

SIGNIFYING THE LOCAL: MEDIA PRODUCTIONS RENDERED IN
LOCAL LANGUAGES IN MAINLAND CHINA SINCE 2000

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My dissertation examines recent cultural productions rendered in local languages in the fields of television, film, fiction, popular music, and the Internet in mainland China since 2000, when the new national language law prescribed the standard Putonghua Mandarin as the principal language for broadcast media and movies. My dissertation sets out to examine this unsettled tension and to explore the rhetorical use of local language in different fields of cultural production. In television, local language functions as a humorous and satirical mechanism to evoke laughter that can foster a sense of local community and assert the local as the site of distinctive cultural production. In film and fiction, local language serves as an important marker of marginality, allowing filmmakers and writers rhetorically to position themselves in the margins to criticize the center and to repudiate the ideologies of modernism. In popular music, increasingly mediated by the Internet, local language has been explored by the urban educated youth to articulate a distinct youth identity in their negotiation with a globalizing and cosmopolitan culture.

Drawing on cultural and literary theories, media studies, sociolinguistics, and dialectology, my interdisciplinary research focuses its analysis on many important but overlooked issues. I explore at length the rhetorical use of local languages to represent “the marginal and the unassimilated” in the underground and independent films of Jia Zhangke and others; I apply Bakhtin’s theory of folk humor to the ambiguous laughter evoked by Zhao Benshan’s comic sketches that are deeply rooted in the Northeast folk performing art *Errenzhuan*; I explain how the laughter wrought through the presence

of local language in the regional TV shows can help foster a sense of local community. My research on the significance of locality also contributes to the study of globalization. If globalization is seen as homogenization and centralization, the local language texts assert the value of pluralism and diversity, and at the same time resist the dominance of both global and national cultural colonization. The burgeoning regional television shows rendered in local languages and the proliferation of the use of local languages on the Internet attest to the urgency of re-imagining a distinct local community for the local inhabitants in the increasing uncertainty of defining locality. Both the global, national cultures and the traditional, indigenous cultural resources are appropriated for self-definition and self-development. On the dialectics of the global and the local, the global and the local do not pose as cultural polarities, but are interpenetrating, interacting, and mutually signifying.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jin Liu got her B.A. and M.A. in Chinese Linguistics respectively in 1997 and 2000 in the Department of Chinese Languages and Literature at Peking University in the People's Republic of China. She pursued her Ph.D. degree in East Asian Literature in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University from 2000 to 2008. She will become an assistant professor of Chinese at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the fall 2008.

to Zhaoqin 照钦 and Ningning 宁宁

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INTRODUCTION

For years, the central government in Mainland China has been promoting the standard Putonghua Mandarin (common speech Mandarin) as the official national language, the principal language for mass media and school education. Those subnational local languages, dialects,¹ or *fangyan* (“regional speech”) in Chinese have been thus subordinated and suppressed in this project of building a modern, national culture. On October 31, 2000, the Beijing government promulgated the first law on language and writing, the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Use of Chinese Languages and Chinese Characters (*Zhonghua renmin gonghegong guojia tongyong yuyan wenzifa*), effective from January 1, 2001. As the law prescribes, Putonghua Mandarin is the principal language in broadcast radio and television, and movies (Articles 12 and 14). Local languages are strongly discouraged in mass media, and their use is limited to a few occasions (Article 16). However, the use of local language in mass media didn’t disappear with the new regulations. Instead, the new millennium witnesses an expanding use of local language in mass media and literature. In the television field, a variety of television shows and genres rendered in local languages are burgeoning: the news talk shows in which news is narrated in local language rather than broadcast in the standard Mandarin, the programs of dubbing films in local languages, the so-called *lanmuju* (column docudrama) programs that cast nonprofessional, local residents and tell short stories about their ordinary lives. In the film field, Jia Zhangke’s “Hometown Trilogy,” largely in Shanxi Mandarin, ushered in a wave of underground and independent films employing local languages. Besides

¹ The controversy over the relationship between dialect and language is a global and often politicized problem. This study will mainly use the term of “local languages” for *fangyan*. For a historical study of standard languages and dialects in the context of nation building, see Hobsbawm (1992: 51-63). For the terminological dilemma faced in the Chinese linguistic situation, see DeFrancis (1984: 55-57).

underground films, increasing numbers of studio productions, shown in public cinema, are rendered in local languages. Among the cultivation of local languages on the Internet are rap songs using local languages as the rhythmic patois and aided by Flash cyber-technology, so-called standard tests on local-language competence, local-language texts parodying Chinese characters, blogs employing local slang and expressions, and downloadable cell-phone ringtones recorded in local languages. Finally, in the fiction field, there has been a growing conscious awareness of local language among writers. A number of established writers, who used to stick to the standard Mandarin writing style, now experiment with writing novels in their native local languages.

Such a profusion of media use of local language has caused considerable concern among the authorities. The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) has been issuing or reiterating regulations, more often than before, to contain the media use of local language. However, as the entertaining and the commercial value of local language have been rediscovered, the tension between the state and capital is intensified. Almost all the news talk shows rendered in local languages topped the local audience ratings, higher than Mandarin-speaking news program in the local market. Similarly, local-language dubbing programs and videos, albums of local-language rap, and local-language ringing tones have also created substantial commercial profit in local television, audio-video, and/or telecommunications markets. It is true that the central and local censors remain in force, but they too have to adjust themselves and take the market and audience seriously. As the ensuing chapters will show, the official documents often exhibit ambiguity, inconsistency, and self-contradiction that the media producers could take advantage of and manipulate. The state media devoted to promoting standard Putonghua, China Central Television (CCTV), is also the major agent to boost the

popularity of Zhao Benshan's series of rural-themed telenovelas with a strong Northeast flavor, which have been shown in primetime on CCTV-1 since 2003, as well as of the non-mainstream martial-arts sitcom *Wulin Waizhuan* (My own swordsman) in multiple local languages, shown on CCTV-8 in 2006.

The media use of local language continues to be a controversial social topic since 2000, as it used to. A frequently debated topic is how to deal with the relationship between the use of local language in the media and the overriding state policy of promoting a single national language. For instance, although Lu Chuan, the director of the hit studio film *Xun Qiang* (Missing Gun, 2002), that employs Guizhou Mandarin, highlights the aesthetic effect of dialect that can capture unique acoustic texture, a government official accused Jiang Wen, the leading actor and executive producer of the film, of running counter to the national-language policy and of bringing to the big screen the “dregs” of the local languages (Yin Tingting 2002). In addition, the concern for education also stirs controversy concerning the use of local language in the media. From time to time, parents and teachers complain that the media use of “vulgar and uncultured” dialects would be counterproductive to children's learning Putonghua. However, the promoters of local language often contend that it is equally important to pass on local cultural heritage transmitted in local language down to the younger generation.

This research builds on the previous scholarship on this topic, primarily Edward Gunn's book *Rendering the Regional: Local Language in Contemporary Chinese Media* (2006). Gunn explored and mapped out the role of local languages in the contemporary mass media and literature of mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. He finds that television plays the most important role in promoting the use of local languages particularly since the 1980s. It is true that television continues to be the primary medium to promote local language in the mainland China since 2000, yet

the Internet, a new medium that Gunn (2006) was unable to discuss, increasingly plays an important role in disseminating the use of local language among the urban educated youth, as Chapter Five will elaborate. Gunn also argues that audience is the most fundamental distinction in consideration of field of cultural production: “while most films were produced for national or international audiences from their conception, many television productions were financed by advertisers whose first considerations were the appeal of the production to a local audience” (9). This observation is important for my study. The hybridized use of local language in Jia Zhangke’s underground films becomes problematic if we take different layers of audience (local, national, and international) into consideration. The functions of laughter through the presence of local language are also different between the television productions targeting local audience and the comic sketches shown on the CCTV to a national audience. Moreover, many critical theories that have informed Gunn’s work continue to prove important in my analysis of the new materials. My study grounds itself on the principal tenet of speech acts theory that language is a social act; discourse is not descriptive, but performative because it produces something which has not existed previously (Austin 1975 and Petrey 1990). As my subject is the colloquial, oral local language, Michel Chion’s theories of sound in film and television (Chion 1994 and 1999) provide frameworks and terminology for my close reading of texts. Likewise, the organization of my dissertation is based on fields of cultural production, a fundamental concept in Bourdieu’s theory on sociology of culture.

Besides the above theories and disciplines that have been critically discussed in Gunn (2006), my research draws on distinct and diverse fields of study. For example, Bakhtin’s theory of folk humor elaborated in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1968) proves applicable to interpret the ambiguous laughter evoked in comic sketches that are charged with folk culture (Chapter Four). The subaltern theory represented in

Spivak's seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988a) helps to explain the hermeneutic violence the intellectual filmmakers have done to the subaltern, lower-class people when they are represented in the films (Chapter Six). The audience study in media studies is useful to analyze audience reception and stratification of local audiences, which is various in terms of age, gender, social origin, social class, cultural status, as well as regional identity (Chapter One). Apart from code-switching, the gender study in sociolinguistics sheds light to my analysis of female and male protagonists in Jia Zhangke's film *Unknown Pleasures* (Chapter Six).

This interdisciplinary study from the perspective of local language focuses its observations and analysis on many important but overlooked issues. One of the distinctive features of recent Chinese underground and independent films is their pervasive use of local languages, a striking deviation from the Putonghua-Mandarin dominant soundtrack in all but a handful of studio films. In Chapter Six, I explore at length the rhetorical use of local languages to represent "the marginal and the unassimilated" in the feature films of Jia Zhangke and others, an approach not taken in previous studies of these films. More than just an analysis of language, I also examine the political implications of intellectual directors like Jia appropriating subaltern voices in finding a niche for themselves in an increasingly complex cultural market. My study of films from the perspective of local languages ultimately suggests that when China is represented by local dialects, it is revealed as a fragmented and unassimilated country where a unified, mainstream discourse is impossible.

As the most obvious function of local languages in the broadcast media is the stimulation of laughter, a major portion of this research is devoted to those language-based comedy genres, an often understudied area in scholarship. Gunn (2006) rightly points out that the use of local languages in television functions to re-imagine the local community in which that media is broadcast, but he doesn't explore much of how this

re-imagination has been made possible. My research, particularly in Chapter Two, tries to explore how the laughter wrought through the presence of local languages can help foster a sense of local community. Drawing on Freud (1960) and Neale and Krutnik (1990), I discuss the communalizing function of the laughter evoked by the local-language dubbed soundtrack and by the local-language television productions in general. The local-language soundtrack provides rich intertextual information which credits the local audience with the necessary knowledge and experience to make sense of its references and offers them the pleasure of recognition. The local-language soundtrack thus creates a communal bonding among the local audiences who share the joke and laugh, while at the same time setting a cultural boundary which excludes those who cannot appreciate the joke and therefore fail to laugh. Affirming inclusion in a community, the shows rendered in local languages perform a consolidating function. Sharing the same linguistic and cultural identity and the same daily-life experience as their viewers, the shows and the local audience are easily identified and aligned with each other, both involved in a communalizing activity. With the local community as their central concern, telenovelas and sitcoms in local language tell stories about the ordinary lives of local residents; the local-language dubbed films address the social problems of the local community and convey the popular opinions of its members; and the news shows on local TV and radio capture the news of the utmost concern and interest to local audiences.

My research on the significance of locality will contribute to the study of globalization. There has been increasing scholarship on the global and the local. But in most cases the local appears to be interchangeable with the national. For instance, the articles edited in Craig and King's *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia* (2002) explore how the "global" or the American cultural and musical resources and commodities have been appropriated and integrated with local knowledge by the

artists and musicians in the so-called “local” nation-states such as China, South Korea, and Malaysia. My study addresses the further localization reaching down the nation state. From this perspective, the function of the nation-state seems more and more identified with globalization and its concomitant homogenization and centralization. Therefore, the local language texts assert the value of pluralism and diversity, and at the same time resist the dominance of both global and national cultural colonization. The burgeoning regional television shows rendered in local languages and the proliferation of the use of local languages on the Internet attest to the urgency of re-imagining a distinct local community for the local inhabitants in the increasing uncertainty of defining locality. Both the global and national colonizer cultures and the traditional, indigenous cultural resources are appropriated for self-definition and self-development. On the dialectics of the global and the local, Henri Lefebvre’s argument still holds true: “no space disappears in the course of growth and development:[;] the worldwide does not abolish the local” (1991: 86). The global and the local do not pose as cultural polarities, but are interpenetrating, interacting, and mutually signifying.

As mentioned earlier, the chapters of my dissertation are organized by the fields of cultural production. Chapters One to Four on television, Chapter Five on Internet and popular music, Chapter Six on film, and Chapter Seven on fiction. Within the field of television, the four chapters are organized by genres and types of shows. Chapter One on telenovelas and sitcoms, Chapter Two on television programs and videos of dubbed film clips, Chapter Three on news talk shows, and Chapter Four on comic sketches. A brief summary of each chapter is provided below.

Chapter One tracks the new development of the television series productions since 2000 in the major urban centers. I include some old television series in Beijing Mandarin made before 2000 that Gunn doesn’t address, for example, Ying Da’s *Wo ai wo jia* (I love my family, 1994) that serves as a finer example than Wang Shuo’s

media productions to show the use of language according to characters' social and cultural status. I also address the complex factors responsible for the increasingly sluggish media productions in Shanghai Wu, as well as the recent strong reactions to the decline of the language both from academia and from the mass media. The continuing active television productions in Sichuan Mandarin provide rich materials for audience study, including the stratification of audience. Taking Li Boqing and his sitcom *Jiada Waizhuan* (Stories of Mr. Fake, 2000) as a case study, I analyze its controversial audience reception in light of Bourdieu's theory of socially constructed taste. Finally, I discuss Guangdong TV's sitcoms as well as the new television-series productions that have been shown on the CCTV since 2000.

Chapter Two examines the performativity in the local-language soundtrack that would be conventionally rendered in Putonghua in the film-dubbing. I argue that it is insufficient to explain the local-language dubbing as a parody of the classic films, which would imply the dubbed text is derivative from, secondary to, and residual to the original text. Drawing on performance studies that celebrate the independence of performance from text, this chapter explores the performative force of the local-language dubbing achieved through a surrogation of the Putonghua soundtracks, that is, to foster a real sense of local community that may have been mis-imagined through Putonghua. Identified as something alien to the local community, the Putonghua soundtrack becomes the object of derision, mimicry, and subversion. The deviation from the original text is simultaneously a striving for a proximity to the local community. The local-language redubbed soundtracks satirically expose the social ills and address the social problems that have concerned the members of the local community.

Chapter Three continues to explore local language empowering local community by examining the burgeoning news talk shows in local languages. Taking

Hangzhou TV's hit show *Aliutou Shuo xinwen* (Aliutou talks news, 2004—) as a case study, I explore how the program creates cultural proximity, immediacy, and familiarity by capturing the news reflecting the everyday experience of the local citizens and by appropriating the local traditional story-telling performing arts rendered in local language. The program's capitalizing on traditional forms of entertainment in the news and information transmission further signifies the gradual re-situation of TV media as an institution of entertainment, which was "somewhat removed from official organization," according to Gunn (2006: 206).

While the television genres and programs in the first three chapters mainly target local audience, the comic sketches *Xiaopin*, the best-received show in the annual CCTV Spring Festival Eve Galas, perform for a largest national audience. Rather than fostering a sense of local community, the laughter evoked in the comic sketches, which have been gradually infused with the spirit of folk culture, manifests Bakhtinian carnivalesque ambiguity. By analyzing Zhao Benshan's Northeast-Mandarin comic sketches that are rooted in the local traditional *Errenzhuan* performing art, this chapter explores the dynamic dialogue between the official discourse from above, represented by Putonghua, and the folkloric discourse from below, articulated in local dialects. Whereas the central, official discourse attempts to manipulate the peripheral, folkloric discourse for ideological reasons, the latter ends up simultaneously conforming to, and subverting, the former; both involve ambiguity, nuance, and indeterminacy.

Chapter Five first discusses the urban educated youth's promotion of local language on the Internet, that can be traced to the arguably first Internet-mediated hit song in 2001, Xue Cun's "Dongbeiren doushi huo Leifeng" (The Northeasterners are all living Lei Fengs), with a strong Northeast flavor. Next, I trace back the broadly defined rock songs rendered in local languages in the late 1990s before the popularity

of Internet, and examine their overlapping with and difference from the dialectal rap in their use of local language. I argue that Chinese youths articulate a distinct youth identity through their use of local languages in both of the musical genres, albeit in different ways. However, the dissemination of dialect songs through the Internet allows for the construction of a collective identity among the youth with shared knowledge and sensibilities about a given locality. Taking Shanghai Rap and the SHN website, its hosting server, as a case in point, this chapter ultimately shows that the motive to construct a distinct imagined community underpins the website's dedicated promotion of Shanghai Wu and Shanghai Rap, and that the Internet enables the diasporic, globally dispersed Shanghai youth to forge a both transnational and local identity—Shanghainese.

Chapter Six explores the rhetorical use of local languages to represent “the marginal and the unassimilated” in recent underground and independent films exemplified by Jia Zhangke's “Hometown Trilogy.” In *Xiao Wu*, I explore the interactions between the two spaces defined by the soundtrack—the relatively quiet, private, intimate space and the heteroglossic, public space. In *Platform*, I consider the inauthenticity of Jia's use of local languages and contend that the protagonists' hybridized and impure dialects betray Jia's limitation in forging a linguistic style through a negotiation between descriptive mimesis and interpretive diegesis. In *Unknown Pleasures*, drawing on gender studies in sociolinguistics, I examine the implications of the divergence in the male and female protagonists' language. Finally, I explore the feature of silent protagonists and sparse dialogue common to Jia's work and other underground and independent films in local languages. Drawing on subaltern theory, I trace the voice of the intellectuals or elites in their re-presentation of the subalterns.

Chapter Seven tracks new developments in fiction since 2000 by focusing on two subgenres: nativist fiction and educated-youth fiction. In the first part, I examine Mo Yan, Zhang Wei, Yan Lianke, and Jia Pingwa's recent novels rendered in local language. I discuss these writers' heightened awareness of local language and show how a) the local language and the rural world continue to constitute a marginal space where the writers critique the modern, urban center, b) folk opera rendered in local language is rediscovered as an indigenous cultural resource to resist western influence, and c) a vanishing rural community is detailed as a memory to be cherished. By comparison, the appreciation of the local in nativist fiction is not shared by writers of recent educated-youth fiction. I analyze four novels/novellas and their film adaptations in the second part, and show how the texts make a distinction between the local villagers' speaking rural dialects and the sent-down educated youth's speaking Putonghua or the urban local language. The uneducated, traditional, rural local languages are condemned, transformed, ignored, or negotiated by the educated urban narrators.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF TELEVISION SERIES PRODUCTIONS SINCE 2000

Gunn (2006: 124-156) mapped out the television series productions in Mainland China through the 1990s. The function of local languages varies in the three geographic areas his research highlights. Simply put, in Beijing, the use of language is distributed based on the social and cultural class: the inept intellectual speaks Putonghua while the diligent and capable members of the working class speak the local Beijing dialect. In Shanghai, the Shanghai-Wu branded telenovelas often turn out to be rendered in multiple local languages. The lack of a homogeneous, standard form makes Shanghai Wu a debated media language, the use of which “evokes disparities and controversy as much as community” (141). In the Chongqing and Chengdu area, instead of contesting against Chengdu for the cultural center of the southwest China, Chongqing distinguishes itself from Chengdu by merely staging a difference. In this chapter, I track the new development of the television series since 2000, in particular in these cities and beyond. In the section on Beijing, I include some old television series made before 2000 that Gunn doesn’t address. Ying Da’s *Wo ai wo jia* (I love my family, 1994) serves as a finer example than Wang Shuo’s media productions to show the use of language according to characters’ social and cultural status. This also holds true in the telenovela *Pinzui Zhang Damin de xingfu shenghuo* (The happy life of the garrulous Zhang Damin, 1999). But in the drama series *Dongshenme, biedong ganqing* (Don’t mess with love, 2005), all the major characters speak Beijing Mandarin regardless of cultural and social status, age, gender, urban or rural origins, or character prominence. In Shanghai, since 2000, there have been fewer new broadcasting media shows in Shanghai Wu, except for a small number of sitcoms that

bear a strong resemblance to the traditional local *huaji* opera. In addition to the few radio shows and stage plays in Shanghai Wu, the section will address the complex factors responsible for the increasingly sluggish media productions in Shanghai Wu, as well as the recent strong reactions to the decline of the language. Chongqing and Chengdu continue to be the most productive region in media productions in local languages. With their greater quantity and more varied reception, the television productions in Sichuan Mandarin provide richer materials for the study of the local audience, which I argue is always a complex and heterogeneous aggregate rather than a single homogeneous mass. Taking the Chengdu series *Jiada Waizhuan* (Stories of Mr. Fake, 2000) as a case study, I analyze its controversial audience reception according to Bourdieu's theory of socially constructed taste. This study also takes into account the prime-time scheduling, which is related to the issue of the stratification of adult and child audiences. In addition, I discuss Guangdong TV's sitcom *Wailai xifu bendi lang* (Native husbands with outsider wives, 2000–) as well as the new television-series productions that have been shown on the CCTV since 2000.

Beijing: In the early 1990's, the name of the novelist Wang Shuo was associated with a long list of hit media productions such as the film *Wan zhu* (The operators, 1988), the telenovela *Kewang* (Yearning, 1990), and the comedy series *Bianjibu de gushi* (Stories of an editorial department, 1991).² As much as these media productions are usually branded as possessing a Beijing flavor, the scriptwriter Wang Shuo prefers to define his novels as ones with a “New Beijing Flavor” (*xin jingwei 'r*), particularly in the sense that his language has little relevance to the old Beijing dialect, as that represented in Lao She's novels. The essence of Wang's “New Beijing Flavor” is rather of a new speech style, that is, to parody and satirize the revolutionary and

² For the analysis of most media productions listed here, see Gunn 2006: 129-136.

intellectual discourses with a Beijing intonation. This speech style of *tiaokan* (playful or sardonic chatter) gained a national currency in the early 1990's, and had a far-reaching influence on the media productions in Beijing Mandarin roughly until 2000.

Compared with Wang Shuo's media productions, Ying Da's first sitcom *Wo ai wo jia* (1994) during the similar period exhibits a more distinct Beijing flavor. *Wo ai wo jia* revolves around the daily life of an ordinary Beijing family in the early 1990's. The languages of the characters are well distributed according to their social class and levels of education. The father, Fu Lao, a recently retired party bureaucrat, speaks a language full of revolutionary jargon. The two intellectuals, the elder son, Jia Zhiguo, a government civil servant and the daughter, Jia Xiaofan, a college student, speak a Beijing-accented Putonghua.³ By contrast, the younger son, Jia Zhixin, a high school graduate, is an unemployed idle youth who occasionally makes small deals on the side. Unlike most of the heroes who speak a Beijing dialect of the *courtyard* in Wang Shuo's novels, Zhixin speaks a Beijing dialect of the *hutong*, blending the urban popular expressions with the old Beijing phrases. Taking Episode 17 as an example, the old Beijing words he uses include: *dǎowo* 倒卧 (frozen stiff), *chuō* 戳 (stand), *shùn* 顺 (walk off with), *qí le* 齐了 (all set), *zidāng* 只当 (as long as), 寻摸 *xúnmo* (look for). He Ping, the wife of Zhiguo, has the most limited education when compared with other family members. Both she and her mother are performers of the local performing art *Jingyundagu*. Their speech peppered with old Beijing expressions and pronunciations indicates their low cultural and social status. In episode 5, the speech of He Ping's mother is sprinkled with words like *m3men* 姆们 (we), *qìnniáng* 亲娘 (form of address for husband's siblings to his mother-in-law), *zhēluó* 折箩 (a chop suey of leftovers), *bāngchèn* 帮衬 (help), *qí huór* 齐活儿 (all set), *qínghǎor* 搯好

³ They rarely use local Beijing expressions, which are not absolutely absent though. For instance, Xiaofan uses *shuādān* “耍单” (“to dress too thinly for the cold weather”) in Episode 2, and Zhiguo uses *chènqian* 趁钱 (“wealthy”) in Episode 5.

儿 (to see an expected good result), and so on. Outside of urban family members, the working class with less of an education speaks various local dialects other than Beijing Mandarin. For example, the housemaid Xiao Zhang speaks Sichuan Mandarin; the construction workers speak Tianjin Mandarin and Henan Mandarin (Episode 1); peasant merchants speak Northeast Mandarin (Episode 7); Xiao Liu who sells *youtiao* speaks Shandong Mandarin (Episode 8); a migrant worker couple speak Shaanxi Mandarin (Episodes 23 and 24), and so on. Nevertheless, a non-Beijinger's level of education is paramount to determining if (s)he speaks dialects or Putonghua. For example, Chunsheng, a rural criminal, speaks Putonghua when he pretends to be a scientific inventor in Episode 17.

As much as the language distribution is based on the characters' social and cultural status, dynamic reversals between the seemingly higher class and the lower class abound. The father Fu Lao is represented as flawed and imperfect beginning with the first episode. Fu Lao's grand plan to reform (*gaige*) and govern (*zhili zhengdun*) family matters much like a state bureaucracy is met with opposition from the rest of the family members, resulting in total chaos. With the patriarchy shattered, the authority of the father figure is undermined, though not in a malicious way. The lower class always has the potential to play tricks on the higher class by borrowing their discourse, but not vice versa. The finest example occurs between He Ping and Fu Lao. In Episode 15, He Ping convinces Fu Lao to invest in stocks by presenting such an investment as a sublime support of the state economy. Conversely, the particular knowledge the lower class possesses is far beyond the comprehension of the cultural elite. In Episode 35, He Ping follows the then *zouxue* trend of pop stars going on tour, making substantial sums evading state taxation. She proudly unleashes a torrent of professional jargon about her performance success, which to Fu Lao just seems like a stream of nonsensical Japanese sentences.

这穴头可不是空码，我攒儿亮着呢，知道他真把上我啦！...昨儿有穴头到我们团来团这事儿，想让我们给出个底包儿，看了我这大鼓说我这活儿还能单档杵，每场置点儿黑杵总比干拿份子强啊。虽然没腕儿那么嗨吧，可也念不到哪儿去。

The head of the *zouxue* troupe is not an amateur. I'm quite aware that he's trying to win me over. ... Yesterday he came over to our troupe to negotiate this thing. He wanted us to give a bottom line price for performing. After watching my *dagu* performance, he said I could even get a separate bonus. The under-the-table tips [from fans] are always better than the profit sharing from each performance. Although I don't earn as much as those big shots – it's almost the same.

The language use according to characters' cultural and social class also holds true in the hit telenovela *The happy life of the garrulous Zhang Damin* (1999), adapted from Liu Heng's novel of the same title (1997).⁴ Zhang Damin, an ordinary factory worker and the eldest son of a working class family, lives with his senile mother and four siblings in a cramped two-room house in a *dazayuan* (a compound occupied by many households). Daming's mundane life is marked by poverty, friction, and misfortune, yet the setbacks are overcome by his humorous garrulousness. Matching his overweight body, Damin's excessive language signifies his optimistic way of living, a catharsis of anxiety and repression. Damin's colloquial, everyday Beijing Mandarin makes a sharp contrast with the language of his college-educated youngest brother Daguo, whose speech features school learned Putonghua vocabulary. In

⁴ The novel was earlier adapted as the film *Meishi touzhe le* (A tree in a house, 1998), starring the famous comedian Feng Gong, speaking Tianjin Mandarin.

Episode 12, Daguo ruefully reflects upon his college dream of planting crops in the remote Xinjiang as *yàuzhì* (naïve) and *bùkānhuìshǒu* (can't bear to recall), and sets a more practical career goal as *zǒushìtú* (to go for a political career).

However, in the drama series *Don't mess with love* (2005),⁵ all the major characters speak Beijing Mandarin, regardless of cultural and social status, age, gender, urban or rural origins, or character prominence. The majority of the plots revolve around He Jiaqi, a white-collar Beijing girl who works at a real estate company, and her complicated romance with three men: her Beijing boyfriend Wan Zheng, her boss Pengzong from Taiwan, and her younger colleague Liao Yu, who allegedly came to Beijing from a city in the South. Except for Pengzong who speaks a Gangtai-accented Putonghua, both the Beijingers and the non-Beijingers speak Beijing Mandarin. For example, the non-Beijinger Liao Yu can utter Beijing slang words like *qiā* 掐 (not get along well), *yǒuyìtuǐr* 有一腿儿 (illegitimate love affair), and *wūtu* 乌秃 (vague or ambivalent attitude). An outsider's imitation of the Beijing Mandarin may be a way to assimilate in the metro life. For Liao Yu, he picks up Beijing Mandarin to obtain the unique sense of Beijing pride, a quality of Jiaqi he finds most attractive. While in the novel, from which the TV series was adapted, it is more evident that Jiaqi and her family members are ready to imitate Hong Kong and Taiwan accents (*gangtaiyin*) whenever they talk with Pengzong, such self-reflexivity is only briefly revealed in the telenovela version. In Episode 6, when Jiaqi explains in a Taiwan accent why Pengzong picks her up everyday, Liao Yu responds, “我就听不惯一个胡同串子说那个台湾普通话。” (I'm not used to hearing a Beijinger speaking that Taiwan Putonghua). Jiaqi immediately retorts, “我还听不惯一个外地人操着我们京腔京韵呢!” (Well, I'm not used to an outsider putting on our Beijing intonation!)

⁵ When this drama series first aired in the spring 2005 it topped the Beijing's TV rankings chart and repeated that feat when it reran in the summer 2005.

Witnessing the further penetration of popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the late 1990s, Wang Shuo and Lao Xia (2000: 227-234), on one hand, claim that the gangtai-style Putonghua is the only language to completely defeat the overly politicized language (*fan zhengzhihua yuyan*) that peaked in the Cultural Revolution on the Mainland.⁶ On the other hand, as a perfect language of romance, the soft- and tender-sounding Gangtai Putonghua has become the predominant speech style to imitate in Mainland youth idol drama productions. Wang worriedly predicted that the Gangtai Putonghua would supplant the Northern Mandarins including Beijing Mandarin among the younger generations within two decades. However, Wang himself actually had written a series of hit television series themed on the romantic love in the early 1990s, for example, *Ai ni mei shangliang* (Loving you for keeps, 1992), *Guobayin* (Hearts' content, 1994), to name a few. By comparison, the series *Don't mess with love*, made around one decade later, seems to suggest in a more assertive tone that the Beijing Mandarin could function as a romantic language. Unlike most of Wang Shuo's media productions, revolutionary and intellectual discourse characteristic of Putonghua rarely springs from the mouths of the characters in this series. Pengzong's Gangtai Putonghua peppered with business jargon in a condescending and forceful tone is more indicative of his economic and social power than of a romantic language. The drama explores almost all kinds of romantic love: the traditional man-woman love, cyber love, older woman-toy boy relationship (*jiedi lian*), senior citizen love (*huanghun lian*), extramarital affairs, divorce, and so on. Almost everyone is trapped in a love triangle, pursuing someone who loves someone else. The peculiarity of the unattainable, frustrated love among the Beijing people could only be expressed by a local Beijing adjective word 拧巴 *níngba*, which literally means

⁶ They point out three features of the over-politicized language: the hollow, exaggerated rhapsody; a language of violence; and a standard, authoritative broadcasting intonation. See Wang Shuo and Lao Xia (2000: 209).

“twisted to the opposite direction.” As Wan Zheng comments on Jiaqi to Liao Yu in Episode 5,

“你是外地来的吧？北京姑娘还就这样，你对她越好，她越防着你，你要不理她，她倒来劲了，就有了征服欲了。所以说，没必要对她们好。小贺就是一典型的北京姑娘。我就喜欢她那付滚刀儿肉的架势，特经得起伤害。”

You're not from here, are you? That's the way Beijing girls are. The better you treat her, the more distant she'll be; yet if you play hard to get, she'll have enough motivation to win you over. So there's no point treating her well. Xiao He [Jiaqi] is such a typical Beijing girl. I like how she can hold up [the slang *gundaorrou* literally means the meat rolls back and forth under the chopper]. She can take anything.

The fact that many phrasings as such have been widely circulated as sayings of love by the young fans in Beijing indicates the potential of the Beijing Mandarin as a language of romantic love, yet to what an extent Beijing Mandarin can compete with Gangtai-Putonghua is still an open question.

