

Images of China and the Chinese People in *China Revealed* (2006): A Semiotic Film Analysis of a Discovery Atlas Documentary

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates historical images of the Middle Kingdom in the West from the ancient Greek to the contemporary era. These images of China as viewed from a Western perspective have undergone a huge transformation over time, which to some extent reflects transitions in Western society itself. However, an analysis of historical resources shows that certain patterns recur consistently to form a complex construction of China. For instance, when we look at modern Western television documentaries on the topic of China, the frequently adopted patterns of the past centuries still remain. Indeed, technological developments in combining image and sound have intensified the role of these recurrent patterns more than words and paintings in terms of shaping perceptions.

Due to the limited scope of this research, the dissertation will mainly concentrate on analyzing one representative documentary from the Discovery Channel, using the semiotic method of film analysis to draw out relevant patterns and themes. However, this research topic could be of great benefit to those with a real interest in understanding the full range of images and constructions used by the West to interpret the Middle Kingdom in terms of visual media representations, and the topic would therefore repay more extensive investigation in the future.

Key words: Middle Kingdom, image, pattern, China-image model, film semiotics, signifier, signified, symbol, code, myth, montage, mise-en-scene, sequence, paradigmatic, narration, camera position, camera distance, sound, light, dubbing

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The Western perception of the Middle Kingdom has changed along with Western historical development over the last two milleniums. In the early Roman and Greek times, the thriving silk trade over the Silk Route brought the presence of the “silk land” into Western knowledge. The Middle Kingdom was positioned as a remote, mysterious and wealthy land located in the oriental world far away from the West. In the Medieval Era, the writings of Marco Polo constructed the Middle Kingdom as a land of uncountable wealth with a wise beloved emperor. The Kingdom was so beautifully portrayed as an earthly paradise that many Europeans were not convinced of its existence. Attracted by this oriental fairy land and motivated by the huge profits generated by the silk trade, Western merchants flocked to the legendary kingdom. In the late fourteenth century, due to the rise of a threatening Islamic power across Central Europe, the Silk Route once again sank into obscurity.

At the end of fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus discovered a new continent, which symbolized a beginning of the era of exploration and a new chapter in European history. A marine route to Asia was also found, by which a succession of missionaries travelled to the Chinese Empire hoping to convert the locals to Christianity. They brought a new perspective from which to observe this vast land, exploring its traditions, customs, philosophy and system of governance. During the era of imperial expansion, owing to the first industrial revolution, Europe was in a position to dramatically enhance its productivity and become the most powerful continent in the world. To further develop the economy, a more open and democratic political environment was required, and so most European countries overthrew feudal rule. The Chinese Empire, on the contrary, remained in the blind arrogance of complete isolation, and failed to notice the huge transformation taking place in Europe. Subsequently, the country’s stagnation led to a state of decline, and it was occupied by Western imperial powers. In contrast with its glorious reputation in the

early days, the period of the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century was an era of humiliation for China.

At the beginning of the last century, China contributed to the global war against Fascism by fighting against Japanese fascists, for which it was highly applauded in the West. After the Communist party took over governmental control, however, China became seen no longer as an ally, but as a threatening enemy to the Western world. Looking back over these varying Western images of China during different times, China does indeed emerge as a “chameleon”, as the Oxford professor Raymond Dawson has argued.

However, despite these frequent changes in the Western idea of China, there are several conceptions of the Middle Kingdom that have remained in place from the very beginning until the present day - for instance, the acknowledgment of the country's ancient history, unique traditions and cultural diversity. The technological development of photography and TV encouraged a more visual representation of this ancient mysterious country. Thus, the comprehensive historical resources, when combined with these contemporary images form a complicated and dynamic model which the modern Western population can use to construct an idea of China.

The Western image mix of China no longer only exists on paper, but nowadays also appears frequently in visual media and other new media. In the past, information about China mainly reached the Western public in print - books, newspapers and magazines. Ever since the invention of television in the late nineteen twenties, however, the world has undergone a huge transformation due to the ever-growing exposure to information. Thanks to the increase in domestic televisions, the exchange of information grows ever more convenient and less time-consuming. The public no longer even have to leave their houses to learn about new changes, but can simply acquire all the information they want by reading newspapers or watching television programmes. In recent years, the fourth media, the internet, has achieved an even more dominant position in the process of information exchange. In this

dissertation, in addition to the investigation of historical Western images of China, the images presented in contemporary visual media will be attentively examined.

Having established that visual images of China will be one of the primary sources to be looked at in this paper, a specific media format must be chosen for the purposes of deeper analysis. Documentary film-making aims to document reality and provide factual information to target audiences, and is usually broadcast through television networks to reach as large an audience as possible. The images in the documentaries are more representative, owing to the property of authenticity this medium strives for. In the sphere of documentary film-making, the Discovery Channel is no doubt one of the market leaders among private broadcast stations; as a consequence, Discovery documentaries can usually guarantee a high reception ratio and can reach a large target audience via an extensive network. Therefore, *China Revealed*, a Discovery documentary which aired in 2006, has been selected for this dissertation as a major research target following the analysis of the historical images of China in Western popular culture. In this case study, a semiotic analytical method will be adopted to decode messages and interpret the significations of each significant sequence in detail.

More perhaps than any other medium, visual images are saturated with symbols and codes, which are received and interpreted as part of the consumption of cultural products. In all these forms, the encoded messages carry symbols which can be identified and accepted by the individuals who share the same cultural map. In terms of Stuart Hall's cultural circuit model, it is indicated that cultural production is a process of message encoding, whilst cultural consumption is a process of decoding symbols.¹ In this case, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of this documentary's filming perspectives, we shall take the American culture and ideology into consideration, as the Discovery documentary is evidently imbued with a distinctive American style.

¹ Hall, Stuart 1980: 20 This view is based on the cultural studies from the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, a fundamental representative figure of the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies. His view of the encoding and decoding process has been developed into cultural models. His approach to textual analysis demonstrates the reception process from the audience's perspective, which is decided by their unique cultural background. The cultural circuit model contains five categories: production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity.

In the contemporary era, China's rapid economic development has enormously surprised the Western World, and ensured the country's return to international attention. As a complex, distant and often paradoxical country, China is now being observed more broadly and deeply than before. In accordance with the political transformation of the Western world, images of China are primarily divided into two categories: they are either soothing or threatening. When the political climate between the West and China eases, the soothing scenario appears in official speeches, news reportage, academic conferences, etc. The former New York Times correspondent James Mann described China as follows:

“Don't be short-sighted. Keep your perspective. Things in China are headed in the right direction. Look at the remarkable changes on the streets. China's economy is thriving; the Chinese people are getting richer. The country's rapid economic growth will lead to far-reaching political change as well. Eventually increasing trade and prosperity will bring liberation and democracy to China.”²

From his words, we can see the process of generating a positive image of China is based on an optimistic perception of the country and its people. By contrast, the upheaval scenario is far more harsh and critical. Its proponents claim that China will be under despotic one-party rule for a very long time, and that “China is headed for some sort of disaster, such as an economic collapse or political disintegration, because it won't be able to maintain political stability while continuing on its current course.”³ Historically, the images of the Middle Kingdom transformed across different eras, and for the time being, the Western image of China can be seen as a dynamic and complex weaving between these two scenarios. In the end, we have to conclude that these images will never be fixed and immutable.

1.2 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore contemporary media representations of China in Western documentary films. *China Revealed*, a Discovery documentary broadcast in 2006, is selected as a case study to represent other documentary films, due to the large audience of the Discovery Channel. Semiotic film analysis reveals how these

² Mann, James 2007:1-2

³ Mann, James 2007: 7

dynamic images are leveraged by the modern visual media. As a result, we will find out if historically stereotyped images are still being implemented in contemporary Western media. If the reality is that these images are indeed still prevalent, then we shall move on to consider exactly how these images are presented to the spectators – do the makers of the documentary give the images the same signification as in historical times, or do the images take on new connotations under new circumstances?

Personally, I chose this specific research topic because I strongly believe that research into Western images of China is a very meaningful, important and interesting field for further academic study in general, and for cross-subject research within media and communications studies in particular. In recent years, China has attracted worldwide attention due to its fast economic development. Some images of the country in the West still resemble those that existed hundreds of years ago, while some new images emerge in the media in accordance with underlying political intentions and social cognitions. Therefore, these images will never be exactly the same, but always dynamic, multiple and diverse. It may also prove instructive for the Chinese to see how their ancient country's image evolves in Western media representations, to learn about how Westerners perceive "they / theirs"⁴. In the meantime, these images reflect a Western cultural sense of "us / ours". Given the limitations of time and scope in this dissertation, I hope that the images of China across all the different Western media formats, such as news coverage, commercial movies and the internet, can also be explored more deeply in the future.

1.3 Literature review

1.3.1 Western images of the Middle Kingdom

Ever since the ancient Greek and Roman times, China has been known to the West under different names, from "Sina" in the ancient Greek times, "Cathay" in the

⁴ Said, Edward W. 2003: 54 "us" and "they" were referred to define the arbitrary concept of mental designation. It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours".

Medieval, to the “Middle Kingdom” and “Chinese Empire” in the Eras of Exploration and Expansion, and finally to China in the contemporary age. Generally speaking, Western images of China can be classified into three categories. In the early times of the Greek and Roman Empire, the West had a vague image of China as a rich and mysterious silk land. From approximately 1250 to 1750, the Middle Kingdom had a positive reputation in the West as a great Empire which possessed great wealth and an open society, as described in Juan Mendoza's *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof*, Matteo Ricci's *China in the Sixteenth Century* and Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *The General History of China*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, China was much despised by the rising European powers. During this time period, China was alienated through Western images; to draw on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, here we can see the West differentiating itself from the Chinese “other”. Towards the end of the last century, China's rise threatened the West, as it is extremely populous and consumes a large amount of resources, surpassing Western demand. All in all, the transformations of the images are highly connected with social and political changes in the West. Rather than categorizing images in light of China's own social development, I will classify them according to the major trends in the historical development of the West. The historical Western images of China are sufficiently complex and broad as to provide an abundant resource for depicting China in the contemporary media. Of course, the world is still changing and developing, and the media coverage of China is also once again shifting its focus, to protect Western interests.

1.3.2 Documentary film for television – infotainment

As a medium composed of a series of moving pictures, film is a powerful way to communicate a message. We have all encountered popular metaphors of film as a “language”, a “visual dream”, a “window to the world” and so forth. Film is considered to be a very essential form of art, of popular culture, which should entertain and educate simultaneously. When the film projector was invented in the late nineteenth century, film was a silent medium. Later, in the twenties, sound was integrated into film. In the nineteen sixties, color television became popular in the American

household, and natural color was brought into the world of motion pictures. The films produced for the 'big screen' started to be re-broadcast on television, and by the 1980s documentary film-making was a thriving industry.

The American television networks are mostly privately owned, whereas in most European countries, the media organizations are public. This means that US television aligns its service to commercial interest, while the BBC (the nationalized British Broadcasting Corporation), for example, prioritizes public service. Thus, documentaries produced by different production companies vary as to style and perspective. However, no matter what style they adopt, documentaries are supposed to be informative, educative and, of utmost importance, interesting. According to the Roper Starch Global Consumer Survey conducted in 1995, "educational" was rated as the second most important quality for a television programme (the first was "interesting").

The notion of public service broadcasting rests on the idea of education; as a consequence, early documentary programmes produced in the UK were more educative than their American counterparts. In the early 1950s in the States, educational programme production was seen as very low-status. "By 1956, there were only two educational stations, mostly broadcasting British programmes and Canadian broadcasting Corporation programmes."⁵ However, the success of the Discovery Channel and History Channel has completely altered the situation. The Discovery Channel was founded in 1987 by John Hendricks, with the aim of creating programmes which offered both education and entertainment. The Channel relies heavily on various documentaries, which are produced by Discovery itself, other production agencies, or co-produced with other media partners. The reason I chose a Discovery documentary as a research theme is that the Channel delivers high quality, accessible factual programming which is engaging, entertaining and stimulating. In addition, the Discovery programs are screened in a large area of the world and are able to reach millions of viewers. According to Taylor's research,

⁵ Creeber, Glan 2009:137

“Discovery is distributed world-wide in 60 territories and in Europe it reaches over 11 million homes”.⁶

1.4 Research method

The studies of Semiotics was introduced in the early twentieth century by the *avant gard* Swiss linguistics professor, Ferdinand de Saussure, who argued that language was made up of signs, and that language cognition was a process of interpreting signs. According to Saussure, language is structured by the signs with which we can communicate. We live in a world full of signs. As we grow, we learn how to decode all these signs and what they signify in reality. What is more, if the structure of a language system can be investigated and discovered, therefore logically other forms of communication, like film or television, can be understood in the same way as a language.

With the work of Roland Barthes, based primarily on the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics began to be viewed as an independent social science. The method of semiology has been widely adopted for the analysis of signs, images, texts and symbols. In semiology, a sign consists of two parts: the signifier, a vehicle to express the sign, and the signified, what a sign means for us. The signifieds or concepts in our minds are shaped by the signifiers that our language provides for us to think and talk with. The relationship between a signifier and a signified, however, is arbitrary, for our perceptions of the signs are largely shaped by our cultures and dominant ideologies. As John Fiske argued, “the signified is determined by our culture, not by some external natural reality”.⁷

If we accept that the connection between a signifier and signified can be shared by people who come from a similar culture, then we cannot help asking ourselves whether one signifier can denote only one signified. Barthes named the mixture of denotations and connotations encoded in media messages the “Myth”.⁸ Bignell

6 Taylor, Joyce 1997: 55

7 Fiske, John 1987:23

8 This concept of „mythology“ in terms of film semiotics was first put forward by Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies*, published in 1973.

explains the term, "Myth here refers to ways of thinking about people, products, places, or ideas which are structured to send particular messages to the reader or viewer of the text."⁹ In other words, the myth is a kind of new system used on purpose to lead to certain political, cultural or social messages, in order to set up a new connotation system. This new system represents a particular political view or social change which can be perceived and shared by a group of people - that is to say, an ideology. As Bignell argues, "The dominant ideology is subject to change as the economic and political balance of power changes."¹⁰ The mythic significations attached to the existing signs have already generated denotations aiming to accomplish the mission of cultural consumption: to promote the dominant ideology.

Semiology can also be used to approach image-based language (photography) or image-based media (advertisement, film and television). The British film theorist Peter Wollen and the French film theorist Christian Metz applied the theory of semiology to analyze the various levels of films: denotation or connotation, and broader ideologies, codes and myth at play, as "Film makes reference to a real word in a symbolic manner."¹¹ Semiotics has been applied as a research methodology to analyze film ever since; film is understood as a compound system consisting of different sub layers in a "singular semiotic system"¹². Semiotics, once incorporated into film research, enabled theorists to systematically analyze a film from a scientific perspective. A handbook from James Monaco describes how to read a film as more than a pure cultural product for entertainment by reading the film language and decoding messages which are made up of images, sound, light and other significant elements.¹³ Every film "is composed of a story that is narrated in a particular way, a mise-en-scene in a special style, a way of shooting and editing that is especially designed for this film and perhaps an extra-pictorial layer that also has its very special qualities".¹⁴

9 Bignell, Jonathan 2002: 16

10 Bignell, Jonathan 2002: 24

11 Kishore, Valicha 1988: 24

12 Metz, Christian 1974: 56

13 Monaco, James 2009: 170

14 Peters, Jan M. 1981: 67

Each individual film has its own unique system of signs, a mixture of narrative, staging, cinematography, editing and sound. In this dissertation, I will use semiotic analysis to read a Discovery documentary film, through which we will gain a comprehensive picture of contemporary Western visual images of China and Chinese people.

1.5 Dissertation structure

To establish the relevant tropes for the analysis of contemporary Western documentaries, this thesis will first look at the historical images of China in the West from their first mutual encounter to the present. This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. The next chapter will look at the historical images of China in the West in chronological, referring to primary sources - ancient scripts, records, missionary reports, travelogues, and some print media coverage - to give a theoretical background for the subsequent film analysis. Based on these historical images, an image pattern of Western perceptions of China will be established by the end of Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, the documentary programme *China Revealed* is introduced as a case study and general information about the documentary including storyline and characters is listed. In Chapter Four, the sequence outline of the whole documentary is illustrated and American values and ideologies are examined in depth, so as to assist in understanding the film's perspective and decoding its underlying messages. Chapter Five uses the semiotic approach to film analysis to conduct a major analysis of the film's language and in particular the presentation of the different characters. The film variables of montage sequences, camera position and distance, light and sound are observed and analyzed. In the final chapter, it will be shown that the findings in the analysis of *China Revealed* are also applicable to the broader context of contemporary Western documentary programmes about China.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL IMAGES OF CHINA

2.1 Images in early times

Written records of a “silk land”, lying somewhere in the distant Oriental world, have existed since Ancient Greek times. People living in this land could produce silk and were therefore nicknamed “silk people”. In Claudius Ptolemy’s¹⁵ geographic work *Geographia*, China was marked as Sina, the land of silk. The Greek merchant and traveller, Cosmas Indicopleustes, voyaged to India in the sixth century A.D. and composed his *Christian Topography*. Despite the fact that the primary information provided in his work was in relation to India, he learned from the Indians of Tzinitza, a so-called “paradise on earth”¹⁶, as stated in the following paragraph:

“This country of silk is situated in the remotest of all the Indies and lies to the left of those who entered the Indian sea, far beyond the Persian Gulf, and the Island called by the Indian Selediba and by the Greeks Trapobane. It is called Tzinitza.”¹⁷

According to Cosmas’ assertion, the majority of the silk was produced in Tzinitza, a land of silk. Some of the silk was transported from Tzinitza to Persia and further to the West. Tzinitza did not only boast a reputation as a “silk land”, but also as the possessor of a great mass of material wealth. The Egyptian Greek author Theophylactus Simocatta¹⁸, in the early seventh century A. D., indicated that the inhabitants of the land lived a wealthy life as they possessed a large amount of precious metals like gold and silver. In one of Simocatta’s classics, *History*, Taugast was another name adopted to refer to the ancient Chinese Kingdom, which was described as a country with a fair justice system and incredible material wealth.

15 Claudius Ptolemy (90-168 A.D.), lived in Alexandria during the Roman rule over Egypt. He was a mathematician, astronomer, geographer, astrologer and a poet of a single epigram in the Greek Anthology.

16 McCrindle, J. W. 1897: 46

17 McCrindle, J. W. 1897: 47

18 Theophylactus Simocatta was a historian in the early seventh century during the reign of Heraclius (610 - 641).

“The realm of Taugast is not troubled by discord, for lineage provides them with the selection of their leader. Statues are the cult of this nation, the laws are just, and their life is full of discretion. They have a custom, which resembles law, that males should never embellish themselves with gold adornment, even though they have become owners of a great abundance of silver and gold as a result of their large and advantageous trading.”¹⁹

Although generally males living in Taugast did not splurge their wealth, Simocatta shows the high status of one city ruler through a description of his wives' carriages:

“In this city the ruler's wives have carriages made of gold, each of which is drawn by one bullock lavishly decorated with gold and precious stones; and even the oxen's reins are gold-inlaid...The wives of the nobility of Taugast used silver carriages.”²⁰

From the Greek to the Roman era, the vague rumours of a “silk land” and “silken people” continued, under the name of Sina, pronounced much like our modern word “China”. People living in “Sina” started to be referred as “Seres” - silk people. “Beyond these regions of the two Scythias, towards the east, a circling and continuous barrier of lofty mountains fences round the Seres, who dwell thus in their rich and spacious plains”.²¹

The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus gave a full description of these “Seres” living in “Sina”, a rich land possessed of a large quantity of silk, which was regarded as a luxury and thus much valued in Rome, in addition to the precious metals of gold and silver. The Romans were charmed and enchanted by silk, a light, transparent and comfortable material. As a luxurious commodity, silk clothes were only affordable for Roman aristocrats. It is said that Caesar once wore a silk tunic to the theatre, which caused an overwhelming fancy for silk products in Roman society. He also loved to cover the stages with silk veils when he gave spectacles to the people. Silk was in great demand in Rome, as it was viewed as a defining symbol of lavishness and high social status.

19 Whitby, Michael and Mary 1986: 226

20 Whitby, Michael and Mary 1986: 227

21 Yule, Henry 1866: 203

The availability of silk was so scarce in the Roman Empire that its status as an expensive commodity was ensured. One frugal Roman emperor, Aurelian, refused to buy his empress a silk dress, because silk cost its weight in gold.²² The appeal of silk products in Rome led to thriving trade between the Roman Empire and Sina. For merchants, transporting silk from the remote, wealthy “silk land” to the Roman Empire could bring huge profits. The 4000-mile-long Silk Route²³ across central Asia to the Mediterranean Sea was much in use. The prosperous silk trade catered to the market demand for silk in the Roman Empire. The merchants were able to make a fortune by importing oriental silks, spices and gems from the East and selling them in the Roman Empire afterwards. Davies Norman summed up the prosperity of the silk trade in Rome as follows:

“The Romans were also wedded to luxuries, and were able to pay for them. The ‘silk route’ was opened to China, and the ‘spice lanes’ to India. Roman traders, the notorious negotiators, moved freely round the Empire after the armies, taking valuables, styles, and expectations with them.”²⁴

By the ninth century, the golden age of Tang, the vigorous silk trade had meant that the “silk land” was described in more detail than ever before by the merchants. One particular description from an Arabic manuscript is especially worth our attention here. Written in 1173, the document describes two Arab merchants travelling to India and China in 851 and 867 respectively. This Arabic manuscript is four hundred years older than Polo’s famous diary, which examined Sina in detail and hence was valued by European missionaries afterwards. The Arab manuscript was translated by the French theologian Eusèbe Renaudot in the seventeenth century from Arabic to French, and thus provided the Europeans with a valuable secondary source concerning the image of Sina in the ninth Century.

The Arabic accounts note that, whereas silk could only be bought by aristocrats in the Roman Empire, it was used as a common dress material for “Seres” dwelling in

22 “The Lady’s Monthly Museum”, Vol.19, 1824: 259

23 The Silk Road was an extensively interconnected network of trade routes across the Asian continent and into Europe. The name was originated from the profitable silk trade with China. This route was used by European merchants, pilgrims, missionaries and travelers for around three thousand years to travel to China.

24 Norman, Davies 1996: 163

Sina. The "Seres" were accordingly portrayed as "dressed in silk both winter and summer and this kind of dress is common to the prince, the soldier, and to every other person, though of the lowest degree."²⁵ In addition, Arabic merchants were charmed by another type of ancient Chinese product – porcelain, which originated in China in the early years of the Tang dynasty. The delicacy and transparency of the porcelain attracted the Arabic merchants as an "excellent kind of earth, of which is made a ware as fine and transparent as glass."²⁶ Their attention was also drawn to Chinese tea. They were aware that under the name of "tcha", tea was treated as the national drink of the "silk land". They also briefly mentioned the way that "tcha" was drunk in Sina. "Tea leaves are infused with hot water, and supposed to be a cure for every disease."²⁷ The various types of fruits caught the eyes of the Arabic merchants and they listed nearly twenty varieties of fruit. It is stated that "They have several sort of fruits, apples, lemons, quinces, sugar-canes, citrus, figs, grapes, and cucumbers of two sorts, trees which bear meal, walnuts, filberts, pistachios, plums, apricots, services (cherries), and coco-nuts."²⁸

Thus, generally speaking, in the early historical era, Sina was a world of fantasy and legend. It was viewed as a "paradise", an unreal place of which most Romans had no clear geographic concept. The silk land was most likely positioned by Greeks and Romans as a region located in the distant oriental world. In the early records about Sina, the focus was commonly on its wealth and refined goods. It was acknowledged that silk and tea had their origin in Sina. Silk and porcelain remain typical "Chinese things" in the eyes of the world, and their two-thousand-year-long existence represents the antiquity of China. To the Roman imagination, the mysterious country was rich in gold and silver; precious silk could be afforded by ordinary people, whereas it was viewed as an expensive luxury in the Roman Empire. The Seres lived an abundant and pleasant life. Porcelain, the culture of tea drinking and special exotic fruits were incorporated into records kept more than a thousand years ago. Subsequently, they can be utilized in images to represent the sheer extent of

25 Renaudot, Eusèbe, 1733: 13

26 Renaudot, Eusèbe, 1733: 21

27 Renaudot, Eusèbe, 1733: 72

28 Renaudot, Eusèbe, 1733: 13

Chinese history. From Roman times to the thirteenth century, the Chinese Empire enjoyed an image as a wealthy land. As the English historian H.G. Wells commented later in the nineteenth century, “China was the most secure and civilized country in the world throughout the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.”²⁹

2.2 Images in the Medieval Era (13th – 14th Century): Great Khan’s land

In Medieval Europe, Sina continued to be seen as a land of silk, and of material wealth, as elaborated in *The Description of the World or The Travels of Marco Polo*, the book of the hazardous adventures recounted by Marco Polo and written down by a friend of Polo during his incarceration in a Genoese prison. An Italian merchant, Marco Polo was a mere profit seeker, yet his journal eventually became an influential resource for thirteenth-century Europeans seeking to imagine Asia, and in particular, “Cathay”³⁰, the finest land in the world as described in Polo’s journal. Driven by a desire to explore the alien oriental countries and share in the huge profit generated from trade with the Oriental world, the Polo brothers travelled along the Silk Road, hoped to arrive in the legendary Sina.

The journal is the personal story of how Polo crossed different nations in central Asia, passed through the Great Desert and finally reached Cathay. He claimed that he had met the Great Khan and been appointed as his representative on his return to Italy (Appendix 1). According to Polo, silk maintained its precious status in Cathay as in the early Roman Times. While regarded as a luxury material in Europe, it was available to common people in the city of Kinsay,³¹ owing to the presence of a large provision of the raw material and advanced production techniques in this city. Both the good quality and large quantity of silk impressed Polo: “Both men and women are fair and comely, and for the most part clothe themselves in silk, so vast is the

29 Wells, H.G. 1922 : 141

30 The name Cathay originated from Khitan, a nomadic state which occupied the northern part of China and established the Liao dynasty. This name was widely known to the people living in Central Asia and Europe, as a reference to the Middle Kingdom.

31 Kinsay was the capital of the Song dynasty, referred to the Hang Zhou City in the Zhejiang province of contemporary China.

supply of that material, both from the whole district of Kinsay, and from the imports by traders from other provinces (of the Kingdom)".³²

The previous image of Sina's wealth was intensified in Polo's journal. The large abundance of material wealth owned by the Great Khan further startled Polo, as evinced by his selection of a series of descriptive emotional words and superlative expressions for Kublai Khan's palace in Cathay. For instance, "gold and silver", "rich", "beautiful" and "vast", initially appearing in Simocatta's account in the ancient Greek times, are constantly repeated in Polo's story to highlight Cathay's wealth across the country. Polo was evidently very much impressed by the view of the royal palace where Kublai Khan lived:

"The roof is very lofty, and the walls of the palace are all covered with gold and silver. They are all adorned with representations of dragons sculptured and gilt, beasts and birds, knights and idols, and other subjects. And on the ceiling too you see nothing but gold and silver and painting...The building is altogether so vast, so rich, and so beautiful, that no man on earth could design anything superior to it."³³

In the above quotation from Polo's journal, the architecture inside royal palaces is modified by words like "vast", "rich" and "beautiful". This vocabulary group can also be seen in Polo's portrayal of another palace of the Khan, the royal residence of the former Song Dynasty, located in Kinsay. The palace was in Polo's eyes the greatest gold palace in the world:

"It is all painted in gold, with many histories and representations of beasts and birds, of knights and dames, and many marvelous things. It forms a really magnificent spectacle, for over all the walls and all the ceiling you see nothing but paintings in gold."³⁴

Based on these words and phrases, we can readily imagine how an Italian merchant, from a small European city, was captivated by the glamorous palaces decorated with gold. "The gilt and very handsome halls and chambers as well as the gilt dragon

32 Polo, Marco 1818: 215

33 Polo, Marco 1818: 117

34 Polo, Marco 1818: 218

around pillars”³⁵ in the Khan’s palace obviously also impressed Polo, leading him to call this marble palace, “admirable as well for the elegance of its design as for the skill displayed in its execution”.³⁶ Polo’s emotional descriptions of these two palaces of the Great Khan, conveyed to Europe, or at least to the European aristocracy, a vision of Oriental affluence and refinement.

The material wealth reflected in these magnificent palaces was not the only facet of the Kingdom’s image in Medieval times. Attention was also given to the construction of the cities and high level of civilization of the society, as shown by the high standard of living and well-developed public infrastructure, in particular in the former capital of Manzi³⁷. From Polo’s point of view, the city of Kinsay was “in greater abundance of all kinds than any other city in the world”:³⁸

“The city is beyond dispute the finest and the noblest in the world. Inside the city there is a lake which has a compass of some thirty miles: and all around it are erected beautiful palaces and mansions of the richest and most exquisite structure that you can imagine, belonging to the nobles of the city.”³⁹

The convenience and cleanness of Kinsay in South China was also covered in Polo’s reminiscences. “All the streets of the city are paved with stone or brick, as indeed are all the highways throughout Manzi, so that you ride and travel in every direction without inconvenience.”⁴⁰

Like the two Arabic merchants travelling to the Chinese Empire in the seventh century, Polo noticed and was fascinated by the variety of fruits in Kublai Khan’s palace: “Inside the walls is the finest and most delectable garden upon earth, and filled with the finest fruits, too.”⁴¹

35 Polo, Marco 1818: 82

36 Polo, Marco 1818: 81

37 Manzi was referred to the Han Chinese under the Mongol rule.

38 Polo, Marco 1818: 132

39 Polo, Marco 1818: 213-214

40 Polo, Marco 1818: 195

41 Polo, Marco 1818: 218

Besides, under the rule of the Khan, Cathay was a vast land. After the Polo brothers agreed to take a message for Great Khan to the Pope, they travelled via the Silk Route across a large area of Cathay and across central Asia to West Asia (including India) and finally arrived in Venice. Inside Cathay, they journeyed across a vast region, extending from Kabalu in the northern part to the city of Kinsay and Suchiu in the south. Polo asserted that the city of Kinsay is 100 miles in circumference and has 12,000 stone bridges.⁴² They took three years to leave Cathay and arrive in Lias, Armenia. Polo's description of Cathay was dubiously received in Europe at the time. His statements were regarded as "ridiculous" and "extravagant fictions"⁴³, as most regions were wholly unknown in Europe and the wealth depicted was so large as to exceed the limits of credibility. However, it was stated in the attached prologue in the printed version of the *Travels of Marco Polo* in 1845, that most of assertions in the journal were authentic representations of Cathay in medieval times. Therefore, Polo was still a key formulator of the image of Cathay in Europe.

During this period, the Great Khan's Mongol rule over the Kingdom allowed convenient travel along the Silk Route, and thus communication between Europe and China largely thrived. In accordance with historical images of China in the Greek and Roman times, luxurious silk was manufactured in large quantities and served as an ordinary material for daily garments in the land. The ancient image of a land of "gold and silver" was further strengthened by Polo's narration of Kublai Khan's royal palaces. What attracted Polo's attention about the local inhabitants was that they were "in a marvelous clean state" because they took baths every day. Apart from the emphasis on the nation's wealth in each chapter of Polo's travel journal, he also provided an introduction of urban infrastructure, and gardens and fruits at the Khan's palaces. Above all, it is evident that Polo followed the image pattern based on the fundamental concept from Greek historians and Roman merchants in previous eras.

42 Polo, Marco 1845: 187

43 Polo, Marco 1845: 21

2.3 Images in the Era of Exploration (15th – 16th Century): great empire

In the fourteenth century, along with the collapse of the Mongol Empire and the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the profitable trade with the oriental world decreased due to the closure of the Silk Route. To maintain their prosperous trade with the Orient, Europeans were forced to explore other possible trade routes to reach Asia. In the end, a new sea route via the Cape of Good Hope was discovered by Portuguese sailors in the beginning of the sixteenth century, by which the commercial trade between Europe and the Middle Kingdom could be resumed. Via the same sea route, European missionaries were able to journey to the Middle Kingdom to attempt to convert the Chinese to Christianity. During this period, alongside the merchants and travellers, missionaries were primarily responsible for sending reports back to Europe to provide information about the Kingdom.

The Augustinian priest Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza (1540-1617)⁴⁴ produced an in-depth book about the Middle Kingdom which also contained the first examples of Chinese Characters in a European text. This signified that European attention towards the Kingdom had moved one step further to include cultural elements as well as material wealth. Unlike the Jesuit missionaries transferred to China, Mendoza was in fact an author appointed by Pope Gregory XIII due to the rising interest in China among the European Christian community. Mendoza had never been to China, but he collected and compiled reports from various Portuguese and Spanish priests including Martin de Herrada, Pedro de Alfaro and Martin Ignacio⁴⁵, and brought them into a volume for publication. The two volumes were named *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the situation thereof*. From then on, Sina or Cathay was known as “China” – both a phonetic approximation of “Sina” and a name which recalled its reputation as a porcelain producer.

⁴⁴ Mendoza's book was first published in Spanish in 1585 and later translated into English under the title, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*.

⁴⁵ Martin Ignacio was known for his two trips to Europe and South America respectively. He also reached Guangzhou in Southern China. Later he was expelled to the city of Macau.

Mendoza's report covered all the major European images and perceptions about the Middle Kingdom, such as silk manufacturing, porcelain and the considerable wealth of the land, as analyzed in the texts of the early times and the medieval era. Just as silk was an attraction to the Romans and to Polo, Mendoza remarked on it, paying complements to the high quality of Chinese silk as well as its advanced production technology. "They [the Chinese] do make great store of silk, and excellent good, and give it very perfect colours, which does exceed very much the silk of Granada, and is one of the greatest trades that is in all that kingdom."⁴⁶ Agreeing with Polo, Mendoza noticed the social courtesy and clean appearance of the Chinese. He believed that "the Chinese observe much exactness in their courtesies and great neatness in their apparel, both men and women; they generally go very well dressed, from the quantity of silk there is in the kingdom."⁴⁷ Although Mendoza did not give an elaborate description of the porcelain, he was fascinated by the lacquer used to produce books: "There are also shops full of earth vessels of divers making, red, green, yellow, and gilt."⁴⁸

Mendoza echoes all the earlier primary sources about the empire's abundant material resources by stating, "Besides all this, it is very rich of mines of gold and silver, and other metals...There is found great store of pearls in this kingdom. And that the first that did discover and inhabit that kingdom were not deceived, for that they found all things necessary unto the preserving of the life of man, and that in abundance."⁴⁹

In addition, Mendoza defended the reputation of Chinese architecture by claiming that "In this kingdom in all places, there are men excellent in architecture: and the necessaries that they have to build with are the best that is in the world."⁵⁰ It is worth pointing out that the celebrated Great Wall, absent even from Polo's travel journal, was finally coming to written record. Mendoza only mentioned the Great Wall briefly:

46 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 20

47 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 21

48 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 33

49 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 18

50 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 26

“There is in this kingdom a defence or wall that is five-hundred leagues long, and begins at the city Ochyoy”, but he notes that he considered it “a superior and mighty work”⁵¹. In the end, he also commented on the convenience of public infrastructure, “The highways are the best and gallantest paved that ever hath been discovered.”

In Mendoza’s compiled work, in the same way as the Arabic merchants and Polo, Spanish missionaries emerge as clearly attracted by all sorts of special Chinese fruits which had not yet been seen in Europe. Mendoza listed a variety of Chinese fruits at the beginning of his work, especially the oranges, lychees and tasty apples.

“They have three sorts of oranges, the one very sweet, which does exceed sugar in their sweetness; the other sort not so sweet as the first; the third sort are somewhat sour, but very delightful in the taste. Also they have a kind of plum that they do call lychee that are of an exceeding gallant taste. Also a kind of russet apples that is very great, of a good taste.”⁵²

The diversity of the Chinese empire, its vastness and greatness, was known to the Spanish missionaries, according to Mendoza’s report. Polo felt that the Middle Kingdom was vast because it took him roughly a month from his entry into the Middle Kingdom to reach Kanbalu. Mendoza also called China “the biggest and most populous country that is mentioned in the world, the great and mighty kingdom.” Despite the huge size of the Empire, he differentiated the ethnic groups that made up the population, or at least noted the distinct groups of Han Chinese and Mongolians, using his examination of the people’s appearance and eating habits to distinguish the two ethnicities:

“They do differ in their cleanness and laws, in which China does exceed them very much. The Tartarians are very yellow and not so white: and they go naked from the girdlested upwards, and they eat raw flesh, and do anoint themselves with the blood of raw flesh, for to make them harder and currish.”⁵³

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was the first Jesuit missionary who mastered the Chinese language, and the first European to read and translate the Chinese classics. He was

51 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 29

52 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 14

53 González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 9

called the “Ptolemy of China” and to some extent the first real cultural communicator. His diary, *China in the Sixteenth Century: the Journals of Ricci Matteo 1583-1610*, compiled by Ricci’s friend, reported the progress of Ricci’s Jesuit missionary work during the late Ming era. The journal depicted Chinese society, Chinese culture, and local life as a whole. As Lach remarked, “There is no reason to doubt that Ricci was an extremely influential source of images of China in its day.”⁵⁴ We therefore need to take a detailed look at this significant image source from the era of exploration.

The charm of Chinese silk did not fade in the exploration era. Ricci discovered that Chinese, both poor and rich, all wore silk due to the large quantity of silk in the country. Moreover, he pointed out that the silk weaving technology originated from the Middle Kingdom and spread to Europe afterwards.

“Nor again have I any doubt that this is the country referred to as the Land of Silk (Serica region), for nowhere in the Far East except in China is silk found in such abundance that it is not only worn by all the inhabitants of the country, the poor as well as the rich, but it is also exported in great quantities to the most distant parts of the earth...In the annals of the Chinese Empire, I find mention of the art of silk weaving as far back as the year 2636 before Christ, and it appears that the knowledge of this art was carried to the rest of Asia, to Europe, and even to Africa from the Chinese Empire.”⁵⁵

Ricci also spoke highly of Chinese porcelain: “There is nothing like it in European pottery either from the standpoint of the material itself or its thin and fragile construction.”⁵⁶ The uncommon porcelain in Europe was so fragile and delicate that it was used to create *objets d’art* rather than daily utensils. He also noticed that Chinese porcelain has special advantages for holding liquids: “This porcelain, too, will bear the heat of hot foods without cracking and, what is more to be wondered at; if it is broken and sewed with a brass wire it will hold liquids without any leakage”.⁵⁷

Tea drinking aroused Ricci’s attention. He gathered information about tea itself and its production procedure from previous records. He also noticed that tea was a

54 Lach, Donald F. 1965: 804

55 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 6

56 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 14

57 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 15

necessary part of household hospitality and usually served when friends paid a visit, which means tea represented not only a drink, but also a cultural tradition in Chinese society. In his journal, he summarized:

“There is a certain bush from the leaves of which is decocted that celebrated drink, known to the Chinese, the Japanese, and to their neighbors as Cia. Here they gather its leaves in the springtime and place them in a shady place to dry, and from the dried leaves they brew a drink which they use at meals and which is served to friends when they come to visit.”⁵⁸

As in Mendoza’s work, Ricci included the Great Wall in his journal. The grand scale of this defense fortress was gradually to be further established and expanded, as it was repaired by the Ming emperors to increase its potential as a defence. It was not as well-known to Europeans as it is nowadays. Ricci mentioned it and its function in a couple of lines in the first Chapter of his journal: “In this country, there are natural mountains to resist the attack of Tatar. The mountains are connected by a four-hundred-and-five-mile-long great wall to form an unconquerable protection”.⁵⁹

In the world of Chinese architecture, a far more attractive presence for Ricci to exhibit in his journal was the grandeur of the Ming Emperor’s royal abode, a Chinese architectural complex.

“Throughout the entire palace, one sees pictures of dragons on gold and silver vases, on the furniture, and in the draperies. The roof and tiling of the palace are also done in yellow and with various paintings of dragons....They are yellow in colour, somewhat larger than the kind we use, and are fixed to the roof with nails or spikes, the heads of which are gilded so that no colour other than yellow will appear on the palace.”⁶⁰

The above language pattern of the palace from Ricci has changed from Polo’s “rich palace of gilt / gold” to “the palace covered by yellow tile”. In Ricci’s words, Polo’s superlatives have been replaced by a relatively matter-of-fact description. Ricci neither mentioned how wealthy the Kingdom was nor offered us exact figures of the country’s revenue as Polo did. He does rather dismissively comment on Kingdom’s

58 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 17

59 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 9

60 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 69

boasted precious stones and metals, remarking: “We must, of necessity, forgo the discussion of many things such as variegated marbles, bronzes, precious stones, gems, various coloring material for paints, scented woods, bitumen, and numerous other things indicating civilization and culture.”⁶¹ This transformation of the tone here reflects a dramatic historical change that had already taken place in Europe. In Polo’s times, “China [had] already reached nearly the same height of greatness and civilization as now, while Europe was still in its infancy”⁶² stated Hugh Murray in 1854. When Europe entered the Era of Exploration, its productivity was greatly enhanced and therefore the grandness of the Chinese royal palace had much less impact on Ricci than on Polo.

However, even if the royal palace no longer commanded such attention, like Polo and his peer Mendoza, Ricci was impressed by the vast size of the Kingdom. He understood why Polo and other travellers always used ‘great’ as a modifier for this country: “Relative to the extent of China, it is not without good reason that the writers of all times have added the prefix great to its name. Considering its vast stretches and the boundaries of its lands, it would at present surpass all the kingdoms of the earth, taken as one, and as far as I am aware, it has surpassed them during all previous ages.”⁶³

As a Christian missionary, Ricci had a special religious mission: to convert the Chinese to Christianity. This meant that he viewed the Empire from a cultural perspective, instead of merely concentrating on its material wealth. The most significant Chinese moral system, Confucianism, established by the emperors of different dynasties, was characterized by cultural tolerance and the spirit of harmony. The collected works of Confucius were first translated into Latin and introduced to Europe by Ricci in the fifteenth century, and thereafter adapted into English, French, German and other European languages. The core value of Confucius was that we

61 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 16

62 Polo, Marco 1845: 21

63 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 7-8

may “never impose on others what you will not choose for yourself”.⁶⁴ Chinese moral philosophy and its creator were expounded on by Ricci as follows:

“The most renowned of all Chinese philosophers was named Confucius. This great and learned man was born five hundred and fifty-one years before the beginning of the Christian era, lived more than seventy years, and spurred on his people to the pursuit of virtue not less by his own example than by his writings and conferences. His self-mastery and abstemious ways of life have led his countrymen to assert that he surpassed in holiness all those who in times past, in the various parts of the world, were considered to have excelled in virtue. Indeed, if we critically examine his actions and sayings as they are recorded in history, we shall be forced to admit that he was the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them.”⁶⁵

Confucius compiled four books of other ancient philosophers and wrote five books of his own words entitled *Five Doctrines*. In these volumes, the ethical principles of decent living, the code of a political life, customs, example of rites and sacrifices and the rules of poetry were defined and clarified, and were later adopted as the major moral standard in Chinese society. The urge to truly comprehend Chinese moral standards drove Ricci to access to these classic works so that he could understand the local people’s mentality and then find a way to convert them to Christianity.

Apart from the translation of the original content, Ricci expressed his own opinion of the traditional Confucian philosophy which had been firmly revered in the Chinese society: “The ultimate purpose and the general intention of this sect, the Literati, is public peace and order in the Kingdom. They likewise look toward the economic security of the family and the virtuous training of the individual...Their writings explain at length the second precept of charity: do not do unto others what you would not wish others to do unto you. It really is remarkable how highly they esteem the respect and obedience of children toward parents, the fidelity of servants to a master, and devotion of the young to their elders.”⁶⁶ Ricci’s words reflected the collective features of Chinese society - that the collective was valued far above the individual. The traditional moral value of being loyal to the emperor and reverent to authorities

⁶⁴ *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*, one of the Confucius Classics, was roughly finished during the Warring State period.

⁶⁵ Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 30

⁶⁶ Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 97

was specifically stressed; Ricci wrote that “Chinese books on morals are full of instructions relative to the respect that children should pay to parents and elders. Certainly if we look to an external display of filial piety, there are no people in the whole world who can compare with the Chinese.”⁶⁷

In Ricci’s journal, he examined the fine art and cuisine of the Middle Kingdom and consolidated relevant information in the first part of his report. The Chinese language was an alien language for Europeans, nothing like Latin or European languages. There were neither vowels nor consonants in the Chinese language and each character was represented by its own ideograph, or symbol, used to represent a thought. For a long time, merchants or missionaries were not inclined to learn the written characters of Chinese or the spoken language. Ricci was the first one who had the courage to make the effort to learn this exotic language. He emphasized the complexity of Chinese characters three times in his journal. In the chapter on Chinese customs, he complained that the language was so complicated that there were many grammatically correct ways to make a simple greeting.

In general, Chinese traditional culture was widely disparate to its European counterpart, not only as represented in the handwriting and pronunciation of the language, but in the fine arts such as painting. Under the European criteria for great art, it was hard to find any drawing techniques in Chinese painting, in terms of perspective or the use of shadows, which fit the European painting skill sets. As a result, even the learned Ricci believed that the ingenious Chinese were fairly primitive in their artistic efforts. “They know nothing of the art of painting in oil or of the use of perspective in their pictures, with the result that their productions are likely to resemble the dead rather than the living.”⁶⁸ He further stated that “Pictures done by well-known artists are in great demand, despite the fact that Chinese pictures are only outlines, done in black rather than in varied colours.”⁶⁹ Ricci did not see much value in the way Chinese music was played either: “The whole art of Chinese music

67 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 72

68 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 22

69 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 79

seems to consist in producing a monotonous rhythmic beat as they know nothing of the variations and harmony that can be produced by combining different musical notes.”⁷⁰ In all these assertions, we can tell that the Chinese culture was highly differentiated, and the whole cultural system positioned firmly below the European cultural framework. Of course, this overlooks the fact that the form of civilization of the great Chinese Empire was simply different; what is more, it is worth noting that by comparison with Europe, the national system was already well-institutionalized and fair.

On Chinese medicine, Ricci commented that the method of checking a pulse was the same as in Europe: “Their method of taking the pulse is the same as ours and they are quite successful in bringing about cures.”⁷¹ The difference lay in the remedies the Chinese took to cure disease: “In general, they make use of very simple remedies, such as herbs, roots, and other such things.”⁷²

Regarding the food in this vast Empire, rice was known by Europeans as the main traditional food cultivated in a large quantity in the Middle Kingdom. As Ricci wrote, “Rice, which is the staple article of Chinese diet, is produced here in far greater abundance than in Europe”. Furthermore, rice did not merely serve as a major food but also an important material for wine-making. Ricci discovered the tradition of drinking rice wine: “They do not manufacture wine from grapes but obtain it by fermenting rice and other grain seeds...The rice wine is very much to their taste and of a truth it is not at all unpleasant, though it does not produce the same feeling of warmth as our wines of Europe.”⁷³

Chinese exotic fruit attracted special attention from Europeans ever since Polo’s visit to China. The charm of these exclusive fruits from the Kingdom continued to work on Ricci too. In the third chapter of the first volume of Ricci’s journal, there was a

70 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 22

71 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 32

72 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 32

73 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 12

detailed account concerning different species of exotic Chinese tropical fruits, like mandarin, litchi and longyan.

“The Chinese, moreover, possess a variety of fruits unknown in Europe which are found exclusively in the province of Canton and in the southern parts of China. These fruits are called licya and longana by the natives and for the most part they are very pleasing to the taste...Here, too, we find oranges and other citrus fruits and every kind of fruit that grows on thorn bushes, in a larger variety and possessing a finer flavor than the same fruits grown in other countries.”⁷⁴

In order to accomplish his religious mission, Ricci made friends with the higher social class of Mandarins, and was frequently invited to join ceremonious banquets. He thus acquired an understanding of Chinese social customs. The banquets in the Middle Kingdom functioned as a socializing opportunity for establishing friendships. “With some, in fact, they are of almost daily occurrence, because the Chinese accompany nearly every function, social or religious, with a dinner and consider a banquet as the highest expression of friendship.”⁷⁵ The banquet or dinner was more about forming social bonds than eating. In comparison with the European customs, “Chinese do not give much attention to any one particular kind of food that might be served, as their dinners are rated by the variety rather than by the kind of courses offered.”⁷⁶

The tools used for the daily meal, the chopsticks, fascinated Ricci. When the Chinese ate food, instead of forks and knives, they used “polished sticks, about a palm and a half long, with which they are very adept in lifting any kind of food to their mouths, without touching it with their fingers”.⁷⁷ Chopsticks were also noticed by Europeans once again in Portuguese travellers’ reports: “The Chinese touch no food with their hands, but all, both small and great, eat with two little sticks for cleanliness.”

74 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 11

75 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 64

76 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 67

77 Ricci, Matteo, 1953: 64

When it comes to traditional Chinese festivals, the Chinese New Year is the most significant and popular traditional annual event, that has been celebrated for centuries in the Middle Kingdom. Ricci provided detailed information about how Chinese celebrated their grandest New Year's fest. They decorated their houses with red lanterns, organized parades or dragon dances, and held firework displays. The Chinese still keep this tradition of having firework performances for celebrations of this sort. Ricci wrote:

“The most important of all Chinese holidays, and the one celebrated throughout the whole country and by every sect, is their New Year's Day. This is known as the feast of the lights because everyone illuminates his home with lanterns, curiously made of cardboard or glass or of cloth. At this time the markets are filled with samples of these lanterns, and each one purchases the design that strikes his fancy. One would think the houses were on fire, so many lights are burning in every part of them. During this time, there is a great deal of night revelling too. Long files of people parade through the streets, made up in sections like fiery dragons, cavorting like bacchantes and shooting off fireworks and festive lights, and the whole town presents a glaring spectacle of unusual brilliance.”

When we compare his writings with the image groups he inherited from the Romans and Polo, it is evident that Ricci managed to observe the Middle Kingdom in much more depth, in terms of its material wealth, architecture, philosophy, language, art, customs, food and festivals, than his predecessors, in particular the specific exotic objects and phenomena that did not fit into the European cultural system.

In addition to these general reports, Ricci however revealed a tone of minor contempt toward Chinese people living in the Ming era. In his letter to Geronimo Roman, which was first printed by M. Ternaux Compans, he first pondered the idea of a European conquest of China, as “The power of China rests rather upon the great number of towns and the multitude of inhabitants, than upon the valour of the people. It appears to me the most difficult thing in the world to regard the Chinese as warriors. They have no more spirit than women, and are ready to kiss the feet of any one who shows his teeth at them.” Although the number of soldiers was large, “there is nothing formidable in thousands of such soldiers”. Ricci believed that the Chinese were not threatening to Europe at all, as, on the one hand, they were weak and had

no warrior spirit, and on the other hand, the Chinese had long been considered to be a peace-loving people. Ricci argued that the land was vast, but the people never imagined invading other neighbouring countries, unlike in Europe. The same view was shared afterwards by an anonymous Portuguese traveller in 1554: "The people of China are, in general, neither brave nor skillful, nor have they any natural inclination for warlike affairs."⁷⁸

In conclusion, we may say that between fifteenth and sixteenth century, the European maritime exploration opened a new chapter of history, which dramatically facilitated the economic and cultural progress in the Europe. It was in this time period that the legendary and romantic images of the Middle Kingdom reached a crescendo, as the Chinese Empire was examined in more details due to the active exploration of European missionaries. The Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, who lived in the Kingdom for thirty years, reported back to Europe on the country in much greater depth than his predecessors. Based on the existing patterns described by previous merchants and travelers, both Mendoza and Ricci produced a more far-reaching and comprehensive account of the Middle Kingdom, although they still included references to ancient products such as exquisite silk, precious porcelain and the national drink, tea. The material wealth of the vast land was covered in the report; but further, in the era of European exploration, the Great Wall started to take shape and appeared in both Mendoza and Ricci's reports. Starting from their European perspective, they compared various Chinese traditions and enigmatic arts, ranging from calligraphy, painting and music, to the fundamental Confucianist philosophy that formed the basis of Chinese society, to the mysterious medicine, the exotic food, New Year celebrations and all kinds of eating and socializing behaviour, all of which formed the basis of contemporary Western images of China in almost every respect.

⁷⁸ The statement from this Portuguese traveller who once was held as a prisoner in China is quoted by DF. Lach in *Asia in the making of Europe*.

2.4 Images in the Age of Enlightenment (17th – 18th Century): *Chinoiserie* & the land of Confucius

In the seventeenth century, monarchic rule reached a peak in Europe. Nostalgia thrived in France. The persuasive popularity of Chinese material and wares, such as silk and porcelain, triggered the European imitation of Chinese commodities. Chinese silk and porcelain were valued in the French court, just as they were admired in the ancient Greek and Roman societies. In this wave of *Chinoiserie*⁷⁹, silk products with distinct Chinese styles inspired innovative Western imitations (Appendix 3). A mania for Chinese fashion prevailed in Europe, especially in France.

Above all, as silk had been cherished by Europeans ever since the ancient Greek and Roman times, silk clothes which were decorated with exquisite embroidery took the most popular leading position during the wave of *Chinoiserie*. The French Jesuit historian Jean-Baptiste Du Halde compiled an essential encyclopaedia lexicon, the *General History of China*. Even though he never visited China, just like Mendoza, his work was a collection of descriptions, experiences and reports of other missionaries. One difference worth noting was the change of the lexicon - from “a great and mighty kingdom” to simply “China”. As a matter of fact, after the economic accumulation of the Age of Exploration, Europe further developed its economic strength and had already reduced the gap with the Middle Kingdom. Therefore, it is not hard to understand why the Kingdom was downgraded to “China” during this time period.

However, certain Chinese products were still well received in the European market, just as they were a millennium ago. Du Halde was particularly impressed by a Chinese lady’s dress ornamented with exquisite embroidery: “The lady came soon after to join him, dressed in a long silk gown richly embroidered”⁸⁰. Moreover, Du Halde portrayed a picture of a man’s attire from head to foot: “Nothing could be more

⁷⁹ *Chinoiserie* is a French term meaning “China-esque”. It refers to an intimation of a China themed image in the European artistic style, which reflects Chinese cultural influence. *Chinoiserie* roughly maintained in the European fashion world from the late 17th Century to the late 18th Century.

