

In spite of controversies, disaster tourism has been a pillar of economy in many disaster areas of the Wenchuan Earthquake. Public museums proliferated in the first year of the earthquake but some of them closed shortly. For example, the museum in Ya'an city, a city with seriously affected towns, was completely abandoned. A major principle of survival in tense competition is to sell the authenticity of the tragedy. In this sense, locality of these two museums is crucial in their survival. In Yingxiu, the epicenter of the earthquake, the Wenchuan Museum is located in a mountain, where the public cemetery of victims is. Likewise, the Beichuan Museum is

built directly in the relics of Beichuan Middle School, Renjiaping campus.

They are integrated into the local disaster tourism and sold in tour package.

The buildings of both museums abandoned the heroic aesthetics of the

Disaster Relief Museum. The Yingxiu museum is like an irregular pile up of

huge grey rocks, which looks like rocks are falling from the mountain when

seen from above (Figure 43). Its underground floor is totally embedded into

the mountain, and the exterior of the building is coated in grain tiles. As

shown in its name "The memory of the earth", this museum is designed to

express the wish of a harmonious relationship between human and nature.

The building of the Beichuan Museum is also embedded into the earth but in

a different way. Its exterior is built with antiquated rust-colored panels, with

green on its roofs. When see from far above, the museum loos like a tectonic

fissure. Its curator Zhao Kaisheng indicates, the rusty building looks old

already, and will not change over time, just like an eternal scar of the earth

(Figure 44).

Figure 43 The entrance to the   **Figure 44 The Beichuan Museum seen above**[71]

Wenchuan Museum

In the Disaster part of both museums are fissure-like walls and floors,

fragmenting the space, which together with the dim lights intensify the

uncertain feeling (Figure 45 & 46). Correspondingly these two museums do

not simply sidestep the destructive effect of the earthquake as the Disaster

Relief Museum does. Multi-media, such as live video, artworks and so on,

display the havoc caused by the earthquake. So do the brave self-rescue of

local people. At the same time they play down the importance of the

party-government, although the core of leadership is also accentuated.

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[71] This picture is from reports of Western China City Daily(华西都市报) on 10 May 2013 which is taken by Chen Yuxiao
http://news.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2013_05/10/25135820_0.shtml (Accessed on 13 May 2015)

Figure 45 The Floor in the Wenchuan Museum

Figure 46 Fragmental Space in the Beichuan Museum

However, the display of the tragicness of the earthquake could not go too far to evoke visitors' questions on the cause of massive deaths. These museums are designed for visitors' empathy and compassion rather than their reflection and criticism. The ruins are preserved and displayed in a safe and orderly way. At the first glance, the Old Beichuan Ruins seems to be frozen in time, preserved almost exactly as they fell (Figure 47). In fact, for the safety of visitors, various support structure around and inside buildings are used based on the safety investigation (Shanghai Project Team, 2009). In addition guardrails in the front of buildings clearly block ruins from access (Figure 48 & 49); banners high and low remind visitors that they are now in a park rather than the earthquake in the past (Figure 50). By doing so, visitors and ruins (old Beichuan) are separated into two areas, safe and

dangerous, present and past.

Figure 47 Old Beichuan Ruins   **Figure 48 Old Beichuan Ruins**

Figure 49 Guard Rails in the ruins of   **Figure 50 Banners Huang in the ruins of**
Xuankou Middle School   **Xuankou Middle School**

This physical separation objectifies the destructive disaster, which is a

part of the scientific discourse that ruins are based on. One of the principles

to preserve buildings is the diversity of tectonic destructions for scientific

research and education. This scientific discourse also turns the Wenchuan

Museum into a geography class. As shown in its Chinese name, 汶川特大地

震震中博物馆 (The Great Wenchuan Epic Center Museum), this museum

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uses the epic center of the earthquake rather than the Yingxiu town as its name. It also unfolds the disaster story in a far remote geological past rather than the immediate and related past. In the Disaster part, the destructive effect of the earthquake is framed in a general introduction about all kinds of hazards, mud floods, and so on, which reduces the particularity of the calamity by turning it into a spot of a bigger picture.

The Revelation Hall of the Wenchuan Museum, which occupies the whole floor of the two-story building, is equipped with different interactive and media technologies, through which visitors can learn the knowledge of earthquakes and experience the tremor in different intensity but in a safe and interesting way. The various resistances of buildings to the tremor are objectified as knowledge about structural differences. With the scientific discourse, the disaster turns out to be an ordinary chapter in a geographic book about earthquake, which renders invisible the immediate past related to the social vulnerability of this area including the quality of buildings.

The Beichuan Museum is also airbrushing the social vulnerability of the disaster in the name of remembering. As mentioned before, it was built

directly on the former ground of the Renjiaping Campus at the Beichuan

Middle School, where only one of six classes was not buried by the collapse

of main buildings. The memory of this tragedy is invisible in the museum,

for there are neither any signs to indicate the school's existence, nor a list of

the victims' names, let alone the scale of the tragedy that unfolded inside.

During my visits to this museum, many people I asked for the information of

the Renjiaping Campus were all confused, and even new teachers in the New

Beichuan Middle School did not know there used to be two campuses of the

Beichuan Middle School. In sharp contrast to this invisible past is a

comprehensive collection about reconstruction work. It is like a hard cover

edition of the Reconstruction Hall in Disaster Relief Hall.

In general, due to locality, these two public museums present a different

way to unfold the tragedy and reconstruct the past. However at the same time,

they are still public museums, which means they could not escape the duty of

pedagogue and propaganda. They have to seek a compromise between the

tragic nature and the national triumph within the culture-nature divide. At the

same time these local museums also face the tension between outside victors

and local people. In the visitor books of the Beichuan Museum, visitors

survived the disaster thought the past constructed by the museum were not

real and survivors of the Beichuan Middle School complained that few

pictures about the buried school. One survivor was angry with visitors who

were taking photos in the museum, and suggested everyone here

commemorate the loss in a solemn way.

4.5   Journalism, museums and collective memory

The discrepancy between local survivors and outside visitors about what

should be remembered could be better understood in the discussion of the

relationship between journalism and museums, which is occasionally

mentioned in the previous analyses. As mentioned earlier, the mediated

disaster is a staring point to understand collective memories of the disaster,

especially for the outside population. Without the publicity, the earthquake

could be as invisible as 1976 Tonghai earthquake in the public memory.

Without the news media, a disaster may have supports from outside

population but never survive as a national trauma in the collective memory

of a large society, which could be seen in the comparison with the Great

Tangshan Earthquake that took more than two hundred thousand lives.

Equally massive and destructive, the disaster relief of the latter did not

involve the media, without which the disaster could not be commemorated as

a national trauma in the collective memory of the outside population[72]. In

short, the news media is central to the transformation of a local disaster into

a national trauma, which makes possible the nationwide commemoration.

In this sense, journalism offered the first draft of collective memory.

First it determined when the collective memory started. As discussed above,

the story of the disaster displayed in museums started at the calendar time, 12

May 2008, which was repeated in the news media at the emergency stage.

This calendar time is also a starting point for the outside population to know

about the affected areas. With the beginning, the past of the disaster

(vulnerability or local related history of the affected areas) was rendered

invisible. Secondly, journalism told museums what to remember. The

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[72] It is not denying the possibility that other media like fictions, films or TV dramas may construct collective memory of this disaster in a large society as shown in the movie, Aftershock, which is about the Great Tangshan Earthquake.

publicity of disaster areas at the emergency stage was then transformed into

the national fame of these areas at the reconstruction stage. The construction

of the Wenchuan and Beichuan Museums are cases in this point. As

indicated in the proposal of Old Beichuan Relics and Beichuan Museum, the

great media attention attracted by this place in disaster relief was one of the

main reason to reserve relics and build museum in this pace (Shanghai

Project Team, 2009). As a part of tourism industry, museums heavily rely on

the texts from the news media to arrange exhibition and to attract potential

visitors in a larger society. Therefore media exposure was also a main

principle of the collections, for the curators could not bother the visitors with

completely foreign events and persons. Most of the museums use newspaper

and news clips as a part of display. They try to collect and highlight related

items of the people or groups who were known for the outside population. In

this sense it is the tourism-oriented policy that leads to the heavy reliance of

the museums on journalism.

However the collative memory starts with journalism but also changes

with journalism. As a huge magnet of attention, anything related to the

Wenchuan Earthquake could be news to attract the public's attention. The corruption or detainment of previous heroes always hit the headlines. Among them are the previous provincial secretary, Tanli （Mr. Smile Tan）, the Best Volunteer, Chenyan, and so on. The reports may not challenge the happy ending of the master narrative, but they together evoked the questions behind the heroism, which will be discussed in a broad context with the relation between the viewing public and people in suffering in chapter 5.

4.6   Conclusion: Remembering to forget

The nature-culture divide in the master commemorative frame smoothly turns the difficult past into a national triumph, but within which different museums freeze and extend different moments of the same disaster. The public museums tries to separate the past and the present, burying the difficult past with the bright present, while the Diary museum brings the past into the present, saving the chaotic moments of the disaster.

The complexities of this disaster are reduced within the master frame because their ambiguity could render the disaster as an enemy within human

themselves and jeopardize the happy ending. If the cultural/social factors of the disaster are remembered, the disaster could not stay well in the category of natural disaster. As Douglas (1996) shows, matters that spoil patterns are the cause of fear. For example, home and schools that should be our protection killed tens of thousands people, conveying a sense of danger within secure. With an enemy inside, there will never be a complete triumph to be celebrated. Likewise heroes and villains should be distinctly separated; otherwise the collation of distinction will destroy the basis of the national triumph and solidarity, which will be elaborated in Chapter 5.

However, collective memories could not be frozen at all. Museums could not monopolize how their stories could be interpreted. As a part of local economy, the local museums have to recruit local residents to maintain their operations, which open their stories to different interpretation. To attract tourists, guides of museums were asked to add their own stories into the routine scripts (Interview in July 2013). Except for these professional storytellers, drivers, clean man, stall owners are all carriers of vivid and individual memories and some of them were eager to tell their own stories

(Interviews in May and July 2013). Grieved parents also secretly hung the banners in the school ruins to express their protests, showing they were still unrelieved. Local survivors whose families were still missing tried to mourn their families in the ruins of previous home where the flower tribute and remains of paper money still could be seen. The official warnings that tell people not to disturb the deceased did not work at all, which exposed the fact that no matter how many museums or memorials are built they could not really comfort the survivors with traumatic memories.

I am not denying either the great efforts of Chinese nationals or the effective leadership of the party-state. However the complexities of the disaster should not be easily airbrushed with a hymn of national triumph, while commemorations of this disaster have been used to build up social capital of different social groups. The post-solidarity is also absent in the master narrative, in which people were placed in the hierarchical structure. Another thing lost in the master frame is the agency of local people. Few of them are remembered except some heroes. The stories of most common people are almost buried. However, official record shows a consider amount

of villages were completely blocked and had no any outside support until

five days after the earthquake. In the master narrative, what happened in

these days was missing and local people in the disaster areas were rendered

passive, waiting for outside support.

Chapter 5 Acting on the mediated disaster: stories after happy endings

On 12 May 2013, there was a special feature on CCTV-13 for the 5th

anniversary of the earthquake, which was named "Five Year after the

Wenchuan Earthquake: Ruins See Rebirth" (or "汶川五年：废墟见证重生"

in Chinese)[73]. This program was intended to show the new and happy life of

earthquake survivors with the help of the whole nation. I was asked to play a

tourist in this program who was buying souvenir from a stall on the major

commercial street of New Beichuan[74], showing the "prosperity" of disaster

areas. But in fact at that time the owner of the stall was complaining how bad

her business was.