Shanghai: The unique heterogeneous nature of Shanghai Wu became ingrained from its formative stage when the local dialect of the Shanghai county blended with Ningbo Wu, Suzhou Wu, Jiaying Wu, Jianghuai/Subei Mandarin, and some other variants. Gunn (2006) points out that the use of multiple local languages has been characteristic of Shanghai stage and media productions. In the 2006 Shanghai-Wu-dubbed version

of the martial-arts sitcom *Wulin waizhuan*,⁷ the six regulars speak four dialects. For instance, the female inn keeper Manager Tong, who originally migrated from Shaanxi to Beijing, speaks Subei Mandarin; Tong's most capable employee, the martial arts master Bai Zhantang speaks Shanghai Wu; the inept scholar Lü Xiucan speaks Suzhou Wu; and the illiterate, impetuous cook Big Mouth Li speaks Chongming Wu. In the Shanghai comedies the stereotypical use of the local languages has been perpetuated to the extent that any attempt go against the stereotypes proves difficult. In the comic sketch series (a radio show later in VCD format) *Huaji Wang Xiaomao* (The comedic Wang Xiaomao, 1987–), the protagonist Wang Xiaomao is depicted as an ordinary Shanghai citizen originally from Subei. Therefore he speaks Subei Mandarin or sometimes a Shanghai Wu with a strong Subei accent.⁸ The show has made a conscious effort in the past twenty years to promote Wang as a new type of Shanghai citizen in the image of a Good Samaritan.⁹ Nevertheless, some audiences from Subei angrily called for a ban on the show because of the offensive portrayal of Subei people as comic figures speaking the Subei dialect (Chen Li, 2006). At the same time, some Shanghai audiences originally from Ningbo deny the possibility that Subei people could serve as the representatives of a new Shanghainese (Ruan Shi, 2006).

The unsettled Shanghai identity of the earlier immigrants seems downplayed in such telenovelas as *Chuang Shanghai* (Making a living in Shanghai, 1999) which depicts the new arrivals' struggles in Shanghai in the reform era. To distinguish them from the group of Henan immigrants who speak Henan Mandarin, the local Shanghai characters, regardless of their origins, speak the national compromise, Putonghua, with the exception of a single minor character, a laid-off female worker speaking Shanghai

⁷ The original sitcom employs more than ten local languages including Shanghai Wu. A brief discussion of the use of local languages in the sitcom can be seen in the Epilogue of this chapter.

⁸ The character Wang Xiaomao is played by at least four actors, each with varying accents.

⁹ For the statement from the producer Ge Mingming, see Wei Qing (2003).

Wu. When He Wenchang and his Henan townsmen first arrive in Shanghai, they are despised and mocked, together with their accent, by the Shanghai people. By learning to speak Putonghua, He is gradually recognized by his Shanghai colleagues in a foreign enterprise. His successful integration into the local community culminates in his taking the place of his former superior, the self-important, pompous sales manager Tuoni (Tony), a U.S.-educated Shanghainese who speaks Putonghua and is ready to switch to English.

Since 2000 there have been fewer telenovela productions in Shanghai Wu. Even those portraying the local Shanghai history and culture stick to a Putonghua soundtrack. Keeping this in mind, the recent telenovela *Chang hen ge* (Song of unending sorrow, 2006) stands out as a rare example for the fact that it inserts a healthy quantity of Shanghai Wu vocabulary into its otherwise Putonghua soundtrack. Wang Anyi's original novel of the same title narrates a half-decade of the life of a former Miss Shanghai, Wang Qiyao, as an allegory of the city of Shanghai. Although the author consciously avoids using vocabulary with a distinctive Shanghai flavor for her characters,¹⁰ the two scriptwriters of the telenovela version, Zhao Yaomin and Jiang Liping, make dense use of Shanghai Wu expressions and vocabulary in their adaptations. The distinctive words, mostly pronounced in Putonghua and sometimes delivered in Shanghai Wu, become new information as they indicate specific historical temporalities and convey rich cultural connotations Putonghua alone would have been incapable of. For example, the nostalgic sentiments toward the vanishing world are instantly evoked by the words from pre-1949 Shanghai: *dulovang* 杜六房 (an old brand name of a local deli store), *jiǎochángshā* 绞肠痧 (a former name for appendicitis), *tánxìngnǚláng* 弹性女郎 (taxi girls in old Shanghai), etc.

¹⁰ Wang declares she avoids linguistic stylization (*yuyan fenggehua*) in her novel writing at least by 1998 (to see Chen, Sihe 1998: 51), although she used Shanghai Wu as a sound from the past in her 2001 novella "Meitou" (to see Gunn 2006: 180-182).

Compared with the already scarce telenovelas, the use of Shanghai Wu in stage plays is even rarer. The longtime promise of staging *Chang hen ge* in Shanghai Wu has yet to be fulfilled. The recent dialect version of the play *Wuya yu maque* (Crows and sparrows, 2006)¹¹ turned out to be a market failure. The play employs a variety of Wu dialects: Ningbo Wu, Shanghai Wu with a Suzhou accent, Changshu Wu, the Pudong suburban Shanghai Wu, as well as the urban Shanghai Wu (Zhu Meihong, 2006). As much as the myriad dialect-dialogues realistically reflect the time when many immigrants were first putting down roots in Shanghai in the Republican era, the dialect version of the stage plays failed to secure the patronage of the young, diverse immigrant audiences who were more used to the plays rendered in Putonghua.¹² The heterogeneity and complexity of Shanghai Wu is coupled with a generational difference: while the older generation's Shanghai Wu carries different accents which reveal their origins, the younger generation is increasingly influenced by Putonghua usage. This is best illustrated in the sitcom *Laoniangjiu* (Good Samaritan, 1995–), which revolves around a Shanghai family of three generations and their daily lives. The generation of *Laoniangjiu* and *Laojiuma* in their late 60s speaks a Shanghai Wu with varying accents. For example, *Laojiuma* still distinguishes *jian yin* (sharp sound) and *tuan yin* (rounded sound), like *siao* instead of *xiao* for “small” in 小囡. However, such distinctions have been absent from the tongues of their sons' and grandsons' generations. Similarly, in one episode, *Laojiuma* pronounces *shuai* 帅 in the line “伊长了勿要忒帅哦” as *se*, which is mocked by her daughter and the daughter-in-law, who take it as *sue*.

¹¹ The film version made in 1949 portrays the struggle between the tenants of a Shanghai *Shikumen* building and their exploitative nationalist landlord at the dawn of the Communist party's takeover of power. Most of the characters speak a language much like Putonghua, except for the peddler Little Broadcast played by Zhao Dan, who occasionally slips into Shanghai Wu.

¹² Email correspondence with Nick Rongjun Yu in January 2007. Yu is a playwright and the marketing director of the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre.

In other words, the three major factors identified in Gunn (2006) still account for the Shanghai media's continued preference for Putonghua rather than Shanghai Wu: the intrinsic heterogeneous nature of Shanghai Wu, the massive influx of middle-class immigrants from across China, and the city's stated goal of becoming an international metropolis—and one making use of universal and official rather than local forms of expression. I would like to add one more consideration to those enumerated by Gunn—the conservative local government policies which have long implemented the central government's pro-Putonghua agenda. In the early 1980s, the Shanghai government initiated a ban on Shanghai Wu in all schools from kindergarten up. In the 1990s, it strengthened its control over the media. For instance, the Shanghai Wu-dubbed version of the telenovela *Hexu zai huishou* (Why the need to recall?, 1998?) was effectively banned in spite of its “main melody” motif of the relocation of released prisoners, which was highly affirmed by the then prime minister, Li Peng (People's Daily, 1998). In 2001, legislation was passed to require all civil servants to speak Putonghua in the public realm. As the first of its kind nationwide, the city regulation to carry out the 2001 national-language law went into effect in March 2006. Accordingly, dialect-based news programs were strictly controlled from then on, and media outlets that launch new entertainment shows in Shanghai Wu without approval from Shanghai SARFT are punished.

Nevertheless, the very reasons previously cited by Gunn as evidence against use of the dialect can be presented by defenders of Shanghai Wu as arguments for opposing the dialect's decline: as far as the use of Shanghai Wu may set communications obstacles for the increasing number of migrants and foreigners, the local dialect sitcoms and telenovelas could function as teaching materials for their better integration and acculturation into the community. While the promotion of Putonghua or even English may enhance Shanghai's image as a cosmopolitan city,

preserving the city's distinctive local linguistic and cultural heritage seems more urgent in the context of global/local dialectical dynamics. As the leading figure of promoting Shanghai Wu, the linguist Qian Nairong has been voicing alarm at the prospect that Shanghai Wu is in decline. His series of articles since 2004 addressing the significance of protecting Shanghai Wu have aroused heated debate and discussion in the Chinese linguistics field and beyond.¹³ The linguist's call for preserving Shanghai Wu and the local cultural heritage resonates in the press. The *Shenjiang Fuwu Daobao* (Shanghai Times, 1/19/2005), which boasts the largest local distribution, devoted two editions of in-depth reporting to the topic of Shanghai Wu: "Nine sins in the decline of Shanghai Wu," and "Seven strategies to revive Shanghai Wu." In a *Xinmin Zhoukan* (Xinmin Weekly) article dated 02/02/2005, the author Wang Che angrily criticizes the CCTV spring festival galas as northern hegemony. The sentiments were triggered by the fact that a local comic skit was disqualified from the gala in the last round (Wang Che, 2005). Even the official newspaper *Xinmin Wanbao* (Xinmin Evening News), which doesn't usually support promoting the language, ran two articles on the topic in April 2006, one commenting on the recent nationwide emergence of media productions in local languages and the other proposing protecting dialect as one would protect one's mother tongue against the dissemination of the "artificial" Putonghua (Wen Xin 2006 and Li Tiangang 2006).

As a possible consequence of the promotions, a reading entitled "上海话‘侬啊晓得口伐’" ("Do you know Shanghai dialect?") which briefly introduces the history of Shanghai Wu and its vocabulary was added to a supplementary textbook designed

¹³ One of Qian's most influential articles "Zhiyi xiandai hanyu guifanhua" ("To debate on the standardization of Chinese language"), was first published in *Shanghai Literature* (2004, No. 2) and later posted on a major Chinese linguistics bbs website (www.pkucn.com). It aroused heated debate and discussion once posted online on 4/2/2004. It had triggered 1320 threads as of 8/30/2005. The discussion and debate focused on the three related issues: the changing nature of language and the (im)possibility of language standardization; tension between Putonghua and dialects; and the extent of the use of dialects in the media and literature.

for the elementary students in 2005. A recent TV talk show, *Sanren malatang* (Three Person Spicy Hot Soup, 2006), became an instant hit, hosted by a Shanghainese man and a Romanian woman both speaking in Shanghai Wu. Moreover, as I will elaborate in Chapter Five, in contrast to the increasingly sluggish productions in the traditional media, the Internet plays an active role in promoting Shanghai Wu among the Shanghai youth: the popular websites hosting Shanghai rap songs, the burgeoning blog writings in Shanghai Wu, as well as the numerous tests of Shanghai Wu mimicking the forms of CET, TOEFL, and GRE. Nonetheless, as I will argue, although the use of Shanghai Wu has become a dominant marker for the Shanghai youth articulating a Shanghai identity, their endeavors are frustrated by their being heavily influenced by the Putonghua usage. The salutary response of the Internet to the question “Whither Shanghai Wu” still looms large. Shanghai identity defined by language continues to be unsettled, and so the controversy over the use of Shanghai Wu in the media will be going on for a long time.

Chongqing and Chengdu: Chongqing and Chengdu (usually combined as *chuanyu*) in Southwest China continue to be the country’s most productive region for media productions in local languages. Between 2000 and 2005, there were over forty television series produced in Sichuan Mandarin (Tian Yigui, 2005: 140-150). In Chongqing, *Qiren Anshimin* (The legendary Anshimin, 2001) is based on the folktale of a local scholar in the late Qing dynasty, who is credited for his resourcefulness in transforming evil people into cooperative ones. The 1960s classic film/play *Zhua zhuangding* (Seizing conscripts) in Sichuan Mandarin featuring a local corrupt GMD officer Wang Baozhang became the script source for a couple of recent television

series.¹⁴ As always, the stories of Wang Baozhang have to do with the time they are told, not with the time that they tell of.¹⁵ In the 2001 *Wang Baozhang Waizhuan* (Anecdotes of Wang Baozhang), most episodes are devoted to the power struggle between Wang and a local landlord, reflecting the burning issue of bureaucratic corruption in contemporary China. In a contemporary urban setting, *Jiefang Linju* (Neighbors, 2000) and its sequel depict the everyday life of a group of familiar neighbors in a Chongqing district. Drawing on the local culture, history, and daily-life practice of district residents, these television series rendered in the local dialect greatly appeal to the local audience. On occasion a tentative switching of the dialect shows to the Putonghua soundtrack would effect immediate, strong objection from the audience.¹⁶ Driven by the wide popularity of the dialect media productions, Chongqing TV opened a *xiju pindao* (Comedy Channel) to show television series in Sichuan Mandarin in July 2004. To a large extent, the media productions in the *chuanyu* region continue to assert the local as the place of their own cultural productions. If the relation of local language and culture to national, metropolitan language and culture is only suggested in the sitcom *Kong le chui* (Hot air, 1999), as Gunn (2006: 151-153) has analyzed, the subversion to the mandated dominance of the Putonghua in media became explicit in a comic sketch “*zhaopin zhuchiren*” (to recruit a TV hostess), the first show in the Chongqing Satellite New Year Gala in 2006. In the sketch, two established television hosts are interviewing a young woman for a job as a TV hostess. After initially responding in Chongqing Mandarin she is asked to speak Putonghua, to which she pointedly responds,

¹⁴ The original plot is about how Wang economically exploits poor peasants and coerces them to join the army in the anti-Japanese War.

¹⁵ This famous argument was made by Brian Henderson (1980-81), who interprets the film *The Searchers* about white-red relations in 1868-1873 as one about white-black relations in 1956.

¹⁶ Information obtained from my interviews (January 2006) with the producers and scriptwriters of the two hit TV shows in Chongqing: *Wudu Yehua* and *Shenghuo Malatang*.

撒子叫普通话嘛？伟大祖国的首都北京讲的呀？普通话嘛就是普通人听得懂，说得来的话撒。我讲的就是普通话撒。

What's Putonghua? Spoken by the people in our great capital Beijing? Putonghua [common speech] is what the ordinary people can understand and communicate. So what I'm speaking is indeed Putonghua.

As Jia Pingwa once joked, this candidate also plays on the word “putong” (common) from the meaning of “universal” to that of “ordinary.” But unlike Jia, she exhibits an apparent competence in Putonghua later on, which prompts the two hosts to recall their own past pains of accent correction in order to pass the broadcasting Putonghua examination.¹⁷

When compared with the fledgling dialect programs in most other regions in China, the television productions in Sichuan Mandarin, with their greater numbers and more varied reception, provide richer materials for the study of local audiences in China generally. Local audience, which is a concept often contrasted with national audience, is far from a single homogeneous group. It is various in terms of age, gender, social origin, social class, cultural status, as well as regional identity. Accordingly, the categories that local audience members in the *chuanyu* area fall into include adult/youth, male/female, urban/suburban/rural, intellectuals/knowledge professionals/working class, Chongqinger/Chengdu'er. As the active, selective makers of meaning, the local audience members are highly involved in the media production in local languages. Although I am not proposing a simple cause/effect relationship between the audience's orientation and show success, there are examples, both

¹⁷ The sketch script is provided by the author Yan Ran. It is slightly different from the actual onstage performance.

successful and failed, that corroborate with producers' accentuated awareness of the stratification of the local audience. The docudrama-type show *Wudu Yehua* (Night talk in the foggy capital, 1994–) on Chongqing TV, clearly targeting local middle/lower-class women, has enjoyed an enduringly high audience rating over the past decade. By contrast, the telenovela *Chongqing qiumi* (The Chongqing soccer fans, 2000), although well received in Chengdu, was cancelled in Chongqing after the first two episodes. Identifying the characters with themselves, the “resistant” local Chongqing soccer fans found certain plotlines offensive and humiliating.

Not surprisingly, stratification of the local audience can even be at the root of reactions to sweeping media issues such as that of the controversy over the condemned vulgarity of the dialect productions. Recent television series have been blamed for their poor quality, lack of taste, or vulgarities, particularly when compared with those mid-1990s telenovelas which enjoy national reputations, such as *Sha'r shizhang* (General Asinine, 1994) and *Shancheng bangbangjun* (Shoulder stick brigade of the mountain metropolis, 1995-1996). Here I take the controversial Chengdu television series *Jiada Waizhuan* (Stories of Mr. Fake, 2000) as a case study. The show had to be cancelled in 2000 for its vulgarity alleged by the Chengdu audience. The local veteran comedian Li Boqing plays the protagonist Mr. Fake (*jiada* is a local term meaning “fake, talk big”), a very local term invented by Li himself. In a scene which is identified as “obscene and nasty,” Mr. Jiada, having become rich by winning a lottery jackpot, is bathing in a hot spring with his new mistress. The question we have to ask, given the complex composition of the local audience for the show, is to what groups of viewers was this scene in vulgar taste, and even within these groups, would the scene have been offensive in all circumstances? Bourdieu's book *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) sheds light on this question and the overall concerns of this study. Defining taste as socially constructed, he stresses the role of

education in and the influence of cultural capital on perceptions of taste. He asserts that, “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.” (7) As my limited data shows,¹⁸ those who called for a ban of *Stories of Mr. Jiada* were largely college professors, teachers, and parents. The Chengdu intellectuals had long been dissatisfied with Li Boqing’s made-for-profit vulgarity in his *sanda pingshu* (a local storytelling form credited to Li). Through this dissatisfaction, the intellectuals with more cultural capital legitimate their privileges, envisioning themselves as superior to those whose tastes differ from their own. At the same time, the audiences with less or limited cultural capital expressed their pity over the show’s cancellation. For example, a local taxi driver Mr. Zeng thought it inappropriate to ban a series which was so entertaining and relaxing (Wu Deyu et al, 2000).

The program’s scheduling was also related to the show’s closure. In 2000, the series was imprudently scheduled in primetime (8:20pm) on the Sichuan TV Channel 1, which enjoys the largest/widest provincial coverage. As Li’s ideal audiences are lower-middle-class adults, segments of the audience outside this dedicated group are those most likely to initiate any ban of his work. In other words, the universality of viewership for primetime material makes Li’s show vulnerable for the hour instead. Moreover, as prime time is often regarded a time for family viewing, it is highly possible that parents found the show too salacious to watch with their children.¹⁹ The lack of a rating system in China and the consequent failure to segregate underage viewers effectively has been the crux of the controversy over the vulgarity of media productions in local languages there. In my analysis of the local-language versions of the cartoon *Tom and Jerry* in Chapter Two, aesthetic judgments of “good” or “bad”

¹⁸ Data collected from the public debate that ensued after the series’ cancellation in late August 2000 in the newspapers *Chengdu Shangbao* and *Huaxi Dushibao*.

¹⁹ In an interview, a Sichuan director/producer also briefly suggested that the failure of the series was due to insufficient awareness of the stratified audience in scheduling. See He Shengtao 2004.

are often replaced by a moral judgment intertwined with standards of educational responsibility.

It is fitting then, that Bourdieu (1984) points out that the changing and contingent judgment of taste has much to do with the perceived legitimacy and institutionalization of its object. Li Boqing, despite his wide popularity in the local teahouses, had no official affiliation by 2000, around the time he shot the series. Responding to the blame widely conferred on him for his vulgarity, Li said, “Once I’ve got an official title and become a state artist, my work will no longer be in low taste.”²⁰ Clearly knowing the importance of institutionalization, Li left Chengdu in 2000 for Chongqing, where he was offered for the first time a senior professional title from the Chongqing *qunzhong yishu guan* (Mass Art Bureau). Six years later in 2006 when the Emei Film Channel in Chengdu resumed broadcasting the series on prime time (19:55), Li had become a well established artist commanding much symbolic capital. There is no debate any more about the vulgarity of the series, much less about any possible call for its banning. The audiences’ enthusiasm for watching the series became a kind of fandom for Li, and the series turned out to rank among the top ten in Chengdu.

Guangzhou: In Guangzhou TV, the hit sitcom *Wailai xifu bendi lang* (Native husbands with outsider wives) was aired in 2000 and completed 1000 episodes by the end of February 2006. As the title indicates, a major theme of the sitcom is increasing immigration in Guangzhou. The parents of a four-son family living in an old city district, *xiguan* in Guangzhou, wish to have local Guangzhou girls as their daughters-in-laws. However, none of their (future) daughters-in-law are native to Guangzhou.

²⁰ From an online post, “Sichuan fangyan yingshiju daole zui weixian de shihou,” <http://www.cslanguage.com/bbs/printpage.asp?BoardID=5&ID=906>

While the second eldest son's wife is from Chaozhou/Shantou in eastern Guangdong, the other three sons all end up marrying girls from other provinces or even other countries. The eldest daughter-in-law, Xianglan, is an honest migrant worker from a humble Henan village. She speaks a Putonghua that features a distinctive Henan Mandarin word 俺 (俺). The third daughter-in-law, Xingzi, is a shrewd Shanghainese who works in an insurance company. She speaks an accented Putonghua that is peppered with Shanghai Wu phrases. The fourth son's girlfriend, Dianna, turns out to be an American. She speaks both Cantonese and Putonghua with a foreign accent. Their outsider accents or languages are contrasted with the standard Guangzhou Cantonese spoken by the local family members, including the parents, the four sons, and the grandson.

The language problem itself is so salient that it becomes the theme/topic of a two-part episode entitled *Ji tong ya jiang/kai thung ap kong*, a Cantonese saying that describes the misunderstanding caused by language barriers. Both Xianglan and Xingzi are highly motivated to learn Cantonese from their husbands. Yet, unaware of the multilayered hierarchy within the Cantonese language, they're learning a kind of Cantonese that isn't the type they're supposed to learn. Although Xianglan hopes to learn some useful Cantonese for daily shopping, what her husband Ah Guang thinks the easiest and most fun to teach are the local expletives. For example, 痴线 *ci sin* (idiot), 蠢居 *ngong geoi* (asinine, stupid), 点极都不明 *dim gik dou dim m ming* (blockhead, literally meaning one still can't get it no matter how hard you explain). Fearing that his wife would leave him for a better job opportunity, Ah Yao teaches Xingzi the variant of stereotypical Cantonese spoken by the rural lower class such as Taishan (*Toi san*) Cantonese, instead of the "aristocratic-sounding" Guangzhou. For example, *neih mat sui* instead of *neih bingo* for "who are you?" *yahk fan* not *sikh fan* for "to eat." Much amusement arises from the immediate, intensive "performative"

effects their utterances evoke for the native Cantonese family members, something the two hard-working nonnative learners would never get. In a similar vein, in order to keep a better marital relationship, Ah Guang and Ah Yao are learning their wives' dialects by means of the local operas (Henan *yuju* and Shanghai *yueju* respectively) and pop songs in local languages. Yet Ah Yao's blunt translation of the female third-person pronoun (she/her) in a pop love song into the Shanghai Wu word *yi* 伊 makes Xingzi furiously probe into his former love affairs. The father's decision to promote Putonghua as the common language of the family doesn't make the situation better. As things turn out, the parents' Cantonese-accented Putonghua (or its localized pronunciation which sounds like Baodonggua 煲冬瓜/white gourd stew) is so heavily accented that the misunderstandings are only intensified. While the mother pronounces *xi* 洗 (to wash) as *si* 死 (to die), the father's pronunciation of *jiaoqu* 郊区 [新房子] is misheard as *jiaoqi* 娇妻 [新房子] by Xianglan, who then suspects that her father-in-law has had an affair. As a final resort, the whole family turns to Dianna, hoping she will teach them English, the universal language, as the common language of the family. Yet their awkward Chinglish leaves Dianna at her wits' end.

At the same time that linguistic and cultural differences contribute both to dramatic conflicts and amusing misunderstandings, the family members' wholesome efforts to overcome linguistic chaos and local stereotypes and to forge harmony and union are obvious. Throughout the series, the local family members and the nonnative daughters-in-law communicate in their own local languages, any one of which is largely linguistically unintelligible from the standpoint of another, indicating their mutual bilingual capability and mutual respect and appreciation. Many episodes showcase the richness and diversity of both Lingnan culture and other regional cultures and customs, particularly those of central north China and Shanghai. Moreover, the sitcom positively portrays the immigrant characters who endeavor to

succeed in Guangzhou. For example, a three-part episode *Chuangdang Guangzhou* (“Making a living in Guangzhou”) depicts an immigrant countryside girl Zhang Yongfang. As Xianglan’s townswoman, Zhang speaks Henan Mandarin. Realizing Zhang’s difficulty in understanding Cantonese, the local Cantonese family members immediately switch to speak accented Putonghua. It is her perseverance and hard work that account for her eventual business success in Guangzhou, which is little hampered by her incompetence in Cantonese. In other words, the relationship between the facility of speaking Cantonese and the job market is patently underplayed. The sitcom fosters a sense that Guangzhou is no longer a closed and homogeneous city with a single, indigenous language and culture, but has become an open-minded, receptive, and dynamic site where the local and multiple other cultures are in a process of interaction, confrontation, reconciliation, and compatibility.

Epilogue: Besides the cities I discuss above, the television series in local languages have been emerging and burgeoning in other parts of China since 2000. Most noticeable is the rise of the television series rendered in Northeast Mandarin. The popular use of Northeast Mandarin in the media begins with comic sketches in the 1990s. Among others, the comedian Zhao Benshan achieved a nationwide fame for his Northeast Mandarin comic sketches in the CCTV Spring Festival Galas. Since 2003, Zhao has produced, directed, and starred in a series of telenovelas with strong Northeast flavor. Just as Zhao epitomizes the Northeastern peasants in his comic sketches (the rich implications of his sketches are examined in 1.4), his rural-themed telenovelas are likewise concerned with the reality of marginalized peasants in an increasingly commercialized, urbanized, and modernized society. *Liu Laogen* (2003) and its sequels tell a story of the peasant-turned- entrepreneur Liu Laogen who manages a vacation resort, Longquan Shanzhuang, in his village. In portraying Liu

coping with his family members, fellow villagers, and the local corrupt cadres, the series illuminates the struggles, dilemmas, and illusions in a peasant's business adventure. *Ma Dashuai* (2005) and its sequels narrate how the eponymous protagonist Ma Dashuai and his rural family members survive after migrating to the city and how Ma later on struggles to run an elementary school for the children of the immigrant peasant workers.

Zhao's telenovelas, with their dense use of the Northeast words and idioms, are aired on primetime on CCTV-1.²¹ Ambiguously enough, the authorities do not consider his series as subject to a 2005 SARFT regulation that reiterates that all television series should use standard Putonghua (Zhao Nannan, 2005). The privilege enjoyed by the Northeast Mandarin in the state media evokes resentful envy from other parts of China. For example, the Sichuan local comedians see Zhao as a rival in their own national initiative that television serials in Sichuan Mandarin also be shown on CCTV (Zhao Bin and Wang Jia, 2005). As a matter of fact, besides Zhao's rural-themed telenovelas, the mainstream revolutionary epics shown in the central state media have also allowed a median use of local languages for characters other than the revolutionary leaders. For instance, in the CCTV-1 aired telenovela *Liliang yingxiong zhuan* (The legend of the heroes in the Lüliang Mountains, 2005), which was shot in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the victory of the war of Resistance to Japan, the anti-Japanese peasant heroes in the Lüliang Mountains speak a Shanxi Mandarin variety which is intelligible to the national audience. In another revolutionary series *Balujun* (Eighth Route Army, 2005), the Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan, his native subordinates, and the Eighth Route Army soldiers from Shanxi all

²¹ To test audiences' understanding of the local speeches in Zhao's series, a so-called "Standard Test on Northeast Mandarin" was circulated online: level 4 for the Southerners, level 6 for the Northerners except the Northeasterners, and level 8 for the native Northeasterners.

speak Shanxi Mandarin.²² Although the same 2005 regulation also stipulates that the revolutionary leaders should speak Putonghua, Deng Xiaoping in the *Eighth Route Army* still speaks Sichuan Mandarin, a privilege the other revolutionary-leader characters including Mao Zedong and Zhu De no longer enjoy. Furthermore, also having to take audience and the market seriously, CCTV shows non-mainstream productions such as the huge hit martial-arts sitcom *Wulin Waizhuan* (My own swordsman, 2006) in multiple local languages. Set in an inn in the Ming dynasty typical of the Hong Kong martial-arts genre, the series is a tale of the *jianghu* underworld featuring the Manager Tong, her employees, and their customers from every walk of life. Almost every major character speaks a local language or an accented Putonghua—for example, Shaanxi Mandarin, Northeast Mandarin, Shanghai Wu, Shandong Mandarin, Tangshan Mandarin, and Tianjin Mandarin. By contrast, only the scholar Lü Xiucui speaks Putonghua without any accent and sometimes he utters English to showcase his high education. However, it is hard to apply here the set rule of language distribution between working class and intellectual we found in the Beijing telenovelas. To be sure, Lü Xiucui is ridiculed for his incompetence and pedantry most of the time, but in one episode, his ontological reasoning exerts the performative force that leads to a brute fact that the killer intending to kill Lü has killed himself. Fashioning a film style like Zhou Xingchi's, the series destabilizes all the seemingly stable social orders and even the spatial-temporal order. The languages in the series are packed with witty jokes, sophisticated satire, and numerous intertextual references to the popular culture and the Internet youth culture.

As the sitcom is an intensely verbal genre, Ying Da, the father of the Chinese sitcoms, has long followed a practice of *Qingjingxiju diyuhua* (the localization of the

²² In an interview, the director Song Yeming said that Yan's dialect well depicts his provinciality, as he would suspect/discredit those subordinates who speak a dialect other than Shanxi Mandarin.

sitcom). Over the past ten years, he has produced a series of sitcoms that explore the wit and humor of local languages, for example, *Wo ai wo jia* (I love my family, 1993) in Beijing Mandarin, *Xin 72 jia fangke* (New seventy-two tenants, 2001) in Shanghai Wu, *Dongbei yijiaren* (A Family in the Northeast, 2002) in Northeast Mandarin, and *Xi'an Hu Jia* (A Family in Xi'an, 2003) in Xi'an Mandarin. As I imply in my previous discussion of *Wo ai wo jia*, the topics of the episodes have been of concern and interest to the local audience at the time. In addition, the sitcom also evokes the immediacy of news programming by trying to integrate the recent social news into its narratives. Even though these sitcoms are well received by local markets, Ying Da recognizes the limitations of the productions in local dialects that appeal to local tastes with regard to audience reception. As he points out, the fundamental solution of the problem of reaching a national market with a sitcom is not inclusion of the local dialects, but a good script.²³ In conformity with this observation, a recent practice in sitcom production is to purchase the script of a regional hit sitcom, and then recast it with local actors and redub it with the local dialect in the target area. For instance, Guangdong TV's *Wailai xifu bendilang* is re-rendered as *Yijia laoshao xiangqianchong* in Changsha Xiang by Hunan TV, *Kaixin Yijiamen* in Hangzhou Wu by Zhejiang TV, and *Songbai xiangli wanjiaren* in Nanchang Gan by Jiangxi TV. All of the reproductions turned out to be local hits and were well received by local audiences. Yet the homogenization and the heterogenization, by turns, of this trans-regional practice should be studied in greater depth than the present research will allow.

²³ From Ying Da's speech at the Symposium of the 10th Anniversary of the Chinese Sitcom in 2003.

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMATIVITY IN DUBBING FILMS IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

A new phenomenon related to the television field is the dubbing of films into local languages. The various texts of all sorts, either foreign or domestic, either silent or audio, either classic or not, become the sources for dubbing. In most cases, the dubbing version rearranges the order of the selected clips of the original films and replaces the original soundtrack with new dialogue rendered in local languages.²⁴ Of this there are abundant examples. Chaplin speaks the Yunnan Mandarin variety of the Luliang county in an entertainment show that ran in Yunnan Kunming TV in 1996. In a series of VCDs aired in many Sichuan local TV stations in 2000, *Jane Eyre*, speaking Zhongjiang Mandarin, asks Rochester about the previous night, and he responds in Chengdu Mandarin that he lost big (*xibe* 洗白) in playing Mahjong. Besides the foreign classics, the series also included episodes from famous domestic films such as the 1950s revolutionary feature *Pingyuan youjidui* (*Guerrillas on the Plain*) and the 1980s martial-arts comedy *Shaolin xiaozi* (*Kids from Shaolin*); in both cases, the dialect versions largely recite/repeat the original lines in the Sichuan Mandarin. This trend didn't reach a national fever until the dubbing of the cartoon classic *Tom and Jerry* (*Mao he Laoshu* in the Putonghua) in 2004,²⁵ which had been made into approximately 17 local-language versions nationwide by 2005. The American cat Tom and the mouse Jerry were given the local names such as *laopi* 老皮 and *suizi'r* 碎子儿 in the Shaanxi Mandarin version, *ergazi* 二奶子 and *xiaobudian* 小

²⁴ To replace a foreign movie's soundtrack has been a universal device for comic effect. For example, Woody Allen's film *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* transformed the Japanese spy film *Kagi No Kagi* (*Key of Keys*) into a comedy with a completely different plot.