⁸⁰ Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste 1763: 151

gallant than his [a Chinese bachelor's] dress, his clothes were of violet coloured silk, with a handsome cap, such as are worn by the learned, his girdle was embroidered, and his shoes neatly made".⁸¹ These words demonstrate an intense European fascination with well-made silk clothes, which was by now far more developed than the abstruse concept held by the Romans and Greeks of silk as an exotic and expensive material which was worth its weight in gold.

Given the popularity of Chinese silk products in Europe, silk was not only exported from China to meet market demand, but also manufactured by local French factories. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the French silk industry was flourishing and manufacturers started to paint Chinese pictures such as dragons on the clothes, which in China were only allowed to be printed on the robes of the . As Reichwein wrote, 'The manufacturers of Paris, Tours, and Lyon, in order to flatter the national taste, undertook to supply a patterned silk or satin material, in imitation of the first Chinese dragon-patterns.'⁸² The clothes, decorated with hand-made painting, were too expensive for the majority of ordinary people, and printing on silk therefore quickly became the height of European fashion. In the end, owing to the increasing consumer demand for silk costumes of such a kind, the manufacturers in Europe endeavoured to print Chinese flowers or figures on clothes tailored in a Europeanized style. Even if the silk products manufactured in France were not easy to sell, the domestic textile industry, including silk production and printing skills, had been vastly improved. In addition, embroidery was very welcomed by both the royal court and the ordinary French household.

Apart from silk clothes as the latest fashion in the eighteenth century, Chinese porcelain progressively became much prized in the decoration of French households. Although porcelain had been known by Europeans ever since Polo's time, it enjoyed a surge in popularity in Europe in the period of *Chinoiserie*, when Rococo⁸³ thrived and was valued most in France. In contrast to the previous Baroque style, one

81 Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste 1763: 144

82 Reichwein, Adolf 1996: 39

83 Rococo, a style of French art and interior design, affected French paintings, architecture and music in many ways. Elegance and charm was highly valued by French society at that time.

distinguishing feature of the Rococo style was asymmetry. There was no clearness, but rather ambivalence, and as Reichwein explained, "Even colour lost the firm clearness of the Baroque. Rococo was fond of pale tones, gradations without sharp definition. Porcelain, which lends itself to light and delicate gradations of colour, became the typical material of Rococo art."⁸⁴ Reichwein suggests that the increasing popularity of porcelain arose from its monotonous and delicacy, and could be attributed to the similarities it shared with the new Rococo style. The porcelain was mainly decorated in white and blue colours. Reichwein justified the French fascination for Chinese art:

"In this subtlety of feeling lies the secret of the affinity in style of Rococo and ancient Chinese culture. It was not so much the written word which gave the Rococo its conception of China. Sublimated in the delicate tints of fragile porcelain, in the vaporous hues of shimmering Chinese silks, there revealed itself to the minds of that gracious eighteenth century society in Europe a vision of happy living such as their own optimism had already dreamed of."⁸⁵

This "gracious society of happy living" recalls the old image of "Sina", the so-called "Paradise on earth". The Oriental world, especially "Sina" or "Cathay", was linked to romance and exoticism, which fit right in to the French aspiration towards a tolerant, harmonious and happy society, just like living in a fairy tale. This fantasy view can be read in the following sentimental description.

"The soft, plastic culture of Southern China, where in the fantastical valley of the Yang-tze the mystical blossom of Laoism flourished, where the tea-like fragrance of Zennism ravished the souls of men, this it was which, lurking in the gleam of the porcelain of kwang-si and in the soft rustling folds of silks from Fukien, aroused all the delight and admiration of that European society which, without being conscious of these inner affinities, was itself the nursery of an intimate culture in fullest bloom."⁸⁶

Reichwein's description of the analogy between Chinese culture and the Rococo style shows that commodities with distinctive Chinese style were highly admired in the era of China Mania in France. Usually Chinese porcelain was covered with

84 Reichwein, Adolf 1996: 25

85 Reichwein, Adolf 1996: 25-26

86 Reichwein, Adolf 1996: 26

different picture patterns, ranging from flowers, willows, and bamboo to dragons, tigers and human figures. In terms of images derived from previous stories and accounts, dragons were carved on the pillars of the Emperor's palace and therefore already signified royal authority. A pattern of dragons was discovered on a porcelain plate (Appendix 4) imported from China to the French court in the eighteenth century. A central dragon was surrounded by four other dragons in the directions of North, South, West and East. Again, this five-clawed dragon was exclusive to the Chinese royal family, and symbolized Chinese royal authority.

As a result, the porcelain became a powerful icon of large wealth and elite social status. Louis XIV, the French King, was eager to show off his luxurious lifestyle by collecting innumerable Chinese porcelain and lacquer wares⁸⁷, which decorated extraordinary rooms in the palace at Versailles in a distinguished Chinese style. The Porcelain Trianon inside the palace was designed especially for the Sun King himself, as is specified on the official website of the Palace of Versailles:

“As early as 1670, Louis Le Vau was charged with building the initial Trianon. He erected a main pavilion and four secondary pavilions. The walls were covered in blue and white Chinese-style ceramic tiles, leading to the nickname of The Porcelain Trianon. The fanciful effect corresponded to the youthful spirit of Louis XIV, the Sun King.”⁸⁸

The Versailles palace was taken as a target to imitate by other European courts, and so was the passion for Chinese porcelain in Europe. The porcelain was delicate and precious, as it had to be transported across the sea from the distant Middle Kingdom. Yet porcelain's expensiveness and exclusiveness to the French court did not last longer than the seventeenth Century. From the eighteenth century onwards, porcelain was adopted as a popular household decoration. In order to be able to generate mass production in Europe, the manufacturers “took advantage of newly discovered clay deposits at home and technology stolen from China by industrial

⁸⁷ Fashionable Lacquer ware in those days was black and gold. A complete lacquer cabinet was once imported to the French court.

⁸⁸ This is quoted from the official website of the palace of Versailles in Paris, France.

http://www.chateauversailles.fr/en/121_The_Grand_Trianon.php

spies such as the Jesuit Francois Xavier d'Entrecolles."⁸⁹ This led to a dramatic decrease in the porcelain export market by the late Qianlong reign, attributed to competition from manufacturers in Europe. Although traditional Chinese monotone porcelain still held a dominant position in the market, they were painted from time to time with more colours to satisfy the customers' requirements in Britain and Holland.

At the same time that the tangible products of silk and porcelain coming from the Middle Kingdom were widely in demand in Europe, the traditional philosophy of Confucius was also highly revered. Ever since Confucian moral principles had been introduced to Europe by Ricci in the sixteenth century, the idea of the Chinese ancient moral system inspired a number of European scholars and intellectuals in their philosophies during the Age of Enlightenment. While Europe was plagued with war and intolerance, the philosophers were actively seeking for reconciliation. The core value of Chinese Confucianism, tolerance, was thus particularly embraced among the Deists and other philosophical schools, who supported the idea of integrating the system of Confucian morality into Western civilization.

The Latin version of Confucius' classics was published by Father Prospero Intorcetta in 1687, which deeply affected followers like Leibniz and Voltaire. Like Ricci, Leibniz defended the accommodationist interpretation of Confucius. Voltaire's published works, which filled over 100 volumes, aspired to tolerance in religion, peace and liberty in politics, enterprise in economics, and intellectual leadership in the arts. He argued that Confucius was a teacher of virtue, and what is more, proposed that this philosophy could be applied to Europe as well.

Leibnitz must appear on any list of European philosophers who demonstrated an interest in China. To learn more about the country and its culture, Leibniz maintained an extensive correspondence with the Jesuit missionaries, Daniel Papebroch, one of the Jesuit editors of the *Acta Sanctorum*, and Father Claudio Filippo Grimaldi in Rome, with whom Leibniz discussed a series of questions concerning Chinese agriculture, porcelain, military machines, etc. Leibniz constantly called for the

89 Rowe, William T. & Brook, Timothy 2009: 84

development of a harmonious relationship between Europe and Asia by facilitating a series of cultural exchanges. He formed a “grand design” of a harmonious and peaceful world: “I consider it a singular plan of the fates that human cultivation and refinement should today be concentrated, as it were, in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in Tschina, which adorns the Orient as Europe does the opposite edge of the earth.”⁹⁰

Concerning the life of local Chinese people under the reign of Manchu, Du Halde supported Ricci’s opinions by arguing that “the Chinese people were favourable. They are mild and peaceable in the commerce of life”⁹¹ He also thought that China was very well governed and extremely prosperous. Leibniz admired Chinese law as implemented by Manchu rule: “Indeed, it is difficult to describe how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquillity and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible.”⁹² The same opinion was held firmly by Voltaire, who considered Manchu rule to be reasonable, democratic and fair: “China’s governance was based on morals and law, and the respect of children for their fathers. The educated mandarins were the fathers of the cities and provinces, and the king that of the empire.”⁹³ Nevertheless, there was a voice of dissent from another French philosopher. Rousseau saw a totally different picture of China as an uncivilized land ruled by a savage people. From his point of view, the Chinese were deprived of the spirit of freedom. In *Discourse on the Arts and Science*, he argued that “China is a country eroded by civilization...Instead of fighting for their country, they became *slaves* suffering a long-term barbarian rule by Manchu”.⁹⁴

In general, during the Age of Enlightenment, Chinese silk and porcelain, as can be seen, maintained their momentum as the most popular and precious products from the Chinese empire. Chinese porcelain was warmly received as the latest fashion in

90 Leibnitz, G.W. 1957: 68

91 Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste 1763: 236

92 Lach, DF 1965: 70

93 Voltaire 1756: 215-216

94 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 1750: 12

decoration in the French royal court, and was also welcomed and imitated by other European countries. In addition, that was an age when philosophical discussion thrived, and the French philosophers strove to enlighten themselves by integrating other philosophical ideas. Confucian principles of harmony and tolerance were keenly admired by Voltaire. The Chinese feudal rule had depended heavily upon the Confucian moral principles for more than a thousand years, and therefore it was in Voltaire's eyes both reasonable and valuable to learn from it. From the highly fashionable pursuit of Chinese ancient products like silk and porcelain to the positive assessment of Confucian values, images of China were utilized to appease the need for French social development at that time.

2.5 Images in the Age of Imperial Expansion (19th Century): the land of stagnation

Toward the end of the Enlightenment, philosophers in Continental Europe were seeking for an ideal way to supervise the rulers of their countries. The Confucianist principles which were used as the basis for government in the Middle Kingdom to some extent provided a theoretical solution for Europeans as a role model of a tolerant society. Although there was a certain negative perception of the Middle Kingdom in this age, it never became the mainstream voice. Generally speaking, the Europeans viewed the Kingdom as a civilized country based on the tolerant Confucian moral system. The image of a celestial empire reached its zenith and went into a decline at the beginning of the nineteenth century. After Britain succeeded France as the dominant power in Europe after Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the main European images of China were determined by British travellers, diplomats and scholars. The loss of the British Empire's American colonies drove forward expansion into Asia Pacific and Africa. The trade deficit generated by Anglo-Sino trade maintained its momentum of rapid growth. A large number of French missionaries and Spanish and Portuguese trade delegations were still sent to China, and Britain followed this example. To reverse the trade deficit and seek more trade opportunities in the huge empire, the first British Ambassador to China, Earl

McCartney, accompanied by Sir George Staunton, John Barrow and other delegates, arrived in Canton in 1796, aiming to obtain more business interests by negotiating more openings of commercial ports in China, or at least to establish a British embassy in Peking. The two parties could not reach a consensus because allegedly the Qianlong Emperor refused to satisfy the British requirements and Sir McCartney refused to kowtow⁹⁵ to the Emperor. The British diplomatic mission failed.

The failure of the mission clearly intensified the rising negative images of China in this age. In 1807, after the British delegation had returned to London, John Barrow published an official account of the country based on the letters and private diaries of Earl McCartney. In this book, he accused the Chinese Emperor of “self-conceit” and complained that “all the presents were thrown away upon Chinese ignorance.”⁹⁶ In Barrow’s opinion, France, Portugal and Holland had already obtained commercial interests from the Chinese government either because they were assisting the Chinese government to bring down pirates or because they had sent missionaries to China. As far as Britain was concerned, it had offered nothing in return, and so the Chinese Emperor refused to grant favours to Britain. Thus, the conclusion drawn from the whole episode was that “the true spirit of trade is but little understood in China.”⁹⁷

The diplomatic failure accelerated the start of a “hundred years of humiliation”, as the gate of China was subsequently forced to open by the British imperial “guns and cannons” in 1842 when the Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars broke out. China lost the wars and was invaded by imperial powers. Consequently China was coerced to sign a series of unequal treaties. The most notorious was the treaty of Nanjing, which aimed to change the framework of foreign trade, and which was signed on 29th of August, 1842. The treaty was comprised of thirteen articles, and the key ones were:

- Opening five ports – Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen until 1930),

95 Kowtow is a sign of showing the highest reverence to the Emperors in Chinese culture. To Kowtow, one has to touch one’s head to the ground. It was widely used in the old China to respect elders, higher officials, superiors, and especially to the emperors.

96 Barrow, John 1804: 350

97 Barrow, John 1804: 355

Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo) and Shanghai (until 1949) – to British citizens for residence and trade without any restraint of any kind.

- Ceded the island of Hong Kong permanently to the Britain
- The emperor of China agreed to pay twenty-one million dollars for indemnity, including six million dollars in compensation for the dissolved opium and for the loss of British lives and three million dollars to cover debts owing to British merchants by Chinese merchants.⁹⁸

As China fell into a state of semi-colonization, travellers continued to come to the old land of civilization. A Scottish Botanist, Robert Fortune (1812 – 1880), travelled to the northern part of China to collect plants after the signing of the Nanjing Treaty. Fortune's trip was supported by the Royal Horticultural society. In his journal *Three Years Wandering in China*, he emphasized the arrogance of the Chinese character: "They from the highest Mandarin down to the meanest beggar are filled with the most conceited notions of their own importance and power; and fancy that no people, however civilised, and no country however powerful, are for one moment to be compared with them."⁹⁹ Though he believed that the country might once have been extremely civilized and prosperous, yet it was now "in a state of decay or in ruins."¹⁰⁰ It also occurred to him how oddly the Chinese dressed, in direct contrast to Polo and Ricci's impression of their good-quality, neat clothes:

"The manners and customs of the people, and the strange formation of the country, are indeed striking when viewed by the stranger's eye; the pagodas, like monuments to departed greatness, towering on the hills; the strange dresses and long tails of the men, and the small deformed feet of the women."¹⁰¹

During this period, rosy and romantic images of Chinese art and tradition began to fade. Instead, China was increasingly considered to be a stagnant country, whose people maintained bizarre thousand-year-old traditions, like female foot binding. Chinese people themselves and their standard of living in those days were under

98 Wang, Dong 2005:12

99 Fortune, Robert 1847: 2

100 Fortune, Robert 1847: xiv

101 Fortune, Robert 1847: xxv

observation. When Barrow visited China in the eighteenth century, European productivity had been enormously enhanced, whereas the Chinese economy remained much the same, and was indeed weakened by war compensations. Here is his impression of the Chinese: “What the Chinese showed in front of the English was just ‘contempt’ and ‘indifference’, and it was only because the Chinese were jealous about the British advanced technology.”¹⁰² A large number of people were addicted to opium and some even spent all their savings in exchange for it. They walked as though they were dreaming or drunk. Fortune portrayed the Chinese as in a “stupid sleepy and dreaming” state when he travelled in South China to gather information about Chinese plants: “When a foreigner at any of the northern ports goes into a shop, the whole of the northern ports goes into a shop, the whole place inside and out is immediately crowded with Chinese, who gaze at him with a sort of stupid dreaming eye.”¹⁰³

Ever since the nineteenth century, China had been heading towards decay and degradation under Manchu rule. In many aspects of technological development and productivity enhancement, the Middle Kingdom fell behind its European counterparts. The American missionary Samuel Wells Williams was a significant figure in the portrayal of China at this time. His series of texts, *The Middle Kingdom* (Appendix 5), followed the fundamental structure of French Baptist Du Halde’s work in the seventeenth century. Although China had entered into a state of decay, however, Chinese silk production was firmly believed to be unmatched. As Williams argued, “The manufacture of silk is original among the Chinese as well as those of porcelain and lacquered-ware, and in neither of them have foreigners yet succeeded in fully equalling the native products.”¹⁰⁴ William admitted that Chinese silk and porcelain had maintained its leading advanced position in the world, even if the Middle Kingdom was in a state of decay, and it could be thus concluded that the European fascination with Chinese silk and porcelain dating back from ancient times still remained unaltered. In addition, just as Ricci observed, Williams emphasized the excellence of the embroidery which commonly decorated clothing and household

102 Fortune, Robert 1847: 351

103 Fortune, Robert 1847: xi

104 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 121-122

textiles: “The skills of the Chinese in embroidery is well known, and the demand for such work to adorn the dresses of officers and ladies of every rank, for embellishing purses, shoes caps, fans, and others appendages of the dress of both sexes, and in working shawls, table covers, etc., for exportation, furnishes employment to myriads of men and women.”¹⁰⁵

In addition, porcelain kept its charisma. Williams made a comment about Chinese porcelain in his book: “Porcelain statuettes and idols are common, and some of the pieces bear extravagant prices from their fineness, colouring, antiquity, shape, or some other quality, which connoisseurs can only appreciate.”¹⁰⁶ Like Ricci, Williams also paid attention to lacquer-ware: “it owes its lustrous colouring to a composition of lampblack and the clarified juice obtained from a species of sumach.”¹⁰⁷

The Chinese national custom of tea drinking had acquired increasing favour in Europe. Western travellers and researchers in the nineteenth century did not only hear about tea drinking and tea leaves, but also expanded their knowledge of tea cultivation and classification. Williams valued the tea trade so much that he even listed it as one of the most significant Chinese contributions, along with printing, compasses and gunpowder:

“Among the branches of Chinese industry, the growth and preparation of tea has been most celebrated abroad, and the gradual introduction and use of this beverage among the nations of the West, and the important consequences of bringing the two into more intimate intercourse, and opening to the Chinese and blessings of Christian civilization, resulting from the trade, is one of the most interesting results that have ever flowed from commerce.”¹⁰⁸

In the nineteenth century, the Western view of Chinese architecture changed somewhat. Instead of being celebrated for its grandness and superiority, the magnificence of the architecture was attributed not to impressive technological achievements, but rather to the strength of a large number of labourers. For instance,

105 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 123

106 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 118

107 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 120

108 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 126

speaking of the Great Wall, Williams remarked that “the public works of China are probably unequalled in any land or by any people, for the amount of human labour bestowed upon them. It has been remarked that the Great Wall is the only artificial structure which would arrest attention in a hasty survey of the surface of the globe. But their usefulness, or the science exhibited in their construction, is far inferior to their extent.”¹⁰⁹

The preliminary impression of Chinese cities as representing a high and ordered standard of living that prevailed in Polo and Ricci’s times changed completely. Instead of evoking the old images of an orderly city, Williams wrote: “Elegance or ornament, orderly arrangement or grandeur of design, cleanliness, or comfort, are almost unknown in Chinese houses, cities, or gardens.”¹¹⁰ William’s assertion is very different from Polo’s impression in the thirteenth century, when China was seen to be perfectly clean. It was also Williams’ opinion that the old architectural style of some Chinese pagodas and temples was “peculiar” (not in accordance with the Western style) and that there were no signs of modern machinery in the country. He wrote:

“A lofty solitary pagoda, an extensive temple shaded by trees in the opening of a vale or on a hill side, or boats moving in every direction through narrow creeks or on broad streams, are some of the peculiar lineaments of Chinese scenery...No meadows or pastures, containing herds and flocks, are visible from the hill-tops in China, nor are coaches, steamers, or railroad cards, ever observed hurrying across its landscapes.”¹¹¹

In the previous missionary reports and travellers’ writings, Europe was informed about China’s rice plant, fruits and its simple primitive agricultural life. After the Industrial Revolution took place in the mid-nineteenth century, the productivity of European nations had been dramatically enhanced. The modern technological inventions, such as the steamer, railway, and others had been applied to industrial development. By contrast, China’s productivity had stagnated– the peasants still worked arduously in the fields as they have been doing for the past centuries. Williams observes:

¹⁰⁹ Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 25

¹¹⁰ Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 35

¹¹¹ Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 35

“They (Chinese) make up for the disadvantages of poor implements by hard work, repeatedly turning over the soil, and sustaining its productiveness by constant maturing. Their agricultural utensils are few and simple, and are probably now made similar to those used centuries ago.”¹¹²

The farming tools used by Chinese peasants for agricultural cultivation remained the same as the ones used hundreds of years ago. “The harrow is a heavy stick armed with a single row of stout wooden teeth, and furnished with a framework to guide it...The buffalo is most used in rice cultivation.”¹¹³ All these sentences indicate that Chinese social productivity had not greatly developed, but rather kept its antiquity, which was now perceived as being backwards and under-developed. The agricultural life in China seemed to be stagnant, unchanged in thousands of years.

In the era of European exploration, although Ricci once pointed out the corrupt and cruel rule of the Ming emperor in his journal, and Rousseau also criticized the decaying rule of Manchu over the Han Chinese, writers such as Leibniz and Voltaire were strongly in favour of Chinese law and order. Against the background of the rise of European imperial power and its expansion to China, Williams put forward a searing criticism of Chinese dynastic rule and its corrupt officials in civil service, in direct contrast to many of his French predecessors. Williams argued in *The Middle Kingdom*, “The institutions of China are despotic and defective and founded on wrong principles. They may have the element of stability, but not of improvement”.¹¹⁴ He censured the civil servants of the emperor: “Although sprung from the mass of the people, the welfare of the community has little place in their thoughts”.¹¹⁵ Williams unveiled a series of social, cultural and political problems in the Middle Kingdom, and therefore reached the conclusion that, “when the purifying, elevating, and regenerating influences of true Christianity come to their aid, certainly a new era in the history of the Middle Kingdom will begin”.¹¹⁶

112 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 101

113 Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 101

114 Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 297

115 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 356

116 Williams, Samuel Wells, VII, 1848: 382

China is a vast and an immense country, which was acknowledged by Polo, Ricci, De Mendoza, Du Halde, and now Williams. He stated in his survey, "The circuit of the whole Empire is 12,550 miles, or about half the circumference of the globe. The coastline from the mouth of Amur to Hainan is 3,350 miles."¹¹⁷ If the country were compared with other nations in Europe, "it is about seven size of the France, and fifteen times that of the United Kingdom".¹¹⁸ The concept of China as a large Kingdom has been preserved from the ancient times to the present day.

Before the era of imperial expansion and colonization began, China in Europe had mainly enjoyed a flattering image which had persisted since ancient Greek and Roman times, when Europe occupied a relatively lower position in comparison with the national strength of the Middle Kingdom. By the late eighteenth century, thanks to the industrial revolution, European power had grown so astonishingly that Europeans became far more confident about their cultures and scientific inventions. China missed the first industrial Revolution and productivity was not as greatly promoted as in European nations, which meant that it was no longer considered to be either a mighty Kingdom or the centre of the world as in the old days. Eurocentrism began to take shape. Nonetheless, traditional trade between China and Europe still continued, including the exporting of silk, porcelain and tea. On the whole, this was an era of image transition for the Chinese Empire and its people, from a wealthy, advanced, orderly kingdom to a poor, unimproved and flawed country. This image transition coincided with the economic development that had taken place in Europe and then was thus a self-reflection of perceived European superiority.

2.6 Images at turn of the century (19th - 20th Century): the yellow peril

The nineteenth century was an era when European imperial powers expanded to the Asian and African continents, while the Manchu rulers imposed an isolationist feudal rule on Chinese people. The image of China in Europe was no longer that of an affluent civilized county like early times, but rather a decaying semi-civilized land.

¹¹⁷ Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 5

¹¹⁸ Williams, Samuel Wells, VI, 1848: 9

This conceptual alteration was linked to the successes that Europe achieved in the fields of economy, science and culture in the nineteenth century, which accounted for their increasing self-confidence and pride in their civilization. They believed that Europe was superior and that it had surpassed the quality of Chinese civilization in many respects. As Davies summarized, “There is dynamism about nineteenth-century Europe that far exceeds anything previously known. Europe vibrated with power as never before: with technical power, economic power, cultural power, intercontinental power...Europeans, in fact, were made to feel not only powerful but superior.”¹¹⁹

Since the ambiguous existing records about China as a silk land in the early times, the Chinese Empire had remained under the European eye. By the nineteenth century, a declining China became an inferior counterpart to the superior Europe. Most typical “Chinese things” like silk, porcelain and tea were already very familiar to Europeans. As a result, it was the legendary ancientness or antiquity that fascinated Europeans throughout all the eras as far as image of China was concerned. Ancient architecture, like the royal palace, for instance, managed to keep its enigmatic appeal to Europeans. Even if the royal court had begun to lose its golden glamour in Western minds, it was still difficult to provide a detailed description of the palace, which meant that the royal residence remained an inscrutable mystery. The name of the Forbidden City came from its Chinese translation, “Purple Forbidden City”. Literally, the word “forbidden” evoked a sense of exotic mystery; as Murdock remarked, “This imperial city with its beautiful contents was the habitation of a royal family. It became so exclusive that it shut itself absolutely in and the world absolutely out.”¹²⁰ As Geremie Barmé argued, the former royal residence was to Western imaginations “a secret and hidden world at the heart of the enigma of China”.¹²¹ Both the Forbidden City and the Kingdom itself remained mysterious, enigmatic and exotic to Europeans. On top of its mysterious character, the Forbidden City symbolized capricious feudal rule. Inside the court, dark conspiracies and secrets thrived, and were not to be accessed and shared by the public. In Franz Kafka’s story in 1917, he

¹¹⁹ Norman, Davies 1996: 759

¹²⁰ Murdock, Victor 1920: 247

¹²¹ Barmé, Geremie 2008: pix

describes the former imperial court in these words, “The emperor is always surrounded by a brilliant and yet ambiguous throng of nobles and courtiers – malice and enmity in the guise of servants and friends, who form a counter-weight to the Imperial power and perpetually labour to unseat the ruler from his place with poisoned arrows.”¹²²

An increasing number of missionaries and Western travellers travelled to China and stayed there for a long time, while they produced a host of in-depth reports regarding Chinese traditions, culture and many aspects of life. The Jesuit missionary James Dyer Ball lived in China for forty years, and compiled a special encyclopaedia concerning China, listing all “things Chinese” in alphabetical order. In the section on Art, he described the difference between Chinese painting and Western painting by stating, “Chinese ideas of painting differ widely from those obtaining in Western countries: the laws of perspective, and light and shade, are almost unknown, though the former is occasionally honoured with a slight recognition.” Although the art of painting “rough outline sketches, in ink, of figures and landscapes are much admired”, from a Western perspective and for Western observers, it consisted merely of “impossible mountains, chaotic masses of rock, flowers, trees, and boats, [which were] depicted in such a manner as to call forth but little enthusiasm.”¹²³

The general image of Chinese people at the turn of this century era was inclined to head in an entirely different direction: a dangerous species. All these critical images of China in Europe were aggravated by the escalated conflict between the local Chinese and the imperial powers which ignited the Boxer Uprising. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Boxer uprising erupted in China in response to increasing imperialist control over China and the Western manipulation of Chinese politics and economy. The Boxers besieged the embassies until the army of the Eight-Nation Alliance patrolled Peking. After the Boxer Uprising in Peking, the Chinese were savagely denounced by the Western media, as from the Western perspective, innocent Westerners were killed during the movement. The Boxer rebellion was

122 Kafka, Franz 1933: 90

123 Ball, J. Dyer 1903: 44

considered to be prompted by “a blind desire for vengeance and slaughter, the mad lust for blood and the brutal deeds”¹²⁴, according to the Guardian reporter Harry Thomson. The Manchu governor Yu-xian, in quelling the Boxer Uprising, earned a reputation for his “efficient, incorrupt administration and quick, if sometimes brutal, execution of justice”.¹²⁵ In the American journalist Utley’s view, “The Boxer Uprising proved to Americans what they had already believed; that the Chinese were not a trustworthy people, that they valued duplicity and deceit rather than honesty...Betrayal and deception were presented as Chinese national characteristics.”¹²⁶

However, there was an exception which showed real sympathy and understanding given to the Chinese people. The Austrian ambassador Arthur von Rosthorn (1862 – 1945)¹²⁷ denied flatly that there was any inherent hostility to foreigners. According to Mackerras’s book, Rosthorn believed that if the Boxers were angry, and indeed hated the representatives of the great powers, these had only themselves to blame for the acts of plunder they had inflicted on China since 1842.¹²⁸ He was of the opinion that the motive of the Boxers was patriotism or nationalism rather than cruelty to foreigners.

No matter whether the Boxer Uprising was a cruel rebellion or a violent expression of patriotism, the image of the Chinese was now constructed as being both violent and threatening in Western eyes. The threat was moreover intensified by the immigration trend from Asia to Europe in the late nineteenth century. The “Yellow Peril”, a major image of the Chinese in the Western world due to increasing Eurocentric hatred of Chinese immigrants, originated from British author M. P. Shiel’s fiction novel *The Yellow Danger*. In the novel, he portrayed Yen How, a Chinese administrator, who weakened Europe and flooded England with his countrymen. The whole storyline revealed to the readers his anti-Chinese feelings. With Japanese expansion,

124 Thomson, Harry Craufuird 1902:124

125 Esherick, Joseph 1988: 192

126 Utley, Jonathan G. 1991:116

127 Arthur von Rosthorn was the Austrian ambassador in China from 1883, hitherto a symbol of the friendship between China and Austria.

128 Mackerras, Colin 1999: 62 Colin Mackerras first taught Chinese literature in the Australian National University, and later became a professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney.

the "Yellow danger" was extended to refer to all East Asians in general, including the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Indians.

The image of the Chinese as the "Yellow Peril" was prolific in Western literature and media representations for several decades. In one cartoon picture (Appendix 6) published in the States in 1899, a Chinese man in the centre with a monstrous face and long pigtail has brutally murdered the woman lying on the ground. He holds a knife in his mouth and is brandishing a gun. This cartoon might not be a mainstream media representation; it still implied the increasing Western hatred towards the Chinese. The fictional character of Dr. Fu Manchu (Appendix 7) created by another English author, Sax Rohmer, first appeared in 1912, and fit right into the general European imagination of the cruel, threatening yet mysterious Chinese. The American cartoonist Robert Ripley (1890 -1949)¹²⁹ once created cartoon pictures about China, which showed the Great Wall, men with pigtails and women with bound feet, all skinny with running noses and dirty, ugly faces. The accompanying stories invariably dealt with theft, burglary, rape, plotting and assassinations, and these media images stayed in the Western mind for two centuries.

One exception to this overwhelmingly negative perception was the Chinese peasant. A portrayal of Chinese farmers working on a rice field with buffalos and harrows appeared in Ms. Pearl S. Buck's best-selling novel *The Good Earth* in 1931, which won the American Pulitzer Prize. She presented a vivid description of Chinese country life to her readers. In this popular novel, she laid out the tough life of a family of Chinese peasants, a hardworking farmer (Wang Lung) and his submissive and long-suffering wife (Oulan). Wang Lung's daily working life with hoe and ox, the same as most peasants' lives, was likewise portrayed: he put "his hoe upon his shoulder, walked to his plots of field, cultivated the rows of grains, and yoked the ox to the plough".¹³⁰ Even though the story takes place in the harsh agricultural landscape of rural China, her depictions of Chinese peasants in her novel emphasize

¹²⁹ Robert Ripley, an American cartoonist, created the image of Chinese people, *Believe it or not*, which was first published in May 1932.

¹³⁰ Buck, Pearl S. 1944: 28

their patriotism and love of their land, a sentiment which was highly revered by Americans.

In Ricci's times, Chinese farming was not mentioned as a primitive way of living. Ricci simply noticed that rice was a sort of Chinese water plant served as a daily primary food. Yet in the nineteenth century, as described in the previous section, European farming efficiency had been greatly improved, due to economies of scale in the implementation of industrial machinery. Compared with European mechanized farming techniques, the purely physical labour of Chinese farming was inevitably perceived as primitive and harsh; however, Buck's portrayal more likely intended to be sincere and sympathetic.

The complex Western image mix with regards to Chinese people was relentlessly changing from one extreme to another. Despite the fact that the Chinese were primarily classified as a threatening race in the West from the end of nineteenth century until the first half of twentieth century, some positive images were exposed to the public, in particular during the Second World War, when China fought against Japan's invasion. According to an American survey made in 1942 in Isaac's *Images of Asia*, there were 'five main images of Chinese people as hardworking, honest, brave, religious, and intelligent,'¹³¹ in that order.

At the turn of the 19th century, Western images of China represented a consistent view of China's ancient products like silk, artistic ware and tea, calligraphy and painting as an art as well as agricultural and living traditions. The striking industrial development in Europe ensured Europe's superior position over China. The notion of China as an enigmatic mystery still remained in the European perception of China, but other than that, China was no longer seen as a fantasy country or role-model as it had been in the early Roman era or indeed in Polo's or even Ricci's times; rather, it was a decayed and stagnated kingdom suffering a severe decline, lacking in vitality. The image of the Chinese as the dangerous "Yellow Peril" was formulated during this period too, which accompanied the perception of Oriental exoticism and mysticism.

131 Isaacs, Harold Robert 1972: 77

But during China's war against Japan, there was a complete change of perception, and the Chinese were now viewed as intelligent and hard-working in America. This alteration was approved by the West because it was believed that China was moving in a direction which suited Western political, economic, and social interests, and the West therefore wished to encourage this trend. Yet when China took the absolute opposite direction to the one that the Western world had expected after the war against Japan, dynamic Western images changed once again, as will be seen in the next section.

2.7 Images after the birth of red China (October 1949 - present day): the red dragon

From New China's establishment in October 1949, the country has undergone a series of dramatic changes in various aspects of politics, economy and society. China's implementation of the Communist system as well as its intimate connection with the former Soviet Union incurred a general hostility in the West. The Middle Kingdom was hence set to be a potential terror and enemy to the Western world. Thanks to Nixon's visit and China's open policy as advocated by Deng Xiaoping after China's internal Cultural Revolution, this stereotype was to some degree replaced by a more positive image. As a result of thousands years development, Western images of China finally evolved into a very dynamic and complicated image model.

2.7.1 Something unchanged

In the long historical progress of Western perceptions of China, from Ancient Greece to the present day, there have been certain views which have remained unchanged: Chinese antiquity, legendary mysteries and exotic traditions. For example, the long-term Western admiration for well-woven Chinese silk products still remains today, so that silk is still a must-have souvenir from the Middle Kingdom for modern tourists travelling to China. In several tourist guides, the traveller is frequently urged to buy silk. In the travel bible *the Lonely Planet*, it is suggested that "best buys include silk

jackets, hand painted T-shirts and scroll paintings.”¹³² In *Adventure Guide China*, it says, “silk and tea have always been popular buys”.¹³³

As an indexical symbol of China’s ancient history, the Great Wall was known to the West but did not become a house-hold name until an American astronaut announced that it was the only man-made architecture discernible from the moon. Suddenly the Wall attracted worldwide attention. In the 1970s, forced by pressure from the Soviet Union during the Cold War and seeking more political allies, the American government began to change its attitude to its Chinese counterpart. The American President Richard Nixon paid a state visit to China and, of course, climbed the Wall. The New York Times reports that he said to journalists, ‘When one stands there and sees the wall going to the peak of this mountain and realizes that it runs for hundreds of miles - as a matter of fact, thousands of miles - over the mountains and through the valleys of this country [and] that it was built over 2,000 years ago, I think that you would have to conclude that this is a great wall and that it had to be built by a great people’.¹³⁴ After all these years of media promotion of the Great Wall, it has been categorized as one of the top listed sightseeing sites for foreigners coming to visit China.

As for Chinese agricultural life, the image of barefoot peasants working in the rice terraces with a buffalo has dominated Western minds for such a long time, as if the image of Chinese peasants working on rice field and living a primitive life has never changed. Two decades ago, for Western travellers journeying to South China, say Guilin city, the rice fields and water buffalo were also necessary for their travelogues. As Starck wrote in his book when he travelled across China:

“The scenes in this part of China evoke vivid images of strange-looking peaks draped in silky mist and tufts of clouds; barefoot peasants, pant legs rolled up, tilling rice fields with water buffalo; people fishing from sleek bamboo boats, ingeniously snaring their catch using long-necked, hook-billed birds; women washing clothes by hand along the banks of the river; junks and sampans tied on

132 Bradley, Mayhew & Miller, Korina & English, Alex 2002: 228

133 Foster, Simon 2007: 374

134 <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/18/opinion/l-nixon-at-the-wall-411987.html> *Nixon at the Wall*, 10th September, 1987.

the shoreline with clothes hanging out to dry; lush green countryside unfolding in neat terraces in all directions; and, finally, a serenity that seems possible only when nature and people live in harmony.”¹³⁵

The conclusion can be derived from these descriptive and emotional words that the authentic nature of the peasants’ agricultural life arouses sympathy and is further identified with a primitive scenic beauty.

On the other hand, agricultural life in rural China is harsh and arduous indeed. The *Awakening of the East*, states that “peasants and working people alike have no hope of ever seeing their humble conditions improved, and their prospective existence is one of absolute monotony, entirely passed by sowing and reaping, in carrying heavy burdens, in the turning of looms or in labouring the earth...”¹³⁶ In Westerners’ eyes, China is supposed to be “ageless and unchanging”,¹³⁷ and to a great majority of Europeans, it is still a country located somewhere in the remote Far East which leaves them “uninterested in her problems and unmoved by her tragedies”.¹³⁸ In fact, the countryside was left behind during China’s economic rise. In the words of the BBC’s Beijing correspondent, “In Britain people tend to think of the countryside as a rural idyll, a bucolic landscape of green fields and happy folk. In China, if they can, people try not to think about the countryside at all. When they do, it is not of a rural idyll, but a grim, dirty place where people are poor and life is harsh.”¹³⁹

2.7.2 Long historical traditions

The Chinese as a group stick firmly to their traditions. The thousand-year-old martial arts, for instance, have been continuously practiced in temples and academies in modern China. Traditionally speaking, martial arts lie in an exotic compartment of

135 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 152

136 Leroy-Beaulieu, Pierre 2008: 220

137 Sullivan, Michael, 1979: 3

138 Dawson, Raymond 1967: 7 Raymond Dawson is a renowned Sinology scholar and University lecturer and Tutor at Wadham College, Oxford.

139 Wingfield-Hayes, Rupert, “China’s Rural Millions Left Behind”, March 2006

Chinese culture. As Jerry Alan Johnson¹⁴⁰ writes, “The ancient Chinese martial, medical, and spiritual skills have long been influenced by the various stories and accounts of warrior kings, Daoist Shaman mystics, and Buddhist immortals with magic powers.”¹⁴¹ As much as the box office hits from Hong Kong in the late 1970s, it is the antiquity of Chinese martial arts that have led to their warm reception in the West, as we can see in this quotation from Charles Steward:

“Kung Fu means hard work, stringent discipline and will power. It connotes the almost sadomasochistic commitment to actualizing one’s entire being and as a technique for self-empowerment since ancient times.”¹⁴²

In the history of Chinese martial arts, it is unquestionable that the Shaolin monastery has occupied a very important position, where the Buddhist religion was practiced daily alongside martial arts. Since the late Ming and early Qing eras, the bare hand combat technique of the Shaolin School developed to become the best in the country. Besides from their skill at bare-hand fighting, the monks were also experts with weapons. The whole martial art system in Shaolin is so mysterious, exotic, complicated and yet intriguing for the Westerners, that it has gained worldwide popularity.

Tai Chi, a relatively gentle Chinese martial art, has acquired a lot of attention in the West too. The scene of the Chinese community performing Tai Chi in the morning is quite familiar to the West:

“Chinese people like to exercise very much. They usually get up very early, especially the old people. Many people get up as early as five o’clock in the morning. Most people like to exercise in the parks or by the street side. Few people exercise at the gym. There are various types of exercises Chinese people do. Some go jogging, others do Tai Chi or take a walk and still others practice qigong.”¹⁴³

140 Jerry Alan Johnson is the executive director of the International Institute of Medical Qigong.

141 James, Andy 2004: vii

142 Steward, Charles C. 1997: 720

143 Ho, Yong, 200: 140

Tai Chi Chuan practice has been to some extent accepted by Americans as a form of complementary medicine. According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) in 2007 on Americans' use of CAM, '1 percent of the more than 23,300 adults surveyed had used Tai Chi in the past 12 months. Adjusted to nationally representative numbers, this means more than 2.3 million adults.'¹⁴⁴

Nowadays, the Chinese drink tea just as they did thousands of years ago, and still play Majiang or cards for entertainment in their spare time. They do not use a brush to write anymore except for calligraphy art work but keep their simplified Characters as written communication all over the nation. As for the Chinese language itself, Europeans and Americans acknowledge its antiquity and complexity just as the early Christian missionaries did, reiterating that 'Chinese script is not only the most complex but also the most ancient system of writing still in use in the world today'.¹⁴⁵

Ever since Ricci's epoch, Chinese medicine has been seen as an exotic theory from the Western medical perspective. The pulse-checking may be based on the same principle as Western medicine, but as a whole Chinese medicine possesses many unique qualities and techniques, such as the use of therapeutic needles in acupuncture, etc. As Bonavia argues, "The Chinese possess a unique, millennia-old medical science of great complexity. Though inferior to modern Western medicine in many respects it can still produce astonishingly good results."¹⁴⁶ As this shows, Chinese medicine is not highly rated by Westerners, yet the herbal remedies for cures are supposed to be natural and good for the health. Bonavia goes on to say that, "People in the West are mostly quite prepared to believe that some ancient Chinese herbal remedies may be as good as – or better than – modern synthesized drugs."¹⁴⁷

144 Quoted from Tai Chi introduction of American National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine official website,

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/taichi/>

145 Bonavia, David 1982: 243

146 Bonavia, David 1982: 128

147 Bonavia, David 1982: 134

In addition, Chinese cuisine was positioned as exotic, not simply because Chinese use chopsticks to eat, but also because the ingredients used in cooking could be odd, and sometimes unacceptable to Westerners. Starck mentions this phenomenon briefly when he writes of his search for a restaurant in Guilin, Guang Xi Province in south China: "On the wide sidewalk along the main street are wire cages and plastic tubs containing a variety of creatures – turtles, snakes, pigeons, civets, and others we cannot identify...We were told about other exotic dishes in cages, including monkey, pangolins (resembling armadillos), and cats. Dogs are a delicacy."¹⁴⁸ A foreign student studying in a city in northern China has published an article regarding his personal encounter with Chinese socializing: "The most common way for people to meet and/or socialize is to go for a lunch and/or dinner date in a restaurant. Eating is a regular habit of the Chinese, thus inviting someone for lunch is considered to be a good way of building a relationship in typical Chinese culture."¹⁴⁹

The celebration of Chinese New Year is another case here, which supports the view that the Chinese are faithful to their significant traditions from generation to generation. They celebrate the New Year with the family, by watching firework displays and lighting firecrackers with family members. The houses are usually decorated with red lanterns. Nowadays, the Chinese celebration of their most important annual festival is not only communicated to the West by traditional media coverage, but also made livelier by drawing on the overseas Chinese as a sort of walking image. Because of their presence in the West, those who maintain the Chinese culture and traditions even in a strange culture far away from home provide Westerners with yet another source to experience Chinese traditions. The celebration of the lunar Chinese New Year is the most wide-spread activity among the overseas Chinese community. On this occasion, the China Town areas in Western cities are decorated with red lanterns and banners. The Chinese communities will organize a series of performances including a lion dance, a dragon dance and costumed parades. A feature article describing traditional celebrations for the 2006 Chinese New Year was published on the BBC website, 'The centre of

148 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 153

149 Kapuwa, Patrick Brima, "Chinese socialization and hospitality", *The Patriotic Vanguard Periodical*, April 2010

London will undergo a transformation, with dragon and lion dances, performances of traditional and contemporary music and dance, including visiting Chinese artists, at Trafalgar Square, and firecrackers, fireworks and arts and crafts demonstrations in Leicester Square'.¹⁵⁰ In this case, the dragon becomes a symbol of tradition maintained in the face of adversity abroad.

2.7.3 A diverse country

During the contemporary era, it is commonly admitted in the West that China is a very large country with a broad ethnic diversity, among which the most celebrated minority group must be the Mongols. Due to the profound influence of Genghis Khan and the subsequent rule over China by his grandson, Mongols are well-known in both China and the Western world. They proudly claim themselves to be “people on horseback” and horseback to be their home,¹⁵¹ whereas in the West they are usually called hordes and are characterized, for historical reasons, as “ruthless barbarians who built an empire by fighting on horseback”.¹⁵²

The Chinese ethnic diversity determines a sophisticated concept of multiple Chinese identities, which are almost impossible to define precisely, for there are fifty-six different ethnic identities. Among these ethnic groups, the Tibetans, Uyghurs and the Mongols are the largest minority groups in current Chinese society. The Cambridge Handbook of China states of the Mongolians:

“The Mongolians once ran a gigantic empire, founded in 1206 by Genghis Khan, which covered most of the Eurasian continent. The Mongolian language belongs to the Altaic family; there are many mutually understandable dialects. The Mongolian script, still in use in the PRC, dates at least from the early thirteenth century. The main religion is lama Buddhism. Mongolians were traditionally nomadic (some still are), living in hide and felt tents called yurts. However, they are increasingly becoming settled and even urban dwellers. Industry is well developed among the Mongolians.”¹⁵³

150 http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2006/01/10/cny_celebrations_feature.shtml

151 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 184

152 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 182

153 Mackerras Colin & Yorke, Amanda 1991: 216

If Chinese traditions are significantly passed down through the generations by the Han Chinese, then Mongols have similarly played an important role in preserving the traditions of their ancestors from a thousand years ago. The Mongols maintain their own culture and customs; for instance, as Thammy Evans observes, “Nomadic by custom, a large number of Mongolians still roam steppes of the land living in yurts and tending herds. They still use their own language and writing.”¹⁵⁴

2.7.4 A threat and foe

“China stands up, Chinese people stand up”, announced by Chairman Mao Zedong, from Tiananmen Castle on October 1st, 1949, a moment which symbolized the official establishment of People’s Republic of China. Following a similar Communist political pattern as the former Soviet Union, the new China was considered to be another serious foe of the States and thus a menace to the Western world. In the era of the Cold War, the mutual communication between China and the West almost faded altogether. The stereotyped information about China in the West was largely limited to criticisms of the political situation and Communist dictatorship, which has had a lasting effect upon today’s images.

After GMD¹⁵⁵ led by Chiang Kai-Shek lost the civil war and a new Communist China was established, the American government was blamed for not offering enough economic and military aid to GMD, which resulted in losing China as an ally during the Cold War. The loss of China undeniably made an impact upon the States; as Isaacs puts it, “What has happened since 1949 has quickly acquired all the distortions of the unknown, dimly seen and greatly feared across a great distance.”¹⁵⁶ The American Secretary of State at that time, Dean Acheson, published an official report on the 5th of August, 1949, widely known as the *China White Paper*. In the end, Acheson emphasized that the Chinese Communist party acted in the interest of the Russian government but not of its own people, and might well be a threat to world security. The original corresponding paragraph is quoted below:

154 Evans, Thammy 2006: 41

155 GMD, Guomindang, Chinese Nationalist Party, the founding and ruling Party of Taiwan.

156 Isaacs, Harold R. 1972: 64

“In the immediate future, however, the implementation of our historic policy of friendship for China must be profoundly affected by current developments. It will necessarily be influenced by the degree to which the Chinese people come to recognize that the Communist regime serves not their interests but those of Soviet Russia and the manner in which, having become aware of the facts, they react to this foreign domination. One point, however, is clear. Should the Communist regime lend itself to the aims of Soviet Russian imperialism and attempt to engage in aggression against China's neighbors, we and the other members of the United Nations would be confronted by a situation in violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter and threatening international peace and security.”¹⁵⁷

Based on this government document in the States, when Mao governed mainland China, the view generally expressed in the West was that the Chinese were ruled by a dictatorship government which deprived the country of freedom and democracy.

“China's government had embraced Marxism, [and the Western perception] was of China as a totalitarian society without any freedom. The way the CCP could neutralize opposition to its elimination of freedom was through *brainwashing*, a process that came to hold a quite important place in the West's hierarchy of images of China.”¹⁵⁸

This viewpoint was incorporated into a number of books, which caused an influential reinforcement of the idea in the formulation of Western images of China. Pierre Ryckmans, a Belgian Sinologist, wrote several books about Mao's rule and the Cultural Revolution which he published with the aim of enhancing China's national productivity. In his *Common Sense about China*, he strongly reproached the Communist government for ruining the splendid Chinese culture, and how terrifying life was for the Chinese during the Revolution. “China was totalitarian and its government bureaucratic with more hierarchy and less equality even than in the old days...It was impossible for a foreigner to talk to a Chinese, because the latter were all too terrified. The Cultural Revolution and the Maoists destroyed a beautiful ancient and mass culture, replacing it with a narrow “monstrous nothingness.”¹⁵⁹ This critical view was obviously shared by Chinese peasant-sympathizer Pearl S. Buck. In 1954 she published her own autobiography and, although it did not have much to say about the Communist government, her attitude expressed in the book was

157 Acheson, Dean 1949: xvii

158 Mackerras, Colin 1999: 86

159 Mackerras, Colin 1999: 196

fiercely hostile. Another novelist, W. E. Johns, claimed in *Biggles* that “China is a country run by sadistic and wicked Communists, utterly subservient to the Russians. Their army will kill anybody for the pleasure of it, including their own people if they’re in the mood.”¹⁶⁰ As Mackerra points out, the novel *Biggles* had a persuasive impact, at least upon Western boys, although W.E. Johns knew virtually nothing about China.¹⁶¹

In addition, China was also identified as a “red dragon”. On the cover of Time magazine issued on 13th September 1963, China is visualized as a red dragon boat filled with millions of people playing the quant. In the upper right corner of the cover, under the headline *Red China*, the words “The Arrogant Outcast” are highlighted in yellow. Evidently, the “red star” of the 1930s had become an arrogant country abandoned by the Western capitalist world. The image of the evil dragon, which has been enforced since the Communist Party took power in 1949, is engraved into Americans’ minds. In Isaac Harold’s fundamental work *Scratches on Our Minds*, he describes the inevitable awakening of the dragon, “Opening his red eyes, rising into motion, breathing fire, he has completely altered the arrangement of lights and shadows in which he was previously seen. There is nothing delicate or subtle about him now, he is tough and crude. He is not torpid, but driving, not passive or yielding, but aggressive and unmanageable.”¹⁶² In the States, China is still regarded as a threat to America’s national security. In November 1999, *Red Dragon Rising* was published, which emphasized one single point from beginning to end: that China is a deadly threat to American national security and even international order. The first chapter of the book is titled “*Red dragon rising*” and describes China as ‘a totalitarian regime that has been responsible for enormous evil’.¹⁶³ In conclusion, this ‘red dragon’ is definitely a foe, and an enemy of the West, because the US government has accused the PRC of continuing “its policy of selling weapons of mass destruction to terrorist nations or others in sensitive regions’.¹⁶⁴

160 Johns, W. E. 1937: 12

161 Mackerras, Colin 1999: 89

162 Isaacs, Harold R. 1972: 209

163 Isaacs, Harold R. 1972: 11

164 Timperlake, Edward & Triplett II, William C. 2002: 4

2.7.5 The paradox of the yellow peril from an inferior race

The conception of China as a foe and threat to the world security was intensely emphasized by the term of “human sea” coined during the Korean war. In 1950, the Korean War between the States and the North Korea broke out. China sent the army to North Korea to assist its war effort. On the battle ground, a very large number of ‘faceless’ Chinese soldiers poured out to fight the American army, intimidating by their sheer numbers, and leading the US to believe that China was a threat to American national security, even to global security. After the war, China’s threatening image worsened with the Sino-Soviet split and its acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1964. The enormous population size led Westerners to compare the Chinese population to ants. A vast land with such a huge population terrified most Westerners; as Raymond Dawson summarized, “In our crowded Western European societies prolificness is often looked down on and associated with poverty and fecklessness (and, in Protestant eyes, with the doctrinal stupidity of the Roman Catholic Church). Metaphorical ways of describing populousness are frequently derogatory, and the Chinese have often been likened to ants.”¹⁶⁵

The term Yellow Peril, which was used to refer to Asian immigration in the late nineteenth century, was once again specifically related to the Chinese. Scott held the opinion that China was “coming back” after 1949, but wonders “with what images and what hopes”. He argued that it would be easy to trigger a threatening sensation among the West because of China’s past glories: “Meanwhile China’s Middle Kingdom heights had also generated perceptions in the outside world of China’s latent and potential strength, a recognition that slid all too easily into fears of China as the Yellow Peril, a long featuring archetype in Western images of China”.¹⁶⁶ Whitney also expressed his deep concerns about the increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants in the States. He called them the “peaceful invader”¹⁶⁷: “Silent and persistent, as the white ants that destroy the strongest timbers while the householder

¹⁶⁵ Dawson, Raymond 1967:149-150

¹⁶⁶ Scott, David 2007:14

¹⁶⁷ Whitney, James Amaziah 2008:138

sleeps, they go further and further; and where they have once settled there they remain".¹⁶⁸

On the one hand, Americans viewed the Chinese as dangerous because of their numbers; on the other hand, they were relieved because the Chinese were hardly a match for industrialized nations. After a hundred years of contempt towards China which had prevailed in the western world, it seemed to be commonly accepted that the "Yellow peril" can be threatening, but is after all an inferior, cowardly and undisciplined race. 'So cowardly were they that the common word for cowardice was "yellow"'.¹⁶⁹ Since the Chinese were labelled as a fragile and weak yellow people, they deserved no respect from Western nations. America was a definite subscriber to this view: "This was not the age of equality, and Americans could agree that Chinese were an inferior people whose fate was to be decided by the ruling nations of the world, of which the United States was clearly one."¹⁷⁰ Although the Chinese were regarded as an inferior race, China was nonetheless viewed as an enemy of the States for decades.