Here I was represented as a witness of the prosperity of disaster areas

but at the same time I witnessed in my fieldwork the struggles of some

relocated survivors to embrace their new way of life as citizens in the newly

built cities. The paradoxical roles I played directed my attention to the gap

between the representation and reality and further the question as to how the

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[73] For the program, see
http://tv.cntv.cn/video/C10616/365ca07adec641d5ae396d1e1ceb94bc (Accessed on 15 May 2013)
[74] With the national support, a new city was built to relocate survivors of Old Beichuan.

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action based on the mediated disaster reshaped the disaster relief and the recovery of the affected population. In this sense, this chapter intends to show stories after the happy ending of national mobilization by linking two ends of the mediation, spectators and sufferers. It begins with a review of two major approaches to media effects to argue that, despite their relevance, both present limitations in the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, ignoring effects of the mediated visibility on sufferers. By combining textual analyses and ethnography, this chapter shows how asymmetrical media attention and relationship between sufferers and spectators reshape the disaster relief and recovery of the affected population.

5.1 Spectators and sufferers: two ends of the mediated disaster

The vast literature on how the media affect us could be roughly divided into two major traditions, which are respectively based on, borrowing the words of Carey (1990), the transmission and ritual view of communication. The first group is usually called traditional effects research, which reads communication as a transmission of signals or messages over distance for the

purpose of control. Hence media effects in this group of theories refer to how

efficiently the message is transmitted in time-space, or how fast and wide the

related information is transmitted between the populations involved.

Correspondingly, theorists in this group have a functionalist understanding of

media effects on the disasters, that is, the media would make a disaster

visible in the public domain and then available for public action. It is through

the agenda-setting function (McCombs and Shaw, 1993) that the media

manage the visibility of a disaster, which is a prerequisite for collective

action of a large society[75].

However the visibility of a disaster does not necessarily lead to action.

The question as to what kind of visibility could lead to action in what way is

the major concern of the second group of theories. The second group takes

communication as a symbolic power or process through which reality is

created, modified and transformed. Hence media effects in this group are

discussed in relation to the performativity of the media representation (or

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[75] There are other ways to categorize theories about media effects, for example, in
Littlejohn and Foss (2008:293-295), due to the evolution of the research, the agenda-setting
function is discussed in the group of social-cultural tradition.

communicative structure and textual quality). Correspondingly, theories in

this group are more concerned about how disasters are represented in relation

to the imaginaries of spectators about suffering and sufferers in distance,

which are central to the transformation of spectators into actors. Here the

distance between spectators and sufferers managed by the media is central to

the perception and understanding of the viewing public about distant

suffering, through which the media offers proposals of action or inaction

(Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006. Silverstone, 2007).

However the same limitation shared by both approaches is that their

major concerns are centred on the receiving end of communication without

taking into account the subjects that are represented, on whom the possible

action/inaction may have an influence. In other words, both groups of studies

examine media effects in terms of the influence on the audiences/spectators,

who are only one end of the communication-action. More specifically, the

first group of theories cares about how the media orient the perceptions of

audience/spectators by telling them what to think, while the second group

concerns about how to act. But they could not tell us the stories afterwards:

what happen to subjects receiving intensive attention, or what kind of effects

of public action? In particular, the intensive attention or collective action of

the viewing public should not be simply taken as a happy ending of a

mediated disaster. The spectatorship itself as well as its transformation into

action has real effects on the subject who is seen and chosen as the target of

action. Also the discussion about effects of action could not be separated

from the imaginary of spectators about their own roles and relationship to

sufferers. Simply put, by telling people what to think and how to act, media

reports and representation of a disaster could have effects on the subject

chosen and represented. In this sense, the studies of media effects are

incomplete without linking the two ends of spectatorship and action. In other

words, the media effects of disaster reports and representation should be

examined and discussed at two levels, the influence on the spectators and the

influence of their attention and action on the subjects.

Both approaches are relevant in the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake.

On one hand, the first approach could lead us to notice the coexistence of

visibility and invisibility of the extensive disaster. Even with intensive media

reports, the complexities and multiplicities of the disaster cannot be exhausted in media representation. Any communication is incomplete and the public's attention during certain time is by definition exclusive. In fact, no matter how excessive media reports were, the representation of the earthquake was always haunted by the problems of scant media attention in certain aspects. In other words, following the transmission view of communication, the media shaped the disaster relief by telling the publics what to care and who needs help.

On the other hand, the ritual approach could help us scrutinize the subtle and nuanced distance between sufferers and spectators, which are central to the imaginary of spectators about who they should be and how they should act as moral subjects (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2008a; Sontag, 2003). As discussed in the previous chapters, the sense of intimacy between spectators and disaster areas inextricably changed as the media zoomed in on and out from the disasters areas. Hence, the ritual view of communication leads us to the question as to how the media invited the spectators to respond or act in what way.

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However so far people in suffering as the other end of the mediated disaster have not fully been discussed, except mentioned occasionally in Chapter 3 and 4. The media has been a constitutive part involved in the disaster relief and reconstruction of the most publicized disaster in the history of PRC. The action based on mediation has greatly transformed and reconstructed the lives of the affected population. In this sense the effects of the mediated disaster could not be fully understood without linking two ends of the mediated disaster. The link between mediation and action should be first contextualized in the specific time-space where the Wenchuan Earthquake happened.

On one hand, the social and geographical gap between spectators and sufferers in the Wenchuan Earthquake was a starting point to understand the shaping power of the mediation. Western China, where the earthquake happened was a relatively underdeveloped region compared to Eastern China where communication resources are concentrated. Before the earthquake, most of the devastated villages or towns were completely unknown to the rich population of Eastern Chin. Therefore, the media was central to bridge

the gap between the two parts of China.

At the emergency stage, the media agencies at higher level could not only regulate the location of media resource at lower level but also directly influence the distribution of resources (Interviews of CCTV producers on 22 May Southern Weekly; Liang, 2008). The director of the division of disaster relief in the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC in his interview by CCTV highly commended the efficiency of CCTV, "The distribution of our supplies is mainly based on your reports" (CCTV News on 14 May 2008; Liang, 2008:74). At the same time the great publicity of this disaster was transformed to national fame that different groups competed for, from the party-state, local governments, NGOs to individuals. Leaders of NGOs I had interviewed admitted that their action were oriented by the media, like most of their counterparts in China, as they had not fully developed and built their own brands, so they still had to follow the media to get more chance to be publicized.

On the other hand, after the emergency stage, affected areas still needed "national witness" to facilitate their recovery and reconstruction. As show in

Chapter 4, the survival of affected areas based on disaster tourism also needed constant media attention. In additional, since the Wenchuan Earthquake has deeply etched into the collective memory of the public[76], it is often used as a magnet to publicize events or areas to attract the attention of a large society.

In general the distance between the affected and viewing population and the social capital transformed from the national witness constituted the shaping power of mediation on people in suffering in a constitutive and processual way. Therefore, the conceptualization of this power first requires overcoming the limitations of textual analyses that are usually event-framed and short-term. In this sense, the method of ethnography that is more local-centered and has a longer-commitment (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002: 13) could help us to link the mediation and action with an in-between perspective.

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[76] Even in 2015, the earthquake still can invoke the collective excitement as shown in the hot topics of micro-blog on its 7th anniversary. For the ranking o hot topics, see

http://d.weibo.com/100803?cfs=&Pl_Discover_Pt6Rank__4_filter=hothtlist_type%3D1#_0 and for the specific topic of the Wenchuan Earthquake see, http://www.weibo.com/p/100808527b39df1c7ee6c2bd34130e8338344a (Accessed on 12 May 2015).

This chapter neither intends to establish a direct cause-effect link between the media texts, and action of the public involved, which is impossible to prove unless one returned to a framework of magic bullet theory[77], nor to attribute the problems of disaster relief simply to the outside aids including the media. Instead it reads the mediated disaster as context where the action and their consequence took place. It is impossible to exhaust all the possible action of the public involved, which goes beyond the scope of an individual study. However this chapter can offer a more substantial and nuanced picture about the dynamic between spectators and sufferers linked by the mediated disaster, showing different stories other than the happy ending in the dominant narrative. In addition it is also an attempt to give a space to voices of people in suffering quietened in the celebration of national solidarity.

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[77] This theory is also called hypodermic needle theory, for it hypothesize the media (needle) injects the message into audience mind and it cause changes in audience behaviour and psyche towards the message, while the audience are passive and they can't resist the media message.

5.2 The problems of asymmetrical media attention: visibility and invisibility

In the current studies, the invisibility of a disaster is often attributed to an "external" influence, such as geographical distance of the disaster, governments' control or the lack of geopolitical interests (Benthall, 1999; Joye, 2009). Shared in these interpretations is a deep conviction of the infinity power of media technologies in making a disaster visible. In fact media attention and resource are always unequally distributed. In the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the intensive media reports were always haunted by the problem of asymmetrical media attention, through which some affected areas, groups and individuals were rendered invisible.

As shown in Chapter 2, the omnipresent images and stories of disaster bridged the gap between the affected population and outside population, especially the rich population in the major cities of Eastern China who are the targeted audience of the major media. However behind the great publicity was the geographical bias of disaster relief intensified by the media representation, which started with the name of the Wenchuan Earthquake.

This partly resulted from the discrepancy between administrative divisions and the natural geography in the naming strategy of the earthquake. "Wenchuan" misled the rescue team and relief supplies to the capital town of Wenchuan country, Weizhou (威州), rather than the real epicenter town, Yingxiu (映秀). As shown in Zhang (2013)'s detailed and documentary-like report, the Yingxiu town did not capture the attention of aid agents in the first two days, during which a considerable amount of rescue teams passed through this poor town to their destination, the Weizhou town. It was two days after the earthquake when the massive aid agents reached the Wenzhou town that the outside aid agents realized Yingxiu town was the real epic center of the earthquake and had a more serious damage than the capital town of the Wenchuan country[78].

This bias was further amplified by the representation of mass media and led to the mismatch of disaster relief and affected places at the very beginning in the disaster relief. On one hand, not all the media made adjustment in time due to their publication circle. For example, as seen in the

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[78] The Yingxiu town finally proved to be one of the most seriously devastated towns in this disaster.

reports "Proceed to the epic center of the earthquake" on 15 May of the Southern Weekly, even three days after the earthquake its journalists still thought, although unintentionally, the capital town as the real center of the earthquake.

On the other hand, when the epicenter area was of considerable area, the name of a lower level of administrative division ceases to convey the desired impression. As mentioned previously, the Wenchuan Earthquake was an extensive earthquake that deadly damaged three provinces in China. The affected areas that located in a long oval shape were actually divided by three provinces. However the Shanxi and Gansu province were not highlighted or even ignored in the pictorial representation on the media (Figure 9 and 10 "Maps Used in CCTV and People's Daily" in Chapter 2)[79]. It is true that one could not blame the media for the bias implicated in naming the earthquake but no one can deny the fact the repetition and representation of this name in the media that embodied the target of the national mobilization at the same time actually, intentionally or not,

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[79] Some of the media professionals admitted later this discrepancy, while what they regretted was the lost the chance to take more first-hand news in some invisible areas.

dramatized and intensified the bias of disaster relief.

Except for the geographical bias, some invisible parts of the disaster could also be attributed to the inherent incompleteness of the media representation with an event focus. A case in this point was the story of the Bottle Boy (or "吊瓶男孩" in Chinese). On 13 May 2015, there were two friends trying to take care one of their classmates who was buried in the remains. But only one of them, the Bottle Boy, was in the picture that was finally published in the newspaper[80]. Their after-earthquake lives were bifurcated by this published picture. The Bottle Boy got his nickname and nationwide fame, which helped him get many honors and then offers from many famous universities[81]. On the contrary, his "invisible" partner had not such privilege and was completely forgotten.