²⁵ The original version for dubbing is the MGM *Tom and Jerry* produced by Fred Quimby in the 1940s.

不点 in the Northeast Mandarin version, *maodatou* 猫大头 and *shuyaya* 鼠丫丫 in the Beijing Mandarin version, *laonaodan* 老孬蛋 and *xiaojingdou* 小精豆 in the Henan Mandarin version, *hantoumao* 憨头猫 and *xiao jin'guaixü* 小精怪鼠 in the Hubei Mandarin version, *loryoedio* 老油条 and *siortzinkua* 小精怪 in the Shanghai Wu version, to name a few. Some local TV stations launched new shows to dub films into local languages in 2004. In Shandong TV's *Ju lai feng* (*Fresh Air from Drama*, 2004), the German officer in *La Grande Vadrouille* responds to the nun in Jinan Mandarin: *chi le ge jidanbao nong le wan tianmo, gangse* 杠赛 *le!* (Just had an egg bun with a Shandong-style sweet sauce. Feel so good!) In its dubbed version of *Dawan* (Big shot's funeral), the funeral ceremony of the internationally renowned film director Don Tyler is planned to take place in the Temple of Confucius in Shandong. Chosen as the overture of the ceremony is a famous piece from Puccini's opera *Turandot* --- *Jinwan wufa rumian* (*No One Shall Sleep Tonight*) in Putonghua, the most common translation for the original Italian title *Nessun Dorma*, becomes very colloquial in Jinan Mandarin: *Jintian wanhang bu shuijiao* (*We're Not Gonna Sleep Tonight*). In Hangzhou West Lake Pearl Channel's *Yingshi hahaha* (*Fun from the Dubbed Films*, 2004-), the Beijing native actor Ge You in *Bujianbusan* (Be there or be square) becomes a local businessman speaking Shaoxing Keqiao Wu, while the Beijing actress Xu Fan turns into a school teacher in Hangzhou. Similarly, in the dubbed Hong Kong movie *Dailao baishou* (Only fools fall in love), the Hong Kong actor Liu Qingyun speaking Hangzhou Wu quarrels with the Hong Kong actress Wu Qianlian, who speaks Shaoxing Wu, over smelly preserved bean curd (*chou doufu*) at West Lake.

To some extent, the dubbing of films into local languages can be related to a larger trend of parodying classics, which was allegedly ushered in by Zhou Xingchi's *Dahua xiyou* (*A Chinese Odyssey*, 1995). Often regarded as spoofing the classic novel *Xiyouji* (*The Journey to the West*), *A Chinese Odyssey* epitomizes the so-called

wulitou (nonsense) or *dahua* language style: a pastiche of discourses transcending the delimitation of time and space. Largely following John Fiske's theory of resistant audience, Tao Dongfeng (2005) points out that the cynical Chinese youths' pleasure of consuming *dahua* texts is derived from the parody and subversion of the classic works as well as of the underlying ethical, moral, and cultural orders they reinforce. Although, to a degree, Tao's explanation of the pleasure is relevant to my study of the comedic function of local languages, his assertion that the *dahua* texts are solely parodies of classic works implies an academic bias that the former is often considered to be derivative and inferior to the latter, which is tacitly considered the origin, the center, and the authority. Furthermore, Tao is so preoccupied with the "nonsense" of the *dahua* texts that he fails to notice the "sense in the nonsense," that is, the performative force of the new text achieved through parodying—the power of what is enacted by deconstructing the original text. In this direction, Kun Qian's (2005) analysis of *A Chinese Odyssey, Part II* is inspiring. Applying Deleuze's philosophy of space and time, Qian finds that the film itself is complicated enough to create a dialogic double structure in temporal-spatial dimensions, and further explores the notion of "being as becoming" in the Monkey King/Joker's identity construction.

A central question with regard to the soundtrack is the performativity of the local-language version/soundtrack that would be normally rendered in Putonghua, and performance studies that celebrate the independence of performance from the text shed light on this question. In his theoretical article "Drama, Performativity, and Performance," Worthen (1998) agrees with Parker and Sedgwick's (1995) rethinking of Austin's classic example of the marital "I do." While Austin stresses the performative force of the text/language "I do" when uttered in a conventional social circumstance, the scholars in performance studies foreground the Austinian conventional procedure, here the wedding ceremony. They argue that it is the

(nontheatrical) performance (the wedding ceremony) that reconstitutes and produces the text (“I do”), which “gains its force not because it is an utterance of a text, not because the words themselves accomplish an action, but because the ‘I do’ cites and so reproduces an entire genre of performance.” (Worthen, 1097) Moreover, performance, redefined in nonliterary and nontheatrical terms, can be associated with the orally based ritual and everyday-life practices in ethnographical studies. To resist reading performances as texts is to challenge the conventional, colonizing ethnography as a form of writing that textualizes “the other” cultures within Western epistemologies. Worthen powerfully demonstrates the performance’s surrogation of text with the example of Baz Luhrmann’s film *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*. Obviously enough, the filmic performance is not derivative from, secondary to, and residual to the original text, Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*. On the contrary, Shakespeare’s lines uttered in Elizabethan English are reinvigorated and empowered, and simultaneously interrogated and surrogated by this modern MTV-style performance. The rich televisual citation in the film signifies its self-conscious address to the contemporary MTV-generation audience. As Worthen concludes, Luhrmann’s film presents “this version of Shakespeare’s work not as a performance *of* the text and not as a translation of the work but as an iteration of the work, an iteration that necessarily invokes and displaces a textual ‘origin’ by performing the text in a specific citational environment --- the verbal, visual, gestural, and behavioral dynamics of youth culture, of MTV. ... [i]t [the drama] can be performed only by or as its surrogates” (Worthen, 1104).

In this light, the local-language dubbing can be viewed as a *performance*, which is not necessarily dependent on or faithful to the *text* of the dubbing source/origin. By a replacement act, the local-language version surrogates the soundtrack conventionally rendered in Putonghua and therefore constitutes a new

work with its own performativity. First of all, the rendition of film in local language subverts the conventional social expectation of film rendering/dubbing in Putonghua. It is noted that in terms of soundtrack, the dubbing of foreign films into local languages is addressed not so much to the original soundtrack as to the dominant tradition of dubbing foreign films in Putonghua Mandarin. Take *Jane Eyre* as an example. Among the most popular dubbed foreign films—such as *Zorro* (Italy/France), *La Grande Vadrouille* (France–Britain), *Death on the Nile* (US), and *Cops and Thugs* (Japan)—the dubbed *Jane Eyre* from the version directed by Delbert Mann in 1970 has been long regarded as a model work of film dubbing in China. The lines dubbed in Putonghua are acclaimed for following entrenched principles of translation aesthetics: fidelity (*xin*), fluency (*da*), and elegance (*ya*). For instance, it is not Jane’s original monologue in English but its Chinese dubbing that becomes the most memorized and widely recited line in the film:

你以为我穷，不好看，就没有感情吗？我也会的，如果上帝赋予我财富和美貌，我一定使你难于离开我！就象现在我难于离开你！上帝没有这样！我们的精神是同等的！就如同你跟我经过坟墓，将同样站在上帝面前！

Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, and I have no heart? But I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are!

Moreover, the particularity of the dissemination of this dubbed movie is that it was circulated more widely in audiocassette form or over the radio than through the theatre. In other words, it was listened to more so than watched. Le Lin (2004) argues that the film itself may or may not be viewed as classic in its home country, but it is the charming voices of Chinese dubbing artists that complete its “classicness” in the genre of film dubbing in China. To a large extent, the Putonghua-dubbed voices become an inseparable part of these western “classic” films. For most of the Chinese audience, that the exotic heroes or heroines speak standard Putonghua has long been viewed as realistic, natural, and redundant.

In this sense, local-language dubbing brings to the audience the new information, unpredicted and undetermined by expectations of the social conventions. It functions as an alienatory mode which runs counter to the conventional practice that has been perpetuating Putonghua as the only “real” media language for any local community. In the dubbed version of *Jane Eyre*, the Sichuan-Mandarin soundtrack replete with the verbal citations of the local words (*basi, anyi*: comfortable), the local idioms (*suode qinqiao, cigen dercao*: talk as if it were a simple matter) and the local product names (*zhongjiang guamian*: noodle made in Zhongjiang) evokes familiarity and “realness” of the everyday life in the local community. The Putonghua lines, when reiterated in the local language and addressed to the local audience, have to be reoriented, reconstituted, and recontextualized. Thus Jane’s famous utterance on love equality in Putonghua cited above becomes a performative utterance of a low-status Zhongjiang immigrant girl, a speech act that prompted Rochester, now a Chengdu citizen and the employer, to abandon his mahjong addiction. Therefore, the rendition of the film into the local language falsifies the residual sense of local community that used to mis-imagine itself as a product of Putonghua. Identified as something alien to

the local community, the Putonghua soundtrack becomes the object of derision, mimicry, appropriation, and subversion.

At the same time, the laughter evoked by the local-language dubbing helps to enact a real sense of local community imagined by local language. In his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1960), Freud suggests the “bonding activity” of joke-telling in his discussion of the third person. A joke, particularly a tendentious joke, involves a tripartite structure of address: the teller of the joke or the first person, the butt of the joke, and the hearer of the joke or the third person, who fulfills the joke’s aim of producing pleasure. While Freud’s major concern is to explain why it is the third person, not the first person, who laughs, his discussion of the common psychological process shared by both is more relevant here. About one of the conditions of generating laughter, Freud notes that “it is essential that he [the third person] should be in sufficient psychological accord with the first person to possess the same internal inhibitions.... Thus, every joke calls for a public of his own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychological conformity” (Freud, 184-185). In his discussion of the smutty joke, one type of tendentious joke, Freud finds that the third person, replacing the second person (usually the sexually exposed woman), “becomes the person to whom the smut is addressed, and owing to this transformation it is already near to assuming the character of a joke” (Freud, 118). Noting that a joking relationship between the teller and the listener is established in this transformation, Neale and Krutnik (1990: 243) further argue that “the telling of a joke...serves to establish a demarcation between an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ ...such jokes create a communal bonding between the participants which establishes a relationship of power, of inclusion and exclusion.” Viewing the audience in the position of the third person, they extend the Freudian “bonding activity” of joke-telling to the “communalizing activity” of the sitcom that they study and of broadcast TV in general. Concerned with

affirming a sense of inclusion in a community, the sitcom performs its consolidating function and “represents an institutionalizing of the pleasures” (Neale and Krutnik, 243).

These insightful arguments are very useful for explaining the significance of the television programs rendered into local languages and the function of the laughter they evoke among the local audience. Sharing the same linguistic and cultural identity and the same daily-life experience, the local audience and the shows are easily identified and aligned with each other, both involved in a communalizing activity. On the level of physical community cooperation, the dubbing studios employ online BBS, cell phone SMS, and phone calls to recruit the local-language dubbers, decide which films are to be dubbed, and solicit new storylines, while simultaneously getting feedback from the local audience. The producer of a recent entertainment show *Juedui OK* (Absolutely OK) in Zhejiang TV even conceived a live competition of local-dialect dubbing in order to maximize the audience’s participation. In return, the local audience, rather than functioning as a passive and detached viewer, became part of the scene and actively involved in the programming production and reception. The laughter the local audience evoked helped to foster a sense of local community. The following dialogue is from the dubbed film *Hero* in Jinan Mandarin in the Shandong TV show *Fresh Air from Drama*, between Nameless (Jet Li), the sales manager of a fly-by-night company and the guard.

侍卫: 给老总捎麽土特产来了? 僚刚从法国回来, 对吗?

Guard: What kind of local products you have bought for our CEO? You just came back from France, right?

无名: 没错, 法国俺都转遍了, 仲宫, 柳埠, 八里洼, 土屋, 俺都去了。

Nameless: Correct. I visited every corner of France, like *Zhonggong*, *Liubu*, *Baliwa*, *Tuwu*, etc.

侍卫: 哇, 还净去的大城市啊!

Guard: Wah, you've been visiting all BIG cities!²⁶

It is true that the generation of laughter here is in accordance with a general principle of satire: the incongruity and exaggeration by confusion of the “categories of actuality” (Feinberg, 1967: 102-142). However, the premise that guarantees such laughter is the ability to identify these disrupted categories. If the audience is unfamiliar with the local place names cited above, which are all small rural towns around Jinan city, and further unable to establish the categorical contrast between the big and the small, (s)he won't laugh. Yet for the local audience, or more specifically the Jinan audience, the above lines provide intertextuality which credits them with the necessary experience to make sense of such references and offers them the pleasure of recognition. In this way, the local-language soundtrack creates a communal bonding among the local audiences who share the joke and laugh, while at the same time sets a boundary which excludes those who cannot appreciate the joke and thus fail to laugh—therefore reinforcing an identity for the community.

Moreover, taking Luhrmann's innovation to an entirely new level, the dubbed program *Hero* is engaged in telling a completely new story with the local community as its central concern. Totally irrelevant to the original plot about an attempt to assassinate the King of Qin in the Warring States period, the dubbed version, with a new title, *Yingxiong: chennian mifanpu* (*Hero: A Rotten Restaurant*), focuses on the character Nameless who becomes the sales manager of a local fly-by-night company and later on the manager of a local rotten restaurant. The dialogues, replete with the

²⁶ The script was provided by the show's producer, Xu Zhiqiang.

local street names, local product names, and local slang and expressions, transform the remote past into the here and now. To deviate and detach from the original text is simultaneously to strive for a proximity to the local community. In the same program *Fresh Air from Drama* in Shandong TV, *Niujin Yishi* (The anecdote of the ox muscle) changes the plot of *Harry Potter* into the story of how a local professional school illegally recruits as many students as possible to make profit. By replacing *niujin yishi* 牛津轶事 (The anecdote of Oxford) with the homonyms *niujin yishi* 牛筋逸事 (The anecdote of ox muscle), the tongue-in-cheek title itself implies the commercial fraud in the plot. Schwarzenegger, in *True Lies*, turns into a Jinan director who charges an exorbitant tuition for a program of training actresses who crave movie stardom. In the Wuhan-Mandarin version of *Modern Times*, the original critique of the problems brought by the modern industrial production after the Great Depression is appropriated to critically address the harsh life of a laid-off worker from a state-owned factory in today's Wuhan. The Sichuan-Mandarin version of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* becomes a story entitled *Tianxia wu waihuo* (No phony commodities in the world),²⁷ which narrates how Wang Heping, a villager in the *Shurong cun* (Sichuan village), fights with the manufacturers of phony commodities after his father is sent to the hospital after drinking a bottle of phony wine and after his mother's face is disfigured by fake cosmetics. The dubbing versions address the real social problems of the local community and convey the real popular opinions and concerns of its members.

Once they realize the inadequacy of one monolithic community habitualized by Putonghua, local subjects feel the urgency of re-imagining a local community of their own through their local languages. These overwhelmingly popular television productions rendered in local languages have created substantial commercial profit in

²⁷ The Chinese title is a mimicry of Feng Xiaogang's movie title *Tianxia wuzui* (No thief in the world, 2005)

local markets. For instance, the sales income for the Sichuan-Mandarin version of *Tom and Jerry* was around ¥20 million in the first month. The TV show *Fresh Air from Drama* became an instant hit in Shandong, for which advertisers bid up to ¥1.2 million to be the Gold Sponsor. Its ratings shot up to 7~9% in the first two weeks; by comparison, the average rating of the shows in Putonghua is less than 1%. In the Kunming area, the dubbed film series produced by the dubbing studio *Kaixin Mengtaiqi* (Happy Montage) are among the most requested programs. The local TV stations have increasingly realized the great appeal of media productions in local languages. Yet even by 2004, the majority of the local TV stations still lacked enough experience and funding to produce telenovelas or other television productions rendered in local languages. Dubbing, with its feasibility in the low-budget situation and its commercial potential, becomes an initial step in the self-definition of the local community. In examining cultural criticism columns in Taiwan's newspaper literary supplements, Liao Ping-hui (1996: 344) cites "instances of how the local can put the global into use in the form of 'neocolonial' mimicry, in the mode of cultural bricolage or reproduction, that helps constitute multiple lines of invention and transformation." In Mainland China, not only the national metropolitan cultural forms but also the traditional indigenous local cultures are appropriated in the process of self-definition and self-development. The traditional local art forms in Shandong such as *Lü Ju* (Shandong local opera) and *Shandong Kuaishu* (Shandong clappertale) are deftly integrated in the dubbed films in the show *Fresh Air from Drama*. *Hangzhou Pinghua* (Hangzhou storytelling), a localized genre of the old performed narrative art form, *quyi* or *shuochang yishu*, has been used to introduce the show *Fun with Dubbing* in Hangzhou TV. The appropriation from the traditional local cultural resources is more manifest in a new trend of the news talk shows in local languages, in which the traditional storytelling performing arts are integrated in broadcasting news of the

utmost concern and interest to local audiences. This is a topic that will be addressed in the chapter 3.

In the above analysis, in regards to the soundtrack, I have not made a distinction between domestic and foreign films as dubbing sources. Yet if we take the image into consideration, the stability of the national border from without would come into a salient question and thus dubbing foreign films into Chinese local languages merit further analysis. The Sichuan-Mandarin version of *Tom and Jerry* provides a wonderful text to explore the dynamics of the uneven power relations in the visual-aural dimension. For this silent cartoon, the original image is conventionally viewed as the source text, which the dubbed voice is supposed to mold itself in conformity with. However, in practice, the dubbed voice often overshadows the image, pushing the latter into a subordinate position. In a scene of the episode *Xin taoyuan sanjieyi* (“The new sworn brotherhood in Peach Garden”), the dog Butcher is presiding over an oath-signing in Zigong Mandarin, a sub-dialect of Sichuan Mandarin which doesn’t distinguish /n/ and /l/ particularly. Table 1 is a close examination of each image and the corresponding dubbed dialogue.

Table 1: A Dubbing Clip in the Sichuan Mandarin Version of *Tom and Jerry*

Frame	Image Sequence	Dubbing	Translation
1	Butch persuades Tom and Jerry not to fight any more and the latter two drop their sticks	现在我们就学一下刘关张桃园三结义	Let's come follow the Sworn Brotherhood in Peach Garden between Liu (Bei), Guan (Yu), and Zhang (Fei)
2	Butch is writing the treaty	我们来签个协议	Let's sign an agreement
3	The image of the cover of "Peace Treaty"	我念给你们听一下	I'm reading to you guys
4	Intertitle "The dog, cat, and mouse agree to live together peacefully."	狗，猫，耗子一致同意，于今日义结金兰，	The dog, cat, and mouse swear brotherhood today...
5	"With this truce, we won't tinker. The one that does is a stinker."	从此以后，有福同享，有难同当，	From now on, (we will) share joys and sorrows, weal and woe ...
6	"Signed Tom, Jerry, and Butch"	签名:	Signed (by) ...
7	Butch nods to Tom and Jerry respectively	假老练，风车车	Names of the cat and mouse
8	Butch points to himself	闷墩	Dog's name
9	The three are shaking their hands happily	我们成为兄弟	We're sworn brothers now.

From Table 1, the dubbed voice is quite fittingly synchronized with the original image, which seems in turn to have been constructed to match the sound. This becomes a typical example of a "playback" process rather than a "dubbing" process, as Chion (1999) defines these terms. The breakdown of the distinction between the two processes causes the viewer to oscillate between a centrifugal process, "tending toward rupture and dispersion," and a centripetal process, "tending strongly toward

concentration and tension.” (Chion: 153) On one hand, the mise-en-scène including the setting, figure design, and English letters conveys a strong American ambience. However, on the other hand, the American cartoon characters experience identity confusion and cultural dislocation in the dub. Tom, Jerry, and Butch are given local names respectively as *jialaolian*, *fengcheche*, and *mendur*, forms of address in Sichuan jokes. They speak in accents which they never had in the original cartoons, and their speeches are a mosaic of popular idioms, popular songs, dirty jokes, ad language, Internet language, and even pidgin English.²⁸ Furthermore, the story told in this episode is changed to recall the famous story about the three legendary Sichuan local heroes, Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei. The sound-image mismatch not only plays on the audiences’ expectations, but also reverses the power relations often assumed to obtain between the hegemonic West represented by the United States and the culturally colonized local community.

There are more layers of the reversal in the local-language version of *Tom and Jerry*. As is well known, a major motif of the cartoon is that the seemingly imposing cat is always outwitted by the innocent, petite mouse. Through correlative thinking, the weak triumphs over the strong, the yielding over the assertive, and the feminine over the male. The producers of the dubbing versions seem conscious of this. In the introductory remarks for the Sichuan-Mandarin version, Li Boqing draws a parallel between the unconventional victory of the mouse, usually a prey to the cat, and the enhanced social status of women in today’s China, as compared to ancient China. Without exception, in all the local-language versions Jerry is dubbed with a female voice, although his gender ambiguously remains male. Correspondingly, those

²⁸ Although it is unclear how people in the Sichuan area pronounce the English words based on their own phonetic system, some rules of the pidgin English in Wu region are as follows: /ai, ei, au/ are pronounced as /e, i, o/, /sh, zh, tsh, dzh/ are replaced with /c, j, tc, dj/, and no difference obtains between /l/ and /r/, etc. (Information provided by a list member at chinese.pku.edu.cn/bbs.)

seemingly vulnerable characters such as duckling and nibbles are also dubbed with female voices, while the outwardly strong cartoon characters such as the lion and the bull are dubbed with male voices. The intention of celebrating the weak is further strengthened by the specific accents the characters carry in the Sichuan-Mandarin version of the cartoon. For instance, the mouse speaks Chengdu Mandarin while the cat and the dog speak Zhongjiang and Zigong Mandarin respectively. A similar example is the Sichuan-Mandarin version of the Japanese cartoon *Labi Xiaoxin* (Crayon Shin Chan), in which the smart and rebellious Xiaoxin (Shin Chan) speaks Chengdu Mandarin while his somewhat patriarchal parents speak Zhongjiang and Dayi Mandarin respectively.

Although to a degree the use of different local languages functions in an aesthetically neutral way to depict the positive and negative characters,²⁹ from a more critical perspective, Han Hong (2003) argues that the local-language dubbing continues to perpetuate the linguistic hierarchy between the local languages of higher status and those of lower status. More specifically, he notes that in many media productions in Sichuan Mandarin, either comedic or not, the mainstream characters speak Chengdu or Chongqing Mandarin, while the socially, economically, or morally marginalized characters speak the local languages of lower status, such as the dialects in Zhongjiang, Zigong, and Leshan, (as opposed to Chengdu Mandarin); and the dialects in Wanzhou and Puling (as opposed to Chongqing Mandarin). By ridiculing and satirizing the latter, the audience speaking Chengdu or Chongqing Mandarin acquire a sense of identity superiority or narcissism, and then further assert the central position of their local languages in the local community. Han's point is consistent with

²⁹ A similar example can be found in the dubbing of the TV serial *Chunguang Canlan Zhubajie* (The sunshine Piggy) into Yunnan Mandarin. The producers attempt to depict different characters by their accents. The local languages used in the dubbing include the dialects from Kunming, Honghe, Qujing, Simao, Yuxi, Xishuangbanna, and Xianggelila (Shangri-la). See Zhai Chunxia (2004).

Gunn's argument (2006: 146-147) that the Sichuan comedians manipulate the linguistic stereotypes to emphasize the regional hegemonic status of Chongqing and Chengdu Mandarin.

The situation becomes more complicated if the local language interpreted as enjoying the local hegemony is also contingent and unstable. In the Sichuan-Mandarin version of *Crayon Shin Chan*, Shin Chan uses many words characteristic of the Chengdu area, the western part of the Sichuan Basin. For example, 搅肇 /tɕiau3 sau4/ for “continually make trouble, or to bug,” 利边 /ni4 pien1/ for “deliberately,” 经佑 /tɕin1 iəu1/ for “take care of,” and 把细 /pa3 ɕi4/ for “steady and attentive.”³⁰ These words may create problems of comprehension for viewers in the eastern part of the Sichuan Basin as well as in Chongqing. With regard to the phonetic system, Chongqing and Chengdu Mandarin have much in common. For example, the syllable final /an/ in Putonghua is pronounced as /an/ in both dialects. However, a recent sociolinguistic study finds that the young generation in urban Chengdu, especially the girls, tend to pronounce /an/ as a nasalized vowel /æ~/ or even a single vowel /æ/.³¹ There are numerous examples in the Sichuan-Mandarin version of *Tom and Jerry*. From the mouth of the mouse *Jialaolian*, dubbed by a Chengdu girl, Jin Li, we hear /kan/ “杆” (a golf club) as /kæ~/, /tʂa tan/ “炸弹” (bomb) as /tʂa tæ~/, /wan ɕiau/ “玩笑” (joke) as /wæ ɕiau/. So it could be predicted that representing Sichuan Mandarin by Chengdu Mandarin would create a sense of their exclusion for the people in Chongqing and for those in eastern Sichuan.³² In a more explicit way, a Shaanxi scholar Zhang Yuezhao (2005) notices that the so-called Shaanxi Mandarin version of

³⁰ These words are provided by Meng Yuanliang, January 2005.

³¹ The information is largely drawn from the scholarly exchange in chinese.pku.edu.cn/bbs, but so far the linguists still argue over whether this new feminine speech style is to assert the local identity of the youth in Chengdu.

³² Some audiences from the eastern part of Sichuan expressed their anger in a BBS about a Sichuan TV program in which the host always introduces **Sichuan** cuisine in a **Chengdu** accent.

Tom and Jerry turns out to be dubbed into Xi'an Mandarin, and it is debatable whether Xi'an Mandarin can represent the heterogeneous sub-dialects of Shaanxi Mandarin. For instance, “碎仔儿，你看我咋拾掇你！” (See how I'll settle you!) in Xi'an Mandarin would be “碎娃，看我咋日塔你！” in the dialects of Yangling and Wugong, “碎娃，看我咋式塔你！” in the Chang'an dialect, and “看这挨锤子的，看我咋收拾你！” in the dialects of Baoji and Fufeng.

In the context of globalization, just as China is becoming local in opposition to the West-as-global, the standard Mandarin is being marginalized as a local language as against English which is perceived as being the universal hegemonic language. Likewise, the Chinese local languages have long been suppressed or ignored by Putonghua Mandarin, which has been promoted as the standard unifying national language and enjoyed a national cultural hegemony. Although the tension is pervasive in the multilayered linguistic hierarchy, English-as-global versus Putonghua-as-local is the most threatening and politically sensitive tension of them all. The dubbing of the classic *Tom and Jerry* into Chinese local languages may provide a vent for nationalistic sentiments for some Chinese. As a number of producers and audiences argue, in the same way that Disney was free to fashion versions of *Mulan* and *Butterfly Lovers* that deviated greatly from the Chinese classics, the Chinese are also entitled to adapt and localize Hollywood classics, because the two cultures should be equal. These critics even acclaim the dubbing of *Tom and Jerry* as ushering in a new era in which China alters Hollywood (Liu Yi, 2004).

The current wave of sentimental nationalism should be considered in the context of globalization, or more specifically, Americanization. Nationalism is often a local response to the dominant forces of global capital originating in this case especially from the US. In interpreting the surge of nationalism represented by the best-seller *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China Can Say No, 1996), Dai Jinhua (2001)

points out that China, in its economic development and social transformation, often chooses the United States as model, goal, and ideal ally. But China's enthusiasm for and illusion of America are not reciprocated on America's part. Therefore, this nationalism is an outgrowth and expression of China's disappointment, "a feeling of resentment, an attitude of self-consolation and self-love and yet an earnest appeal" (Dai, 2001: 175). In this way, Dai associates recent Chinese nationalism with the larger social critiques on globalization—the economic, cultural, and political imperialism of the West. When analyzing the ending soliloquy "*Cuihua'r*, serve the pickled cabbage" in Xuecun's Internet hit song in Northeast Mandarin *Dongbeiren doushi huo Leifeng* (Northeasters are all living Lei Fengs), Zhang Ning (2002) posits amusingly that eating too much of McDonalds' French fries and ketchup, the Chinese younger generation with higher education becomes fed up with Western food, and that as a welcome alternative, indigenous food like pickled cabbage from the Northeast appeals to them with excitement and freshness. Zhang further claims that this "theory of the taste bud" is not only based on a physiological reaction, but serves also as a warning and criticism of the homogeneous taste brought by globalization. Indeed, as Spivak argues, the "politics of translation" currently gives prominence to English and the other "hegemonic" languages of the ex-colonizers, and many translations over-assimilate the literature of the third world to the Western dominant discourses and ideology, so that "the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan" (Spivak 2000: 400). In this light, the dubbing of films into local languages becomes a project of resisting homogenization and restoring diversity. Widely circulated on the Internet, the famous monologue of "The Holy Writ of Love" in Zhou Xingchi's *A Chinese Odyssey* has been rendered into about 20 local languages, English and Japanese. A short text *yizhi laoshu zuile* (A mouse is drunk) in modern Chinese has been rewritten in more than 50 local

languages, pidgin English, mop language,³³ and even classic Chinese. Moreover, one version of Xue Cun's song sets the butt of the parody on the U.S. pride in its military power, with the lines such as “俺们那旮全球有驻军，俺们那旮都是轰炸机，俺们那旮山上有核弹，怕你我就不是美国人。” (We have garrisons all over the globe. We have bombers everywhere. On the hills in our place are there nuclear weapons. If I feared you, I wouldn't be an American.)³⁴ The lyrics, posted online on July 23, 2001, were inspired in the wake of the controversial U.S. surveillance aircraft's incident with the Chinese fighter jet in the South China Sea in 2001 and the U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in the former Yugoslavia in 1999. Related, a mock dialogue between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair on the war with Iraq is widely circulated online in Beijing Mandarin, Northeast Mandarin, Shanghai Wu, Sichuan Mandarin, and Cantonese. In addition, Bin Laden speaks vulgar Beijing Mandarin words in a mock interview on the 9/11 attack on America.

However, it is interesting to note that the recent nationalist sentiments of the Chinese grassroots are often recognized and manipulated by the government as a diplomatic lever. Be it the student protest against the embassy bombing in Belgrade in 1999 or many small-scale anti-Japanese protests in the past few years, they all enjoy tacit support from the Beijing government, which itself keeps a low profile and neutral attitude most of the time. In reporting a petition of 22 million signatures against Japan's bid to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Kahn (2005) reasons that, “by allowing millions of people to sign their names to a petition against Japan, Beijing's new leadership seems determined to show that recent Japanese actions have so inflamed popular sentiment that China has no choice but to adopt a

³³ Mop, a kind of Internet language, is named after a popular website in China, www.mop.com.

³⁴ The entire text of this version can be found at http://bbs.city.tianya.cn/new/TianyaCity/Content.asp?idWriter=0&Key=0&idItem=47&idArticle=21493&page_num=1 (last accessed on July 3, 2008). A more detailed discussion of Xue Cun's original song can be found in Chapter Five, particularly pp. 107-111.

tougher diplomatic line.” Furthermore, Gunn (2006: 208) points out, “local language always implied a project of cultural excavation to expose older layers of cultural colonization by the metropolitan culture of the empire, adapted to construct the opposition to modern forms of colonization from overseas.” The adoption of local languages as the voice of the mass grassroots seems to make the confrontation between China and the west rhetorically less direct and more subtle. On one hand, English-as-global versus Putonghua-as-local parallels the Putonghua-as-national versus dialects-as-local. On the other hand, the fact that the West does not recognize China is threatening to the Chinese and could arouse their anger and indignation, but the fact that the Putonghua-speaking cultural elites do not recognize local languages has long been taken for granted and thus does not hurt. Therefore, by replacing Putonghua with local dialects to construct the opposition to the West, what is threatening and strained becomes non-serious and comic, particularly to the Internet-savvy young educated Chinese.