The color yellow used to be the imperial color exclusive to emperors in Chinese history. However, in Western terms, it has become a symbol of exotic otherness, a way to denote an inferior race, the people who need to be rescued by God. Along with the rise of advanced technology and economy success in the West, the contempt from the white world for yellow labor can be seen in the unanimous agreement signed during the fourth Inter-colonial Trade Union Congress in Adelaide in 1886. Labor immigration should be totally abolished, "because the competition of Asiatic against European labor was completely unfair; it is well-known that the presence of Chinese in large numbers in any community has had a very bad moral tendency".¹⁷¹ The Chinese moral standard inherited from Confucius, once highly revered by philosophers in the eighteenth century, was now seen as a symbol of degeneration and inferiority. As McQueen commented, "Once the Chinese were

¹⁶⁸ Whitney, James Amaziah 2008:137

¹⁶⁹ Utley, Jonathan G. 1991:116

¹⁷⁰ Utley, Jonathan G. 1991: 117

¹⁷¹ McQueen, Humphrey 2004: 35

perceived as an economic threat, the belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority quickly turned Chinese customs into conclusive proof of oriental infamy.”¹⁷²

2.7.6 After the first diplomatic contact between the USA and the red dragon

In the 1970s, the United States was trapped in the Vietnam War, and confronted huge pressure from the military competence of the Soviet Union. For this reason, the American government was forced to build a constructive relationship with the PRC. In 1972, the American president Richard Nixon paid a visit to China, which greatly affected the bilateral relationship between the States and China, and to a more general extent, between the West and China. After he returned to the States, the image of China had already been altered. The Gallup Polls on the nature of the Chinese taken in 1966 revealed three main negative images: the Chinese were “ignorant, warlike and sly”. By 1972, the words for the Chinese character had changed to hardworking, intelligent, practical, artistic and so on.

Furthermore, Harold Isaacs described the direct impact of the new US diplomacy and Nixon’s visit in images of China in America. He noted an increased interest in Chinese food, art, fashions, and acupuncture. The number of Americans going to China rose quickly. There was a mania for everything Chinese. After two decades of hostility, the old kingdom seemed appealing again. “A China fever swept the United States. Its symptoms were not only the enraptured accounts of life in the PRC by the early American visitors, but also the tidal wave of *Chinoiserie* that deluged everything from art museums to hair salons and from interior design to high couture.”¹⁷³

The American interest in China was successfully maintained by China’s internal changes. Mao’s successor Deng Xiaoping implemented a string of measures to push forward internal reform in 1976, and at the same time implemented an increasingly open policy towards the West. The West believed that China was moving away from Marx, abandoning its one-party rule and heading towards political democracy and a

172 McQueen, Humphrey 2004: 35

173 Harding, Harry 1991: 244

liberal economy. Highly praised by Western journalists, Deng Xiaoping was named as Time's person of the year in the 1978 and 1985 (Appendix 8). In the Time's issue of September 1985, a cover story titled *the Second Revolution* was published on the front page. In this article, China was portrayed as a country infused with vitality which was transforming peacefully into a capitalist market economy.

“Deng and his reformist allies have displayed an impressive blend of self-criticism and self-confidence in their attempts to balance a measure of freedom with control, unity with diversity, experimentation with tradition. Their success at opening to the outside world a country that has long lived behind walls both great and small has been remarkable. The people have seized their new opportunities with the spirit and skill shown by the industrious Overseas Chinese.”¹⁷⁴

Until the end of the 1980s, the image of China and its leader Deng Xiaoping was that of a revitalized world power with a self-confident and determined leader. The positive images, generated by Nixon's visit in 1972 and the reform policies conducted by Deng, were only able to be maintained until the breakout of the Tiananmen Massacre in June 1989, after which the open and democratic image of China crashed down again. ‘The 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre remains a sensitive issue with the Chinese communist party, and anyone discussing that bloody crackdown risks serious jail time.’¹⁷⁵ American Sinologist John F. Fairbank wrote, “In far-off China, Chairman Mao Zedong killed millions and millions of Chinese while calling it a class struggle for revolution. His successor in 1989 was so stuck in China's autocratic tradition that, when confronted with unarmed petitioners for democracy, he made the mistake of sending in tanks to shoot down hundreds of them on primetime television.”¹⁷⁶ In Time magazine, there were a series of articles concerning the Beijing Massacre with a seriously critical tone. In an article called *China: Deng's Big Lie*, the image that the government is a liar, as in the era of the Cold War, was reinstated, even more aggressively than before.

“Can it really be that easy? Can memory be so short? Can history be rewritten by proclamation of the Beijing Communist Party propaganda department? Eerily,

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,959914-12,00.html>

¹⁷⁵ Timperlake, Edward & Triplett II, William C. 2002: 7-8

¹⁷⁶ Fairbank, John King 2006: 2

China's top leaders apparently believe that if they repeat the lie enough times, it will turn into truth...It is the sheer enormity of the untruth, however, that is so stunning. Certainly there is nothing subtle about the Chinese leadership's tactics. Tell the lie again and again."¹⁷⁷

Under the impact of globalization in the 1990s, the Middle Kingdom has been further driven into a process of transition in the spheres of economy, culture and society, aiming to get rid of the utter poverty left by the civil war to pursue developed modernization. There was big economic gap between China and the West; as Bonavia observed thirty years ago, "here was the once rich and splendid China brought so low economically that her people had to go around on bicycles while foreigners parked expensive cars on her ruined sites".¹⁷⁸ However, since the beginning of the new Millennium, China has gained astonishing achievements in its economic construction.

Migrant workers swarm to China's major cities, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, causing a tremendous increase of population pressure in urban cities. Over the last two decades, China has undergone rapid urbanization. According to the figures released by China Labor Bulletin, a Hong Kong-founded NGO, "The proportion of China's urban population increased from 18 percent in 1978 to 43.9 percent in 2006."¹⁷⁹ The large numbers of migrant workers and rapid urbanization in China have remained a focus of Western media attention.

From the perspective of creating an open and mutually respectful society, an essential value in the Western philosophy system, China has been criticized for implementing the controversial one-child policy for a long time. Since 1979, China's government has carried out a state policy of demographic control, namely the one-child policy (or family planning policy). This officially restricts the number of children married couples can have to one, although it allows exemptions in several cases, including rural couples, ethnic minorities, and parents without any siblings themselves. This policy currently does not apply to the special administrative regions

¹⁷⁷ Smolowe, Jill *China Deng's Big Lie*, June 26th, 1989. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,958001,00.html>

¹⁷⁸ Bonavia, David 1982: 101

¹⁷⁹ Migrant Workers in China, <http://www.china-labour.org.hk/en/node/100259>

of Hong Kong and Macau either. The introduction of the One-child policy has contributed to a reduction of about two hundred and fifty million people in China, according to a BBC report.¹⁸⁰ Without the implementation of this policy, the total Chinese population would otherwise be 1.7 billion. However, this policy is accused by the critics of being the leading cause of the death of female infants, due to a traditional preference for male children. Some women are even forced to get an abortion in order not to pay the penalty charge. The One-child policy, therefore, is criticized as a violation of human rights and is in particular opposed by the United States.

From 1949 until today, certain images of China, established in Ancient Greece, have been preserved in the Western imagination, thus contributing to the view that China is an ancient and traditional country. The specific political conditions of the 20th century, however, have highlighted negative images drawn from the nineteenth century. The older images combined with new imposed ones have merged in the Western perception into a more complex, dynamic, and yet still stereotyped image mix of the Middle Kingdom, which will be summarized in the subsequent section.

2.8 The construction of the China image model

Various different perceptions of the silk land have been generated in the West since ancient Greek times, and these images have gradually transformed alongside historical developments. Over time, images of China have varied from an admirable paradise, to a great and mighty kingdom possessing wealth and civilization by the eighteenth century. The giant country fell into Western contempt in the era of imperial expansion, and eventually became reconstructed as a Communist enemy after the Communist Party gained power during the Cold War. China, seen through Western eyes, becomes a “Chinese Chameleon”, claims Oxford Sinology professor Raymond Dawson, in reference to the instability of the images of China in different eras in the West, which also to some extent reflect the West’s own development.

180 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/941511.stm>

In Polo's times, the Middle Kingdom was an affluent and civilized dreamland. In the Era of Western imperial expansion, it was commonly held to be a mysterious and alien land swarming with poor and starving people, as described in missionary journals or travelogues. After Communist China was established and became the Soviet Union's "little brother" in 1949, American was overwhelmed with concerns of a communist threat growing in China and Eastern Europe. The Chinese Communist government was regarded as a representative of brutality. However, ever since the late 1990s, Westerners have been startled by the striking economic take-off of communist China; the country once considered "backwards", which used to be governed by Western imperialist powers, is now rising as a new power on the global stage. This section will investigate general Western images of China from the early Greek and Roman times until the present day, and how contemporary Western images of China have been shaped by these historical images and follow certain image patterns. The core proposition here is that the Chinese nation is at present perceived from the Western perspective in terms of the following five aspects: antiquity, tradition, diversity, transition and threat.

2.8.1 Antiquity

China is an ancient civilization, known to Europe as a silk land ever since Ancient Greece. The antiquity of China is closely associated with the long-lasting reputation of its expensive silk, delicate porcelain and tea drinking. According to historical records, these products have been manufactured in China for a very long time and renowned in Europe via the commercial trade between Europe and the Middle Kingdom. Nowadays, these commodities are no longer exclusive to China, but are nonetheless still classified as "Chinese" and their history links them with China's unique antiquity. Since early times, these three products have been favored and valued by Europeans, even when China fell into a state of decline in the late eighteenth century. Regardless of the fluctuation of the Western historical images of China and the Chinese people from positive and negative images, and regardless of the state of development in Western nations, precious silk has maintained its symbolism as an indicator of elegance and taste, whilst porcelain still signifies

fineness and delicacy. Tea is also highly welcomed and adapted to suit the different tastes of European customers. Therefore, silk, porcelain and tea have been adopted as a cultural code in the West to represent the thousands of years of China's continuous antique culture and history. This code is also used in the contemporary Western media's representations of China, in particular in the film and television genres.

In addition, Chinese antiquity can also be represented by ancient constructions, such as the Great Wall or the Royal Palace, known as the Forbidden City in contemporary times. Both of these were selected to be listed as World Cultural Heritage sites, thus ensuring their standing as symbolic icons to represent China's antiquity within contemporary cultural scope. Initially, the Great Wall was built by Qin Shi Huang Di¹⁸¹ to enclose the territory of Qin and protect the national border from the incursion of the northern nomadic tribes. After continuous renovation and extension work by a series of emperors, it only reached its current impressive length by the sixteenth century during the Ming Dynasty, which probably justifies its omission from Polo's famous travel journal. Nowadays, the Wall is estimated as approximately 1250 miles long. It took the emperors more than two thousand years to complete the construction of this long fortress. Hence the time-consuming historical Great Wall is regarded as a symbol of China's long, ancient and continuous history. The Royal Palace of the Mongol Yuan dynasty was in Polo's eyes an extravagant world of gold, silver and skilful paintings, the greatest and finest palace in the world. Later, in Ricci's account, it was described as a palace covered everywhere in yellow colours, as the exclusive colour of the royal family. As access to the royal palace was forbidden to the public and only opened to the public after new China was established, it managed to keep its mysterious appeal among the ordinary people. When we look at the former royal residence today, it still implies a royal mystery and the long-term imperial rule over China.

¹⁸¹ Qin Shi Huang Di (259-210B.C) was the first emperor of a unified China in 221 BC and started to build the Great Wall to fight against nomadic tribes living in the northwest.

China's antiquity can also be seen in the evolution of Western images of China. China was once seen as a land of abundant wealth with large amount of gold and silver. This image of a rich and shiny oriental world started to fade when European industrial productivity improved. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, European countries underwent the period of the Renaissance, which encompassed a resurgence of learning, arts and architectures which favoured the style of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Age of the Enlightenment came next, a time period referring to a huge transformation in the circle of philosophy and cultural life, a foundation for European industrialization. A more epoch-making economic and social systematic industrial revolution spread initially across Western Europe, then further to Russia and other Eastern European countries.

Compared with the thriving and advanced development proceeding in Europe, the Middle Kingdom was under the strict, oppressive and cruel rule of the Ming Emperor. The Chinese rulers implemented the policy of isolating China as a so-called "celestial empire" by permitting very little communication with the outside world, meaning that China did not manage to catch up with the wave of the industrial revolution. When missionaries arrived in China in the sixteenth century, they saw the land in "a thousand years of pagan darkness"¹⁸² and sympathized with the misfortune of the Chinese people. Much European sympathy over the centuries lay with the primitive agricultural lives of the rural Chinese. The image of barefoot peasants working in a rice field holding a hoe and pulling an ox was adopted in Western painting during the 18th Century and later on very much inspired the Buck's Pulitzer-winning literary creation. This way of living may be hard and backward, however the narration of such harsh physical labor triggered real Western sympathy, and as a result Chinese peasants emerge in Western cultural artefacts as real people, instead of mere negative images.

2.8.2 Tradition

182 Ricci, Matteo 1953: 82

Tradition is the second distinct label given to China, as it possesses the longest continuous history in the world, with rich and varied cultural traditions. The Chinese art of painting and calligraphy has been learned in the West for centuries. These arts have enjoyed a long-term reputation as a Chinese enigma, because their styles differ so distinctly from European artistic criteria. The Chinese language is complicated, inscrutable and must be written in characters with a soft brush. However, it is this different style which distinguishes them as a symbol of China's unique cultural tradition. From the philosophical point of view, Confucius dominated China throughout its long history, making a profound impact upon the Chinese mentality. For example, the Chinese society is decidedly collective, and so family relationships and loyalty to superiors are given great value. Socially, certain customs have been carefully preserved to the present day, such as the wine culture - serving rice wine at a Chinese banquet with family or friends remains an important tradition in contemporary Chinese society. The whole celebration and decoration tradition for the Chinese New Year, the most important traditional feast in China, has been largely preserved in the contemporary era.

2.8.3 Diversity

Diversity is another distinct characteristic of the country, as China is such a vast land, not only topographically but also ethnically. China has always been an enormously populous kingdom. This statement has already been confirmed by European merchants, missionaries, travellers, diplomats, journalists, and everybody else who has ever been to China. There is a great difference in the various customs, language, cuisine and so forth across the country between Chinese people from different regions. As well as the majority Han Chinese, there are other ethnic minority groups scattered all over China, including Mongols, Manchu, Uyghur, etc. Each ethnic group has its own cultural characteristics, which are highly different from those of the Han Chinese, but they all live in China and form an essential part of Chinese identity.

If we take Mongols as an example, we know that Mongols are more strongly built than the Han Chinese, and are experts at horsemanship. Genghis Khan's invasion of

Europe brought the Mongols into the European horizon, even though theirs might not be a pleasant history for Europeans. Special European attention goes to the Khan. In the medieval era, most people from the noble class in Europe read about Polo's meeting with the Great Khan in his intriguing magnificent golden palace located in this paradise land, too wealthy and prosperous to be believed. The charm appealed to Columbus and inspired his ambition to find a sea route to the oriental world. This legend continued to generate an impact even after five-hundred years - Voltaire included Genghis Khan as a wise king in *The Orphan of China* during the Age of Enlightenment. The missionaries portrayed a picture of Manchu in the reports sent back to Europe. The ethnic diversity of the vast land of China is not new to Europeans.

2.8.4 Transition

The historical Western images of China left an impression of a country enriched with antiquity, tradition and diversity. The modern development in China reflects a land undergoing a huge transformation in many respects. From the political perspective, the Chinese overthrew the Qing's imperial rule in 1912 but failed to establish a strong and powerful government. China became a country divided by imperial powers. By 1949, Mao had unified the whole country and implemented communism as the political foundation.

From the economic perspective, China was regarded as a wealthy oriental country full of gold and silver for about a thousand years in Western history, until it changed to being seen as a backwards and poor country in the age of imperial expansion. This image has held up into the 1990s. In these days, a rising China has attracted Western attention once again. By contrast to European vital modernization, China is seen as an ancient and exotic country. But nowadays, China also has a soaring skyline in Shanghai and other modern architecture in the metropolises. China paid a huge price in exchange for modernization in a small part of the county. The gap between rich and poor is widening dramatically. A very small fraction of the elite population possesses most of the national capital. In order to facilitate the

development of its heavy industry, the natural environment has been severely damaged.

Socially and culturally, under the impact of globalization, the life of the Chinese is changing and some of their traditions have had to confront the challenge of the Western lifestyle. Chinese women still have to play the traditional role of the good wife who cares for the family in contemporary Chinese society, but they are facing challenges and pressure to adjust themselves to this new changing society. All these transitions are happening in contemporary China, and China is developing so fast in the twenty-first century that it has left a lot of social problems behind. In order to adapt itself to pursue a more harmonious life style, both the Government and individuals have to confront these problems and seek solutions.

2.8.5 Threat

After new Communist China was established, it was positioned as a threat to world security in the West, especially in the United States. Above all, communism in Western minds is cruel, despotic, and pays no respect to individuality, and communist countries are where enemies come from in American film and TV productions. As far as the media is concerned, communism must only meet with strong condemnation and sharp criticism. In the Hollywood film *My One and Only*, Chris Noth played the role of an American general of the 1960s. During a family breakfast with his wife, Anne (heroine) and their sons, one of the boys complains about the boring uniform which the Communists wear in Soviet Union. The general replies, "That is why we are fighting communism, boys, because we are living in a country founded on individualism. If the communists did take over, everybody would be wearing the same clothes. Every street would have exactly the same store, no matter which town you went to, each the same as the next. That is why our boys are fighting and dying so that that does not happen." From these lines, we can sense with how much hostility communism was perceived in the early sixties in the States. So, we get a basic picture that communism equals uniformity without individuality.

Red China, or the Red Dragon, are special terms coined to describe Communist China. During the Cold War Era, Communism was seen as an evil and cruel regime. Such a huge land under the communist regime was of course seen as a foe to the Western capitalist world. China is a populous country, and the large population is intimidating to European countries whose lands are smaller and who have fewer people. In the late seventeenth century, Napoleon once stood in front of a map and pointed to the location where China lay, and then said, "Behold the Chinese Empire. Let it sleep, for when this dragon wakes the world will tremble."¹⁸³ The fear of this threatening dragon breathing fire continued until the beginning of the twentieth century when the growing influx of Chinese immigrants into Europe and the States earned the Chinese a reputation as the "yellow peril". This image of the Chinese army as a threatening yellow peril was further enforced during the Korean War, as the huge Chinese "human sea" definitely outnumbered the American army. In brief, contemporary Western images of China are derived from historical images and additionally affected by the interactions between the West and China. These images follow certain patterns, based on the sum of all the historical images of China in the West.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY: CHINA REVEALED

Documentary filmmaking is characterized as documenting reality, and the genre is adopted by filmmakers to present information to the audience, which can generate a specific social impact which may either be "educationally instructive" or "culturally enlightening"¹⁸⁴. If we accept that documentary-making is to some extent a quasi-scientific reconstruction of reality, then a Western documentary on China must visually present the Western understanding of the country as faithfully as possible. As the images of China in documentaries make up a significant proportion of

¹⁸³ Fitzgerald, John 1996: 5

¹⁸⁴ Hill, W. John & Gibson, Pamela Church, 1998: 426

Western media representations of China, it would therefore seem valuable to analyze the images covered in documentaries in this thesis.

In order to acquire an in-depth understanding of the visual media's images of China, I will analyze the specific case of a documentary made for the Discovery channel which portrayed China from different angles. In this dissertation, the documentary will be examined from the cultural perspective, looking in turn at the film's production, primary storyline, characters, before moving onto a detailed semiotic analysis of key sequences. Based on this analysis, we will consider whether or not contemporary televisual images follow the historical image pattern summarized in the second chapter. The reason why only one Discovery documentary was chosen for in-depth research is that the programs broadcast by this channel can reach a large international audience, and the channel is a very important player in the world documentary film community. Founded by John S. Hendricks in 1982, "the Discovery Channel reached over 86 million subscribers in the United States in 2003, and was the most widely distributed television brand in the world, reaching over 425 million homes in 155 countries".¹⁸⁵ These numbers show the extensive scale of the audience network of the Discovery Channel around the world.

Furthermore, this documentary did not merely focus on one single topic about China, such as its economic rise, environmental pollution or only about one historical site; rather, it offered a comprehensive overview composed of visual observation of this huge country in less than two hours. The producer therefore had to select the most enlightening perspectives to portray this old country. The documentary thus forms a visual link between China's antiquity and modern development, and further delivers a great many messages about China in transition to the target audience.

Audiences from different cultural backgrounds will decode the signified messages delivered by a film from their own unique perspective. What is more, the way in which different media channels encode images and narrations to communicate messages to their target audience is also highly varied. The Discovery Channel, for

¹⁸⁵ Ellis, Jack C & McLane, Betsy A. 261

instance, prioritizes commercial interests with the objective of attracting more viewers, whilst the BBC, a public broadcast station, ensures its documentary films can focus on meeting satisfaction with a much smaller target audience. If we take these behind-the-scenes intentions into consideration, the filming style including the editing technique and filming composition must differ from a Discovery documentary to a BBC documentary accordingly.

3.1 Discovery Atlas – *China Revealed* introduction

Launched by the Discovery Channel, *Discovery Atlas* is a television documentary series which is scheduled to film three seasons of four episodes covering eleven countries, including Japan, Italy, Brazil, Australia, and Russia. All the documentaries were filmed to bring an actual picture of the social development and individual struggles in these countries to the audience. Meanwhile, the filming explored historical and ethnic customs and unique cultural traditions. The whole project took about five years and targeted around twenty countries.

The People's Republic of China was the focus of the first episode to air. On the 1st October, 2006, the first episode, *China Revealed*, was broadcast on the Discovery channel. The television documentary played for one hour and forty minutes, and took an in-depth look at the stories of more than ten individuals. Their lives and their struggles reflected the dramatic transition taking place in both the economic and social sphere which are now affecting contemporary China as a whole. Based on individual personal struggles and the disparities between their dreams and reality, the documentary portrays a picture of local Chinese people and their real contemporary life.

Recently, China, the world's oldest continuous civilization, has been swept by a transformation influenced by systems of Western values. In the process of social adaptation, tradition has encountered modernity. The Western lifestyle is successfully and persuasively promoted by the spread of Western, and in particular American, culture, including Hollywood films and television dramas, whereas the

ancient Chinese arts are losing their historical dominance. While the Chinese economy has boomed, astonishing the rest of the world with its surging GDP, the gap between rich and poor is also widening dramatically. China in the new twenty-first century is then a land in transition.

3.2 Film storyline

The documentary's storyline charts the personal stories of ten different representative individuals from various social backgrounds. Their personal stories and interviews in the film are interwoven with montages.

- **Antiquity versus modernity**

The documentary begins with a montage of a Chinese peasant's life in Guangxi, subsequently followed by a migrant worker working in Shanghai. Some peasants living a life by rice-planting happily enjoy their agricultural life, while others living in similar rural areas prefer to migrate and work in big cities.

- **Tradition versus present reality**

The second part of the documentary revolves around the topic of China's traditions, with the story of a Kung Fu master and his most talented student at the Shaolin Temple. Instead of staying in the Temple to pass down the traditions of martial arts, this student hopes to become a police guard or enlist in the army.

It is deeply rooted in traditional Confucian philosophy that children must obey their parents. Here we see, in contemporary China, a child athlete following her father's severe training regime for the honour and reputation of the nation.

A bow-maker explains how hard he tried to preserve the art of traditional bow production throughout the Cultural Revolution. A property tycoon discusses building

modern properties in the city, which evidently changes the traditional look of the city and introduces a new Western lifestyle.

- Ethnic diversity

The film director chose to film the Mongol minority group living on grassland, thus exploring China's ethnic diversity, and the challenges to this minority's way of life under the impact of Chinese modern development.

- Women's transition

Three women were interviewed in this section of the documentary to portray a picture of contemporary Chinese women's real life. China is in a state of transition, and new development has brought many challenges to the role of Chinese women. In this context, they have to find a balance between their traditional role and the fulfillment of new responsibilities.

- Cultural tradition

As the most important annual celebration in China, the Chinese New Year is the most frequently mentioned topic of Chinese cultural tradition. In the final part of this documentary, the camera shows how the Chinese celebrate their most crucial annual festival.

3.3 Characters

There are altogether nine individual stories of nine representatives, in which general images of China are intermingled with their footage.

Two central characters (privileged characters):

- Sun Feng - a window cleaner in Shanghai (migrant worker)
- Jin Yang - a twelve-year-old gymnast preparing for the 2008 Olympic Games (athlete)

Other main characters:

Male:

- Liu Jieshan - a Kung Fu master in the Shaolin temple (master)
- Yang Fuxi - a traditional bow-maker living in Beijing (artist)
- Vincent Luo - a property tycoon in Shanghai (businessman)
- Huai Han - a Mongolian living on the grassland (Mongol)

Female:

- Mrs. Liao - a female peasant in Guangxi province (peasant)
- Elisa - an employee in a computer firm in Shanghai (white-collar business woman)
- Zhou Lin - a policewoman working in the drug squad in northwest China (policewoman)

Supporting characters:

- Mrs Liao's daughter and her husband
- Xiao Cui
- Jin Yang's father
- Eliza's boyfriend and her mother
- Zhou Lin's mother
- Sun Feng's wife

3.4 Filming locations

The filming locations of *China Revealed* cover a large area of Chinese regions and cities. From Inner Mongolia in the northwest to Hong Kong in the South, the documentary displays a variety of Chinese landscapes, customs and ethnic cultures. On the map of China (Appendix 9), the provinces or cities selected as filming locations in the documentary are marked in red ovals. From these signs, we can see that the filmed places are mainly located in the area along the east Chinese coastline. In the vast Western area, two other well-known yet controversial autonomous minority regions, Xinjiang and Tibet, are not covered in this documentary, and nor were the huge in-land provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan.

If we carefully look at the details of all the cities marked on the map, we can discover that the filming locations were selected to develop a storyline representing typical "Chineseness" in Western perceptions. Famous Chinese cities such as Beijing,

Shanghai and Hong Kong are indispensable in Western documentaries on China, as they are regarded as convincing representations of fast economic development and thus an epitome of the whole country. Following the long-existing Western attraction to Chinese peasants, the terrace in Guangxi province located in Southern China would of course be included as the best option to represent the antiquity of an agricultural land. The selection of the Shaolin temple in Henan province allowed the director to include an ancient setting for the mysterious martial art of Kung Fu, which has gained much popularity in recent years in the West. Last but not least, to portray a picture of a diverse ethnic culture in China, Inner Mongolia was a must, for the Mongols live in this vast region. On the whole, a large part of China's east area from North to the South is covered in this documentary film.

CHAPTER 4

FILM SEQUENCE

4.1 An analysis of the terms “Atlas” and “Revealed”

As the name of the Discovery Atlas project implies, the storyline is connected by introductions of different regions located on maps in an atlas. As stated in the Britannia Encyclopaedia, “An atlas is a bound volume of maps and charts describing the geography of the world or of particular areas of the world. An Atlas may contain information about the geology, topography, climate, vegetation, economy, and population of an area which it describes.”¹⁸⁶ The documentary was designed in the format of an atlas, which means that all the information revealed in this documentary is comprehensive yet sketchy, like an illustration from an atlas. Hence, it is assumed that audiences would expect the information about the fundamental facts or aspects from a Western perspective, ranging from China's geographical traits, population, and cultural traditions to the economy in general.

Another key word in the title is “Revealed”, which means to disclose or unveil something secret which is only available to a small amount of people. “China

186 Britannia Encyclopaedia, P266

Revealed” thus implies that China is categorized as a mysterious land, a land to be understood, explored and discovered. Although images of China have appeared more frequently than ever in the Western media, it seems that Westerners are still eager to access more information about this remote oriental country. As Hawley argued, “given the lack of information generally available, Americans formed their ideas and images of Asia from any sources they could find”,¹⁸⁷ and the West have long held “the desire for information about the mysterious East”.¹⁸⁸ The title of *China Revealed* suggests that this country, so inscrutable and inaccessible in earlier days, will at last be revealed by the camera to Western audiences.

4.2 Film sequence graphic

00'00	*	<p>Exposition</p> <p>(1)Discovery HD Theatre opening (2)Shaolin Kung Fu (3)Forbidden City (4)Calligraphy (5)Mass of people (6)National flag (7)Kung Fu academy (8)Shanghai city night view (9)Horse race on the grassland (9)Arrow practitioner (10)Tai Chi (11)Gymnastic athlete (12)Farmers working in the rice paddy. (13)Great Wall</p>
02'27	*	<p>Discovery Atlas series exposition</p> <p>(1)Views of different lands (2)China Revealed title</p>
03'20	*	<p>Opening transition</p> <p>(1)Animation effect of the Earth (2)Tai Chi practice at Shanghai Bund(3)Horse race in Mongolia (4) Forbidden City in Beijing (5)Iron manufacturing in Lanzhou</p>
06'00	*	<p>Country of antiquity: Agricultural life in China</p> <p>(1) Rice plant scene and interview with Mrs. Liao (2)Natural landscape of the Longsheng paddy field (3)Mrs. Liao sieving rice as a transitional scene. (4)Four generations sitting around the table and eating together. (5)Grandpa Liao writing slogans on the blackboard and explaining his certificate issued by the CCP. (6)Images of the natural landscape and interview with Mr. and Ms. Liao</p>
13'50	*	<p>Country of Transition: a migrant worker working in</p>

187 Hawley, Sandra M. 1991: 133

188 Hawley, Sandra M. 1991: 133

		<p>Shanghai</p> <p>(1)Construction workers at the construction site. (2)People traveling in the street. (3)Sun Feng walking along the Shanghai Bund - his story starts. (4)Sun Feng working as a window cleaner in a basket outside a skyscraper. (5)Transitional sequence of city view in Shanghai and street life shots. (6)Sun Feng eating at a local street stall. (7)Sun Feng again standing in a basket and cleaning the windows of a skyscraper. (8)Chinese cultural representations of different cities from the “Atlas”.</p>
18'55	*	<p>Country of diversity: Mongolian way of life</p> <p>(1) Traditional Mongolian wrestling (2) Demonstration of Mongolian horse race</p>
21'18	*	<p>Country of tradition: Chinese Calligraphy Art</p> <p>(1) A man performing Chinese calligraphy with a huge brush.</p>
22'08	*	<p>Country of antiquity & threat: Martial art practice in China</p> <p>(1)The monks beating water and the interview of Mr. Liu, the Kung Fu master. (2) Different kinds of the Kung Fu performance by the Shaolin monks in front of stone pagodas. (3) Fighting skills performance by Master Liu's students and a short interview with one of his most talented students, Xiao Cui (4)The exterior view of the Temple and eating scene with all monks. (5)Xiao Cui performs a Qi Kung Fu so that he can break the brick. (6)Mass martial arts performance by the students of a Wushu academy. (7)Xiao Cui playing with toy guns at a games station. (8)Traditional Buddhist rituals performed by Master Liu (9) Traditional martial art performance by a monk (10) School children saluting the national flag and singing the national anthem. (11) Images of Chinese infants and school children doing physical exercise.</p>
34'12	*	<p>Country of tradition: a child gymnast</p> <p>(1)Jin Yang doing gymnastics on the uneven bar. (2)Jin Yang and her teammates training for the Olympic Games. (3)In Jin Yang's dorm at the training school, she complains about her roommates. If she misses her family, she will cuddle her toy bear. (4)At Jin Yang's home, her father shows her award certificates with his daughter's shrine in the background. (5)Jin Yang trains at school under the supervision of her coach.</p>
39'05	*	<p>Country of transition: SF visiting a Audi car sales shop in Shanghai</p>

		(1)The Atlas (2) Sun Feng walks into an Audi car sales shop and touches a luxurious car. He shows great admiration for the car which he could not afford.
40'38	*	Country of tradition: Chinese cuisine (1)The Atlas (2) A poultry market in Beijing (3)The kitchen of a restaurant in Beijing (4)The guests eating at the restaurant.
42'31	*	Country of tradition: a bow-making craftsman (1)Special effect of a panoramic view of Beijing (2)The view of the Forbidden City (3) An elite body guard shoots an arrow from his bow twice. (4)Yang Fuxi coaching the guards on how to accurately shoot an arrow from the bow. (5)Yang Fuxi interviewed at his home, interconnected with images of Tiananmen Square as a condemnation of the cultural revolution. (6)Yang Fuzi walking in the Summer Palace, interspersed with shots of the bow-making process. (7) Images of a body guard in traditional costume shooting an arrow
49'03	*	Country of antiquity: Great Wall (1)Atlas and special effects of a panoramic view of the Great Wall (2)View of the Great Wall from all kinds of camera angles and positions
50'11	*	Country of transition: a property tycoon building Xin Tian Di in Shanghai (1)Atlas and special effect of the panoramic view of the city (2) Shanghai city night view (3)Vincent Luo inspecting his construction site. (4)Mr. Luo standing in the elevator and showing a nice view from the building he is constructing. (5)The street view of Xin Tian Di and an interview with the American architect Ben Wood (6)Sun Feng working at night and being interviewed in Xin Tian Di.
55'48	*	Country of diversity: a Mongolian living on grassland (1)The sun setting in China's frontier, the Mongolians leading their horses back and setting up their yurt, and preparing for the feast. (2)Huaihan and his family and friends sitting and singing around a bonfire to celebrate.
58'55	*	Country of transition: a developing China (1)Atlas and special effect of the panoramic view of the city (2)Beijing morning rush hour street view (3)Panoramic view of Beijing (4)Property construction and industrial development in

		Beijing
59'53	*	<p>Country of tradition: Jin Yang's story</p> <p>(1)Beijing gymnastic academy (2)Jin Yang's gymnastic practice and other children in training. (3)Jin Yang runs to her father, and he takes her to a theme park.(4)In this Beijing theme park, she rides a roller coaster.(5)Jogging in a park with her father (6)Jin Yang and other children in hard training.</p>
01'07'12	*	<p>Country of transition: a city girl pursuing beauty surgery</p> <p>(1)Atlas animation (2)Shanghai city night view (3)Eliza's boyfriend riding a bike, carrying her on the back. (4)Eliza visits a TCM pharmacy and buys some Chinese herbs. (4)Eliza has cosmetic surgery in a beauty clinic.</p>
01'14'02	*	<p>Country of transition: Zhou Lin's story as a policewoman</p> <p>(1)Policewoman Zhou Lin on her morning training routine (2)Atlas animation - Lanzhou (3)Great Wall (4)Scene of life in a Chinese rehabilitation centre and the people eating and playing basketball (5) Zhou Lin checks buses at the border and catches a taxi driver carrying heroin. (6) Zhou Lin buys vegetables in an open market, washes clothes at home, cooks and eats with her family. Her mother is interviewed, she is worried about her daughter's marriage. (7)Shots of the Great Wall and Zhou Lin's interview</p>
01'21'26	*	<p>Country of tradition: Chinese New Year Celebration</p> <p>(1)The fast motion of moving people on the street and in a railway station (2)The human migration before the Chinese New Year and Sun Feng heading home (3)Chinese New Year celebration, New Year scrolled and parade (4)A worker in Hong Kong moving firecrackers on a ship (5)Sun Feng arrives at home, but his daughter does not recognize him. (6)Jin Yang's selection competition for the 2008 Olympics; her father watches and films her during the competition (7)Eliza walking in the city.(8)Sun Feng's wife cooking for the whole family for the New Year's eve. (9)New Year firework celebration in Hong Kong and at Sun Feng's home, repetition of shots from all interviewees.</p>
01'39'18		

4.3 The American Dream

China Revealed was filmed for the Discovery channel, and therefore the target audience are Westerners, in particular Americans. The American way of thinking and basic values thus must have unarguably influenced the arrangement of subjects and setting, the filming perspective, the selection of characters and the editing. In other words, the images of China drawn on and constructed in this Western documentary must necessarily differ from documentaries produced for Chinese television. As a part of the Atlas project on the Discovery Channel, *China Revealed* has a distinct “Discovery” style, a code easily shared among Americans and others who share a similar cultural background. The icons representing images of China are intended to be interpreted from the American perspective, or more precisely, the signification could be compared to and identified with similar connotations within the American cultural scope. Therefore, before I move on to a semiotic analytical study of the sequences in *China Revealed*, to give a more thorough understanding of how the images of China are represented and shaped through this documentary, it would seem reasonable to have a closer look at the relevant American values and ideologies: and, in particular, the most appealing dream ever – the American Dream, which drives Americans to pursue what they want and remains a significant element of the American value system.

The term “American Dream” was first introduced by the American historian James Truslow Adams in 1931. He published a book about American history and in this book, he claimed in the prologue that the aim of this book was ‘to trace the beginnings at their several points of entry of such American concepts as “bigger and better”, of our attitude toward business, of many characteristics which are generally considered as being “typically American”, and in particular, “of that American dream of a *better, richer, and happier* life for all our citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world.”¹⁸⁹ The idea of the American Dream – the pursuit of a better life - was succinctly defined in the Preamble of the United States Declaration of Independence,

189 Adams, James Truslow 1941: Prologue

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹⁹⁰

One firm belief behind the concept of the American Dream is the view of America as a land of New Hope, of dreams and a promising future. Historically speaking, Puritans came to this continent to establish “New Jerusalem”, the “City Upon a Hill” as a religious “Utopian Community”. In the early colonial era, most of the immigrants from England were suffering from severe religious or political persecution at home. As Adams stated of the rigorous climate there,

“For various reasons, economic conditions in England were very bad, both gentlemen and poorer people of many sorts finding themselves hard pressed either to keep up their accustomed scale of living or to make any living at all. The opportunities of the New World were painted in glowing colors, and those who were sinking in the social and economic scales in England began to look toward it as a land of refuge and of hope.”¹⁹¹

Due to the harsh religious persecution under the Stuarts’ rule in England in the seventeenth century, exiled people fled to America through Ireland. They all hoped to enjoy a better and freer life in the new land, “a life in which a man might think as he would and develop as he willed”,¹⁹² which set up a historical framework for the birth of American Dream.

With its intrinsic connection to European culture, American culture was for a long time simply regarded as its extension in many respects, until the end of British-American War of Independence. Post-Independence Americans naturally required more spiritual liberation so that they would no longer be restrained by the old systems. The words of “hope and freedom” are at the core of the American Dream. This American Dream did not originate from the ruling classes, but from ordinary men, and it swept people’s minds and brought hope to the New World.

190 Jefferson, Thomas 2009 :19

191 Adams,James Truslow 1941:30

192 Adams,James Truslow 1941: 31

“If a distinction had developed between rich and poor, nevertheless even the poor were better off, freer and more independent than they had been in Europe. Above all, they had glimpsed the American dream. English, Irish, Scotch, Germans, all who had come to our shores, had come to find security and self-expression. They had come with a new dynamic hope of rising and growing, of hewing out for themselves a life in which they would not only succeed as men but be recognized as men, a life not only of economic prosperity but of social and self-esteem.”¹⁹³

This exploration of the cornerstone value of the American Dream leads us to the question of how exactly this dream plays a role in American’s everyday life. The analysis above shows us that the American Dream is a process, first to set objectives and expectations, and then to make every effort to fulfil these goals. First of all, the American Dream is about achieving wealth and social status. In the beginning, Americans were motivated to pursue happiness and hope in the new land, but over a period of time, it could be argued that “This pursuit has been transformed into the welfare of the individual. That welfare, in turn, has been defined mostly in terms of income and wealth.”¹⁹⁴

In American society, there is, broadly-speaking, an admiration for people who make money and strive towards higher social status. Getting rich is of utmost importance in American culture. Jim Cullen quotes a slogan for MasterCard as evidence to demonstrate the importance of money in the American value system. The slogan goes, “There are some things that money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s MasterCard”. He argues that “the meaning of liberty, by contrast, sometimes seems all too clear: a celebration of the right to buy – if you’ve got the cash or credit. And the pursuit of happiness – is it simply the acquisition of creature comforts? Even advertisers would say surely not. Yet we Americans often act as if we believe there really isn’t anything money can’t buy.”¹⁹⁵

Secondly, the American Dream is about pursuing success. Getting rich is certainly an important feature of the American Dream, yet it is not the whole story. Wealth

¹⁹³ Adams, James Truslow 1941: 68-69

¹⁹⁴ Samples, John 2010: 43

¹⁹⁵ Cullen, Jim 2003: 39

should be accumulated from scratch through individual hard work, rather than through inheritance or any other, easier way. Patrick Primeaux has argued in his book that the accumulation of wealth will only be deemed praise-worthy in American society if one has acquired the wealth based on personal endeavour:

“What we absorbed from the many people and institutions influencing us are the basic values of the American Dream: wealth and distinction. *We also learned that we have to do it for ourselves.* We have to concentrate on ourselves, distinguish ourselves from others, and make it or break it on our own. We are to be autonomous individuals providing for ourselves, becoming self-supporting and self-sustaining. We are to break away from the pack, differentiate ourselves from others, and do so through achievement, wealth, and status. We are to be strong, powerful, and independent in our own right and through our own devices.”¹⁹⁶

It is widely acknowledged that personal success and wealth are hotly pursued in American society. Affected by the media and artistic productions, American people have learned that there will be opportunities to be rich if they work hard. As Cullen summarizes, “For hundreds of years, American readers and writers have had tireless appetites for tales of poor boys (and, later, girls) who, with nothing but pluck and ingenuity, created financial empires that towered over the national imagination (and in some cases towered over the national landscape as well).”¹⁹⁷ The Hollywood blockbuster film, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, starring Will Smith, released three years ago, provides a classic example of this trend – it tells the story of a poor man who eventually becomes a financial tycoon because of his arduous persistence at his work.

Apart from the pursuit of wealth, upward social mobility is another essential element of the American Dream, rooted in the stories of earlier role models such as Franklin and Lincoln. One of the Declaration drafters, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), had a great belief in upward mobility. He himself signed a nine-year contract for an apprenticeship with his older brother James to learn the printing industry, because his father could not afford to pay for his education. He ultimately broke off his

¹⁹⁶ Primeaux, Patrick, 2000: 12

¹⁹⁷ Cullen, Jim 2003: 60

apprenticeship and moved to New York and then Philadelphia to work as a journalist. Owing to his own rise in the world, he became adamant that “acting on a belief in the efficacy of hard work yields affluence, then surely this is a sign of God’s favor.”¹⁹⁸ He was believer in the principle of ‘doing well by doing good’. He earned huge profits from his printing business, and later retired from business and began his scientific research on the use of electricity. His philanthropic work benefitted everything from public libraries to hospitals. His diplomatic work in France during the revolution gave him a reputation long before the drafting of the Declaration. In summary, to some extent, he was the first real American celebrity to start from nothing.

Franklin gives us an excellent example of the most-admired component of the American Dream: to obtain wealth by one’s own efforts, and then give back to the community. The new aristocracy of American society “attain their eminence through merit, which is definitely not including inherited privilege, rather than education, experience and (especially) virtue”.¹⁹⁹ Another great figure in American history whose story serves as an example for this argument was Abraham Lincoln, who was well-known for his role in the abolishment of slavery in America. He realized his American Dream of upward mobility, ending up as the President of the United States. The stories and experiences of these models have attracted millions of followers of the American Dream in the following two hundred years. The desire to get rich and to move further upward has been deeply engraved into American minds. “The American dream is a constant reminder that America’s true nature and distinctive grandeur is in promising the common man, the man on the make, a better chance to succeed here than common men enjoy anywhere else on earth.”²⁰⁰

In America, success is everything, and the basic logic derived from the American dream is that “hard work will lead to success and success to happiness”.²⁰¹ However, the determination to fight for this success should come from one’s own will rather than from somebody else, not even one’s parents. As Jillson argues, individual

198 Jillson, Calvin C. 2004: 265

199 Cullen, Jim 2003: 66

200 Jillson, Calvin C. 2004: 269

201 Jillson, Calvin C. 2004: 44

independence is very much emphasized within the concept of American success:

“The American Dream, however, is not interested in happiness. It is interested only in success, and to that end promotes autonomous independence, and excludes anything and everything else. The American Dream focuses on the individual, and directs that individual to conceptualize and pursue a path towards success, regardless of other people, nature, and God.”²⁰²

Americans pursue success and wealth, but if we go back to the original version of the American Dream, the achievement of happiness was also important. They cared about the sense of community and devoted themselves to community service to demonstrate that they did not “simply focus on them[selves], on disconnecting from others through wealth and distinction, but also connecting with others through surrender and compassion”.²⁰³ However, the question is what the motives behind such surrender and compassion are, and the answer should be the pursuit of happiness.

The devotion to the community or any kind of charity activity can make people themselves happy by assisting others. In Primeaux’s words, “As success is pursued with respect to independence and self-interest, happiness is pursued with respect to dependence and other-interest”.²⁰⁴ It must be remembered that for business tycoons and corporate entities, this type of ‘giving’ or ‘helping’ others is not only an issue of gaining happiness or comfort, but more like a kind of business investment. After all, the extraordinary amounts raised for charity and society as a whole also gave dividends in terms of wealth and distinction in the end. As Primeaux argues,

“We give to others because it does something for us, because there is a return on the investment. Individuals and multi-national corporations contribute to social, educational, and artistic programs because giving boosts their images, and because it brings their names and their products into prominence. They are about wealth and distinction, and want to let others know they have achieved them to the extent that they have enough to give some away.”²⁰⁵

202 Jillson, Calvin C. 2004: 45-46

203 Primeaux Patrick, 2000: 23

204 Primeaux Patrick, 2000: 23

205 Primeaux, Patrick 2000: 21

4.4 American values

Politically, democracy means a government elected by a popular majority. Governmental rule should be achieved by political parties who represent the will of the majority. In this way, the political and social capacity of each individual person can be fully utilized. The original advocator of American democracy, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), one of the pioneer founders of America, laid emphasis on the need for the government to interfere in the business world as little as possible, and stressed the importance of ensuring a free press and the right to freedom of speech.

The birth of the democratic government dates back to the earlier colonial rule by Britain over America. The American political philosopher, Samuel Adams (1722-1803), openly attacked British colonial rule, as a tyranny which caused slavery and miserable conditions for America as a colony. Those living under British colonial rule in America were quick to respond to this philosophy. As a consequence, the pursuit of democratic freedom was shaped. As Adams stated, "The establishment of government by free consent of all had become embedded in the mind of the average man, as an essential part of the American Dream".²⁰⁶ The difference between America and England or France was it was never to be ruled by a monarchy. There was no doubt that America anticipated being the greatest nation ever, and yet back then, "Every great nation in the world was monarchical and aristocratical, [whereas] America began as a republic and had made a long step toward a democracy".²⁰⁷ DEMOCRACY and FREEDOM became the philosophical cornerstones of the American political system. Above all, respect for each individual to exercise his or her right to freedom of speech and religion are the key elements of the American democracy. Another principle of democratic political systems is the assumption that the public can make moral distinctions between good deeds and bad ones. It is believed that when the populace realizes that the government is making mistakes, they will exercise their rights and power to overcome it.

206 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 83

207 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 100

The American political system has been set as a standard for Americans to benchmark and evaluate other nations in the world. Though Americans do admit that their democracy system is flawed, many of them still hold the opinion that it is valued and desirable, “not because it makes America great, but because it helps Americans, and other citizens in other democracies, to live good, decent and moral lives”.²⁰⁸ The reason why Americans hold such an opinion lies in that they are in Christian terms at least, an “almost chosen people”²⁰⁹. Their behaviour is therefore morally correct and so assists them to achieve material success.

Americans have always had a sense that the world is watching, that God has a special role for them to play in the world, and that their insights and experience should enlighten mankind. As Stephanson wrote in *Manifest Destiny*, most Americans, then and now, believe that “American sovereignty will be a blessing to any land.”²¹⁰ Since the eighteenth century, some well-known politicians like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Ezra Stiles have envisioned a society “characterized by peace and plenty, by political and economic freedom and opportunity, and by accomplishments in religion, morality and art.”²¹¹ This is the very centrality of the American Dream, and fundamental to the American spirit.

In the United States, American democracy coexists in harmony with market capitalism and commercialism. Americans are entitled to a series of equitable rights, which they believe that people in communist nations or any other kind of dictatorship are not be able to enjoy. In the eyes of the majority of Americans, “Everyone in America has the right to speak, read and discuss freely; to worship freely, to form families freely; and to be treated fairly by the police and in the courts”.²¹² In the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, it is said, “All men are created equal; all men have the same political rights; government derives its powers solely from the consent of the governed”.

208 Ringen, Stein 2010: 22

209 Butler, Jon 1990: 295

210 Stephanson, Anders 1996: 99

211 Jillson, Calvin. C 2004: 267

212 Ringen, Stein 2010: 23

One essential value of the American identity is “I”, a strong individual orientation, the will of one person. The question is always, “What can I do? What do I want to do? What can others do for me?” etc. Generally speaking, an individualized culture is more valued in Western society, and Westerners, including Americans, prefer to demonstrate their differentiated individual personalities, the manner in which they can be distinguished with others. In Primeaux’s words, “In keeping with our appreciation for opportunity, we want to learn as much about ourselves as individuals as we possibly can. We want to be the best we can be as autonomous, self-contained individuals.”²¹³ It is apparent that individuals demonstrate a much stronger preference for independence and autonomy in an individual society like the States than in a collective society like that of most Asian countries.

If we compare American values to Chinese values, it can be seen that while self-interest is highly valued in the context of American culture, it is advocated in China to put the collective interest first. According to the individual cultural scale index from Hofstede, the States obtained 90 points and occupies 1st place, whereas China has only 20 points and is ranked 56th. This research outcome proves that Americans admire the concept of individualism the most. However in China, it is collectivism that is most valued, which means people sometimes are required to, or are willing to, sacrifice their individual interests for the protection of the collective interest. By contrast, in the USA it is widely admitted that, as Adams expresses it, “Each of us is likely to be the centre of his own universe. It would be hard for most of us to deny that whatever might bring us wealth, opportunity, consideration, was not somehow in itself beneficent.”²¹⁴

Religion plays a more essential role in American society than in Europe. Christianity (in particular Protestant Christianity) is the major religion in America, and accounts for 78.5 percent of all believers. According to a survey launched by PEW in 2002, 59 percent of Americans claimed that religion is of utmost significance in their life, which

213 Primeaux, Patrick 2000: 120

214 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 216

is much higher than in other Western nations.²¹⁵ The typified American self-perception is that of a white Anglo-Saxon protestant (WASP). In fact, WASPs represent a small and privileged community, who nonetheless retain possession of American financial, cultural and political power. In real life, they live in the same neighborhoods, go to the same church and share the same religion.

The pursuit of wealth and success was only confined to this small group of white Anglo-Saxon Americans in the very beginning, and was not open to all citizens or immigrants until the nineteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the American Dream became extremely competitive; as Jillson describes it, "Individualism and competition displaced community and cooperation as men fought to tame the continent, seize its wealth, and control the course of its development."²¹⁶ In January 1848, gold was first discovered in California, causing "gold fever" to sweep the country. People felt that they could get rich overnight. The gold rush tempted people to compete for wealth, and the American Civil War forced people to protect their land. The desire for wealth and land caused frantic competition for limited resources and recent immigrants were no exception. The popular novel *Gone with the Wind* shows the heroine Scarlett fighting to protect her land (Tara) against the backdrop of the American Civil War. She was taught by her father, an Irish immigrant, that you must value your own property as a resource and keep it out of the hands of others (whether they be English colonists or Yankee soldiers).

In line with this fierce competition for resources was the intense desire to own your own house, which represented to many the hope of a new stable life in the New World. During the British colonial rule over America, the British recognized the importance of land, not only as an exchangeable commodity, but also as a new home for immigrants, the land of dreams. Since the early days of frontier life, land held great importance in American life, which incurred a common desire in Americans to have their own home. This passion for home-ownership remains to this day. Cullen observes, "Roughly two-thirds of Americans owned their homes at the

²¹⁵ <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=167>

²¹⁶ Jillson, Calvin. C 2004: 267

start of this century, and it seems reasonable to believe that many of the remaining third will go on to do so.”²¹⁷

Thanks to industrial development in the early twentieth century, cars stayed in the focus of technical research and thus the desire to own a car is as strong as that of owning a house. Cullen comments that car ownership, like home ownership, points to one more distinctively American trait: relative wealth.²¹⁸ In the States, except for big cities like New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, there is very little by way of public transport, and therefore, cars are really a necessity. Moreover, cars are important in Americans’ daily life, not only because of their practical use, but also their social signification: “The automobile embodied personal mobility, and as such was the perfect complement for the anchorage provided by a privately owned homestead”.²¹⁹ In addition, even in the world of automobiles, there are differentiated brands and categories, as luxury brands like Porsche and Hummer are a symbol of high social status and wealth.