It was not an exceptional story about "heroes" who happened to be

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[80]Like I discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, when I heard this story from one of my informers I thought it was a joke for informer told me jokingly. I did not take it seriously until I found in a corner of the Diary Museum in the Jianchuan Museum Cluster another picture of the other boy who was taking care of the same person. Until then, I just realized actually there were two pictures that were taken by the same journalist or different journalists, but I could not answer the question as to why only one was finally published on the paper, although which is quite relevant in the discussing the problems of visibility.

[81] For more stories about the Bottle Boy after the earthquake, see the related report from Xinhua News Agency, http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2010-07/14/c_12332639.htm (Accessed on 31 May 2015)

captured as heroes. That is why anti-hero joke-rumors took these "lucky" people as target. However not all people who received extensive media attention felt lucky. On the contrary they felt sick of the media. Scarcity and excess coexisted as two sides of the same coin. When some affected people did not received timely help or deserved support due to scant media attention, there were some groups facing the problems of excessive outside attention.

There was an inside joke among the survivors I interviewed that goes "Caution: Fire, Thieves and Journalists " (or "防火防盗防记者" in Chinese), in which journalists were listed among top three most dangerous things after the earthquake. The psychologists I worked with or interviewed devalued media attention as a serious intervention of the recovery of people in suffering, although they admitted media reports could help them solve a lot of problems[82]. The "secondary damage" or "secondary trauma"[83] was one of the recurring words during my interviews with the psychologists when they

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[82] Actually some of the groups I interviewed used to benefit from the media's report about their problems, like with the help of the media reports, their delayed or stolen supplies were delivered or found back in a short time.
[83] The "secondary trauma" is often associated with social sense of lost, including the events or public perceptions that inhibit timely community recovery that could prevent the survivors of a trauma from recovery or reconnection with their pre-existing social network. For more see Long and Wong (2012).

were asked about their ideas about media reports about people in suffering in disaster areas.

Among psychological studies of survivors' recovery is Long and Wong (2012)'s long-term project, which focuses on the influence of outside aids on a whole group, and in this case, a middle school that had attracted great attention because of its great lost[84]. In their long-term studies, they find the recovery of this school as a whole was actually greatly intervened and interrupted by the outside supports. Although the media is not highlighted as an independent factor in their studies, it indeed played an integral part in the intervention of the recovery and reconstruction of the school community. As a magnet of media attention, this school relocated and resumed class fast and received lots of donations both from the governments, NGOs and individual donators. However at the same time, the great "fame" of the school was used by various kinds of social groups, from government officials, NGOs to celebrities, as a magnet to attract the media attention and then enhance their

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[84] "More than 1,300 students and 40 teachers were killed, and almost all of the survivors lost family members. Of the 157 surviving teachers, 42 lost their children and ∕ or spouse" (Long & Wong, 2012:243). One of the authors, Professor Long even refused to reveal the name of the school in her conference presentation or interviews, which actually was used by the media professional as a magnet to attract attention.

own public images. The administrators, teachers and students had to stop their routine to prepare for constant visits of government officials with different rankings as well as social groups in the name of charity or compassion.

To sump up, through the mechanism of visibility and invisibility, visual hierarchies among affected areas/groups of the same disaster had been accumulatively constructed, which could not only promote the preformation of victimhood/heroics among affected population but also lead to an increasing but unhealthy competition amongst disasters and victims in China, a disaster-prone country with vast territory. Even among the affected population, complaints related to the media were targeted at each other. In other words, they blamed the other rather than the media itself for the insufficient media (outside) attention. As mentioned earlier, Beichuan and Wenchuan were geographically close and at the same time two of the most devastated areas in this earthquake, however they belong to two different administrative cities, A Ba and Mianyang. People in these two areas should have some solidarity due to the shared vulnerability, however in reality they

became competitors for media attention. One Beichuan local people was unsatisfied with the name of the Wenchuan Earthquake used by the media or the whole nation. He complained a lot, "Wenchuan shook, but Beichuan Pained" (or "震在汶川，痛在北川"). Obviously his complains were based on the loss of capital towns of both countries[85] and he thought too much attention had been attracted to the Wenchuan because of the name. A local driver in Yingxiu town had contrary complaints, "we did not have so many powerful media as Mianyang[86] and now Beichuan have a better life than us". In fact as the most severely hit and publicized areas, they had no reason to feel unfair for they had got more structural privilege in comparison with other relatively invisible affected areas.

The problems of the asymmetrical media attention shows that the shaping power of the mediation lies not in media texts but in the authority of the media as "witness" of suffering and heroic deeds, which could be transformed into opportunities for structural rewards and privilege. It is such

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[85] As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the capital town of Wenchuan was misunderstood as the epic center and the outside aid agents overestimated its damage at the first two days.

[86] Mianyang is the second-biggest city in the Sichuan Province, which has more social capital in terms of the media resource.

visual authority that endows the media with power to orient the public action

and influence people in suffering at the level of area, groups and individual.

5.3   The problems of asymmetrical relationship: sameness and

otherness

Apart from the mechanism of visibility and invisibility, the shaping power of

the mediated disaster also worked through the management of distance

embedded in the media representation. Before the national ritual,

geographical and social distance was bridged shortly by the concerted media

representation framed by We-as-Sichuan People structure (Scannell, 2000),

which unified the whole nation symbolically and invited everyone (Chinese

national) to fight against the evil earthquake. However, after the national

mourning days, the honeymoon of the media ended. As the disaster relief

entered the reconstruction stage, the previously orchestrated media

representation broke down along the line between disaster and non-disaster

areas, the policy-oriented and market-driven media[87].

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[87] In fact shortly after the national mourning ritual, a tentative space for heteroglossia
(Bakhtin, 1984) emerged, where some media started to distant themselves from the national
sentiment and identified other possible perpetrators than the nature who should also take

For the media in non-disaster areas, attention on disaster areas declined with the withdrawal of rescue teams. However there were some critical moments the disaster areas would attract the attention of the media in non-disaster areas or even the nation again, including moments of every anniversary and traditional festivals or scandals and new disasters. For the sake of analytical convenience, these reports could be roughly divided into two groups of mediated visibility, in which the viewing public are invited respectively to witness the happy ending or judge the evil-doings.

Witnesses of happy endings

The first groups were stories about the happy endings of the affected population. The anniversary reports on CCTV were representative of this group, which continued the narrative of "we-ness" developed at the emergency stage. The special feature mentioned in the beginning of the chapter was a case in this point, which was intended to show positive image of the reconstruction of the affected areas as a witness of national triumph.

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responsibility for the calamity. However this space soon closed because of the rigid media censorship on the controversial issues, for example, the massive death of the schoolchildren. The tentative space will be discussed later in this chapter.

Again the narrative of "we-ness" was mainly constructed by the "unified time-space". Like other anniversary reports, this special feature started with a long shot of the new Beichuan and other newly built cities at exactly 14:28 pm on 12 May 2013. This ritual gesture synchronized disaster areas and the outside population (or the nation) with the calendar time, the current moment. However there was a major difference between the "united time-space" that was constructed at the emergency stage and at the moments of anniversary or other festivals. The former was centered on the disaster time while the latter the national time. In other words, at the anniversary or festival moments, it was the national time (the outside population) rather than the disaster time that synchronized heterogeneous recovery processes of disaster areas to display a happy ending of the national mobilization.

In doing so, the "normality" of the affected population was exaggerated while ignoring their "strangeness" or heterogeneity in terms of their struggles and difficulties. This kind of representation conveys the impression that they (sufferers) are just someone like us (the viewing public) who have a new normal life at the current moment. In doing so, the zigzag disaster

reconstruction and relief were compressed in a linear process, in which

difficulties and struggles of the affected population were rendered invisible.

Metaphorically, this kind of representation was a like close-up of the

affected population in the current moment, visually exaggerating their

sameness with the viewing public and denying the "otherness" in terms of

their struggles and difficulties. At the reconstruction stage, this close-up of

"we-ness" was not intended to mobilize the Chinese nationals with the

communal bond but to offer a visual acknowledgement of the efforts of the

viewing public, who used to be donators or actors involved in the national

mobilization.

In domestic context, action driven by communal bond is based on the

mutual awareness and expectation between benefactor/beneficiary (Boltanski,

1999). In an ideal sense, as a member of the community, one has obligation

to help another who is in suffering for some day s/he could get equal help in

return when s/he suffers. On the other hand, the person in suffering is also

aware of the potential help and has obligation to return it in future. However

in the mediated disaster, this mutual awareness was greatly intervened by the

media who offer the visual witness of the effect of help. In other words, the media embodied the mutual trust and the communal bond, turning the mutual expectation into visual witness of a happy ending as a return.

The witness of the happy ending might assure helpers that their efforts were not diverted but at the same time this visual witness could be transformed into great pressure on the recovery of the affected population. For one thing, the employment of "unified time-space" in the anniversary reports actually obscured the heterogeneity of social times and rendered invisible temporal discrepancy between the viewing public and people in suffering. As discussed above, the recovery of schools like School B in the spotlight were interrupted by constant visits and interviews. In fact as Long and Wong (2013) argues, the recoveries of self and community must be heterogeneous process, for different individuals/community have to recover at their own speed. However for the School B with intensive media attention, the temporality of recovery had to be synchronized with the national time. The expectation on the "normalization" of the school was transformed into the increased workload of administrators and teachers, who in turn imposed

rigid time control on students. This greatly damaged the post-solidarity among the school administrators, teachers and students, who were supposed to get support from each other during their recovery rather than being in a estranged relationship.

This was not an exceptional story about the temporal pressure felt by survivors at critical moments. A experienced psychologist/psychiatrist who worked for a long time in quake zone told me every festival after or anniversary of the quake was a sensitive and difficult time for people who had Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for at these critical moments when the survivors were supposed to take a break from their busy work, the sense of loss started to re-emerge. Ironically, these sensitive times were chosen by the media as good time to commemorate this difficult past or even celebrate the national triumph. My informer sighed, "We had to come back here for Chinese New Years, since it was sensitive time for high incidence of suicides".

In fact, as the withdrawal of the media professionals from the quake zones, the focus of most media representation of the disaster area turned to

organize an exit for collective excitement, while the psychological challenges of people in suffering just started. Five months after the Wenchuan Earthquake, 董玉飞, a local official in Beichuan who was rewarded with Hero of Disaster Relief, committed suicide. After that there was a chain of suicides across the vast disaster areas. However the difficulties facing the affected population as well as their struggles in recovery were invisible in the kind of media reports that were intended to witness the happy ending of the national mobilization.

Judges of wrongdoings

The second group of media reports took a more critical stance to scrutinize the possible corruption and wrongdoings in the disaster relief and reconstruction. These reports were intended to distance the viewing public from the national sentiment, inviting them to be judges of the disaster relief and reconstruction. Among these reports were investigative reports on the massive death of school, intensive media reports of Guo Meimei scandals[88]

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[88]See footnote59 in Chapter 4 for the story of Guo Meimei.

or other corruption of "heroes" from the city leader to the best volunteer of

the Wenchuan Earthquake[89].

Compared to the first group that employed sympathy and invited

donation, narratives in this group mainly invoked angry and

accusation/protest. They were less official in the sense the

reports/investigation were mainly led by market-driven media, like Southern

Weekly (or"《南方周末》"in Chinese) or by grassroots as shown in the case

of Guo Meimei Scandal. In some cases, the less-marketized media, like

CCTV or Xinhua News Agency, did not get involved until these issues

dominated public attention[90]. For the limited space, the serial reports of

Southern Weekly about the massive death of school children are taken as the

representative of this group. The reports formally started on 29 May 2008,

half a month after the Wenchuan Earthquake, while the last related report

was published on 21 May 2009, a year after the quake.