For the central government, the performativity of dubbing into local language is a double-edged sword. Whereas nationalism works to liberate the “mouse” of China from the “cat” of the United States, it unfortunately works at the same time to empower the “mouse” of local Chinese culture from its dominance by the “cat” of Putonghua. Quickly realizing the trendy phenomenon runs counter to the broadcasting media’s mission to promote Putonghua, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) ordered an end to broadcasting dialect-dubbed foreign films on October 13th 2004.³⁵ Very noticeably, the regulation alleges that the decision was made “to provide a healthy and favorable linguistic environment for the underage

³⁵ The full title for the regulation is “Guangdian zongju guanyu jiaqiang yizhi jingwai guangbo dianshi jiemu bochu guanli de tongzhi” 广电总局关于加强译制境外广播电视节目播出管理的通知 (A SARFT announcement on strengthening the control of showing dubbed foreign broadcast radio and television programs)

viewers.” This was written in recognition of the fact that children, inadvertently or not, become the major viewers of the dialect-dubbed films, particularly cartoons. So here, I would like to elaborate on the audience of children, a topic concerning the stratification of local audiences. Some condemn the dialect versions of *Tom and Jerry* on the grounds that first, the dialect versions are counterproductive to the children’s Putonghua learning; and second, the many vulgar, brash and blatantly sexual references made in their dialogue are harmful to the children’s development. As for the former accusation, the promoters of local language often contend that it is equally important to pass home-grown culture down to the younger generation. Yet the latter accusation has much to do with the target viewers (adult or children) and the related rating system. The Shanghai Wu-dubbed *Tom and Jerry* intentionally targets the local Shanghai kids, a generation whose loss of competence in Shanghai Wu alarmed the producer (Chen Li, 2004). As a result, this quite “pure” version was applauded by the defenders of Shanghai Wu as an effective way to teach Shanghai kids local language and local cultural heritage. By contrast, the majority of the lines in the Beijing Mandarin version amusingly reflect the sexuality and mentality of the adults, such as male working professionals and aging women. The scriptwriter Dai Pengfei explicitly states that he wrote it for the adults, joining in the emerging trend of adult cartoon-making (Xiao and Zhou, 2004). An example of an intermediary alternative is the two Shaanxi Mandarin versions, one designed for the adults, and another censoring the use of sexual and violent language, for the kids. Nevertheless, despite some producers’ accentuated awareness of their target audiences, due to the lack of a rating system in China, the children remain the primary viewers of those dialect-version cartoons designed for adults. The debate on the appropriateness of the dialect versions for child viewers further becomes an urgent call for a rating system in China, the very theme of a well-researched article in *Nanfang dushibao* (Southern Metropolitan News). Entitled

“Dongman, cuoxu gei ertong de zhuanli” (Manga and Cartoons, a privilege mistakenly granted to the children), Xu Linlin (2004) argues that in China the cartoon has long been a children’s genre, and that it is the lack of a rating system and a related concept of adult cartoons that has caused the chaos of the displacement of adult materials onto underage audiences.

The central authorities certainly didn’t think that far into the crisis. Even as ambiguous and loose as it is, the official regulation targets foreign-film dubbing only and outlines no measures to punish violators. Implicitly, dubbing of domestic films and other media productions into local languages is still legally allowed, although there is no substantial difference in the possible negative influence on the children audience. Therefore, the Hangzhou TV show *Fun from Dubbing*, which is mainly dubbing Zhou Xingchi’s comedy films, is still a vigorously sought after and marketed program. The telenovela *Zaixiang Liu Luoguo* (Prime Minister Liu Luoguo) is dubbed into Chongqing and Yunnan Mandarin. The telenovela *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West) is dubbed into Zhejiang Wu. The stage play *Tuo’er* (Salesperson’s decoy) by the famous Beijing-based comedian Chen Peisi is dubbed into Yunnan Mandarin. Furthermore, the central and local SARFT censors remain in force, but they too have to adjust themselves and take the market and audience seriously. In 2004, the Shandong TV show *Fresh Air from Drama*, after being aired for only one month, was cut permanently by the local SARFT after an allegation that the Jinan Mandarin lines are so vulgar as to denigrate the images of Jinan and Shandong.³⁶ However, it is the same local SARFT that ambiguously authorized two succeeding programs in Jinan Mandarin: the 2005 hit news talk show *Lagua* (Chat) on Shandong Qilu TV and the 2006 martial-arts sitcom *Medouguan* (All things considered) on Shandong TV. In

³⁶ According to the producer Xu Zhiqiang, this is the actual reason for the show closure, although the alleged reason is copyright infringement. Telephone interview with Xu on Dec. 27, 2004.

addition, the official concerns are ignored as frequently as they are articulated. Despite the 2004 regulation, episodes of the series *Tom and Jerry* dubbed into Hangzhou Wu have been openly aired on the Zhejiang TV show *Juedui OK* (Absolutely OK) since September 2005. It is true that the climactic popularity of the local-language film-dubbing phenomenon faded away with this regulation, but the state authority could by no means be the sole determiner of its fate. The overwhelming popularity and the big market success of the dialect-dubbed soundtrack, with the underlying need for re-imagining a local community, all make the television productions in local languages a burgeoning cultural phenomenon in most parts of China.

CHAPTER 3

EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITY: TV NEWS TALK SHOWS IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

In Chapter Two above, I argue that the practice of dubbing films into local languages helps to foster a sense of local community through a double motion to iteration—the Luhrmannian and the Freudian. The urgency of re-imagining a local community is manifested by the overwhelming popularity of the dialect-dubbed soundtrack and its unprecedented market success. In a way, the local TV stations have been inspired to explore the local cultural and linguistic resources as a new strategy to appeal to local audiences and local advertisers. In this section, I examine another recent phenomenon of the burgeoning news talk shows in local languages. Taking Hangzhou TV's hit show *Aliutou Shuo Xinwen* 阿六头说新闻 (Aliutou Talks News) as a case study, I explore its appropriation of the local traditional, indigenous cultural forms and the implications in empowering a local community.

The news talk show *Aliutou Shuo Xinwen* was launched in January 2004 in Hangzhou TV's West Lake Pearl Channel (or HTV 2). The anchor in a long traditional man's gown (*paozi*) stands in a storyteller's house-like setting with the requisites such as table, chair, teapot, and fan. He plays a role as an ordinary Hangzhou citizen called *Aliutou* (pronounced as *Alodei* in Hangzhou Wu), a common Hangzhou Wu name that literally means he is the sixth son in a family. The show begins with a verse-like passage performed by the two anchors.

熬稍，熬稍，不要吵不要吵；熬稍，熬稍，阿六头来了。市面蛮灵，说法儿蛮好；听听新鲜，看看味道；9:30，频道锁牢，阿六头来了！

Come on, come on, please be quiet. Come on, come on, Aliutou is coming. He's so well-informed and eloquent. Come taste the freshness. 9:30pm, stay tuned please. Aliutou is coming!

Similar to the *xingmu* (awakening rod) in the traditional storytelling, this opening functions to bring the audience to attention and invite them to watch the show. Mainly recruited from the local opera (Hangzhou/Shaoxing *huajixi*) troupes, the comedian-turned anchor narrates and comments with improvisation³⁷ the local social news, the stories of utmost interest and concern to the local Hangzhou citizens, for example, topics on medical care, housing, transportation, community life, and daily anecdotes. It is noted that to integrate contemporary everyday life with talking and singing has been a noticeable feature of Hangzhou *Xiaorehun* (one of the local *quyi*), which is arguably different from Yangzhou storytelling, in which repertoires are mainly serialized historical novels.³⁸ Sometimes Aliutou spontaneously creates additional fictional characters and plots as a narrative device. He from time to time mingles professional acting and singing, which are often accompanied with the traditional storytelling form.³⁹ As the language of the traditional Hangzhou performing arts is based on the spoken dialects of the Hangzhou area, Hangzhou Wu words and slang abound in the anchors' news telling. For instance:

这两天，平时出门都骑自行车的张先生有点吃不消了，外面太阳白晃晃的，不如改乘公交车吧。为了躲太阳，木佬佬骑车的人都和张先生的想法差不

³⁷ There is no subtitle for the news introduction because of the anchors' unscripted broadcasting style. (My interview with Zhang Jianmin, the vice director of the HTV 2. 06/05/2005)

³⁸ Yangzhou storytelling has been examined in details in Vibeke Børtdahl (1996).

³⁹ For example, when the anchor tries to explain why the National Day of Loving Ears is set on March 3rd, he draws the number 3 close to each of his ears while saying "aren't they like two ears?" Gu Fangfang et al. (2004)

多。不过，要是你坐的不是空调车，上去就同洗桑拿没啥两样的。如果是上下班高峰，火火热，人贴人，自己晓得。

Lately Mr. Zhang, who normally rides a bike, can't take the sizzling sun and is better off taking bus. He's not alone. Lots of cyclists trying to beat the heat have a similar idea. But unless you're taking a bus with AC, it's not much different from a sauna on wheels. If you've taken the rush hour bus where the passengers are packed like sardines, you know the feeling of being cooked.

Correspondingly, the headlines are more colloquial and even prolix compared with the conventional terse and formulaic news titles. For example:

双休日 三八商机木佬佬

There're a whole bunch of commercial opportunities on the March 8th holiday weekends [木佬佬 /mo lo lo/ meaning "many, a whole bunch"]

铁道路口面不平 车子经过慌兮兮

The road is so uneven that cars are scared stiff to go through. [慌兮兮 /huan qi qi/ meaning "afraid, scared"]

多算饭钿 吃客发火

The customers are mad at being overcharged. [饭钿/ve~ tiε~/ meaning "meal bill"]

老酒吃饱 司机十字路口晒觉

Drinking too much, the driver takes a nap in the crossroad! [晒觉/kun tɕio/ meaning "sleep, nap"]

The vivid use of local language in the show serves to create interrelated effects of cultural proximity, familiarity, and entertainment to the local Hangzhou citizens, as Putonghua Mandarin cannot do. This is more evident from the comparison below of report on the same topic “长木桥：公交站点窨井开口” (Bridge Changmu: the manhole in the bus stop is left open mouthed) in Putonghua and Hangzhou Wu respectively.

“市民们说，这个没盖的窨井在白天大家注意一点还可避让，但晚上就危险了。”《明珠新闻》

“The citizens said, it might be possible to avoid [falling into] the lidless manhole in the daytime if we pay some attention, but it would be very dangerous in the evening.” Broadcast in Putonghua in the program “Mingzhu News.”

“专门来这里等车子的人说，白日里光线亮还好一点，要是到了夜里墨塔铁黑介格会看得出？人又不是猫罗，晚上头看得出的呀？”《阿六头说新闻》

“The people who are here waiting for the bus said, it’s ok in the daytime when the light is bright. But when it’s black as ink who can make out [the manhole without the lid]? People aren’t cats, who can see when it’s dark?” Broadcast in Hangzhou Wu in the program “Aliutou Talks News”

In some sense, this news talk show *Aliutou Shuo Xinwen* is a further reaction to the news broadcasting convention that is dominated by the serious anchors skilled in broadcast standard Mandarin. According to Gunn’s study, as the target audience began to shift from the cultural elite to the urban citizens in the late 80s and 90s, the news investigation-interview programming which emphasizes audience involvement and

interview facility have increasingly acknowledged their reporters' non-standard Mandarin (Gunn 2006: 127). The media scholar Li Xing (2004) further observes that there have been three anchoring style innovations in the Chinese television in the past decade, first being reporter type of anchor (*jizhe xing zhuchi*) such as Bai Yansong in CCTV's *Jiaodian Fangtan* (Focus) and *Dongfang Shikong* (Oriental Space), then actor type of anchor (*yiren xing zhuchi*) such as Li Xiang in Hunan Satellite TV's *Kuaile Dabenyong* (Citadel of Happiness), and now the commoner anchor (*pingmin zhuchi*). Li is also quick to point out that the linguistic feature of the commoner anchors is their unconventional use of non-standard Putonghua or dialects, for instance, Aliutou speaks Hangzhou Wu, Meng Fei speaks Nanjing-accented Putonghua in the news show *Nanjing Ling Juli* (Nanjing at Zero Distance) on the Jiangsu TV City Channel, and Yuanyuan speaks Beijing Mandarin in the news talk show *Di Qi Ri* (The Seventh Day) on the Beijing TV Station. According to Li, the transition of anchoring from the cultural elites and stars to the commoners signifies a new program ideology, that is, to observe (*guanzhao*) commoners' life from the equal perspective of commoners (Li Xing, 2004).

The abovementioned TV news shows, together with Anhui TV's *Diyi Shijian* (Fastest News Report), Hunan TV's *Wanjian Xinwen* (Evening News) and Qingdao TV's *Shenghuo Zaixian* (Life Online) are often mentioned as the typical cases of an emerging news genre called *minsheng xinwen*, which literally means news about the people's life. Overlapping with the western terminologies such as soft news, human interest news, or social news, the *minsheng* news capture the everyday experience of the common people, particularly of the local citizens in urban cities. Therefore a prominent feature of *minsheng* news is the news localization, which is often argued as a survival strategy made by the local city television stations to compete with the national CCTV and provincial TV stations. Lu Di proposes an interesting metaphor.

CCTV and provincial TV stations with cable or satellite channels are of an umbrella-shaped media, featuring broader/wider coverage, stronger administrative forces, and more flexible market orientation. In contrast to the mass-oriented, umbrella-shaped media, most urban city TV stations are of well-shaped media that is oriented towards a more fixed local market. Therefore the well-shaped media has to dig down into the local resources, finding its market niche in producing shows palatable to the local audiences' tastes.

Among other resources, local languages and the traditional oral performing arts employing local languages are explored to appeal to a specific geographically and culturally defined group. According to Weng Xiaohua, the producer of the *Aliutou* show, the production crew are not only concerned with “what to say,” but also “how to say it,” how to report the serious news in an easy, lively, and entertaining way. The entertainmentization of the news (*xinwen quweihua*), which is much enabled by drawing on elements of traditional entertainment forms, is paramount to earn audience rating and the market success (Weng Xiaohua, 2004). The program of *Aliutou Shuo Xinwen* proved to be an instant blockbuster hit in Hangzhou area. As of 2005, it topped the AC Nielsen ratings at an average of 11%, almost five or six times higher than Mandarin-speaking news programs in the Hangzhou area. In 2004, the ad revenue from the show (\$5 million) accounts for half of the annual ad income of the entire channel.⁴⁰ Many local TV stations eagerly copied its successful formulas, and the news talk show mushroomed around 2004. A list of selected news talk shows in local languages in TV media is as below.

⁴⁰ Data obtained from my interview with Zhang Jianmin.

Table 2: TV News Talk Shows in Local Languages as of 2005

Show Name	TV Station and airing date	Local Languages	Notes
<i>Wo he ni shuo</i> 我和你说 (I'm talking with you)	Hangzhou TV 3; 2004	Xiaoshan Wu and Shaoxing Wu	Shaoxing Lifolo, 莲花落, a traditional art of storytelling in Shaoxing is used. ¹
<i>Baixiao jiang xinwen</i> 百晓讲新闻 (Baixiao talks the news)	Wenzhou City TV; 06/2004	Wenzhou Wu	“Baixiao” in Wenzhou Wu means someone who is very informed.
<i>Laifa jiang shaxi</i> 来发讲啥西 (What's Laifa talking)	Ningbo TV 2; 02/2005	Ningbo Wu	The titles of the sub-columns are all in Ningbo Wu phrases. For example, /kaφiŋtφio/ 解心焦 (play jokes) and /zakuaŋa/ 石骨硬 (not skilled at Putonghua)
<i>Shiye shuo xinwen</i> 师爷说新闻 (Private Secretary talks news)	Shaoxing TV; 01/2005	Shaoxing Wu	Shaoxing had long enjoyed a nationwide reputation of producing scholars or “private secretaries” (<i>shiye</i>) employed by prefects, magistrates, and other top <i>yamen</i> officials by the nineteenth century.
<i>Tiantian shanhaijing</i> 天天山海经 (Daily Chatting)	Suzhou TV; 2004	Suzhou Wu	<i>Tan Shanhaijing</i> (to talk the “Classic of Mountains and Seas”) is a local slang in Wu, meaning “to chat”
<i>Afu liaozhai</i> 阿福聊斋	Wuxi TV; 12/2004	Wuxi Wu	<i>Liaozhai</i> is the abbreviation of <i>Liao Zhai Zhi Yi</i> (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio) by Pu Songling. <i>Liao</i> in <i>Liaozhai</i> literally means “chat.”

¹ Compared with *Hangzhou Pingshu*, *Shaoxing Lifolo* includes more singing. The story themes are mainly about everyday life rather than serialized historical novels, the repertoire of *Hangzhou Pingshu*.

Table 2 (Continued)

Show Name	TV Station and airing date	Local Languages	Notes
<i>Jinzhao duo kandian</i> 今朝多看点 (To watch more today)	Jiaxing TV; 11/2005	Jiaxing Wu	<i>Jinzhao</i> in Wu language means “today”
Dagang shuo xinwen 大刚说新闻 (Dagang talks news)	Nanjing TV; 03/2004	Nanjing Wu	
Xinwen shuchang 新闻书场 (News storyteller house)	Sichuan Cable TV	Chengdu Mandarin	Shuchang is the traditional storyteller house.
Laoxi'er pie ba 老西儿编吧 (Laoxi'r's chat bar)	Shanxi TV Public Channel; 05/2005	Taiyuan Mandarin	pie in Jin Language means “chat;” the anchor is recruited from the local xiangsheng troupe.
Lagua 拉呱 (To chat)	Shandong Qilu TV; 10/2005	Jinan Mandarin	Lagua in Shandong Mandarin means “chat;” the anchor is recruited from the local xiangsheng troupe.
Dushi chazuo 都市茶座 (Urban teahouse)	Hubei TV; 2000	Wuhan Mandarin	Hubei Pingshu, comic skits, and huajixi are employed.

Without exception, all the above listed news shows were warmly welcomed by the local audience and topped the local channels' ratings. As the commercial, entertaining, and aesthetic values of the traditional arts were being rediscovered, many shows try to integrate the elements from local performing forms, such as the

Hangzhou xiaorehun, Shaoxing lifolo, Yangzhou Pinghua, and Taiyuan Xiangsheng. In turn, the former performers or comedians of the traditional arts became instant celebrities of the region because of anchoring the news talk shows. Their stage performance of local opera in the theatres received unprecedented box office success. It is reported during the big festivals of 2005, the live theatre performances of the local *Huajixi* were all sell-out events in Hangzhou (Chen Jinhong, 2005). Prompted by the burgeoning *Quyí* market, a new TV show of local performing arts *Kaixín chaguan* (Happy teahouse) was aired on HTV 2 in 2005 and it enjoys a soaring rating. As some producers of HTV 2 optimistically claimed, the TV shows were saving a traditional local opera. It is true that the gradual re-situation of TV media as an institution of entertainment enabled the producers to draw inspiration from the traditional entertainment art forms, which in turn may have helped heighten the popular consciousness of protecting local cultural heritage. Aside from heated discussions on the issue of dialect use in the media, an official from Hangzhou, motivated by the success of the Aliutou show, even came up with four suggestions for a proposal to protect and save Hangzhou dialect and Hangzhou local arts.

Nevertheless, it is still debatable whether the revival or rejuvenation of traditional entertainment is the motivation or the side effect of such media shows. The highly orally oriented media of radio and television has long been viewed as posing a competitive threat, challenging the survival of the traditional oral arts. Zhang Lianhong (2002) and Zhang Lianhong (2005) examine the historical transitions of the traditional opera's performing space with the advent of modern media to Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. She found that as the opera's performing space shifts from open-air shelter (*xipeng*), to teahouse (*chalou*), and then to new-style theater (*juchang*), the originally spontaneous, random, and chaotic opera performance became a more regulated, orderly, and rational public consumption activity. This

transformation was first enabled by the commercial market force with the urbanization and modernization of Shanghai, later on intensified by the politics under Mao's version of modernity. Particularly, in the opera reform movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the operas' commercial and entertainment functions were greatly suppressed and denied. Together with other forms of noise and symbolic violence, traditional opera were dramatically transformed as a vehicle to carry on party ideology, as a way of being integrated into a unified modern nation-state system. With the increasing cultural commercialization in the 1990s, the commercial and entertainment value of the traditional arts was rediscovered by the media, as analyzed above. However, as the performing space was moved to the studio, many performers-turned anchors experienced difficult adjustment. Zheng Guanfu, the anchor for the show *Shiye Shuo Xinwen* in Shaoxing TV admits, unlike face-to-face interaction with the audience in stage performance, what he faced now in the studio is an emotionless camera, which would enlarge or distort his image and make his performance unnatural (Zhu Xiaoyan, 2006). The Tianjin and Beijing-based performer Guo Degang, who quickly rose to the most popular Xiangsheng entertainer in North China in 2006, insists that *xiangsheng* (the traditional comic cross talk) needed return to the teahouse in order to recover its original function of pure entertainment. In Guo's opinion, the dominance of televised *xiangsheng* has diminished its charm over the years. He showed a strong contempt for the 1980s generation of Xiangsheng performers whose short-lived, TV-made fame crumbled in the late 1990s, and many of whom abandoned Xiangsheng for comic sketches (*xiao pin*) and sitcoms. In spite of his criticism of the media, Guo still relied heavily on modern media for self-promotion in the beginning, by hosting a TV program and by writing a blog. Therefore, it might be safer to contend that the modern media plays a role, although not the most key role, in the re-appreciation of the traditional art.

As noted from the table 2, the majority of news talk shows emerge from the Wu language-speaking urban cities in lower Yangtze delta region. As one of the nine macroregions in terms of units of socioeconomic integration proposed by Skinner, Lower Yangtze was the most urbanized region as early as 1843 (Skinner, 1977), and is claimed as the economic center second to the Zhujiang delta region in the reform era. Targeting a specific linguistically, culturally, and geographically defined group, the shows are viewed as a kind of “narrowcasting” (*zhaibo*) as opposite to broadcasting.² Yet Shi Tongyu points out the relatively small target audiences rather come from the regions enjoying economic prosperity and/or cultural ascendancy. Taking Hangzhou as a case study, Yu Hong tries to find some common features of the areas where dialect programs are active: developed economy, long tradition of cultural heritage, excellent natural conditions, and enough leisure time.³ In the case of Hangzhou TV’s Aliutou show, to the producer’s surprise, the show attracts a considerable audience from viewers with higher education degrees. Approximately 55% of the total audience are from the 25-55 year age group, the demographic most valued by advertisers. So Aliutou not only provides information and entertainment for the Hangzhou local citizens, but also becomes a way of cultural identification, or even cultural narcissism (Yu Hong, 2005).

What these shows try to promote is a strong sense of local community. The shows are dominated by local news, and domestic news or international news are

² As Mumford (1998: 127) defines it, “ ‘narrowcasting’ refers to cable networks’ practice of selecting or producing programming designed to appeal to a specific target audience, such as viewers of a particular age, gender or ethnic identity.” Whereas “narrowcasting” has been a standard practice in the West’s cable TV media, China has mainly applied this notion to regional TV without cable.

³ But the converse is probably not the case. Compared with the burgeoning dialects shows in many cities of the lower Yangtze delta, there are fewer TV shows in Shanghai Wu except for some sitcom productions. A story has it that one of the channels under Shanghai Media Group tried to broadcast news in Shanghai dialect in 2005, but the effort was later halted for undisclosed reasons. See *Shanghai Daily*, 02/23/2006

seldom touched upon.⁴ The shows try every means to encourage local citizens' involvement and participation. Based on a sample study of the Aliutou show for one week (3/1/04-3/7/04), the hotline news from the citizens' call-in accounts for 29.8% of the total 57 weekly news items (Gu Fangfang et al., 2004). Besides news talk shows in the Hangzhou area, *Hangzhou Lao* 杭州佬 is a docudrama-type show played by ordinary Hangzhou residents about their everyday life. The film-dubbing show *Yingshi Hahaha* 影视哈哈 frequently invites local citizens to volunteer to dub the films in dialects. Prior to the TV shows, both the local radio broadcasting and newspapers started programs or columns in Hangzhou dialect. For instance, *Atongbo Shuo Xinwen* 阿通伯说新闻 (Atongbo Talks News) from Hangzhou People's Radio since 1994; *Kaixin Shisandian* 开心十三点 (The Happy Time at 1pm)⁵ and *Axing Awang* 阿兴阿旺 from Hangzhou West Lake Radio since 1998. In addition, the local print media experiments with writing in local language, such as "Hangzhou Tuofu" 杭州托福 (Hangzhou TOEFL) to examine readers on Hangzhou Wu slang and phrases in *Hangzhou Ribao* (Hangzhou Daily) since 1998 and "Rongge Shuo Xinwen" 荣哥说新闻 (Rongge Talks News) in *Jinri Chenbao* (Today Morning News) since 2000. A passage from the latter to describe how the author stopped a theft attempt is as below:

“昨天中午 2 点多，我 快要到体育场路口时，只见毛十个一群的男伢儿在路旁边逛。格辰光，只看到其中一个最小的、大眼睛、卷头发伢儿朝一个遇着红灯慢骑的女子跑过去，手脚轻快地拉开女子挂落后腰间的小皮包拉链。我在后面看得煞煞清爽，大吼一声“喂”，小偷儿连忙缩手，格女子也回过

⁴ There is a tendency to cover more news beyond the urban cities. Shanghai TV's "1/7" show turn their camera to nationwide events. In Hunan Satellite TV's "Evening News," they use Xiang language for the local Hunan social news; while for news from Northeast or Shanghai, Northeast Mandarin or Shanghai Wu would be used respectively.

⁵ As a pun, "shisandian" in Wu language means someone is idiosyncratic.

头来晓得发生了啥个事体……”(《荣哥说新闻: 路见不平一声吼》, 2003年7月22日)

Around 2pm yesterday when I ... was nearing the road leading to the gym, I saw a dozen young guys loitering by the road. Just at this moment, the smallest of them, who had big eyes and curly hair, began running towards a young woman who slowed her bicycle while approaching a red traffic light. (The guy) yanked down the zipper of woman's purse, which was on her back waist. I observed every detail so clearly and couldn't help yelling out "Hey!" The petty thief at once drew back his hands. This young woman also turned her head back, having now figured out what had happened. From "Rongge Talks News: Yelling Out at an Injustice on the Road," (07/22/2003)

The local media, anxious to employ local language to construct a cohesive and centripetal community, facilitates the assimilation of the increasing number of migrants who wish to learn the local language. Besides providing subtitles of dialect shows, the media has been involved in holding various dialect training workshops (*fangyan peixun ban*). So far the similar workshops held in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Nanjing, Suzhou, Wuxi, etc. are all well received. In Ningbo, it is reported that the people who sign up the workshop doubled in the past two years; 95% of the students are those white-collar middle class and/or with higher education degree (Zhu Xiaoyan, 2006). In Hangzhou, taking a similar workshop even becomes mandatory for the migrated/outsider taxi drivers, since according to a recent controversial regulation, they have to pass a Hangzhou Wu exam in order to get a work permit (Ma Lili, 2005).

As much as the local media tries to uphold a hegemonic place for the dominant local language, it is hard to reach an agreement on the standard of the media language, not only because of the suburban and urban linguistic variants, but also because of

generational difference. The producer of the *Tantian Shuodi Afugen* 谈天说地阿富根 (All Things Considered with Afugen), which re-aired on Shanghai People's Radio in 2002, worried that there were only four professionals skilled in broadcast standard Shanghai Wu, which, as he insisted, was much different from that the ordinary Shanghai citizens speak (Morning news, 2002). Audiences also pointed out some hosts of the news talk shows, such as Suzhou TV's *Tiantian Shanhaijing* and Hangzhou TV's *Aliutou Shuo Xinwen*, didn't speak the authentic local languages. As one of the hosts of the Aliutou show defended himself, it is true that his Hangzhou Wu is different from that of his contemporaries; yet he is trying to follow the old generation's pronunciation (which seems for him more authentic and standard), such as that of the blind storyteller in the film *Sanmao Xue Shengyi* (Sanmao Studies Business, 1958) (Zou Yingying, 2004).

Such a profusion of media shows in local languages has drawn considerable attention from the media and scholarship, as well as the authorities. A national symposium on regional news broadcasting was held in Hangzhou in 2004, producing a number of in-depth academic papers focusing on the dialect broadcasting. One media critic listed the media productions in local languages as one the top ten broadcasting events in 2004 (Wang Chenyao, 2005). A core topic permanently debated in media and academia is how to deal with the relationship between the use of local language in the media and the overriding state policy of promoting a single national language. Interestingly, the promoters of dialect broadcasting also maneuvered the ambiguity of the 2001 national language law to justify their arguments. As Zhang Jianming defended them, none of the dialect programs shown on HTV2 ran afoul of the National Language Law, as they all got permission from the state or the provincial SARFT, as stipulated in the Article 16 in the Law.⁶ Furthermore, consistent with the

⁶ Interview with Zhang Jianmin.

state policy of *Santiejin* (Three Closeness)⁷, dialect broadcasting would facilitate the dissemination of party policy, making it more comprehensible, especially for elderly people (Zhang Jianming, 2004). Moreover, Putonghua didn't completely disappear from these dialect shows. For many of the news talk shows, although the anchors spoke the local languages, the *vox populi* from on-the-street interviews is often heard speaking Putonghua. In some entertainment shows, a common hosting pattern would have an older male host speaking in dialect, while a younger female hostess speaks Putonghua. To a large extent, Putonghua enjoys an elevated status in the linguistic hierarchy. A *Nanfang Zhoumo* reporter took interest in how the anchor of Sichuan Economy Radio's talk show *Chi Zai Chengdu* (Eating in Chengdu) introduced restaurants with different linguistic variants -- roughly speaking, Sichuan Mandarin for small eateries less than 100 square meters, *Jiaoyan* Putonghua⁸ for those restaurants between 100 square meters and 2000 square meters, Sichuan-accented Putonghua and Beijing-accented Putonghua for more elegant and luxurious ones, and finally the standard Putonghua for the western-style restaurants (Yuan Lei, 2005).

Still, the state and provincial censors show much concern regarding the expanding media productions in local languages by their frequent reiteration of media language regulations. In February 2006, Shanghai announced the city's first law to enforce the National Language Law, which prescribed that any new shows in Shanghai Wu must be approved by the Shanghai Culture, Radio, Film and Television Administration. In Zhejiang province, as the TV and radio shows in local languages rapidly reached around 50 by the summer of 2005, the provincial censors made a

⁷ The "Three Closeness" mandate asks the broadcast industry to provide programming that is "close to reality, close to life, and close to the masses."

⁸ Sichuan-accented Putonghua is usually called as *chuanpu*. According to Li Boqing's further distinction, *Jiaoyan* Putonghua, as a sub-variance of *chuanpu*, is used amusingly for the Sichuan Mandarin vocabulary spoken in the tone of Putonghua, such as *dīngdīngmāo* for dragonfly. See Yuan Lei (2005).

quota of the dialect shows (one such show for each channel and no more than two for each station). The tension between capital and the state was spelling trouble for the burgeoning local media industry, especially when the media tried to be more commercially self-sufficient. After the announcement of the quota, the Hangzhou West Lake Pearl Channel (HTV 2) and the Life Channel (HTV 3) each increased to three programs in local languages by June 2005. For Hunan TV, which brought national attention for producing leading entertainment programs, the local popular talk show *Yue ce yue kaixin* 越策越开心 (to chat the more, the happier) in Changsha Xiang, similar to its other nationwide hit shows *Chaoji nüsheng* (Super girl) and *Kuaile dabenyang* (Citadel of happiness), was somewhat dismissive of the criticism from the state as well as from CCTV.⁹ In the Sichuan and Chongqing regions, the media has a longer tradition of producing dialect shows. A short list includes the news talk show *Acong dubao* 阿聪读报 (Acong reads newspapers) in Sichuan-accented Putonghua, the food show *Tianfu shifang* 天府食坊 (Food in Sichuan) in Chengdu Mandarin, the entertainment shows *Shenghuo malatang* 生活麻辣烫 (Spicy Soup of Life) in Chongqing Mandarin, *Jingji malatang* 经济麻辣烫 (Economy Spicy Soup) in Chengdu and Gonglai Mandarin, and *Chaoji pinwei* 超级品位 (Super taste) in Chengdu Mandarin.

Finally, I briefly introduce an emerging television program genre, *Lanmuju*, which features local languages and is related to news dramatization. Chongqing TV's *Wudu Yehua* (Night Talk in the Foggy Capital, 1994-) in Chongqing Mandarin was arguably the herald of this genre, which the creator and producer Ma Jiren christened *lanmuju*, which literally translated as "column drama." Stylistically speaking, *lanmuju*

⁹ A recent media regulation which is read by WSJ to directly aim at Hunan TV's "Super Girl" stipulates that contestants on all future talent shows must be at least 18 years old. It also requires that entertainment programs "avoid vulgar or gross styles." See Geoffrey Fowler and Juying Qin (2006).

is closer to the docudrama genre. Yet as the documentary drama is usually defined as a work “that has developed very much in the conventional manner of a play (a script emerging largely from individual creative work which is then cast and shot) but that has employed some of the looks and sounds of documentary material to deliver a more ‘realist’ impact” (Creeber, 32), most *lanmuju* productions instead follow a practice that is the reverse of this. The scripts are based on recent local news stories to produce the immediacy and authenticity of news programming. But at the same time, the scriptwriting emphasizes story-telling narrative techniques to deliver a melodramatic effect. As the show is specifically geared to be palatable to the local female audience, the stories mainly elaborate issues of family, marriage, love, friendship, and ethics. In the beginning years of the show, around 1994, the stories were almost exclusively concerned with then hot topics such as love triangles and extramarital affairs. Moreover, a distinctive feature of *lanmuju* is its brevity. A story is usually told in no more than two episodes, so that it can be completed in two 20-minute broadcasts at most. According to Ma, it is a reaction to the lengthy serialized television genres for which audiences usually cannot afford enough time.¹⁰ In the opening credits, a voiceover in Chongqing Mandarin states: “This is not a television series. This is a real story about the real people, an authentic story about the Chongqing people played by themselves.” Indeed, audience participation was always crucial to the program. The stories were acted by non-professional, volunteering local residents who speak their native Chongqing local dialects, and whom a professional branch organization recruits and trains. Furthermore, a radio station actively solicited story-script sources through call-in hotlines. Consequently, the topics of the stories in the show were of the utmost immediate concern and interest to the local audience, as are the scripts of the

¹⁰ My interview with Ma on January 18, 2006.

telenovelas and sitcoms discussed in the chapter one and of the news talk shows examined above in this chapter three.