4.5 America: the facts

The United States of America is a large country with abundant natural resources. It covers an area of 9.83 million square kilometers with an estimated population of 308 million. When the European Puritans sailed in the Mayflower and arrived in this continent, they realized that the land was huge and rich in resources which they desperately needed. In the *Epic of America*, Adams began his chapter with the introduction of the geography: “In a country of such vast extent, the scenery and local conditions varied greatly. In every way the land was one of strong contrasts rather than of softly graded tones, a land of dazzling light and sharp shadow, of drought and overwhelming food, of sunshine and appalling storms.”²²⁰ He writes with contempt of the savages (Native Americans) who live so unwittingly in such a vast and precious land, and his covetous tone indicates the Puritans' desire for these abundant resources: “Deep in its soil, all but unknown to its first inhabitants, were

217 Cullen, Jim 2003: 136

218 Cullen, Jim 2003: 150

219 Cullen, Jim 2003: 150

220 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 5

fabulous riches of coal and iron, of silver and gold, of copper and oil, and other things of which for the most part the savages neither felt the need nor knew the use.”²²¹

In the early times of development, Americans held the opinion that the bigger the country was, the more it could achieve. “Like poker chips, his money measured his skill and success in business, and so, again like poker chips, the rising figures of population and Chamber of Commerce statistics measured his success in foresight and struggle in another way. Size, like wealth, came to be a mere symbol of “success,” and the sense of qualitative values was lost in the quantitative, the spiritual in the material.”²²² The quickest way to build a bigger country was of course that of continuous population growth. The more people moving to and settling down in America, the stronger and safer the community would be. As Adams argued,

“from the very beginning, the quantitative measure of value assumed a definite place in the American mentality...But for the first comers to America there was no chance to get ahead unless others came also, by birth or immigration...All motives – safety, profit, social intercourse, educational opportunities, everything – led the Americans to watch mounting figures of population growth with an eye to all that made life richer and pleasanter.”²²³

And, of course, given the stress laid on relative wealth (as seen previously), the first immigrants would enjoy having more recent comers to compare themselves to so as to feel their own superiority. Since Europeans immigrated to America in the seventeenth century, the States has been considered to be the land of hope, dreams and opportunity. In order to achieve these dreams, one had to choose an initial goal to aim for, and “in a land of unlimited opportunity, it was much easier to make things bigger than to make them better, and in working for bigness first we came to a great extent to forget the ultimate purpose of humane value.”²²⁴

Historically, the USA came into existence as a diverse immigrant society. The

221 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 6

222 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 216

223 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 215

224 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 217

population is composed of various ethnic groups. The eastern and southern Europeans immigrated to the land in the late nineteenth century. Asians and Latin Americans made up another immigration peak in the early twentieth century. During some of the peak years of immigration in the early 1900s, about 1 million immigrants arrived annually, which was more than 1% of the total U.S. population at this time. As a percentage of the total population, the percent of foreign-born residents fluctuated from 13% to 14% during the Age of Mass Migration (1850-1913).²²⁵ Therefore, to some extent, American demography is rooted in immigration, and immigrants still contribute to the contemporary diversity of American society.

The new rising cities appealed to a large number of immigrants from backward areas for the greater employment opportunities they offered. As a golden land of opportunity, America attracted millions of immigrants from abroad. "In the year 1907 alone, for example, 1,285,349 immigrants entered the United States, a number almost equal to the total population of the English colonies in America in 1720. From 1904 to 1914, more than 10 million Europeans entered this country, almost three times the population of the United States in 1788."²²⁶

This increasing amount of European immigrants was certainly not the end of the story, and domestic migration took place within the nation. From 1910 to 1930, 1.75 million African Americans migrated from the Southern United States to the North, Midwest and West, seeking better job opportunities in industrial cities. From 1960 to 1970 there was a second Great Migration, when people moved from Texas to California due to an industrial boom there. However, in the era of New Migration (1995-2000), the direction was the other way around. People were going back to Texas or Maryland because of the increasing number of good jobs and improving race relations. The population shifted from the older agricultural areas to regions which offered industrial advantages, such as iron or coal deposits, water power, good harbors, or strategic railroad locations. As the result of this demographic

²²⁵ Hirschman Charles, Perez Daniel, Anthony, p386 In the early 19th century, European immigrants were only a small proportion of the whole when compared with the number after the mid-century. Until 1880, European immigrants exceeded the number of African Americans.

²²⁶ Barnes, Harry Elmer & Ruede, Oreen Morris & Ferguson, Robert Harry 1942: 31

migration, the United States of America is now a highly urbanized nation. According to the demographic statistic report of the United Nation, 24.9 million people live in cities in the year of 2007, whereas only 5.69 million live in rural areas. The percentage of urbanization is up to 81.4%.²²⁷

For many, the adjustment to urban life was hard. A new term was coined to describe the health conditions of city dwellers: the diseases of civilization. Crowded city life replaced the stillness of the countryside, and people started to suffer from much more stress and pressure. Besides, as the infrastructure developed more slowly than the automobile industry there were massive traffic jams in all the major cities during peak hours. As Barnes argued of the social problems caused by urbanization, "The shape of the city has encouraged a spirit of superficiality, haste, and nervous tension. The concentration of population has increased the problems of traffic and transportation, especially since the coming of the automobile. Even the development of suburban areas has not solved the transportation problem because it only increases congestion in cities during working and shopping hours."²²⁸

American entrepreneurialism, creativity, and hard work have produced tremendous wealth. Yet the gap between rich and poor in America is widening. The United States has the greatest concentration of wealth, the greatest income inequality, and the highest poverty rates in the advanced industrial world. Moreover, the gap between rich and poor has been increasing for the past forty years. CNN reports that:

"In the early 1960s, the top 1 percent of households in terms of net worth held 125 times the median wealth in the United States. Today, that gap has grown to 190 times. The top 20 percent of wealth-holding households, meanwhile, held 15 times the overall median wealth in the early 1960s. By 2004, that gap had grown to 23 times."²²⁹

National wealth has increased, and those in the top income bracket take the largest share of about 33 percent. According to a Wall Street Journal analysis of Social Security data, executives and other highly-paid professionals now receive more than

227 World Urbanization Prospects, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, February 2008

228 Barnes, Harry Elmer & Ruede, Oreen Morris & Ferguson, Robert Harry 1942: 31

229 Sahadi, Jeanne, *Wealth Gap Widens*, August 29 2006, http://money.cnn.com/2006/08/29/news/economy/wealth_gap/

one-third of all pay in the United States.

Having examined the fundamental American values and ideology, the film images shall be first analyzed from this perspective: how American values have influenced the selection of film characters and the storyline. The whole film will be divided into units: exposition, the stories of Mrs. Liao, Sun Feng, Xiaocui, Jinyang, Yang Fuzi, Vicent Luo, Huahan, Eliza & Zhuli. Within each unit, we shall analyze images / sequences in relation to both American values and historical Western images of China.

CHAPTER 5

FILM ANALYSIS

5.1 Exposition analysis

The opening sequence sets the framework for the entire film and introduces the major characters and background information to the spectators. It tells the audiences what will be presented in the rest of the documentary. The exposition sequence of *China Revealed* is quite short (less than two minutes) but covers a broad range of subjects; on average, each shot lasts only about one second, so that in two minutes, there are altogether ninety-nine shots displayed on the screen. To present a convincing and in-depth argument in this documentary, the director has adopted binary filming angles. So, as expected, in the exposition, we can identify a contrast between rural and modern, tradition and modernisation, threat and peace.

5.1.1 Narration

In documentary narration, opening questions are usually put forward to attract the attention and arouse the interest of the target spectators. In the exposition of *China Revealed*, the narrator summarizes some basic concepts about China, and raises three questions to be answered by the documentary.

“China, the oldest civilization on earth, a land founded on extraordinary customs and rituals, celebrated monuments without equal, preserving thousands of years of learning, a country that is the home to the greatest population on the planet. 1.3 billion people, a nation that is set to become the world’s next super power. This is the story of the fastest growing country on earth, of the dreams and challenges driving its people, of individual struggle and triumph. How is the world’s largest communist state becoming its most powerful economy? Can this ancient civilization survive its breakneck journey into the future? And what is the price in this world for its change? This is the story of the greatest transformation on earth, and the people living in its heart. This is the story of life behind the Great Wall.”

Some words in the above narration are consistent with the concept of antiquity which was examined in the context of historical Western images of China. Literally, “oldest” and “thousands of years”, for instance, remind us of the antiquity of the Chinese history and culture. “Customs” and “ritual” imply the mystery and exoticism of the oriental culture. “Greatest population”, “1.3 billion”, and “next super power” indicate a correlation between a populous country and a threatening force. When the words are matched with the visual images, the messages of sentences in the voice-over may be weakened, enforced or even changed. To understand exactly which effect is produced here, we need to further analyse the film elements of the exposition sequence.

5.1.2 Sequence protocol

- (1) 00:00:17 – 00:00:22, Pan shot of the Great Wall
- (2) 00:00:23 – 00:00:27, Satellite animation
- (3) 00:00:28 – 00:00:44, Monks beating the water, medium shot of Kung Fu master moving, full shot of monks practicing martial art skills, monks in traditional costumes holding a prayer ceremony
- (4) 00:00:45 – 00:00:49, Crane shot of the Forbidden City
- (5) 00:00:50 – 00:00:56, Medium shot in zoom out and overhead camera angle of a man performing calligraphy
- (6) 00:00:57 – 00:01:08, Fast shot of crowds in the train station and on the street
- (7) 00:01:09 – 00:01:23, Close up of a child raising the national flag, wide shot, close shot and medium shot of Kung Fu performance in a martial art academy

- (8) 00:01:24 – 00:01:23, Shanghai city night view, shot of Elisa and her boyfriend riding a bicycle
- (9) 00:01:24 – 00:01:41, Sun Feng working outside a modern building, an old man counting money
- (10) 00:01:42 – 00:01:46, Panoramic animation view
- (11) 00:01:47 – 00:01:52, Close shot of a person shooting an arrow, Tai Chi performance at Shanghai Bund
- (12) 00:01:53 – 00:01:59, Medium shot of a child playing on an uneven bar
- (13) 00:02:01 – 00:02:06, Wide shot of an agricultural landscape, Pan shot of Jinmao Tower in Shanghai
- (14) 00:02:07 – 00:02:14, Long shot of children at school, Wide shot of peasants working on the rice terrace, Medium shot of a girl practicing movement on a vault
- (15) 00:02:15 – 00:02:26, Pan shot of the Great Wall

5.1.3 Sequence interpretation

Antiquity & tradition

The exposition sequence opens with a pan shot of the Great Wall from an eye-level camera position. In this wide shot (Appendix 10), we can see the mountains lying partly hidden by the sky and partly visible. The Wall extends far away towards the mountain. The whole picture creates a three-dimensional effect: the sky and mountains lie behind, the rocks are in the foreground lying on the x-plane, and the Wall is right on the z-plane. This establishing shot has a khaki colour tone, which triggers a sense of ancient and historical atmosphere. The green trees can hardly be seen in the background. The sky is a muted greyish blue. The wide-angle shot and the Great Wall in dark colours draw us into a country with a long history and many vicissitudes.

As for the sound track, this opening shot is accompanied by slow, rhythmic and melodic Chinese music played on a traditional Chinese string instrument. This music

is monotonous, resembling Ricci's description of Chinese music in the seventeenth century. This type of music conveys a sense of the exotic, different, magic and mysterious, as it does not follow the familiar European harmonious orchestra system. Therefore, even without a voice-over or a title on the screen, the audiences should be able to connect both the Wall and the music with the ancient Middle Kingdom.

The opening shot of the Wall is followed by the image of Shaolin monks improving their physical competence by beating water. The walking monks are holding a Buddhist ceremony in their red and yellow religious costumes. The inclusion of Shaolin monks in the film represents the long-standing Western interest in China's ancient civilization, religion and cultural tradition in its historical context, as the history of the legendary Shaolin Temple dates back to the Tang dynasty two thousand years ago, and thus once again reminds us of Chinese antiquity. The selection of these images surely also reflects the increasing popularity of Chinese martial art films in the West. With *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, for example, mysterious Kung Fu techniques have been widely accepted and admired in the Western world.

All the bald monks in these shots perform Kung Fu with knives or swords in the courtyard of an ancient temple. In the background, we see that both the temple and pagodas have the typical Chinese architecture style of a flying roof, surrounded by bamboo plants. All the Kung Fu performers are wearing their traditional grey costumes, whilst senior officials at the Temple are dressed in red and yellow silk for the Buddhist ceremony. The surroundings and costumes in this montage deliver a signification of Chinese antiquity, and the traditions of enigmatic and mysterious oriental art. The action of the performance is processed with a slow motion effect to add a more artistic and other-worldly atmosphere to this montage in the film.

Some ancient architecture has been preserved intact to the present day in China, and so symbolizes Chinese antiquity. Along with the Great Wall, the Forbidden City is filmed in the opening exposition too. The camera pulls up from the marble fence to give a full shot of the palace, an unequalled monument to Chinese antiquity. As the

former royal residence of the Ming and Qing emperors, these buildings were forbidden to the public, and the palace appears in the film also to connote both mystery and the long-term imperial authority over the Chinese people.

Chinese calligraphy is performed by a man after the Forbidden City montage in the opening sequence. Historically speaking, Chinese characters were regarded as inscrutable, enigmatic and somewhat artistic, a writing system completely different from the Latin alphabet. These days, calligraphy work is more likely to be seen as an art-form than as writing. We see a stone quad decorated by red lanterns as a background setting. When the camera pulls back and zooms out, a man is shown bending over a long table to draw calligraphy work with a huge brush. The camera position then switches to an overhead angle, so we can clearly see ink and a slab laid on the left side of the screen. These “Chinese things” draw on the mythicized nature of Chinese art, and of course also refer to China’s antiquity and traditions.

So, from the very beginning of the documentary, images of the Great Wall, martial arts, the Forbidden City and calligraphy in the opening sequence guide the viewer into the ancient and mysterious oriental world of the old Middle Kingdom. The images used here in the exposition sequence to portray China remind us of similar descriptions provided by travellers, missionaries, diplomats and all others who have been to China.

China as threat

Once the audience has been brought into to the “country of antiquity”, the following images pull them back to the contemporary reality. As seen in Chapter 2, China in Western eyes is still a populous, threatening country. It is universally acknowledged that China is a huge land, the most populous country in the world, with over 1.3 billion people, which accounts for one fifth of the world’s population. Aiming to emphasize the fact that China is a densely populated country, the image of this large populous nation is represented by a fast motion montage of crowded people in a train station and a busy street. In the eighties, the Chinese were compared to “blue

ants”, who wear the same uniforms and can hardly to be recognized. Here in this fast motion shot, we see an astonishing number of “faceless” people through the camera and cannot really tell the difference between individuals. The visual image of a large number of people is potentially “threatening”, and could remind the audiences of the Chinese as a “human sea”, as they were perceived in the 1950s and 1960s.

The large population size as a potential threat is further highlighted in the following scene of a Kung Fu performance at a martial art academy. In the full shot and close-up shot of the players, we can tell that they have already started to practice martial arts in this academy even though they are only teenagers, or even children. On the television screen, they all looked serious and devoted. Without the ancient architecture and costume setting as background, not even string music to accompany the images, the same Kung Fu performance here takes on a different connotation: that of a tool of military force employed by China to become the “next super power”. Even children are involved with this training to be policemen or soldiers in the future. A large crowd, when combined with martial art exercise, signifies that China could be a threat to the Western world, which is in accordance with the Western historical stereotype of China as an “awakening dragon shaking the world” and the Chinese as a “yellow peril threatening global security”.

An economic rise

As a matter of fact, in the new millennium, China has achieved astonishingly fast economic development. The fast motion of a busy street in the evening time in Shanghai, the scattering of grand skyscrapers shaping a modern city, support the narrator’s description of China as the world’s fastest growing economy. Since the economy is developing fast, the American value system would surely lead an American audience to assume that people’s lives should have improved. Thus, the director now takes us to a medium shot of the window-cleaner handing a hundred yuan²³⁰ to his father, who counts the money at once. The camera moves from a

²³⁰ A hundred yuan equals approximately 9 Euro in 2006.

close-up shot of the money to the father's happily smiling face. Here the signification is clear: individual triumph aligned with the pursuit of material wealth.

The opening sequence continues with shots of individual people: a police woman, a business tycoon, and Mongols appear on the screen, as they will be the privileged and supporting characters interviewed in the subsequent body of the film. The storyline moves on to show a child athlete, representing China's fight for the future. In 2005, the preparation for the 2008 Olympic Games was an important priority for the Chinese government. A lot of construction for stadiums and properties was underway. In order to achieve this goal, child athletes had to sacrifice their childhood and undergo tough training for the Olympic competition. Chinese family traditions have been deeply affected by Confucian philosophy, which requires that children must obey their parents, and that individual interests should be sacrificed for a collective mission.

For a thousand years, Chinese notions of loyalty and duty have dictated that people must obey the orders of officials, and children must obey the will of their parents. In this exposition, when the narrator says "the price to pay for it", a close up of a teenager girl playing on a parallel bar arouses our attention: frowning, her face expresses pain, and her arms seem to bear the weight of her whole body. Here, the combination of the image and words suggests that Chinese children have endured a lot of physical pain to compete in the big game. They have sacrificed their childhood to prepare for the "significant moment" of their country.

Another medium shot shows a little girl performing on top of a beam; she succeeds in completing a series of movements, but in the end she cannot keep her balance and almost falls off the beam. Her eyes are not staring at the camera, but rather keep looking down at the beam. At the end of this short montage, she is about to fall off the beam and her final unbalanced movement in this context is used to symbolize China's "breakneck journey" towards fast economic development, leaving serious social problems in its wake.

Country of antiquity

At the end of the opening sequence, there is a shot of peasants working in the rice paddies, which echoes Pearl Buck's novel and many other Western images of Chinese agricultural life. When the narration closes with the final sentence, "This is the story of people living in its heart", the matching image is a medium shot of a peasant walking barefoot through a rice paddy, pulling an ox to plough the field. He is wearing a straw hat and ragged clothes and looking down towards the earth, so that the audience can hardly see his face. The man is bent over, showing the toll that the hard physical labour of farming has taken its toll. The conjunction of image and narration here implies that the people living in China's "heart" are peasants; and indeed, agricultural labourers still account for three quarters of China's whole population. In other words, China is still an agricultural country.

The decision to use a medium shot shifts the focus from the rich rice paddy to the actions of the peasants. Showing no evidence of modernized farming techniques, the peasants are using hoes and oxen to plough the field, suggesting that the primitive way of life in the Chinese countryside has not modernized along with rapid economic development. The primitive way of farming may have been chosen as it would be an appealing sight for a Western audience; the image of the traditional Chinese peasant who put his "hoe upon the shoulder and yoked the ox to plough" would be familiar from Western literature, and would also stir the audience's sympathy for these poor people.

China remained an agricultural country in the 1950s, as is mirrored in the natural primitive landscape in the sequence. The ancient land of the Middle Kingdom was considered as fertile and fruitful for a very long time; but since the eighteenth century, the general image of China has shifted from a fabulous fairyland to a primitive farmland. In the second half of the nineteenth century, while capitalism developed in most European countries, Chinese society was under the rule of the Qing emperors. While the standard of living in Europe improved enormously in Europe, most Chinese still depended on their farmlands for a living and suffered from poverty.

Chinese peasants thus became the representative group of Chinese people to some extent, and their daily life has long been seen in the West as being the epitome of Chinese society.

Country of transition

To provide a contrast with the primitive image of rural China, shots of a modern city were added immediately afterwards. In the first second, the audience's eyes are invited to dwell on the rich, unique and natural green rice paddy in front of the mountains, then in the next second, the montage cuts to a magnificent modern city night view. The run time of this modern view shot is short; the camera pans from one skyscraper to another in two seconds. To the centre of the frame stands the Jin Mao tower²³¹ in a medium shot, and several other skyscrapers can be seen in the background on the right.

All the buildings looked shiny and glamorous with bright colours, and the city bears a marked resemblance to the night views of other first-ranking metropolises such as New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, etc. Skyscrapers first appeared in the nineteenth century in America; the earliest skyscrapers were built in Chicago and New York. Due to the rising status and economic boom in the States, skyscrapers began to be regarded as an icon of a modern city. This image flow between China's primitive beauty and skyline construction emphasizes that China is in a period of transition and undergoing an enormous economic transformation. This sharp and striking contrast between a backward farming land and an advanced city supports the narrator's remark that this would be "the story of the greatest transformation on earth"²³².

Exploration: reality behind the Great Wall

231 Jinmao Tower is located in the Lujiazui area of Pudong District of the Shanghai city. Until 2007 it was the tallest building in the PRC, the fifth tallest in the world by roof height and the seventh tallest by pinnacle height.

232 Quoted from the narration of the opening sequence of *China Revealed*

The exposition ends with the same signifier with which it began - the Great Wall - but shown from a different camera angle and position. The Wall is filmed in an aerial shot at the end, giving us an astonishing panoramic view from the sky so that the Wall on the screen looks like a stretching dragon clinging to the mountain. The winding line of the Wall creates a resonance among spectators with the notion of an old and continuous Chinese civilization. The Great Wall, however, seems a lot smaller, more vulnerable and insignificant in this bird's eye shot. Then the montage cuts to a pan shot of a guard tower on top of a mountain peak. The camera moves in pan and follows this tower from left to right until it fades out of the frame. Apart from cinematic significations of different camera angles, this panoramic technique is frequently used in Discovery Channel documentaries to increase the attraction and visual delight of the audience, by taking shots that could not be reproduced easily by a tourist camera, thus making the view more magnificent and exciting. Thus, we can see here how a visual effect can at once function as a "selling point" to attract an audience and also as a signifier of cultural preconceptions or thematic aims.

Colour is skillfully used here, so that the Wall marks the separation between the mountain and the sky in the background. The yellow of the Wall is lighter than in the first shot, whereas the mountains are in a cold colour tone (green) and sky is azure without white clouds. The faded yellow connotes a sense of ancient history, whilst the bright green and blue suggest confidence toward a promising future.

Arguably, the use of colour in the shot also reveals the Wall as a symbolic icon of a curtain or barrier in the way of the mutual communication. The corresponding narration for this second image of the Great Wall is "This is the story of life behind the Great Wall"²³³, and thus, we are led to see the Wall as a communication barrier preventing the West from discovering the country and its people. The main theme of this documentary is thus the story of real life behind the Wall. The film-maker leads the audience across the Great Wall with the camera, so that the real story about the life of people living in China will finally be revealed in this documentary. Briefly, these three shots of the Great Wall and the narrative words succeed in delivering the

233 Quoted from the narration of the opening sequence of *China Revealed*

message that the priority here will be to explore the story of ordinary life in China, rather than providing a travelogue. The soundtrack has moved from traditional Chinese strings to music played by modern instruments which is fast, exciting, and with a strong rhythm which creates a pleasant and enjoyable atmosphere to psychologically attract the audience's interest.

Generally speaking, China is much more frequently represented in Western documentaries by showing footage of thousand-year-old traditions or familiar age-old architecture. Subjects such as mysterious martial arts, calligraphy, the Great Wall, and the Forbidden City, are often selected as representations of Chinese culture and tradition in Western media. As a matter of fact, China does not merely boast the Great Wall or the Forbidden City in Beijing, but also possesses other heritage sites across the country - for instance, Lijiang city in North-Western Yunnan or the ancient gardens at Suzhou. Nonetheless, the Great Wall and the Forbidden City have been historically associated with images of China in Westerners' minds, which can be inferred from the selection of filming settings or visual images in film production. It is far more common for film makers to choose familiar subjects rather than actually reveal something new about China, which might risk being unacceptable to audiences.

5.2 Country of antiquity – story of Mrs. Liao and her family

5.2.1 Paradigmatic analysis of Mrs. Liao

Mrs Liao is selected as a representative of the Chinese peasants living in the rural areas in China. For generations, her family has lived in Longsheng village and worked in the rice paddies. Her world is one of hard physical labour in an agricultural setting, with which "a city type could not cope."²³⁴ She and her husband stand in the muddy fields and work arduously with a hoe every day. The images of Mrs. Liao and her husband fit right into the Western conception of Chinese peasants cultivating rice.

In early medieval times, the ancient land of the Middle Kingdom was seen as a

234 Quoted from the narration of Mrs Liao's sequence of *China Revealed*

fruitful and fertile land with a rich and abundant supply of natural resources, as described by Polo. In the nineteenth century, the land lost its previous appeal in Europe and was considered a poor country with a limited supply of resources. We might perhaps recall the *Good Earth*; the hero can only take one shower a year, and even then is accused by his father of wasting water. Thanks to this best-selling novel, in the early 1930s the image of Chinese peasants became particularly popular and sympathetic in American society. The perception of Chinese peasants living in a state of poverty and adversity was set in Western minds thereafter. The novel was even made into a Hollywood film.

The sight of this pure physical work with buffaloes in paddy fields generates a comparison with the arduous farming life in the United States just after the country was bestowed with national independence and sovereign integrity, when living conditions in America were relatively poor. The young nation was rather weak in both political and economic aspects. Farming work, in particular, “meant the hardest sort of long physical toil”²³⁵, with no farm machinery. Thus, the portrayal of China’s agricultural society has retained its grip on the Western imagination, evoking as it does the special emotional connection with the land in the American cultural consciousness. Images of Chinese peasants and their primitive land draw much Western attention. Despite the tendency in China towards urban expansion, Chinese peasants still account for more than fifty percent of the whole Chinese population. Therefore, the representation of the peasants’ life must be a necessary element in creating an authentic picture of Chinese people’s way of life. Hence, in almost all China-themed documentary films, the peasant figures or images related to peasants or rural landscapes are inevitably integrated in the film.

5.2.2. Sequence protocol

- (1) Pan shot of Long Sheng paddy field
- (2) Close shot of water-logged paddy field, a pair of legs standing in the field
- (3) Close-up of a pair of muddy hands holding a hoe

235 Adams, James Truslow 1941: 97

- (4) Close-up of Mrs. Liao's face
- (5) BCU of Mrs. Liao's face in an interview
- (6) Full shot of women working in a field
- (7) Crane shot of a water buffalo
- (8) Close-up of a pair of feet
- (9) Close-up of rice plant in a field and peasants planting rice
- (10) Dolly shot of the paddy field
- (11) BCU of Mrs. Liao and her husband's happily smiling faces

5.2.3. Sequence interpretation

Scene of rice planting

The sequence started with an establishing shot of Long Sheng and its terraced paddy fields (Appendix 11). As the camera dollies from left to right, we see local women working barefoot in the water-logged rice fields. They are either carrying hoes or pulling buffaloes to plough the fields. Following this dolly shot, there is a close-up shot of a pair of legs standing in a muddy field, showing that this person is ploughing with a hoe. The next shot shows a close-up of muddy hands holding a hoe tightly to plough the field. The hoe, buffalo, muddy hands and dirty white clothes in these three consecutive shots indicate the intense physical work and harsh working conditions of Chinese peasants. In particular in these close-up shots of muddy hands and clothes, it is evident that they are all lowering their heads, facing the ground and devoting their full attention to their work. The agricultural codes symbolizing the farmers' identities - muddy rice fields, hoes and buffalos - allow the film-maker to formulate the myth that Chinese peasants are still living a life of agricultural poverty, and that the Chinese agricultural industry is still at a primitive stage, and has remained unchanged for centuries.

In this sequence, the camera zooms in for a close-up of a rice plant three times. Rice is an indispensable main food in China, and was reported as such by early Western merchants and missionaries like Polo and Ricci living in the country. This perception of rice as the main Chinese food is also noted in Spader's voice-over narration, "Mrs. Liao and her family are planting one of the most staple foods in China, rice."

The sound track accompanying this part of the sequence is a monotonous tune played on a Chinese pipe. The music is first rhythmic and slow, as at the beginning of the exposition sequence, and then switches to a cheerful tune when the narrator tells us that “this is the busiest season”, so that the whole montage presents a scene of busy rice planting in China. The dubbed voice for Mrs. Liao is an Asian lady who speaks English with a strong Asian accent, which indicates that the production team probably made an effort to find a suitable dubbing actress for Mrs. Liao on purpose, with an accent to indicate that Mrs. Liao and other Chinese peasants of her kind would not speak correctly.

In the whole montage of rice planting, based on metonymic signs, we see that the agricultural life in China is being presented as stagnant, without any progress towards modernization. The succession of images constructs the impression that Chinese farmers undertake hard physical labor, using only buffaloes and hoes instead of advanced farming machines. The ideological context of these shots suggests that China is still an agricultural country of ancient farming. As a matter of fact, according to the official statistics, 2.06 million large and medium-sized and 1.62 million small-sized tractors have been implemented in the agricultural industry across the country.²³⁶ However, in this sequence of Chinese farmers, there is no sign of such modernization. Instead of a buffalo as a ploughing tool, bulldozers, tractors or any other modernized machine could have been chosen to be filmed, which would have depicted a more industrial and modern image of the Chinese agricultural industry. As it is, the film leaves the audience with the impression that Chinese farmers had experienced none of the progress or improvements of modernization.

Scene of Longsheng landscape

The film presents a succession of spectacular natural landscapes from various camera angles of aerial shots and wide shots. The fields were used as background setting in the previous sequence, but in this part of sequence, the image is more artistic and aesthetic. In these shots, you do not see muddy clothes, hands, feet or

236 National Statistics Report, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2008/indexch.htm>

buffalos, but rather, mountains standing in mist, and clouds floating above the mountains and vast green paddy fields stretching away like a dragon's back. The aerial shots and wide shots of green mountains, the winding river and the bamboo present the full grandeur and magnificence of China's natural wonders.

The frame composition of this landscape montage is well-balanced and aesthetically pleasing, giving a harmonious natural atmosphere. The mountains, white clouds and river are intentionally placed in symmetry. When we see these shots of landscapes, we situate ourselves in them. This image of terraced rice paddies has been familiar to Westerners since the reports of the early missionary hundreds of years ago, and has become increasingly recognizable thanks to photographs in travel guides in the past decades. As shown in the above shot, the presence of one or two peasants working in rice fields suggests the harmonious balance of nature and human beings in a picturesque landscape.

Scene of family union

- (1) Close-up of pouring rice into a pot and stirring it
- (2) Tilt shot of an aged lady putting rice into a bowl
- (3) Close-up of two bowls of steaming rice next to a stone pot

Following on from the emphasis of rice in the first rice planting sequence, the cooked rice is once again filmed in an impressive aesthetic manner. Two bowls of heated rice are juxtaposed with a stone rice pot on a wooden table in a setting of mise-en-scene. Chopsticks are laid on the edge of the bowl. In the shot, we can clearly see the steam going up in the air. The whole montage delivers a message of an exotic and ancient oriental tradition preserved for thousands of years, as we are brought back to the Chinese dinner banquet portrayed in Ricci's journal.

The camera starts from a wide establishing shot of the family scene at the meal, and then zooms into a close-up of the dishes on the table. Following these camera movements, an interview of the family members is conducted. The scene of a large Chinese family getting together and eating around the table always appears in

Western documentaries about China. The Chinese tradition of four generations living and eating in the same house has been known to Westerners since the seventeenth century, thanks to the reports of the missionaries. The profound impact of Confucian philosophy has made family relationships, the foundation of a collective culture, of great importance in Chinese society.

The tradition of eating rice dumplings shown in this montage indicates that some Chinese customs have been passed down from generation to generation. The preservation of this social custom and traditional food therefore reinforces the idea that China is a country possessing antiquity and tradition. In addition, the rice dumpling is not prevalingly cooked in the West, making it an exotic food for Westerners, and hence a symbol of Oriental culinary exoticism. As has been established as a stereotype since Ricci's times, the rice plant represents all other Chinese crops, and rice is once again presented as the primary food in China, whereas in fact people living in northern China eat more wheat than rice.

After Mrs. Liao says, "Ever since the land was privatized, life has been getting better and better. Now it is much better. We now eat better and we have better clothes. Now we have even bought a fridge and a TV", the montage cuts to a shot of the sun covered by dark clouds at dusk. Eventually the sunshine manages to break through the shadow formed by the clouds. This metaphoric shot signifies that the life of Chinese peasants is heading in a better and richer direction thanks to the implementation of land privatization in the 1980s. The more income they have generated, the more their primitive way of living has improved, particularly as they can now afford modern household appliances such as a TV and a fridge.

Mrs. Liao is the first character shown in the documentary film, which implies that Chinese peasants are of particular interest to Western audiences, especially Americans. The country of antiquity is what first appears in the documentary. On the one hand, the primitive beauty of the rice paddies and the ancient traditional foods such as the rice dumplings are fascinating, but on the other hand, agricultural life is shown as remaining harsh and tough, although it has been greatly enhanced by land

privatization. Chinese peasants are still leading the agricultural life known to the West for such a long time, and so we are lead to conclude that the ways of working on the field are as ancient and stagnated as the historical images would suggest.

5.3 Country of transition – story of Sun Feng (SF)

5.3.1. Paradigmatic analysis of SF's sequence

To represent real life “behind the Wall”, the director chose several individuals to interview and film. One key main character was Sun Feng, a representative of millions of Chinese rural-to-urban migrant workers. He has taken on a hard and dangerous job as a window cleaner in Shanghai, so that he can send money back to support his family in the countryside. As one of the main characters in *China Revealed*, the scenes involving SF are interwoven into the documentary for four times, documenting his experience, perspective on life and view of China's contemporary economic transformations from the viewpoint of a migrant worker.

The reason that SF's coverage was more emphasized than others may well be that his story reflects the trend of internal migration which is taking place in China. In fact, Chinese urbanization had accelerated a great deal since the beginning of the 21st Century, and is an important social phenomenon in China. The constructed ideological myth behind the television images is that Chinese people are now pursuing material success just as Americans were desperate to do in the early days after industrialization had created an imbalance in the economic development of different regions. The documentary thus suggests that the contemporary “Chinese dream” has much in common with the American Dream – to get rich. Driven by the dream of getting as wealthy as urban people, SF has gone to Shanghai to seek his fortune.

China Revealed addresses this Chinese version of the American dream from several different viewpoints. Economically, China has obtained astonishing achievements ever since the internal revolution of the last three decades. In the course of Chinese modernization, people's daily life has transformed enormously. In *China Revealed*,

the implication is that all city dwellers admire the Western middle-class life-style, whilst rural inhabitants actively pursue a city life. Just as Americans pursued material wealth in the early frontier days, so, the documentary implies, the Chinese are now determined to be rich so that they can afford the lifestyle they have always wanted. The pursuit of material success has become the primary concern of people's lives and now motivates the Chinese to work hard to earn it. What is more, getting rich is not simply seen as becoming wealthy, but also achieving the tangible glamour of material possessions which symbolize a higher social status.

5.3.2. Introductory sequence of SF

Sequence protocol

The first establishing scene of SF's introductory montage was filmed in the Shanghai Bund, where the beauty of the Shanghai skyline at night can be seen in the background. Through the narration, the audience is informed that SF works as a window cleaner, pursuing wealth and success in the great metropolis. The actual experience of the job was filmed on camera in the following shots in the montage:

- 1) Crane shot of SF walking on steps leading to Shanghai Bund
- 2) Medium shot of SF walking through a crowd of people
- 3) Extreme long shot of SF walking along the bank of the Bund
- 4) High angle shot of busy streets from the top of a tall building
- 5) Zoom-in shot of SF working in a basket next to a window in the middle of the sky
- 6) Low angle shot of SF working, filmed from inside the building
- 7) High angle shot of SF working in a cleaning cradle
- 8) Close-up of SF in an interview
- 9) Low angle shot of the cradle descending from the top of the building
- 10) High angle shot of SF and his colleague in the cradle

Sequence interpretation

In this montage, except for the close-ups of SF's face during his interview, all the shots were filmed either from a high angle or low angle (Appendix 13 and 14). Both

camera angles highlight the terrifying height of SF's cradle in the sky. From the low angle, we can roughly evaluate the cradle's size and how little protection is provided by the low edge of the cradle. The high angle provides a very clear view of how scary and dangerous this job could be, working in a cradle hanging in the sky, looking down on cars which look like children's toys. The more dangerous SF's job seems to be in the montage, the more the audience will perceive how hard he works to earn his money and fulfil his dream of supporting his family in the countryside.

After the introductory montage of SF's work, viewers are drawn into his after-work life. We see him eating at a cheap, unhygienic-looking street stall. He smiles happily when he talks about his adorable daughter in the interview. From this ECU on his facial expression, we are able to perceive his warm feelings about his daughter and feel what he feels. However, the close-up also gives us a view of SF's discoloured, irregular teeth (Appendix 12). In the States, utmost importance is attached to dental health. After a succession of advertising campaigns, good teeth are connected with a "perfect smile" by advertisers and indeed are considered to be necessary to both personal success and physical attractiveness. Americans want a smile like a Hollywood star. In fact, teeth whitening has become the country's most requested cosmetic dental procedure.²³⁷ In America, it is very common for people to get a gift voucher for teeth whitening or dental treatments. Americans admit that they are a nation obsessed with the pursuit of a whiter, more dazzling smile. Therefore, crooked teeth are completely out of the question. Teeth should be white and even. From the ECU of SF's face, the audience must be completely shocked by his yellowing, crooked and nicotine-stained teeth, which are definitely not consistent with the American dental standard. Arguably, the audience is being invited to share in the stereotype of the filthy Chinese so popular with travellers and diplomats during the Imperial Era up until the turn of the century.

Sequence of SF in a car shop

Sequence protocol

237 <http://www.70news.com/2009/05/14/cnn-teeth-whitening-report/>

SF's dreams and ambitions are shown through his admiration of an Audi car during his visit to the showroom.

- (1) The camera is set to catch a low angle shot of the Jin Mao Building in the evening rush hour in Shanghai.
- (2) The camera pans from the skyscraper to the street and a tracking shot of Sun Feng walking towards the camera.
- (3) Sun Feng opens the door of the Audi showroom; part of a yellow Audi stands in the foreground. He walks slowly to the car and stares at it with obvious admiration.
- (4) A close-up shot of another shiny black car; Sun Feng touches the body of the car gently, while the camera catches a close-up of one of his hands. He walks around the car, opens the car door, looks inside, and then closes the car door. In this montage, the car remains in focus in the shot foreground all the time.
- (5) The camera proceeds to film the car tail light; SF touches the car again and walks away.
- (6) An interview with Sun Feng
- (7) Sun Feng pushes the door open and leaves the car store. The yellow car and the black one stand in the background. He walks into the street again. The camera pulls back to track him and pans to the street view, then tilts up until his back looks tiny within the frame.

Sequence interpretation

The director arranged a car visiting sequence to present the “Chinese dream” through the eyes of a migrant worker – to own a car would mean he was somebody. This gives the audience a clear view of SF's ambition to move upward from the bottom of Chinese society, just as Americans used to fight for their success during the period of American economic development. Indeed, this strong desire for car ownership has lasted until today. In the beginning of this sequence, the camera is positioned lower to catch a shot of famous skyscrapers in Shanghai in the evening. This low angle shot makes the building look significant and majestic, a symbol of modernity and affluence. Shots inside this building and outside on the streets are

infused with light, to give a beautiful modern city night view, but also the real world hidden behind the bright and dazzling light.

The signification of the car in this montage is that of success and wealth. The brand of Audi signifies a particular elite superiority; the brand itself has differentiated itself very much from its mother company, the Volkswagen group. Whereas the Volkswagen has retained its image as the car of the people, Audi cars, while not belonging to the ranks of Porsche or Ferrari, still have a veneer of luxury, especially in this “kingdom of the bicycle”. Sun Feng is surely a representative of millions of immigration workers swarming into big cities. His desire for luxurious cars thus gives us the conceptual map that every migrant worker craves material success so that they can enjoy a glamorous and dazzling life, and become a member of the social elite in the same way that the Audi has assumed a high-status brand in the automobile industry. As SF said in the interview, “I would have felt so proud if I could’ve driven this car. I would be somebody. But there is no way that I can afford this car right now. I cannot even think about it.” At the first order of the denotative level, Audi cars represent wealth, power and status. At the second order, the image connotes the ‘big dream’ of an immigration worker, and thus argues for the dissonance between the level of poverty of the average city migrant and the aggressive ambition towards material success and wealth in Chinese society. The conventionally accepted connotation of the Audi brand in Chinese society was then shifted from cars to the myth constructed in this film’s composition.

In addition, throughout the entire montage, either the yellow or red Audi car is centred in the foreground within the frames all the time. SF’s soft touch of the gleaming bonnet shows his anticipation and wholehearted desire toward material wealth, as though wealth is a tangible thing as shiny and appealing as these cars. In some shots, SF’s hand or his upper body is in the background, whereas the car remains in the foreground at all times. This technique leads us to perceive that this vivid temptation to live a successful life with a fancy car is wholly unattainable to SF. The chiaroscuro effect at the end of this sequence again emphasizes this signification. In contrast to the strong light in the night city view, the focus here is not

cast on SF's face; instead it is in shallow focus in the darkness. After he walks out of the shop and back into the street again, the camera tilts up to reach a higher position, emphasizing SF's insignificance and smallness in relation to his ambition of moving upward to the social elite, represented by earning money to afford a luxurious car – and as he told us in the interview, he would not even dare to think about it.

Sequence following the introduction of Xin Tian Di

Following Vincent Luo's story, filmed in the Xin Tian Di sequence, SF expresses his concerns in the interview about losing his traditional way of life in Shanghai. Here the message encoded in the night shot of the city has altered. In the Xin Tian Di sequence, the shot of the city at night represents simply a fast-developing financial centre, whereas in SF's story, it signifies the ever-increasing commercialization which is carrying away Chinese traditions. On a second level of signification, it represents the widening gap between rich and poor.

When the camera pulls in to film SF and his colleague in their swinging cradle high above in the sky, the shiny skyscrapers are in the background within the frame. In contrast with the casual relaxation of the patrons of the bars and restaurants in Xin Tian Di, Sun has to work to clean windows at night. His face is in shadow all the time, while the light from the dazzling city lights surrounds him. This forms a contrast between the bright enjoyable life that rich people can enjoy in a Westernized area, and the shadow that this life-style casts over poor migrant workers, who have to work hard to buy a bottle of beer which costs two yuan (about 20 cent). The beautiful city life is no doubt appealing to poor people, but it seems that it can only be watched, never attained.

Generally speaking, in the process of an economic boom, China has transformed into a more materially modernized country than it was thirty years ago. This dramatic success, however, has encouraged admiration for and aspiration to a luxurious lifestyle, and the country is now inclined to be more Westernized in cultural and social aspects. This gives rise to the concerns voiced by SF in his interview: "If China continues to develop in this way, we will lose our simple way of life". Although Xin

Tian Di forms a miniature of the glittering Western urban life-style, in the end, it represents a life of luxury which could never be affordable for Sun Feng and people of his kind. In his opinion, "it is only the place for the rich people", which indicates the continuous widening gap between rich and poor. As urbanization expands, so does the gulf between the urban and rural incomes in China.

Sequence of New Year celebration

SF's last screen appearance is in the Chinese New Year celebration sequence at the end of *China Revealed*. He happily travels back to his home town in Taizhou for the annual Chinese New Year celebration and a reunion with his family. On his way back home, he talks excitedly about being able to see his little daughter again. However, when he eventually gets home and holds his daughter in his arms, she looks at him as if he were a stranger; she cannot even recognize him because he has been away from home for such a long time. Repeatedly showing close-up shots of the little girl highlights her confused and unemotional face, and invites us to ponder over her every expression. The sharp contrast between SF's smiling, happy face and the indifferent, bewildered face of his own daughter causes a resonance of sympathetic feeling among spectators. It is undeniable that Sun has been trying hard to be a good father by working hard in Shanghai. He even engaged himself in a dangerous occupation as a window cleaner in Shanghai, so that he could earn more money to support his daughter and his family; however, his daughter has had to suffer a life in which she can only see her father once a year. The shot demonstrates that although this New Year should be a pleasant time, instead of the genuine excitement of a family reunion, SF ends up disappointed due to this awkward and sad situation.

SF's story gives the audience the unique perspective of a migrant worker. His identity as a representative of Chinese peasants is under scrutiny here, perhaps because of the Western fascination with the ancient nature of Chinese primitive agricultural life. In this period of economic transition, he has left the peasant life by moving to the city, in pursuit of wealth and the "Chinese dream". The audience is invited to ponder how he copes with this social transition, and to note the ways in which he still values and maintains Chinese traditions, such as his eating habits, the

New Year celebration, and so on.

5.4 Country of antiquity & tradition – story of Xiao Cui (XC)

5.4.1. Chinese calligraphy

Paradigmatic analysis of Chinese calligraphy

As described in the earlier section on historical images, Chinese characters came to Western attention through the communications of missionaries. The Chinese used a brush to write in characters instead of letters for written communication, as confirmed by Ricci in his journal. For a long time, in the West, the Chinese language was notable both for its rules of pronunciation which were hard for Westerners to learn, and for its characters. The art of Chinese calligraphy was appreciated as a sign of thousands of years of learning and civilization. The Chinese script, which “originated some three thousand years ago as a system of simple drawings [was] the most natural way for any early society to express thoughts in writing.”²³⁸ If you do not hear the language but rather look at the written form of Chinese calligraphy, you might think written Chinese was a fascinating kind of drawing.

Sequence protocol of Chinese calligraphy

- (1) ECU of the brush soaking up ink from the ink block
- (2) ECU of brush being used to write on paper
- (3) Zoom out in high angle shot of a man performing calligraphy art
- (4) Close-up of a character
- (5) Long, high-angle shot of a piece of calligraphy and stationery
- (6) CU of the character
- (7) Zoom-in of full shot at eye-level
- (8) Freeze shot, then circle shot to the ECT of two characters on paper

Sequence interpretation

238 Willetts, William Y. 1981: 250

In this sequence, the whole process of calligraphy is filmed in ECU shot and other camera distances using a combination of high and low angles, ensuring full presentation of how calligraphy is done. The Chinese brush, ink and block as Chinese cultural codes all appear in shots 1 and 2, in exactly the way that exotic Chinese calligraphy drawn with a soft brush has historically been described to the West. The whole footage is filmed in a Chinese yard with grey stone floors and wooden carved windows, a site built in the ancient traditional Chinese style. The performer is also wearing a Chinese suit while he writes, which further emphasizes his Chinese identity. From the previous historical images, we already know that Chinese characters and Chinese calligraphy have been known to Europeans for hundreds of years, ever since Ricci introduced them to Europe. The whole sequence is composed of calligraphy, a traditional house as a filming setting, and the traditional costume the artist is wearing, which delivers a strong symbolic construction of the antiquity of Chinese civilization to the target audience.

At the end of the sequence, the editor has included something of an artistic flourish: after the camera shows the last movement of the calligraphy brush, the frame is frozen, and then the camera circles above the work until the calligraphy itself occupies the whole screen (Appendix 15). The traditional Chinese characters of 飞龙 (flying dragon) may well be unrecognizable to most of the audience - however, the art of the Chinese characters is clearly still exotic and appealing for westerners. The scene is shot in soft, natural light, to which an artistic atmosphere has been added. The narration informs us that "Over 40,000 unique symbols can capture every essence of life in this immense nation." The combination of image and narration convey the message that Chinese calligraphy is a traditional Chinese art, highly differentiated from the Western tradition, and thus can evoke old cultural memories of these characters to arouse Western interest.

Chinese calligraphy is used throughout as a cultural code. It appears in the documentary three times, which implies a keen fascination on the part of a Western audience for this ancient and exotic art performance. This sequence is the first calligraphy-related montage to appear in the documentary, and is followed by

another two montages in the last sequence of the New Year celebration which show the same artist performing calligraphy on a red strip of paper for door banners, one of the Chinese traditions for the New Year celebrations.

5.4.2 Xia Cui's sequence

Paradigmatic analysis of XC

Xiao Cui is a buddhist monk and a martial arts practitioner, who lives in an ancient Shao Lin Temple. From the sequence, we learn that he participates in traditional prayer ceremonies, and obeys the Buddhist rules of the Temple. From the earlier analysis of American values and ideologies, it is clear that religion plays a significant role in American society. We can assume that most Americans would therefore pay great attention to the religion and religious practices of other nations. The audience is invited to view Shaolin martial arts not simply as combat skills, but as a sophisticated mixture of a fighting form, self-healing, and more importantly, a technique for the cultivation of Buddhist self-discipline. As Shahar summarizes, "Arguably, this unique combination of military, therapeutic, and religious goals has been the key to the martial art's appeal in [the Chinese people's] native land and the modern West as well."²³⁹ Here the emphasis is on Kung Fu as exotic and mythic for Westerners. It is intended to be seen as a religious practice more than a way of fighting. The selection of XC's story therefore may well reflect the importance placed on religion in American culture, as XC is a Buddhist.

The selection of XC's martial art performance clearly aims to draw on the Western fascination with the mysterious, exotic and intriguing Chinese Kung Fu. Kung Fu has been constantly and extensively used in the Hollywood commercial films, such as the *Matrix Trilogy*, *Kill Bill* and *The Transformer*. In those Kung Fu films, the charisma of the Kung Fu performance is visualized by filming Kung Fu masters flying to and fro or walking on walls. The selection of this martial art montage builds on the increasing popularity of Chinese Kung Fu in the West, following from the growing

²³⁹ Shahar, Meir 2008: 3

popularity of Kung Fu films since the 1970s in the States. *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, released worldwide between 2000 and 2001, was awarded an Oscar for Best film in a foreign language, and instigated a mania for Chinese martial arts, particularly light skills (flying skills).

Martial art functions as a symbol of the antiquity of Chinese civilization. This ancient civilization is incarnated in historical buildings, including the Great Wall, the Forbidden City in Beijing, thousands of temples, and the gardens in southern China, and also represented spiritually through old and incredible legends and folklore. Although we could not trace a precise and direct record of the Shaolin Temple or martial arts in any of the reports of early European travellers or missionaries, according to Chinese records, the Shaolin Temple was built by the Emperor Xiao Wen in AD 495 during the Northern Wei era,²⁴⁰ and the monks living in the temples were experts at bare hand combat and weapon arts.

Martial art practice shares similarities with the traditional Chinese medical theory of the human body, which is viewed by Westerners as exotic, and even a bit superstitious, but also as a reflection of a part of Chinese mystery and a symbol of China's national culture. Both martial arts and Chinese medicine incorporate ancient Chinese philosophies of the human body. For instance, the Chinese believe in a flow of vital energy and the balance of *yin* and *yang* inside the human body. Chinese martial artists are seen as being imbued with a mysterious and magical power (*qi*) which protects them from attack. To present this principle, XC performs a brick-breaking Kung Fu move later in the sequence.

Sequence protocol of the Shaolin martial arts footage

- (1) Establishing full shot of the temple with mountains in the background
- (2) Crane shot of temple to monks beating water
- (3) Liu's interview in ECU
- (4) Close up of the water
- (5) Medium shot of a monk beating the water

240 Cheong, Jack 2002: 12

- (6) Long shot of monks with their master
- (7) High-angle aerial shot of monks beating water
- (8) Low-angle pan shot of pagodas in the temple
- (9) Crane shot of pagodas
- (10) Tilt shot of one monument
- (11) CU of engravings on the monument
- (12) Full shot of two pagodas
- (13) Crane shot from pagodas to monks practicing combat skills

Sequence interpretation

From the calligraphy sequence, the film storyline starts to present Chinese cultural traditions. With the introduction of an atlas animation, the music changes to a slow but relaxed Chinese classic folk tune, suggesting that the following sequence must somehow be connected to Chinese antiquity or tradition, as similar music accompanied the footage of ancient Chinese agricultural land in the Mrs. Liao sequence.

The establishing shot of the martial art sequence is the Shaolin Temple surrounded by mountains covered in green bamboo trees, a typical portrayal of the ancient Chinese world in the Western imagination. The scene was filmed in the ancient surroundings of the grey limestone pagoda and an open area in front of the main temple. Just like Polo and Ricci, our eyes are caught by the red temples with flying roofs surrounded by white granite pillars. When the camera reveals the image of the yard or external natural environment of the Temple, the corresponding narration is the phrase, “oldest continuous civilization”, which further stresses the antique character of Chinese culture.

Another important signifier in the montage is the image of the pagoda (Appendix 16), a six-angled stone monument built in the Buddhist temple. Along with flying roofs, the pagoda as a Chinese architectural style was noticed by the missionaries Mendoza and Father Ricci, and later imitated by European architects during the

wave of French *Chinoiserie*. The images of pagodas in the Shaolin Temple and the pan shot of calligraphy engravings around its body represent Chinese antiquity and tradition, for they have been familiar to the West ever since the Medieval Era through the reports of missionaries. In this montage, the pagoda and these engravings embody the sacredness of the Buddhist religion, for the pagoda originated from Buddhism. The Buddhist pagoda and monuments were filmed via low and high angles in pan or tilt shots 8, 9, and 10. These shots highlight the connection between Shaolin Kung Fu and Buddhism, rather than showing it as a purely aggressive fighting skill. These shots of this age-old architectural style in the establishing shots create a sense of nostalgia for Chinese ancient civilization. The narration also stresses the religious and cultural nature of the temple by using the words “holy and spiritual” to qualify the location.

The message of the martial art as a symbol of China’s ancient culture and religious traditions is further represented by slow motion shots of the monks’ movements in traditional costumes against the setting of the ancient architecture of temples and pagodas. Chinese martial arts encompass various combat styles, boxing skills and weapon arts and the martial art practitioner must learn how to fight with fists, or with knives and swords. Hence there are a host of images showing the monks in their robes practicing combat skills under the supervision of master Liu. All the combat scenes are filmed in slow motion, creating an atmosphere which is both intense and artistic. Master Liu compares his Kung Fu practice with calligraphy writing, remarking that “Each movement has to be practised again and again, just like calligraphy.” This narration links martial arts and calligraphy, which has already been identified in the documentary as a representation of Chinese ancient culture. It is evident to us that both calligraphy and Kung Fu practice here are classified in the category of China’s antiquity and tradition.

The camera dwells on a full shot, medium shot and close-up of the monk’s uniform, daily training routine and *qi* practice. The monks also need to learn how to control *qi* in their body and then concentrate it on one point, so that they can break a brick with their bare hands. In the documentary, Xiao Cui, the most talented student of Kung

Fu master Liu, practices *qi* in the open yard of the temple. This shot fits neatly into Western ideas of the ancient Chinese environment - grey granite floors, flying rooves and green plants surrounding the temple. After XC exerts his *qi*, he smashes the brick, an impressive feat which adds a mysterious charm to Chinese martial art in this documentary. In sum, these shots of the Shaolin monks wearing traditional costumes to practice Kung Fu and adhering to religious rules in the temple once again place an emphasis on the antiquity and religious traditions of Chinese culture.

5.4.3. Sequence of martial art at an academy school

In the Shaolin Temple sequence, martial art is not related to military power, but strongly recommended for its cultural and religious purposes. By contrast, the storyline now proceeds to the footage of another Kung Fu academy, located close to the temple. Here we see a sequence of martial arts practice by students in an academy, presented and interpreted from the opposite perspective. In the subsequent section, I will analyze these film images in detail for analogical comparison.