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[89] For more stories about the corruption of the best volunteer, see reports from Southern Weekly, http://www.infzm.com/content/93428 (Accessed on 13 May 2015)

[90] It does not mean these less marketed media did not produce critical reports, for example like Mingji (or "铭记" in Chinese, meaning to remember) produced by CCTV had a reflective perspective on the disaster. Dualism between critical or non-critical stance could not fully characterize the distinctions between the policy-oriented and market driven media. In fact there were some very critical texts from the state or policy-oriented media at certain time during the Wenchuan Earthquake while some market-driven media were full with voyeuristic reports of the disaster in the name of communal sentiment.

The investigations on 29 May 2008 clearly attributed the massive death of school children to the bad quality of school buildings. In spite of their efforts to suggest possible corruption involved in the construction of schools, they could not make allegation against specific official, designer, or merchant who were involved. Although reasons of collapse varied, all the cases pointed to the unavoidable historical fact, that is, great financial deficit in education funding in rural areas in Sichuan as a result of general poverty. As shown in their investigation, most of the collapsed buildings on the township level were constructed during late 80s and early 90s, when the party-state implemented the policy of nine-year compulsory education. However due to the general poverty of these rural areas, the presidents of collapsed schools could not get sufficient financial support from upper administrative divisions for school buildings. They had to rely on themselves and even borrowed money from local people. That strategy was called "who needed school who build and manage it" (or "分级办学，乡办乡管" in Chinese) and "Education: for the people, by the people" (or "人民教育人民办" in Chinese). The Sichuan province as a whole still faced 8.1 billion

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RMB deficits in education until 2002[91]. Another similarity shared by these "problematic" buildings was they did not meet the national standard for strict seismic design that was implemented in 2001 and later. The reason for failures in improving the sub-standard buildings was the same, the poverty of the areas[92].

In this sense the balanced investigation could not deny the general poverty of rural areas as the starting point to understand the massive death of school children in this disaster, however the journalists did not go further to ask who should take responsibility for this. If the causal chain had been lengthen beyond the bad quality of school building to the identification of particular perpetrators, the journalists would have to deal with two related and tricky historical facts, the implement of nine-year compulsory education with collective efforts of local people and the extreme poverty of local governments on the country level. They were tricky in the sense that no one could easily deny the great achievement of the policy of nine-year

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[91] The policy changed since 2002 that the schools could get more financial support from upper administrative division, as shown in the investigation reports.
[92] The success of an intact elementary school in comparison in the reports was greatly attributed to the individual efforts of then president who was alerted to the danger of bad quality of schools and devoted years to desperately ask all kinds of organizations for money to strengthen the building.

compulsory education or the massive support of local people in rural poor areas in 80s facing such huge financial deficit in education. If the investigators had extended further their causal chain, they would have to deal with the great disparity between rural and urban areas as well as Eastern and Western China. In that case the massive death of the school children could be linked to the sacrifice that Western China/rural areas made for the development of Eastern China/cities at an amazingly fast speed.

However the lengthened causal connection would make difficult the search of perpetrators, for it would involve the collective responsibility of the whole nation, especially including the viewing public in coast cities as a whole who benefited greatly from the sacrifice of the underdeveloped Western China/rural areas. In addition, it would destabilize the dominant narrative of national triumph that dwelled well in the culture-nature division as discussed in Chapter 4. If the investigation had gone further, the major culprit of the disaster would not the earthquake any more but the culture or the people themselves. In that case, as indicated by Hoffman (2002), culture is no longer "the seat of human trust, the provider of protection" (136);

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instead it creates disasters.

However, the party-state imposed rigid censorship to stop lengthening the causal connection between the disaster and the general poverty. One year after the earthquake, the official investigation on the quality of collapsed buildings was published, showing there was no corruption related to the quality of building. This official report was read as the official interpretation of the issue, which symbolized the closing of discursive space. However the report could not convince the angry public, who directed the anger towards the control of the party-state and cast doubts on local governments in general.

Hence, the investigation about the massive death of the disaster as a result of historical and structural vulnerability was abruptly terminated without full and comprehensive discussion, let alone reaching to a consensus or solution. Instead it finally became a story that was familiar to Southern Weekly and other media that were known for their critical stance as well as their anger and disappointed followers, that is, a fight against the "authoritarian" state for freedom of speech. At the same time, the viewing

public also lost a chance to be fully aware of the complexities and ambiguities of the suffering and their collective responsibility of the suffering. In other words, it was a failure to let the whole nation acknowledge the historical and personal participation in perpetuating the vulnerability of the affected population.

Some definitive features of the second group could be summarized here. Firstly their critical stance more or less challenged the master narrative of the disaster, that is, a national triumph over the nature evil. However the controversial issues involved, like corruption of charity agents, local official and heroes, were not full discussed and debated due to the media control imposed by the party-state. Ironically, the party-state' intervention led to great doubts of the publics onto itself as well as local governments in distance or even other public figures with "official" awards. For example, the reports about the Best Volunteer attributed his misconduct to his relation to official agents[93]. However these reports failed to remind their audience that

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[93] For the stories about the Best Volunteer see reports from Southern Weekly , http://www.infzm.com/content/93428 and http://www.infzm.com/content/93429 (Accessed on 23 May 2014)

the corruption of these public figures mainly began with the great publicity

of these figures, which was appropriated by different social groups for

political, private and commercial purposes.

This is related to the second feature of these reports. Spectators in this

group of representation were stabilized as judge or accusers as opposed with

the "evilness" of governments in general. It is not denying the positive effect

of these reports by putting the power under the scrutiny of the public. These

reports were problematic in the sense they has a certain what Robins calls

"moral weightiness": "it grants sensation without demanding responsibility,

and it involve us in a spectacle without engaging us in the complexity of its

reality" (Robins, 1994: 313; quoted by Silverstone, 2007: 119). Simply put,

the reports of wrongdoings and corruption failed to provoke the public

awareness of or nationwide debate on the structural problems exposed by the

disaster, which could not be overcome without collective efforts of the whole

nation. In addition, the commercial interest led some media to produce

sensational stories by combining the corruption or wrongdoings with the

Wenchuan Earthquake, for example the Guo Meime sandal, which in turn

cultivated the public desire for "abnormality" of the disaster relief and reconstruction. This kind of representation would lead to the collapse of the post-disaster solidarity between the governments and society as well as the accumulation of the public's distrust on governments in general.

Although the two groups of representation focused on contrary aspects of the disaster relief and reconstruction, they ultimately converged in producing the asymmetrical relationship between outside supports and local communities as well as intensifying the visual bias of the disaster relief. One NGO leader who worked in Beichuan for seven years shared with me the changes before and after the Guo Meimei Scandal. Before Guo's Scandal, they used to rely on local governments to deliver goods, for it was a good way to reconnect and empower local communities. However after the scandal, due to the increasing distrust of benefactors, they were asked to deliver goods directly to survivors, which did not only increase their unnecessary workload but also did nothing good to the reconstruction of local communities. For one thing, after disaster, local communities based on natural villages collapsed and survivors who used to live in the same

community often spread to different places. If local people themselves had been assigned to deliver goods within their own community, it would not only revive survivors but also help re-build local community. By contrast, if outside teams had done the delivery, they would only deliver goods to survivors in the same temporal settlements rather than in the same community, and the connection would be built between outside teams with individual survivors rather than within local communities.

Secondly, accumulated doubts on governments in general might render outside population more eager than ever to "see" the "instant" effect of their help, to know whether their intensions were distorted or not. So many complaints I heard from the fieldwork were that benefactors who did not trust local agents would ask for some visual proofs in return. For example, schoolchildren who received donation were asked to take a picture with a forced smile and donation (money, schoolbags and the like). Or they were required to write a letter to express gratitude to donators. Some psychological groups were even asked to record treatments and disclose the list of patients who received help. Most of the requirements proved to be

insensitive, which finally made children very uncomfortable.

In general, despite the differences, the two groups of the media representation shared a similarity that the viewing public was placed in the moral high ground to require a return or produce a critique. On the other hand people in suffering were juxtaposed in a static and stereotyped relationship to the viewing public as an object to a subject. This is not denying the positive effects of the media power to witness the happy ending or scrutinize possible corruption. However there was a bias in the visual power in the sense that the relationship between spectators and sufferers was constructed in an asymmetrical frame that the mutation of the subjects and objects in the viewing relationship was impossible, leaving no space of self-reflection for the viewing public. Or using the words of Silverstone (2002:83), it was "'immorality of distance', a relationship whereby the figure of the spectator is fully sovereign in her/his agency over the suffer" (quoted by Chouliaraki, 2013: 58). According to Silverstone (2007), the distance between spectators and sufferers in both groups of representation was "improper distance": too close to see the irreducible otherness of the affected

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population to the viewing public or too far in the later to remind the viewing

public of the responsibility as well as their own "otherness" in terms of the

destructive potential of the outside attention and help.

5.4   Stories without happy endings: clashes of realities

Like shadow is always there together with the light, the invisibility is always

the other side of the visibility. In this sense the incompleteness and

asymmetry of the mediated visibility of the Wenchuan Earthquake could not

be fully understood without the invisible stories beyond the media, which did

not necessarily have happy endings. As one end of the mediated disaster, the

viewing public could not simply be understood as potential/actual helper,

paying money, doing volunteers or making accusations on the wrongdoings.

They could bring as much damage as help to the affected population. One

psychologist heard the jokes of journalists mentioned earlier and said, "We

have heard similar version of jokes[94] from local people who were irritated

by psychologists. Some of our colleagues came and forced survivors to

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[94] The joke that was refereed to here was "Caution: Fire, Thieves and Pyshcologists", a
similar version to the joke of journalists mentioned earlier.

answer questions and cry but then they just disappeared for good, leaving the

second trauma to the people involved."

In fact, outside aid agents received a consider amount of help from local

people in a number of ways. For example for the psychologists, they did get

a lot of altruist help from local people not only in material sense but also in

social sense. Local people had been a great pool of subjects for various kinds

of questionnaires or experiments. More often than not, the experience in

disaster areas became a shining page in the resumes of these psychologists.

However not all aid agents were full aware of the complexities of roles they

played in disaster relief and had a critical reflexivity on their position as

helpers. Some of them seemed very satisfied with his position as helper.

Among multiple voices around whether the earthquake museums should

charge the tourists[95] was an uncomfortable anti-charge reason, which I heard

with surprise from one psychologist who actually worked in the field for a

few years, "How could they charge the admission for the museum? Since **we**

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[95] As indicated in Chapter 2 of the thesis, when I was in fieldwork in 2013, all public earthquake museums were free. Tourists could choose to pay money for the transportation from Beichuan Museum to Old Beichuan Ruins. But this issue of charge had been attracted the outside media attention again one year after my fieldwork, for more see http://news.sohu.com/20140730/n402914900.shtml

gave **them** so much help, they should know to be more **grateful**" (emphasis

added). Unlike other opinions that thought the local governments should not

get any economic benefit from the commemoration of the national trauma,

this type of opinion betrayed a narcissistic self-image of the helper, who put

himself and the people in suffering in an asymmetrical relationship that he

could ask for gratitude in return for granted.

On the one hand not all the viewing public were satisfied with the role of

helper. One of my interviewees, who came from the affected areas in the

Sichuan province, shared with me the discontentment of people from poor

areas with the privilege that the Sichuan province had received. She told me

one friend of hers who came from Henan Province was angry with the

priority of financial support given to students from any place of the Sichuan

Province. My interviewee admitted with an embarrassing smile, "I knew she

needed the money more desperately but the school thought the Sichuan

students were more pathetic."[96] It is true the publicity of the earthquake has

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[96] Actually I had similar experience in 2008 when I was still a teacher who was in charge of
a class in a university. In August 2008, I was asked to arrange students from the Sichuan
Province who received school donation to deliver presentation to express their gratitude.
One of the students who were chosen by the school was so reluctant that she did not need
the donation from the school although she came from a so-called quake zone. She felt

in some sense transformed the social capital of the Sichuan as a whole, however the failure to bring the general poverty under the public debate intensified, if not initiated, the tension between survivors and among people in general poverty.