It became a mushrooming trend in 2006 that the local television stations on the provincial and city levels made their own *lanmuju* programs of short-story telling. A long list of examples of this would include *Gushihui* and *Gushi jiuba* in Changsha Xiang by the Hunan Economy TV, *Jingshi gushihui* in Wuhan Mandarin by Hubei Economy TV, *Juedui gushi* in Shandong Mandarin by Shandong Satellite TV, *Dushi suixi* and *Langren huju* in Xi'an Mandarin by Shaanxi Satellite TV, *Goutong gushihui* in Hangzhou Wu by Zhejiang Economy TV, *Daocheng gushi* in Qingdao Mandarin by Qingdao TV, *Gushihui* in Suzhou Wu by Suzhou Economy Channel, *Beifang gushi* in Northeast Mandarin by Jilin Entertainment Channel, *Feichang banzha* in Kunming Mandarin by Yunnan Kunming TV, and *Tage zou tianya* in Hainan Mandarin by Hainan TV. Together with other local shows rendered in local languages, these *lanmuju* programs carried by local television stations, intimately portraying the slice of life of the ordinary local residents, fostered the imagination of local communities while greatly empowering them as real local entities.

CHAPTER 4

AMBIVALENT LAUGHTER: COMIC SKETCHES IN CCTV'S "SPRING FESTIVAL EVE GALA"

In the years since *Zhongyang dianshitai chunjie lianhuan wanhui* (The China Central Television's Spring Festival Eve Gala Performance) began in 1983, it has gradually evolved as part of China's ritual celebration of its biggest folk festival, the Spring Festival (Lunar New Year). As a significant cultural event, annually organized and produced by the state media CCTV, the Gala is often seen as a valuable opportunity for the Party or the state to convey central, state-sanctioned, official ideology to the populace. Signaling the official, mainstream discourse, Putonghua Mandarin, is predominantly employed in the Gala performance. *Xiaopin* (comic sketches), the best-received popular show in the Gala, evokes laughter among the largest national audience.¹¹ Approximately since the early 1990s, *xiaopin* has evolved from a training exercise in urban academic drama schools to a dialogue-based comic genre infused with the spirit of folk culture—*minjian wenhua* in Chinese.¹² Correspondingly, the *xiaopin* performers, drawn largely from the "lower," local, rural folk art troupes, tend to speak various local languages or Putonghua with distinct accents. Zhao Benshan, the acclaimed king of the comic sketch, often played a comic role in *Errenzhuan*, a regional performing arts form of duet in Northeast China. His sketches, rendered in

¹¹ According to data culled from a CCTV audience group, the Gala has enjoyed the largest national audience for almost two decades, as the average rating per family between 1996 and 2003 was 89.5 percent. To see Wang Liejun (2003).

¹² Although the terms *folk* in English and *minjian* in Chinese are not exactly equivalent, my approach blends their connotations in each language under the umbrella word *folk*. Therefore, on one hand, "folk" means "traditional, premodern, preindustrial, and pretechnological." In this sense, folk culture could, according to Kammen (1999: 6) signify "traditional" popular culture as contrasted with the technologically transformed, modern popular culture. On the other hand, the term connotes "among the ordinary people" (what *minjian* means literally in Chinese), "vernacular" (not elite or highbrow), "not associated with academic institutions," or "not associated with official government."

Northeast Mandarin, are deeply rooted in the traditional peasant *Errenzhuan* art that he and his scriptwriters have grown up with. By examining the laughter evoked by the language-based comic sketches in the Gala, with a focus on Zhao Benshan and *Errenzhuan*, this chapter explores the dynamic dialogue between the central, official discourse from above, represented by Putonghua, and the peripheral, folkloric discourse from below, articulated in local languages. Whereas the central, official discourse attempts to manipulate the peripheral, folkloric discourse for ideological reasons, the latter ends up simultaneously conforming to, and subverting, the former; both involve ambiguity, nuance, and indeterminacy.

Bakhtin's Theory of Folk Humor

Bakhtin's theory, with its fascination with folk culture and obsession with socioideologically charged language, provides an insightful theoretical framework for this study. In his oft-cited study *Rabelais and His World* (1968), Bakhtin examines the culture of folk humor in the spirit of carnival, as depicted in François Rabelais's series of novels *La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* (Gargantua and Pantagruel), written in vernacular French in the Renaissance. According to Bakhtin, the ideal of carnival comprises festive, ritual spectacles such as pageants, comic shows, and open-air amusement, with the participation of clowns and fools. As carnival is predicated on the basis of laughter, Bakhtin ascribes great importance to the nature of carnivalesque laughter:

It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll

aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, the laughter is *ambivalent*: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of the carnival. (Bakhtin 1968: 11-12; emphasis added)

Fundamental to the corporeal, collective nature of carnival laughter is what Bakhtin terms “grotesque realism.” As its essential principles are degradation and debasement, the function of grotesque realism is to transfer things on a high, spiritual, ideal, abstract level to a low, material, bodily, and concrete level. Grotesque realism presents the human body as multiple, bulging, over- and undersized, protuberant, and aged. Again, the grotesque body in its exaggerated and distorted form is ambivalent and contradictory. On one hand, it is “ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed” (Bakhtin 1968, 25). On the other hand, Bakhtin celebrates the unfinished and open body for its positive force, a growing, regenerating, renewing, and creative one. The unity of image and sound demands that the grotesque body seek a grotesque language. For Bakhtin, such grotesque language may take the forms of comic verbal compositions (oral and written), such as parodies and travesties, and various genres of billingsgate, including abusive language, profanities, oaths, slang, humor, popular tricks, and jokes (Bakhtin 1968: 5-17). Consistent with his positive assessment of the lower stratum of the human body, Bakhtin celebrates the vitality of all sorts of “low” and “dirty” folk humor: the forbidden laughter that is usually excluded from official ideology.

Among other forms of carnivalesque language, Bakhtin highlights the tension between Latin, on one hand, and the French vernacular or dialect employed in Rabelais’s novel, on the other hand:

The line of demarcation between two cultures—the official and the popular—was drawn along the line dividing Latin from the vernacular. The vernacular invaded all the spheres of ideology and expelled Latin. It brought new forms of thought (ambivalence) and new evaluations; this was the language of life, of material work and mores, of the “lowly,” mostly humorous genres, the free speech of the marketplace (although popular language, of course, was not homogeneous and contained some elements of official speech). On the other hand, Latin was the medium of the official medieval world. Popular culture was but feebly reflected in it and was distorted, especially in the Latin branch of grotesque realism. (Bakhtin 1968: 465-466)

Local dialect, alongside other socioideologically charged languages and speech styles, is an important component of Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia*. In heteroglossia, a phenomenon found in Renaissance as well as in contemporary Chinese literature, a local dialect is employed to decentralize the central discourse, to distort the standard form, and to excite a perception of critiquing differences and contradictions masked by the master narrative (Liao Xianhao 1990: 96-99). In the above-cited passage, Bakhtin provides a historic account of heteroglossia. A prominent cultural phenomenon of the Renaissance was that various vernaculars or dialects besieged, penetrated, and relativized Latin and all the unitary, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political discourses that expressed themselves through it. In recognition of the performative power of the vernacular, Bakhtin emphasizes that rather than composing a clear-cut binary opposition, the discourse at the center and the discourse at the periphery form a dynamic, dialogic relationship of interpenetration, interaction, and interillumination. “Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of

language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (Bakhtin 1981: 272).

Liu Kang (1995) defines Bakhtin’s heteroglossia as a theory for times of cultural transition: for example, for the ancient Greco-Roman era, the Renaissance, and the turn of the twentieth century. Bakhtin’s theory definitely has broad implications for the scene in contemporary China. Undergoing a comparable cultural transition in the reform years, China has witnessed an increasing encroachment of popular, vernacular culture on the realm of official, elite culture, and a further blurring of the boundary between high and low culture. For example, Barmé (1999) observes “an uneasy coexistence” among various forms of culture since the early 1990s, “one characterized more by constant compromise rather than simply a mutual antagonism or entrenched opposition” (Barmé 1999: 100). CCTV’s annual Spring Festival Gala exactly constitutes just such a field of “uneasy coexistence,” where the official, state-sanctioned culture, the modern, technologically transformed popular culture, and the traditional, premodern, preindustrial folk culture form a dynamic dialogical relationship, exhibiting Bakhtinian tension, contradiction, and ambivalence.

On one hand, as the Chinese New Year celebration is fundamentally of folk-cultural origin, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala shares some elements of the utopian ideal of Bakhtinian carnival. The almost five-hour-long performance is an extravagant display of singing and dancing, particularly by groups; language-based comic shows including *xiangsheng* (comic cross-talk) and *xiaopin*; *xiqu* (folk opera) performance; and other variety shows. The comic, clownish role, as a constant element of the New Year celebration, is manifested most prominently in the Gala’s comic sketches, as later analysis will show. The collective laughter the Gala evokes is shared by the roughly 90 percent of Chinese families nationwide watching the show. Coupled with

other festive rituals such as *nianyefan* (New Year's Eve feast) and *shouye* (staying up late or all night on New Year's Eve), the Gala serves a basic function of carnival in celebrating the death of the old and the birth of the new.

However, on the other hand, many critics point out that even Bakhtin's notion of a carnival is a licensed affair, sanctioned or endorsed by the authorities themselves, and that therefore, the Bakhtinian carnival spirit does not necessarily undermine authority. Gluckman (1965: 109) asserts that although the "rites of reversal obviously include a protest against the established order ... they are intended to preserve and strengthen the established order." In the Chinese form of the carnival during the Lunar New Year, the state broadcast media CCTV sees the Spring Festival Gala as an invaluable opportunity to inculcate the Party ideology into the populace, as well as to showcase the official mainstream culture. Nevertheless, in an era of cultural transition, the state media policy has correspondingly had to undergo gradual infrastructural changes. Therefore, Bakhtinian "grotesque realism," characteristic of folk culture, is allowed temporarily to rupture hegemony, challenge authority, and dissolve ideology. However, this brief carnivalesque laughter, generated by comic sketches and the like, in turn serves to solidify the position of the long-term Party leadership. Prepared under the scrutiny of censors, each year the Gala is carefully orchestrated to stay safely within the Party line, initiating and structuring a process of self-containment and ambivalence.

Evolution of Xiaopin in CCTV's Spring Festival Gala

Xiaopin, which literally means a short skit, originally referred to a theatrical performance sketch serving as a training exercise in metropolitan, professional film and drama schools. This academic acting tradition is discernible in early Gala sketches by the famous film actors Chen Peisi and Zhu Shimao, who both largely speak

Putonghua. Chen plays a comic role as an extra in a movie shoot in the sketches “Eating noodles” (*Chi miantiao*, 1984) and “Shooting a film” (*Pai dianying*, 1985). The mode of “sketch within a sketch” is also in evidence when Chen plays a supporting role as a traitor who tries by every means to steal the show from the lead role, an Eighth Route Army officer played by Zhu in the sketch “The leading actor and the supporting actor” (*Zhujue yu peijue*, 1990). The playfully subversive theme in this sketch seems to exhibit the genre’s potential to incorporate carnivalesque, folk-cultural elements. Lü Xinyu (2003: 93-94) further points out that *xiaopin* is better suited than either *xiqu* or *xiangsheng* for modern television transmission: the plot development of the typical sketch framed in time and space corresponds to the linear movement of the television camera. Thus the televised *xiaopin* proves to be a key comic genre for the CCTV Gala to legitimize itself as a traditional festive ritual celebration. The comic, clownish role, always indispensable in rural folk festival celebrations, is manifested most prominently in the increasingly “folkified” comic sketches.

In the CCTV Gala of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the comic figure played by the school-trained professionals gradually evolved from an urbanite who speaks Putonghua into a “lower,” rural peasant who speaks a variant of Northern Mandarin or who speaks Putonghua Mandarin with a distinct accent. Guo Da, from the Xi’an Spoken Drama Theater (*Xi’an Huajuyuan*) at that time, plays a “feudal” peasant husband and speaks Shaanxi Mandarin. He is anxiously hoping for an infant son instead of a daughter in “In front of the delivery room” (*Chanfang menqian*, 1987). In “A slacker’s blind date” (*Lanhan xiangqin*, 1989), Song Dandan, trained in the Beijing People’s Art Theatre (Beijing Renyi), speaks a strongly accented Mandarin. She plays a single-minded, provincial rural young woman, whose most memorable line is “俺叫魏淑芬，女二十九岁，至今未婚” (“My name is Wei Shufen, female, 29 years old, not married yet”). In “Birth-quota-exceeding guerrilla” (*Chaosheng youjidui*, 1990),

Song and Huang Hong, a Shandong-native comedian from a Shenyang military performance troupe, both speaking an identifiable Northeast Mandarin, play a shabbily dressed and uncouth rural couple. With three daughters already in tow, the expectant wife is protuberant with a fourth. In order to evade the heavy fine demanded by the Birth Control Policy, they lead a guerrilla-like vagrant life.

Roughly at the same time, the casting of *xiaopin* actors also quickly turned away from urban stage actors, trained by the academic schools, and reached down to favor more authentic peasant performers of lower, regional folk art troupes. The late Zhao Lirong had long played the female comic role (*caidan*) in *Pingju*, a folk opera allegedly originating among the village beggars in the Hebei area. Zhao Benshan, Pan Changjiang, and Gong Hanlin had traditionally played comic roles in *Errenzhuan* in their home villages. For instance, Zhao Benshan's hometown is at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy—Shizui village, in Lianhua town, Kaiyuan county, Tieling city, in the Liaoning Province. Mirroring these casting changes, the sketch scriptwriters were increasingly drawn from those who had been working on folk art production. For example, Shi Lin, who wrote most of Zhao Lirong's sketches, works in a *Quju* troupe in Beijing. Zhang Chao, Cui Kai, He Qingkui, and Zhang Huizhong, the scriptwriters or directors responsible for most of Zhao Benshan's sketches, are peasant artists on *Errenzhuan* in the local folk art troupes in North Liaoning.

In the various dialect-speaking sketches in the CCTV Galas, a key difference between the staged Mandarin varieties and the standard Putonghua Mandarin is the Chinese characters' tonal change in the phonetic sense (see table 3).

Table 3: Intonation Variations in the Comic Sketches in the Galas

Performer	Mandarin Variety	Tones in the Sketches	Tones in Putonghua	Sketch Name	Year
Chen Peisi	Mandarin with a Uygur accent	乌鲁木齐 (Urümqi)		“Yangrouchuan” (Skewering the Shish Kebab)	1986
		wu53 lu55 mu55 qi53	Wu55 lu214 Mu51 qi35		
Shen Fa	Sichuan Mandarin	打麻将 (“play Mahjong”)		“Jie Qi” (Pick up the wife)	1988
		da42 ma31 jiang 12	Da214 ma35 jiang51		
Song Dandan	Mandarin with an unidentifiable accent	俺娘说 (“my mom said”)		“Lanhan xiangqin” (A slacker’s blind date)	1989
		ŋæ~ 35 niang45 suo55	An214 niang35 shuo55		
Ni Ping	Shandong Rongcheng Mandarin	天气预报 (“weather forecast”)		“Tianqi yubao” (Weather forecast)	1990
		tian31 qi21 yu12 baor21	tian55 qi51 yu51 bao51		
Huang Hong	Northeast Mandarin	知道不? (“you know?”)		“Chaosheng youjuidi” (Birth-quota-exceeding guerrilla)	1990
		zi35 dao bu44?	zhi55 dao51 bu?		
Guo Da	Shaanxi Xi’an Mandarin	换大米 (“exchanging rice”)		“Huan dami” (Exchanging rice)	1991
		Huan55 da55 mi53	huan51 da51 mi213		
Zhao Benshan	Northeast Mandarin	别紧张 (“don’t be nervous”)		“Wo xiang you ge jia” (I want a family)	1992
		Bie51 jin214 zhang22	bie35 jin214 zhang55		
Zhao Lirong	Hebei Tangshan Mandarin	有啥说啥 (“say whatever you want”)		“Mama de jintian” (My mother’s today)	1993
		you214 sha53 shuo35 sha51	you 214 sha35 shuo55 sha35		

From the table 3, the Mandarin varieties, identifiable or unidentifiable as specific dialects, could be viewed as forms of accent liberation from the single Putonghua Mandarin. The intonation of the official language can relatively freely undergo deployment and differentiation within the range of its basic, standard tone. In this sense, Putonghua is no longer uni-accentual, isolated or closed, but can be

exaggerated, distorted, or diffused, thus becoming multi-accentual, plural, unfinished, and unpredictable.

Among others, Zhao Lirong's sketch "A day in the life of the hero's mother" (*Yingxiong muqin de yitian*, 1989), scripted by Shi Lin and Zang Li, manifests the folkloric subversion enacted by the local dialects against the official discourse represented by Putonghua. In this sketch, Zhao Lirong plays an ordinary, rural, old woman speaking Hebei Tangshan Mandarin. Upon going out to buy tofu, Zhao is visited by a Putonghua-speaking television director, surnamed Hou. He has come to make a documentary of Zhao's daily life in celebration of March 8th International Women's Day. Because her son became a hero for capturing a criminal, Zhao is cast by Hou as a model of a hero's mother. Director Hou reads the bombastic and grandiose conception for shooting the documentary from his folder:

Through you, we want to set up a glorious image of a hero's mother. Through you, we want to capture the spiritual perspective and the characteristics of the time period of women in the 80s; through you, we will track how the hero grows up; through you, we also want to reflect the aesthetic pursuits of Chinese women.

The subgenre of the "model-setup" has been an entrenched propaganda technique since the Maoist era. In it, the grand, ideal, abstract ideology is materialized and personalized by a concrete, real human body. In this sketch, the director, or the Party, the authority, attempts to materialize Zhao's body and to have her project the morality of a hero's mother in the 1980s: an educated, urban, fashionable, and extraordinary woman with a positive outlook on life. However, Hou's attempt at materializing the ideal is thwarted by Zhao's materialization working in the opposite direction, that is,

toward degradation and debasement, the essential principle of Bakhtin's grotesque realism. At every turn, Hou's sublime, ideal, spiritual, and grand message is lowered by Zhao's flippant and vulgar utterances.

Hou: (following his purported reasons for shooting) Do you understand what I've just said?

Zhao: (raising head from doing chores): Oh, yes. [I] understand... Well, what did you say just now?

Hou: (disappointed) Anyway, stay where you are, and let's get to work... What do you do when you get up every morning? I mean, the FIRST thing?

Zhao: The first thing? Can I say anything?

Hou: Say whatever you'd like.

Zhao: The first thing is to GO TO THE TOILET.

Hilariously, her response deflates the director's expectation of something lofty or unique, and lowers the interview to quotidian, bodily functions such as excretion. Zhao's materialization of her own body defies the materialization expected or assigned by the director: elsewhere, she dismisses the movements of disco dance, a fashionable metropolitan cultural form at the time, as less attractive than the motions of a policeman directing traffic in her neighborhood. She sings the then-popular Taiwanese melodrama theme song "Zuoye xingchen" (The constellation last night) so that it gradually devolves into a *Pingju* tune. And she never correctly pronounces the title of the "meaningful" ancient story about the literati, "Sima Guang Za Gang" (Sima Guang

breaking the jar),¹³ whereas she is quite familiar with “superstitious” folk ghost stories and fairy stories.

Puns are also a ubiquitous element in the *xiaopin* shows as they appear in the Gala. Punning is one of the forms of what Bakhtin calls *grammatica jocosa*, which, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White explain, is a form of locution where “grammatical order is transgressed to reveal erotic and obscene or merely materially satisfying counter-meaning” (Stallybrass and White 1986, 10-11). They further cite Arthur’s argument on the punning in Bakhtinian style:

[The pun] violates and so unveils the structure of prevailing (prevailing) convention; and it provokes laughter. Samuel Beckett’s punning pronouncement “In the beginning was the Pun” sets the pun against official Word and at the same time, as puns often do, sets free a chain of other puns. So, too, carnival sets itself up in a punning relationship with official culture and enables a plural, unfixed, comic view of the world. (ibid., 11)

The sketch “A day in the life of the hero’s mother” makes frequent use of punning. For example, Hou’s identity as a *daoyan* 导演 (director), a prestigious job title, is degraded by Zhao as 倒爷 *daoye*, a derogatory word for blackmarketeer/profiteer. The same holds true for punning on the abstract professional jargon-word *gousi* 构思 (conception) with the word for the concrete, everyday food *doufusi* 豆腐丝 (sliced tofu), on *jikuair* 几块儿 (several episodes) with *jikuair* 几块儿 (several chunks of tofu), and on *xiayige danyuan* 下一个单元 (the next unit of camera shots) with *xiayige danyuan* 下一个单元 (a downstairs unit of a building), and so forth.

¹³ The ancient story of “Sima Guang Za Gang” tells how the young Sima Guang of the Song dynasty saved a fellow child who had fallen into a big jar, filled with water, by bravely breaking the jar with a stone.

From a sociological perspective, Wang Liejun (2003) is quick to point out that the model-setup is a technique of power control prevalently both in society generally as well as in the yearly Gala. The “parody of the lofty model” in the sketch “A day in the life of the hero’s mother,” when compared with the dominant “model-setup” form exalted in other shows in the Gala, can be seen to serve as a necessary lever of power rather than as an instance of resistance to it. Such sketches are arguably an alternative technique of power control devised by the state media, thus helping to form a “compromise equilibrium” in the Gramscian sense, where the power exercised by dominant groups operates through subtle and complex negotiations and compromises rather than through explicit domination of, or direct conflict with, subordinate groups (Storey, 2003). In this light, both Du Wenwei (1998) and Zhao Bin (1998) only partially make sense of the legitimatization of *xiaopin* in the state-sanctioned Gala. While Du attributes the popularity of *xiaopin* exclusively to its critical potential for lampooning the commercial ethos in the market economy, Zhao goes to the other extreme by arguing that *xiaopin*, as the most popular form of entertainment, is made to convey effectively the packaged official propaganda. Nevertheless, all three authors fail to identify the traditional folk culture in which *xiaopin* is implicitly grounded, and thus they are unable to fully comprehend how the dominant ideology legitimizes itself by staging folk forms in the major cultural productions of the modern broadcast media, such as the CCTV Gala. It is true that the various folk forms (folk opera and ballads, folk songs, as well as the folk performing arts integrated in the comic sketches) are a way for the Gala to establish continuity with the traditional festive celebrations, and it is equally true that these premodern, preindustrial folk entertainment forms have been increasingly threatened and marginalized by the modern, industrial, popular forms of entertainment such as television. In this way, by staging, recognizing, and even possibly valorizing the folk forms in the CCTV Gala, the most prestigious cultural

spectacle of the mainstream media, the state and the mainstream society alike seem to convey a cultural message that no valuable cultural heritage has been sacrificed, victimized, or will perish in China's modernizing process. At the same time however, these authorities may not be aware that to inculcate the populace with any such ideological message is to employ a double-edged sword. The comic sketches embedded in the peasant folk performance art can simultaneously conform to and subvert the state ideology in an ambivalent and nuanced way, as Zhao Benshan's comic sketches most clearly illustrate.

Zhao Benshan's Comic Sketches and Northeast Errenzhuan

Ever since his first appearance in the CCTV Spring Festival Gala in 1990, Zhao's sketch has become a perennial staple in the yearly Gala, ushering in a tradition of comic sketches delivered in Northeast Mandarin. Zhao Benshan is often claimed to be the key figure who transformed *xiaopin* from a training exercise used in metropolitan drama and film schools to a comic genre, charged with peasant folk performance art. His achievement in these sketches is inseparable from the *Errenzhuan* he and his long-time collaborators have grown up with. As his scriptwriter Cui Kai comments, the common characteristic of all of Zhao's comic roles, encompassing various ages, genders, and personality types, is *chou* (ugly or grotesque), which is applicable to his appearance, language, or slapstick behavior (Li Shanyuan and Zhang Feifei, 2002). *Choujue* is the comic role Zhao has long played in the local *Errenzhuan* troupe in his home village in North Liaoning. In *Errenzhuan*, *Choujue* is also called *xiazhuang* (the lower dress), which is consistent with Bakhtin's analysis of the clown's grotesque body as "the lower bodily stratum." By inverting the bodily hierarchy of spiritual upper functions and vulgar lower ones, the *Choujue* clown's body image is ambivalent: destroying and generating, swallowing and being swallowed (Bakhtin 1968, 163).

For *choujue* or *xiazhuang*, the most characteristic part of his performance is *shuokou* (speaking), as opposed to singing, dancing, or acting. According to Wang Qiuying et al. (1979, 73), there are at least ten interwoven types of *shuokou* delivered in the colloquial Northeast Mandarin, such as *pingkou* (strictly or loosely rhymed, toned in *ping* and *ze*), *xiangsheng kou* (delivering the punch line of a joke), *zhuakou/geda kou* (spontaneous improvisation), and *gushi kou* (short stories or jokes). As its main function is to evoke laughter, the language is often discredited as being vulgar, low, and dirty. Here is a typical excerpt from a traditional *Errenzhuan* work, *Wang Meirong Guanhua* (Wang Meirong enjoys the flowers), as cited in Ma Qifen (2003, 107). Wang speaks to herself when meeting her future husband, Mr. Right:

被窝里睡新人儿，一条腿儿，蘑菇根儿；两条腿儿，芦花鸡儿；
三条腿儿，煎饼鏊子儿；四条腿儿，饭桌子儿；脸对脸儿，是小镜子
儿；嘴对嘴儿，是烟袋锅子儿；腿摺腿儿，那是麻花子儿。

A newlywed couple sleeps in the quilt. One leg—a mushroom root; two legs—Dominique Hen; three legs—a tripod griddle; four legs—a table for eating; face to face—a small mirror; mouth to mouth—a long-stemmed pipe's mouth; leg intertwined with leg—twisted fried dough.

The humor arises from a series of witty, rhymed metaphors made between erotic sexuality and familiar objects of rural life. The folk, unofficial laughter is evoked, not only because it strongly emphasizes the bodily, material level of food, drink, digestion, and sexual life, but also because of an ambiguous, plural, comic world the double-voiced utterances reveal.

Zhao's dialogues in the sketches are rooted in the folk art tradition of *Errenzhuan*, and especially in the colloquial speech art of *shuokou*. In a series of sketches since 1990, Zhao has successfully set up a number of comic scenarios featuring the speech styles of *niangen* 蔫眼. *Niangen* could be translated as "cold humor." *Nian* describes somebody who appears honest and speaks sparingly, and *gen* means a punch line. *Niangen* has been hailed as the highest achievement of the *shuokou* art, where intonation is paramount. The music critic Li Wan (2005) highly praises the resourcefulness of intonation in *Errenzhuan*. The various intonation patterns within the same wording create a mood of paradox, through which an ambiguous clarity emerges. He further points out that the distinctive feature of this local art form is *biaoqing* (emotive-affective) instead of *biaoyi* (semantic-referential), insofar as the meaning is expressed not in the content but in the form of intonation. Li's observation echoes Volosinov's argument¹⁴ that intonation makes the word it attaches to "virtually empty semantically" (1976, 102). From a more theoretical perspective, Volosinov elaborates on the social nature of intonation. He argues that a different treatment of intonation is the key distinction between discourse in art and discourse in life, though both discourses remain dependent on their direct contexts to varying degrees. In the extraverbal context, intonation "always lies on the border of the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid" (ibid., 102), therefore exhibiting "the greatest sensitivity, elasticity, and freedom" (ibid., 105) when compared with other factors of verbal utterances.

¹⁴ Liu Kang (1995) mentions the dispute over the authorship of this article and of Volosinov (1986). No matter who the real author is, Volosinov or Bakhtin, we should note the fact that both worked closely in the Leningrad Group and that therefore their ideas would have possessed important affinities.

Zhao Benshan is a master of such intonation.¹⁵ Most of his catchy lines are registered with unique, expressive intonation. In the sketch “Blind date” (*Xiang qin*, 1990) scripted by Zhang Chao, although most of his dialogue is muffled, conveying shyness or uneasiness, his forceful, emotion-charged articulation rhymed with *ao* “就兴你们年轻人连蹦带跳又搂又抱，我们老年人就只能干靠” (just let you young people dance and jump, kiss and hug, so the elderly are left to be lonely?) highlights the social issue of remarriage among the elderly at the time. In the sequel “Laonian getting married” (*Laonian wanhun*, 1991) scripted by Zhang Chao and Zhang Huizhong, Zhao parodies the Cantonese accent of his peasant fiancée, who has changed considerably following several months’ stay in Shenzhen. In order to test her love, Zhao feminizes his voice and plays an elderly woman engaging her in conversion.¹⁶ In the “The elders pay a New Year’s call” (*Lao bainian*, 1993) scripted by Cui Kai and Zhang Chao, since the traditional opera troupe has been marginalized in the booming modern market economy, the *Errenzhuan* master Zhao has to pay a New Year’s call on his former students-turned-entrepreneurs in order to find a job. As his line goes:

咱们那个地方戏团办成气功训练班儿了，排练场租给小商小贩儿卖货摆摊儿了，把我这副科级给我挤兑靠边儿了，整得我
一·周·七·天·全·是·礼·拜·天儿·了。

¹⁵ As the term “intonation” is interpreted here as “emotion-charged” or “emotive-affective,” it should be clear that this study uses a broad definition of intonation, which not only includes the melodic tone contour, as defined in Halliday (1994: 9), but also other vocal factors such as rhythm and variation in tempo and loudness.

¹⁶ Double-gender acting is characteristic of *Errenzhuan* performance. In contrast to cross-gender acting, for instance, the female role played by Mei Lanfang in the Beijing Opera, the person playing a double-gender role in *Errenzhuan* art can be easily identified as a man who acts like a woman.

Our local opera troupe has become a Qigong training class; the rehearsal room has been rented to the peddlers; I've been pushed aside, and for me EVERY DAY IS A SUNDAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK.

The intonation epitomizes the style of *niangen*, that is, *puping dianwen jiedexiang* 铺平垫稳揭得响 (A controlled foreshadowing leads to a more effective climax). In “Red sorghum fashion model group” (*Honggaoliang Mote Dui*, 1997) scripted by Cui Kai and He Qingkui, Zhao makes a hilarious analogy out of “hidden similarities”¹⁷ between modern model training and rural insecticide spraying:

收腹，是勒紧小肚子；提臀，是要把药箱卡住；斜视，是看准果树；这边加压，这边就喷雾。它的节拍是这样的：一刺刺，二刺刺，三刺刺，四刺刺。

To push your belly in is to cinch up your belt; to lift your hip is to buckle on the spray box; to cast a sidelong glance is to look towards the fruit tree; while pumping direct the spray. The beat is like this: yì cì cì/er cì cì/sān cì cì/sì cì cì [the sound of spraying in the rhythm of Viennese Waltz, ¾ time].

In “Paying a New Year’s call” (*Bainian*, 1998) scripted by He Qingkui and Zhang Qingdong, Zhao stammers when he suddenly realizes the *xiangzhang* (town leader), a distant cousin whom he had assumed to have been dismissed, allegedly due to corruption, has actually been promoted to the higher position of *xianzhang* (county magistrate). Zhao’s stammering exemplifies the Freudian “mechanism of a slip of the

¹⁷ A favorite definition of joking has long been that it involves a statement that reveals the similarity between dissimilar things, that is, hidden similarities. Jean Paul expresses this definition in a joking form: “joking is the disguised priest who weds every couple.” See Freud (1960: 11)

tongue” (Freud 1935, 30-47), the suspension of a previous intention as a result of a series of socially hierarchical reversals: the family hierarchy of filial piety between Zhao and his cousin, temporarily rescued from the hierarchical political repression that separates common villagers and the *xiangzhang*, is repressed again by a stauncher political hierarchy between common villagers and the *xianzhang*.