Sequence protocol

- (1) Moving shot of Kung Fu academy
- (2) Full shot of students practicing Kung Fu
- (3) From crane shot to aerial shot of *wushu* performance
- (4) Pan shot of training
- (5) Aerial shot of training
- (6) Combination of pan shot, crane shot and aerial shot
- (7) Full shot of a child in uniform performing *wushu*
- (8) Medium shot of a child in the academy
- (9) Long shot of the performance
- (10) Wide shot of the performance
- (11) Medium shot of children's feet running
- (12) Medium back shot of children running back from the training campus

Sequence interpretation

The montage of the Kung Fu performance following the Shaolin sequence shows thousands of students from a martial art academy near the Shaolin temple in Henan province. Kung Fu was positioned in the last sequence as a religion, an art, a tradition, whereas the filming of the practice in this academy gives it a signification of aggressiveness and even generates a tone of threat.

The montage begins with students training on a vast campus. Instead of the traditional costumes worn by the monks in the temple, they are all dressed in the same school uniforms and making the same steps and gestures, which makes them lack individuation. This picture could well trigger a past Western cultural memory of the image of the “blue ants”, the faceless Chinese mass during the Cultural Revolution. These aerial shots demonstrate the grandness of the mass of students, but also suggest the insignificance and smallness of each individual person. Meanwhile, we hear the students shouting in unison every time they change to a new training movement. The Kung Fu image presented in this sequence resembles more a scene of military training than a pure artistic performance.

Along with the switch between pan shots and aerial shots, the sound track changes from the tranquil Chinese monotonous music of the previous sequence to a fast-beating rhythm that falls in time with the performance. The narration continues, “There are dozens of academies with tens of thousands of students. Here there is no Buddhism, no prayer, no ritual.” By choosing the words “dozens” and “tens of thousands”, special emphasis is laid upon the great number of students devoted to Kung Fu training. The second sentence stresses that the modern adoption of martial arts in China by no means relates to religion, culture and tradition. The students are dressed in the same uniforms, consistent with the historical Western image of the Chinese as a “human sea” in the 1950s. The montage of combined images, sound track and narration creates a scene which carries a hidden message of aggressiveness, ambition, and coercion.

Shots 7 and 8 focus on a little child practicing martial arts in the academy. The full and medium shots clearly show that even little children are learning these combat

skills, yet with the training objective stated in the narration, “to become policemen or join the army” rather than staying to inherit and promote the Buddhist tradition. The montage then cuts to XC playing with an electronic gun at a local game bar. We learn from an interview with him at the bar that, although he is the most talented and qualified student of Master Liu, he hopes to be a policeman or bodyguard in the future, not a monk like Master Liu. This contrast implies that old traditions are losing their appeal for the younger generation. XC has been trained to pass on the martial art as a cultural tradition, but he would rather serve his country as a policeman. The contrast montage within this sequence delivers the message that tradition and religion are losing their popularity with the younger generation as a result of the cultural transition which encourages them rather to pursue their “Chinese Dream”.

5.4.4. Other cultural codes

Portrayal of Tai Chi as a traditional art form

In addition to the Kung Fu learned in the Shaolin Temple, Tai Chi is also popular among the older generation in China. It is slightly different to a martial art; in addition to being a combat skill, it is also one of the oldest traditional Chinese sports for keeping fit. Stemming from Taoism, Tai Chi concentrates more on the internal force of the human body than combat skills. Tai Chi Chuan is practiced in search of health and longevity. This traditional sport, as a result of the cultural accumulation of centuries, embodies a form of cultural guidance for the country and still has a significant influence upon the people. Tai Chi reflects not only Chinese values such as self-control and benevolence, but also integrates traditional Chinese principles of body and spirit, *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi* (vital energy), *Wuxing*, and *Bagua*.²⁴¹ Nowadays, Westerners will be familiar with the scene of a group of Chinese people performing this ancient practice in the early morning in the park.

241 *Yin* and *Yang* are used in classical Chinese science to explain the concept of interconnection and interdependence. *Yin* means dark and cold, whilst *yang* means bright and hot. The balance of *Yin* and *Yang* ensure a vital and powerful energy, *qi*. According to Chinese philosophy, everything in the world is composed of five basic elements, metal, wood, water, fire and earth. *Bagua* contains symbols of heaven, lake, fire, thunder, wind, water, mountain and earth.

Tai Chi as a leisure sport in China is shown in this documentary by a group of middle-aged Chinese in white Kung Fu costumes next to the Huangpu River on the Shanghai Bund, with a skyscraper skyline in the background instead of the usual park. The Shanghai Pearl Television Tower stands in the background; the Jin Mao Tower and other skyscrapers gleam in the dawn sunshine. The shot reflects the contrast between ancient tradition and urban modernity, thus implying that China has risen to be a modern country, while at the same time maintaining important traditions. China has changed, and has been greatly affected by globalization and internationalization; however, for certain traditions, it never changes. The light tone in the footage is weak and blurry, and the sky is covered in heavy cloud, connoting a feeling of uncertainty toward China's transition between tradition and modernity.

Image of Chinese cuisine

In the Chinese cuisine sequence, the editor first takes us through a montage of a Chinese poultry market, and we see chickens and ducks in cages. Then in the next montage, the camera takes us for a closer look at Chinese food, in a kitchen in a restaurant in the city of Beijing. Our attention is then brought to a succession of close up shots of exotic ingredients in the kitchen - snakes, silkworms, turtles and fish heads - just as we have learned from the historical Western perception of Chinese cuisine that "the Chinese basically eat everything alive".²⁴²

Despite its international popularity in recent decade, the presentation of Chinese food here focuses more on unusual, possibly terrifying ingredients. In this documentary, our eyes are caught by several terrifying ingredients. We see the cook selecting chopped fish heads, peeling off snakeskin and frying the meat, and preparing silkworms. These scary and peculiar ingredients are surely intended to shock Western audiences. This image could also be intended to strengthen the popular conception that the Chinese are brutal to animals, as China has already been very well-known as a cruel dog-eating country: "In connection with this 'understandable prejudice', it has led to a conviction that 'when people do eat dog

242 Quoted from the narration of Mrs Liao's sequence of China Revealed

flesh they must be starving and desperate”²⁴³. Such a picture actually fits right into Western images of Chinese cuisine.

Image of Chinese social traditions

Banqueting is a very significant social custom in Chinese society, which was noted by Ricci. He noticed that it was a networking opportunity for Chinese literati to get acquainted with each other, and Ricci himself also used banquets as a way to build friendship with officials, so that he could gain more support to accomplish his work as a missionary. This tradition has certainly been well preserved until the present day.

In this restaurant montage, the editor cuts to close and medium shots of various smiling faces; from this we see how crucial it is for the Chinese to get together on such occasions. The drinking culture is an important part of China’s social life to break the ice between people who are not acquainted with each other. In this case, the host and the invited guests toast each other, through which social relationships can be built and business deals happily closed. As Sam Song argues, “It is practically impossible for someone to be Chinese if they do not indulge in social drinking. Every drinking occasion is an opportunity to improve relationships, and gain respect and trust in China.”²⁴⁴

Traditionally, the Chinese have two types of drinks: Chinese tea and rice wine. Unlike Chinese tea, Chinese wine was introduced to the West by Ricci in his journal. He observed that Chinese wine was produced from rice rather than grapes as in Europe. Rice wine is not quite as popular as tea in the West; the Chinese however have special feeling for wine drinking, which has played an important role in daily life ever since ancient times. If a Chinese person wants to celebrate with his or her friends or business partners or colleagues from work, they would usually go to a restaurant and drink some wine.

243 Simoons, Frederic J. 1994: 203

244 Song, Sam 2007: 19

In the United States or Europe, some people prefer to invite people over to their homes to socialize, developing a closer relationship in a casual family environment – although of course going out to restaurants is also popular. By contrast, the Chinese go out to restaurants a lot more often than their Western counterparts. Restaurants in China are like bars in the West. People meet daily in restaurants for socializing. It is cheaper to eat out in China than in the West, yet it is far more important, and is seen as a traditional and essential part of the Chinese way of socializing. In addition, eating at home is also a powerful way for the Chinese to pass on their traditions. When the Chinese stay at home to eat with their families, a private social intimacy is then created for family members to share their thoughts and experiences. If a Chinese family invites somebody to their home for a meal, it means that this person is a really close friend, like one of the members of the family.

5.5 Country of tradition – story of Jin Yang (JY)

5.5.1. Paradigmatic analysis of Jin Yang's story

One of the two prioritized main characters, Jin Yang is a child gymnast fighting for a place in the 2008 Olympic Games. *China Revealed* was filmed in 2005, when China was preparing for the Olympic Games, and this timing would doubtless increase Western interest in the topic. Jin Yang is an only child, but in the documentary we learn that she has had to endure incredible physical pain and sacrifice her childhood to gymnastics practice in an academy in Beijing. Although only twelve years old, she already places great store on national pride and glory. Her mind is filled with what her father and coach have told her to do - to practice hard and hope to be selected to the national gymnastics team so that she can compete in the Games on behalf of China. Jin Yang was chosen to be filmed in this documentary, as her story is used to represent the life of China's younger generation, only children under great pressure from their family.

Firstly, the one child policy is considered in the American ideological framework to be

an “extreme population control method”²⁴⁵. It has always been considered as a controversial measure, as it is a violation of human rights according to American values. As I argued in the previous chapter in relation to the topic of American ideologies and perceptions, respect for human rights is one of most significant conventions accepted by the American people. We could thus share in the conclusion drawn by Harding, that “Americans now seem more willing to apply their own values and principles to an assessment of China. In particular, Americans feel justified in asking hard questions about the state of individual liberty and human rights in China, even though the Chinese leadership itself continues to deny the applicability of such ‘bourgeois’ concepts to their own country.”²⁴⁶ From the perspective of the American value system, such hard training forced upon little children is absolutely inhumane, and could trigger a Western memory of Chinese women’s “deformed feet”.

JY bears the physical and psychological demands of her gymnastic training because it is her father’s wish instead of her own will - or to put it another way, her father’s will has *become* her own. In JY’s life, her father’s intentions and national pride are her first priority. As we saw earlier, one major element of Chinese tradition is the collective social culture rooted in Confucian philosophy, which has deeply influenced Chinese society for about two thousand years and has harmony and obedience as its philosophical essence. Traditionally speaking, inside a family, children must do what their parents require, and this social order still plays a significant role in the lives of the younger generations.

5.5.2 JY’s first sequence

Sequences involving JY appear three times in the documentary. The first one comes directly after Xiao Cui’s Buddhist martial art sequence, and focuses on her training regime and her dormitory at the gymnastic school. JY’s father is introduced in this

245 McElroy, Damien *China is furious as Bush halts UN 'abortion' funds* published on 03 Feb 2002
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1383627/China-is-furious-as-Bush-halts-UN-abortion-funds.html>
246 Harding, Harry 1991: 255

sequence and interviewed at their family home. In this first sequence, we get a general idea that JY and her companions are required to train hard every day at the boarding school. Through these camera images, we are in a position to see many little children, about four or five years old, practicing gymnastic movements. A couple of close up shots make it pretty clear that these children are both young and confused. It seems that they do not quite understand why they are being trained or what they are supposed to be learning, but simply repeating movements. The narrator explains, "Children at the age of four are in training six days a week, six hours a day." The images and narration combine to show spectators these children's arduous efforts to realize their dreams. However, this hard training scene also strongly conveys the message that this training is inhumane and that it divests the children of their right to enjoy their childhood.

When the sequence moves on to JY's interview in her dorm room, we learn that the girl's home is in Beijing like her school. Even so, due to the intensive training, she is not allowed to stay at home but must sleep at the school. She has to stay in her dorm even though she very much dislikes two of her roommates. The worst is that if she misses her family, she can only cuddle the teddy bear from her parents and think of them. All these images demonstrate that there is not only physical pain for child athletes to bear, but also psychological suffering.

As for JY's father, he cannot visit his daughter frequently either; therefore, he has built a shrine for her at home. This shrine is positioned on the left-hand side in the background of the frame, whilst JY's father stands in the foreground on the right side. In cinematography, objects on the left have more significance. Hence, in this composition, the eye-catching object is the shrine built by JY's father. We see JY's picture in the middle; to the right of her picture are her medals and certificates. Under her picture is a calligraphy banner, which reads "healthy, safe and happy" (*Pingan Kuaile*) in Chinese. The shrine looks as if it has been set up for somebody who has passed away. Thus, we can see how much JY's parents miss her, but she cannot live with her family because of her gymnastic training.

After watching JY's first sequence, the audience has been invited to feel sympathy for the family, or even mystification, as, for Americans, individualism and free will should be given the first priority. Instead of acting on her wishes to stay with her parents and enjoy a happy childhood, JY has to make sacrifices to achieve her dream, or, more precisely, her father's ambition – to be selected to the national team and win a medal for China in the 2008 Olympics. The children have to put up with the distance from their families and the hard training program, indicating that they have no freedom to follow their own wishes or enjoy their own individual rights. In accordance with the collectivist principle, JY's personal interest is subsumed into the collective interest, in keeping with typical Chinese moral standards.

5.5.3 JY's second sequence

Sequence protocol

In this sequence, JY's father comes to pick her up from boarding school on Saturday afternoon, her only free time during a hard week of training. He takes his daughter to a theme park in Beijing to have a couple of hour's fun. The sequence shots are as follows:

- 1) A medium shot of JY running to her father
- 2) Two medium shots of JY's father and JY walking together, with big, happy smiles on their faces
- 3) CU of JY's face
- 4) Full shot of them leaving the gymnastics school, on the left side of a national flag billboard. JY's father is on a bicycle, JY is sitting on the bicycle's back seat.
- 5) A full shot of JY's father and JY walking side by side.
- 6) Tilt shot from circling horse to JY and her father.
- 7) Full shot of a roller coaster in Beijing's theme park
- 8) Close shot of JY and her father in an interview
- 9) Medium shot of JY and her friend sitting in the first row of the roller coaster
- 10) Close shot of JY pulling down the safety protection and then cast to her face
- 11) Full shot of the whole roller coaster on track

- 12) Track shot of JY's nervous face
- 13) Medium shot of JY and her friend, JY closing her eyes tightly and her friend lowering her head to her arm
- 14) Backlit full shot of the roller coaster moving fast on its track
- 15) Track shot of JY waving her right hand when the roller coaster returns to the starting point

Sequence interpretation – “To be somebody”

In the first part of this sequence, we can see that JY is truly happy to meet her father, even if they can only see each other once a week. From shot 1 to shot 7, we are drawn into a pleasant atmosphere and feel how much they enjoy their time together. Then follows shot 8. In this interview, her father mentions that the reason JY loves going on the roller coaster is because this experience gives her more courage in her gymnastic practice. The impression is given to the audience that the poor girl cannot forget about improving her gymnastics performance even when she is trying to have some fun.

The sense of the pressure on JY is increased by the montage, which might arouse sympathy among spectators. The second montage begins with a full shot of JY jogging beside a lake in a park, while her father rides a bicycle behind her. During this short time with her father, she is still pushed to engage in skipping and jogging. This footage is filmed in a Chinese park (Appendix 17), decorated with willows and pavilions, which are, as we have seen, two major signifiers of the romantic vision of China in the West. In a relaxing environment, there are couples rowing a boat on the lake, and some people doing Tai Chi in the background – which connects with our analysis of the previous story of Xiao Cui, in which Tai Chi emerges as a traditional exercise technique for physical fitness). In contrast with the fun Tai Chi in the park, the father and child continue their own training routine. The sharp contrast between the casual surroundings and the tense training is emphasized further by a pan shot from JY's father sitting on the bicycle (sharp focus) and people doing Tai Chi or dancing (soft focus) to JY skipping rope. JY is shown skipping among a group of

elderly people who are doing exercises for their health, emphasizing her incongruity with them. Later on, the camera shows us JY jogging through dancing people in front of her father's bicycle. The adults are enjoying their gentle exercise, whereas this little girl has to keep jogging on her only free day to improve her physical competence for the competition. They are all practicing sport, but this girl is undergoing harsh training, unlike the adults who can enjoy the pleasure of a leisure sport.

JY is an only child; hence she carries the burden of huge psychological pressure to satisfy her parents' expectations, like any other only child in contemporary China. The One-child policy restricts each family to a single child, at least in urban areas. This policy means that, on the one hand, the child may be spoiled by the whole family; but on the other hand, he or she is also the only hope for the family and has to assume a lot of responsibilities. In JY's case, she has had to sacrifice her family reunion for training, for she cannot afford to disappoint her father. Her father hopes that JY will be selected to the national team and finally win a gold medal in the Olympic Games. In her interview in the second montage, she says, "When I started training, nobody wanted me to continue, because it is too harsh for me, except my dad." She emphasizes her father's ambition and anticipation for her at the end of the whole sequence. She expresses her own wish to succeed in the light of her father's aspirations: "I would be happy to be selected to the national team, but I think my dad would be happier." It seems that winning a gold medal is her father's wish rather than her own. The high expectations of parents drive their children to make huge efforts to pursue future success.

Thus, the audience is led to see that at least one core value of the American dream, to be "somebody" and to achieve success, is shared by Chinese society. This value was reinforced by the One-child policy in contemporary Chinese society, for the only child has to take on all the hope and pressure from their parents, to be competitive, to study much harder than his or her parents' generation. This is encapsulated by the Chinese idiom "to wish children to become dragons (*Wang zi cheng long*)" - meaning to become successful, because the dragon symbolizes wealth and

achievement in Chinese culture. Speaking of the pressure imposed by Chinese parents on their children, Michael Bristow writes in his report for the BBC on the Asia-Pacific region, "China's family planning policy may have successfully limited most homes to just one child, but it has also increased the pressure on the child each family has. Parents are now keener than ever to make sure their offspring grow up to be educated, successful and wealthy. Inevitably, these high expectations often lead to conflict between parents and their children, who sometimes fail to fulfil these hopes."²⁴⁷

As a child, JY has been put through a very tough and physically torturous training programme. Thanks to this brutal training regime, JY and the other child athletes in the gymnastic school have never eaten candy or been spoiled like other children their age. Through footage of a training scene in the school, the audience is provided with an insight into the training life of these child athletes, starting with the low-angle shot of JY's jump from one side of a bar to the other. This is followed by a medium shot of a girl building her back muscles by carrying a heavy metal weight on her back. Then we are presented with more shocking images: in a tilt shot we see a girl with her leg and ankle heavily bandaged (Appendix 18), who is nonetheless continuing her training. Next, we see a man pricking the blister on a girl's palm with a nail-clipper (Appendix 19). After this CU shot is an ECS shot of the girl's bleeding hand. Finally, we watch JY grabbing a steel shelf and putting her whole body weight on her arms, while simultaneously lifting her legs to her chest over and over again. She says in her interview, "Most of all, I was so scared of being forced to stretch my legs over and over again. Sometimes I thought I was doing the same thing all afternoon." From this little girl's words, we can tell that the training which she has to constantly repeat is very boring and tough for a child her age.

The training regimes of the kind experienced by JY here were labeled "inhumane"²⁴⁸ by David Shambaugh, a specialist on China at George Washington University and the Brookings Institution. JY's story in the documentary could cause audiences to

²⁴⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7001561.stm>

²⁴⁸ Shambaugh, David "Yes, Award Olympic Games to a Changing China", from the Opinion Column of the *New York Times*, July 13th, 2001

think of media coverage of China's athletics training, which had been condemned as inhumane for a long time, an impression which was also deeply strengthened by media representations. As Barry Gewen wrote in the Time's report on "Olympian Questions", "China's Olympics program has resulted in the forcible separation of talented children from their families; the budding athletes are then sent to government camps where they are subjected to apparently cruel and inhuman training schedules."²⁴⁹ In another Times report, the author interviewed the father of an Olympic Gold Medal winner, who commented on his son's training conditions, "Every time I think about him training, I feel so sad that my heart hurts. For him, and for me, there is so much pain."²⁵⁰

Generally speaking, it can be convincingly claimed that the Chinese care about very different things than Westerners do. They have no tradition of individual democracy or privacy or liberty and therefore the violations of such values in China are seen as of little consequence.²⁵¹ By contrast with Western individualist principles, Chinese society is organized under the guidance of collective principles, which makes it short on individual liberty or justice. Thus, the reputation of the whole country is more valued than a personal reputation; the national interest is far more important than an individual interest. This view is also upheld in *The Great Wall in Ruins*, "For centuries the Chinese were taught from childhood that public interest should be placed above individual interest."²⁵² In such a collective cultural context, JY and her team mates have been motivated to win gold medals for their country at the Olympic Games, by withstanding hardship on the journey to success. Their personal interests are supposed to be cast aside.

China is a society structured by a collective culture and family hierarchy. Having been affected by Confucian philosophy for such a long time, children's own desires might not be taken into very serious consideration. Rather they are expected to obey

²⁴⁹ This report was published online on July 30, 2008.

<http://papercuts.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/30/olympianquestions/?scp=3&sq=China's%20athlete%20training,%20inhumane&st=cse>

²⁵⁰ Macur, Juliet "In China's Medal Factory, Winners Cannot Quit" published on June 21, 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/21/sports/olympics/21athlete.html>

²⁵¹ Conroy, Hilary 1991: 310

²⁵² Chu, Godwin C. & Ju, Yan'an 1993: 156

their parents' wishes in most cases. Chinese parents love their children so much that they believe only they can make sufficiently wise decisions to ensure their children a brilliant future. Children are assumed to be too young to be decision-makers. In JY's case, she wanted to quit once after the Chinese New Year break, but her father did not approve and persuaded her to go back to the gymnastic school. JY did what her father asked her to do and devoted herself again to training.

5.6 Country of antiquity and totalitarianism – story of Yang Fuxi (YF)

5.6.1. Paradigmatic analysis of YF sequence

The main character in this sequence is Yang Fuxi, a deft craftsman who carries on the traditional bow-making technique he inherited from his family. In this sequence, he shows the audience the secrets of the bow-making trade, and also recounts the story of his family's experiences during the Cultural Revolution. Once again, analysis flags up references to ancient Chinese culture in this film footage of YF.

As argued in Chapter two, China is in general regarded as a totalitarian country under a dictatorship, where people have had no freedom of speech since the Communists took over the government, and in particular during the era of the Cultural Revolution. The image of Chinese ancient culture being destroyed and replaced by a monstrous nothingness has been engraved in Western minds. The reportage associated with the Cultural Revolution was historically of great interest to the West, in particular in the States, where democratic rights are categorized as a fundamental value. The Chinese Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966. Right after the State visit of American President Nixon, the Western perception of the revolution was relatively positive; popular opinion held that China led by Chairman Mao was pursuing its own route to social fairness and justice. The tone had altered by the beginning of 1980s, however, and the Revolution was condemned as having brought chaos and destruction to a once-valuable culture. The selection of YF as an interviewee in the documentary develops the film storyline by introducing references to the Cultural Revolution, and reflecting the consistent Western image of China

since Red China came into being.

5.6.2 Archery performance in the Forbidden City

YF's sequence is composed of three primary montages, all of which were filmed in places aligned to Chinese antiquity: archery practice in the Forbidden City, an interview at an ancient house in Beijing which serves as his studio, and an interview in a pavilion in the Summer Palace.

Sequence protocol

- (1) Wide shot of the front of the Forbidden City
- (2) Two yellow roofs are in the foreground, with a pagoda in the middle and the mountains in the background.
- (3) The camera pans from the red door of one palace across to a narrow lane (a *Hutong* inside the palace)
- (4) The camera pulls forward and zooms in on the major palace of the Forbidden City. At the same time, two Chinese vessels enter into the frame.
- (5) The camera pulls back to the outside of a huge door and provides a P.O.V shot - some men and women in the traditional costumes of the Qing dynasty are walking to and fro.
- (6) A mid-shot of a body guard holding a traditional bow; two maids are passing him with handkerchiefs in their hands.
- (7) The bodyguard is preparing to draw the bow. An arrow flies out to reach the target. A tracking shot of the flying arrow and in the end a close-up of the arrow reaching the target.
- (8) Three arrows lie in the foreground, and the bodyguard walks in the background.

Sequence interpretation

From Greek and Roman Times, the royal palace has been equated to material wealth. Polo actually believed that the Palace was made of solid gold. For two thousand years, the palace has been a symbol of incredible wealth and royal

authority. Until the beginning of last century, the royal residence was prohibited to the public, and so retained its enigmatic appeal for most European and American travellers coming to visit China. Nowadays the Forbidden City is still one of the most frequently adopted Chinese icons in Western television representations, and still denotes totalitarian political power, royal authority and Chinese antiquity.

The introductory establishing shot of Yang Fuxi's story is set within the Forbidden City, an ancient and historical environment. A static opening shot with the former royal residence standing in the middle is followed by a medium shot of the palace's rooves covered by yellow tiles. A wide shot of the royal palace expresses the magnificence of the former imperial residence. This setting, against a dim sky to ensure a dark light hue, signifies the historical atmosphere of the imperial era, creating a strong sense of nostalgia for the old culture and traditions. In the context of the whole montage, the film setting and composition serve to emphasize the ancientness and value of political and cultural heritage, which China has always been famous for in the Western world.

In addition to the ancient royal palace, the filmed targets of the palace bodyguards and maids in the montage are all dressed in costumes from the Qing dynasty. They have all dressed in these Qing costumes for the royal residence, which brings the minds of the spectators back hundreds of years, to the last feudal rule in Chinese history. The mysterious and exotic ancientness of the country has been constructed through the juxtaposition of ancient architecture (the Forbidden City) and Qing costumes (*Qi Pao*, also known as banner quilt²⁵³). Also, the montage presents the traditional activity of archery practice: on the ground of the imperial palace, the body guards are practising their bow techniques, while the maids are walking through the palace or waiting to serve their masters.

²⁵³ *Qi pao*, a banner quilt, originated from the traditional costume of the Manchu ethnic group.

5.6.3 YF's Sequence

Sequence protocol

- 1) Interview at his studio with bows as background
- 2) A wide shot of Tiananmen Square
- 3) The shadow of the national flag on the rain-drenched floor
- 4) A wide shot of Tiananmen Fortress at the Square with lion statue in the foreground
- 5) A full shot of Mao's portrait on the wall
- 6) An ECU of a national flag
- 7) A long shot of a monument
- 8) The shadow of the national flags on the wet floor
- 9) A close shot in tilt of a stone statue
- 10) A pan shot of shabby houses
- 11) ECU of YF in interview

Sequence interpretation

In this sequence, much attention has been paid to images which evoke the memory of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which is now portrayed in Western historical accounts as a dark time in Chinese history. When YF tells us the story about what happened to his family in his childhood during the Cultural Revolution, the montage flips through Tian'anmen Square, the Chinese national flag, and Mao's portrait, which are all closely connected with China's political image. The Forbidden City is used to symbolize royal political rule as a form of cultural heritage, whilst the modern political symbols are used very differently. In Western perception, Tian'anmen Square was considered as a symbol of the brutal totalitarian rule of Chinese authority, and this impression was reinforced by the massacre in 1989. Therefore, the signifiers of Tian'anmen and Mao's portrait have been infused with political symbolism, of a government which damaged culture and tradition, and more seriously, human rights. The red flag, appearing in this montage three times, implies a stereotyped signification defined by the West: innocent people losing their lives

during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, in this short interview sequence with YF, images of Tiananmen Square and the national flag are repeatedly applied to invoke a political commentary on a totalitarian government destroying the nation's culture and tradition, as was communicated in the West in the 1980s.

The atmosphere of sympathy for a tragedy is further reinforced by the gloomy rain in the footage. All the places and buildings in this segment were filmed when it was raining in Beijing and the musical score accompanying this montage emphasizes a tone of tragedy. The narration recounts YF's individual story during the Cultural Revolution. His family broke their bows in half and wrapped them in oil papers to hide in the roof tiles. By this action, they risked being executed for protecting one single bow from the red guards. The narrating voice adds, "The Cultural Revolution was destruction to learning, art and tradition", which on the contrary should have been respected and preserved. Audiences watching this montage learn that intellectuals were politically affected and persecuted, and traditional artistic skills - like bow making - were destroyed. Thus, in the montage, the contrast between the nostalgic preservation of the past e.g. bow-making, and the realities of the present - the destruction of tradition, in this case by Mao's Cultural Revolution - are revealed.

Sequence protocol

- (1) A crane shot of a willow in the foreground of the frame; a white stone bridge lies in the background.
- (2) A wide shot of the bridge with YF walking with his back to the sunshine towards the camera in the sunset.
- (3) CU and medium shot of him making a bow at his studio
- (4) A crane shot of a big pavilion in the park
- (5) The camera zooms in to a side shot of Yang Fuxi sitting inside
- (6) CU of YF in interview

Sequence interpretation

By contrast with the dim and critical montage on the Cultural Revolution, the

sequence that follows it pictures a typical Chinese world. The setting switches to a pavilion in the Summer Palace. During the interview with YF, he is surrounded by typical Chinese elements which fit right into the Western imagination of Chinese gardens, usually full of arched stone bridges, pavilions and willows.

Owing to *Chinoiserie*, the mania for all things Chinese in the eighteenth century, the art of Chinese gardening has been prevalent and fashionable across Europe, in particular in France. A Chinese garden should at least include willows, arched bridges and pavilions. Willows activate a romantic memory of the Middle Kingdom in the Age of Enlightenment. The summarized concept of China as a “willow-patterned world” was first put forth by the Oxford University Professor Raymond Dawson in *Chinese Chameleon*.²⁵⁴ In this part of the montage, the willow world is brought back to life again in the image of the Summer Palace, a summer garden for the royal family in a suburban area of Peking. In this mise-en-scene, the conceptual map of Western ideas of China has been reproduced in a picture of the soft willow bending over the lake, with a white stone arched bridge across the lake. A huge red pavilion is located in the park, and YF is sitting in a pavillion. YF appears in a Chinese costume which dates from the Republican era of about a hundred years ago. Both the character himself and the external setting he has been given convey a message of Chinese traditional antiquity. When YF is interviewed in his studio, an ancient house built in Qing Times in Peking, in the background of his ECU shot a calligraphic board on the wall indicates his identity as a traditional artist, as calligraphy has been seen as a symbol of Chinese learning since it was established as such by the *Chinoiserie* of the eighteenth century.

The use of light in this sequence is significant. YF is filmed against the sunshine during the sunset. The silhouette effect of his image adds a more artistic and romantic atmosphere to the sequence. The accompanying soundtrack consists of slow but melodic Chinese instrumental music. YF’s explanation of why he preserves the manual bow-making technique in the modern world is dubbed as narration. He claims that bow-making is no longer merely bow-making, but a way to preserve the

254 Dawson, Raymond 1967:106

continuity of traditional culture. Thus the signifiers of the willow, bridge and pavilion are used to create an atmosphere of nostalgia and romance, which is also in line with YF's identity, as a representative of traditional culture and art.

5.7 Country of transition – story of Vincent Luo

5.7.1 Paradigmatic analysis

Following YF's story, the film sequence moves on to the story of a property tycoon working in construction in Shanghai. Building a property empire, Vincent Luo²⁵⁵ is an acknowledged successful business figure representing China's elite class, a role-model for the type of ambitious Chinese pursuing career success. He was selected as he is "somebody" in Chinese society, an idol for the "nobodies" of China. The dreams of people from different social classes and backgrounds differ. The American Dream encouraged millions of American to firmly believe in the possibility of going from a "nobody" to a "somebody" using one's personal enduring effort. Similarly, the migrant worker SF was dreaming of possessing a fancy Audi car through a well-paid job and his hard work. Luo's dream is to expand his property empire. The sequence shows him inviting an American architect to build a new retail complex in pure Western style in downtown Shanghai. The reason why he copies Western styles could be attributed to his personal connection with the West, as he received education in the West and is the only interviewee in the documentary who speaks fluent English without dubbing in post-production. The selection of Luo in the documentary indicates a general Western interest in China's modern development, which represents the transition element of the China-image model. This sequence discloses how the country has been altered under the impact of the influence of the West and globalization.

255 Vincent Luo, or Kangrui Luo, is the chairman of the Hong Kong based Shui On Group, a construction and property investment company. He has built several architectural complex in Shanghai, which earned him an honorary title „son-in-law of Shanghai“.

As the first major character possessing a large amount of wealth, Luo's sequence forms a sharp contrast with ordinary poor people like SF who have been introduced from the beginning of the documentary. Historically speaking, China was considered to be a very wealthy "silk land" ever since ancient Greek and Roman times. In the nineteenth century, China was considered a poor land with a waning economy due to continuous wars and Western invasion. Three decades ago, China was determined to revive its economy by importing Western market economics. These days, the country has accelerated its economic development, with an average annual GDP growth rate of 8%. But while the Chinese economy is rising, a series of transitions are being undergone in China; for instance, a large number of peasants living in rural areas are moving to cities, leading to the kind of urbanization experienced by the States during industrialization. Also, the gap between rich and poor is enlarging dramatically, just as it is today in America, which has the widest gap in the Western industrial world.

Luo's sequence focuses more on portraying transitions in modern China, and which is an indispensable element of describing present-day China. By contrast with SF's sequence (transition) and YF's one (tradition), Luo's story adds more dramatic value to the documentary as a whole, for it is necessary to create an interesting, sharp contrast between two opposing themes, namely tradition versus modernity, poor versus rich, ancient tradition versus Western cultural impact perceived by Western eyes. This sequence therefore specifically emphasizes the comparison between traditions and modern development in the process of modernization.

5.7.2 Sequence of Luo

Sequence protocol

- (1) A panoramic shot of Xin Tian Di²⁵⁶
- (2) A wide shot of a historical house (the headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party) and the tall buildings around it

256 *Xin Tian Di* means new heaven and earth. It is considered to be one of the first lifestyle leisure centers in China. It is located in the downtown area of Shanghai, containing the traditional restored stone gate houses as well as several narrow alleys, which are intended to be cafes or restaurants. This district includes shopping, eating and entertainment.

- (3) A tracking shot of Vincent and the American architect Ben Wood, walking in Xin Tian Di
- (4) A zoom shot of an old photo of construction sites with tall buildings in the background
- (5) The street view of the newly built Xin Tian Di
- (6) A medium shot of the people walking on the street of Xin Tian Di
- (7) A young man, wearing a suit, sitting outside a restaurant, eating with a knife and a fork and drinking a bottle of juice
- (8) Two men wearing suits and shirts walking in the foreground, and another two walking foreigners in the background
- (9) A big close-up of Vincent Lau (interview)
- (10) A close-up of a middle-aged Chinese lady sitting outside, holding a fork to eat
- (11) Two young ladies eating with knives and forks
- (12) A big close-up tracking shot of the American architect and Vincent (interview with Ben Wood)
- (13) The night view of Xin Tian Di, a crowd of both Chinese people and Westerners are sitting outside, eating and drinking.
- (14) Interview with SF

Sequence interpretation

This sequence starts with a pan shot of a glamorous city view of Shanghai in the evening, and then cuts to a construction site in the day time. The city resembles other famous metropolitan cities like New York and London, showing that China has to some extent achieved similar modernization. Following the montage of marvellous city views, we see buildings under construction in the open area, which symbolize the ongoing process of the country's development and indicate that China is still making efforts to develop the construction of properties and infrastructure

The first shot shows a photo of old houses which once stood where Xin Tian Di was built (Appendix 20). In this picture, we can see traditional three-storey houses being pulled down to be replaced with tall buildings, like the skyscrapers around them.

Although traditional houses stand in the front of the photo, they are grey, old and shabby, overlooked by gorgeous new buildings. The skyscrapers are in the background, but they look much more modernized than the traditional grey houses. The image contrast is clarified in the documentary narration, as the old area is referred to as a “slum”.

As Luo said in the interview in shot 3, he is intending to introduce a Western modern lifestyle including Western restaurants, pubs and a shopping mall by building a new retail complex, even though he admits that all his friends have disapproved of this idea from the very beginning. The American architect Ben Wood, invited by Luo, also shows up in this sequence, commenting on Xin Tian Di’s success: “The typical traditional Chinese restaurant has a round table full of people; you can’t whisper nice things to your girlfriend, it cannot happen - but now it happens”. From the close-up of Vincent’s smile while Ben complains slightly of the privacy issues caused by the traditional Chinese way of eating, we can tell that Luo agrees with Ben’s view. The traditional custom of eating around a table, from Ben’s point of view, makes it impossible to communicate with others in privacy, which is eccentric and uncomfortable for those who come from a Western background. Vincent and Ben’s interviews show that the Western dining style has been imported and fully accepted, at least in Xin Tian Di, through Vincent’s newly established complex.

In the globalization process, America has promoted its cultural identity to almost every corner of the world. This cultural consumption has promoted Western cultural values abroad, and encouraged those from different locations to experience a sense of identification with, even of worship for the Western life style. Western audiences would probably find the following shots 5 and 6 familiar: a variety of restaurants, open cafes and shops scattered along the streets in a clean and comfortable environment. In Western romantic comedy movies, scenes of cafes are often incorporated into filming. Under the impact of American cultural promotion, instead of visiting the tea house to drink tea, which has been the national drink ever since the thirteenth century, the younger generation in China prefer to go to Starbucks or a Western-style open restaurant. While the narration continues, our eyes are caught

by Chinese business professionals wearing Western suits, sitting on the terrace of a restaurant, eating with a knife and fork, and drinking in a bar at night. In shots 7, 8 and 11, the camera catches young Chinese, who probably work in joint venture companies in Shanghai, enjoying themselves in Xin Tian Di, showing their acceptance of, or more precisely, their admiration for Western culture.

What is more, as filmed in this sequence, it is not only the young Chinese who have embraced this Western style. The older generation have also opened their minds to experience something different from the West. The pursuit of the Western lifestyle has permeated into the lives of the older generation, which can be seen in the CU shot 10. A couple in their fifties are sitting outside and enjoying their food with cutlery rather than using traditional Chinese chopsticks. Along with all the beautiful images, the matching music tone of this whole sequence is light and pleasant, formulating the myth that the Western life style is modern, comfortable and free. In the context of globalization, the encounter of Chinese tradition and Western style was inevitable and in reality, the Western style has already made a huge impact on Chinese people's lives.

Since this encounter of the traditional and the new was unavoidable, what kind of outcome should we expect? The most likely result is perhaps a marked transformation of Chinese society brought about by globalization, or more precisely, Westernization – an increasing imitation of Western consumerism and a decrease in the traditional Chinese lifestyle in cities. This outcome is supported by SF's interview at the end of the sequence. In the end, SF explains that the Chinese traditional way of life is simple and frugal, but that Xin Tian Di is only for the rich. Through the compared montage of Xin Tian Di and SF, the audiences are thus made aware of China's widening gap between rich and poor. There are people who can afford the new fashion in the newly built places, whereas poor people like SF have to work hard at night. After all SF criticizes the place only because he thinks everything is too expensive there, not because he did not like it!

Here in this sequence, as a matter of fact, we are left with the feeling that although it might be painful that some Chinese traditions are losing their popularity in China, the tendency towards Western cultural integration into Chinese culture is a positive thing. The world's mainstream ideology is now determined by Western developed nations. As Foucault argues in his power / knowledge model, power determines knowledge and ideology – he who holds the power makes the decisions.²⁵⁷ Besides from the cultural and social change happening in the cities, modern China, from the Westerner's point of view, should also move towards abandoning its totalitarian government, and assimilating Western political values rather than adhering to its own principles. The dominant media images, called by Tomlinson the “spread of a certain western-modern lifestyle”,²⁵⁸ have already taken effect upon Chinese ideologies and thoughts, as we can see by the images and narration chosen for the documentary.

5.8 Country of diversity – story of Huaihan (HH)

5.8.1 Paradigmatic analysis

The Chinese Mongol community inhabit Inner Mongolia, one of five major autonomous regions, of which the others are Ningxia in the centre, Guangxi in the south, Xinjiang in the north, and Tibet in the south-west. In this documentary, Mongolians were selected to represent Chinese ethnic diversity, as they once played a key role in China's history. Ever since the Middle Ages, the Chinese Empire ruled by the Mongolian Kublai Khan was well-known to Europeans through Polo's adventure across Asia. According to Polo, the Middle Kingdom was extraordinarily rich in luxurious silk and material wealth, and Kublai Khan himself was a wise and intelligent emperor who embraced religious diversity. Later in the Age of Exploration, the Mongolian Khan's rule was replaced by Han Chinese emperors who founded the Ming dynasty. The Mongolians were then positioned as Tartars on horseback, who must be separated from the Han majority by reinforcing the Great Wall construction.

257 Foucault, Michel 1980: 190

258 Tomlinson, John 2002: 2

Due to the Mongol's invasion of Europe in the Middle Ages, Mongols were considered to be brutal and heartless barbarians in the West. The word "barbarian" is supported by Starck, "Probably, the north produced a stronger breed, one whose blood was mixed in both war and intermarriage with the fierce, indestructible nomadic "barbarian" even farther north – the Mongols, the Huns, the Kazaks, the Uyghur."²⁵⁹ Mongols are now seen from the Western perspective as nomads living in *yurts* (a kind of portable housing unit). Mongols proudly claim themselves to be "people on horseback" and horseback to be their home. The close connection between their life and their horses lead us to draw an analogy between Mongolians and American cowboys – both groups value their horses and live an arduous nomadic life. The pioneering spirit of the cowboys was very much respected in early American history, and hence the sequence of Mongolian could have created a sense of cultural resonance for the target audience.

If Mongols were cold-blooded and ruthless in Western eyes 800 years ago, the new Chinese cowboys are no longer feared by Westerners. The image of Genghis Khan appears as a wise emperor a play by Voltaire in the eighteenth century, and he has managed to remain in favour until today. In modern times, beautiful TV images of Mongolian culture and traditions have aroused curiosity among the Western world; the life of the Chinese cowboy might be as interesting as that of his American counterpart. From 1956, the story of the Mongol ruler Genghis Khan has been adapted for film six times. In 2007, *Mongol*, a movie directed by Russian director Sergei Bodrov, was even nominated for an Academy award for Best Foreign Language film. In these films, traditional Mongolian life is romanticized on the big screen. Like American cowboys, they enjoy a reputation as "heroes on grassland".

5.8.2 HH's first sequence

The Mongols' montage is included twice in the documentary sequence; once in the beginning right after Sun Feng's story (see sequence graphic 18'15) and again in a longer montage intersected with Huahan's interview (see sequence graphic 55'38)

259 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 108

following Vincent Luo's story. The first montage depicts the typical Mongolian landscape and the unique Mongol traditions of horse racing and wrestling competitions at the Namadu fest.

Sequence protocol

- (1) Expansive grassland against a dim, cloudy sky
- (2) Dressed in traditional gowns and holding flags, Mongols are riding horses.
- (3) During the Nudamu festival, two Mongols wearing leather vests wrestle competitively.
- (4) The riders demonstrate their skill on horseback.
- (5) The Mongols are preparing for a horse race on the third day of Nadamu festival.
- (6) Close-up shot of three child riders
- (7) Pan shot of blue sky and green grassland
- (8) Child riders running towards their horses
- (9) Children riding across grassland.
- (10) Tilt shot from three riders down to horses
- (11) Wide shot of children riding
- (12) Horses galloping towards the camera
- (13) Wide-angle shot of blue sky, green grassland and riders

Sequence interpretation

Grassland provides the setting for filming the Mongols. The camera draws us into a world of expansive space, and into the life of the horde, represented in particular by footage of the traditional Mongolian *Nadamu* festival. This sequence begins in a landscape setting, followed by a scene of Mongolians galloping over the grassland. The second shot captures Mongolians dressed in gowns like their medieval ancestors. The gowns and flags with Mongolian letters symbolize a unique Mongolian tradition and ethnic identity, by which they can distinguish themselves from the Han Chinese. They are galloping on the grassland, holding flags in their hands, as their ancestors once fought across the land. The horse as a signifier of unique Mongol identity appears in almost every shot, so that it seems that if there is

a Mongol on camera, there must be a horse next to him. From shot 7 to shot 13, horses and grasslands and horses with their riders alternate on screen. Thus we receive a clear message from the sequence: horses and grassland are home for the Mongols, and mean everything to them. The close attachment between horses and Mongols triggers the memory of the American cowboys.

After the establishing shot of grassland, the home of these Chinese cowboys, the footage moves on to the scene of the *Nadamu* Feast, which occurs during the annual Carnival on August 1st. In the Mongolian dialect, *Nadamu* means entertainment and games. The festival originated in the days of Genghis Khan, as a celebration of his victory over Hualamo in an important battle. During the celebration, Mongolians display their riding, archery, and wrestling skills. The most exciting part must be the tracking shot (shot 12) of children riding during the Namadu competition. The camera is positioned at a high angle, a low angle and eye-level. Most shots are well-balanced wide shots, emphasizing the vastness of the Mongolian land and capturing the azure sky and limitless green grassland. The exterior shots of the horse race were taken at dawn, when the sunshine was bright, gilding the riders. The sound track of this sequence is lovely and pleasant, while the child riders demonstrate their excellent riding skills, suggesting that they have well inherited their ethnic traditions. In general, by leveraging various cinematographic techniques, this sequence invites the audience to appreciate the appeal and uniqueness of the Mongolian tradition, which accounts for a significant component of diverse Chinese tradition as well.

5.8.3 HH's Second sequence

Sequence protocol:

- (1) Sunset view
- (2) Mongolians leading horses back
- (3) A backlit wide shot of the sunset scenery of the grassland, a rider and a horse shown in the foreground; a couple of people are walking in the background
- (4) Two locals building Mongolian yurts.

- (5) The yurt has been set up and two Mongolians are now cooking.
- (6) They are preparing a freshly slaughtered lamb for a feast, then adding the meat to a cooking pot
- (7) A wide shot of the yurt and the two people
- (8) A pan shot of locals sitting around a bonfire, playing string instruments
- (9) A close-up of the very distinctive Mongolian instrument
- (10) A medium shot of singers in traditional costumes
- (11) A close-up shot of lamb and wine
- (12) A close-up shot of Huahan
- (13) A medium shot of singers playing string instruments
- (14) A close-up shot of hands cutting the meat, and then people eating
- (15) A Mongolian pours the wine for another, then they toast each other
- (16) A close-up shot of the interviewee's face
- (17) A pan shot of the vast, green grassland
- (18) A close-up again
- (19) A backlit low-angle shot of a man walking with a horse

Sequence interpretation

From the aesthetic point of view, documentaries intend to document reality, and therefore use relatively few cinematic methods to ensure a realistic presentation. Yet in the beginning of this sequence, the scene is filmed during the sunset and the director introduces artistic photographic techniques to form a contrast between light and dark, to achieve a heightened, dramatized, larger-than-life effect. The montage starts with a series of landscape shots of the grassland scene in a dramatic chiaroscuro effect with a sunset backlight, which indicates that the following theme will be philosophical and serious. The horses, yurts and people were then filmed against natural light to achieve a silhouette effect. This *Contre-jour* (backlit shot) technique hides the details of the subjects, in order to emphasize outlines and shapes of the people or landscapes being filmed.

In all these shots, the audience's attention is attracted to typical Mongolian signifiers,

for instance, the vast sky, expansive grassland, horses and the nomadic yurt. All these Mongol things create an image of Mongols as a symbol rather than a collection of individuals. Other details, like the appearance of the people and their facial expressions, are hidden in backlit compositions. In shot 6 and shot 8, the viewers are given a clear view of food preparation for a bonfire celebration, in which the distinct Mongolian identity is highly emphasized by their traditional robes, language and group activities. Within the frame of this celebration, local Mongolians are wearing traditional costume and playing the *Morin Khuur*²⁶⁰. The songs are sung in a Mongolian dialect. What is more, to stress the Mongolian ethnic identity, the interview with Huahan is conducted in the Mongolian language rather than Mandarin.

This montage aims to present the audience with a real portrayal of the Mongols' lifestyle: the locals are still raising horses, living in yurts, eating half-cooked meat, and sitting outside around a bonfire to sing and play instruments, just as they have been doing since medieval times. In shot 19, the camera is positioned at a low angle to highlight the significance of a local person and his horse, which could be interpreted as a sign of respect for the Mongolian identity. These symbols also suggest underdevelopment and primitivism in this Mongol inhabitant. Most of the shots were filmed against natural light, a sharp light contrast to the dim lighting hue (Appendix 21). In this sequence, backlit shots and the sunset setting formulate a serious and uncertain tone for the future of Mongol's cultural and ethnic identities, for they will have to confront a cultural conflict between modernity and tradition. This highlights the real challenges facing the Mongolians to maintain their cultural identities and lifestyles, and the risk that this traditional "life on horseback", as HH calls it in the interview in the documentary, could one day be integrated into the general modernization of the country; that horses could eventually be replaced by automobiles and yurts by buildings.

As in the first montage of Mongolian life, this montage contains the essential signifiers of horses, grassland and yurts which convey a rich Mongolian tradition to

²⁶⁰ The Morin Khuur is a traditional Mongolian stringed instrument, which means literally „fiddle with a horse's head". This instrument is regarded as a symbol of the Mongolian nation.

audiences. On top of these signifiers in this sequence, another crucial one is added – the *morin khuur* instrument. All these filmed elements compose a distinct representation of the nomadic lifestyle. The grassland appears as a living home for Mongolians. Horses here signify the traditional lifestyle. Yurts are convenient to put up and take down quickly. The signifiers used here to convey an idea of a Mongolian culture are at the same time transient and vulnerable – the yurts are fleeting and impermanent, but have remained as part of Mongolian culture for centuries; the horses represent home, but are constantly mobile. All the Mongolians filmed in these two sequences are wearing their traditional costumes, emphasizing their different ethnic identity from the Han Chinese.

The second sequence concerning Mongolians appears fifty-five minutes into the documentary, following the story of Vincent Lau. The Mongolian-related montage coming at this point in the editing sequences forms a contrast between fast-growing modernization and its consequence - the disappearance of traditional culture, not only for the Han community but also for the Mongolian minority group. As argued above, horses and grassland are a home for Mongolians. However, modernization requires corresponding industrial development. The increasing industrial appetite needs to be satisfied by the occupation of grassland to build factories, and horse riders are becoming factory workers. As Starck laments, “Inner Mongolia is China’s land of the vanishing cowboy, and the people’s nomadic way of life is giving way grudgingly, yet quickly, to the development of industry and exploitation of rich natural resources.”²⁶¹

The two sequences of Mongols in this documentary fully reflect the complexity of Chinese national identity as a general concept. From the perspective of cultural identity, these romantic Chinese cowboys are easily accepted by Western audiences as a component of Chinese identity. To differentiate themselves from the Han Chinese, Mongolians maintain their specific cultural identities. The most distinctive traditional Mongolian activity is the horse-riding competition held on the third day of *Namuda* festival, which was filmed in the first Mongol sequence. The admiring

261 Starck, Kenneth 1991: 180

attitudes of the locals towards the race and the wrestling competition arguably demonstrate the unstable, passionate, open and combative Mongolian spirit, which distinguishes the Mongolians from the Han Chinese in every respect. This marked contrast can be seen in all aspects of cultural life. In contrast to the peace-loving, quiet Han personality, Mongolians were connected with invasions, wars and Nomadic traits. From the culinary perspective, Han Chinese prefer to cook food in a more sophisticated manner whereas Mongolians enjoy rare mutton. In terms of housing, the Han Chinese live in permanent housing while the traditional way of life for the Mongolians is to live in yurts on the grasslands. Mongolians play string instruments very well and love singing and dancing. The Han Chinese, however, pay more attention to calligraphy and painting and other folk art skills. Thus, a unified Chinese identity is nearly impossible to define; rather, we can see a multiple, diverse identity, marked more by its contrasts and contradiction than by its uniformity.

The diversity of the Chinese identity lies mainly in various ethnic identities, yet for these ethnic groups, how to preserve their own unique identities has become a complicated issue. As a matter of fact, even the majority Han Chinese are facing the challenge of contemporary cultural globalization, mainly referring to as Americanization, as covered in Vincent's footage. Thus the Han Chinese are struggling to keep their traditions. In the second sequence, from Huahan's interview, we can tell that it is even harder for the Mongols to maintain their traditions and still develop their industrial productivity. As in America's own "Wild West", rapid economic change taking place in China will no doubt also affect Mongolia.

When the general Chinese identity was confronted by the expansion of Western "cultural imperialism", the Mongolians, one of the Chinese minority ethnic groups, were concerned about losing their own ethnic identity. There was conflict between domestic national identities and foreign identities. Even though both conflicts were involved in the documentary, the signification was different. The Westernization of China is represented in the documentary with a balance of positive and negative images, which signify that this change may also be great and beneficial. But if the Mongolian identity is at risk of being modernized by factories and buildings, then it is

a huge concern for Mongols, as is represented by the cinematic composition of the second Mongol sequence.

If the montage of Mongolians is compared with the previous sequence of Vincent, it can be seen that the latter was filmed to represent the image of a modern China; moreover, this modernity was based upon Western cultural values and opinions. For instance, in this sequence there were hardly any traditional Chinese signifiers or Chinese elements featured in the images. On the contrary, this Chinese identity or lifestyle in Western eyes should reflect an image of an advanced, developed society, in accordance with the Western cultural identities. The “otherness” of an oriental country is being gradually assimilated and replaced by Western cultures. In the subsequent montage of HH, this assimilation or integration is shown as negative and to be rejected, because the traditional nomadic way of life should be preserved, even if this way of living could be at a certain level seen as primitive, harsh and backward. The images of the whole montage present the daily life of Mongolians in a comprehensive manner, including their houses (yurts), their food (freshly slaughtered meat), and their way of celebration (bonfires). It must be widely acknowledged that all of these images were the real representations of a Mongolian lifestyle, which characterizes them and differentiates them from other ethnic identities.

5.9 Country of transition – story of Eliza

5.9.1 Paradigmatic analysis

Eliza, representing China’s new urban middle-class in the documentary, is educated and ambitious and started her career in a computer firm in Shanghai. Her story in the film delivers a message to audiences that even white collar employees in offices suffer from a lot of pressure due to fierce competition in the job market. This pressure, Eliza claims, is the reason for her visit to a traditional Chinese beauty clinic. A beautiful appearance is, in Eliza’s view, of utmost importance for women who want to achieve career success in China. Thus she made a decision to have cosmetic surgery, to give her double eye-lids and a higher, straighter nose, closer to

the Western standard of beauty.