On the other end of the mediated disaster, victims saw the mediated visibility facilitated the disintegration of the post-disaster solidarity. The sense of shared vulnerability was shattered in the competition for mediation attention. On the other hand the population under overexposure was forced to be normal, which in some ways estranged the relationship within community and hindered the recovery.

It is true that the disintegration among people in suffering could not be completely blamed on mediated visibility, however, there is no exaggeration to say the action based on the partial and asymmetrical media representation facilitated the disintegration of "the post-disaster solidarity". The mediated visibility did not lead victims and survivors in disaster areas or rural areas to

embarrassed for then her condition was still better than average and she was repulsed by the role of a donation receiver imposed on her. At the same time there was another student in my eyes who might need the money more but ironically the school thought she was not qualified, for this special donation was only for the students who come from quake zones.

see their shared vulnerability but transformed them into potential competitors.

For the outside population, the mediated visibility also favoured an asymmetric relationship between spectators and sufferers which mistaken "connection for closeness, and closeness for commitment, and which confuse reciprocity for responsibility" (Silverstone, 2007: 173). This asymmetrical relation could find echoes in the action on the spot where the outside aid agents indulged in the instant satisfaction of being a helper without full awareness of the complexities and ambiguities of their roles. In short, the incomplete and asymmetrical media representation was a part of the clashes of realities in the disaster relief.

History always repeats itself. The Lushan Earthquake saw more intense competition both in the viewing public and affected population. On one hand, when the Lushan Earthquake broke out, a large amount of journalists and reports as well as NGOs flooded into the area, which directly blockaded the roads in and out of the affected area and hindered the disaster relief. The consequent road control of local government even provoked public debates on whether official aid agents could be trusted at all and given preference to

pass[97]. The pursuing of social capital attached to the publicity of disaster

relief and the distrust on official forces accumulated from scandals

converged together weakened the base of concerted efforts between the state

and society that emerged in the Wenchuan Earthquake.

At the same time, the visual bias of disaster relief found all kinds

expression. Before I proceeded to the Lushan earthquake zone, one television

reporter who just returned from the area said to me, "you will feel

disappointed, you cannot **see** as many collapsed houses as in the Wenchuan

Earthquake." (Emphasis added). What is more, in the Lushan quake zone, I

saw a member of NGO from Hong Kong who stayed in that town only for

half a day and bribed little children candies and toys to take picture with

them. One of so-called psychiatrists even forced a child to do a casual

psychiatry with a camera in a public playground with the only knowledge of

his recent loss of a parent.

One the other hand, problems of the asymmetrical media attention still

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[97] For more stories about the debate, see related reports from The Wall Street Journal
http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-earthquake-prompts-debate-on-role-of-volunteers-14075
27469 , Guanchazhe (观察者网) (http://m.guancha.cn/society/2013_04_22_140214) and
blogs (http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_69f8eee501019yg9.html) (Accessed on 16 May 2015)

harassed the affected population. A woman who was in charge of a private kindergarten complained to me that she could not understand the priority of resources was given to the public counterparts, although some of which were not so damaged as hers. She was so disappointed when I told her I was just a student who once studied journalism rather than a real journalist. She believed deeply if her stories could be told on newspaper or TV, her problems could be solved in short time and had more resource to reconstruct her career and life. In contrast, a leader of a local public school in the Lushan country was so sick of the journalists, and told me that the media pried into the school for sensational stories that used to happen in the School B in the Wenchuan Earthquake. But what my informer was mainly concerned about was the coming Gaokao (or 高考, meaning the National College Entrance Examination), while constant media interviews disturbed greatly the school and students, who actually went through the disaster safe and sound. He referred to School B as a "bad" example and complained, "They (media professionals) thought we were another School B and keep spying for touching stories, which we did not have". He added, "The outside donators

gave the money directly to the students. Every student now has more pocket money than me. They don't like to study any more. "

These stories together indicated the ambivalence of the spectatorship of suffering: on one hand it could mobilize the whole nation to face and address the crisis but at the same it could be appropriated by different social groups for their own interests. In some sense, the mediated visibility could effectively connect the affected population with a larger society but also contain potential to disintegrate the local communities.

5.4   Conclusion: Otherness in the construction of "we"

A domestic disaster is always thought to easily invoke people's compassion and action since there is a pre-existing bond (communal solidarity) between the spectators and people in suffering. Public action based on this pre-existing connection therefore has been seldom problematized in current literature. However, as Sontag argues, "no "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other's pain.   (Sontag, 2003: 8). As shown in the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the public attention and action based

on the mediated visibility were greatly problematic.

Even within the national boundary, the problems of inclusion versus exclusion, through invisibility versus visibility lurked under the surface of the symbolic construction of "we". The transmission approach to media effects could direct our attention to the influence of the mediatized suffering in shaping the public perception about who need help. The influence of the asymmetrical media attention should be better understood in the context of Chinese media landscape that is characterized by its integration into the political structure. At the emergency stage, it could dramatize the bias of disaster relief and mislead the official or non-official aid mission away from other places in need. At the reconstruction stage, they could exaggerate the unequal distribution of resources, orienting supplies to particular areas, groups and individuals while ignoring others.

The usefulness of the cultural approach lies in telling us how the mediated visibility invited the viewing public to act. Two groups of media representation were discussed to show two kinds of relationship between spectators and sufferers, witness of happy ending and judge of wrongdoings.

They also corresponded to two proposals of action, sentimental donators without judgment or angry accusers without responsibility (Boltanski, 1999). Despite their differences, they could lead to a narcissistic and introspective public without full reflexivity on the responsibility and complexity of the viewing public as potential actors (Chouliaraki, 2013).

Both approaches could not offer us more subtle and nuanced stories after the public action, which needs the help of ethnography. Although this chapter is not intended to establish a direct cause-effect relationship between the media texts and effects, the combination of the textual analysis and empirical research shows the problems of the meditated visibility found their expression in different cases at the level of area, groups and individuals. The asymmetrical media attention and relationship between spectators and sufferers was a part of the clashes of realities in disaster relief and reconstruction. The mediated visibility might connect a large society with the affected population but at the same time have great destructive potential to disintegrate the local communities.

However what was done does not mean what should be done. In this

sense, the last chapter of this thesis takes the Wenchuan Earthquake as a

privileged access to examine the media-society dynamic of China at disaster

moments and discusses how the study could help us to imagine alternative

ways of mediation and action to cope with the dynamic and complex disaster

relief and reconstruction.

Chapter 6 Disasters, media and societies

A popular understanding of the Chinese word for "crisis", "危机" is a combination of dangers (危) and opportunities (机)[98], which suggests a positive thought that there will be a progress of history as compensation for the great lost brought about by disasters. However it is more a wishful thinking than a self-evident truth. More often than not it could easily be used as a empty promise to pacify people in suffering or anger. A disaster could not naturally promote a progress of history unless there are continuous and critical reviews and reflections on social conditions of vulnerability with which a natural hazard turns out to be a disaster. This thesis, in this sense, is an effort of critical reflection by providing a privileged access to Chinese society as well as valuable sociocultural information and perspective for disaster relief and reconstruction in general. The conclusion chapter first summarizes previous chapters as answers to major research questions proposed in the Introduction chapter. Then it discusses the relevance of the

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[98] Some linguists do not agree with this interpretation and instead see "机" as a critical moment (or "时机" in Chinese). For more see Adams, C. 2000. Is the Chinese word for "crisis" a combination of "danger" and "opportunity"?. The Straight Dope. http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/2363/is-the-chinese-word-for-crisis-a-combination-of-danger-and-opportunity (Accessed on 12 May 2015)

study in relation to China study and media-disaster studies in a broad context, followed by the discussion of its limitations as well as corresponding recommendations for further studies.

6.1   Mediated disaster: power and paradox

A wide range of media representation of the Wenchuan Earthquake has been examined in previous chapters, including news reports, jokes and rumours, and museums at different stages of disaster relief. Shared in these varied media representation are two major threads, which are the definition of this disaster and the spatial and temporal distance between suffers and spectators.

In the aspect of the definition of this disaster, there are constant challenges throughout different stages of disaster relief and reconstruction towards the nature-culture divide framing the official narrative. On one hand, some news reports, museums and anniversary reports defined this catastrophe as a natural disaster and translated the complex and massive calamity into a triumph of Chinese nationals over a natural hazard. However, this disaster could not be easily lodged in the category of natural disaster,

Some rumors related to origins of the disaster questioned the official interpretation by offering different reasons and interpretation for this disaster, while misunderstanding jokes introduced the absurdity into the official interpretation by associating the origins of the disaster with varied misunderstanding. Critical investigative reports also exposed the sociocultural gene of this tragedy, buildings with bad quality, the miscommunication in disaster relief and the general poverty. These media representation together imposed a constant pressure on the nature-culture divide framing the definition of this disaster.

The temporal and spatial distance managed in media representation also changed as the disaster relief ventured into different stages. Before the reconstruction stage, orchestrated nationwide news reports effectively created the intimacy between disaster areas and a large society and synchronized heterogeneous social time with the disaster time. The natural hazard that served as the Other of Chinese nationals mobilized the whole nation into the disaster relief, in which the boundary between sufferers and spectators was eliminated in the construction of the sense of "we as

sufferers". The sense of "we as sufferers", unintentionally found its echoes in the popularities of rumors and jokes in non-disaster areas, which showed the uncertainty, anxiety, vulnerability and humanity shared between non-affected population and affected population. However the distance between spectators and sufferers had been re-introduced since the mourning ritual. In order to make possible a national mourning, a unified national time was accentuated to flatten the heterogeneity of tragedies caused by the disaster. The accentuation of national time was maintained in mnemonic narratives including museum texts and anniversary reports. People in disaster areas as passive victims, beneficiary or villain was juxtaposed in an asymmetrical and static way to the viewing public as active rescuers, benefactors or judge.

With different definitions of this disaster and the changing distance between spectators and sufferer, the media representation was integral to the disaster relief and reconstruction, which include national mobilization, mourning ritual, rumoring, joking, mnemonic activities and other mediation-induced action in distance or on the spot. In general, due to the

asymmetrical media representation, a new viewing hierarchy was built into

disaster areas themselves as well as their relationship to non-affected areas.

More specifically, the disaster areas became competitors for the attention of

a large society. An improper distance between spectators/actors and sufferers

were embedded that it either too close to see irreducible "otherness" in

vulnerable population, or too far to see the collective responsibility of a

larger society. These kinds of improper distance brought about

corresponding problems in the reconstruction of disaster areas, which

converged in producing the bias of mediation. The bias of mediation was

integrated into the clashes between outside assistance and affected

population in the disaster relief and reconstruction, which in some sense

destroyed the post-disaster solidarity without empowering local communities.

Borrowing words from Silverstone (2007), it is a kind of closeness that

results in distance (134). In this sense, the mediated disaster presented both

the power and paradox of mediation, the ability to eliminate and create

distance, to integrate and disintegrate society.

6.2   A privileged access to Chinese contemporary society

The Wenchuan Earthquake as a mediated disaster with the power and paradox of mediation offered a privileged access to a better and deeper understanding or (re) interpretation of the context that with which it began (Grossberg, 2013). With the in-between perspective, the thesis offers an integrative and fluid understanding of the disaster-media-society dynamic of China. We should start with the reading of the disaster as both an interruption and continuance of society. More specifically, it was an event that interrupted social order and structure in the sense that social is reassembled with a tentative solidarity. However it was also a process as a result of social order and structure in the sense that it reproduced the social hierarchies and division in Chinese society.