There are other examples of intonation alone being self-sufficient and meaningful. In “Uncle Niu promoted” (*Niu dashu tigan*, 1995), scripted by Cui Kai, Zhao plays Uncle Niu, who is sent by a poverty-stricken village school to a local government-sponsored company seeking some funding. He is temporarily “promoted” to fill in for the company manager who has been hospitalized because of a stomach problem stemming from endlessly attending business banquets. Preparing prior to the guests’ arrival, Uncle Niu practices a toast, reading a text written by the manager’s secretary. But what the audience hears is just a stream of toned utterance except for some filtered words: “zhe ge ----- a, wo shuo --- a” (well ----- a, I say ----- a). If taken in isolation, the intonation itself would be empty and unintelligible. But here in the extraverbal context, the audience bursts into laughter hearing the illiterate Uncle Niu parodying the stereotyped, tedious, and overbearing tonal speech pattern of Party cadres and officials. The politically and culturally inferior addressee’s rendition of the superior addresser’s intonation becomes a meaningful locution because of the performer’s and the audience’s shared “knowledge and social evaluation of the situation” (Volosinov 1976, 99). What is said is determined by what is unsaid; at the same time, what is said anticipates what is unsaid. As a whole, the sketch satirizes the social ills of excessive dining-out on public funds. This turns out to be in conformity with the national anticorruption movement, an effort undertaken by the Zhu Rongji regime at the time. Therefore, one may argue that the intention of Zhao’s sketches is dual: to dissolve authority through satire, and at the same time to gain proximity to

authority. Nevertheless, neither the conforming nor the subversive voices are explicit; both are involved with ambiguity and indeterminacy, as a close reading of the following sketch will demonstrate.

The sketch “Yesterday, today, and tomorrow” (*Zuotian, jintian, mingtian*, 1999), scripted by He Qingkui, is about an elderly Northeast rural couple who come to the then-hit CCTV talk show “Shihua shishuo” (To tell the truth). The sketch sets up a hierarchical opposition between the host in the center and the couple in the periphery right from the beginning. The host, with the name Cui Yongyuan, speaking Putonghua, is a real television celebrity hosting the show in the state station in Beijing. The rural couple, Dashu (played by Zhao Benshan) and Dama (played by Song Dandan), speaking the Northeast dialect, are nameless members of the folk mass from the Northeast region, the “guests” who are notified to come to the official realm they do not really belong to. Yet soon the hierarchy between the central, official discourse and the peripheral, folk discourse is reversed:

Cui: The topic of today’s talk show is “yesterday, today, and tomorrow.” This time, we’ll change our rules and have Dashu talk first.

Zhao: We prepared at home last night, came over here today, and will go back tomorrow. Thanks.

Cui: No, no. Dashu. I didn’t mean for you to talk about “yesterday.” I was hoping you’d talk about something even earlier [than yesterday].

Song: The day before yesterday? We got the notification from the *xiang* government [to come to the show] the day before yesterday. Thanks!

Cui (becoming a little anxious): Dashu and Dama, the “yesterday, today, and tomorrow” I was talking about is not “yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”

Zhao: The day after tomorrow?

Cui: Not the day after tomorrow.

Song (puzzled): Then which day do you mean?

Cui: Not a specific day. What I meant is to ask you to recall the past, comment on the present, and then look into the future.

Zhao: Aha! Then that's "the past, the present, and the future."

Song (echoes Zhao): That's not the same thing as "yesterday, today, and tomorrow."

Zhao (speaks to Cui): yeah, the way you asked was a little problematic.

Song (echoes again): No one asked this way.

Zhao: Exactly.

Cui (shaking his head): Well. Seems to be my fault?

For the host, his interpretation of the phrase "yesterday, today, and tomorrow" is uni-accentual, excluding the original, basic meaning of the phrase and fixating on its extended meaning as "the past, the present, and the future." Implicit in this phrase, in its official interpretation, is another typical Party formula of class education dating from the Maoist era, *Yikusitian*: to recall the bitterness of the past (in the old society) and to savor the sweetness of the present (in the new society). The audience, long inculcated with Party ideology, found the couple's retrieved meaning of the phrase to be unexpected and unanticipated. This is what lies behind the carnivalesque laughter, not only does folk discourse restore the familiarity, originality, and multi-accentuality of language, but also official discourse becomes aware of its own limitations or flaws only when confronted with folk discourse.

Nevertheless, once the couple figures out what the official intention is, their utterance soon seems to conform to the mode of *Yikusitian*. As Zhao passionately reads:

Dear leaders and comrades. ... Good evening. The year 1998 was an unusual year. A bumper crop harvested, a flood repelled. The people live and work in peace and contentment. [We] all praise the unexcelled Party leadership. It's especially hard to find a better army in the world than the PLA; other countries are such a mess, daily plotting against each other. Today their cabinet resigns, tomorrow their prime minister ousted [in Japan]. The Financial Crisis [in East Asia], presidential impeachment [in the U.S.], one after another. To have a bird's eye view of the world, the best scenery is here! Thanks a lot! [The original monologue rhymes in *ao*]

Here, apparently, the Party achievement in the past year is exalted by Zhao's rhymed accumulation of "comparatives and superlatives." Wang Xiaokun (2005) thus argues that the essence of Zhao's sketches is the unity found in diversity. His various comic images are in fact consistently a transmission of the official discourse in the center from a peasant position in the periphery, a rhetorical strategy from below to attempt to render, interpret, and illustrate the state ideology disseminated from above. However, it is important to note that Zhao *reads* the whole passage from a notebook. Reading from a text rather than speaking spontaneously is the standardized form of transmitting an official message. This is what Volosinov (1986, 130) terms "direct discourse" or the "referent-analyzing modification of the indirect discourse," which is "somewhat rationalistic and dogmatic in nature." As Zhao reads the utterance that "belongs to *someone else*" (ibid., 116), and here, belongs to the Party or the state, he transmits only passively an ideology that he may not have internalized very well. Such literal or mechanical transmission in turn testifies to the official discourse being a finished, fixed, inert, and immutable one.

A new twist emerges. Immediately following Zhao's utterance of "Dear leaders and comrades," the host dismissively comments, "You want to give a report?" It seems that this form of transmitting the Party voice is not quite favored by the authorities or the state media itself. In order to adjust the couple to the shifting role of the media, the host Cui is ready to borrow the language of ordinary folk. He guides the talk this way, "Dashu and Dama. The talk show is for talking, chatting, or shooting the breeze. Just like you Northeast people chatting (*laoker*) on the *kang* (a northern brick kiln-like bed). How are things at home, how are things going here."

Once having converted the public official space into the private intimate space channeled by the host, the couple freely unleash a torrent of backhanded compliments, addressing Cui's popularity in their village: "The people in our village really like you ... Everyone praises you, saying you do a great job in hosting, except that you could be a little handsomer." Song's utterance is immediately followed by Zhao's: "Your show is everyone's favorite in our village. Your hosting style is unique. When you're laughing, it looks like you're crying. And when you're crying, it looks like you're laughing." The simultaneous praise and abuse is characteristic of folk language, of which Bakhtin (1968, 165) comments: "the praise is ironic and ambivalent. It is on the brink of abuse; the one leads to the other, and it is impossible to draw a line between them."

Such folk language abounds when the couple begins to chat about their past love story, their present personal life of idol worship, and their future plan of writing books and traveling. The couple's heteroglot speech style showcases the Bakhtinian internal stratification within one language, Northeast Mandarin: abusive language (abusive praise or praiseful abuse), such as *xiebazi lian* 鞋拔子脸, *zhuyaozi lian* 猪腰子脸, *kechen* 坷磣 (the local derogatory idioms for one's appearance) and *baxia* 扒瞎 (talk nonsense); puns, such as the literary idiom *ansongqiubo* 暗送秋波 (a beautiful

woman secretly makes eyes at her lover, or ogle) degradingly taken as *ansongqiubo* 暗送秋菠 (to secretly deliver the autumn spinach); popular song titles, such as *Dayue zai dongji* 大约在冬季 (Probably in the winter), *Taosheng yijiu* 涛声依旧 (The wave still as before), and *Xiangyue jiuba* 相约九八 (Meet in 1998); popular phrases in the 1990s such as *xiagang* 下岗 (laid off) in “两颗洁白的牙齿也光荣下岗了” (two pure white teeth has been honorably laid off); idioms of the younger generation such as *xinzhong ouxiang* 心中偶像 (idol in the mind) and *mengzhong qingren* 梦中情人 (dream lover); revolutionary jargon, such as *Wa shehuizhuyi qiangjiao, hao shehuizhuyi yangmao* 挖社会主义墙角, 薅社会主义羊毛 (to dig the socialist corner, to weed the socialist wool); classical Chinese, such as *yushihu* 于是乎 (thereupon); jocose grammar, such as *bijiao shuai dai le* 比较帅呆了 (relatively hunkish handsome); western political jargon, such as *dongxi liangyuan yiyuan* 东西两院议员 (senators and congressmen) and *tanhe* 弹劾 (impeach) in, “这家伙把我们家的男女老少、东西两院议员全找来开会, 要弹劾我” (this gal implores everyone in our big family, every senate and congressman/congresswoman to hold a meeting in order to impeach me); foreign words, such as “hello,” “OK,” and “mishi” (咪西)¹⁸ in “天天吃饭啥的, 也不正经叫我了, 打电话, 还说外语: Hello 啊, 饭已 OK 啦, 下来咪西吧”; and so on. The various social “languages” and speech styles, however alien, opposite, or supplementary to one another, are bound together through debasement, augmentation, or leveling. As the hybridized utterances dynamically transgress the limits of the established linguistic and social conventions, the laughter arises. The celebration of the ambivalent laughter continues toward the end of the sketch. The host asks each member of the couple for one concluding remark “from the bottom of your hearts” (*fazifeifu*), which would be conventionally rendered in a solemn, pompous, and

¹⁸ The Japanese noun *meshi* めし (meal) is often misconceptualized by Chinese as a verb and mispronounced as *mishi* or *mixi* in *pinyin*.

formulaic tone. Song's strong wish to meet her idol (*shifen xiangjian Zhao Zhongxiang*) seems a debasing parody of the revolutionary jargon of worshipping Chairman Mao (*shifen xiangnian Mao Zhuxi*). Zhao's response in his unique *Errenzhuan niangen* style is more about material necessity, which is "key" in his own words: "Who is going to reimburse us for our train tickets?" (*Laiqian'er de huoche piao shei gei bao le?*)

The art of *Errenzhuan* as a local folk form has come a long way from the marginalized, unofficial "marketplace" of rural fields, courtyards, and the village inns (*dachedian*) to its legitimatization in the official mainstream broadcast media. Even though Zhao still lamented the dimming future of local folk art in his 1993 sketch ("Laobainian"), this "low" art form has gradually ascended to the high official realm and has also become a household name, with Zhao's comic sketches in the CCTV Galas of the 1990s and a series of telenovelas *Liu Laogen* (I, II, III), *Ma Dashuai* (I, II, III), and *Zhengyue lilai shi xinchun* (Story of an *Errenzhuan* troupe) that aired on CCTV-1 since 2003. Thus in the 2005 CCTV Gala, the sketch "Xiaocui talks" (*Xiaocui shuoshi*), a sequel to the 1999 sketch "Yesterday, today, and tomorrow," is followed by a show of *Errenzhuan* dance performance. Cui's clumsy dance among Zhao and other professional *Errenzhuan* performers makes the CCTV host himself a comic figure, out of place in the realm of presumably high official culture.

Although the peripheral, premodern folk reality is represented by the central, official discourse in such a manner as to convey the ideological initiatives of the state media and official culture alike, it also seems to find legitimacy and agency in the modern television medium, which has enabled its survival and development. And although the central, official discourse attempts to manipulate the peripheral, peasant folkloric discourse to confirm its own elevated position, this confirmation is not achieved without compromise, ambiguity, nuance, and indeterminacy. The "high"

official discourse has become porous enough to allow the “low” folkloric humor, with its concern with “grotesque realism,” to mix with it, to form a dialogic relationship. Since the undermining of authority and the dissolving of ideology appear contained within some bounds, the folk humor manifested in the CCTV Gala’s comic sketches evokes an ambivalent laughter, in the spirit of a utopian, Bakhtinian carnival, which simultaneously conforms and subverts, praises and abuses, asserts and denies. Such is the dynamic relationship of interpenetration, interaction, and interillumination between the discourse at the center and the discourse at the periphery.

CHAPTER 5

POPULAR MUSIC AND LOCAL YOUTH IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

In the previous four chapters, I have discussed the burgeoning use of local languages in the field of television production. As most TV shows rendered in local languages appeal to the local audience, the younger and comparatively better educated segment of that audience has migrated to the new media—the Internet. Ever since its introduction to China in the early and mid 1990s, the Internet has been passionately embraced by Chinese youth. According to a recent state-sponsored study dated on January 22, 2007, China's netizens reached 137 million at the end of 2006, which accounts for 10.5 percent of the total population. More than 80 percent of the Internet users are young people under 35 years of age, and the age group between 18 and 24 years old has consistently accounted for a much higher portion (usually 35%–42% between 2000 and 2007) than any other age groups. Regarding their level of education, approximately half of the users have a college (including two-year college) degree, even as those who only have high school diplomas have increased annually. Roughly one-third of China's netizens are currently students, and the incidence of Internet use in urban areas is 6.5 times greater than in rural areas.¹⁹ Taking the perspective that Internet users compose a distinct urban youth culture in China, this research argues that the Internet has been playing an important role in promoting and disseminating the use of local languages and in consolidating local identities among the urban, educated youth particularly since 2000: through the colloquial dialects

¹⁹ China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), "19th Statistical Survey Report on the Internet Development in China," Jan. 2007. <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/html/Dir/2007/01/22/4395.htm>.

typed in the e-chatrooms and Web forums, through blogs and cyberfictions employing local slang and expressions, through local-language texts parodying Chinese characters, through so-called standard tests on local-language competence, through downloadable cell-phone ringtones recorded in local languages, and as well as through independent and city-government sponsored websites devoted to promoting regional dialects. Alongside this online cultivation of local languages, popular songs rendered in local languages, aided by cyber-technologies, have become the vogue among the urban educated youth. This Internet-age phenomenon of the promotion of local-language use by the educated elite can be traced to the arguably first Internet-mediated hit song in 2001, Xue Cun's "Dongbeiren doushi huo Leifeng" (Northeasterners are all living Lei Feng), with a strong Northeast flavor. Xue Cun's song ushered in a wave of Internet songs (*wangluo gequ*) rendered in local languages. Besides reworking song lyrics originally based on dominant, standard Mandarin, the Internet-savvy youth write original rap songs in various Chinese local dialects. By a comparison with the broadly defined rock songs rendered in local languages in the late 1990s before the popularity of Internet, this study argues that Chinese youths articulate a distinct youth identity through their use of local languages in both of the musical genres, albeit in different ways: whereas migrant rock musicians largely employ the intonation variations of local language to signify a marginal outsider identity, the urban rap singers capitalize on the local vocabulary resources to articulate a privileged local identity that celebrates their home cities. More importantly, however, the dissemination of dialect songs through the Internet allows for the construction of a collective identity among the youth with shared knowledge and sensibilities about a given locality, no matter where these youths are physically located. Taking Shanghai Rap and the SHN website, its hosting server, as a case in point, this research ultimately shows that the motive to construct a distinct imagined community underpins the website's dedicated promotion

of Shanghai Wu and Shanghai Rap, and that the Internet enables the diasporic, globally dispersed Shanghai youth to forge a collective, musicalized local identity—Shanghainese.

Xue Cun's Song and the Educated Youth's Promotion of Local Languages on the Internet

In China and elsewhere in the world, the dissemination of popular music is inextricably bound up with the technology that makes it possible. In 2000, the first online purchase of a popular song, enabled by digital audio technology, was successfully made in China (Shen Wenyu, 2000). In 2001 Xue Cun's "Northeasterners are all living Lei Fengs," with a strong Northeastern flavor, aided by Flash-animation cybertechnology, became arguably the first widely circulated Chinese online song. The song eulogizes the good deeds of the Northeasterners through a synecdochic substitution of an ordinary working-class or peasant Northeasterner for their entire population. In a basic, mostly repetitive diatonic melody, the 75-second song tells a simple story: Old Zhang drives to the Northeast, and gets injured in a car accident. The driver who causes the accident flees. Fortunately, a Northeasterner helps out sending Old Zhang to the hospital. When the recovered Old Zhang invites the Northeasterner to dinner to show his appreciation, the Northeasterner "says":

俺们那旮都是东北人/俺们那旮特产高丽参/俺们那旮猪肉炖粉条/
俺们那旮都是活雷锋/俺们那旮没有这种人/撞了车哪能不救人/俺
们那旮山上有真蘑/这个人他不是东北人!

Anmen neiga dou si dongbeiyin/anmen neiga tecan gaolicen/anmen
neiga zuyou dun fentiao/anmen neiga dou si huo leifen'r/anmen neiga

meiyou zeizong yin/zuang le ce naneng bu jiuyin/anmen neiga sansang
you zengmo/zeigeyin ta busi dongbeiyin!

We are all Northerners. The regional specialty in our place is the
Korean Ginseng. And pork stewed with bean noodle. We are all living
Lei Fengs. We don't have such a person in our place. How can
someone not help the injured after causing an accident? On the hills in
our place grow fungus mushrooms. That man is not a Northerner!

As noted, the typical Northeast Mandarin pronunciations such as *ren* (person) as *yin* and *zhurou* (pork) as *zuyou* are integrated in the uses of the characteristic Northeast Mandarin words such as *anmen neiga* (we there, our place), the well-known regional specialties such as *gaolisen* (Korean ginseng) and *zenmo* (fungus mushroom), as well as the local cuisine *zuyou dun fentiao* (pork stewed with bean noodle). The singer-songwriter Xue Cun, a dropout from Peking University (PKU), wrote the song as early as 1995, but it was dismissed by the record companies at the time. In 2001 a PKU alumnus Liu Lifeng, among others, made one quirky Flash animation and uploaded it to a PKU-hosted website, <http://newyouth.beida-online.com>, which soon became the major institution to disseminate the song among PKU alumni and peer college students, including those diasporic students overseas. As early as 2002, Ying Da, also a PKU alumnus, adopted the song as the theme song for his popular Northeast Mandarin sitcom *Dongbei yijiaren* (A family in the Northeast, 2002), which revolves around a working-class family in the Northeast. Thus in 2003, the song's ending soliloquy "Chuihua'r, shang shuaichai" (Cuihua, get me pickles) ranked among the top three catchiest expressions among Chinese youth surveyed on the topic (Chen Si and Yang Changzheng, 2003).

As this chronology of the song's success clearly shows, it was first appreciated and promoted by the university-educated youth, particularly those cultural elites from the most prestigious universities, such as PKU. Furthermore, it can be generalized that the most avid promoters of local-language music on the Internet are educated youths, who already have a good command of Putonghua and sometimes of English as well. In the context of globalization, the writer Li Rui's article "Wangluo shidai de fangyan" (Local language in the age of the Internet, 2000) conveys great consternation that the Internet would encourage the global dominance of English to the point that all other languages, including standard Chinese, would be marginalized as local dialects and face the fate of elimination. He cites Han Shaogong's *Maqiao Cidian* (Dictionary of Maqiao, 1997) as an admirable effort to demonstrate the complexity, richness, and liveliness of the Chinese local languages, "which are hardly substituted for by the standard Putonghua, nor can they be expressed by the English formatted computer" (Li: 47). In spite of Li's self-admitted reservations about new technology, as a member of the cultural elite, he acutely senses the contemporary significance of local languages. As he voices out, "in such an age of the Internet, under such circumstances, resisting formatting, resisting the hegemonic control of the language of the center, insisting on the independence of local dialect, and reexamining the value and significance of local dialect, and appealing for and establishing the equality of languages are issues unavoidable not only for literature but also for every person" (ibid., 44). Tacitly implementing Li's insights, the younger techno-savvy cultural elite challenge the hegemonic, homogenizing languages, either Putonghua or English, on the Internet. In an entertaining way Li could not have anticipated, the young people draw on the local languages as an unexpected, unpredictable, refreshing source of popular youth culture. The laughter generated by local-language texts helps, on the one hand, to undermine/resist the institution of formal education, where standard

Mandarin as well as English is generally acquired, and, on the other hand, to celebrate the distinct local identity of the urban youth—in both ways serving to undercut the globalization the Internet paradoxically functions at the same time.

Xue Cun's "Northeasterners are all living Lei Fengs" ushered in a trend of online popular music rendered in local languages. Reworked versions of popular songs originally set in standard Mandarin, the dominant language for lyrics, is rampant on the Internet. For instance, Yang Chengang's Internet superhit "Laoshu ai dami" (The mouse likes rice, 2004) has been rendered into numerous versions encompassing the seven major dialect groups (Mandarin, Wu, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, Min, and Cantonese). Taiwan pop star Jay Chou's "Shuangjiegun" (Nunchaku, a martial arts weapon of double sticks) is reworked as "Shuangjiegun zhi Chongqing nongmin ban" (The Chongqing peasant version of Shuangjiegun) in Chongqing Mandarin, which ranked among the top ten most-googled local-language songs in 2004 (<http://list.mp3.baidu.com/list/hot0105.html>). In addition, songs originally written in local language, for example, Xue Cun's song itself in Northeast Mandarin, have been reworked into other local-language versions. By replacing the distinct local words and expressions of the Northeast with those local to other cities in China, the re-rendered versions of Xue Cun's song become a way for the urban educated youth to eulogize the Lei Feng-like good deeds of the citizens in their home cities and thus to celebrate their local identities. For example, the lyrics of Ye Zhenhong's Jiangsu Zhangjiagang Wu version go:

偶里几朗都是港城人/偶里几朗特产拖炉饼/偶里几朗韭菜裹馄饨/
偶里几朗都是活雷锋/偶里几朗恩驳里种人/撞了车他哪能不救人/
偶里几朗身朗有良心/个只棺材佛是里郎人.

We are all Zhangjiangers. The regional specialty in our place is the Toulou Pie baked in a double furnace. And wonton stuffed with hairtail/blade-fish and Chinese chives. We are all living Lei Fengs. We don't have such a person in our place. How can someone not help the injured after causing an accident? The people in our place have consciences. That man is not a native here.

The promulgation of local dialectal texts via the Internet is a phenomenon that has required the overcoming of some thorny problems of transcription. As colloquial, largely spoken languages, most Chinese dialect varieties have no corresponding written forms. Since the Chinese writing system is traditionally based on northern Mandarin, the singers/lyricists, particularly those whose native dialects are other than Mandarin (such as Zhangjiang Wu), have to type in Chinese characters that denote the same or similar phonetic sounds as those of a particular dialect to transcribe that dialect. In this redubbed song, Ye uses the characters 偶里几朗 *oulijilang* for Zhangjiang words /ngoulijilang/ (we here), 恩驳 *enbo* for /mbeq/ (have no), and 棺材 *guancai* for /guzai/ (that fellow). On one hand, this produces difficulties in the transcription of dialect lyrics, as the later analysis of Shanghai Rap will further demonstrate. But on the other hand, the “lack of institutional constraints” and the “triumph of informality” (Androutsopoulos, 2006) that characterize Internet communication encourage the experimental attempts at *wenzihua* (transcription in characters) of local-language varieties online that were traditionally confined to spoken forms.²⁰ Thus the above-mentioned method of phonetic transcription in

²⁰ Nevertheless, the *wenzihua* of Chinese dialects has been a perplexing issue for the intellectuals since the twentieth century. As early as the May Fourth Period, Liu Bannong (Liu Fu) complained of the problem of transcribing dialect when he collected folksongs. The linguist Lü Shuxiang (1984) prefers an alphabetical spelling script to character script, so as to promote a colloquial writing style in China, a development long overdue.

Chinese characters, coupled with alphabetical spellings and additional explanative notes, is widely practiced by the Internet-savvy youth in their e-chat conversations, BBS postings, blog writing, and other typographical online activities.

Sometimes, young people entertain themselves by playing with Chinese characters when putting the largely oral dialect varieties into written forms. Since 2001, the most memorable line of Zhou Xingchi's film *Dahua Xiyou* (A Chinese Odyssey, 1995),²¹ beginning with "there used to be a genuine love in front of me," has been rendered into more than twenty local languages. In the dialect versions, the written character is no longer a totality that conventionally integrates both meaning and sound. Rather, deprived of its semantic reference function, the character disintegrates into a solely phonetic symbol. For example, the characters 椅弯撵 in the version of Shaanxi Mandarin have nothing to do with "chair, bent, or to drive away," but just function as phonetic signs similar to the pinyin yīwānnián or the national phonetic symbols (Bopomofo) ㄧ ㄨ ㄢ ㄣ ㄩ ㄢ ㄣ ㄣ ㄣ ㄣ to the end of denoting "ten thousand years" in Shaanxi Mandarin. The intentional avoidance of the use of the original characters 一万年 yīwànnián subverts the conventional association of the Chinese characters and their Putonghua pronunciations. The aggregation of such superficially nonsensical characters makes sense only when the characters are decoded as a transcription of the phonetics of one identifiable oral dialect or another. When the nonsensical gradually emerges as sense, the pleasure arises.

Whereas the playful transcription of dialect somewhat challenges and undermines Chinese writing tradition based on the standard language, the widely circulated online written tests on local-language competence endow the local

²¹ The BBS craze about the film among college students, particularly those in elite PKU and Tsinghua, is frequently identified as having had a critical role in popularizing the film on the Mainland since 1997 (Liu Leyuan, 2000). The so-called *dahua* speech style has become the epitome of the Internet language. Zhou's famous phrases such as "I 服了 YOU" (I admire you; you're the man) and "给个理由先" (to give a reason first) have gained wide currency in online communication.

languages so transmitted with the status and value traditionally reserved for the official language. Mimicking the formats of the authoritative, official English exams CET (College English Test), TOEFL, and GRE, the so-called standard tests on local languages are entitled, for instance, “Quanguo tongyi Tianjinhua dankexing biao zhunhua ceshi kaoshi: siliuji” (The national standard subject test on Tianjin Mandarin: CET-4 and CET-6) and “Tuofu Changshahua ban kaojuan” (TOEFL test on the Hunan Changsha Xiang). Obviously demonstrating an excellent grasp of Putonghua, the anonymous college-educated examiners show their professional expertise in the local languages and local knowledge. The examinations test local slang, argot, idioms, and expressions, which demand an essential familiarity with local history, local culture, and local everyday experience. For example, there is a Shanghai Wu CET-8 test on the old Shanghai Wu word 包脚布 (a local flour-made food) and a Beijing Mandarin CET-4 test on the appropriate setting for the phrase “how much for a beng’r (a game-room token)?” (多少钱一个崩儿?). In fashioning a test that appears official, the young, educated authors of these exams seem to esteem the colloquial, oral local languages as conduits of knowledge equal in value and power to Putonghua or English. Furthermore, it is likely that one’s competence in the latter two languages is interpreted by this population as an ability inferior to that in the former in at least one way: mastering a local language often implies a sort of experiential or existential privilege, as it can be rarely acquired in a classroom—as mastery of Putonghua or English quite commonly can.

In addition to the respect and value Internet activity confers on Chinese local languages through their transcription via the keyboard and the symbolic official tests, the Internet also enables avenues of approach between local languages and the perceived cosmopolitan and fashionable Western-imported musical genre of Rap music or Hip-hop music. The Hip-hop culture, largely consisting of three major

elements (rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti art), emerged as an ethnic African-American street culture in the South Bronx area of New York in the late 1970s. In the past three decades, rap music, originally enunciated in a strong African-American accent, has gained an international currency, and has been continually relocalized by a global youth culture speaking many different languages. Although Chinese rap in standard Putonghua predates the Internet (as epitomized in a 1993 album “Daoban: guoyu RAP zhuanji” (Pirated edition: an album of rap in standard Chinese)), the emergence of rap songs performed in the rhythmic patois of Chinese local languages was clearly made possible by the Internet. Since 2001, there have been rap songs blending English and Putonghua words with Shanghai Wu, Hangzhou Wu, Suzhou Wu, Wenzhou Wu, Yixing Wu, Jinyun Wu, Changsha Xiang, Hakka, Nanjing Mandarin, Wuhan Mandarin, Beijing Mandarin, Northeastern Mandarin, Sichuan Mandarin, Qingdao Mandarin, and so on. Most of the rappers are college-educated youth, who are at the same time addicted web surfers. They make songs on home computers with downloaded music software that enables digital sampling. Upon completion of these homemade pieces, they upload them into virtual space.²² Often accompanied by Flash versions, the songs are disseminated among the globally diasporic Chinese youth, particularly those who share the same native dialect. Therefore the Internet is the major venue for the local-language rap songs’ production, circulation, and consumption. It is true that the local languages are often associated with the old, traditional, premodern forms of entertainment, such as the local folk operas, that have become less and less appealing to contemporary young people. However, their compatibility with rap music and Internet seems to provide local languages an opportunity for aesthetic transvaluation—from being rustic and obsolete

²² Some major rap-hosting websites or BBS forums are the “Xiha didai” (Hip-hop territory) forum in www.xici.net, www.ent365.com, www.shiftcn.com, as well as www.shanghaining.com, which will be elaborated on later.

to being modern and stylish. I will further illustrate this below in the analysis of Shanghai Rap.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the local languages were used in the broadly defined rock music, or non-mainstream, alternative music realm in the late 1990s, a time when the Internet hadn't yet played a significant role in disseminating local languages. So in the next section I will trace back the use of local languages in the rock-music genre, examining its overlapping with and difference from rap music in its use of local language. Whereas the migrant rock musicians largely appropriate the musicality of local languages (such as intonation and the related regional folk tunes) to signify a marginal, outsider identity, urban rappers make substantial use of the distinctive local terms, slang, and expressions in the lyrics to articulate a privileged local identity that celebrates their urban roots. And yet, regardless of the differing strategies, the two groups of musical personalities articulate a distinct youth identity by employing local languages.

The Use of Local Languages in Alternative Rock Music in the Late 1990s

In the late 1990s, alternative-rock musicians explored and appropriated the local-language resources and their associated regional folk music traditions as a way of articulating a distinct identity. *Ziyue* (The Confucius says) is a home-city based rock band in Beijing, headed by lead singer, songwriter, and lyricist Qiu Ye, a native of Beijing. The band is known for its distinctive Beijing flavor. For example, the song “Ciqi” (1997) describes a particular kind of friendship among Beijing youth—*ciqi* 磁器, a local Beijing word meaning “very good buddies.” As the lyrics go, “We’re friends. We’re brothers. We’re comrades. We’re *ciqi*.” To varying extents, the friendship is associated both with the brotherly love indexed in the musical citation of Cao Zhi’s ancient poem “Qibushi” (“Seven step poem”) and with the revolutionary

comradely love referenced in the song through the insertion into the composition of a Party cadre's lecture to a comrade-subordinate. However, both associations seem to be negated at the same time they are evoked. In a parodying and distorted way, Qiu Ye recites the poem with a feminized falsetto voice and replaces all the otherwise standard *juansheyin* (retroflex initials) /zh ch sh/ with the /z c s/ that characterize the cadre's speech full of revolutionary jargon. The kind of buddyship indexed in the word *ciqu*, which has a connotation of local hooliganism or chivalry, cannot be fully described without the intertextual use of another Beijing street-slang word *siqia* 死掐 (to quarrel, neither willing to give in): 你拉我一把/我会帮你一下儿/你要是耍我/我就跟你死掐 (If you give me a hand/ I will help you in return/ if you try to make fun of me/ I'll quarrel with you and never give in).

Nonetheless, compared with the occasional use of distinctive Beijing Mandarin vocabulary, the band is more inclined to employ melodic and tonal variation to convey the political satire their songs are characteristic of. In the song "Dashu" (Big tree, 1997), Qiu Ye narrates about a big locust tree in the center of a courtyard typical in Beijing:

Around this courtyard live all my dearest family members. [They] survive till today depending on this reliable big tree. Until now its heresy and horror were concealed. But it's too difficult to uproot it now. What a big regret it was at the outset!

The lyrics are rendered in a tune typical of *Jingyundagu*, a local drum-accompanied musical storytelling form. It is through such nuanced tune and tonal variations that the political metaphor of the big tree as the once all-powerful Party authority is conveyed. In another song "Guaiguai de" (To stay obedient, 1997), the son has been constantly

asked by his authoritarian father to be obedient. Every time the frustrated son tries to speak out about his true feelings, his overbearing father silences him by inserting a piece of candy into his mouth, and then gives a lecture:

Stay obedient!

No matter how hard the road is, that I, your daddy, have walked through

The various tastes I've had, the sour, the sweet, the bitter, the spicy, the salty, the savory, and the foul, are even more than the meals you, little devil, have had

That's why I tell you: my boy, if I am contented, so should you be happy

Don't knit your eyebrows and pretend to be deep in thought

The nice things you eat, you drink, you wear are what I, your daddy, have spent my whole life to earn! Understand?