Cosmetic surgery first gained popularity in the United States. According to the official annual report of American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, in 2005, the number of surgical and non-surgical procedures in the United States increased by 44 percent in 2004 to a total of nearly 11.9 million, and the number of surgical procedure increased 17 percent. Why so many American women go for cosmetic surgery lies partly in their desire to improve their careers.²⁶² A 61-year-old woman, Ms. Ginny Clark, had a face lift done by Dr. Alan Matarasso in Manhattan, hoping to look 20 years younger to maintain her position on Wall Street. In the words of the New York Times' report, "Ms. Clark is among a growing number of people seeking out cosmetic surgery to get ahead in the workplace. From 2000 to 2004, the number of facial plastic surgery procedures and injections increased 34 percent."²⁶³ Hence, the pursuit of beauty is definitely important for women, no matter what nationality they are. However, the difference is that the American women choose to have beauty surgery because to look good whereas Chinese women are to some degree forced to do so because of external pressure from the job market.

5.9.2 Eliza's sequence

Sequence interpretation

The beginning of Eliza's sequence is composed of a succession of fast-moving shots of a dazzling city view of Shanghai at night. The shiny lights and commercial billboards with glittering advertisements for handbags and mascara are scattered along the street, calling to mind the material world of vanity and temptation. The quick cut off close up of these posters is too much for the viewer's eyes to take in, denoting the superficial, flashy nature of this world of wealth. The shots switch at high speed to create the impression of a world which is fashionable and attractive,

262 The numbers are quoted from the news release archive of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in 2005, <http://www.surgery.org/media/statistics>

263 Brown, Eryn "Sometimes, Nips and Tucks Can Be Career Moves," February 12th, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/12/business/yourmoney/12plastic.html?scp=107&sq=&st=nyt>

but also full of pressure, and thus the director implies that this is the impact that Western consumer goods have had on China. Nowadays, China, at least in cities like Shanghai, has been heavily impacted by Western consumerism.

Due to globalization, China is unavoidably set to be a more commercialized country than before. What is more, the Chinese mentality has been deeply affected by Western consumerism along the way. The concept of the beauty economy not only refers to cosmetic surgery or products to be consumed in the market, but is also involved with a dramatic change in ideas of what constitutes beauty. Being affected by Western criteria has meant that Western looks are highly pursued by Chinese women, thanks to the images of young and beautiful American and European top models and film stars which now appear in advertisements for cosmetics, clothes and so forth. Therefore, if a Chinese woman possesses Western looks, she must now be considered to be a real beauty.

Eliza was interviewed and acted as the key figure in this sequence. As a representative of urban career women, Eliza was simply one of the women who is going after a pretty appearance so that she can compete for a brilliant career. She first states in the sequence that she would like to become more beautiful as she believes that girls are often evaluated in terms of their appearance rather than competence in the working environment. Her idea of beauty seems to be a Western Barbie. Therefore, in order to boost her confidence and have an outstanding career, Eliza has decided to have cosmetic surgery for double eyelids as well as face and nose reshaping surgery.

It is widely accepted that women are vulnerable when it comes to career competition with men, and beauty can indeed be a great advantage for women. Women in the States, Europe, and Asia, in particular South Korea, spend a lot of money on beauty surgery. Eliza is certainly not the only woman in the world who has had the idea of undergoing cosmetic surgery, but the question should be whether her decision is absolutely her own, or being driven by others such as her society or her parents' wishes.

In this sequence, tradition is brought in by filming Eliza visiting a clinic of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). As argued in chapter two, ever since the seventeenth century, TCM has been considered as exotic, enigmatic and even to some extent 'unreal' in comparison with Western medical science. As I point out in the chapter on historical images, a large number of Western doctors firmly believe that the Chinese medical system is inferior and primitive, and the Chinese medicine theory that pain can be relieved and diseases can be treated with needles stuck into unlikely parts of the body is still controversial in the Western medical community. The principle of the opposing forces of *yang* and *yin*, and the concept of life as a form of energy in constant motion, are regarded as highly superstitious and proto-scientific. But with deeper study of Chinese medicine in some Western countries including the UK and the USA, acupuncture has been widely accepted and Chinese herbs are increasingly used as natural remedies.

In the film, Eliza visits one of the oldest traditional Chinese pharmacies in Shanghai before she undergoes cosmetic surgery. The scene is set inside the pharmacy. The doctor and Eliza are sitting opposite each other, with Eliza facing the camera and the doctor with his back to it. This shows that the doctor is not the central focus of the shot. When he talks in the footage, there is no English dubbing as with the other interviewees, only English subtitles appearing at the bottom of the screen, which strengthens the mystery of what he is saying about traditional Chinese medicine. Without English dubbing, the audience has to listen to the original Chinese pronunciation, which sounds alien to Western ears. If the audience ever had the time and interest to read the subtitles attentively, they would discover that the doctor is describing the principles of Chinese medicine – assessing people's spirit inside their human body, or diagnosing their condition by feeling their pulse and observing their facial appearance – which might seem enigmatic or even unbelievable to Westerners. After the doctor's monologue, the camera rests on a close-up of Chinese herbs, which were prescribed by the doctor to Eliza. As he collects the herbs, he introduces the names and functions of some typical Chinese herbs. This time, the subtitles have been replaced by a dubbing voice, perhaps because natural herbs are more acceptable and convincing than specious theories.

One important supporting figure in this sequence is Eliza's mother. The interview with her mother serves to convince us that Eliza's decision to have cosmetic surgery comes not from her own free will but from the influence of her mother and society as a whole. Eliza's mother recounts that she convinced her daughter that she would benefit from this surgery. In contemporary Chinese society, women do not only play the traditional role of the good wife who cares for the whole family, but also have ambitions to achieve successful careers too. They crave success, and have to overcome fierce competition against men. As only children, they also have to bear the weight of their parents' high expectations. Most Chinese parents wish their children to be "somebody" and move upward in society. "To be successful", Eliza has to ensure her competitive advantage over other candidates – and has decided that this will be the direct result of her cosmetic surgery.

China Revealed ends with an integrated montage of each interviewee. One ECU shot of Eliza from this ending sequence shows us that she has changed her appearance. In this shot, Eliza has had her hair-style changed and is wearing make-up to highlight her beauty after the surgery. In this case, she apparently looks more confident and secure about her future by striding down a city street. At the same time, the camera is positioned from a low angle to make her image look taller. In the interview, she confirms that her new looks have been of great assistance to her career as well as in her private life. However, she looks uncertainly into the middle-distance after the conversation ends, which reveals her uncertainty and vulnerability inside and therefore suggests that she is not as confident about her future as she claims, despite her new appearance. All in all, from Eliza's story, it can be concluded that Chinese career women suffer from a great deal of social pressure, owing to the national transition to a more consumerist society. Even if they are able to change their looks, it does not necessarily mean that they can fulfil their dreams.

5.10 Country of transition – story of Zhou Lin (ZL) & Sun Feng's wife

5.9.1 Paradigmatic analysis

Eliza represents a group of women who are desperate for career development, but what comes after career success? There are of course new problems that need to be dealt with - particularly the work-life balance. Zhou Lin represents the successful Chinese career woman. She works as a policewoman in a police station in the far west of China. She is the first woman to work in the front-line drug squad in Gansu province. As a successful career woman, she takes on as many responsibilities as her male colleagues. Unfortunately, her lack of a romantic relationship worries her mother so much that she even bursts into tears in front of the camera. Working as a policewoman can be dangerous, and does not fit with the traditional role of women. Women are supposed to work in an office, as a teacher, doctor or civil servant. What is more, policing is not a high status job in China in the way it is in the West. ZL's job, which she loves, is an major impediment to finding a husband.

As we saw in Chapter Two, owing to the influence of Confucianism in Chinese society, great importance has always been given to the family, as was perceived by Western writers in the eighteenth century. One of the cornerstones of Confucian philosophy is the harmonious relationship between emperors and people, and inside each family unit. Children should obey their parents and be loyal to them. Relationships between family members should be very close. A daughter or son lives with her or his parents until they get married. Their child's marriage is normally the first priority for parents, and this is especially true for daughters. Chinese philosophy also expects the man to be the smartest and most successful in the relationship, and the woman to be a housewife, who cares for the children and looks after the family. These traditional values have made it through the recent cultural transitions, and remain strong to this day. ZL is a successful and professional career woman, but her devotion to her career cannot be accepted by men; her job at the police station is not a typical women's profession and thus not helpful for supporting a family. Both ZL and her mother are under huge pressure from historical tradition.

5.9.2 ZL's sequence

Sequence protocol

After the montage of ZL's work with the frontline squad, footage of ZL's private life is edited into the time line.

- (1) Tilt shot from the dim sky to the city street in Lan Zhou
- (2) Full shot, medium shot and American shot of ZL buying vegetables in the open market
- (3) CS of her wringing out clothes
- (4) MS of ZL at a low angle
- (5) CS of her hands
- (6) ECU of her face (interview)
- (7) Full shot of ZL squatting next to a basin and washing clothes by hand
- (8) CS of switching on the hob, then CS of the wok
- (9) MS of ZL's mother stirring egg with a chopstick
- (10) CS of the egg
- (11) MS of ZL frying egg in a wok in the kitchen
- (12) ECU of ZL's mother
- (13) MS of the whole family sitting around a table and having a meal
- (14) CS of food on table, celery and aubergine
- (15) Two side shots of ZL and her father
- (16) CS of celery on table
- (17) CS of ZL eating celery with chopstick
- (18) CS of ZL's mother crying

Sequence interpretation

Through this montage, audiences gain a deeper insight into ZL's private life. She still plays the traditional woman's role, caring for her parents by washing their clothes and cooking meals for them. ZL's mother says she is very proud of her daughter because of her outstanding performance at work, but in her ECU, she looks worried and does not smile at all. Despite her words, the audiences cannot see any happy expression in her face but only sadness. The reason for this strange phenomenon is explained by ZL's mother in the documentary, "I do not think a job like this is suitable for a girl; simple people like us should set up a family of their own. But she is on her

own and still single. I am very worried about my daughter.” When she is speaking, the camera shows ZL’s and her father’s serious faces, which suggests that ZL’s unmarried state must be a heavy burden for the whole family. ZL’s mother is actually crying by the end of the conversation. Through an ECS, we clearly see her using a handkerchief to dry her tears, shed because she is so concerned about her daughter’s future life as a single woman. We perceive that if a woman cannot get married by a certain age, it will be seen as a burden on her whole family.

5.9.3 Paradigmatic analysis of Sun Feng (SF)’s wife

More than the two city-dwelling female interviewees, SF’s wife is particularly focused on in the documentary. Along with Mrs. Liao, she reminds us of the image of submissive Ou’lan, Buck’s heroine in the *Good Earth*. The historical images of women living in China’s countryside share certain characteristics – they are hard-working, stressed, and obedient to their husbands. These traits fit into the image of Chinese rural women as portrayed in the beginning of the twentieth century, the role model of the traditional country housewife, and in *China Revealed* we see yet another example. SF’s wife is an ordinary country woman, raising her daughter and looking after the whole family on her own at home while her husband earns money in the city. To prepare for the Chinese New Year celebration at home, she has to cook a twenty-two course meal all by herself. The model of the Chinese country women in Buck’s is being drawn on once again here – SF’s wife has similar responsibilities, attending the family, playing the traditional role of the submissive housewife and obeying her husband.

5.9.4 Sequence of SF’s wife

Sequence protocol:

- (1) She is cooking in a shabby old kitchen in dim light, medium shot
- (2) Close-up shot of her hands cutting garlic, then tilt to her face
- (3) Close-up shot of the dish for the dinner
- (4) She is pouring soy sauce into vegetables in a pan

- (5) A medium shot of Sun Feng and his wife, his wife cooking in the background, he is standing in the foreground of the frame, and both of them have their backs to the camera
- (6) Sun Feng turns around, smokes a cigarette and has a look around the kitchen, and then walks away.
- (7) Extreme close-up of her face, then a back shot of her cooking in the foreground, Sun Feng's back from the window in the background
- (8) She is cutting a thousand-year-old egg with a thread
- (9) Close up of green sweet pepper in the pan
- (10) Interview of Sun Feng's wife, medium long shot

Sequence interpretation:

In shot 5 (Appendix 22), SF's wife is positioned in the background, while her husband stands in the foreground of the shot and watches her cooking. SF is standing closer to the camera than his wife; hence he looks bigger than his wife in this shot, which signifies that his position in the family is more important than that of his wife. This image is congruent with the image of Ou'lan in the Buck's novel working on the farm, cooking for her husband and father-in-law and raising two sons. She has to do all the housework on her own. In this montage, the film language tells us that husbands are still dominant in family life, at least in rural areas, which is reflected through the contrast between the large image of SF's back in the foreground against the smaller image of his wife in the background.

5.11 Chinese New Year celebration

5.11.1 Paradigmatic analysis

The last part of *China Revealed* focuses on the biggest Chinese annual festival, Chinese New Year, the importance of which has been acknowledged by Westerners ever since Polo and Ricci's times. Ricci described this celebration in ancient times - every household was decorated with red lanterns and families entertained

themselves by watching a dragon dance and a firework show. As the most celebrated Chinese festival, the New Year tradition has been kept up even abroad, as seen in the chapter on historical images. The New Year festival is therefore indispensable in any documentary on China which aims to thoroughly penetrate Chinese culture and traditions.

5.11.2 Last sequence

Sequence interpretation

The sequence starts with a montage of fast motion shots of Chinese people heading towards train stations on New Year's Eve; countless people are going back home for a family reunion during the New Year. After that, the camera comes to rest on the dragon dance performed by dozens of Chinese people, ending with an ECU shot of the head of a red dragon used for the performance (Appendix 23), which was a major exciting part of the celebration. In this short transitional montage, the red dragon is established as a symbol of the incoming Chinese New Year, which the audience may well have been accustomed to seeing in the overseas China Towns during the Chinese New Year festival.

The symbol of the dragon has been endowed with a significant meaning in the context of Chinese cultural history, to the extent that contemporary Chinese claim that they are descendants of the dragon. In ancient times, the dragon pattern could only be used in the imperial palaces, where it appeared on silk products, paintings, and royal utensils made of gold, silver and bronze, and was engraved on jade and porcelain. Ever since the medieval era, Europeans knew from Polo's account that the dragon was engraved on the pillars and roof of the royal palace. During the Yuan dynasty, the golden dragon pattern featured on the garments of the emperors, and was regarded as a symbol of imperial dignity. During the eighteenth century, Chinese porcelain with dragon pictures was exported to Europe, France in particular. From the perspective of Chinese folklore, the dragon signifies success, glory,

imperial power and national pride. China itself has therefore been compared with a dragon in the Far East. In the Chinese community both at home and abroad, it has been widely accepted that the dragon refers to China.

Gradually, the dragon has been constructed as a major signifier for China in Western media representations. The images of the dragon hence serve as an indispensable part of any documentary on China. *China Revealed* is no exception. Indeed, here, dragon-connected shots were filmed from different camera angles and distances by the film maker. In an aerial shot of the Great Wall, its shape resembles a dragon climbing up the mountains. The two Chinese calligraphy characters in a circle shot in the previous calligraphy sequence literally read “flying dragon”. And if these two significations might not be easily perceived by audiences with no knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, the third must be familiar to most Westerners. At the latter part of the whole documentary, a dragon dance performance to celebrate the Chinese New Year in a village of the southern China is filmed in rolling full shots and close-ups. All these images in synthesis create a unified concept that the dragon signifies China and is one of the core symbols of Chinese cultural identity.

Another image code worth mentioning here is the use of red, appearing on the lanterns and firecrackers. In Chinese folklore, red is thought to bring good luck, prosperity and happiness to everyday life, as it is supposed to be able to scare away bad devils. That is why on special occasions like the Chinese New Year feast, red is applied to almost all decorations, such as the banners, lanterns, the fireworks and firecrackers (which do not enjoy the same pleasant connotations as the fireworks in the West, for they are considered to be horribly loud), and clothes. By contrast to the Chinese interpretation of red, the colour of red has a considerably different connotation in the West, where it symbolizes aggression: “Blood is red, for example, so red is seen to be an aggressive colour and is used...as a warning”.²⁶⁴ When taken in conjunction with thoughts of China, the colour red could also be easily associated with communist China in the West, and therefore connote blood and violence. Thus, rather than good luck or hope, as it represents in the Chinese, the image of

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everything red in this sequence might rather, to the Western audience, suggest Communism, blood and aggression..

In Western mythology, the dragon is seen as a cruel monster with thick scales, sharp claws and strong wings. The dragon even refers to Satan in the New Testament of the Bible. It is both scary and evil. "Red" and "dragon" were combined to form the term "red dragon" as a code for communist China, as we saw in the earlier discussion of Western images of China after 1949. In this sequence, we see the repetition of one dimension of the China-model: threat. The preconception of "red" and "dragon" ensures a subconscious association between China and an aggressive warlike monster. The image of China as the red dragon has been maintained in America for at least fifty years. The shot of red dragon thus might well evoke a perception of China as a threat to American national security among the audience.

Paradigmatic analysis of the final shot

China is a vast country with a vast population, and has been so seen in the West since ancient times. However, over time, the large population has started be a symbol of threat and intimidation, especially after new China was established. Ever since the Korean War, the image of a "Human Sea" has been persistently strengthened and deeply impressed in the West - for instance, Harold defined the Chinese with three adjective phrases: "faceless masses", "cruel and nerveless subhuman", "incomprehensible and inscrutable".²⁶⁵

Not only is there a large population in China, but also Westerners typically struggle to distinguish their individual faces, hence the cliché that "All Chinese look the same". Thus, the combination of the vast population and this difficulty of distinguishing between individuals means that the Western conception of Chinese people is as a mass, rather than as unique individuals.

Shot interpretation

²⁶⁵ Harold, Isaac R. 1972: 234

The opening montage of the documentary is composed of shots of the “human sea” on the street in Peking. The shots are processed with a fast motion effect, so that the images of this populous country can be more vividly reflected. Meanwhile, the audience is not able to thoroughly observe their faces. They exist more as a collective community without individual differences.

The final shot of people in Hong Kong at the end of the documentary is more like a mosaic of individual human beings. We can even count their heads and tell the difference between their faces (Appendix 24). They are all standing in rows to watch a fire-work display in a perfect self-disciplined manner. They do not push each other or squeeze inside the group. While the image is once again of a group of people, the last montage reflects the Western view of the differences between Hong Kong and mainland China. The human mass in mainland China in the shots is faceless, whereas in Hong Kong each person can be identified as an individual human being. After all, Hong Kong used to be a British colony and was therefore more heavily influenced by Western political concepts and cultural values.

Through our semiotic analysis of the critical sequences of the documentary, it becomes clear that the China-image model set up in Chapter Two was implemented in the filming of *China Revealed*. All these sequences of individual figures can be linked to the components of this model, namely antiquity, tradition, diversity, transition and threat. Several codes signified antiquity and tradition: the signification of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and Kung Fu performance in the film were in accordance with historical western images of China. However, other codes have transformed their significations to an opposite or broader scope along with social and economic development. The image of agricultural land, for instance, signified wealth and prosperity in the old times, but has evolved to signify a poor and arduous life. China has been known as a populous land since the reports of the Jesuit missionaries; however, in contemporary times this large population connotes threat, alongside images of “Yellow peril” and “red dragon”.

In general, Western images of the Middle Kingdom stem from the ancient Greek and Roman times. Over time, these images have been deeply and widely embedded in the Western cultural consciousness. However, the transformation of certain images of China also reflects the social transitions and development in the West. A thousand-year observation of China in the West has shaped a complex yet dynamic image pool, from which images can be correspondingly picked out by the present-day Western media. The selection and arrangement of these images to create a story line will be based on the attitudes and preferences of the target audience. The next chapter will examine how the image codes to present China have been leveraged in other Western documentaries.

CHAPTER 6

OTHER FILMS

6.1 Other Western documentaries about China

As summarized in Chapter Two, over the past thousand years, a great variety of images about China have been formulated by a succession of travellers, missionaries, and journalists. Moreover, these historical images have been used to create a dynamic image mix in the present day, which covers various dimensions. For example, China's antiquity is represented by ancient products and architecture, whilst its unique traditions are reflected in its long-existing moral ethics and social customs. China has always been a relatively conservative country, strong on preserving traditions. The country is broad, populous and diverse, and is home to fifty-six ethnic groups. This complex giant was the world's strongest country for more than a thousand years. However, it went into a decline and suffered a hundred years of humiliation by being invaded by Western imperial powers. After the Communist Party took over the government in 1949, China became stereotyped as a threat or a "red dragon" during the Cold War Era in the Western World. This threatening image has never really weakened, even today. Contemporary China is striving to improve its national strength from scratch and aiming to become an economic power. Indeed,

it has already realized a national dream of revival and astonishing economic take-off, which has nonetheless led to a widening gap between rich and poor.

In the case study of *China Revealed*, we can find these stereotyped images in the sequences once again. The stories of ten representative individuals from different social classes are presented in the film, and the consecutive sequences serve as visual documentation of how China has achieved economic development in contemporary times and what consequences this ongoing transition has had. Although the film focuses on the present day, we can still identify the historical Western images of China. Given that one documentary is perhaps not enough to prove that this dynamic image mix derived from historical images is frequently adopted and represented in present-day films, I will now briefly examine another three documentary series in this chapter.

6.2 China's River- China's Future (ZDF, 2002)

China's River - China's Future (Chinas Stroeme – Chinas Zukunft) was filmed by German ZDF correspondents Dietmar Schulz, Thomas Euting and Joachim Holtz. It was first broadcast by ZDF on 1st of August, 2002. The documentary series comprises three episodes: "The Yangtze", "The Pearl River" and "The Yellow River". The storyline follows the travel route of the production team. They stop at the large or medium size cities along the Yangtze River to interview locals and present their stories of life in contemporary China. Interwoven with their stories, the history and culture in relation to these cities is also presented.

6.1.1 Episode One – The Li & Pearl River

In the first series of *China's River (Li River)*, we can identify a lot of signifiers in the documentary, just as in *China Revealed*. For example, in the beginning of the first series, we can see very similar images of rice paddies in China's Guangxi Province. Like Mrs. Liao, we see female peasants standing in the muddy field with bare feet, planting rice. Again, there are no machines in this sequence, which signifies the stagnation of China's agricultural life. When the production team visit a migrant

worker's hometown in the countryside, we see a narrow road, presented in this montage as filthy, muddy, and difficult to walk down. Unlike the rural areas in the West, which are seen as a quiet and beautiful world for relaxation, Chinese rural areas are positioned as backward and undeveloped in Western media representations, but also as in a way representing Chinese antiquity. The contrast between antiquity and modernity becomes even clearer and sharper when an agricultural image of this kind is followed by a shot of modern life in the cities along China's coastline.

Although agricultural life in China is presented as harsh and tough, it is always portrayed as possessing the beauty of authentic primitivity for Westerners. Local people living on the land maintain their traditional agricultural life. The director intends to present a rural land in an artistic way, just as in *China Revealed*. Here the director relates the images of the rural land to traditional Chinese landscape painting, and includes typical Chinese folk music in the corresponding soundtrack, so that both agricultural land and the traditional art of Chinese painting can be taken to represent China's antiquity.

The film moves on to an observation of Chinese social life. The next significant element we are shown is the montage of a Cantonese restaurant. As we have learned from the analysis of historical images and the film images in the previous case study, here we see again a cliched image of Chinese food that could make a Westerner vomit – in this case, chicken feet, which remind us of the images of fish heads, peeled snakes and worms shown in *China Revealed*. All these codes in the film deliver a message that Chinese people eat everything. For Westerners, these images might seem more like television entertainment than documentary, and they establish a belief that the Chinese are entirely alien from Western culture. As always, we see images of Chinese people sitting in a restaurant and enjoying their meal. Again, we learn that Chinese socializing is likely to be in a restaurant – enjoying the food and drinking rice wine or beer with friends and business partners.

After this picture of Chinese eating customs, the documentary moves on to portray

Chinese Buddhism. The monks wear traditional costumes, just like Master Liu's red and yellow robe in *China Revealed*. In this series, we are also shown a traditional prayer ceremony in a temple in Guangdong province. The red flying roof and gold budda in the temple again fit into the Western idea of an ancient Chinese architectural complex.

China's traditions date back thousands of years, but in the contemporary era, tradition has encountered modernity, a trend coming from the Western world. The contrast of tradition and modernity is one of the main focuses of Western representations of China – the image of Chinese life in the context of globalization. Thus, once again we see here a shot of a city at night, a materialist world full of advertisements promoting cosmetics from Christian Dior and many other Western lables. A modern dancer has been selected as a representative to be interviewed at this point in the documentary. The documentary shows that she welcomes Western culture, by filming her receiving modern dance training and going to a disco at night, in just the same way in which young Westerners entertain themselves. From her case, it can be seen that the Chinese have been affected by Western culture and lifestyle. Tradition and modernity are to a certain extent mixing and co-existing in Chinese society.

This documentary series touches on the same topics as *China Revealed*: an ancient civilization, with unique and distinct traditions, is undergoing transformation and transition. Along with the economic rise, a widening gap has sprung up between rich and poor, coastal cities and inland areas. From the media images in this documentary, a signified myth can be interpreted - the uneven development in China will be the root for a series of social problems, and this ancient country still has a long way to go.

6.1.2 Episode Two – The Yangtze River

With China's economic development, a small number of people are becoming very wealthy and moving upward to the affluent upper class. This widening gap between rich and poor has encouraged a wave of migration from countryside to cities. The

narrator of *China Revealed* tells us that the peasants' annual income is roughly RMB 5000 (about Euro 700). With this amount of money, they cannot live a decent life. In order to improve their standard of living, they have to leave their homes in the rural areas and swarm into the cities to seek better paid jobs. In Episode Two, we come across a story of another window cleaner, Mr. Chen, who is also working in Shanghai to wipe the windows of magnificent skyscrapers, just like *China Revealed's* Sun Feng. Both Sun Feng and Chen are representatives of millions of China's migrant workers and their stories are epitomes of China's ongoing internal migration.

Just as there is a window cleaner like Sun Feng in this documentary as a representative of poor migrant workers, there is also a successful business figure to provide contrast. Ms. Wen Bao, an investment banker working in an office of the Jinmao Building, is as successful in her career as the property tycoon Luo in *China Revealed*. They have a different understanding of the Chinese dream. For Chen, his dream is to work in a prosperous city and earn more money to pursue a decent life, whereas Bao's ambition is to keep moving upward in society. She is aggressive, ambitious, educated in an elite American university, and speaks fluent English. In her sequence, she swims and goes roller skating on the Shanghai. In the evening, she goes to a local bar to have some fun. From her montage, the audience learns that she shares a lot common with Westerners. The images of roller skating, foreign language proficiency and going to a bar and drinking wine indicate her Westernized way of life, and thus the sense of an increasing Western cultural influence over China is further strengthened by her story. Bao symbolizes the Chinese version of the success story. The juxtaposition of Bao's working scene inside the skyscraper and the image of Chen cleaning the windows of the same skyscraper forms a sharp contrast of rich and poor, urban success and rural migration. The country is in a state of transition.

In Bao's sequence, we can also identify a couple of images which represent Chinese antiquity and tradition. We notice that there is a gold dragon as her corporate image in the office. She is probably quite Westernized, but still keeps some of her Chinese

identity - for we know from our analysis of historical images how significant the image of the dragon is to the Chinese. The signification of the dragon as a symbol of wealth in Chinese culture is delivered to the audience by the narration. After we see her closing a deal with a client, Bao and the client talk about Confucius and admit his strong and persuasive influence on Chinese culture and society even nowadays.

6.1.3 Series Three – The Yellow River

The Yellow River originates in the Qinghai Plateau and flows across China's inland region, where the economy is not well developed and the natural environment has been severely depleted. This series begins with images of Tibetans, a controversial topic which is currently one of the most popular political topics in Germany – and as such would never be omitted from a European documentary about China. The Tibetans live in the Plateau area where the climate and environment are harsh. In the beginning of this series, the camera shows us the whirling sand in the sky through poor visibility. The river bed is cracked and dry. The peasants are farming with primitive agricultural tools, with no sign of modern machinery. This image of a field is highly different from the rice paddies always present in Western documentaries on China. Here, the field is completely covered in sand, there is no water, not one green plant. The combined message of these images is that the Tibetans' life is vastly different from that of the Han Chinese, and that they live in a very harsh environment.

Yet, as one of China's rivers with a long history, any documentary on the Yellow River will witness the inheritance of tradition. The Shaolin Temple is located in Henan province, which the Yellow River passes through. As we saw in film case study, Chinese Kung Fu has an incredible appeal for Westerners. As a representation of the Chinese religious tradition, Shaolin's martial arts performances are frequently presented in documentary films. Martial art practice for physical fitness has a long history in China, and over time Kung Fu has become a combination of martial art, religion and traditional Chinese medical principles. Since the 1970s, the Chinese Kung Fu has been well-received in the Western world, owing to the popularity of Hong Kong Kung Fu films and film stars. The charisma of this mysterious martial art

has fascinated Western audiences in films, and has led to a great enthusiasm for integrating Chinese Kung Fu elements in Hollywood action films. The art of Kung Fu is perceived as a symbol of the exotic by Westerners, which explains its frequent implementation in Western media. Among all martial art practitioners, the monks from the Shaolin Temple are the favorite filming target for documentary production on China. Here in this series, again we see the familiar images of the monks' martial arts performance, just as in *China Revealed*.

In the final sequence of this series, the director films a noodle factory. The camera captures the portraits of Mao, Stalin, and Lenin displayed outside the factory. Then the camera brings the audience's attention via a montage to the female employees of this noodle factory in their uniform, standing in lines and singing a Maoist song, which draws on Western cultural memories of the Chinese as seen in the seventies – always in uniform and without any individuality.

At the end of the series, Mr. Wang, a village party secretary, is interviewed. In the background of his office, we see a Chinese painting hanging to the wall, which symbolizes his literati identity. In this montage, the camera dwells on the various statues of Mao standing on Wang's desk. He wipes them carefully and gives the interviewer Mao's "little red book" as a present. The whole montage portrays an image of a devoted local party official working in China's rural area who firmly admires Mao. His image fits into the Western image of the "brain-washed" Chinese, who have extreme reverence and admiration towards China's late Chairman Mao.

6.3 China Rises (CBC, 2006)

Co-produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the New York Times and other media partners, *China Rises* was aired on 22nd and 29th January, 2006 on the CBC channel. This documentary series included four episodes, *Party Games*, *Getting Rich*, *Food is Heaven* and *City of Dreams*. Exploring the current significant aspects of Chinese politics, economy, environmental protection and social transition, this series examined the lives of a wide variety of people living in a fast-growing economy. There are rich entrepreneurs who live in grandiose luxurious mansions

refurbished in Western style, but also peasants in a state of poverty who can barely feed themselves. The topic is addressed much more broadly and deeply than in *China Revealed*. The representative figures cover different classes and professions.

6.2.1 Episode One: Party Games

“Party Games” mainly refers to the Olympic Games of 2008, which is portrayed here as China’s “show time” in Western media. There are different stories in this episode: we see a child athlete (like JY) on the national gymnastics team preparing for the Olympic Games; a law student at Peking University trying to become a Communist Party member, who explains about her view of the Olympic Games; a modern artist who is creating an art work for the celebration of the Olympic Games; a patriot organizing anti-Japanese demonstrations; and the democratic election of a local party secretary held in a village.

The episode begins with a portrayal of the life of the construction workers working on the Olympic Stadium. This montage captures their daily life in the early morning, and subsequently shows them at work. The juxtaposition of a tilt shot of a bunch of steel bars hanging in the sky and a full shot of a cement mixer machine manufactured by three workers in the working montage give us the sense of the fast-increasing rate of the consumption of industrial resources. In the meantime, the narration “Now [China] is using one third of the world’s steel, almost half of the cement” informs us about China’s resource consumption, and highlights the myth that China is competing with the West by absorbing the limited non-renewable resources.

In this scene of construction, we see the Chinese people preparing to welcome a meaningful and important Games. The inclusion of the story of a young athlete training for China’s significant moment gives the sequence greater audience appeal. Xiao Sha (XS), another child gymnast like JY, similarly emerges as a key figure in *China Rises*. XS goes for her dancing training routine and practices her turning movements on the beam. Her leaps are impressive and steady. She does not even fall from the beam once, unlike JY. Although we see less of the inhumane practices undergone by JY in XS’s sequence, this does not mean that she does not suffer less

than JY psychologically. She has not seen her parents in Gui Yang for three years, for her training takes place in Beijing. An interesting montage is presented in this sequence - when XS goes back to her dorm alone, she sits on a small stool next to her bed and reads a book. Her back faces the camera and is positioned in a long shot. She looks small, insignificant, and lonely, which we understand is the price she has to pay for the Olympic Games. The implication here is once again that the training regime for China's child athletes is inhumane; as in JY's sequence, we feel the pathos of little children being separated from their families.

The stories of JY and XS as child athletes leave us with the impression that they have taken on a lot of pressure because they cannot make their own decisions. There is only one option for them – to continue with their hard training and compete for the Olympic Games. We can identify here a cultural concept typical of a collective society: sacrificing the interests of the individual for those of the collective. Just like JY, who once wants to quit the training but is coerced and beaten by her father, in XS's interview, she mentions that once, after the Chinese New Year, she did not want to continue her training because it was too hard for her. In the end, she was persuaded by her parents to keep training further. Her interview intensifies the Western perception that child athletes are supposed to be protected by their parents and their free will ought to be respected. Instead, the media message of XS's sequence suggests that these athletes are manipulated by abstruse national prestige and their parents' expectations, and their pleasant childhoods expropriated by intense gymnastic training.

Another image to be mentioned here is the montage about the Cultural Revolution, which is explained by Ai Weiwei, a modern artist. The Cultural Revolution was a special political campaign in China's contemporary history, and was at first highly praised by the American media as a great move toward democracy - Mao's good intentions were perceived. Nowadays, the Revolution is portrayed as the extreme opposite, an era of desperation, which showed no respect for individual human beings and was a disaster for China's culture and economic development. In *China Rises*, we learn of the Revolution from the touching personal story of Ai Weiwei's

father, one of the most famous poets of his day. According to his mother Gao Ying, “The whole family was banished to Xinjiang and lived in a hole.” Ai Qing had to undertake a lot of physical work and attend several self-criticism meetings everyday. As Ai Weiwei recalls, he was terrified one day by the sight of his father coming home pitch-black because of ink thrown all over his body. When he recalls his history, the shots are interlinked with flashbacks of old black and white photos and historical footage, which aims to create a sense of plausibility and history. Accompanied by slow traditional Chinese music, the narration of the individual experience of Ai Qing during the Cultural Revolution gives a strong sense to the audience that the Revolution must have been a dark and tragic time period.

China Rises makes it clear that Western culture and ideology have permeated into every aspect of Chinese daily life, lifestyle, private life, and more importantly, into the minds of individuals. The respect for individual freedom and democracy is starting to be advocated and developed in China. Ai Weiwei, one of the designers of Olympic Stadium, claims to be a “free individual, [who] has the right and ability to choose” after his thirteen years living in New York. In his sequence in *China Rises*, we see black-and-white photos of him in front of the New York subway and a tower in a zoomed-out shot. He was so disturbed by what he suffered during the Cultural Revolution that he left to make a new life in the States in 1980. Due to his overseas experience, his mind has been engraved with strongly Western political beliefs.

6.2.2 Episode Two: Getting Rich

It is already acknowledged in the Western world that China is in a transitional state, moving from a “poor and isolated” country a generation ago to become an economic power. This message is brought to the audience in *China Revealed*. Here once again, it is demonstrated by comparing rich entrepreneurs and higher officials with poor migrant workers. These successful business figures are shown to be role-models in Chinese society. Like Luo in *China Revealed*, they are wealthy, ambitious, and pursue a Western life style. They personify the goal of the lower social classes.

The episode starts with an establishing shot of a luxurious mansion located in

Chongqing, which belongs to the Chinese motorcycle entrepreneur, Mr. Shen Zong. The camera brings us to this beautiful residence, an epitome of European style, both in its decor and private gardens. In this montage, a piano concerto played by a symphony orchestra is used as the acoustic music in consistency with the Western style of the house. The gilded statues and the fountain in the middle look like a replica of the statues in Versailles. Zong's hobby is collecting dogs and horses from around the world. In these shots, we can tell that he actively pursues a Western lifestyle.

In contrast with Zong's astonishingly luxurious life, the film also shows the story of a migrant worker, who works in Zong's factory. The clothing and home of Mr. Yang and his wife bear no resemblance to Zong's. With China's booming economy, migrant workers are moving to cities where more job opportunities and better working conditions exist, so that they are able to support their families in the countryside by earning well above the rural average. While working in the urban cities, they engage themselves in the most dangerous jobs. We are shown the Yangs' annual visit home to celebrate the traditional Chinese New Year with their family. The whole family sit happily around a table to eat and drink together on this festival. The scene is full of happiness, warmth and comfort. Underneath this harmonious scene, however, lies the harsh reality that the migrant worker couple are trying desperately to please their children, but the children cannot even recognize them and treat them like total strangers. In the Yangs' story, from an overhead shot, we feel the pathos of the moment when their little nephew does not know who they are and refuses to talk to them. He flinches back and plays with his toys when Yang and his wife approach him. It can be seen that Chinese migrant workers are leading an underprivileged life.

The sequence goes on to present the life and work of another successful IT entrepreneur, Mr. Yun Ma. This is followed by a series of images of the Great Wall, which represents China's antiquity. As one of the most remarkable historical sites in human history, the Great Wall is a must-see for Western tourists these days and also essential to contemporary Western media representations of China. The portrayal of

this ancient Wall is accompanied by a montage of a top official (Mr. Zhou) from the state-owned Bank of China, who enjoys hiking to the Wall every now and then. Shots of the Wall in this montage are stunning and magnificent. In the camera images, the mountains are covered in green trees while the sky is blue and clear, and clouds are floating in the sky. The light tone of this montage is colorful and fresh, with no yellow tones to highlight a sense of history as in *China Revealed*. The whole montage ends up with a long shot of the Wall stretching towards the sky. In this context, the same signifier, the Great Wall, is not used to create intense historical connotations. Rather, the wide-angled and medium shots invite us to celebrate the astonishing beauty of the Wall and the surrounding landscape.

In this specific context, the signification of the Great Wall is extended to symbolize national solidarity, and this positive message is conveyed by the combination of the impressive images and the banker's words. Zhou tells us that millions of Chinese people worked together in ancient times, to construct this architectural miracle without any modern technology. He suggests that if all contemporary Chinese people made a joint effort, they should be able to create another miracle. A large population means abundant labor resources and is therefore considered to be an advantage for the construction of the national infrastructure; and of course, this view reminds us of the desire for population growth so prevalent in the early European immigrants to America, for they believed that the more people joined them in their new land, the more quickly they would become a powerful group.

Zong and Ma are not the only entrepreneurs being affected by Western culture. Another example given in *China Rises* is the air-conditioning manufacturer, Mr. Yue Zhang, another multi-millionaire industrialist from Hunan province. He built his corporate headquarters in imitation of the French style of landscaping, so that you almost feel as if the sequence has been shot in a small European town. To inspire his employees, he has constructed a European style palace as a training institute, surrounded by statues of famous Western scholars, heroes and innovators, such as Adam Smith, Martin Luther King Junior, Thomas Edison, James Watt and the Wright brothers. Yue Zhang is not only deeply influenced by Western culture; he is further

inspired by the Western conception of innovation, technology and sustainable development. He is very passionate about implementing green energy and modern technological expertise. This short montage shows that Zhang is quite determined to learn from advanced Western technology so that his staff are able to improve their products to contribute to environmental protection. Zhang's story in this episode indicates that China is to some extent transitioning towards being a more open, international and Westernized country.

6.2.3 Episode Three: Food is Heaven

In the beginning of the third episode, we once again revisit the clichéd images of horrible Chinese food, with an ECU of fish heads and wriggling scorpions. In this episode, a cooking show made by Mr Wang (a master chef living in Canton) for local television is included in the footage, and is even compared with Jackie Chan's²⁶⁶ Kung Fu performances. Although real Kung Fu is not included in this documentary series, the addition of this cooking show can be seen as a practical variant of martial arts in daily life. During Mr Wang's show, he is filmed from a low angle throwing up bottles of vinegar and oil and catching them again. This low-angle shot indicates a respect for the chef, or perhaps we should call him, the "Kung Fu" master. Yet, during his show, we cannot help noticing that the shrimp have been thrown alive into the hot pan. They jump on the plate. In Mr Wang's opinion, shrimp have to be alive to be truly fresh.

Chinese cuisine, one significant component of Chinese culture, is indispensable to China-themed Western documentaries. As we saw in the sections on historical images in this dissertation, Chinese cuisine has long been seen as exotic by Westerners. To Western knowledge, Chinese people eat "practically everything"²⁶⁷. Viewers were shown all those terrifying animals as ingredients in a Beijing restaurant in the previous case study, with fish-heads and scorpions being prepared for the main course.

²⁶⁶ Jackie Chan, one of the Kung Fu movie stars, is to some extent taken as a representative figure of Chinese martial art stars.

²⁶⁷ Quote from the narration of *China Rises*.

The sharp contrast between rich and poor is intensified by presenting life in the city and the country. The internal revolution benefits some people by giving them splendid opportunities to get rich, but people living in the countryside are left far behind this growth. From the close-up shots of colorful and various foods on restaurant tables, we can tell that people in Canton have no lack of wonderful food; they believe that “appeasing hunger is an old story”. The montage then cuts to a peasant couple living in a village on the Loess Plateau, located in the northwest of China. From a series of aerial shots, full shots and wide shots of this village, audiences are provided with a picture of the harsh living environment in the Chinese countryside. Trees are sparsely rooted on the mountain, making khaki the main color tone in this place. The peasants work on the dry land to grow plants which can barely support them. We see from the selection of images that they cannot afford much choice in their diet, and eat noodles practically every day.

In this episode, we have been presented with the familiar images of a family reunion over a meal, of a primitive agricultural land unchanged for hundreds of years, of the harsh living environment of the rural areas. In addition to these frequently filmed images, the codes to represent Chinese culture and tradition are also covered in the film. Chinese painting, for example, is used again by the director to represent China’s distinguished civilized culture in this documentary. The storyline proceeds to the filming of a Chinese painter who specializes in painting fish, and who explains to us the symbolic meaning of fish in traditional Chinese culture. In keeping with the theme, the music for this sequence is Chinese folk music, which creates an atmosphere of a unique Chinese tradition and antiquity.

6.2.4 Episode Four: City of Dreams

In the episode expository, our attention is attracted by a night club, a beautiful night view of the Shanghai skyline, crowded modern buildings, fast-motion shots of automobiles zooming down the road, a runway model, fashion brands, etc. This montage brings us into a fast-growing Chinese city. Shanghai is a heavily Westernized Chinese city where it is easy to find bars, pubs, Western restaurants and shops scattered in the downtown area. The zoom-in close-up shots make eye-

catching luxurious brands like Hugo Boss stand out for the audience. We are thus impressed that China, once seen as “poor and isolated” (narration of *China Rises*), is becoming a newly rising consumer market, including luxury consumption.

This episode begins with a scene showing the working life of a representative of the new urban middle class, Mr. Liang Ma, an independent film director living in Shanghai. We observe that in the montage of Ma’s commercial shoot, the models are pretty and nicely dressed, the environment in the park is clean, quiet and filled with ancient Roman-style pillars surrounded by little yellow flower blossoms. The images of beautiful models, a suburban park and flowers indicate the aesthetic romance of his commercial advertisement. In the interview with Ma, there are three artistic dolls hanging in the background, which implies Ma’s sense of taste and artistic identity. Another member of the urban middle class, Jenny Ji, is working as a fashion designer in Shanghai after studying in Italy. In Jenny Ji’s montage, she is filmed in her own exquisite fashion boutique, which is decorated in an antique style in soft tones. When she is interviewed, our eyes are attracted to the mannequin in a red fashionable dress and lily flowers in the background. The light tone of Jenny’s montage is soft, gentle and creamy, which gives it a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. From the setting and design of her shop, we can see her personality. In Jenny’s own words, “I feel great, and I have no restrictions and no boring attitude”. Jenny has achieved career success, as she is the only female designer to be invited to the Shanghai International Fashion Festival. She is young, talented and ambitious.

In contrast with the clean natural environment of Ma Liang and Jenny’s boutique, the fancy stories of a commercial director and a fashion designer, the sequence is followed by a sharp contrast between rich and poor: the image of shabby ruined houses surrounded by new buildings, which is also adopted in Mr Luo’s montage in *China Revealed*. This short montage of ruined houses shows us local residents in blue trousers and muddy black shoes living in small houses without electricity or running water. The camera brings us into a world of terrible living conditions, where cracked stones and dog excrement are all over the place. In a close-up of an aged lady, we observe her frowning eyebrows and feel strongly her grief and anger. This contrast between the new urban middle class and the poor again reinforces the

sense of a widening social gap, even in a city like Shanghai.

Historically speaking, family relationships have always been of great importance for the collectivist Chinese. In the old days, the more generations the family had, the more prosperity and wealth they possessed, as all family members of different generations lived together and supported each other. Nowadays, family members may no longer live together, but they are still determined to meet each other every now and then for significant family celebrations. Images of family reunions over a meal were hence included in both documentaries. Indeed, the scene of a family reunion around a round table is constantly repeated in Western documentaries on China. In *China Revealed*, four generations of Ms. Liao's family sit together to eat rice cakes for the celebration of the dragon boat festival. Now in this series, Ma visits his parents on a Sunday afternoon to enjoy some family time. In this montage, the whole family is filmed sitting on a couch in the living room. They look through photo albums to share their sweet memories of the past. Ma's mother holds her grandson on her knee and smiles at the child. This is a typical scene of a happy Chinese family of four generations.

The core values of the "American Dream", the pursuit of wealth, success and happiness, are highly appreciated in China nowadays. Exactly like Americans, the Chinese are also striving to move upward in the society. The lower class hopes to move up to the middle class, while the middle class pursue success, in order to live in a villa with a garden or in a town house. This ambition for career success is apparent in Ma's personal experience. He and his wife live in different countries, because his wife is studying fashion design in France. The couple are in two different countries because the wife is preparing for her future career development by pursuing higher education abroad. Their story shows that both men and women in contemporary China are in search of a successful career, even at the cost of their private life.

When we see Ma chatting to his wife online, the camera captures the decoration and furniture of his room. The floor is made of wood, a large bouquet sits on top of a

desk decorated with simple patterns, and a lamp is fixed to a piece of wooden artwork leaning against the wall. The room looks cozy, simple but modern, in the IKEA style which is widely admired and followed by the urban middle class in Shanghai. The style of his room suggests that both Ma Liang and his wife are in favour of the Western modern style, which has evidently influenced China's younger generation.

Just as we see Ma Liang cherishing his family time during a reunion, the young designer Jenny Ji values Chinese traditions despite her Westernized education and profession. Her story captures the experiences of a generation of young Chinese who pursue a Western lifestyle while at the same time maintaining certain Chinese traditions. Jenny works hard to put together her fashion show in Shanghai, which is very similar to a Western one. However, she still pays her respects to her grandparents' tomb with her mother and cousin during the Qing Ming fest. The montage of her visit to the tomb opens with a pan shot of the whole large cemetery where it is quiet and moody. Melancholy Chinese string music strengthens the intrinsically sad atmosphere. In a full shot, Jenny puts a bouquet of yellow daisies on the tomb, which symbolizes respect for people who have passed away, and especially for older family members. After that, they light incense and burn paper money in a basin, as is called for by Chinese tradition.²⁶⁸ From this scene, it is clear that the Chinese still adhere to their history and traditions at least some of the time.

In the big happy Chinese family, the old parental, and especially patriarchal, authority still exists. The Chinese parent-child relationship is very different to that in Western countries. In light of the core values of Confucian philosophy, parents' protection and love for their children entitle them to control over their lives, and children must respect their parents and obey what they say. In a medium shot of an ordinary family (Hu Yang) of three people in Shanghai, the parents are sitting on one side of the table, whereas their only daughter is sitting on a lower stool opposite them. This seating arrangement in the image shows that children are positioned

268 In Buddhist practice, incense burning represents a ritual pray for safety and health. Paper money should be burnt in front of a tomb so that the people who pass away can use the money in their afterlife.

lower than their parents in the family.

After the one-child policy was implemented, children became the centre of their parents' attention. Although they may receive more indulgence, they also have to carry all the burdens and confront a lot more pressure than their parents' generation. In Hu Yang's interview, he points out that Chinese parents prefer to invest a lot time and money in their children's education and therefore expect them to be the very best in every area. In this case, children are driven to focus only on studies, so that they can be accepted by elite universities and eventually be successful in their future. In order to obtain good grades, Hu's daughter puts a textbook (filmed in an ECU shot) in her bag, and goes to study in the school library even on Saturday. We feel sympathetic for these little children being pushed so hard by their parents due to the fierce competition in Chinese society.

The sequence of Ma and Jenny ends with pan shots and full shots of Western-style houses in Shanghai's suburbs. Copying the Western lifestyle, these houses are surrounded by trees, neat and clean roads, and fountains with bronze statues. This area can only be afforded by a few rich people, yet just like in the USA and the American dream, these houses are a symbol of wealth and high social status, and a dream for ordinary Chinese people. Now, at least, there is hope for them to make the dream a reality. The situation of the expanding gap between rich and poor is investigated in-depth in this episode, and to illustrate the topic, the audience is shown two types of residence in Shanghai. The life of the new urban middle-class, represented by Ma Liang and Jenny Ji, is compared with that of a member of a lower social class, Wei Qin, a laid-off worker, who has lost her home in the old downtown area.

Wei Qin, a representative of protesters and poor city people, is filmed on her way back home. She is living in a single room in a very old building with her son. The whole montage is void of any style, or indeed any hope. She has been laid off by a state factory, but is still wearing the typical blue factory uniform which earned the Chinese the nickname "blue ants" in the 1970s. When she buys fruit at a street stand,

her action of counting coins instead of notes indicates her poverty. Later on, she goes to ask her mother for some money. An ECU shot demonstrates her embarrassment about being financially assisted by her mother, who has only a small state pension herself. She can only afford to go window shopping and share one McDonald Burger with her son. Wei's life is poor, hard, and tough, compared with comfortable existence enjoyed by Ma Liang and Jenny Ji.

Since the birth of the new China, the Chinese Communist government was isolated from the West for a couple of decades, then later welcomed back into the fold due to its internal reform and external opening. In the last sixty years, it has been criticized by the West on two major issues: democracy and individual freedom. In the ten golden years between the end of the 1970s and 1980s, the Communist government led by Deng Xiaoping was highly welcomed by the West; however, after the Tian'anmen Massacre took place, the image of China entered the darkest period of its recent history, as the individual human rights were not seen to be respected in China in Westerners' eyes. In *City of Dreams*, a lawyer's story of fighting the government fits perfectly into this image pattern. The lawyer represents his wife's friend, along with two thousand other Shanghai residents, who are suing the Shanghai government. According to his wife's narration in the documentary, in the process of looking for evidence, her husband discovers governmental corruption behind a property deal. At the end, the lawyer is sentenced to three years in jail. The audience is shown a sharp contrast in a montage of the lawyer's wife and her friend. They are shown taking a walk in the Bund, where people are happily performing a Chinese fan dance in the foreground, but then they walk quietly away as soon as they see the local police. There is no expression on their faces and they are definitely not as happy as the fan dancers. As the wife expresses her anger towards this social injustice, she weeps in front of the camera. In the interview with these two women, the camera distance is short and shots are primarily in ECU or CS, so that the audience can directly feel their sorrow and be sympathetic for what they have been put through. The more sympathy spectators feel, the crueller the Chinese Communist government appears. The whole sequence is delivering a message to audiences that individual rights are not respected in Communist China.

6.4 China (BBC, 2006)

Finally, we turn to *China*, which was produced by the filmmaker Jonathan Lewis and broadcast on 13th June, 2006 on BBC Two. Filmed over eighteen months, this documentary was also made up of four episodes, *Power and the People*, *Women of the Country*, *Shifting Nature* and *Freedom and Justice*. In accordance with the BBC's documentary production style, *China* focuses on serious political issues, such as the one-party rule, democratic supervision, human rights, and how the Chinese are fighting for freedom and justice. In contrast to the other two documentary series, the BBC's *China* emphasizes reports of the current conditions of Chinese women in the countryside and environmental pollution. These serious social and ethical topics are explored through a series of interviews. However, even though the style of this documentary is different from the others, we can still identify some familiar images about China that have been prevalent both in the historical images and the other documentaries.

In the series, the images of city construction sites continue to appear in wide shots, pan shots and long shots. Episode One starts with a construction site at night, where builders are working late. The wide shot of the unfinished building is followed by a medium shot of a worker, and then a pan shot of the whole construction site with a huge crane in the foreground. The construction site here is used as a code to indicate a developing economy, or in other words, modernization in action. In order to develop its economy, China has to consume a tremendous amount of resources like iron, cement and steel. The narration goes on with the threatening remark that China consumes far more resources than some smaller countries, "She has cities Westerners have never even heard of producing more than small nations. This may be China's century." The combination of images and words creates the impression that China is improving its productivity at the cost of an enormous consumption of the world's resources. China is competing with the West and might be the next superpower. Western spectators thus reasonably ponder the question – if China rises, what will be the fate of the West?

In *China's* first and second episodes, we see images of the narrow, uneven and muddy country roads, so dirty that the locals have to wear rubber boots. In *China's Rivers*, when the production team takes a Jin Mao miniature back to a migrant worker's home, the road is also muddy and dirty. In these rural settings, we hardly see any modern agricultural technology - no hoses for watering plants or machinery for daily work; every agricultural job needs to be done manually. In *China*, we do not even have any green spectacular rice paddies or beautiful music to bring out the primitive beauty which is often presented as a balance to the dirty harsh environment, but only images of muddy roads and barren fields. Again, the documentary follows the historical image-model of China as a stagnant and primitive world, as portrayed in Buck's novel for instance.