A tentative solidarity

Theoretically, modern media technologies have potential to reach everybody in the world or within a nation simultaneously and directly. However this potential is restricted by societies. As earlier mentioned, the Wenchuan

Earthquake as a mediated disaster was a rare realization of the full potential

of modern media technologies. The earthquake quickly monopolized all

means of communication, including television, radios, newspaper, and the

Internet. Meanwhile the whole nation was greatly involved, psychically or

psychologically and people were summoned together to respond to and act

against the national crisis. The spectacular unity of the media and collective

action on a mammoth scale were seldom seen in other places except China,

which provided the whole society a peek, although momentarily, to

alternative possibilities of Chinese society.

First, it was a moment of "mechanical solidarity" (Dayan & Katz, 1992),

a public ceremony where the whole nation was invited and expected to

attend. The mediated disaster not only offered shared vulnerability as cause

of collective action in a national community but also reaffirmed vitality of

the nation through the collective effervesces and action. Also it reactivated

the forgotten enthusiasm and sense of solidary that tends to wane in an

increasingly fragmental society.

The unusual cooperation and coordination presented in the disaster were

often interpreted by the party-state as a manifestation of the superiority of socialist system (or "社会主义制度优越性" in Chinese) to legitimate its leadership. As shown in the slogan of "Concentrate Resource and Do Big Thins" (or "集中力量办大事" in Chinese), the party-state presented great capacity of mobilization in the disaster relief and reconstruction. It is true that the mobilization power could not be separated from the parallel structure of Chinese society in which the media is an integral part. However there is no reason to dismiss this disaster moment as a negative case of state intervention or a mere result of the "authoritarian" force. As shown in the study, the party-state is not omnipotent as imagined but with fractions and conflicts within its power structure. The control of party-state has transited from by coercion to by "scientific" governance through engineering of consensus and sources of legitimacy (Zheng, 2008). In this case, the national sentiment was key to the success of the national mobilization, for without the voluntary participation of the society any national mobilization is doomed to fail. In other words, that the invitation of the party-state was commanding was attributed more to the accumulation and employment of national

sentiment before and during the earthquake than to "authoritarian" rule or economic means. As shown in previous chapters, the active publics constituted by the mediated disaster manifested themselves in one and another way.

In addition, the public invitation made the party-state or other powerful institutions politically vulnerable. It is true that the publicity of the mediated disaster were used or appropriated by the party-state, advertisers or other social forces for their own interests; but at the same time it exposed the vulnerability of the power and put it under great public scrutiny. In this sense the mediated disaster created a "contact zone" (Chatterjee, 2004) where the powerful forces were put in touch with the needs of society, which allowed the part-state, society and other social groups and individuals to interact intensively and differently.

In the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake, the publicity of the mediated disaster had become a moral force that every social force felt the moral obligation to put their sentiments as well as action in harmony with the disaster relief. The collective attention attracted by the disaster also imposed

a political pressure on the disaster relief to succeed. The pressure was then

transformed into collective responsibility of the reconstruction. Unlike other

cases of disasters in which reconstruction was largely left to the private

market or local governments, the reconstruction of the Wenchuan

Earthquake were supported together by the central government and 18

partner provinces[99]. If we follow Arendt (1998)'s definition of power, this

collectivity created by the mediated disaster manifested the power of

ordinary person, that is, power emerges when men and women come and act

together.

Although the mediated disaster was inevitably commemorated as a

national triumph to legitimate the leadership of the party-state or used to

promote public images of entrepreneurs or products' brands, it indeed

suggested a possibility of a tentative consensus within a national community,

as well as "subjunctive modes of culture"(Turner, 1969). In other words,

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[99] The model of reconstruction was called national counterpart aid (NCA) model (国家对口
支援). On June 11, 2008, the State Council approved the One to One Support Scheme of
Post-Wenchuan Earthquake Restoration and Reconstruction. Under this program 18
significantly 18 counterpart provinces supported affected countries in Sichuan Province. The
partner provinces were required to commit 1 per cent of their annual revenue to support t the
affected counties by providing various types of assistance in the following three years. For
more see Xu & Lu (2013).

even if the solidarity was temporary and short-lived and had no chance to be institutionalized into new norms, "at least they provoke critical awareness of the taken-for-granted and mental appraisal of alternative possibilities" (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p.20).

However it would be a mistake to think too much of "we" power. As earlier quoted, "no 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other's pain" (Sontag, 2003: 8). The mediated disaster also exposed the deep structural and social inequality between the viewing public and people in suffering as a whole.

Social divisions in "the imagined community "

The national bound hailed in the master commemorative narrative obscured social divisions that shaped the mediated disaster, which include the disparity between costal areas of China (or Eastern China for short) versus the Great West regions (or"大西部地区"in Chinese or Western China for short) as well as the urban-rural division.

In domestic context the physical distance was easily ignored, for a

nation-state as an analytic unity is often taken for granted. However the Wenchuan Earthquake exposed the historical and social construction of the distance between spectators and sufferers. It is worth noting the remoteness of affected places both in the geographical or cognitive sense was relative rather than absolute. The remoteness of affected areas is less physical than historical in terms of their positions in the national power structure. In Mao's era, most of the cities in Western China where the Wenchuan Earthquake happened were categorized as third-tie cities, which were given less priority than first-tie or second-tie cities by the nation-state. Therefore, Western China as a whole is long thought as a relatively undeveloped area in comparison to Eastern China. This historical accumulation of underdevelopment is critical to the understanding of the physical distance between spectators and sufferers repeated in the news at the emergency stage. Theoretically, due to advanced transportation, crossing over the physical space between Western China and Eastern China was not supposed to be difficult at all, while in reality in the first few days after the earthquake, as mentioned already, some of severely affected towns were completely

isolated due to blocked transportation. In China, there are five levels of roads

in terms of quality corresponding to the levels of administrative divisions,

from national highway, national road, provincial road, country road to

village road. In the affected towns or villages in Western China, their public

transportation was completely relied on village roads, whose quality was

extremely bad. Most of the towns only had a tough and rugged way to the

outside world that was often blockaded by frequent landslides even at

non-disaster moments.

In addition to the underdevelopment of public traffic, the viewing

hierarchy between areas in terms of the communication resource and media

attention further intensified the sense of remoteness related to Western China.

Compared to Eastern China, Western China is relatively indivisible in terms

of media representation, which lead Western China is social distant for the

population of Eastern China who constitute the major part of the targeted

audience of the mainstream media. Even the population of Western China is

heavily relied on the mainstream media. As a result, despite the enormous

size of China, a particular pattern of geographic concentration developed in

communication that gave inordinate power to some major cities in Eastern

China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other eastern costal cities.

The unequal distribution of media resource along the Western-Eastern

China division was intersected with the urban-rural division. In a strict sense,

there was no so called local media. Even Mianyang Daily and Mianyang

Evening could be relatively thought as local media in comparison with other

media at the national level or in non-affected cities in the study. Although

they are located in disaster areas, their locality is relative, for they are in big

cities that are distant from rural areas; for example, there is 3-hour drive

distance from Mianyang City to the Old Beichuan. In addition to the physical

distance as a result of long-term underdevelopment of public traffic, these

local media are very city-centered. More often than not, they were still not

close enough to "see" local histories of the affected towns as well as the

struggles of relocated peasants who became citizens and unemployed at the

same time. The lack of media resource and local focus together led to the

national ignorance of the history of affected areas before the earthquake and

the intense competition of these affected areas for outside attention after the

earthquake.

Although some affected areas became meaningful to the nation through the mediated disaster, a new viewing hierarchy was built among affected areas and the structural hierarchies between Western and Eastern China or urban and rural China have not been challenged in general. The untouched structure is further weaved into the vulnerability of Western and rural China and will manifest its power at another disaster moment.

Fluid media autonomy in Chinese state-market complex

The in-between perspective could also better capture the fluid media autonomy in Chinese state-market complex at disaster moments. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the current studies of Chinese media often take state and market as two mutually exclusive or independent variables in shaping the media landscape and events. The differences of media texts have been often compared and framed between policy-oriented and market-driven media in current studies, which often link the former with propaganda while the latter professionalism. However, the disaster saw the

suspension of competition and then cooperation and convergence of different forces or institutions, which greatly challenged the theories based on the state-market division.

What is more, when the party-state loosened the news control, Xinhua News Agency, CCTV and other so called "policy-driven" media with less marketization on the national level presented greater strength and professionalism than other commercialized media on the local level, offering a more impartial representation of the suffering. Higher position in the media infrastructure always means deeper integration in the broader political structure. This means the less-marketed media could be more sensitive to the party-state control but at the same time in some cases they could gain more advantage from the governments. In particular these national but less marketized media could easily to get assistance both from governmental agents and local media to get more first-hand information and privilege to approach affected areas closer and faster.

Their advantages were manifested not only in the technique advance but also the manpower in different branches. Therefore these less marketized

media presented a more broad and general scope of the disaster, compared to their marketized counterparts. Some of the marketized news media, such as the Straits Herald (Appendix VIII) and the Mianyang Evening (Chapter 5 of this thesis), were relatively narcissistic in the sense that they geared to those on the receiving end of communication, or in other words, the targeted audience in their own home cities.

Meanwhile the shaping forces of the party-state or the market should be understood in relation to other structural factors, for example territorial tensions within the power structure including national-local division, urban-rural division, and tension between Western China an Eastern China. In short at the disaster moment especially when the party-state lifted the media control, the differences of the media representation could not fully captured in the categorical division between policy-oriented or market-driven media. It is not denying the validity of these categories in conceptualizing the shaping forces of the media landscape. Instead this thesis offers a more fluid understanding of the state-marked complex that could be more sensitive to different cases and junctures.

Fluid boundary between audience and actor, spectator and sufferers

Related to this fluid understanding of the state-market complex is a more diversified and complicated understanding of audiences/users as participants and spectators and suffers. The active public should be in plural form, which not only manifest themselves in the action on spot or action in the distance invoked by sympathy or anger but also in rumors and jokes involved in the making of a media event. In particular, these grassroots texts are neither irrational/psychological responses, nor naturally rebellious protests. They are actually effective ways to negotiate the meaning of a disaster in response to the mediated disaster. In this sense they were also sufferers who shared sense of vulnerability and humanity with people in affected areas.

The combination of textual analyses and ethnography further problematized the relationship between spectators and sufferers. Without building a simple cause-effect relationship, the study shows how the territorial hierarchy was reproduced through specific perceptions of the disaster as well as the relationship between spectators and sufferer that were

favored and promoted. This perception was closely intertwined with the disaster relief and reconstruction in the sense that the asymmetrical and incomplete media representation was a part of the clashes of realities in disaster relief, maintaining the structural bias or inequality in the contemporary society.

Therefore by showing a complex picture of the disaster as a particular conjuncture in contemporary China, this study offers a privileged access to China with its unique potential and problems. In addition, this study could be relevant to other mediated disasters in different contexts.

6.3 Beyond the Wenchuan Earthquake

The problematic of mediation is not a new topic in media-disaster studies, however this study with an integrative approach and an in-between perspective offers a more flexible and fluid framework to study different cases in both national and global context.

In epistemological sense, by denying a grand theory of mediated disasters, the study takes the radical contextuality as a starting point to go

beyond the "either-or" frame shared by the approaches of media events and media spectacle. The meaning of a mediated disaster could not be fixed or negotiated in advance, for example, national integration or segmentation (Dayan, 2008). Their meanings are forming, maintained and challenged throughout the process among different forces and social groups at different stages. This approach is concerned fundamentally with the interaction between different social forces in particular context, which could capture well the open-endedness of social practices as well as "the embedding of practice in wider relations of power" (Couldry, 2012: 35)

In methodological sense, this approach integrates technological and institutional aspects of media as well media effects, which is based on the multiple-media realty, a fluid understanding of power as result of social interaction, a deconstructed understanding of state and society, as well as a diversified definition of audience. In addition, the combination of textual analysis and ethnography shows an alternative to avoid semiotic determinism.