It is noteworthy that the words of the patriarchal figure are imitated by the Beijing-Mandarin speaking "son" in an intonation which could be identified as of the Tianjin Mandarin.²³ The father's distorted intonation, coupled with his coarse, colloquial, uneducated language, create a deliberate garbling of the lyrics to ridicule and undermine the dominant patriarchal didacticism, whether it's interpreted literally at the family level or metaphorically on the national level. The resistance of the oppressed is most manifested in the last line, where the long dominated son finally blurts out the truth: "the piece of candy you give me IS NOT SWEET AT ALL."

²³ Generally speaking, the tonal variation is the most significant difference among the northern Mandarins. For example, if we change the tones of hao3chi1 (delicious) in Beijing Mandarin into hao4chi2, that would fit in the tonal pattern in Tianjin Mandarin.

Like the *Ziyue* band, many so-called folk rock bands have tried to link to regional folk music to mark a distinct identity for the band and the musicians themselves. The band *Ershou meigui* (The second-hand rose), formed in Beijing in 2000, features a strong Northeast flavor. As the lead singer Liang Long is a native of Heilongjiang in Northeast China, the band combines “second-hand,” imported Western hard rock with the double-gender crossing and rich intonation resources of the local Errenzhuan performing-art form. Always brightly dressed up in the outfits of an enchanting woman, Liang manipulates various intonation patterns to convey ambiguity and sarcasm in his songs of social criticism. Branding itself as “the most seductive band in Chinese rock music,” the band appropriated regional folk music for its self-definition. Likewise, singing with a strong Yinchuan Mandarin accent, Su Yang tells stories and legends of his remote hometown in Ningxia in the Northwest to the Beijing audience, both his melodies and lyrics bearing a strong resemblance to traditional local folk music such as Hua’er.

As Beijing is the assumed center of Chinese rock music, the migrant musicians largely use their native dialects to convey a sense of nostalgia, marginality, alienation, and estrangement. The members of the duo *Ye haizi* (The wild child, 1995-2004), singing with a Northwest Mandarin accent, speak about their disillusionment and bewilderment in the lyrics “Beijing, Beijing, is not our home/ I didn’t know the working people are the poorest until now/ Life is not ideal, not a fantasy, not what we can understand” in the song “Shenghuo zai dixia” (Live underground, 1996?) about their harsh life in a rented basement room in Beijing. Zhang Guangtian, a native of Shanghai, wrote the song “Shanghai Shanghai” around 1994, when he was leading a wandering, rootless life in Beijing. A strong nostalgic sentiment is evoked in his enumerating those “familiar” local places with his Shanghai Wu accent, such as the Bund, Huangpu river, Yangpu bridge, and Xujiahui district. Wang Lei, a native of

Sichuan, is a so-called Reggae musician based in Guangzhou. As in the music of the immigrant musicians in Beijing, the theme of alienation, loneliness, and depression as a migrant artist is featured in many of the songs on his first album entitled “Chumenren” (Sojourner, 1994). In his 1998 album “Chuntian laile” (The spring comes), Wang consciously employed Sichuan Mandarin to signify his marginal outsider identity. One of his songs about a quarrel among a three-member Sichuan family is even entitled as “Sichuan fangyan” (Sichuan dialect). Without the usual accompaniment of heavy metal instruments, Wang literally talks in a Sichuan Mandarin intonation:

Youge xiaohuozhi/ si ge duseenzi/ fumu xi'ai ta/ suohua dai bazi/ Bazi
sige sa?/ Sicuan di zanghua

There is a young fellow/ the only child in the family/ his parents love
him/ he likes to speak *bazi*/ what is “*bazi*”?/ Sichuan's offensive
language

Obviously enough, the song about “here” is addressed to an audience “elsewhere”—other than Wang's Sichuan townsmen, since he has to explain about the local slang such as “bazi.” Rhetorically, the song's evocation of an outsider identity also positions Wang himself as a musical outsider from the mainstream musical practices contained in the official state apparatus.

The outsider theme is also discernable in Hu Mage's 1999 album “Renren dou you ge xiao bandeng, wode bu dairu ershiyi shiji” (Everyone has a little bench, and mine won't be brought into the 21st century). Of rural origin in west Hubei, Hu lived a bumming life in suburban Beijing after graduating from a university in Wuhan. In the song “Bufen tudou jincheng” (Some potatoes come into the cities), the singer sings the

lyrics in his West-Hubei Mandarin accent, which exactly provides a unique sonic texture to depict a migrant peasant worker persona that Putonghua Mandarin cannot render.

That big cat on the roof is so lucky to have a balcony
She can comfortably sleep all day long, holding the *hukou* [permanent urban residency] of the city
Really want to marry her, so walking on the street with a new identity
Pass by a two-story Western-style building, which is just like my newly built house
Awe-inspired, I walk towards the entrance
The female doorkeeper hands me a piece of toilet paper, saying “thirty cents per person”
Oh, yet [is it because of] my outsider accent?!

The obsession with his accent, which marks a marginal, outsider identity, is most prominently manifested in the final line cited above. Repeating “*kosi wodi waidi kouyin*” no less than thirty times, the singer conveys a spectrum of affective emotions with varying intonations each time: puzzlement, bewilderment, disbelief, self-irony, frustration, helplessness, desperation, preoccupation, and so on.

In an article, “Singing in local dialect,” the veteran music critic Li Wan (1999) highly praises Hu’s alternative musical style, from his spontaneous and nonformulaic composing, his loose, idiosyncratic narrative structure, his half-speaking and half-singing style, to his rural accent. Li points out that Hu’s music maintains an important link to the regional folk opera and the local storytelling art in the Hubei villages where Hu grew up. As Li optimistically predicts, “Hu’s music is the voice from the rural

country folk, where lies the hope for the future of Chinese popular music.” Implied in Li’s optimism seems to be the Chinese music critics’ and musicians’ obsession with the “Chineseness” of contemporary Chinese popular music, which has been heavily influenced by the musical styles imported from *gangtai* (Hong Kong and Taiwan) and the West. Yet for Li, the ultimate definition of Chineseness seems to have to be presented in terms of the local, the local folk music and local language it is embedded in. Focusing on the rock music realm, Jeroen de Kloet (2005a) explores Beijing rock musicians’ various efforts of “authentication”²⁴ and sinification in order to be distinguished from both the *gangtai* pop and the assumed Western-originated rock. But among the five authenticating tactics he examines, the tactic of rebellion-construction may only enable the rock musicians to distinguish themselves from *gangtai* pop, which they perceived as too commercial, but not western rock, as rebellion is basically in line with the spirit of Western rock. Conversely, the tactic of invoking ancient China may keep the Chinese rock from being accused of being an imitation of the West, but pride in Chinese cultural heritage is a common theme shared in *gangtai* pop too. In his article “Liuxing yinyue yu fangyan” (Popular music and local language), Yuan Yue (1999) astutely observes that the Chinese local-language resources offer a unique edge for the Mainland musicians to mark a difference both from the Western Rock sung in English and the *gangtai* pop rendered in Cantonese and Guoyu standard Chinese respectively. Sharing a similar vision with Li (1999), Yuan argues that the appropriation of the indigenous Chinese regional folk music, including the local accents, local folk tunes, and local vocabulary, is ultimately a way to construct a distinctive Chinese national identity vis-à-vis Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the West.

²⁴ When de Kloet uses the terms “authenticity” or “authentication,” he mainly refers to the Chinese Rock musicians’ strong desire to produce a distinctive, indigenous, Chinese music rather than something influenced by the Gangtai popular music or copied from the Western rock music.

This nationalist proposal to construct a national music from the Chinese folk music can find precursors, such as the folksong-collection movement led by Liu Bannong and others during the May Fourth period (Hung 1985) and the sinification of music in leftist films of the 1930s (Yeh 2002). So again, at the turn of the 21st century, the New Leftist musician and playwright Zhang Guangtian advocated the so-called “New Folksong Movement.” In line with the strong anti-Americanism and antiglobalization position reflected in the controversial play *Qie Gewala* (Che Guevara, 2000-2001),²⁵ of which Zhang was the director and composer, the Movement also evinces a strong anti-Western nationalist sentiment as well. Commenting on his edited signature album entitled “Gongyehua shidai de shi yu ge” (Poetry and songs in the era of industrialization, 2000), Zhang (2000) claims that the album was intended to draw on the folk music (*minjian yinyue*) of the people, by the people, and for the people against the capitalist, imperialist, and industrialized popular music. He particularly strongly condemns the economic globalization and ideological homogenization brought about by the hegemonic popular music from the United States. Proposing to rename popular music folk music, Zhang (2003: 122) champions the traditional principles of the melody/tone relationship in folk music, particularly that of “Yi zi xing qiang” (the melodic pattern of the composition in accord with the tonal pattern of the Chinese characters).²⁶ Oddly, even though Zhang highlights the determining role the Chinese tones played in traditional melodic construction, in practice, most of the “new” regional folksongs on the album did little to achieve the

²⁵ For more analysis of this play, see Cheng Yinghong (2003).

²⁶ Working in line with this principle, a body of recent research, either from linguistic or musicological perspectives, proves that the melodic pattern of the local folk songs largely accords to the tonal pattern of the local language. For example, Dong Hongyuan (1999) on Jingyundagu and Beijing Mandarin; Liu Yulin and Chang Weiwei (2005) on North Shaanxi folksongs and the North Shaanxi dialect; and Deng Xiansheng (2005) on west Fujian Shanghang folksongs and the Hakka variant in west Fujian.

tune-tonal harmony with respective dialects and thus still largely adopted standard Putonghua lyrics.

The veteran rock pioneer Cui Jian also pays attention to the peculiarity of the Chinese language as a tonal language. But unlike Zhang, who recognizes the positive importance of the tones, Cui finds that the four tones of the Putonghua impose an undue restriction on the rhythmization of the language (*yuyan jiezouhua*). As Cui is increasingly fascinated with rhythm as opposed to melody, he has long experimented with rhythmizing Chinese language, using it as an instrument and thus making compound rhythms. Set in a strong beat structure, many songs of Cui Jian are reminiscent of the rhythmic rap style, for instance, either his famous “*Bushi wo bu mingbai*” (It’s not that I can’t understand) in 1987 or most of the songs in his 1998 album “*Wuneng de liliang*” (Power of the powerless). Although his language for rapping was largely Putonghua, Cui consciously experimented with Chinese intonation in the song “*Shidai de wanshang*” (The evening of the era) on the 1998 album. The lyrics “No new language, no new methods either. No new power to express new feeling” are uttered in a way that the original tones of the Putonghua characters are deliberately minimized and subordinated so as to be integrated to the 4/4 drum beat pattern. And sometimes, a certain degree of the tone distortion would lead the lyrics so rendered to be identified as a northern Mandarin variant. His album “*Gei ni yidian yanse*” (Show you colors, 2005), a mix of rock and rap, is often recognized for the use of local languages—for instance, the Shandong Mandarin in the song “*Wangluo chunan*” (Net virgin) and the Hebei Tangshan Mandarin in “*Nongcun baowei chengshi*” (Villages besiege cities). In the latter, Cui adopts the persona of a migrant peasant to justify the legitimate existence of migrant workers, on one hand, and to criticize the arrogance and hypocrisy of the urban citizens, particularly the intellectuals, on the other hand. As for the Tangshan-Mandarin intonation identified in

this rap, Cui explains, “it just sounds like Tangshan dialect, as I’m a fan of Jiang Wen’s *Devil on the Doorstep* [featuring Tangshan Mandarin]. But the people native to Tangshan would argue about its authenticity. Actually this is not a specific dialect, but a kind of liberated accent” (Li Ruyi, 2003).

If Cui can actually be concerned about the Chineseness of such experiments in “accent liberation” in Hip-hop music, this can only be because the Chinese national identity can only be presented paradoxically in the absence of the particular significations of the Chinese language, or in his own words, “once the problem of the Chinese language [intonation] is solved, the Chineseness of my music will come out naturally” (ibid.). Somehow, Cui’s musical transition from Rock to Rap attests to what Kloet (2005*b*) describes as “cultural synchronization,” the accelerated globalization that irresistibly exacts conformity from Chinese musicians with the musical stylistic trend of the West. In the global/local framework, Kloet argues that compared to Chinese Rock culture, Chinese Hip-hop is more intrinsically cosmopolitan and more “synchronized.” Based on his research on a couple of Beijing-based rap bands with mixed nationalities who sing in various languages, he argues that the Chinese Hip-hop culture “renders any essentialized idea of Chineseness inherently impossible” and “put[s] the Chineseness into an ontological crisis” due to the outside influence of the West. In part, it seems reasonable to argue as Kloet does that Chinese rap, including dialect rap, is a localized version of the Western-originated rap, and therefore associated with cosmopolitanism. Wang Fan, one of the earliest rappers in Shanghai Wu, named himself BlaKK Bubble, the double capital “K”’s paying homage to one of his favorite groups, Kris Kross. Wang was first introduced to Hip Hop music in the 1990s through the *dakou* audiocassettes and CDs illegally imported from the U.S.A. (<http://www.shanghaining.com/music/blakk/>). Sharing an experience similar to Wang’s, Qingdao MC Sha Zhou also admits the significant influence of Western

music, as he has been listening to mostly American music and hardly any domestic music (Danwei Music, 2006). The rappers regard rhyming in nonstandard, colloquial dialects as being in conformity with the perceived ethnic origin of African-American rap, which features dialect and street slang as well. For the Chinese educated urban young rappers, freestyling is inseparable from the Hip-hop lifestyle they aspire to—a free, fashionable, and cosmopolitan life parallel with that of their peers in what they perceive as the more advanced United States. However, because Kloet does not consider the further localization reaching down within the nation state through Western-inspired music, his research fails to include the evidence of a more heterogeneous and differentiated Chinese identity in the rap songs rendered in Chinese local dialects, a distinct local identity that takes a more diverse, complex, and distinctive Chinese experience as its foundation than Putonghua ever did. Yet whether and how this constructed local identity foregrounds, negotiates with, and challenges their national identity is still an open question, as Chineseness per se is rarely an issue of concern for the Hip Hop generation.

Rap Songs in Local Languages

Originally featuring a strong African-American accent, rap music is essentially an oral art of speaking/talking. Rappers, often compared to the African storytellers *griots*, inherited the African American's oral tradition of storytelling (Ayazi-Hashjin, 1999: 18). As a musical genre enabling the greatest capacity for lyrical expression, from the start, African- American youth used the rap to tell stories about their harsh daily reality in the ghettos. Likewise, for the Chinese youth, the rap genre has been appropriated as a form of expression to vent something they consider important to say. The themes of the dialect raps are diverse: everyday street life in Koushui juntuan (Saliva regiment) band's "Ren'erdeng" 人儿灯 (someone with a flamboyant

personality, someone who likes to show off, 2001) in Hangzhou Wu, Liao Jian's "Doudizhu" 斗地主 (Name of a poker game, 2005) in Sichuan Mandarin, D-Evil band's "He hundun" 喝馄饨 (Eat wonton, 2005) in Nanjing Mandarin, and Webber Wang Bo's "Jingcheng lanqiu shaoye" 京城篮球少爷 (Beijing basketball masters, 2007) in Beijing Mandarin; coming-of-age love experiences in Koushui juntuan's "Jiandan ai" 简单爱 (Simple love, 2002) in Hangzhou Wu, "Hadenglun/hadelo~" 哈等卵 (Utterly stupid, 2004) in Changsha Xiang, and Mild Wild Child's "Yigeren de eryue shisiri" 一个人的2月14日 (The lonely Valentine's Day by myself, 2005) in Shanghai Wu; childhood memories in Heibang (Hi-Bomb) band's "Xiafeilu de bashiqi hao" 霞飞路的87号 (No. 87 Avenue Joffre, 2004) in Shanghai Wu; Xingqiliu yinyue gongzuoshi (Saturday music studio) band's "Xibiaozi" 细表滋/子 (I'm a naughty boy, 2005) in Jiangsu Yixing Wu; the college life in Hao Yu's "Daxue zixishi" 大学自习室 (College self-study room, 2003) in Northeast Mandarin and Jihetuxing (Geometric figure) band's "Xuesheng fengyun" 学生风云 (A student journal, 2004) in Suzhou Wu; critiques of pop stardom in Duan Sisi's "Xinliao ni di xie" 信了你的邪 (Fall under your spell, 2006) in Wuhan Mandarin; and nationalism in Jihetuxing's anti-Japanese "Minzu-yiminzu de xuanxiao" 民族—异民族的喧嚣 (Clamor of one nation against the other nation, 2004) in Suzhou Wu.

It is noted that the majority of these rap songs are about issues of social concern. For example, Peng Peng (Poom Poom) band bashes some pop stars they strongly dislike in "Huiqu zhongtian" 回去种田 (Go back home to be a peasant, 2003) in Shanghai Wu. Lil Yining takes a shot at the young people's blind idol worship of the Japanese and Korean entertainment stars or those *hahanharizu* in Chinese in her song "Made in Shanghai" in Shanghai Wu. Many rap songs contain biting social commentary. For example, in "Qingdao laobazi" 青岛老巴子 (Qingdao bumpkins, 2004) in Qingdao Mandarin, the MC Shazhou unabashedly expresses his strong

dislike of the peasant workers migrating to Qingdao, using the derogative local words such as *laobazi* 老巴子 (country bumpkins) and *bae biaola* 别彪了 (stop being a sucker, don't be stupid/don't be an idiot). Sha Zhou complains about the urban chaos and moral decline brought by the migrant workers, such as the “salon prostitutes” from the rural Jimo county. He is outspoken on what is going on around him and what he thinks about it. But his strong personal opinions became easily offensive and immediately evoked controversy among local netizens after the song was uploaded online. According to the reportage in *Qingdao morning news* (August 26, 2004), some migrant workers in the Internet cafés felt so demeaned that they called the hotline of the local newspaper to find out the singer/author. Afterwards, Shazhou had to make a public apology as demanded.

Thus, if comparing these local-language rap songs and the popular songs in Putonghua, one may find that Putonghua pop music, which has been heavily influenced by the Gangtai pop (Cantopop), is dominated by love songs (although sometimes nationalistic or propaganda songs are also popular). So if Putonghua pop music is largely defined by love songs, the local language rap songs are not usually about romantic love, but about more collective social issues. This suggests that, rather than competing or sharing the same cultural space with Putonghua songs, local language songs construct another arena where they can actively voice their views rather than act the role of passive students being socialized by formal institutions.²⁷

Furthermore, the rap songs in local languages are infused with distinctive knowledge and sensibilities which originate from the particular place in which they were acquired. Take three dialect songs as examples. The Hangzhou-based band Koushuijuntuan (2001-2003), one of the earliest dialect rap bands, had a distinctive Hangzhou spin. Their song titles and the lyrics abound with expressions characteristic

²⁷ I owe much of this observation in this paragraph to Gunn.

of Hangzhou Wu. For instance, the song “Jian’erfan/Jie’r fe~” 贱儿饭 (A mooched meal, 2002), about eating in a restaurant with no intention to pay, is peppered with local gang argot and street slang: 贱儿饭 *Jie’r fe~* “a mooched/begged meal,” 霸王餐 *bahuangce~* “a free meal by force,” 麻袋 *made* “no money in one’s pocket,” 搞七捻三 “vague or ambivalent attitude,” 鞭三饭 *pie~se~fe~* “to beat someone,” and 色色宽宽 *sese~kue~kue~* (more than sufficient). Once Dong Lei, the lead singer, sent the song over to a local music website (www.livehouse.cn) and several networked campus websites based in Hangzhou in 2002, the local young fans overwhelmingly raved about it (Zhang Lei, 2005). The song, augmented by these distinctive local expressions, evokes a gangster-like experience grounded in the specific locality, Hangzhou. By comparison, D-Evil band’s “Ji gongjiao” 挤公交 (Squeeze in the packed bus, 2007) in Nanjing Mandarin depicts the more mundane street-life experience of taking the always-packed bus in Nanjing. Besides the use of distinctive Nanjing Mandarin words, the lyrics integrate a range of locally embedded images and sounds, for instance, the recorded voice from the machine for the monthly bus-pass swipe card “刷卡太快请重刷” (you swiped your card too quickly. Please swipe again); the bus drivers’ pet phrase to keep order, “上一步，往里走，带快点表堵门口” (one step up, keep moving, come up faster and don’t block the entrance); comments on the local media celebrities who don’t have to take the bus, such as Meng Fei, the host of the local hit human-interest news show *Nanjing Ling Juli* (Nanjing at Zero Distance). In a similar vein, Qingdao MC Sha Zhou’s “Guang Zhanqiao” 逛栈桥 (Hang out in the Zhanqiao port, 2004) narrates in the authentic Qingdao Mandarin his one-day experience of hanging out in the local place of interest, *Zhanqiao* (the loading dock). The lyrics draw on the everyday knowledge gained through living in Qingdao, for example, taking the No. 5 bus to Zhanqiao and spoofing a 2008 Olympics propaganda song “Welcome to

Qingdao,” the MV of which is shown daily on the local buses.²⁸ Coupled with the Qingdao Mandarin words *siaomer* 小嫚儿 (form of address for a young girl), *siaoge* 小哥 (form of address for a young fellow) and *zhenjingla* 真惊啦 (damn that’s surprising), the rap evokes familiarity with everyday life in the local community and offers the local citizens the pleasure of recognition.

As much as the rappers construct different urban narratives, they draw on the same essential local knowledge of place. And a fundamental common theme of the dialect raps is the young urbanities’ pride in their home cities. Such pride is conspicuous from the song titles such as Koushuijuntuan’s “Hangzhou shige hao difang” 杭州是个好地方 (Hangzhou is a good place, 2002/2003), Xiong Jie’s “Zai Wuhan” 在武汉 (In Wuhan, 2004), He Wei’s “Wenzhou shige hao defang” 温州是个好地方 (Wenzhou is a good place, 2006), and “Jiushijiu ci lian’ai aishang Shanghai” 99次恋爱爱上上海 (Love Shanghai 99 times, 2006) sung by a group of Shanghai rappers. In “Hangzhou is a good place,” the band proudly enumerates in Hangzhou Wu the local places of interest (West Lake), local cuisine (West Lake Sour Fish), a local specialty (Meijiawu Longjing tea), a local famous pharmacy (Huqingyutang), and local street names (Wulin Road). Furthermore, as Stokes (1994: 3) points out, “the ‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary.” In “Ala Shanghai” 阿拉上海 (Our Shanghai, 2004), the rapper PZ-FRAN articulated a privileged identity as a Shanghainese through an implicit comparison between Shanghai and the rest of the larger national community. Asserting a unique relationship of Shanghai with China, he intones “阿拉是中国的上只角” (We’re the upper corner of China). The local expression, *za~tsako/shangzhijiao* 上只角 (upper corner), refers to the fashionable, expensive neighborhoods in the former French Concession in western Shanghai, as contrasted to the “lower corner” that means the

²⁸ Qingdao will host all the sailing games during the 2008 Olympic Games.

lower- or working-class neighborhoods in the vast northern, eastern, and southern districts of the city (Luo, Xiaowei and Wu, Jiang, 1997). In addition, to defend the good reputation of one's hometown can be a strong motivation for making a rap. For instance, Chen Xu's "The local specialty of the Northeast is not the underworld" (Dongbei techan bushi hei shehui) was written in 2004 when he indignantly read a story about a number of non-Northeastern bandits imitating the Northeast Mandarin accent to carry out robbery (Zhao Yuqing, 2005). The song is therefore identified as being a Northeasterner refuting the stereotype conceived by the non-Northeasterners with a dense use of Northeast Mandarin words, slang, and idioms pronounced in the unique Northeast intonation, such as *laotie* 老铁 (buddy), *kejing'er* 可劲儿 (exert all one's strength), *shuadadao* 耍大刀 (play tricks), *baxia* 扒瞎 (talk nonsense), *xiaoyang'r* 小样儿 (derogatory idiom about someone), *dang shanpao* 当山炮 (treated as a bumpkin), *huzhoubache* 胡诌八扯 (talk nonsense), *yansi huishui de/dasi jiangzui de* 淹死会水的/打死犟嘴的 (Drown to death those who can swim. Beat to death those are stubborn), *xiaoshu buxiu bu zhiliu'r/ren bu xiuli genjiujiu'r* 小树不修不直溜/人不修理眼翘翘儿 (A tree wouldn't be straight without pruning. A person would be arrogant without fixing).

Unlike the migrant rock musicians, the dialect rappers usually perform for a local audience that is largely composed of their townspeople. Their songs, once uploaded online, are also most likely welcomed by the young netizens who share the same native dialect. Chen Xu's "The local specialty of the Northeast is not the underworld" ranked No. 1 on a *baidu* chart of the top ten most searched Internet songs in 2004. The ringing tone of the Nanjing rap "Eat wonton" was downloaded 16252 times (RMB 0.5 per time) by the local Jiangsu China Unicom users in about ten days in 2005 (Yang Yude, 2005). Sha Zhou's first album sold 15,000 copies (RMB 15 per

CD) in two weeks in Qingdao in 2004 (Danwei Music, 2006).²⁹ The local-language songs make possible a communal bonding among local audiences, who get pleasure from making sense of the lyrics and from identification with the content of the songs. In this sense, dialect rap partakes of the same wealth of local languages as the TV shows, such as the film soundtracks dubbed in local languages (Chapter Two) and the TV-news talk shows in local languages (Chapter Three), because they can foster a sense of local community and assert the local as the site of cultural production. As a matter of fact, raps are sometimes integrated into the local television shows. For instance, Koushuijuntuan's "Hangzhou is a good place" and He Wei's "Wenzhou is a good place" serve as the musical accompaniment for the ending credits of the local hit news talk shows *Aliutou shuo xinwen* (Alodei talks news, 2004-) rendered in Hangzhou Wu and *Baixiao jiang xinwen* (Baixiao talks news, 2004-) in Wenzhou Wu respectively. However, as far as this research is concerned, while the broadcasting media have to take state ideology, market, and stratification of local audiences into consideration, the Internet has been a comparatively uncensored, spontaneous, and non-mainstream medium for the young Hip-hop generation. Furthermore, in terms of audience, whereas the local TV shows (such as Hangzhou West Lake Pearl TV Station's "Aliutou shuo xinwen"), usually with a local coverage, are normally shown to a local audience who are in a specific geographic place that the show targets (such as Hangzhou), the rap songs, mediated through the Internet, are distributed and consumed among the globally dispersed youth speaking the same dialect. Shanghai serves as a good example of the divergent use of local languages in the two media. In contrast to the increasingly sluggish productions in Shanghai Wu in the traditional broadcasting media, as discussed in Chapter One, Shanghai Wu has been ardently

²⁹ Despite market success, the young rappers' music can so far still be regarded as authentic, as the rappers cathartically and honestly voice their concerns and yearnings.

promoted by the Shanghai youngsters, particularly by the Shanghai diasporas, on the Internet.

A Case Study of Shanghai Rap and the SHN Website

Shanghai Rap, characterized by the rhythmic patois of Shanghai Wu, is the most prolific of all the dialect raps. Over 20 rap bands have created roughly 60 Shanghai rap songs. Moreover, although most rappers in other dialects are physically based in their home cities, besides enjoying a global fan base, a considerable number of Shanghai rappers are currently living overseas or have had overseas living experience. For example, Mild Wild Child (MWC) now resides in Seattle, U.S.A., and Lil Yining in Germany. Little Lion, or the former MC Tang, one of the earliest rappers in Shanghai Wu, spent his middle school and college years in the U.S., before forming the duo Hi-Bomb band in Shanghai in 2001. Gintonic, the key member of the “201 crew” band, spent many years in Japan before returning to Shanghai in 2004. On the one hand, compared with their domestic peers, Shanghai rappers benefit from being immediately and consistently exposed to Hip-hop music and its related lifestyle, and yet, on the other hand, their commitment to rapping in Shanghai Wu proves how the diaspora has played a role in promoting local language and engendering a local identification. As Gunn (2006: 16) puts it, the local language functions as “a discourse for the dislocated and relocated, as much as a location.” According to Stokes (1994: 3), one way of cultural relocation for the diasporic population is through music, which “evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity.” Through rapping in Shanghai Wu, the diasporic Shanghai youth associate their affective attachment for their native dialect with a collective memory of the place of Shanghai.

In Hi-Bomb's "No. 87 Avenue Joffre,"³⁰ Little Lion tries to do exactly this, to identify Shanghai Wu with a reconstructed past.

呃马路边红色的救火会
阿拉总会在里面开会
ohhey~弄只疯狂的斗鸡 party
只为一块香草味道的 chocolate
yeah~so sweet 我最欢喜
it'z like u n me n he n she
then back 2 me
讲来讲去讲不拎清
bak 2my people~ppl~ppl~people
大叉没福气
打仗是男小人最欢喜的游戏
白相来白相去还是吾最老鬼
隔壁的阿弟伊总会帮吾赖耍皮
讲起来吾还是老想伊.....
谢谢那童年的 comradez
da time we spent 2gether was so great
想要想回到老早
弄堂里有点吵

霞飞路的 87 号
(lalalalalalalalala)
霞飞路的 87 号 check it out~
(lalalalalalalalala)
no doubt no doubt

夏夜漫长
我坐在厅里乘凉
傻傻偷看邻家姐姐
她正在梳妆
一头乌黑长发真的漂亮
想象长大后要她嫁做我的新娘
时光转眼一晃
我也已经成长
想来她早已为人嫁娘

³⁰ Interestingly, Cheng Liang's independent film *Xiafeilu* (Avenue Joffre, 2001), also in Shanghai Wu, seems an elaborated version of this song.

只记得她曾送我甜甜的梨膏糖
还有那可爱理想我不会忘
何时才能再坐那木马摇

haha~这些年少记号
也永远不会变老
她就像那陈酒一般的美妙
改变多少？保留多少？

霞飞路的 87 号
(lalalalalalalala)
霞飞路的 87 号 check it out~
(lalalalalalalala)
no doubt~ yo... (check it out)

Relegating his English mostly to the refrain, Little Lion rhymes the first half verse in Shanghai Wu. He makes a dense use of Shanghai Wu vocabulary, such as *aklak* 阿拉 (I, we), *baksian* 白相 (play, have fun), *hoexi* 欢喜 (like), *noexionin* 男小人 (little boy), *dacamakfoqchi* 大叉没福气 (a group hand game to select out who is the most unlucky), *loziu* 老鬼 (slippery), and *yi* 伊 (he/she). The rapper seems to narrate in a past tense the playful scenes with his pals in the Shanghai *longdang* when he was a boy: the crazy cockfighting party, the vanilla-flavored chocolate, the fighting game, the boy next door playing tricks for/together with him. In switching to Mandarin in the second half verse, the rapper seems to have grown up, reflecting upon his dawning love with a neighboring girl in the present tense. The association of Shanghai Wu with the constructed past is further suggested in the remembered sound of the girl's voice, when the voice of a young lady recites the ballad of “Yo'a'yo, yo'a'yo, yodo ηakbu jio” (row, row, row to the grandma's bridge) in Shanghai Wu, following the rapper's nostalgic line in Putonghua “heshi caineng zai zuona mumayao?” (when may I ride the rocking horse [with you] again?)³¹

³¹ “Yao” (rocking) in “mumayao” is the same character as the “yao/yo” (to row) in “yao a yao/yo a yo.”

The nostalgia for one's childhood is a common theme in youth culture, as the uncertainties of growing up characterize the transience of youth in general. However, what makes this song particularly interesting is that the rapper's nostalgia for his faded childhood in the 1980s and 1990s is entwined with nostalgia for the Shanghai modernity of the 1930s. The song title uses Avenue Joffre, the former name for today's Huaihai Middle Road from 1915 to 1943, rather than what it has been called since the rapper's childhood. As is well known, Avenue Joffre was a trademark street in the French Concession in Shanghai in the 1930s. According to Lee (1999: 17-23), the exotic cultural aura conveyed in the coffeehouses in the French Concession attracted a number of Chinese Francophile writers, such as Zeng Pu, Zeng Xubai, and Zhang Ruogu. Viewed by these writers, the coffeehouse craze was one of the crucial symbols of modernity and had an enormous impact on their literary writing. Furthermore, at the end of this song, Zhou Xuan's song "Tianya Ge'nv" (Songstress of the World) from the classic film *Malu tianshi* (Street angel, 1937) is superimposed with another ballad in Shanghai Wu. As Tuohy (1999: 208) argues, music in the films from that time played a pivotal role in the making of the cosmopolitan, modern culture of China in the 1920s and 1930s. She notes most of the background music consisted largely of well-known pieces from the European classical and romantic symphonic traditions. Yet for Yeh (2002), *Tianya Ge'nv* in this specific film, rearranged from a Suzhou folk song, exemplifies the process of "negotiated sinification," an effort taken by the Leftist filmmakers to set indigenous Chinese folk songs as diegetic and Western music as nondiegetic. Nevertheless, for the young generation of Shanghai who were born in the late 1970s and 1980s, the simulacrum of 1930s Shanghai is glowing in its oversimplified version of modernity and cosmopolitanism. Yet this mediated memory of the old Shanghai turns out to be consistent with the Hip-hop generation's lifestyle, which is perceived as comparably (if not more intensely) cosmopolitan and modern.