Chinese parents have high expectations of their children, wherever they live. In the countryside, indeed, these high expectations are even higher than in cities, for knowledge is the only chance for the children to escape the harshness of peasant life. Therefore, in the interview with a migrant worker in this documentary, he tells a story of buying a new pair of boots for his daughter as a New Year's gift. When the little girl tells him she loves the boots, he immediately links them to her studies, urging her to study hard to get into university. This will enable her to escape the poor peasant life of her parents.

China is a nation composed of 56 officially registered ethnic groups and well-known for its ethnic variety. 91.59% of the Chinese population is identified as Han Chinese majority ethnic group. The other 55 groups are categorized as minority ethnic groups. In historical times, the distinguished Han culture, including calligraphy and painting for instance, were considered to be the whole picture of the Chinese cultural puzzle. However, in recent years, the life of these minority ethnic groups has been of particular interest to the Western media. To comprehensively portray China as an ethnically diverse country, minority groups are essential to documentary filming.

In *China*, the Tibetans, who possess a unique and distinctive identity, are selected and presented as representations of these diverse ethnic groups. The Tibet- and

Uyghur- related montages appear in three episodes (One, Two, and Four) of the BBC's documentary series, giving the audience a visual presentation of the real living conditions of the Chinese minority groups. In Episode One, the Uyghur and Tibetan governors are interviewed to provide general information about current conditions in their regions. In addition, women are positioned as a vulnerable group, and as such are given special attention in the whole second episode. Han Chinese women in the countryside are fighting to conquer their hardship in life by improving their social capabilities. Uyghur and Tibetan women are also interviewed in the documentary to express their thoughts on the current social transition. In the film, we see that Uyghur Muslim women are still wearing headscarves to cover their faces in front of the camera, and are reluctant to express themselves until their husbands leave. Then they tell truth that they are willing to go out and work but instead have to stay at home to play the traditional role of caring for the family. In the montage of Uyghur women, we see that the lives of both Han women in rural areas and women from minority groups in China still need to be improved.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Based on the extensive analysis of historical images and the film images examined here, we can draw the conclusion that images of China in contemporary Western documentaries follow a certain pattern: antiquity, tradition, diversity, transition and threat. Chinese antiquity is firstly introduced by the traditional products which have been known to the West for thousands of years, for example silk, which has been popular since Roman times. In the early Arabic journals, tea was introduced as the national drink of the Middle Kingdom. Elegant, precious porcelain, a unique Chinese artwork highly valued in Europe in the era of *Chinoiserie*, conveys a connotation of delicacy and nobility. In all the documentaries featured in this dissertation, at least one of the upper-class interviewees is positioned with porcelain in the background of the shot. These artistic porcelain pieces are so expensive as to be out of the reach of the poor, and thus are used to imply a differentiated social identity. In addition,

China's antiquity can also be represented by rice planting in a primitive agricultural landscape, and historical buildings like the Great Wall and the Royal Palace.

The distinguished arts of Chinese traditional calligraphy and painting have existed and been used by members of the elite to decorate their houses for many hundreds of years. In modern China, the Chinese are still fond of adopting traditional painting and calligraphy art as decorations both at home and at work. In a medium shot of a Chinese family, a Chinese painting is hung on the wall of the living room, which denotes the family's social status as members of the intellectual class. In the interview settings of the BBC and CBC's documentary series, it can be noted that all the interviewed government officials, intellectuals and entrepreneurs are positioned in a setting decorated either by porcelain artwork or a Chinese painting or sometimes both. It is quite obvious that this image composition suggests that party officials and intellectuals belong to a higher social class.

From the perspective of cultural globalization, Western culture has already had a huge impact on traditional Chinese culture. Chinese people however do persist in certain traditional festivals, such as Qing Ming, Mid-Autumn and the New Year festival, and the ways in which the Chinese celebrate these festivals is included in all of the documentaries examined here.

As the most important festival in the Chinese community, the Chinese New Year is one of film-makers' favorite China-related subjects, in particular when combined with the lives of Chinese migrant workers. Migrant workers' stories of their lives in this country of transition are covered in all four documentaries, in particular to portray how they celebrate Chinese New Year with their family. The huge economic transition undergone in society guarantees more opportunities than ever before, and people living in rural areas are driven to move to more developed areas. In order to earn more money in cities, they have to sacrifice their time with their families, which results in a problematic relationship with their children. Sun Feng, one of the two major characters in *China Revealed*, represents the 0.8 billion people living in rural China, and also the enormous number of migrant workers living in the country of

transition. The price of his work in Shanghai is his daughter's inability to recognize him when he goes back home for Chinese New Year.

The diversity of Chinese culture and identities is constantly revisited in these documentaries. As China has the longest continuous history in the world, its culture has diversified along with its territorial expansion. Nowadays, fifty-six ethnic groups live in this vast land, and each ethnic group has its own distinctive culture and traditions. For instance, the Mongol ethnic group living on the western grassland is filmed in *China Revealed*. From their montage, we learn that Mongols are concerned about how to preserve their culture and traditions under the pressure towards cultural assimilation into the Han Chinese mainstream. The Mongols are taken as representatives of Chinese ethnic minorities in the Discovery documentary because, from an American perspective, the Mongolian way of life shares some similarities with the cowboys' lives in the Wild West. In the European documentaries, the directors have instead selected the Tibetans living on the Qinghai Plateau and the Uyghur living on the old Silk Road as representatives of China's ethnic diversity.

China is in a state of transition, which could be one of the most surprising transformations happening in the world. The economic take-off must be represented by the modern city of Shanghai. In all the documentary series, the city is filmed and regarded as a token of China's booming economy, a successful role model for China's modernization process. Shanghai dazzles the audience, and would convince the most sceptical Western viewer that the skyline of a Chinese city could be as amazing as that of New York City or Paris. A montage of modern and dynamic city life usually encompasses image of local Chinese people in a nightclub, shiny glittering skyscrapers, in particular the Jinmao Tower, and the whole city skyline along the Yangtze River.

To emphasize an atmosphere of excitement and temptation, the film directors utilize a Chinese song with a fast, clear tempo to match these shots. The duration of each shot lasts for a couple of seconds. The image and music codes in the whole sequence applied in *China Revealed*, *China's Rivers* and *China Rises* form a

mythology that the city night life is lively, energetic and ceaseless. City life represents wealth, success and status, which are pursued desperately in contemporary China. The tremendous change in this city strikes Westerners, in the mean time, to make sure that they are very well aware that the story of Shanghai's modernization is not the whole story for China as a whole. There are second tier cities in rural areas which are in a state of poverty. In this case, the prosperous, wonderful city life must seem, to the Chinese living in other less-developed cities and rural areas, like a pleasant dream. In brief, this episode presents the audiences with a transforming China, which needs to tackle a series of social problems such as a widening wealth gap between rich and poor and the environmental problems caused by its economic development.

In eighteenth-century France, there was a European mania for Chinese design and style, from silk and porcelain to gardens and architecture. More than two hundred years later, the trend seems to be in the opposite direction, as a wave of imitation of Western style pervades China, along with the growth of Western-style capitalism. We see media images of a local music club filled with people cheering a group of Chinese hip-hop dancers. China's current cultural trend is a full obsession with everything Western, ranging from cosmetics, clothing styles, and dancing, to concepts and attitudes in everyday life.

China is a populous country - the population accounts for one fifth of the world. "Human sea", a term coined during the Korean War, has been used to refer to the Chinese. Images of China as a populous country appear in the Western media all the time. In the expository of *China Rises* Episode Two, we see a large amount of faceless Chinese in an MCS squeezing onto the street and swarming into an automobile exhibition. We are therefore left with the impression that there are too many Chinese even in China and that its population density is extremely high. The expository of the BBC's *China*, Episode 2 ("Women of the Country") shows a succession of shots from different camera distances of Chinese people walking through a train station. In these shots, the crowd occupy almost every space, the railway station hall, the moving staircase, the security check point and the platform.

In one final full shot, their faces cannot be seen because they have been filmed from the back. As the camera pulls out, the only thing that can be seen in the frame is a cluster of black heads, which exactly fit into the Western concept of the faceless Chinese. China as a large populous land was seen as a great and mighty kingdom in the old days, whereas the image of its large population in these days can connote a sense of threat to Western security.

China's threat to the Western world was once considered to be its large population, giving rise to the terms "yellow peril", "red dragon" and "human sea". This image of threat is nowadays further intensified by China's competition for resources to drive its economic boom. There is no doubt that China has accomplished surprising achievements in the past decade. According to Lester R. Brown's report in the *Guardian*, to meet the huge demands of its industrial development, China has overtaken the US as the leading resource consumer in the world. It now competes directly with other industrial nations with energy-based economies. China consumes more grain, meat, oil, coal and steel than the US, "nearly twice as much meat - 67m tonnes compared with 39m tonnes in the US; and more than twice as much steel - 258m tonnes to 104m".²⁶⁹ These numbers suggest that China's economic appetite can only be satisfied by the consumption of vast quantities of resources.

All in all, there is no denying that China is a complex, paradoxical, diverse, ever-changing, magnificent, multi-cultural nation. Ever since China and the Western first encountered on another, Western images of the Middle Kingdom have not ceased to change, mirroring the whole process of Western development itself. When the West was still primitive and undeveloped, the Kingdom was mysterious, incredibly wealthy, and highly advanced. When capitalism took shape in the West, China missed the industrial revolution. As a consequence, the Middle Kingdom became seen as a primitive, backward and undeveloped semi-colonized country occupied by imperial industrial nations. After communist China was established, it shape-shifted once again, becoming a red authoritarian power, a potential threat to global political order

269 Brown, Lester R. «A New World Order», a Guardian article published on 25 January 2006
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/jan/25/china.guardiansocietysupplement>

and security in Western eyes.

China resists categorization and stereotyping due to its ceaseless capacity for change. However, historical images, positive and negative, are still adopted in the contemporary Western media in the form of fixed image patterns composed of five dimensions – antiquity, tradition, diversity, transition and threat. China is populous, diverse, multi-identified, with an ancient history and civilization; on the other hand, the country consumes large volumes of energy to ensure its fast economic development, which generates a widening wealth gap between the rich and the poor. China is undergoing a dramatic transition, and its rising power leads the West to see it as a potential threat. This general perception of China is thus widely encoded through media signifiers, and then audiences with a similar or the same cultural background can receive and decode these messages.

Today, China remains an enigmatic and exotic nation to most Westerners. There are a quantity of traditions and customs which Westerners cannot understand, a succession of serious social problems to be addressed, a multitude of democratic measures to be implemented. However, the fact is, in the context of globalization, China can no longer isolate itself from the rest of the world, but needs to be open and transparent, to improve its writing system, to promote advanced technology and to tackle its social problems by reducing the widening wealth gap, enhancing the lives of disadvantaged groups, and prioritizing environmental protection. There is definitely still a long way to go.

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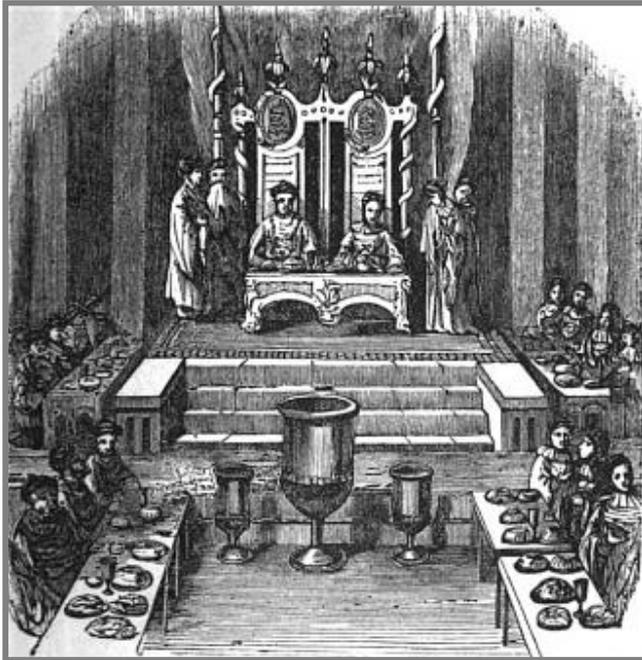
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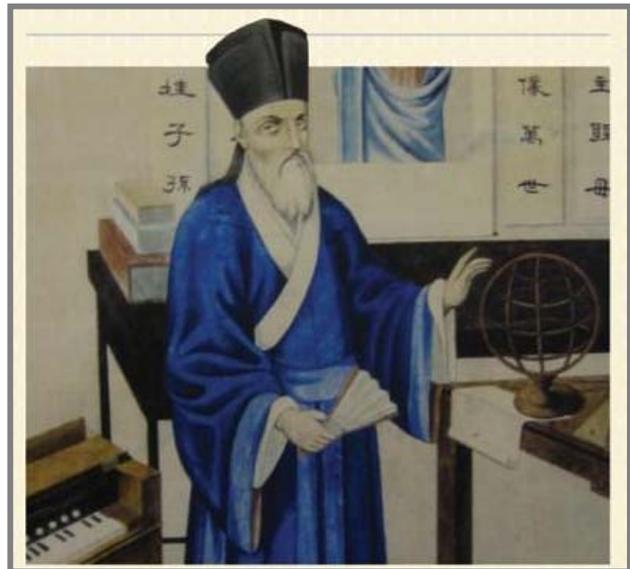
APPENDICES:

[1.0 Images](#)

Chapter 2: Historical images of China



Appendix 1: Festival of the Great Khan in the thirteenth century, *the Travels of Marco Polo*



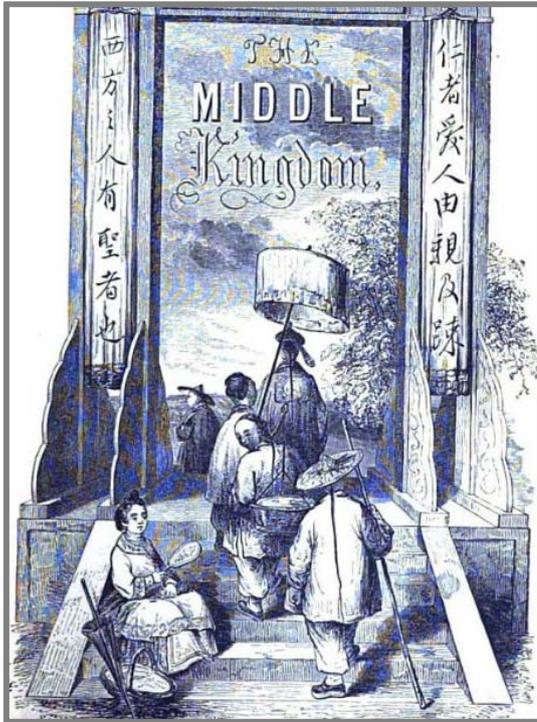
Appendix 2: Father Ricci in a Chinese gown in the sixteenth century: a Jesuit in the Ming Court



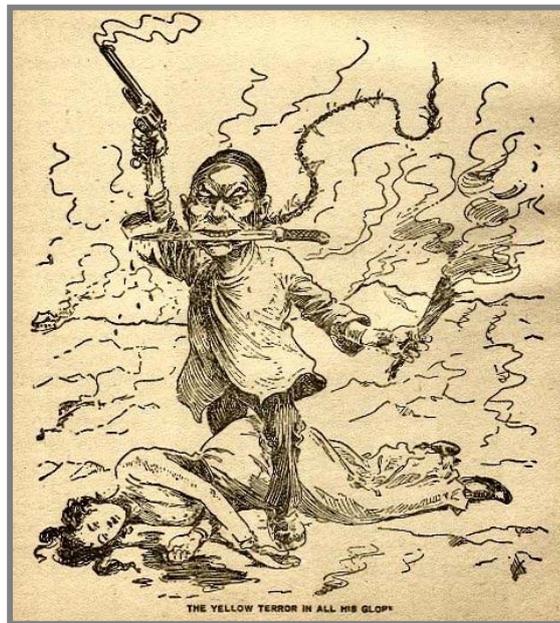
Appendix 3: A wallpaper hanging from the Chinese Study of Saltram House in Britain, purchased during the mania for *Chinoiserie*



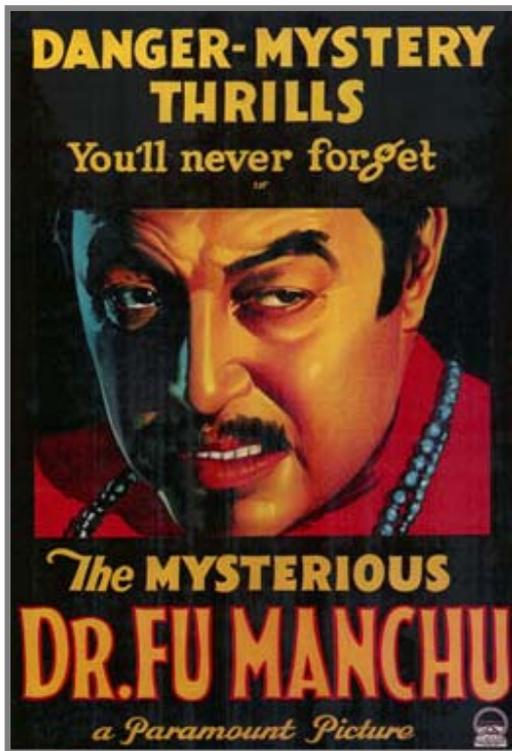
Appendix 4: A porcelain plate with dragon pattern imported to the French Court



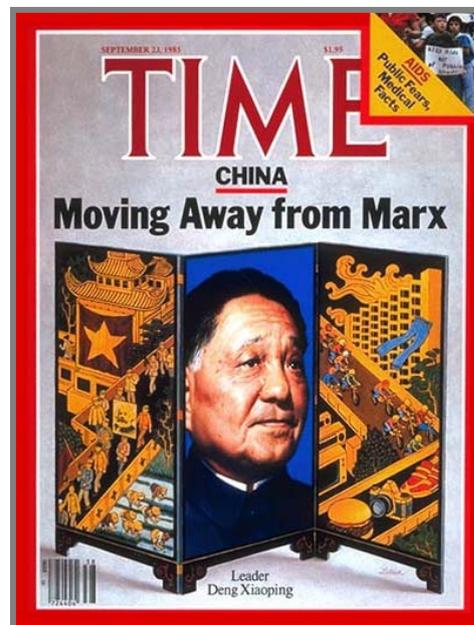
Appendix 5: The Middle Kingdom in a decline in the nineteenth century



Appendix 6: The Yellow Terror in All his Glory
An American cartoon from 1899



Appendix 7: A film billboard for the film of Fu Manchu, an evil character from a series of novels published in the 1930s



Appendix 8: Deng in the front cover of *Times* magazine, issued in November 1985

Chapter 3: Case study
Filming locations



Appendix 9: A map of China

Chapter 4:



Appendix 10: The Great Wall in the expositional sequence



Appendix 11: High angle shot of the rice terrace in the Longsheng village, Guanxi



Appendix 12: Sun Feng's teeth in an ECU



Appendix 13 & 14: Sun Feng at work, and a close shot of him working in a cradle



Appendix 15: Chinese calligraphy work in the documentary film, meaning “flying dragon”



Appendix 16: Shaolin pagodas



Appendix 17: Jin Yang and her father training in a park in Beijing



Appendix 18: A girl keeps training despite her injured leg



Appendix 19: The coach pricks a blister with a nail-clipper



Appendix 20: Slum area of Shanghai



Appendix 21: Sunset view, backlighting effect of the landscape & a yurt



Appendix 22: SF's wife is cooking in the kitchen for the whole family



Appendix 23: ECU of a dragon during the dragon dance for the Chinese New Year



Appendix 24: A scene of New Year celebration at the end of documentary

2.0 Film narrations

China, the oldest civilization on earth, a land founded on extraordinary customs and ritual, celebrated in monuments without equal, preserved in thousands of years of learning, a country that is the home to the greatest population on the planet - 1.3 billion people - a nation that is set to become the world's next super power. This is the story of the fastest growing country on earth, of the dreams and challenges driving its people, of individual struggle and triumph. How is the world's largest communist state becoming its most powerful economy? Can this ancient civilization survive its breakneck journey into the future? And what is the price of this whirlwind of change? This is the story of the greatest transformation on earth, and the people living in its heart. This is the story of life behind the Great Wall.

Dawn. The People's Republic of China. Across the city of Shanghai, thousands gather to practice the ancient art of Tai Chi. Over a thousand miles away, Mongolian nomads prepare for the biggest horse race in the world. In Beijing, the Forbidden City opens its doors to tens of thousands of tourists. To the west, in Lanzhou steel works, No. 5 furnace comes online. And in this same moment, 12-year-old Jin Yang dreams of Olympic glory. Xiao Sui perfects a Kung Fu move five centuries old, and billionaire property tycoon Vincent Luo sees a future of limitless opportunity. It is now predicted that the Chinese economy will become the largest in the world in little more than twenty years. China already consumes more than one third of the world's steel and almost half of the world's concrete. In any single minute, the Chinese nation now burns almost 2.5 thousand tons of coal, 24 million watts of electricity, and 210,000 gallons of crude oil. It has been estimated that within thirty years we will need another Planet Earth to satisfy China's ever growing appetite for raw materials. But for all this extraordinary explosion of industry, China still rests on traditions that are thousands of years old.

Mrs. Liao:

In the far south of China lie the paddy fields of Long Sheng. And here it is the first day of the annual rice planting. "This is a busy season for us. This is the time of year that everything needs to be planted, out in all the fields and rice paddies." Mrs. Liao and her

family are planting one of the staple food of all China – rice. They have worked these terraces all of their lives and their families have lived here for over 20 generations. This work is in their blood. “We get up at 6. As soon as we have eaten breakfast, we head out to the fields. We don’t come back home until 8 or 8:30. Only us locals could handle the work, you city types wouldn’t be able to keep up.”

The rice terraces of Long Sheng are an agricultural wonder. Floating high above the clouds, stretching along 20 miles of peaks, these terraces have become known as the “dragon’s back”. Chinese farmers carved these paddies from the steep slopes of a vast mountain range almost 8 centuries ago, shifting hundreds of thousands of tons of earth. But all of this labour was for good reason: for all its vast area, less than 10% of China can actually be farmed. Every usable piece of land has to be put under the plough. And if a harvest fails, the effects can be devastating. Mrs. Liao can still remember the terrible famine of 1959. “Life was very harsh back then. There was nothing in the rice fields, and many people in our village starved to death. My grandmother died of starvation.”

Four generations of the Liao’s family still live together. At the time of the rice planting, they get together for a family feast to celebrate the harvest to come. As part of the celebration, they cook a traditional rice dumpling wrapped in leaves. This ancient practice is still a powerful symbol of a family’s wealth and success. “Every child takes their special dumpling to school on the day after the feast. It is like a great big competition. They all show off and compare them with each other to see who has got the biggest and the best one.”

Grandpa Liao is the head of the family. He is also a leading figure in the local Communist party. He is responsible for relaying details of the Party’s policies to the remote reaches of the “dragon’s back”. He has found the perfect way to get the party’s directives out to his fellow farmers. He turns them into simple slogans and poems. “Growing crops will increase our food, so every family needs a plan and that’s good. You can relax at harvest’s end; a store of crops means cash to spend.” Mr. Liao has set his blackboard out in the village square for two decades now, a direct connection with the Communist Party headquarters in Beijing a thousand miles away. “In 2004, I was

honored as an outstanding party member. I put the certificate up on the wall, so the younger members of the family can see what their granddad has achieved.”

Until 1978, the Communist Party directly controlled all of China’s land. But then they announced an extraordinary change in policy. The party decided to hand the land over to the peasants to run themselves. The average peasant income rocketed by more than 1500% and the lives of the Liao family changed beyond all recognition. “Ever since the land was privatized, life has been getting better and better. We now eat much better and we have better clothes. Now we have even bought a fridge and a TV.” But if life has improved in China’s rural heartland, the greatest revolution has occurred in the city.

Sun Feng:

There the Communist Party has told entrepreneurs to build their own businesses, announcing that to get rich is glorious. This has led to one of the greatest migrations in human history, as tens of millions of Chinese have abandoned the traditional farming life to seek their fortunes in China’s great cities.

Sun Feng came to Shanghai from the countryside almost a year ago. Here he hoped to find wealth and success. Little did he know that he would end up with one of the most perilous jobs in the city. “It is a really dangerous job. That is the worst thing about it. The first time I stepped into the basket, I was so terrified that I would fall out. When you are lowered on the rope and you hit something, it is really frightening. Now my heart does not race that much. Now it is just like standing on the ground.”

Already 8 times the size of New York City, Shanghai is expanding every day. Investors are pouring more than 10 billion dollars a year into this city, raising a skyline the equal of any in the world. In a population of 20 million, over 3 million are migrant workers like Sun Feng, but it’s a far cry from the small rural town where he grew up. “When I first came to Shanghai, I felt completely lost. Shanghaiers tend to push outsiders away. Getting to know people here is difficult.” And although he is earning more cash than he ever could at home, even as a window cleaner, Sun Feng is still paying a high price for his months

away. "The hardest thing is not seeing my daughter, who is just so adorable. She only needs to smile to make me forget all the worries of my life."

In just a few weeks, Sun Feng will see his daughter for the first time in months, when he heads home to celebrate the Chinese New Year. But for now, all that he can do is work as hard as he can and earn as much as he can to support his family back home.

Great Wall:

The Chinese call their nation the Middle Kingdom, because they believe it sits at the very centre of the world. China covers over 3.5 million square miles of land: to the east lie great cities and ports, to the south, the impassable peaks of the Himalayas, to the west, great stretches of barren deserts. This great land is home to over 50 different peoples, each with their own culture, history and tradition.

Stretching across Northern China lies Inner Mongolia: thousands of miles of open grass lands and ragged mountain ranges. Although they have become citizens of Greater China, the people of Inner Mongolia still hold on to their unique culture. Once a year, they gather for the festival of Nudamu to celebrate the ancient traditions that set them apart from the rest of China. Extraordinary skill in horsemanship lies at the heart of Mongolian culture. And the climax of the Nudamu festival comes at the dawn of the third day in what is the biggest horse race in the world. By tradition, all the riders are children, selected for their light build. Over 200 will be competing, racing across some of the most remote terrain on earth. As the start is called, the jockeys rush to their mounts and thunder across the open grassland. The riders still follow ancient Mongolian custom to the letter. They have neither saddles nor stirrups, making the horses far harder to control. It is a trial of riding skill and endurance without equal, a testament to the survival of unique traditions and cultures all across China.

China is a nation so diverse, its people still speak 7 different major languages and over 80 different dialects. There is just one bond between them all. They can all read and use the same written characters. Over 40, 000 unique symbols, they can capture every essence of life in this immense nation.

Shaolin:

But China is shaped not just by its land. This country has also a history of unparalleled riches, for this is home to the oldest continuous civilization on earth. Liu Jie Feng is a Kung Fu master. He spends his days passing on this ancient Chinese art to China's younger generations. "I feel it has been my greatest honor to devote my life to martial art. However much I study martial art, there is always more to learn. You can never attain perfection." To strengthen the spirit in the hands of students, Master Liu makes them beat great urns of freezing water. But what place do these ancient rituals have in a China that is now hurtling towards the future?

Master Liu has made his home far from China's teeming urban centers. Songshan Mountain is one of the holiest and most spiritual places in all China. Over the centuries, Buddhist monks have built countless monasteries, temples and shrines on its slopes. And more than 500 years ago, these same monks invented the arts of Kung Fu. Originally Kung Fu was devised as a means of defense from marauding bandits, but now Kung Fu (or Wushu as it is known in China) has developed to include hundreds of different styles of combat, using a vast range of weapons or just simple bare hands.

Master Liu has 30 students under his wing. Every day he puts them through a rigorous and exhausting training regime. "Learning Wushu is like writing Chinese calligraphy. Each movement has to be practiced individually many times before they can be joined together in a sequence." The most talented of Master Liu's students is 17-year-old Xiao Cui. "He is a great teacher. And we all admire him. It was destiny that brought us together." "Xiao Cui has been a follower of mine for 5 years now. His technique is excellent and he shows talent in every area of martial arts." Master Liu's academy is in the grounds of Songshan's finest Buddhist monastery. This is reputed to be one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in all China. Here he and his students live in a community of fifty monks, praying and offering devotions to Buddha in a rhythm unchanged in two thousand years. "I think practicing martial arts without Buddhism is a rather empty experience. I teach my students that martial art is a path towards self-improvement, not a tool to be used for fighting and confrontation."

Every day at dawn, Master Liu sets Xiao Cui to a test of the spirit that will push him to the limit. Now he must smash a brick with his bare hands, a task would shatter the bones of an untrained novice. "When you achieve internal harmony, you can raise your spirits up and be full of strength. But if you are distracted, you will lack the concentration needed for martial arts." In order to give his fingers the strength of iron, Xiao Cui must control what is called his Qi or life force, a spiritual energy that Buddhists believe runs through all living things. "When I am preparing to break the brick, I need to bring Qi into my fingers. I collect Qi from all around me and then focus it into my finger tips. When all my strength is gathered in my finger tips, I bring my hand down on the brick, and the brick will break."

When Xiao Cui meets his master's challenges high in the far monastery, only 2 miles away, Kung Fu is forging in a new modern identity. This is Wushu city, an entire town devoted to the training of martial arts. There are dozens of academies with tens of thousands of students. Here there is no Buddhism, no prayer, no ritual. Children and teenagers travel here from all over China for one simple reason: to get a job. A certificate from one of these schools can lead to a position in the army or police, a well-paid career for life.

And Xiao Cui is no different. For all the time he spends at the monastery, it is here in the modern world that he sees his future. "Would you like to become a Buddhist monk?" "Sorry?" "Would you like to become a monk?" "It's not something I've ever wanted to do with my life. I would like to be a martial art coach or a security guard or maybe join the army." "Although he has made some progress in spiritual learning, Xiao Cui is only interested in practicing his skills in martial art." It seems that Master Liu's way of life, founded on the seclusion of spirituality, has less and less appeal for China's new generations. But even as the country changes around him, he is still grateful that at least he has the chance to pass on at least some of his knowledge. "I believe Xiao Cui is good at it. No matter what happens in the future, I hope he will keep alive the tradition of martial arts."

At the start of every school day, 240 million Chinese school children gather to salute their country's flag, and to sing a national anthem that is filled with the spirit of ambition. (Children singing national anthem.)

China is the most populous nation on earth, 1.3 billion people, nearly double the population of all of Europe and the US combined. Every minute, another 34 Chinese children are born. Every year, the population grows by another seven million. The Chinese have taken extraordinary measures to manage their vast population. In 1979, they instituted a one child policy to make it illegal for anyone to have two or more children. The one-child policy has been recently relaxed, but not before the birth of an entire generation of only children, a generation that carries all the ambition of their family and their nation on their young shoulders.

Jin Yang:

In 2008, China's youngest generation will have the chance to prove their talent, their spirit and dedication on behalf of their country, for China will be hosting the Olympic Games for the first time ever. "We all want to be an Olympic champion, we all want to be the best in the world, I very much hope that I will be a member of the Olympic team, I hope I can win a gold medal for China." Like almost all of her generation, Jin Yang is an only child, but at 12 years old, she is already one of China's top athletes. Out of the tens of millions China's school children across the country, she is one of an elite of just 300, who spends their days here in Beijing's Shijiahai gymnastics school. Here children as young as 4 are in training 6 days a week 6 hours a day. Jin Yang and her fellow gymnasts were first picked out for Olympic glory when they were barely out of diapers. "I was only about 2 years old. I was in nursery school then. A coach called Cheng Bo came to our nursery to choose candidates for our gymnastic team. We were too young to really know what was going on. When it was my turn, I just jumped as high as I could."

So intense is Jin Yang's training, she and her fellow gymnasts have to board at school, even if their family homes are in Beijing. "This is Wang Yanan's bed. Her family is quite loaded, but she is a bit of a slow coach. I don't like her very much. I really don't like her, she is the messiest person in our room. Her bed is always untidy. I don't like her, she is

lazy, she doesn't even wash her socks. This is from my parents. They kept it at home, and now my father has washed it at home and brought it here for me, so whenever I feel homesick, I just cuddle my bear and think of them." At Jin Yang's family home, on the other side of Beijing, her father has build a shrine to his only child. "Naturally I will be more than delighted if she could win an Olympic gold in 2008. These are all the prizes my daughter has already won, but beyond these, I am convinced she can win even greater prizes." In just a few weeks, Jin Yang will have to perform in front of China's Olympic selectors. They will then decide if she could be good enough for the Olympic squad. She has been put on a punishing training regime, especially for one so young, but Jin Yang is spurred on by a powerful sense of national pride. "I am proud to be Chinese. If I win a world championship title, I will not only be happy for myself, I will also have won honor for my country, and everyone will be happy then."

Meanwhile, far to the south in Shanghai, it's evening rush hour. And window-cleaner Sun Feng is chasing his version of the Chinese dream. "I just want to buy a car, any car will do. Loads of rich people started out with nothing - that could be me. I would feel so proud if I was driving this car. I would be somebody. But there is no way I can afford this car right now. I cannot even think about it." Shanghai has yet to deliver the fortune that Sun Feng dreamed of when he first arrived here. And for now he must save what little he earns to feed his young family far away.

If there is one thing that China famous for, the world over, it is its cuisine. And the city of Beijing is China's culinary capital. Beijing's cooks use every last morsel of nature's bounty, to create a menu that has countless thousands of dishes. Here it seems that everything can be made into something. In one of Beijing's largest restaurants, a hundred chefs are working the evening shift. Noodles are being lovingly prepared by hand, while terrapins and turtles are being boiled in savory stock, and then served with a spicy sauce. Snakes are being skinned, chopped and deep fried. Larva and grubs follow them into the same pan and chefs prepare cuts that would horrify a typical Westerner. For the Chinese, it is the fish's head that is the greatest delicacy; the fish's cheeks, the daintiest bite. The citizens of Beijing put food at the centre of every social occasion, and also professional life, for no deal can be sealed without a banquet to celebrate.

But Beijing is not just China's culinary capital; it is also the ancient political heart of China. At its centre stands the Forbidden City. The Forbidden City is an extraordinary complex of over 800 palaces, temples and halls. For 5 centuries, it was home to China's mighty emperors and the centre of all government and rule. As well as home to the emperor, the Forbidden City was barracks and arsenal, the home of the elite imperial bodyguard. And here the emperor's skilled workers developed weapons of immense sophistication and craftsmanship. Most extraordinary was the Chinese military bow, light, durable, immensely accurate and powerful.

Yang Fuxi:

Even today, the skills of China's elite imperial bow-makers are viewed with awe and admiration. Just one man has managed to keep alive their knowledge in the 21st century - knowledge that almost cost him his life. Yang Fuxi is the last in 17 generations of imperial bow makers. "Every craft must have its secret which should not be revealed to outsiders. In fact, the whole process of making a bow involves nearly 200 steps." But all of Yang Fuxi's knowledge and skills were almost lost forever. In 1966 Chairman Mao stood at the balcony of the Forbidden City and declared a Cultural Revolution. He ordered that everything old and traditional was to be obliterated. Regiment of red guards swept across the country in an orgy of destruction, and anyone associated with learning and the arts or crafts became a target for humiliation and even execution. Beijing's ancient guild of bow makers were a prime target. "I was 8 when the Cultural Revolution started. I still remember it vividly. No one who has experienced that period can forget that nightmare." Yang Fuxi's family lost everything, except for just one bow that the family managed to preserve at extraordinary risk. "We broke it in half. We wrapped the broken bow in oil paper and stuffed it into a wooden pile to hide it from the red guards. If somebody had pointed to us alleging that we had hidden a bow in our house, the whole family would have been executed as a result of that allegation. And this is no exaggeration. It was as if everyone had gone insane, totally mad."

It was two decades before the bitter legacy of the Cultural Revolution began to fade. Two decades before Yang Fuxi dared to repair that one remaining bow and to persuade his father to teach him how to make bows himself. "The best part of the whole process is

when you are just about to fit the string on the bow. Up until that moment, you simply cannot know how the bow will turn out. By the moment I see a beautiful bow come into being, there are no words that can truly express my feelings of happiness in that moment. Many people ask me why I continue to protect the craft of bow making and what use are my bows in this modern world. It is a question of continuity. A bow is not just a bow, it is history, culture - its value goes far beyond a bow.”

Great Wall:

If there is one single monument to Chinese history and culture, it is of course the Great Wall. 600 years ago, the emperors of the Ming dynasty decided to close off the entire northern border of China, behind 4000 miles of massive brick and earth battlements. A million laborers were put to work building through some of the most hostile and mountainous terrain on earth. They built a wall wide enough for 5 horses to ride abreast along its length while 1000 garrison towers accommodated over 100,000 troops. China's Wall still stands as one of mankind's greatest achievements.

Vincent Luo:

But 6 centuries on, the same sense of scope and ambition that built the Great Wall is again being felt across China. There are currently more construction projects in China than anywhere else in the world. Vincent Luo is a man at the heart of this building boom. One of the wealthiest men in China, he owns a construction empire that stretches from one end of the country to the other. Currently he is redeveloping 5 entire blocks of downtown Shanghai, offering not Chinese but new Western styles of design and living. “When it is all finished, this will be a very very big landscape area, indoor swimming pool and a very nicely decorated and fitted out club house for the residents. You come in here; you can see the living room with the very nice view of the man-made lake that we built over here. On that side, is Corporate Avenue where the top Grade A offices will be built. And there is Xintiandi. ”

Xin Tian Di is Vincent's favorite development. A low rise retail complex nestling in the very midst of his towering apartment blocks, built right next door to what was China's first communist party headquarters. Vincent shipped in an American architect, Ben

Wood to lend the development a distinctly Western feel. Together they turned a beaten-up slum into a sleek shopping area that would not seem out of place in any Western capital. But from the start, Xintiandi was always more than just a shopping centre for Vincent and Ben. They were selling a whole new lifestyle imported from the West. "A few years back, when we were planning this, people all thought I was crazy. Al fresco dining is something unheard of in Shanghai. My Shanghai friends all told me, there is no way, no way we're gonna sit outside. And now everybody wants to sit outside when the weather is good." "Up until we created a place like this, it was only bright lights and round tables. You know, the typical Chinese restaurant is a round table full of people, you know, you can't whisper nice things to your girlfriend. You know, you can't. That didn't happen, now it happens." "People are starting to appreciate life, they want to have something like this, that's why Shanghai people are so proud of Xintiandi."

But high above Xintiandi's teeming restaurants and bars, window cleaner SF is still hard at work. Many of Shanghai's companies demand that their windows are cleaned at night to avoid disturbing their staff in the working day. For SF, Vincent Luo's brave new world of al fresco dining has little appeal. "Back in my hometown of Taizhou, I've been to lots of places. And there is nowhere I didn't dare go. Xin Tian Di is a place only for the rich. I cannot afford to come here. I cannot buy anything here. This bottle of beer costs 40 yuan here. I can buy one myself in a corner shop for just 2. Here it is ten, even twenty times the price." For SF, like millions of others, Shanghai's glittering lights promised wealth and success, but he is increasingly unconvinced by the new world that he has found here. "The typical Chinese way of life is very simple. A plate of vegetables, a bowl of soup and a helping of rice. That is enough for me. But if everyone wants lots of luxuries, then how much money is enough. I think that if China continues to develop in this way, we will lose our simple way of life."

Huai Han:

Far to the north of Shanghai, the sun is still setting on China's furthest frontier. Out of the Mongolian grassland, the horses have been led back to their paddocks. Traditional nomad's tents are being put up for the night. Huai Han and his family are preparing a feast of freshly slaughtered lamb cooked on an open fire. As darkness falls, they settle

down to an evening of traditional festivities including folk songs performed by traditional Mongolian throat singers. "We Mongolians are fun-loving people. We love to get together, to drink, to dance, to recite poems, and sing epic stories, to express our feelings." As the Mongolian moonshine begins to flow, Huai Han expresses his feelings about the time of change that is sweeping across China. "I am really worried about the effect of modernization, in one day, our pastures are replaced by city, or worse a mine, I would be totally devastated. The traditional Mongolian life style is described as a life on horse-back. We should continue that traditional life and never abandon it." As the Mongolian band plays on into the night, HH and his family feel they are looking out into an uncertain future. "If our distinctive way of life of herding animals ever becomes just a memory, or something in the museum, that will be the end. Our way of life would be extinguished."

All across China, the pace of change is being felt. In Beijing, it's morning rush hour. 30 years ago, almost no one owned a private car in China. Now there are 20 million, and more than 600 new vehicles are joining Beijing's streets every day. By the time of the Olympic Games in 2008, the number of cars in Beijing is expected to top 3 million and 200 miles of new road are being laid to prepare for the expected flood of visitors. Everything must be complete in less than 2 years.

In Beijing's Shijiahai Gymnastic Academy, the clock is also ticking for 12-year-old Jin Yang. Six days a week, six hours a day, she is in training. Her goal: to win a place on China's gymnastic squad. There is just 3 weeks to go before the first round of selection. Here there is no time for play, for gossip in the playground, no candy, no treats, nothing of the ordinary life of a 12-year-old, except for one snatched moment on the weekend. Every Saturday afternoon, Jin Yang's father takes his daughter out for a few hours of fun. Jin Yang's favourite day out is a ride on the biggest roller coaster in Beijing. "She loves anything that's thrilling. I think it is all got something to do with the gymnast, she has got guts from her training. Maybe sometimes she gets a bit afraid for a moment, but once she's used to it, she is fine." "It's fun and exciting. You come high to the top and then next thing you know, you are diving down. While I am at the top of the roller coaster, it feels just like being on the parallel bars in the gym."

But even in their few hours together, Jing Yang's father keeps his daughter on a strict training regime. Like so many Chinese children, Jin Yang is an only child and she has always been the focus of her father's ambitions. "When I first started training, no one in the family wanted me to continue, they all thought it was too harsh for me, except my dad." "For all the hard work she has put into her training, from the bottom of my heart, I am really proud of what she has got to, but I cannot feel comfortable when I think about how hard I was on her when she was not achieving her best. Once after the Chinese New Year's holiday was a bit too long, she said, Daddy, I do not ever want to go back to the academy, but I told her that if she gave up, all her hard work would have been wasted. I then beat her. I shouldn't have been so hard on her when she was so young." At six o'clock Sunday evening, Jin Yang has to head back to the academy. It is the only life she has ever known.

All the students at Shijiahai have to learn hardship. They train with sprained and broken limbs, when their hands are blistered and bleeding. JY is still haunted by the memory of her early days. "When I was little, I was really, really scared. Most of all, I was scared of being forced to stretch my legs over and over again, Sometimes I felt I was doing the same thing all afternoon." Like all the students, JY has regular check-ups with the academy physician. "Gymnasts have the hardest training of all athletes, they train beyond normal endurance, more than body can bear. Complete freedom from pain is impossible, so our children must have developed a very high pain threshold. Mentally they must also become incredibly tough." But with only days to go before the first round selection for the national team, it is clear to Jin Yang what it is at stake, the culmination of ten years' pain and hardship and her father's greatest dreams. "I'd be so happy if I made it to the national team, but I think my dad would be even happier. Dad says if life is easy, there is nothing to remember when you get old. He says only if there is bitterness with the sweetness, tears as well as smiles, will I have great memories to look back on." But if Jin Yang's father has trained his daughter to a life of competition and hardship, her experience is not that different to millions of other Chinese.

Eliza:

Xiaojian, or Eliza as she prefers to be known, is typical of Shanghai's new middle urban classes. Educated and ambitious, she has started out her career at a Shanghai computer firm. But China's fast population means 12 million new faces join the job market every year. Eliza knows she has to fight on her hands if she is to stand any chance of promotion and new opportunity. "Every year there are so many new graduates and outsiders coming to Shanghai, then when you apply for a job, you are not chosen for your qualifications and work, but because of the way you look." "These days there is a beauty economy in China. If two girls have the same qualifications, the one who is better looking would have a better chance of promotion, even though she may be less capable." Clearly it is going to take more than just hard graft for Eliza to get ahead. For thousands of years of Chinese history, health, well-being and appearance have been the province of traditional herbalists.

Eliza has come to one of the oldest traditional pharmacies in Shanghai.

(Doctor's explanation in subtitles.)

Traditional Chinese medicine treats both the body and the spirit with almost 2500 different herbs and natural substances. Dr. Jin Ming has something for everything. "Chinese wolfberries are used to replenish the Yin. They are also used in traditional Chinese beauty therapy to improve the skin around the eyes, which can become wrinkled and dry with age. Peach kernels are used to invigorate the circulation. In traditional Chinese medicine, we often also use insects, like centipedes, which reduce blemishes." For Eliza's mother, Dr. Jin Ming and his potions would have been her only option. But China is, of course, changing.

All across Shanghai, countless new surgery clinics have opened their doors, offering their services, not to counter the effect of aging but to help young professionals like Eliza in the pursuit of their careers. Eliza is going to have a complete facial restructure, her nose remodeled, her chin realigned to make her face symmetrical and a fold inserted into her eyelids make them look more like those of a Westerner. "I know my eyes look typically Chinese, and I am beautiful, however, people here think differently, that is why I am going for this double eye-lid surgery, this way I would look more like a Barbie doll, she is so lovely." Eliza is wheeled into the operating room for the first series of

procedures. Outside her boyfriend and her mother wait nervously. But it is not just the pressures of the job market that has driven Eliza to the operating table. Just like Jin Yang, Eliza is her family's only child. "She is all I have, and I have high expectations of her. Maybe I have passed this on to her. I have wanted the best for her from a very young age. I think she was under pressure even when she was little." After 2 hours, Eliza emerges from surgery. It will be another 2 days before the bandages can come off. "People do all kinds of things in order to be successful. Having this surgery was something I thought I should do. If you can succeed in the end, any effort is worthwhile." "It is hard to tell right now, but I think it was worthwhile. Now that it's done, things will be better than before, won't they?" But even if Eliza finds the success she and her mother so desperately crave, China still has unexpected pitfalls in store.

Zhou Lin:

Police superintendent Zhou Lin is stationed in the far West of China. She is on her morning training routine, a hard-balled of military-modified martial arts. Zhou Lin the first woman to work on the frontline of China's Gansu Province drug squad. "I may be a woman on the outside, I may appear to be very gentle, but I am a lot tougher than I look. I am just as capable as my male colleagues and I've got the guts to face down hardened criminals. If I am chosen to confront a criminal, I never hesitate and always follow that order." Gansu Province is in the West of China, where 600 years ago the Ming Emperors began their 4 thousand mile Great Wall. They were confident that their mighty construction could make China safe from any invasion, but it can do little to hold back the threats of the modern world. Drugs are the new scourge of modern China. As the country has opened up to the rest of the World, the number of the heroin addicts has exploded. There are over a quarter of million Chinese on a forced government detox programmes like this. And overall it is estimated there are now between 7 and 10 million addicts, a tenfold increase in just 5 years. "China's open door policy was introduced with the goal of bringing in new and advanced technology and also, to bring in other positive forces in the development of our country, but it is inevitable that this also brings in socially undesirable and destructive elements with it." On a narrow back road, Zhou Lin is heading up an armed police road block. Every year, thousands of kilos of heroine are being smuggled into China along back roads like this. After 3 hours, Zhou Lin and her

team strike lucky. They pull over a taxi driver. A series of crumpled plastic bags are founded underneath his seat. And he is carrying more cash than a driver should earn in 3 months. "We have just caught a suspect in possession of drugs. We have got two wraps of heroine and 3000 yuan in cash." It is a significant haul and the penalties for drug smuggling in China are harsh. This man now faces the death penalty. "I have no doubt that drugs do serious damage. I am very proud of doing this job. By getting rid of the drugs in society, I feel like I am making a contribution to my country and eliminating the dark side of human society."

But Zhou Lin's greatest challenge is not dealing with Gansu's criminal classes. As a successful professional woman, she is also having to confront thousands of years of Chinese tradition, a code that places women not on the police frontline but at home, attending the family. "My parents are getting old, so I do all that I can to help them. You do what you have to do. I am exhausted after a day's work and when I get home, all I want to do is rest, but I can't leave the housework to them, knowing they are old and not so strong, so I do what a daughter is supposed to do." Zhou Lin's mother worries that her daughter, for all her success, has chosen a wrong path of life. "I am so proud of my daughter, because she is so devoted to her career. But I don't think a job like that is suitable for girls. Simple people like us should set up a small family of their own. But she is on her own and still single. I am very worried about my daughter." But it is not simply the older generation who does not understand Zhou Lin's outlook. Out here in China's far west, a woman with career ambitions still has to fight for acceptance. "I have dated a few guys in the past couple of years, but none of them have understood why I am so devoted to my job. It is painful to think about, I have made real sacrifices for this job. My boyfriend or husband should be pleased that I am doing something meaningful. I really hope that one day I will find Mr. Right, a man that will understand and care for me."

China's story of modernization has transformed a millions of lives in countless different ways, but there is still one moment in every year that brings the entire nation together. 800 million people are on the move, all across the nation. It is the biggest human migration on earth - they are all heading home to see friends and family, and celebrate the biggest festival in the Chinese calendar. This is Chinese New Year. Migrant worker

Sun Feng has been cleaning windows in Shanghai for an entire year. Now he is going back to his family with the profit of his labour stuffed in his pocket. When he left home, his only daughter was just a young baby. He has got no idea what she will make of him. "I most want to see my kid, she is only three and she has not seen me for a year. She will be very shy. I can't wait to see how much she has grown." All across the country, the Chinese are preparing for the holiday season with rituals and customs centuries old. Banners are posted on every doorway, inviting in good luck and prosperity. Parades wind their ways through the towns, large and small. And at the great port of Hong Kong are in full swing for the biggest celebration of them all, a vast firework display, the largest ever in the city: 2.5 tons of explosives on four barges across the harbour.

After a 6 hour train journey, Sun Feng arrives in his hometown of Taizhou. He is carrying gifts for every member of the household. Sun Feng has waited a long time to be reunited with his daughter, but he doesn't get the welcome he was hoping for. "I was away for so long that my daughter didn't recognize me. I was a stranger to her. When I got inside the house, she did not understand who I was. I felt quite shocked."

Far to the South, in the people's stadium in De Zhou city, there is no time for gifts and greetings. Twelve-year-old Jin Yang is about to face the biggest test of her life. 132 young athletes from all over China have been gathered behind closed doors to face the toughest judges in the country. This is the first round of selection for the national gymnastics team and 2008 Olympic squad. Jin Yang has been entered in 4 events, the horse, the floor, the beam and the bars. Unknown to her, her father has also travelled over a thousand miles from their home in Beijing to be here. He cannot bear to miss this moment. "She is really going to be feeling the pressure, more psychologically than physically. She has never competed at such a high level before, and she has never had to perform all four disciplines, but I think the psychological demand is much higher than the physical one." Jin Yang's coach has been working with her for 3 years. He knows just how much is at stake here. "If she fails today, it could destroy her confidence, which will have serious impact on her performance in the selection process."

This is the moment when Jin Yang will discover if she has got what it takes to compete on behalf of an entire nation. After two hours waiting on the floor, Jin Yang is called forward. She bows to the judges who are about to decide her fate, although she has no idea her father is here. He is nervously filming her every move. Jin Yang's first event is the horse. Speed, height and grace in landing are what the judges are looking for. Her jump is perfect but her landing is heavily faulted. Jin Yang launches immediately into her floor routine. She quickly finds her rhythm. Jin Yang's floor performance will earn an excellent score.

But next is the beam. This is one routine she has been dreading. "When I am on the beam, it's like standing on the head of nail or walking on springs. It is not that I am bad, I just get really scared when I am up there." The pressure begins to tell. On her first forward somersault, disaster strikes. Jin Yang climbs straight back onto the beam. She cannot possibly give up now, but her concentration has been badly shaken. It is a terrible performance. It could seriously damage her chances of selection. But Jin Yang has one more opportunity to prove herself, on the uneven bars. If she is to have any chance of getting through, she now has to produce a nearly perfect performance. Under huge pressure, she holds her nerve. It is a superb performance. "She did pretty well, not bad at all." But after her early mistakes, there is no guarantee that this will be enough to see Jin Yang through. As judges compile and compare everyone's results, she receives one small consolation.

Neither her father nor her coach pull their punches. Jin Yang has to wait a full 2 hours before the judges have evaluated all the scores. On a notice board in the back corridor are their final verdicts. Father and daughter have no idea what to expect. Jin Yang's performance on the bars has scored enough to put her through to the next round of selection. She is one step closer to her dream. "I never stop thinking about the Olympics in 2008, especially the moment when I hold up a gold medal. Sometimes I get tears in my eyes when I think about it. But I know I will have to take it one day at a time." For Jin Yang, a childhood sacrifice for a chance of the Olympic glory is a price worth pain. "If you do sit around, you won't get anywhere. Life won't give you a gold medal for nothing."

As New Year Eve falls across China, the entire nation is preparing to celebrate its dreams and ambitions for the coming year. In Shanghai, Eliza is already one step closer to realizing her aspirations. Her cosmetic surgery is complete. "Generally speaking, I feel much better than I did before the surgery. I am much happier now. My surgery has boosted my confidence. My new looks are helping me in my career and my private life." In Taizhou, far from Shanghai, Sun Feng's wife is still playing out a traditional woman's role. She is single-handedly cooking a 22 course New Year's feast for her family. But when she cooks, Sun Feng's wife reveals that she also has an eye on greater things, "My dream is to be a super woman. Nowadays, since the reforms, women can run their own businesses and make money for themselves."

At the same moment, in the great city of Hong Kong, the entire population is heading to the water front, as the clock ticks down towards the biggest firework display ever seen in the city. In Taizhou, Sun Feng has lit the lanterns hanging over the door. He and his father are setting up their own, somewhat smaller display, for fireworks are a another great tradition of the Chinese New Year, another way to frighten off evil spirits and bring luck for the coming year.