Despite the uniqueness of the Wenchuan Earthquake as a particular

conjuncture of Chinese society, the study of this case could be relevant in studying other cases in domestic and international context.

In the global context, the analyses of the Wenchuan Earthquake could be generalized into other context in the sense that how media representation are organized around the definition of a disaster as well as the relations between suffers and spectators, which are crucial to the ownership of a disaster which different social groups are competing for. While in the domestic context, the case of the Wenchuan Earthquake could be seen as a reference point to see how the hierarchy of different disaster events was, is and will be constructed. In addition, the introduction of territorial dimension in liking two ends of mediation-induced action could be applied to other disaster events or media events in general.

6.4　Limitations of the study and future development

However the study also faces some limitations, which need to be addressed in future studies. As an individual study, the study could not exhaust all instant and important media texts of disasters. For example, the study does

not include texts from radios, for these audio texts could not be saved like written or visual texts produced by other media technologies. Due to the difficulty of being studied, radios have been undertheorized in the media-disaster studies, however it is actually a very effective means that the affected and isolated population could use to get the information of outside supports at the emergency stage.

Another limitation of this study is the on-site ethnographic research was relatively shorter, which could limit the depth and comprehensiveness of the study. In the future studies, a longer-term commitment should be made to have a chronic record of the affected population and then a deeper understanding of the influence of the mediated visibility on the affected population.

The lack of historical and comparative perspective also limits the significance of the study. Therefore future studies could be conducted with the comparisons between different mediated disasters in different time-space within or across the national boundary. More specifically, within the national boundary, historical changes could be examined by comparing between the

Wenchuan Earthquake and the Great Tangshan Earthquake, an earthquake

that was less publicized but happened in a major city of Eastern China. Also,

to have a more subtle and nuanced understanding of the structural disparity

between areas, future studies could conduct comparisons with 1998 Great

Flood that involved the send-tie cities along Yangtze River; or 2003 SARS, a

man-made disaster that involved Beijing and Guangzhou, the most

media-saturated cities; or 2010 Yushu Earthquake that involved minority

population with multiple religions. Beyond the national boundary,

comparisons could also be conducted between the Wenchuan Earthquake

and 2005 Hurricane Katrina, or 2011 Japanese Tsunami to see different

relationships between media and society at disaster moments. Also the

presence of international media attention should be taken into account to

capture well the disaster-media-society dynamic in the global age.

Meanwhile, quantitative data collected from questionnaires and surveys,

could also help generalize the findings based on qualitative studies. A refined

quantitative research could help explore the possible correlation between

media reports of distant suffering and the intensity of responses and action.

In general, those limitations could not be easily overcome by a single study. The depth and comprehensiveness of the studies about the mediated disasters could not be achieved without a group of studies with different perspectives and a long-term commitment. Except for the combination of different approaches, the cooperation between different researchers across national boundaries is also crucial to capture the complexities of the media-disaster-society dynamic. As does in disaster relief, disaster research also requires the solidarity among different groups of people (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2002).

Toward media literacy

Practically, this study provides valuable sociocultural information and perspective for the disaster relief and reconstruction in the sense it not only shows the great shaping power of the spectacle of suffering but also it problematizes the inherent bias, incompleteness and ambiguity of the mediated visibility. The visibility of suffering is too important to be left to governments. Neither to the media or the publics. Both the power and

problems of mediated visibility of a disaster should become "common sense"

for the whole society through the development of media literacy.

In fact, the party-state and local governments did learn lessons from the

Wenchuan Earthquake or other disasters as shown in some changes of the

disaster relief of the Lushan earthquake. For example, the disaster relief was

led by the local government instead of the central government as usual,

which was called "the territorial principle of disaster relief" (or "属地原则"

in Chinese)[100], showing governments had paid attention to negative effects of

the ignorance of outside assistance of local situations in previous disasters.

So did the media. In the Lushan earthquake, the state media was more

sensitive to the incompleteness of news and kept reminding the publics that

the capital town was not the most damaged place and suggested the publics

not rush to the affected areas. Correspondingly non-professional groups or

individuals did not rush to the affected area without any preparation and

training as usual.

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[100] For more see the report on the Xinhua Net, "Progresses: 7 Years after the Wenchuan Earthquake", http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/sjxw/2015-05/12/c_127793040.htm (Accessed on 12 May 2015)

However history repeated itself in some aspects. The disparity as well as inequality between different areas in terms of vulnerability had not attracted sufficient public attention. In reality, this recent earthquake saw more hostility and schisms between governments and society as well as the people in suffering. Without sufficient reflections and public debate on these problems, the society will never learn the lesson from the great lost of the previous disasters including the Wenchuan Earthquake. This requires the development of media literacy among a more broad population. As the media is increasingly involved in the disaster relief and reconstruction, responsible and reflective social practices are impossible without full awareness of with ambivalence and non-transparence of the mediated visibility as well the implication and consequence of their action base on the mediation.

In this sense, the study could provide relevant resources for media literacy, to enhance public awareness of the power and bias of media representation, and to teach the public how to read carefully and critically, and act rationally in disaster relief. The development of the media literacy needs concerted efforts of governments, the media as well as the publics.

With the critical engagement of mediation, disaster relief and reconstruction

could be more productive to make full use of the outside resource without

undermining the local history, culture, infinitives and participation.

To conclude, disasters bring great damages to our society but at the same

time resources to imagine alternative social formations. As Arendt puts,

"What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people

involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them

has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them."

(Arendt, 1958:53) Arendt used the metaphor of table to describe the

necessity of connecting and separating people at the same time, "to live

together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between

those who have in common, as a table is located between those who sit

around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the

same time" (Arendt, 1958:52). In this sense, disasters should be taken as

precious chances to invite us to see the shared vulnerability and the

irreducible otherness between different populations within the national

boundary. The media-disaster studies could offer a privileged chance to

invite us to exist the everyday world and reexamine the status quo as well the

alternative possibility.

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Appendix I   National media in the Wenchuan Earthquake

People's Daily:	The first special issues and special website for an emergency;
Xihuan News Agency:	The fastest time to release domestic disaster news The most journalists sent to cover the same event
CCTV:	The first non-stop program (Wenchuan Earthquake Special) lasting for 32 days The most reporters sent to the affected areas

Complied with the sources from *China Publishers Yearbook 2009* and *Television Files*

(Liang, 2008)

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Appendix II   Definitions of disaster versus accident

Words	Disaster	Accident
Oxford Dictionary of English	• a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life. • an event or fact that has unfortunate consequences: a string of personal disasters	• an unfortunate incident that happens unexpectedly and unintentionally, typically resulting in damage or injury • an event that happens by chance or that is without apparent or deliberate cause
Merriam-Webster	• something (such as a flood, tornado, fire, plane crash, etc.) that happens suddenly and causes much suffering or loss to many people • a complete or terrible failure	• a sudden event (such as a crash) that is not planned or intended and that causes damage or injury • an event that is not planned or intended

Appendix III   Power structure involved in regulating media in China

Political Structure	Government Structure
Political Bureau	State Council (SC)
- Publicity Department of the CCP Central Committee (usually known as Department of Propaganda) **International Communication Office of the CCP Central Committee**	- Ministries: - Ministry of Culture; - Ministry of Industry and Information Technology; - Ministry of Commerce - Ministry of State Security - Organizations directly under SC: - State Administration of Radio, Film and Television; - General Administration of Press and Publication; - General Administration of Press and Publication (National Copyright Administration) - Institutions: - Xinhua News Agency **Information Office of the State Council**(with another name "International Communication Office of the CCP Central Committee")

Complied with the sources from http://english.gov.cn/links.htm#4; http://www.gov.cn/gjjg/2005-08/01/content_18608.htm (Retrieved on 6 February 2012) and Zheng (2007)'s edition with some adaptation.

Appendix IV   Chinese characters of "难"
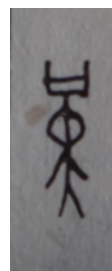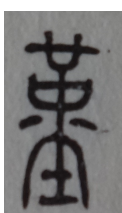
Tradition Chinese   Simple Chinese
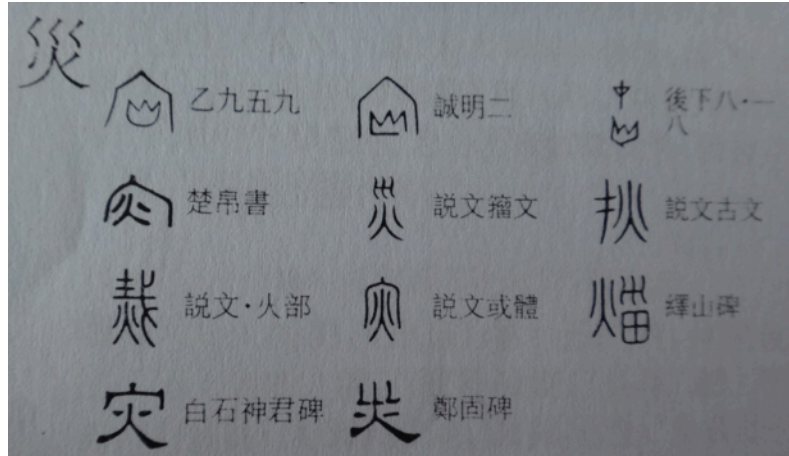
難   难

Oracle Born Description of "堇" ("难/難"'s section header)

From Xu, Z., 1988. Oracle Bone Scrpt Dictionary, Sichuan Cishu Publisher, Chengdu, p. 1463. (徐中舒, 1988. 甲骨文字典. 四川辞书出版社, 成都.)

Appendix V   Etymology of Chines character "灾"

Variants of "灾" :

from Chinese Dictionary (2010), p.2347 (汉語大字典编辑委员会, 2010. 汉语大字典. 四

川辞书出版社, 成都; 武汉.)

Traditional Chinese   Simple Chinese

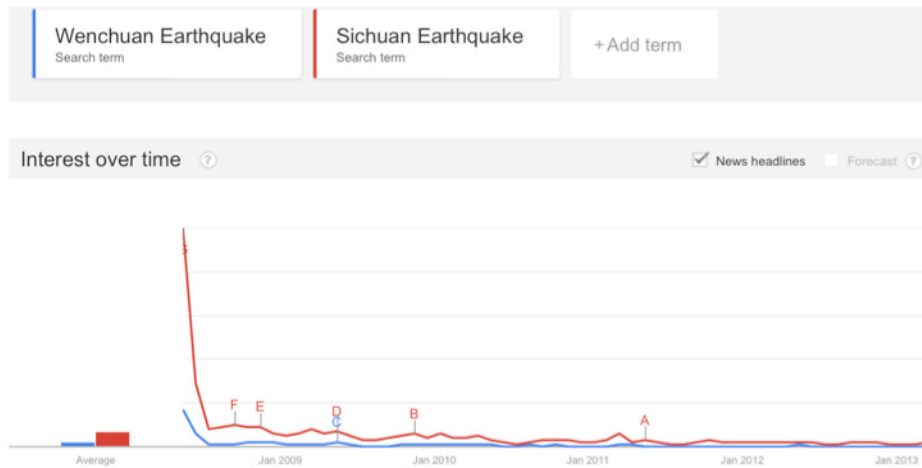灾   灾

Oracle Born Description:

From Xu, Z., 1988. Oracle Bone Scrpt Dictionary, Sichuan Cishu Publisher, Chengdu, p.