As the New Year turns, it seems that all China has been swept up in a storm of change: a tempest of shifting values of growing wealth, of new opportunities, a tempest that is reshaping the lives of everyone of its 1.3 billion citizens. Some carry the nation's burden on their slight shoulders, while others have already triumphed, building empire of their own. Some are fighting to build a new nation, secure and safe, as others struggle to preserve a five thousand year history. For some there is now prosperity never seen before, while for others wealth and success must still lie in the future. Whether or not every one of China's citizens can ever realize their dreams, perhaps the difference in the new China is that everyone can now have one.

3.0 China Revealed production team

Narrator: James Spader

Writer/producer/director: Cassian Harrison

Executive producer: Richard Bradley

Associate producer: Marcus Jones

Editor: James Gold

Cinematography: Lee Pulbrook

Director:



In the production team, the director plays a decisive role in making the story selections, choosing the film's contents and perspective, etc. *China Revealed* was written and directed by a Western film maker, Cassian Harrison, who is currently working for the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) as a Commissioning Executive Producer. Before joining the BBC, he had a diverse career as an award winning producer/director and executive producer working across genres including history, science and current affairs. He also founded the interactive department of Lion Television. *Beneath the Veil*, one of his current affair documentaries, has won an Emmy, a Peabody and a BAFTA (British Academy for Television and Art) award. For the Discovery Atlas series, he has been the writer and director for *China Revealed*, the writer for *India Revealed*, and executive producer for *South Africa Revealed*.

The target documentary case study is produced by All3 Media, who produces documentaries for the Discovery Channel mainly targeting Western audiences. In order to fit the demanding style of Discovery programmes and satisfy the appetite of Discovery's target audience, the programme must have been filmed in a way familiar to them. To better understand the film, it is very much necessary to initially obtain a perception of significant American values.

4.0 Information about DVD release:

DVD Release Date: January 30, 2007

Run Time: 102 minutes

Production manager: Charlotte Spencer

Sound recordists: Mark Roberts, Grant Lawson

Camera assistant: Danny Lai

Dubbing mixer: Nick Fry

Graphic design: 422 South

Post production facility: The Farm Group London

Program consultant: Xinran

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

1.1 Einführung:

Der stete Wandel in der Wahrnehmung des Reichs der Mitte durch den Westen ging einher mit dessen historischen Entwicklung in den letzten zwei Jahrtausenden. In der Zeit des frühen römischen und griechischen Reichs brachte der aufblühende Handel über die Seidenstraße die Gegenwart des "Seidenlandes" dem Westen zur Kenntnis. Das Reich der Mitte wurde in der orientalischen Welt, in weiter Entfernung von der westlichen Zivilisation, als abgeschiedenes, geheimnisvolles und reiches Land verortet. Insgesamt kann man sagen, dass die Wahrnehmung Chinas in der frühen historischen die einer Welt von Fantasie und Legenden war. Es wurde als „Paradies“ betrachtet. In der römischen Vorstellung war das geheimnisvolle Land reich an Gold und Silber. Die Menschen aus dem Land der Seide lebten ein angenehmes Leben im Überfluss. Wertvoller Seide konnten sich hier der Vorstellung nach auch gewöhnlichen Menschen leisten, wohingegen es im römischen Reich ein teures Luxusprodukt war.

Im Mittelalter positionierten die Schriften von Marco Polo das Reich der Mitte als ein Land mit unfassbarem Reichtum und einem weisen, vom Volk geliebten Herrscher. Die Menschen lebten dort angeblich ein friedvolles und opulentes Leben. Das Königreich wurde als derartig ausgedehnt und reich, wie ein Paradies auf Erden portraitiert, so dass viele Europäer von seiner Existenz nicht überzeugt waren. Angezogen von diesem orientalischen Märchenland und motiviert durch die hohen Profite, die aus dem Seidenhandel gezogen werden können, strömten westliche Händler in das legendäre Königreich. Im späten 14. Jahrhundert sank die Seidenstraße, auf Grund des Aufstiegs einer bedrohlichen islamischen Macht in Zentraleuropa, wieder in Vergessenheit.

Gegen Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts entdeckte Christopher Columbus einen neuen Kontinent. Damit begann eine Ära der Erkundung und ein neues Kapitel in der europäischen Geschichte. Die ebenfalls neu entdeckte Seeroute nach Asien nutzte eine Reihe von Missionaren in der Hoffnung die Bürger des chinesischen Reichs zum Christentum zu bekehren. Sie kamen mit einer völlig anderen Perspektive als ihre Vorgänger in das Land, von welcher aus sie das große Reich und seine Traditionen,

Bräuche, Philosophie sowie Staatsführung untersuchten. Gleich blieb die Wahrnehmung des Königreichs als Land mit großen Rohstoffvorkommen n. Der Missionar Mendoza beschreibt seinen Eindruck mit den Worten: "Besides all this, it is very rich of mines of gold and silver, and other metals...There is found great store of pearls in this kingdom"¹. Zu dieser Zeit, richtete sich die volle Aufmerksamkeit des Westens auf Seide, Porzellan und andere wertvolle materielle Güter die in China hergestellt wurden. Von dem ebenfalls nach Europa importierten kulturellen Gedankengut zur Staatsführung und philosophischen Prinzipien wurde keine Notiz genommen.

Im 17. Jahrhundert erreichte die monarchische Herrschaft in Europa ihren Höhepunkt. Eine Sehnsucht nach der Vergangenheit erfasste vorallem Frankreich. Die anhaltende Beliebtheit von chinesischen Materialien und Waren wie Seide und Porzellan löste in Europa die Imitation von chinesischen Gütern aus. Zur gleichen Zeit wie materielle Güter aus dem Reich der Mitte in Europa hohe Popularität genossen wurde auch die traditionelle Philosophie des Konfuzianismus beliebt.

Während der Ära der imperialen Expansion, in Folge derer die erste industrielle Revolution auftrat, war Europa in der Position seine Produktivität dramatisch auszuweiten und zum damals mächtigsten Kontinent der Welt aufzusteigen. Um die Wirtschaft weiter zu entwickeln, war ein offeneres und demokratischeres politisches Umfeld notwendig. Daraus resultierte in den meisten europäischen Ländern der Sturz der feudalen Regime. Das Reich des Himmels dagegen verblieb in vollständiger Isolation und verpasste die großen Umbrüche die in Europa stattfanden. Das Ansehen des chinesischen Kaiserreichs in Europa begann zu Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts abzusinken. Die Stagnation führte das Kaiserreich in den Verfall und schließlich zur Besetzung durch die westlichen Imperialmächte. Im Gegensatz zu seiner ruhmreichen Reputation früherer Jahrhunderte war die Zeit von Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in das frühe 20. Jahrhundert eine Ära der Erniedrigung für China. Robert Fortune, ein schottischer Botaniker der China bereiste, nahm an, dass das Land einst blühend und sehr zivilisiert gewesen sein müsste. Allerdings war es zum Zeitpunkt seiner Reise "in a

¹ González de Mendoza, Juan 1854: 18

state of decay or in ruins"². Diese Ansicht wurde auch von vielen britischen Diplomaten sowie amerikanischen Missionaren geteilt.

Im 19. Jahrhundert war das Bild Chinas in Europa nicht länger das eines wohlhabenden, zivilisierten Landes wie in früheren Zeiten. Stattdessen hatte sich das Bild eines zerfallenden, nur halb-zivilisierten Landes festgesetzt. Diese konzeptionelle Umbildung war mit dem wirtschaftlichen, wissenschaftlichen und kulturellen Erfolg Europas im 19. Jahrhundert und des daraus resultierenden steigenden Selbstbewusstseins und dem wachsenden Stolz auf die eigene Zivilisation begründet. Die Menschen glaubten, dass die Zivilisation Europas überlegen sei und die chinesische in vielen Facetten überholt habe. Der komplexe Igemix mit dem die chinesischen Bevölkerung betrachtet wurde, Schwung von einem Extrem in das andere über. Trotz der Tatsache, dass die Chinesen von Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts hauptsächlich als bedrohliche Rasse (gelbe Gefahr) vom Westen wahrgenommen wurden, gab es auch einige positive Eindrücke. Diese bezogen sich insbesondere auf die Zeit des 2. Weltkrieges, in der China sich gegen die japanische Invasion zur Wehr setzte. Dies wurde vom Westen sehr positiv aufgenommen.

Seit der Gründung der Volksrepublik China in Oktober 1949 hat das Land eine Reihe von dramatischen Veränderungen sowohl in der Politik als auch in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft erlebt. Die Einführung des kommunistischen Systems und die enge Beziehung mit der früheren Sowjetunion erweckten eine allgemeine Abwehrhaltung des Westens gegenüber China. Das Reich der Mitte wurde von jetzt an als potentielle Bedrohung und Feind des Westens gesehen. Dank des Besuchs von Präsident Nixon in der Volksrepublik und Chinas Politik der Öffnung, wie sie von Deng Xiaoping nach der Kulturrevolution angestoßen wurde, konnte dieses Stereotyp bis zu einem bestimmten Grad durch ein positiveres Bild ersetzt werden. Auf Grund der fortschreitenden Entwicklung, sowohl Chinas als auch der westlichen Welt, entwickelte sich das westliche Bild von China schlussendlich in ein sehr dynamisches und vielschichtiges Igemodel.

Wenn man über das sich mit der Zeit verändernde Bild Chinas im Westen zurückblickt,

² Fortune, Robert 1847: xiv

wirkt das Land wirklich wie ein "Kameleon", wie Professor Raymond Dawson aus Oxford argumentiert. Trotz dieser zahlreichen Veränderungen gibt es jedoch einige Konzepte die sich seit der Zeit des ersten Kontakts bis heute kaum verändert haben – zum Beispiel die Anerkennung der langen Geschichte Chinas, seiner einzigartigen Traditionen und der kulturellen Diversität. Wenn man die reichhaltigen historischen Quellen mit dem jeweiligen Bild Chinas im Westen kombinierter ergibt das ein dynamisches und vielschichtiges Model. das sich die westliche Bevölkerung zu Eigen gemacht hat.

In der gegenwärtigen Ära hat das rapide chinesische Wirtschaftswachstum die westliche Welt stark überrascht und zu dem China eine starke internationale Aufmerksamkeit gesichert. Als ein komplexes, entferntes und oft auch paradoxes Land, wird China heute mehr in seiner gesamten Breite und Tiefe betrachtet. Auf Basis der politischen Transformation der westlichen Welt kann man das westliche Bild von Chinas weitestgehend in zwei Kategorien geteilt: unkritisch oder kritisch. Wenn sich das politische Klima zwischen China und dem Westen entspannt, wird ein unkritischer, freundschaftlicher Ton in offiziellen Ansprachen, Nachrichtensendungen, Reportagen, akademischen Konferenzen etc. verwendet Der frühere Korrespondent der New York Times James Mann beschreibt China wie folgt:

"Don't be short-sighted. Keep your perspective. Things in China are headed in the right direction. Look at the remarkable changes on the streets. China's economy is thriving; the Chinese people are getting richer. The country's rapid economic growth will lead to far-reaching political change as well. Eventually increasing trade and prosperity will bring liberation and democracy to China."³

Aus seinen Worten können wir erkennen, dass der Prozess der Erschaffung eines positiven Bildes von China auf einer optimistischen Wahrnehmung von Land und Leuten beruht. Im Gegensatz dazu ist in der zweiten Kategorie der Ton bei weitem rauer und kritischer. Die Befürworter einer kritischen Betrachtung der Volksrepublik gehen davon aus, dass das Land für eine sehr lange Zeit unter der despotischen Ein-Parteien Herrschaft verbleiben wird und das "China is headed for some sort of disaster, such as an economic collapse or political disintegration, because it won't be able to maintain

³ Mann,James 2007:1-2

political stability while continuing on its current course.”⁴ Historisch hat sich das Bild des Reichs der Mitte im Westen über die verschiedenen Epochen gewandelt. Einstweilig kann das Bild des Westens von China als eine dynamische und vielschichtige Verwebung der beiden Szenarien betrachtet werden. Letztendlich müssen wir daraus schließen, dass das Bild eines Landes nie fix und damit unveränderlich sein wird.

Die Mischung von verschiedenen Bildern zu China existiert nicht länger nur auf dem Papier, sondern erscheint heutzutage auch häufig in den Bildmedien sowie anderen neuen Medien. In der Vergangenheit erreichten Informationen über China die westliche Öffentlichkeit hauptsächlich über Printmedien wie Bücher, Tageszeitungen und Magazine. Seit der Erfindung des Fernsehers in den späten 1920er Jahren hat die Welt eine starke Transformation, durch die steigende Verfügbarkeit von Informationen, erlebt. Die technische Entwicklung der Fotografie und des Fernsehens ermutigte zu einer mehr visuellen Darstellung dieses sehr alten und geheimnisvollen Landes. Dank der Zunahme an privaten TV-Geräten wurde der Austausch von Informationen bequemer und war mit weniger Zeitaufwand verbunden. Die Bürger mussten damit nicht länger ihre Häuser verlassen, um etwas über weltweiten Vorgänge zu lernen, sondern konnten alle Informationen über das Lesen der Tageszeitung oder das Ansehen von Fernsehbeiträgen gewinnen. In den letzten Jahren hat ein viertes Medium, das Internet, eine noch dominantere Position in der Verarbeitung und dem Austausch von Informationen eingenommen. Diese Dissertation wird über die Erarbeitung des historischen Bildes Chinas im Westen hinaus auch das Bild Chinas in den gegenwärtigen Bildmedien untersuchen.

Nach der Einführung die festlegt, dass das visuelle Bild Chinas eine der untersuchten Hauptquellen dieser Arbeit sein wird, muss ein spezifisches Medienformat für den Zweck einer tiefgreifenden Analyse gewählt werden. Im Dokumentarfilm ist es das Ziel des Regisseurs die Realität sowie begleitende Fakten seinen Zuschauern zugänglich zu machen. Gewöhnlich werden diese von unterschiedlichen Fernsehsendern gezeigt, um ein möglichst großes Publikum zu erreichen. Die in Dokumentationen gezeigten Bilder können als repräsentative betrachtet werden, da dieses Medium nach Authentizität

⁴ Mann, James 2007: 7

strebt. Auf dem Gebiet des Dokumentarfilms ist der Discovery Channel ohne Zweifel einer der Marktführer unter den privaten Fernsehstationen und erreicht über sein ausgedehntes Netzwerk ein breites Zielpublikum. „*China Revealed*“ beleuchtet, im Gegensatz zu anderen Dokumentationen, verschieden Aspekte der chinesischen Kultur im Übergang in ein neues Zeitalter. Die Vielzahl der behandelten Themen ermöglicht eine sehr gute Analysegrundlage. Aus diesem Grund wurde „*China Revealed*“ eine Dokumentation des Discovery Channels, welche 2006 zum ersten Mal ausgestrahlt wurde, für diese Dissertation als Hauptforschungsziel ausgewählt und im Anschluss an die Analyse des historischen Bildes Chinas in der westlichen Populärkultur bearbeitet. In dieser Fallstudie soll eine semiotische Analysemethode genutzt werden, um die Botschaften in der Dokumentation zu dekodieren und die Bedeutung jeder einzelnen signifikanten Sequenz detailliert zu interpretieren.

Wahrscheinlich mehr als alle andern sind die visuellen Medien durchdrungen von Symbolen und Kodes, die als Teil des Prozesses des Konsums von Kulturprodukten empfangen und interpretiert werden. In all diesen Formen enthalten die gesendeten Botschaften Symbole, die von den einzelnen Individuen, die den gleichen kulturellen Kontext teilen, identifiziert und interpretiert angenommen werden. Gemäß dem Sender-Empfänger-Modell von Stuart Hall, ist kulturelle Produktion ein Prozess des Verschlüsseln von Botschaften, während der Konsum ein Prozess des Dekodierens von Symbolen darstellt.⁵ Da die Dokumentation des Discovery Kanals einem erkennbaren amerikanischen Stil entspricht, soll die amerikanische Kultur und Ideologie einbezogen werden, um ein umfangreiches Verständnis von der Drehperspektive der Dokumentation zu gewinnen. Aus diesem Grund wird in dieser Arbeit erst ein tieferer Einblick in die relevanten amerikanischen Werte und Ideologien gegeben, insbesondere in den anziehendsten Traum – den amerikanischen Traum, der die Amerikaner dazu treibt ihre Ziele zu verfolgen und bis heute ein signifikantes Element des amerikanischen Wertesystems darstellt. Das Verständnis der amerikanischen Werte wird uns dabei

5 Hall, Stuart 1980: 20 Diese Sichtweise basiert auf den kulturellen Studien des britischen Kulturtheoretikers Stuart Hall, einem wesentlichen Repräsentanten der Birmingham School für kulturelle Studien. Seine Ansicht des Kodierens und Dekodierens wurde zu einem kulturelles Model entwickelt. Dieser Ansatz der textgebundenen Analyse zeigt den Empfangsprozess aus der Perspektive der Empfänger, die sich durch den einzigartigen kulturellen Hintergrund bestimmt. Das Sender-Empfänger-Modell beinhaltet fünf Kategorien: Produktion, Konsum, Rahmenbedingungen, Identität und Informationskanal (Medium).

helfen zu verstehen, aus welchem Grund der Handlungsstrang in bestimmten Sequenzen wie beschrieben entwickelt und warum bestimmte Menschen und ihre Geschichten für den Film ausgewählt wurden. Im Anschluss folgt die semiotische analytische Studie der Sequenzen von *China Revealed*, um ein breites Verständnis davon zu geben, wie das Bild Chinas in dieser Dokumentation dargestellt und geformt wird.

Über die vergangenen tausend Jahre gab es eine große Vielzahl von Stereotype über China, die von einer Abfolge von Reisenden, Missionaren und Journalisten geschaffen wurden. Diese historischen Bilder wurden von den Menschen weitergegeben, bis heute ein dynamischer Mix daraus entstanden ist, der die vielschichtigen Dimensionen abdeckt. In der Dokumentation *China Revealed* können wir diese Stereotype in den unterschiedlichen Sequenzen wiederfinden. Zehn unterschiedliche Geschichten von Vertretern verschiedenster sozialer Klassen werden in diesem Film genutzt, um als aufeinanderfolgende Sequenzen eine visuelle Dokumentation zu liefern, wie China die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung im 21. Jahrhundert gelang und welche Konsequenzen diese andauernde Wandlung mit sich bringt. Obwohl der Film sich auf die Gegenwart konzentriert, können wir trotzdem die historischen Stereotype der westlichen Welt über China identifizieren. Da eine Dokumentation wahrscheinlich nicht ausreicht um zu belegen, dass der dynamische Stereotypmix von historischen Bild stammt und häufig in modernen Filmen angenommen und präsentiert wird, sollen weitere drei Dokumentationen in dieser Dissertation schwerpunktartig beleuchtet werden.

1.2 Forschungslage

1.2.1 Westliche Stereotype gegenüber dem Reich der Mitte

Seit der Zeit der Griechen und Römer ist China im Westen unter verschiedenen Namen bekannt. Von „Sina“ im griechischen Reich, über „Kathay“ im Mittelalter zu „Reich der Mitte“ und „Chinesischem Kaiserreich“ im Zeitalter der Exploration und Expansion zu „China“ in der gegenwärtigen Periode. Gemeinhin kann man das westliche Chinabild in drei Kategorien einteilen. In der frühen Zeit des griechischen und römischen Reichs hatten die Menschen im Westen nur eine sehr vage Vorstellung von China als reiches und geheimnisvolles Land der Seide. Von ungefähr 1250 bis 1750 hatte das Reich der

Mitte eine sehr positive Reputation im Westen als Kaiserreich, das großen Reichtum und eine offene Gesellschaft besitzt. Im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert dagegen blickten die erwachenden europäischen Mächten auf China herab und verachteten das Land. Während dieser Zeit wurde China durch das Chinabild im Westen herabgestuft und vom Selbstbild abgetrennt. Wenn wir Edward Saids *Orientalism*, hinzuziehen, können wir erkennen, dass der Westen zwischen sich und den Chinesen als „andere“ unterschied. Gegen Ende des letzten Jahrhunderts, begann das erwachende China auf die westliche Welt bedrohlich zu wirken, da das bevölkerungsreiche Land sehr viele Ressourcen benötigt, die den Bedarf des Westens übertreffen.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass die Transformation des Chinabildes stark mit den politischen und sozialen Veränderungen im Westen zusammen hängt. Daher soll, statt das Chinabild an der eigenen sozialen Entwicklung des Landes festzumachen, eine Klassifizierung an Hand der größten Strömungen in der historischen Entwicklung des Westens durchgeführt werden. Die historischen Chinabilder des Westens sind hinreichend vielschichtig und ausgedehnt, um eine unerschöpfliche Quelle für die Darstellung Chinas in den zeitgenössischen Medien zu liefern. Natürlich befindet sich die Welt laufend in Bewegung und Wandel und damit verändert sich auch der Blickwinkel der medialen Berichterstattung zu China, um die Interessen des Westens zu wahren.

Seit jeher gab es Aufzeichnungen oder Bücher die entweder ein Bild vom Reich der Mitte im jeweiligen Zeitalter entwarfen oder eine Zusammenfassung des Chinabildes seit der Ära der Griechen und Römer bis zur Gegenwart des Verfassers vornahmen. Beispiele hierfür sind: *The Travels of Marco Polo: a Venetian in the thirteenth century* für das 13. Jahrhundert; Juan Mendozas *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation* sowie Matteo Ricci's *China in the Sixteenth Century* für das 16. Jahrhundert; Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *The General History of China* für das 18. Jahrhundert; John Barrow's *Travels in China* für das 19. Jahrhundert sowie viele weitere Aufzeichnungen, Reportagen, Journale, Gegenwartsliteratur und individuelle Äußerungen im Westen, die China und das chinesische Volk betreffen.

Das gezeigte Bild und die Beschreibungen des entfernten Landes variieren bedeutsam in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung. Diese schwanken zwischen einem positiven und negativen Extrem, was einige Literaten dazu antreibt die verschiedenen Chinabilder sowie ihre genaue Darstellungsform zu untersuchen. Adolf Reichwein schrieb über das Zusammentreffen von China und Europa, im speziellen im Kontext der Chinoiserie, in seinem Werk *China and Europe: Intellectual and artistic contacts in the 18th Century*. Oxfordprofessor Raymond Daswon definierte den Prozess des Umbaus des Chinabildes vom Altertum bis in die Anfänge des 20. Jahrhunderts in seinem Buch *Chinese Chameleon: an Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization*. Mit dem Erscheinen Amerikas auf der Weltbühne, nahmen die amerikanischen Literaturforschungen zum Chinabild ihren Anfang. *America views China: American Images of China Then and Now* herausgegeben von Goldstein, Isreal und Conroy fokussiert sich auf die Analyse des Chinabildes im historischen Kontext zu Beginn des letzten Jahrhunderts. Gegen Ende des 20. Jahrhundert beschreibt Colin Mackerrass in seinem Buch *The Western images of China* in chronologischer Reihenfolge historische Chinabilder von der antiken Zeit der Griechen und Römer bis in die Gegenwart. Dieses Werk ermöglicht dem Leser sich ein vollständiges Bild über die Veränderung des Chinabildes in den letzten Jahrtausenden zu machen.

Daneben gibt es eine Vielzahl von Büchern in denen das Reich der Mitte sowie das Bild des Landes aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven analysiert werden . Was meine Recherche diesbezüglich betrifft soll das Chinabild gemäß bestimmter Phasen im westlichen historischen Prozess und nicht nach den chinesischen Dynastien kategorisiert werden. Zur Kategorisierung werden die Ära der Griechen und Römer, Mittelalter, Exploration, Aufklärung, Imperiale Expansion, Jahrhundertwende, Kalter Krieg und Gegenwart unterschieden. Außerdem soll das westliche Bild Chinas während dieser verschiedenen Phasen in den Printmedien hauptsächlich als signifikante theoretische Grundlage betrachtet werden, aus welcher ein Iagemodel hergeleitet werden kann. Dieses Modell wird in den modernen visuellen Medien wie Unterhaltungs- und Dokumentationsproduktionen weiter untersucht. Durch die Anwendung einer semiotischen Filmanalyse soll das Chinabild aus unterschiedlichen Blickwinkeln interpretiert werden, um die Bedeutung und den Bedeutungsumfang im medialen

Kontext zu untersuchen und festzustellen, ob diese konsistenz oder inkonsistent mit dem historischen Bild sind. Ein Medienmix aus Bild, Musik, Licht, Ton, Kammerwinkel und -einstellungen wie Weitwinkel- und Nahaufnahmen werden in die umfassende Studie, wie das Chinabild im Kontext eines Films zu lesen ist, einbezogen.

1.2.2 Dokumentationsfilme für das Fernsehen – Infotainment

Als ein Medium, dass aus einer Serie von sich bewegenden Bildern besteht, sind Filme ein machtvoller Weg eine Botschaft zu übermitteln. Wir alle sind bereits beliebten Metaphern für Filme wie "Sprache", "visueller Traum" oder "Tor zur Welt" begegnet. Filme werden heute als essentielle Form der Kunst, vor allem der Populärkultur, gesehen die zur gleichen Zeit unterhält und bildet. Als der Filmprojektor im späten 19. Jahrhundert erfunden wurde, war der Film noch ein stummes Medium. Erst in den 20er Jahren des nächsten Jahrhunderts konnte Ton hinzugefügt werden. Das Farbfernsehen wurde in den 1960er Jahren bei amerikanischen Haushalten beliebt und so kam Farbe in die Welt der bewegten Bilder. Anfangs wurden nur Filme, die für das Kino produziert worden waren, im Fernsehen ausgestrahlt. In den 1980er Jahren begann sich dann der Dreh von Dokumentarfilmen zu einem blühenden Industriezweig zu entwickeln

Amerikanische Fernsehkanäle legen ihr Programm auf Grund eines kommerziellen Interesses fest, wohingegen zum Beispiel die staatliche britische Sendeanstalt BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), den Öffentlichen Sendeauftrag in den Vordergrund rückt. Die Dokumentationen, die von den unterschiedlichen Produktionsfirmen erstellt werden variieren aus diesem Grund auch stark in Stil und Perspektive. Unabhängig vom Stil, wird an eine Dokumentation jedoch immer die Anforderung gestellt, informativ, bildend sowie, am wichtigsten, interessant zu sein. Gemäß der "Roper Starch Global Consumer Survey" aus dem Jahr 1995 wird "bildend", als die zweitwichtigste Eigenschaft für ein Fernsehprogramm gesehen, die wichtigste ist "interessant".

Der Schwerpunkt von öffentlichen Sendeanstalten liegt auf der Idee der Bildung. Als Ergebnis dessen kann man feststellen, dass sich ältere Dokumentationen dahin gehend unterscheiden, dass in Produktionen aus Großbritannien deutlich mehr Wert auf diesen Aspekt gelegt wurde, als bei amerikanischen Dokumentationen. In den frühen 1950er

Jahren hatten Lehr- und Bildungsprogramme in den USA einen sehr niedrigen Status bei den Zuschauern. "By 1956, there were only two educational stations, mostly broadcasting British programmes and Canadian broadcasting Corporation programmes."⁶ Der Erfolg des Discovery Channel und des History Channel veränderte die Situation völlig. Der Discovery Channel wurde 1987 von John Hendricks mit dem Vorsatz gegründet, sowohl Bildung als auch Unterhaltung zu bieten. Die Sendeanstalt setzt stark auf unterschiedliche Dokumentationen, die häufig entweder vom Sender selbst oder in Ko-Produktion erstellt werden. Der Grund, warum für diese Arbeit eine Dokumentation des Discovery Channels ausgewählt wurde, liegt in der Hochwertigkeit und der Zugänglichkeit der TV-Produktionen, die gleichzeitig informativ, unterhaltsam und anregend sind. Darüber hinaus wird das Programm der Sendeanstalt in zahlreichen Ländern der Welt von vielen Millionen Zuschauern gesehen. Wie Joyce Taylor in einer Studie herausfand "Discovery is distributed world-wide in 60 territories and in Europe it reaches over 11 million homes".⁷

1.3 Forschungsziel

Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es zeitgenössische Mediendarstellungen von China in westlichen Dokumentationsfilmen zu untersuchen. *China Revealed*, wurde als Fallstudie für diese Arbeit ausgewählt. Die semiotische Filmanalyse zeigt, wie die dynamischen Chinabilder von den modernen visuellen Medien genutzt werden. Da es Realität ist, dass diese Stereotype auch heute noch verbreitet sind, wird im nächsten Schritt prüfen, wie diese den Zuschauern präsentiert werden. Geben die Regisseure den Stereotypen die gleiche Bedeutung wie in früheren Zeiten oder werden diesen unter neuen Umständen auch neue Konnotationen zugeordnet?

Persönlich habe ich mich für dieses Forschungsthema entschieden, da ich glaube, dass die Untersuchung des Chinabildes im Westen ein sehr bedeutsames, wichtiges und interessantes Gebiet für weitere akademische Studien im Allgemeinen und für interkulturelle Forschungen im Bereich der Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaft im Besonderen ist. In den letzten Jahren hat China durch seine rasante

⁶ Creeber, Gian 2009:137

⁷ Taylor, Joyce 1997: 55

Wirtschaftsentwicklung das Interesse der Weltöffentlichkeit gewonnen. Einige Stereotype über China im Westen gleichen jedoch denen, die bereits vor hunderten von Jahren existierten. Andere Neue tauchen in den Medien im Einklang mit den zugrunde liegenden politischen Intensionen und sozialer Wahrnehmung auf. Daher werden die Stereotype niemals genau Deckungsgleich sondern immer dynamisch, mannigfaltig und facettenreich sein. Es mag sich auch als aufschlussreich für die Chinesen herausstellen zu sehen, wie sich das Bild ihres Landes in der Darstellung westlicher Medien wandelt, um zu erkennen, wie die Menschen im Westen "they / theirs"⁸ wahrnehmen. In der Zwischenzeit spiegelt das Chinabild das westliche kulturelle Verständnis von "us / ours". Auf Grund der gegebenen Limitation von Zeit und Themenbreite in dieser Dissertation, hoffe ich, dass das Chinabild in den verschiedenen westlichen Medienformen wie Nachrichten, kommerzielle Filme und Internet in zukünftigen Forschungsarbeiten tiefgreifend beleuchtet werden können.

1.4 Forschungsmethode

Die Semiotik wurde im frühen 20. Jahrhundert vom Avantgarde Linguistikprofessor Ferdinand de Saussure eingeführt. Er argumentierte dafür, dass Sprache aus Zeichen besteht und dass die Sprachwahrnehmung ein Prozess der Interpretation von Zeichen ist. Nach Saussure wird Sprache durch die Zeichen mit welchen wir kommunizieren strukturiert. Wir leben in einer Welt voller Zeichen. Wenn wir aufwachsen, lernen wir wie wir diese Dekodieren und welche Bedeutung sie in unserem Kulturkreis tragen. Wenn die Struktur eines Sprachsystems erforscht und aufgeschlüsselt werden kann, lässt sich schlussfolgern, dass dies auch mit anderen Formen der Kommunikation, wie Film oder Fernsehen, in der gleichen Weise möglich ist. Mit den Arbeiten von Roland Barthes, die hauptsächlich auf der strukturalen Linguistik von Ferdinand de Saussure aufbauen, begann die Semiotik als unabhängige Sozialwissenschaft zu gelten.

Die Methode der Semiologie ist für die Analyse von Zeichen, Bildern, Texten und Symbolen weitverbreitet. In der Semiologie besteht ein Zeichen aus zwei Teilen: dem

8 Said, Edward W. 2003: 54 "us" und "they" wird benutzt um das willkürliche Konzept der psychische_n Bezeichnungen zu definieren. Es ist ausreichen für "us" die Grenzen in unseren eigenen Köpfen festzusetzen. "They" werden dementsprechend zu "they" und sowohl ihre Mentalität als auch ihr Lebensumfeld werden als verschieden von „ours“ verortet.

Bezeichner, der Träger um ein Zeichen auszudrücken, und dem Bezeichneten, der Bedeutung eines Zeichen für den Einzelnen. Die Bezeichneten sowie die Gedankenkonzepte werden durch die Bezeichner geformt, die unsere Sprache für uns zum Denken und Sprechen bereithält. Die Beziehung zwischen Bezeichner und Bezeichnetem ist willkürlich, da unsere Wahrnehmung von Zeichen hauptsächlich von unserer Kultur und dominanten Ideologien geformt wird. John Fiske ist der Ansicht, dass, "the signified is determined by our culture, not by some external natural reality".⁹

Wenn wir akzeptieren, dass die Beziehung zwischen Bezeichner und Bezeichnetem von Menschen mit gleichem kulturellem Hintergrund geteilt werden, bleibt die Frage offen, ob ein Bezeichner sprachlich nur einen Bezeichneten beschreiben kann. Roland Barthes nennt die Mischung aus Bedeutung und Konnotation, die in Botschaften der unterschiedlichen Medien verschlüsselt sind, "Myth".¹⁰ Jonathan Bignell definiert den Term wie folgt: "Myth here refers to ways of thinking about people, products, places, or ideas which are structured to send particular messages to the reader or viewer of the text."¹¹ In anderen Worten, ist der Mythos ein Art von neuem System das absichtlich verwendet wird, um zu bestimmten politischen, kulturellen oder sozialen Botschaften zu führen und ein neues Konnotationssystem einzuführen. Das System repräsentiert eine bestimmte politische Sichtweise oder einen sozialen Wandel, der von einer Gruppe von Menschen wahrgenommen und geteilt wird – das ist sozusagen Ideologie. Bignell schreibt dazu: "The dominant ideology is subject to change as the economic and political balance of power changes."¹² Die mythischen Bedeutungen, die bestehenden Zeichen anhaften, haben bereits Bedeutungen generiert, die darauf abzielen die Mission des Kulturkonsums zu vollenden: die dominante Ideologie zu fördern.

Semiologie kann ebenfalls angewandt werden, um bildbasierte Sprache (Fotografie) oder bildbasierte Medien (Werbung, Film, Fernsehen) zu analysieren. Der britische Filmtheoretiker Peter Wollen und sein französischer Kollege Christian Metz wandten die

9 Fiske, John 1987:23

10 Das Konzept der „Mythologie“ hinsichtlich Filmsemiotik wurde als erstes von Roland Barthes in seinem Buch *Mythologies*, aufgegriffen, welches 1973 erschien.

11 Bignell, Jonathan 2002: 16

12 Bignell, Jonathan 2002: 24

Theorie der Semiologie an, um die verschiedenen Ebenen von Filmen zu analysieren: Benennung oder Konnotation, Ideologien, Kode und Mythen da, "Film makes reference to a real word in a symbolic manner."¹³ Die Semiologie wird seit ihrer Entstehung als Forschungsmethode zur Filmanalyse angewandt. Unter Film versteht man in diesem Zusammenhang ein Verbundsystem von unterschiedlichen Teilschichten in einem "singular semiotic system"¹⁴. Seit der Eingliederung der Semiologie in die Filmforschung, ermöglicht sie es Filmtheoretikern Filme aus einer wissenschaftlichen Perspektive systematisch zu analysieren. Ein Handbuch von James Monaco beschreibt, wie man einen Film als mehr als nur ein rein zu Unterhaltungszwecken geschaffenes Kulturprodukt sehen kann. Dabei wird die Filmsprache und die Botschaften die durch Bilder, Ton, Licht und weitere signifikante Elemente übertragen werden, entschlüsselt.¹⁵ Jeder Film "is composed of a story that is narrated in a particular way, a mise-en-scene in a special style, a way of shooting and editing that is especially designed for this film and perhaps an extra-pictorial layer that also has its very special qualities".¹⁶

Ein einzigartiges System aus Zeichen besitzt jeder Film, eine Mischung aus Handlungsstrang, Inszenierung, Kinematographie, Editierung und Vertonung. In dieser Dissertation, wird die semiotische Analyse dazu verwendet, einen Dokumentarfilm des Discovery Channels zu analysieren. Dadurch werden wir ein umfassendes Bild des gegenwärtigen visuellen Chinabildes im Westen zu Land und Leuten bekommen. Auf Grund der begrenzten Möglichkeiten dieser Forschungsarbeit, wird sich die Dissertation hauptsächlich auf die Analyse einer repräsentativen Dokumentation des Discovery Channels konzentrieren. Dabei soll die semiotische Methode zur Analyse des Films angewandt werden, um relevante Muster und Thematiken herauszuarbeiten. Diese Forschungsarbeit kann von großem Wert für jene sein, die daran interessiert sind, ein umfassendes Verständnis zu den Chinabildern im Westen zubekommen, insbesondere in der visuellen Medienpräsentation. Dieses Thema zahlt sich dadurch in der Zukunft mit neuen tiefgreifenderen Forschungsarbeiten aus.

13 Kishore, Valicha 1988: 24

14 Metz, Christian 1974: 56

15 Monaco, James 2009: 170

16 Peters, Jan M. 1981: 67

1.5 Forschungsergebnisse:

Diese Forschungsarbeit beschäftigt sich mit den historischen Chinabildern im Westen, von der Zeit der Antike mit dem griechischen Reich bis in die Gegenwart. Diese Chinabilder haben aus westlicher Perspektive betrachtet im Laufe der Zeit eine starke Transformation erlebt. Diese Veränderungen spiegeln zum Teil die Transformation der westlichen Gesellschaft wieder. Die Analyse der geschichtlichen Quellen offenbart jedoch, dass bestimmte Muster sich beständig wiederholen und ein komplexes Bild von China schaffen. Wenn wir zum Beispiel moderne westliche Fernsehdokumentationen zu China heranziehen können wir feststellen, dass diese häufig auf Chinabilder der letzten Jahrhunderte zurückgreifen, die auch heute noch Bestand haben. Tatsächlich vereint die technologische Entwicklung Bild und Ton und kann mit der erzielten Intensität der Wahrnehmung mehr als Worte und Malerei erreichen.

Basierend auf einer breiten Analyse der historischen Stereotype sowie der in der Dokumentation verwandten Chinabilder können wir zum Schluss kommen, dass die Darstellung China in westlichen Dokumentationen einem bestimmten Muster folgt: Altertum, Tradition, Diversität, Übergang und Gefahr. Das chinesische Altertum wird als erstes durch traditionelle Produkte wie Seide, die im Westen seit der Zeit des römischen Reiches beliebt sind, vorgestellt. In frühen arabischen Journalen wurde Tee als das Nationalgetränk des Reichs der Mitte vorgestellt. Geschmackvolles, kostbares Porzellan wurde als chinesisches Kunsthandwerk in Europa besonders in der Zeit der *Chinoiserie* gewertschätzt, da es auch eine Konnotation von Besonderheit und Vornehmheit in sich trug. In allen untersuchten Dokumentationen findet sich zumindest eine Aufnahme, in der ein Interviewpartner aus einer gehobenen sozialen Schicht in Hintergrund feines Porzellan stehen hat. Dieses Kunsthandwerk wird auf Grund seines Wertes und damit der Zugänglichkeit für nur bestimmte Klassen einer Gesellschaft als Abgrenzung der sozialen Identität verwandt. Darüber hinaus kann das Muster des Altertums auch durch das Anpflanzen von Reis in einer einfach geprägten Kulturlandschaft oder durch historische Gebäude wie die Große Mauer oder den Kaiserpalast übermittelt werden.

Die angesehenen Künste der klassischen chinesischen Kalligraphie und Malerei wurden

schon immer von Mitgliedern der jeweiligen Elite dazu genutzt ihre Häuser zu dekorieren. Im der modernen Volksrepublik werden auch heute noch sehr gerne Wohnungen und Arbeitsplätze mit diesen Kunstprodukten dekoriert. Im Hintergrund, einer in der Dokumentation gezeigten Aufnahme einer chinesischen Familie in ihrem Wohnzimmer, ist ein chinesisches Gemälde zusehen, welches die soziale Zugehörigkeit der Familie zur intellektuellen Klasse verrät. In allen Intervieweinstellungen von Staatsangestellten, Intellektuellen und Unternehmern in Aufnahmen für Dokumentationen des BBCs oder CBCs sind stets entweder chinesisches Porzellan oder Malerei arrangiert. In manchen Fällen wird sogar eine Kombination beider Kunstprodukte verwandt. Es ist offensichtlich dass diese Bildkomposition suggerieren soll, dass Offizielle der Partei sowie Intellektuelle einer hohen sozialen Klasse angehören.

Durch die kulturellen Globalisierung hat die westliche Kultur einen großen Einfluss auf die traditionelle chinesische Kultur. In keiner Dokumentation fehlt jedoch, wie die Chinesen an bestimmten traditionellen Festen wie Qing Ming (Fest der Grabbegehung), Mondfest und Neujahresfest festhalten und diese in ihrer eigenen Weise begehen. Als dem wichtigsten Fest in der chinesischen Gesellschaft handelt es sich beim chinesischen Neujahresfest um ein Lieblingsthema von Regisseuren, in Zusammenhang mit einem auf das Reich der Mitte bezogenen Themenkreis. Dies trifft insbesondere zu, wenn diese Einstellung mit dem Leben von Wanderarbeitern und ihren Familien kombiniert wird.

Die Schicksale von Wanderarbeitern und ihr Leben in einem Land des wirtschaftlichen Umbruchs werden in westlichen Dokumentationen über China häufig beleuchtet. Die ausgedehnten wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen, die sich zurzeit in China vollziehen, garantieren den Menschen mehr Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten den jemals zu vor. Die Bevölkerung in den unterentwickelten, ländlichen Gebieten wird durch Armut und Chancenlosigkeit in Regionen mit einer starken Entwicklung getrieben. Um mehr Geld zu verdienen, verlassen Wanderarbeiter, meist für lange Zeit, ihre Familien. Dies resultiert in familiäre Probleme, wie der Entfremdung der Kinder von einem oder beiden Elternteilen. Sun Feng, einer der Hauptcharaktere in *China Revealed*, wird dort stellvertretend für die 0,8 Milliarden Menschen, die im ländlichen China leben oder als

Wanderarbeiter ihr Auskommen suchen, vorgestellt. Den Preis den Sun Feng für seinen Arbeit in Shanghai und damit weit entfernt von seiner Familie bezahlt, wird in der Dokumentation als sehr hoch beschrieben – seine Tochter erkennt ihn nicht mehr, als er für das chinesische Neujahrsfest nachhause zurückkehrt.

Die Diversität der chinesischen Kultur und Identität ist ebenfalls ein in Dokumentationen gerne behandeltes Thema. Diese Auffächerung ging in China, das für sich in Anspruch nimmt die längste durchgängige Geschichte zu besitzen, einher mit der territorialen Ausdehnung. Heute leben 56 anerkannte ethnische Gruppen mit eigener Kultur und Traditionen in der Volksrepublik. Ein Beispiel ist die im westlichen Grasland beheimatete ethnische Minderheit der Mongolen, die in *China Revealed* gezeigt werden. Aus der Filmsequenz können wir erfahren, dass viele Mongolen besorgt sind, wie sie ihre Kultur und Traditionen auch gegen den Druck einer kulturellen Assimilierung an die Mehrheitsgruppe der Han-Chinesen bewahren können. Die Mongolen werden als Repräsentanten für die ethnischen Minderheiten in China gewählt, da diese aus amerikanischer Perspektive in ihrer Lebensart Gemeinsamkeiten mit den Cowboys im eigenen Land aufweisen. In europäischen Dokumentationen werden bevorzugt Uiguren, die an der alten Seidenstraße Leben ausgewählt, um Chinas ethnische Diversität zu verdeutlichen.

China ist ein Land in einer Übergangsphase, aus der sich eine sehr überraschende Transformation ergeben könnte. Der wirtschaftliche Aufschwung wird durch die moderne Stadt Shanghai repräsentiert. In allen untersuchten Dokumentationen wird die Stadt als Beispiel für die positive Auswirkungen des Wirtschaftsbooms vorgestellt, ein erfolgreiches Model im chinesischen Modernisierungsprozess. Shanghai blendet und überzeugt so auch den skeptischsten Zuschauer, dass die Skyline einer chinesischen Stadt es ohne weiteres mit denen von New York oder Paris aufnehmen kann. Eine Einstellung die das moderne und dynamische Stadtleben zeigt, kommt gewöhnlich nicht ohne Sequenzen einheimischer Chinesen in Nachtclubs aus. Dabei werden auch Nachtaufnahmen von funkelnden Wolkenkratzern, besonders des Jinmao Towers sowie der gesamten Skyline entlang des Yangtze Flußes, gezeigt.

Um eine Atmosphäre voll Exaltiertheit und Versuchung zu schaffen, nützen Regisseure chinesische Musik mit schnellem, klarem Rhythmus, die die Einstellungen untermalt. Die Dauer jeder Einstellung ist auf ein paar Sekunden beschränkt. Die Bild- und Musikkode die während der gesamten Sequenzen in *China Revealed*, *China's Rivers* and *China Rises* genutzt werden, formen eine Mythologie, die das Nachleben als lebhaft, energiegeladen und endlos beschreibt. Das Stadtleben repräsentiert in China Reichtum, Erfolg und Status - Wunschbildern denen im gegenwärtigen China viele Menschen hinterherjagen. Der ungeheure Wandel in den Städten erstaunt die westlichen Zuschauer, die sich zeitgleich dessen bewusst sind, dass die Geschichte der Modernisierung Shanghais nur ein Puzzlestück und nicht die Erfolgsgeschichte des ganzen Landes ist. Den Metropolen in den Wirtschaftszentren stehen ärmlich Städte in den ländlichen Gebieten gegenüber. Diese prosperierenden, wohlhabenden Städte müssen Chinesen in unterentwickelten Orten und ländlichen Gebieten wie ein Traum erscheinen. Die Sequenz präsentiert ihren Zuschauern ein sich veränderndes Land, das eine ganze Reihe von sozialen Problemen wie der sich weitende Schere zwischen Arm und Reich sowie Umweltproblemen, durch die schnelle Wirtschaftsentwicklung, in Angriff nehmen muss.

Im 18. Jahrhundert existierte in Europa, besonders aber in Frankreich, eine Manie für chinesisches Design und Stil von Seide und Porzellan bis Gartengestaltung und Architektur. Mehr als zweihundert Jahre später, scheint der Trend in die gegengesetzte Richtung zu gehen. In China imitieren immer mehr Menschen den westlichen Stil während sich der Kapitalismus ausbreitet. In den Filmsequenzen können wir Chinesen in lokalen Musikclubs sehen, die Hip-Hop Tänzer anfeuern. Chinas gegenwärtiger Trend ist eine Obsession mit allem was aus dem Westen zu kommen scheint von Kosmetik, Kleidung und Tanz zu Einstellungen und Konzepten die das tägliche Leben berühren.

China ist ein bevölkerungsreiches Land, dessen Volk ein Fünftel der Weltbevölkerung stellt. "Menschenmeer", ein Begriff aus dem Koreakrieg, wird heute daher gerne auf China bezogen. Einstellungen die China als bevölkerungsreiches Land zeigen, erscheinen sehr häufig in den westlichen Medien. In einer Filmsequenz im zweiten Teil von *China Rises* sehen wir eine große Zahl gesichtslos erscheinender Chinesen, die

sich aus einem Zug heraus wie ein Fluss in eine Automobilausstellung ergießen. Der Zuschauer wird mit dem Eindruck zurück gelassen, dass es selbst in China zu viele Menschen für dieses Land gibt und die Bevölkerungsdichte sehr hoch ist. Auch in der BBC-Dokumentation *China*, Episode 2 ("Women of the Country") zeigt verschiedene Sequenzen aus unterschiedlichen Kameraeinstellungen von Menschenmassen die sich durch einen chinesischen Bahnhof bewegen. In diesen Einstellungen ist beinahe jeder Platz des Bahnhofes, die Rolltreppen, Sicherheitskontrollpunkte und Bahnsteige, mit Menschen überfüllt. In der letzten Kameraeinstellung sind die Gesichter der Menschen nicht erkennbar, da sie von hinten gefilmt werden. Als die Kamera herauszoomt, bleibt als letztes Bild ein Meer aus schwarzen Köpfen, die das Stereotyp der gesichtslosen Chinesen im Westen erfüllen. In der Vergangenheit wurde China als ein bevölkerungsreiches Land und dadurch als starkes Kaiserreich gesehen. Heute dagegen kommt beim westlichen Zuschauer ein leichtes Gefühl der Beklemmung und Bedrohung durch diese Menschenmassen auf.

Als das größte Gefahrenpotential Chinas für den Westen wurde einst die große, als „gelbe Plage“, „roter Drachen“ bezeichnete, Bevölkerung eingestuft. Das Bedrohungsbild ist heute weiter ausdifferenziert und wird im Wettbewerb um Ressourcen, für Chinas boomende Wirtschaft, gesehen. Es gibt keinen Zweifel daran, dass China in den letzten Jahrzehnten überraschende Erfolge erzielt hat. Folgt man dem Artikel von Lester R. Brown im *Guardian*, hat China, um seinen großen Bedarf in der Industrie zu decken, die USA an der Spitze als führender Verbraucher von Ressourcen abgelöst. China konkurriert jetzt direkt mit anderen Industrieländern, die auf Rohstoffimporte angewiesen sind. Das Land konsumiert heute mehr Öl, Kohle und Stahl als die USA, "nearly twice as much meat - 67m tonnes compared with 39m tonnes in the US; and more than twice as much steel - 258m tonnes to 104m".¹⁷ Diese Zahlen legen nahe, dass der Hunger der chinesischen Wirtschaft nach Rohstoffen nur durch den Konsum großer Ressourcen gestillt werden kann.

Wenn man alles zusammen nimmt, kann man nicht leugnen, dass es sich bei China um

17 Brown, Lester R. «A New World Order», am 25 Januar 2006 im Guardian erschienen.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/jan/25/china.guardiansocietysupplement>

eine komplexe, paradoxe, diverse, sich laufend verändernde, multikulturelle Nation handelt. Seit der ersten Begegnung des Westens mit dem Reich der Mitte, hat das Chinabild im Westen nicht aufgehört sich zu verändern und damit auch den Prozess der Entwicklung der westlichen Welt zu spiegeln. Als die westliche Welt selbst noch unterentwickelt war, erschien den Menschen das Reich der Mitte als mysteriös, unglaublich reich und fortschrittlich. Als der Kapitalismus im Westen seine Form annahm, verpasste China die industrielle Revolution. Als Konsequenz wurde das Land vom Westen selbst als rückständiges, unterentwickeltes halb-kolonialisiertes Land angesehen, das von den imperialistischen Industrienationen besetzt war. Nach der Einführung des Kommunismus veränderte sich das Bild des Landes im Westen erneut. Das neue Bild war das einer roten autoritären Kraft, die ein potentielles Risiko für die globale politische Ordnung und die Sicherheit des Westens darstellt.

China widersteht einer Kategorisierung und Stereotypisierung durch seine Fähigkeit zur Transformation. Jedoch werden auch heute noch die historischen sowohl positiven als auch negativen Chinabilder in den westlichen Medien genutzt. Dabei entspricht die Form fünf unterschiedlichen Bildern von China - Altertum, Tradition, Diversität, Übergang und Gefahr. China ist ein bevölkerungsreiches, diverses, multiethnisches Land mit einer langen Geschichte und alten Zivilisation. Das Land verbraucht heute große Mengen an Energie in seine schnell wachsende Wirtschaft, die gleichzeitig die Kluft zwischen Arm und Reich ausweitet. China durchlebt gerade eine dramatische Übergangsphase. Sein Erstarren führt dazu, dass das Land im Westen als potentielle Gefahr wahrgenommen wird. Diese allgemeine Wahrnehmung von China wird in den Medien kodiert übertragen. Das Publikum mit gleichem kulturellen Hintergrund kann die Botschaft empfangen und entsprechend dekodieren.

Heute wird China von den meisten Menschen im Westen nach wie vor als rätselhaftes und exotisches Land betrachtet. Es gibt zahlreiche Traditionen und Bräuche die auf Grund des kulturellen Unterschiedes im Westen nicht verstanden werden, zahlreiche ernsthafte soziale Probleme die angegangen werden müssen sowie ein in langsamen Schritten einzuleitender Demokratisierungsprozess. Im Zuge der Globalisierung kann sich China nicht länger vom Rest der Welt isolieren. Es muss an Offenheit und

Transparenz gewinnen, fortschrittliche Technologien und Umweltschutz fördern und seine sozialen Probleme durch eine Eindämmung des Wohlstandsgefälles sowie einer Förderung benachteiligter Gruppen angehen.

1.6 Dissertationsstruktur

Um die relevanten Themen, für eine Analyse des gegenwärtigen westlichen Dokumentarfilms herauszufiltern, wird im ersten der sieben Kapitel ein Blick auf die historischen Chinabilder gelegt. Dabei soll ein Zeitraum vom ersten Kontakt bis in die Moderne abgedeckt werden. Das nächste Kapitel wird diese historischen Chinabilder in chronologischer Reihenfolge, anhand von Primärquellen – historische Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reiseberichte, Briefe und Berichte von Missionaren sowie Nachrichten in Printmedien – um einen theoretischen Hintergrund für die anschließende Filmanalyse zu schaffen. Basierend auf dieser Analyse, wird am Ende von Kapitel zwei ein Katalog von Chinabildern eingeführt, die entscheidend für die Wahrnehmung Chinas im Westen sind. Im dritten Kapitel wird die Dokumentation *China Revealed*, als Fallstudie für diese Dissertation, vorgestellt. Neben allgemeinen Informationen zur Dokumentation findet sich hier eine Beschreibung des Handlungsstrangs sowie der Charaktere. Anschließend wird im fünften Kapitel eine sequentielle Untersuchung der gesamten Dokumentation durchgeführt. Ziel ist es die zugrunde liegenden amerikanischen Werte und Ideologien zu untersuchen, um die in der Dokumentation eingenommene Perspektive zu verstehen sowie die Botschaftern des Films dekodieren zu können. Hierbei wird ein semiotischer Ansatz gewählt, um die Sprache in der Dokumentation sowie die Darstellung der einzelnen Charaktere zu analysieren. Außerdem werden die Regelgrößen Szenenaufbau, Licht, Vertonung sowie Kameraposition und – abstand aufgezeichnet und untersucht. Im letzten Kapitel wird gezeigt, dass die aus der Analyse von *China Revealed* gewonnen Erkenntnisse auf den Gesamtkontext des westlichen Dokumentationsfilms zu China übertragbar sind.