1362, 1230, &1117. (徐中舒, 1988. 甲骨文字典. 四川辞书出版社, 成都.)

Appendix VI   Google's search trends data

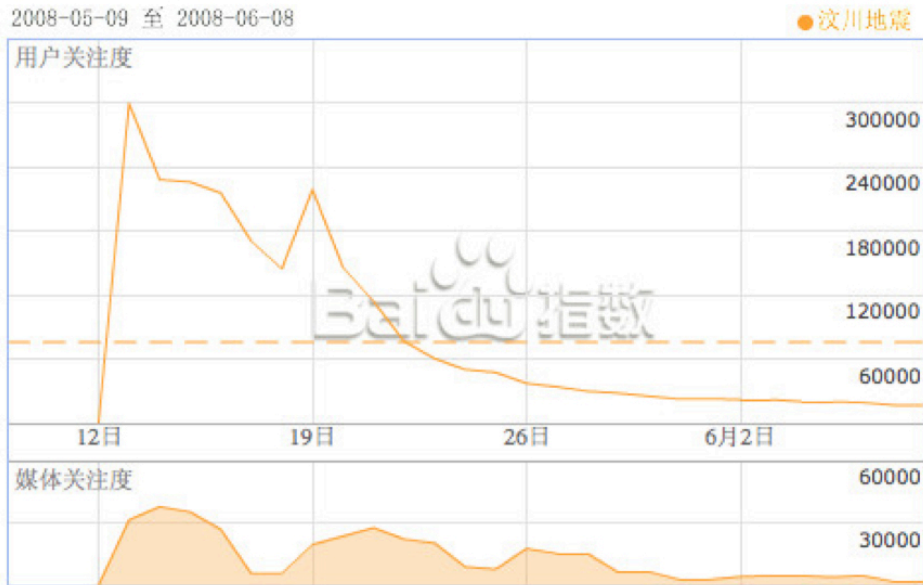"The Wenchuan Earthquake" and "Sichuan Earthquake" from May

2008-June 2013[101]

(source:http://www.google.com.sg/trends/explore#q=Wenchuan%20Earthqu

ake%2C%20Sichuan%20Earthquake&date=5%2F2008%2059m&cmpt=q ;

Accessed on 10 June 2014)

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[101] The time span chosen excludes the possible interference of another big earthquake that
happened in Sichuan in April in 2013.

Appendix VII   Baidu's[102] search trends data

"汶川地震" in Chinese in May 2008

2008-05-09 至 2008-06-08   ●汶川地震

用户关注度

300000
240000
180000
120000
60000

12日   19日   26日   6月2日

媒体关注度   60000
30000

(Source:http://index.baidu.com/main/word.php?type=1&area=0&time=200805-200808&word=%E3%EB%B4%A8%B5%D8%D5%F0%2C%B1%B1%BE%A9%B0%C2%D4%CB%BB%E1; Accessed on 20 October 2013)

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[102] Baidu is the biggest search engine in China now, which has 63% shares in China's search market.

Appendix VIII   Summary on the Straits Herald's Earthquake reports

(13 May to 18 May 2008)

Topics	Frequency	Percentage
Fujian in Action	156	61.4%
Fujian People in Sichuan	20	8.0%
Taiwan People in Action	47	18.5%
Taiwan People in Sichuan	11	4.3%
Sichuan People in Fujian	15	5.9%
Others	5	1.9%
Reports (News and Pictures) whose news source is from the Straits Herald itself	254	100%

Appendix IX   Rumours

Sample **1**

PEOPLE.CN—Chinese Earthquake Administration announced on 12

May 2018, there was a 2-magnitude earthquake in parts of the Beijing

city at 14:30 on 12 May. And it also issues a warning of a

2-6-magnitude earthquake in parts of the Beijing. Please beware and

prepare.

（来自"人民网"的消息:"中国地震局刚刚发布公告称,北京时间08

年05月12日14点30分左右北京局部地区发生2级轻微地震,

另警告在08年05月12日晚上22点至24点时间段北京局部地区

还会有2-6级地震,望大家提前做好预防措施。）

Sample 2

News: At the beginning of PRC, Li Siguang forecasted there would

be four great earthquakes with 60 years, which will happen in

Tangshan, Taiwan, Sichuan and Fujian. Three of them happened and

the last one is in Fujian.

消息:新中国初期，李四光预测中国60年内将有4次特大地震，预测地
点分别是在唐山、台湾、四川、福建，现在前三个地方都应验了，还有
一个地方没有发生，就是在福建.

Appendix X   Formula for forecast rumors

Authorized sources + disaster phenomena + disaster trend + exact
time and location + the exaggerated extent of disaster + reasons for
an absent official announcement + warning.

"完全形态的预报谣言,其公式为:"1.权威的消息来源——2.灾难迹象——3．灾难趋势——4.精确的时间地点——5.被放大的灾难程度——6.未被正式公布的原因——7.警示语" (Shi, 2008:29).

Appendix XI   Jokes

Joke sample 1

5.12 大地震给我们造成的伤痛,语言难以形容,心头一直堵得慌。因为种种原因，我们大多数人，除了捐点钱，不能给灾区人民做点什么更为实际的事情。因此,关注灾区的一切消息便成了习惯，飞哥偶尔在网上看到一些灾区朋友自己发的帖子，结果，用四川话说：笑喷了！于平凡处见伟大，现摘录部分如下，让我们共同为灾区人民祈福吧！！！同时,希望大家添加新内容。这也是一种心理疗伤方式，对灾民，对我们都是如此。（source: Xinsuotuo Forum 新 索 兰 托 论 坛 . http://www.xcar.com.cn/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=11982130 posted at 07:33 on 18 April 2010 Retrieved on 20 April 2014.

Joke sample 2: An innocent dog

成都商报的编辑在编发地震新闻时看到"地震爆发前狗狗狂吠拖出房内主人至室外"的稿子，非常气愤地和同事投诉说地震时他家狗狗居然还在打鼾，于是下班后回家把他家狗暴打一顿。(source: Baidu Forum (百度贴吧) http://tieba.baidu.com/p/392549395, posted on at 10:31 on 30 May 2008; Retrieved on 25 April 2014.)

Joke sample 3: An interview of toad migration

全国各地出现大量蛤蟆，弄的人心惶惶。记者现场采访了几个蛤蟆

记者：请问你们为什么大量出行？

蛤蟆甲：繁殖期到了，出来找对象。

记者：这么多出来一起找？

蛤蟆甲：现在公多母少啊兄弟。

记者：请问你们为什么大量出行？

蛤蟆乙：夏天来了，换个地方住，那边环境好，凉快。

记者：这么多出来一起找？都换吗？

蛤蟆乙：原来的洞涨价了，买不起。

记者： ......

蛤蟆乙：不是现场直播吧？这要是上了电视别忘了给我打上马赛克。

出了什么事我可付不起责任。

结论：本次蛤蟆大迁徙系其内部矛盾，与地震无关。

记者：请问你们为什么大量出行？

蛤蟆丙：我们刚从四川迁徙此地，吓死老子了，差点全被埋了。

记者：......

记者：请问你们为什么大量出行？

蛤蟆丙：前段时间不是闹地震了么？我们组织大伙出来给四川的青蛙们献血的。

记者：......

(source: Xinsuotuo Forum 新索兰托论坛.

http://www.xcar.com.cn/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=11982130 posted at 07:33 on 18 April 2010 Retrieved on 20 April 2014)

Joke sample 4: fishing

我的家乡在四川丹棱，据在县城上班的同学说，一位大伯在山上水库钓鱼，当时刚好扯到一条大鱼，鱼还没拉出水面，地震发生了。顿时山在摇，水在冒，大伯见状高呼一声："不对哦！快跑！出龙了！"(source: a personal blog of ID: Morer,

http://baby525.blog.163.com/blog/static/27831008200851383775285/. posted at 20:37 on 13 June 2018.Retrieved on 21 April 2014.)

Joke sample 5: A violent washing machine

地震时我老妈一个人在遂宁，地震后快半个小时终于跟她联系上，她说："刚才洗衣机甩洗衣服，我在耍电脑，桌上的瓶子掉地上砸烂了，立柜的镜子也掉地上砸碎了，我的鼠标也掉地上。你给我

买的啥子洗衣机哦，甩个衣服整恁个大阵仗！" (source: a personal

blog of ID: Morer,

http://baby525.blog.163.com/blog/static/278310082008513837 5285/.

posted at 20:37 on 13 June 2018.Retrieved on 21 April 2014.)

Joke sample 6: Scary things

比地震更可怕的是余震，比余震更可怕的是预报余震，比预报余

震更可怕的是预报了余震却一直不震。(source: a personal blog of

ID: no3q，

http://hi.baidu.com/awxvaqxbxknstwr/item/98c04cd8a2879e1e21e25

010. Posted at 17:12 on 5 June 2008. Retrieved on 21 April 2014)

Joke sample 7: Sleeping

六至七级余震《通告》的当夜，朋友来短信问："出来避难不？"

正在睡觉的老公回复："就在家头睡，地震了，记着来救我！"

(source: a personal blog of ID: no3q. posted at 17:12 on 5 June 2008.

http://hi.baidu.com/awxvaqxbxknstwr/item/98c04cd8a2879e1e21e25

010. Retrieved on 21 April 2014)

Joke sample 8: A couplet

上联：八级地震毫无预报，延误几万同胞性命。下联：六级余震

信口开河，折腾千万市民睡觉。横批：横顺不准(source: a personal

blog of ID: no3q，

http://hi.baidu.com/awxvaqxbxknstwr/item/98c04cd8a2879e1e21e25

010. Posted at 17:12 on 5 June 2008. Retrieved on 21 April 2014)

Joke sample 9: Kebab

有个成都女孩和朋友一路出去，走到烧烤摊前说的，"先吃点烧烤，不然遭埋起了咋撑 100 多个小时哇……"source: a person blog of ID:泪的舞蹈，

http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_52cdf9450100998b.html posted on 2008-05-29 10:20:27; Accessed on 25 April 2014

Joke sample10: Mah-jongg

四个婆婆在打麻将。突然发现桌子在摇。婆婆们二话不说，分头各自去找了些硬纸板，垫在桌子下面。然后坐下来继续打！ ＝＝! 估计是重庆市最强悍的几个老太婆了. (source: Xinsuotuo Forum 新索兰托论坛.

http://www.xcar.com.cn/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=11982130 posted at 07:33 on 18 April 2010 Accessed on 20 April 2014)

Appendix XII   Motifs of the disaster relief museum

Motifs	Content
Forward: 特大地震 举世震惊 Devastating Earthquake Shocking the Whole World	The great loss brought about by the devastating earthquake
Part I: Strong Leadership 坚强领导 心系人民 Strong Leadership Cares for The People	The effective leadership of the party-state, especially the members of the Politburo Standing Committee then.
Part II: Disaster Relief 争分夺秒 全力营救 Racing Against the Time and Rescuing with Full Strength	Performance of national rescue teams: PLA, Polices, Medical team, Journalists, Scientists.
Part III: Self-Rescue 临危不惧 奋起自救 Fearless when facing the crisis and Self-Rescue	Performance of local party systems and governments and the average person in disaster areas
Part IV: Social Solidarity 八方支援 共克时艰 Support form everywhere Facing the crisis together	Supports form non-disaster areas, including local party systems and governments and common people.
Part V: Reconstruction 恢复生产 重建家园 Restarting Production, Rebuilding home	Plans and process of reconstruction
Part VI: National Sprit 伟大精神 不竭动力 Great Sprit, Inexhaustible Power	Heroes: rescue team members who died in disaster relief; local officials who had outstanding performance with great personal loss; teenagers who saved their friends.