Therefore, the identification with 1930s Shanghai becomes a way of constructing historical continuity of a culturally privileged identity for the rapper and the diasporic Shanghai youth alike.

Sharing a diasporic experience similar to that of Little Lion, Chen Leiqing, the founder and CEO of the SHN website (www.shanghaining.com), immigrated to Los Angeles when he was 11 years old. Founded in California in July 2003, SHN soon proved to be very popular among the Shanghai youth all over the world. It had 63,000 registered members by April 2005, and the number increased to 189,000 as of April 2007. Most of them are self-identified Shanghainese now in Shanghai or in other countries, such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, Germany, Japan, Australia, and Austria. Oriented as a platform to provide members with the most cutting-edge entertainment culture, the SHN is dedicated to promoting Shanghai Rap, “a burgeoning avant-garde street culture in Shanghai” as the website explains. The site acts as a server for the rappers to upload their works, and provides the most complete collection of mp3s and of lyrics for public download. Shanghai Rap, one of the website’s most featured BBS forums, serves as a dynamic platform for the rappers and the fans. According to Robin Shi Lifeng, almost every song of his Poom Poom band was well received, which gave him and the band a lot of confidence and motivation to keep going (Michelle Zhang, 2005). In addition, the SHN theme song “Nong baksian sa” 侬白相啥 (What are you gonna play?) is rapped in Shanghai Wu. The website has also initiated and organized many music-themed activities and events, such as an annual SHN Hip-hop party, crazy Shanghai 1930, and Hip-hop beach party. Its avid promotion of Shanghai Rap culminated in the release of the so-called first Shanghai Rap CD, “有啥讲啥

@Shanghai” (Say what you gotta say), co-produced by the Sony-BMG company and the SHN website in July 2005.³²

The motivation to construct a distinct Shanghai identity can be seen to underpin the website’s dedicated promotion of Shanghai Rap and Shanghai Wu. As the SHN introduces itself, “we are the new generation of Shanghai. We represent the new culture of Shanghai. Come chat in our own language [Shanghai Wu], sing with our own music [Rap], and dance to our own rhythm [Hip-hop].” The website’s domain name is spelled as Shanghaining (Shanghainese), with *ning* from the Shanghai Wu pronunciation (nin) rather than that of the Mandarin (ren). Engaged in cyber-chatting in Shanghai Wu, the SHN members follow some tacit rules regarding the most frequently used Shanghai Wu words typed with Chinese characters. For example, to replace 我(们) with 阿拉 for “I” or “we,” 什么 with 撒额 for “what,” 谢谢 with 下下 for “thanks,” 好 with 灵 for “good,” (上海)人 with (上海)宁 for “Shanghainese,” and 在 with 了了 for “be in/at.” Moreover, a portion of the homepage, 上海闲话 (Shanghai Wu), is devoted to daily exhibition of a Shanghai Wu word with the English and Mandarin translation. According to Chen Leiqing, each day the website receives more than 200 words or expressions from members. They have accumulated a large online base of Shanghai Wu vocabulary in about two years (Xu Jitao, 2005). No longer facilely associated with the old-fashioned local opera (*huju* or *huajixi*), Shanghai Wu is now linked with the most edgy entertainment and cyber culture. As many SHN members and rappers put it, Shanghai Wu sounds “COOL” or “IN.” The local words and expressions have been explored to mark a distinct visual style for the website and its members. For example, 谈谈山海经 (to chat) indicates its general forum section (which is usually rendered as 论坛 in Chinese). Regarding the subforum

³² Of the 13 songs included in this CD, the majority are rendered in Shanghai Wu (with some parts rhymed in Putonghua), although at least 3 songs are entirely in Putonghua.

titles, the website adopts 阿拉卖相好伐 (how about your appearance?) rather than 会员照片 (members' photos); 翻翻行头 (to change clothes/dress) rather than 服装时尚 (fashion); 白相自编书 rather than 博客/播客 (members' blogs). Moreover, the monthly beauty competition (选美) is called 嗲囡囡评选, as 囡囡 /noe noe/ means “girls” in Shanghai Wu. A street-snapshot competition in 2007 that has been a trend among the Japanese youth since the late 1990s was called 拗潮型, as 拗 /ao/ means “make up or strike a pose” in Shanghai Wu.

This distinct local identity, defined by local language, is achieved to a large extent by replacing Mandarin words with Shanghai Wu words. As the prerogatives of the nation-state seem more and more identified with globalization and its concomitant homogenization and uniformity, the Putonghua Mandarin as the national language has become too common, general, and amorphous, and therefore insufficient for the purpose of articulating a distinct identity for young people, overseas and at home alike. The young SHN members create a deliberate distance from Putonghua Mandarin, thus the Chinese characters on display are defamiliarized and reoriented. Such a website with a strong local flavor sets up a linguistic and cultural boundary that excludes those Chinese who cannot understand Shanghai Wu, in keeping with an attitude PZ-FRAN raps, “bu dong aklak sanghe eeo jiao nong xieko” 不懂阿拉上海闲话叫依歇脚 (If you don't understand our Shanghai Wu, just stop talking), in the song “Our Shanghai.” But at the same time the website certainly functions as a virtual community for its qualified members all over the world. The SHN members of globally dispersed diasporas celebrate the imagined collective local identity—Shanghaining in their physically confined places. *Sagəsigai* 萨额世界 (啥个世界/什么世界/What a world, 2004-2006) is a SHN-hosted online talk show in Shanghai Wu.³³ Among the four hosts, two were in Seattle and Los Angeles respectively, and

³³ The talk show made 14 episodes altogether, running from Aug. 12, 2004 to April 20, 2006.

the other two in Shanghai. Besides their hosts, their guests were also recruited from across the world. According to the founder/host Mild Wild Child, himself a rapper, the hosts and guests recorded their parts in their separate localities around the world, and then he synthesized the audio clips transmitted online with sound software.³⁴ Despite a time-consuming production process that masks explicit identification of participants' locations, the synchronized, "on-site" sound effects evoke a seemingly integrated sensibility and forge a collective local identity. In other words, what the talk show attempts to highlight is that a group of Shanghainese, wherever they are physically located, is talking about issues concerning the place of Shanghai in Shanghai Wu, whether the topics might be Shanghai rap, films and film music of the 1930s Shanghai, Shanghai *longdang* culture, childhood in Shanghai, or Shanghainese studying abroad.

Nevertheless, however much Shanghai Wu has become a dominant marker for the young Shanghainese of a unique, distinct youth identity, their inadequate and nonstandard Shanghai Wu is often a target of criticism. First, as some linguists point out, the rappers' pronunciations of Shanghai Wu have been heavily influenced by Putonghua. The rappers can hardly distinguish between the voiceless sound (*qing yin*, like /f/) and the voiced sound (*zhuo yin*, like /v/), and between the sharp sound (*jian yin*, like /tsi, ts'i, si/) and the rounded sound (*tuan yin*, like /tɕi, tɕ'i, ɕi/). Many phrase constructions pronounced in Shanghai Wu are actually based on the Putonghua Mandarin grammar. For instance, "if, suppose" should be rendered as 假使讲 /tɕia s1 ka~/ rather than 如果 /z1 ku/, which is a typical word from Putonghua. Second, the Shanghai youth don't know the original characters for the Shanghai Wu words. For example, the standard, original characters for "Shanghai Wu," one of the most frequently used phrases, should be 上海言话 rather than 上海闲话. A linguistic

³⁴ Information obtained from email communication with *Mild Wild Child* in April 2005.

scholar made another version of the lyrics of a rap based on the supposedly correct characters (www.pkucn.com), while the local press complained that the incorrectly written characters (*cuobiezi*) in the rap lyrics posted in the SHN website were too numerous to list (Wang Huajing et al. 2005). As much as the SHN members sometimes intentionally avoid using the original Chinese characters for the local words in order to mark a distinction, the transcription of the dialect is still a big problem for the Shanghai youth and those in other cities alike. Because of the difficulty of transcribing dialect, there are no lyrics printed in the liner notes of the first Shanghai Rap CD (Han Lei, 2005). Those who experiment with writing blogs in local languages confront this problem as well. For instance, the blogger and newspaper writer Lin Yu mentioned her struggle to render the colloquial Shanghai Wu with Chinese characters in an article entitled “My thoughts about writing in Shanghai Wu” posted in her blog on Jan. 27, 2005 (<http://magnovich.spaces.live.com/default.aspx>). Third, Shanghai Wu, like other local languages, betrays its limitations and inadequacies as an independent system of communication in the increasingly cosmopolitanized world. From time to time, Mandarin and English expressions have a way of creeping into the rapping, talking, and writing. For example, in a 10-minute clip of the talk show “What a world” (Episode 7), you would hear the idioms and vocabulary pronounced in Putonghua such as *shizaibixing* (be imperative under the circumstances), *buchuwosuoliao* (as I expect), *nvzhonghaojie* (a woman of exceptional ability), *baofali* (explosive force), and *ouxiang* (idol); as well as the music and Internet terminologies in English such as “rap,” “Reggae,” “MC,” “music,” “BBS,” “download,” and “keep it cool.”

The educated youth in Shanghai as well as in other cities in China cannot and do not have to completely replace Putonghua with their native dialects. The local dialects they employ in their songs, no matter to what degree impure and nonstandard,

exhibit a linguistic edge the urban youth are undeniably possessed of. The bilingual or multilingual competence (dialect, Putonghua, and maybe English) that mediates the inadequacies of either language is earning them a distinct identity from those who define themselves either through one language/dialect or through a multilingual ability with combination of languages. Furthermore, the urban youth draw on locally embedded knowledge and resources to construct an individual musicalized identity. Yet once disseminated on the Internet, the dialect song makes it possible to forge a collective identity among young people who share knowledge and sensibilities about a given locality. Lastly, in the context of the global/local dialectical dynamic, as Chinese urban youth make paradoxical use of globally synchronized music and stylistic resources to articulate a local identity, localities so constructed are simultaneously associated with a cosmopolitan subjectivity. Particularly in the era of the Internet, the global and the local do not pose as cultural polarities, but are interpenetrating, interacting, and mutually signifying. Such is the logic of glocalization.

CHAPTER 6

THE RHETORIC OF LOCAL LANGUAGES AS THE MARGINAL: CHINESE UNDERGROUND AND INDEPENDENT FILMS BY JIA ZHANGKE AND OTHERS

In the early 1990s, the emergence of “underground,” “independent” documentary films and fiction films with a “documentary impulse”³⁵ in Mainland Chinese filmmaking aroused attention in the international film circuit. The former are exemplified by Wu Wenguang’s *Liulang Beijing: Zuihou de Mengxiangzhe* (Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers, 1989) and *1966, Wo de Hongweibing Shidai* (1966, My Time in the Red Guards, 1993), and the latter are represented by Zhang Yuan’s *Beijing Zazhong* (Beijing Bastards, 1993) and Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Dongchun de Rizi* (The Days, 1993).³⁶ Although such terms as “underground” or “independent” are fraught with contradictions, as examined in Cui (2001), they still have merit as broad definitions: these films are produced outside the state studio system and its ideological censorship. Lacking access to official channels of distribution, they cannot be shown publicly in cinemas within China and thus are often largely inaccessible to the domestic audience. Furthermore, diverging from the Fifth Generation directors’ preoccupation with traumatic histories and allegorical narratives, as in the early works by Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, the young-generation filmmakers show a keen concern for marginal figures in contemporary China. Yet this “underground” cinema

³⁵ Braester (2007) and Leary (2003), among others, have pointed out the “documentary impulse” of fiction films by young-generation filmmakers.

³⁶ For an insightful overview of the young film and video directors in Mainland China in the 1990s, see Dai (2002), Cui (2001), C. Berry (2002), and Lü (2003).

is difficult to define, not only because the filmmakers differ from each other in significant ways, but also because they change styles with the times.

Tony Rayns (2003) contends that the dominant current in underground filmmaking arrived with the appearance of Jia Zhangke's films in the late 1990s. Although Jia continues to use the underground production mode and a documentary filmmaking style, interviews with and reports about him attest to his conscious effort to distinguish his films from those of his predecessors. As Jia often argues, China has no sustained tradition of documentary, apart from state-sponsored propaganda films and technical or educational films. His contention is that although China is undergoing tremendous change, contemporary Chinese movies seem to avoid grappling with "the here and now" (*dangxia*); "there is a responsibility to film [the present]," he says, "so that in the future we will be able to see how it really was."³⁷ Hence, his "Hometown Trilogy" —*Xiao Wu* (Xiao Wu, 1997), *Zhantai* (Platform, 2000), and *Ren Xiaoyao* (Unknown Pleasures, 2002)—offered Chinese cinema a "supplementary history," a documentary-based representation of a contemporary Chinese underclass, people who are marginalized by sweeping societal developments.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Jia's films is his consistent and pervasive employment of local languages, a striking deviation from the Putonghua Mandarin-dominant soundtrack in all but a handful of studio films. This assertive linguistic stance became the stylistic hallmark of Jia's films and ushered in a wave of underground films in local languages. Gunn (2006: 158) defines the rhetoric of local languages as representing "the marginal and the unassimilated," a trend "away from depicting characters in nationalistic and socialist themes as participants in a broad social mainstream." This chapter will explore how the local language serves as an

³⁷ Similar arguments have been expressed in interviews with Jia Zhangke (e.g., Zhang Yaxuan and Jian Ning 2000, Barden 1999).

important marker of marginality in the feature films of Jia Zhangke and others, an approach not taken in previous studies of these films. Following an overview of Jia's use of local languages as an integral part of the director's documentary filmmaking style and his underlying realist aesthetic, this study closely examines Jia's Hometown Trilogy. In my discussion of *Xiao Wu*, I explore the interactions between the two spaces defined by the soundtrack—the relatively quiet, private, intimate space where the eponymous protagonist dwells and the heteroglossic, public space characteristic of a media-savvy society. In this framework of private versus public spaces, the analysis also highlights the role in the film narrative of nondiegetic popular music and its contrast with the diegetic silence of the protagonist. In my discussion of *Platform*, I consider the inauthenticity of Jia's use of local languages, because none of the leading actors and actresses speak Fenyang Mandarin, the local dialect spoken in the community in which the film is set. The protagonists' hybridized and impure dialects betray Jia's limitation in forging a linguistic style through a negotiation between descriptive mimesis and interpretive diegesis. As a result, Jia may be manipulating a real local community to create a fictionalized “Fenyang” as a microcosm of China. In *Unknown Pleasures*, the female protagonist speaks the local dialect and shows no interest in upward social mobility. The two male high school graduates speak Putonghua, which carries with it a certain cultural and symbolic capital, but they still have no prospects for escaping small-town life. The difference in the male and female protagonists' language reveals a stratification among the disaffected and disillusioned youth in China. Finally, I explore the feature of silent protagonists and sparse dialogue common to Jia's work and other underground and independent films in local languages. Drawing on subaltern theory, I trace the voice of the intellectuals or elites in their re-presentation of the subaltern. This study of films from the perspective of local languages suggests that when China is represented by local dialects, it is revealed

as a fragmented and unassimilated country where a unified, mainstream discourse is impossible.

Documentary Filmmaking Style

Jia Zhangke's use of local language is an integral part of his documentary filmmaking style and realist aesthetic³⁸ that favor the representation of bare events as the most efficacious way to capture reality. His Hometown Trilogy films are all set in Shanxi Province, with the first two in Fenyang *xian* (county), Jia's hometown, and the third in Datong, a run-down middle-sized city in north Shanxi. The *xian* or *xiancheng* (county seat) functions as an important geographical-cultural crossroad marker in China because it links villages with big cities and thus becomes a site to observe the intersection of urban lifestyle with the rudimentary life of the peasant migrants. It has often been said that Jia Zhangke discovered China's *xiancheng*, just as Shen Congwen discovered west Hunan. The choice of *xian* or *xian*-like city settings breaks with both the early Fifth-Generation-cinema (e.g., northwest villages in Zhang Yimou's films) and earlier independent movies (generally set in big cities [Cui 2001]). To evoke an authentic spatially and temporally defined environment, Jia uses the local languages supposedly spoken by real people living in small towns. Integral to this *vérité* style, long takes are used to convey an objective and detached perspective. Synchronized recording without ambient noise filtering is adopted to achieve a naturalistic and primitive sound effect. Jia uses nonprofessional actors to minimize the artificiality of dramatic and formalistic acting styles. Improvisation rather than recitation of lines is encouraged to create a sense of spontaneity and individuality. In many senses, these film techniques are reminiscent of Italian neorealism of the 1940s. As Laurie Jane

³⁸ Rayns (2003) generalizes Jia's filmmaking style as "minimalist realism," featuring "wide-angle compositions, extended takes and low-key, undemonstrative performances." For a more thorough discussion of the realism in Jia's films, see McGrath (2007).

Anderson (1977: 41) argues, the neorealists' desire for a faithful reproduction of events led to a wholesale adoption of everyday language and dialects, such as the Sicilian dialect spoken by the village fishermen in Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (Earth Trembles, 1948).

In his 58-minute *Xiao Shan Huijia* (Xiao Shan Going Home, 1995), about a migrant worker in Beijing who plans to return to his rural hometown in Henan for the Chinese New Year, Jia began consciously to employ nonprofessional actors who speak Henan Mandarin. By speaking their local dialect throughout the film, Xiao Shan and his fellow townsmen are portrayed as closed off from the Beijing Mandarin-dominant community; their estrangement conveys the sense of alienation experienced by the hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants who have migrated to the big cities in search of employment. Jia Zhangke has remarked that Wang Hongwei, the Henan Anyang native who plays Xiao Shan, gives a natural and spontaneous performance and that his body type and peculiar gait are rare among professional actors (Wu Wenguang 2000: 194). Gu Zheng (2003: 31), who collaborated with Jia in shooting the film, found that the actors could not understand each other well because they spoke different variants of Henan Mandarin; even so, allowing the actors to speak their own dialects helps them identify with their characters and thus exhibit personal traits more fully.

Note that the actors are allowed to speak their native dialects, which are not necessarily the dialects their characters would have spoken. On the one hand, this is at odds with the director's desire for cinematic verisimilitude (the implications of this are considered further in my discussion of *Platform*). On the other hand, the disregard to the appropriate and realistic use of dialects may indicate, to some degree, that the use of local languages is aimed more at creating an atmosphere than at conveying a particular message or speech. Following production of the documentary *Gonggong*

Changsuo (In Public, 2001), set and shot in Datong, Jia Zhangke (2003a: 4) made a deliberate decision not to use subtitles: “The audiences do not have to know what the character is exactly saying. His voice is part of the environment. What matters is not his words, but his behavior and mannerism.”³⁹ In *Xiao Shan Going Home*, Jia himself plays one of Xiao Shan’s Henan townsman, and in a gathering he unleashes a torrent of filthy language in his own Shanxi Fenyang Mandarin, which is unintelligible even to a Shanxi audience outside Fenyang, not to mention a potential national audience;⁴⁰ his monologue thus becomes more a registering of expletives than a vehicle of communication. The creative space opened up by the underground filmmaking mode allows for such unrestrained dialogue, which does not have to adhere to the social or educational obligations of the mainstream public media in China. Freed from the national language regulations and official censorship, Jia’s films use language that might be heard only in informal, uncensored conversations.

Private Space versus Public Space in Xiao Wu

Perhaps the most influential Chinese independent fiction film, *Xiao Wu* provides an excellent text to further examine the function of local language in relation to soundtrack and narrative structure. As Wang Zhuoyi (2005) incisively points out, “the key dramatic conflicts in *Xiao Wu*, with social change as its central theme, unfold not in a diachronic dimension but rather in a synchronic space, where aural effects are more prominent than visuality.” Jia also believes that the soundtrack should have a structure that is integrated within the film narrative. Indeed, the film successfully sets

³⁹ Except as noted, all translations from primary sources are the author’s.

⁴⁰ Both the Shanxi Fenyang dialect and the Henan Anyang dialect belong to the Jin Language (*Jin Yu*), which is arguably different from Mandarin. But since it is still an unsettled issue, this study treats them as one subtype of Mandarin. As some linguists point out, the dialects in Jin Language are often mutually incomprehensible because of the regional differences; see <http://www.pkucn.com/viewthread.php?tid=157344>.

up an opposition, defined by the soundtrack, between a relatively quiet, private, intimate space—where the protagonist, a pickpocket, and his “crew” pursue their traditional occupation, following the ethical code of an agrarian society⁴¹—and a heteroglossic, public space occupied by broadcasting propaganda as well as entertainment programs of the modern media. The conflict between the two spaces is highlighted when a TV reporter stops Xiao Wu’s wandering fellow, San Tu, in the street to ask him—in Fenyang-accented Putonghua—questions about the ongoing countywide “strike hard” (*yanda*) campaign against petty crime. According to Wang Zhuoyi (2005), “the microphone held by the reporter is always situated at the center of the image sequence. As a tool for recording and amplifying sound, the microphone seems to become something connecting the private and the public space. However, the public audio space is so privileged and selective that those who fail to express a conforming opinion are rejected. Metaphorically, the microphone as well as the Putonghua it transmits symbolizes a threatening intrusion to people like Xiao Wu, who have to remain concealed and speechless in the public space.”

However, as the story develops, Xiao Wu’s “sworn brothers,” first Xiao Yong, and later San Tu, appear talking on television; this shift from the private space to the public space signifies their gradual accommodation and surrender to the dominant system. In one scene, Xiao Yong, Xiao Wu’s erstwhile best friend and partner-in-crime, who is now a prominent local businessman, is granted a public speech in a television report that announces his wedding and hails him as a “model entrepreneur,” so designated by the authorities. His speech is full of the formulaic and bombastic

⁴¹ In presenting a pickpocket (*pashou*) as the protagonist in *Xiao Wu*, Jia Zhangke said that his initial intent was to depict a *shouyiren* (a craftsman who earns his living by his hands) as someone with a tenuous connection to industrialized society, such as a blacksmith, a tailor, or a cook. What the director intends to highlight, then, is that the victim of dramatic societal changes maintains the traditional moral values that modern society is losing, such as codes of brotherhood and fidelity (Zhang Yaxuan and Jian Ning 2000; Barden 1999).

vocabulary characteristic of mainstream authoritative discourse, yet his effort to achieve mainstream assimilation through mimicry is undermined: the speech is delivered in Fenyang Mandarin, rather than Putonghua Mandarin.

“各位父老乡亲，亲朋好友，首先感谢大家多年来对我的支持和帮助，值此本人新婚之际，我谨向多年来关心恒通商贸公司的各位领导，各界人士表示感谢。现在我公司决定捐款三万元，用于汾阳的希望工程。”

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends and relatives, first of all I'd like to express my gratitude to all of you for your support and help over the years. On the occasion of my wedding, I'd like to thank the leaders and friends who are always concerned with the development of Hengtong Company. And now our company has decided to donate 30,000 *yuan* to support Project Hope in Fenyang.”

The parody ends with a cut to Xiao Yong back in a private space following his speech; here he utters vulgarities to his relative (played by Jia himself), still in Fenyang Mandarin.

Just as the politics of identifying new-generation films as “underground” or “independent” reveals the preoccupation of Western festival juries and art house distributors with the films’ “transgressive qualities,”⁴² the use of local languages in Jia’s films is sometimes interpreted as politically and ideologically subversive. In analyzing Jia’s own extensive chatter in Fenyang Mandarin in *Xiao Shan Going Home*, New York-based critic Kevin Lee (2003) comments, “Jia’s unapologetic use of dialect” compensates for “seven decades of Chinese movies that have been dubbed in standard Mandarin dialect in accordance with government language policy.” A close

⁴² The term “transgressive qualities” is borrowed from Cui (2001: 77), who writes that “these ‘qualities’ depend specifically on a commitment to independent filmmaking, and thus to subverting mainstream production and official censorship.”

reading of *Xiao Wu* reveals that the local language is so pervasively used in both public and private spaces that its potential subversiveness is hard to pin down. Like the nouveau riche Xiao Yong, the policeman Hao Youliang also speaks Fenyang Mandarin, whether or not he is on duty. In spite of the repeated loudspeaker exhortations in broadcast-standard Putonghua to crack down on petty crime, in the first scene, his encounter with Hao, Xiao Wu greets Hao as “teacher,” and they seem to be longstanding associates: tension between authority and criminality is thereby undermined. Hao urges Xiao Wu to reform, following Xiao Yong’s example. During the course of the movie, everyone tries to adapt to modern society except Xiao Wu, who cannot let go of his old value system and embrace the new. The marginalization of Xiao Wu parallels the fate of the small county in which he loiters. Although Fenyang used to be the hub of Shanxi draft banks (*piaohao*), a national financial center in late imperial China, it has been left behind in the reform era. Xiao Wu’s actual Henan Anyang Mandarin (spoken by Wang Hongwei), which is often unintelligible to the Fenyang people, has already excluded him from the local speech community, evoking an aesthetic effect of alienation for the local Fenyang audience. On the other hand, Wang’s difficulty in understanding other actors’ Fenyang Mandarin makes an interesting parallel with Xiao Wu’s bewilderment over his surroundings in the film.⁴³

Music plays as prominent a role as language in Jia’s films. Yueh-yu Yeh (2002: 79) argues that music is central to Chinese dialect films of the 1930s: “productions of low-budget dialect films often skipped the process of recruiting good scripts” and “tended to recycle opera repertoires that were already familiar to regional audiences.” Jia’s films extensively the cheap “wallpaper” of popular music to establish

⁴³ In an interview with Zhang Yaxuan (2003: 181), Wang Hongwei mentioned his difficulty in communicating with the actors playing Xiao Yong and Xiao Wu’s parents because of language barriers.

a period scene, although local Jin opera (*Jin Ju*) is also occasionally used to enhance the regional flavor of the setting. The leitmotifs of “synchronized” popular songs are well integrated within the film narrative. In *Xiao Wu*, the mid-90s karaoke hit “Xin Yu” (Heart Rain) is played several times; this song is a musical dialogue between a man and his lover who “will become someone else’s bride tomorrow.” Played on TV as a celebration of Xiao Yong’s wedding and sung by a young duo in front of a funeral parlor, the song is heard in public in an absurd and incongruous way. Only when Xiao Wu sings it in private, while bathing, do the lyrics become relevant in conveying the subjective melancholy of his doomed love affair with a bar escort, who soon leaves him for more lucrative customers. Here the song functions empathetically, which, according to Michel Chion (1994: 8), “directly express[es] its participation in the feeling of the scene.” In a similar vein, Tu Honggang’s hit song *Bawang Bieji* (Farewell to My Concubine), which alludes to the ancient hero Xiang Yu, recurs every time Xiao Wu feels betrayed. We hear it first when Xiao Wu learns he has not been invited to Xiao Yong’s wedding, and again after he is arrested. Xiao Wu not only watches San Tu denounce him on TV and cheer his arrest, he also finds out what made his pager suddenly ring while the crime was being carried out, leading to his capture: it was a weather forecast, rather than a call from Mei Mei, who had asked him to buy the pager so that she could contact him. The nondiegetic music in a throbbing beat makes a sharp contrast with the diegetic silence of the protagonist, signifying the powerlessness of any speech. His bewilderment, his dignity, and his struggle over his self-worth all seem to be encapsulated in the lyrics “问苍天，四方云动。剑在手，问天下谁是英雄？” (Ask the deep blue sky, clouds moving in all directions. With sword in hand, I ask the world, who is the hero?)

In this section, I have described the use of local language versus Putonghua Mandarin in the framework of public and private spaces defined by the soundtrack.

The analysis has explored how popular songs, as an integral part of the soundtrack, serve the empathetic function for the silent protagonist. The local dialect, as the everyday language for the local community, is extensively used in both public and private spaces. By contrast, Putonghua Mandarin, symbolizing the mainstream, is subdued most of the time as background noise in the heteroglossic public space. Virtually no character speaks standard Putonghua, and none are depicted in the heroic light typically found in mainstream films. To a large degree, the local language in Jia's film is associated with the marginal—those not (well) absorbed into mainstream society.

The Tension Between Diegesis and Mimesis in Platform

Popular music continues to play an important role in Jia's next film, *Platform*, which follows the lives of four performers in a local Fenyang troupe from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. As Mark Kermode (1995: 9) argues, "more than any other art form, pop music is a disposable, transient product which reflects, mimics, and occasionally shapes the zeitgeist. As such, pop music can serve as a film's memory, instantaneously linking it with its audience, tapping into a nostalgic past, or fixing the film firmly in the present." In many interviews, Jia has recalled the enormous role of popular music in the lives of his contemporaries as they came of age (e.g., M. Berry 2003: 61-62); this is abundantly evidenced in *Platform*. The numerous "classic" pop songs—whether the revolutionary song "Huoche Xiangzhe Shaoshan Pao" (A train traveling toward Shaoshan) from the late 1970s, Teresa Teng's "Meijiu Jia Kafei" (Fine Wine and Coffee) from the early 1980s, the rock song "Zhantai" (Platform) in the mid-1980s, or the theme song of the early-1990s telenovela *Kewang* (Yearning)—capture a specific temporality and authentically evoke a particular period of history. As a whole, the use

of popular music is consistent with the filmmaker's effort since *Xiao Wu* to document the social and cultural changes that have taken place in his hometown of Fenyang.

However, this authentic documentation of local Fenyang is problematized by the inauthentic and hybridized dialects the protagonists speak. As noted earlier, the protagonist in *Xiao Wu* speaks Henan Anyang Mandarin, which is different from the Shanxi Fenyang Mandarin spoken in the community where the film is set. More noticeably, none of the four leading actors and actresses in *Platform* are native to the locale, and consequently none of them speak Fenyang Mandarin, even though they are portraying Fenyang natives: Wang Hongwei (playing Cui Mingliang) speaks Henan Anyang Mandarin, Zhao Tao (playing Yin Ruijuan) and Liang Jingdong (playing Zhang Jun) speak Shanxi Taiyuan Mandarin, and Yang Tianyi (playing Zhong Ping) speaks only Putonghua. In a way, the performers' actual outsider identity may make them more easily identifiable with their characters, who seem eager to break loose from the "isolated" local town. Still, to a large extent this discrepancy between the actors' actual dialects and the protagonists' supposed dialects is at odds with the filmmaker's emphasis on cinematic verisimilitude, especially when compared with his meticulous treatment of minor characters' accents or dialects. Besides the dominant Fenyang Mandarin spoken by the real local residents in the films, most of the outsider accents of the minor characters could be reasonably explained away. For instance, the bar escorts in *Xiao Wu* speak Northeast or Sichuan Mandarin, and in fact, prostitutes usually do business in places other than their hometowns; the bar boss in *Xiao Wu* and the troupe leader in *Platform* speak Putonghua with a strong Beijing accent, which is consistent with their identity as sent-down youths from Beijing; in *Platform*, the Fenyang Rural Culture Troupe, which is privatized and repackaged as the allegedly "Shenzhen All-Star Break Dance Electronic Troupe," advertises its tour performance with an imitation of a Cantonese accent.

Jia's response to such "flawed" linguistic authenticity is that as long as the effect as a whole seems coherent and harmonious, it doesn't matter whether actors speak Fengyang Mandarin.⁴⁴ This somewhat dismissive explanation has to do with the subjective ambivalence intrinsic to his brand of documentary realism. Jia sums up his realism in an interview with Sun Jianmin (2002: 31) in this way: "All the realist methods are there to express the real world of my inner experience ... I pursue the feeling of the real in cinema more than I pursue reality, because I think the feeling of the real is on the level of aesthetics whereas reality just stays in the realm of sociology."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Jia's version of realist linguistic effect raises questions about audience reception. For some local audiences, the effect of linguistic coherence is not achieved; some viewers from the region have indicated as much in an online Q&A with Jia.⁴⁶ For the national audience, linguistic harmony might be possible but is still problematic. As Gunn (2006: 9; emphasis added) explains, "the film audiences vary linguistically throughout China so much" that "what is overwhelmingly used as a standard of *realist conventions* providing a unity of sound and image would otherwise be rejected by any audience outside that 'specific reality' of the cultural product". Indeed, it doesn't seem realistic when characters supposedly from the same region speak in different Chinese dialects. For example, although Shanxi Fenyang Mandarin and Henan Anyang Mandarin are virtually indistinguishable to audiences outside these regions, most Chinese can tell the difference between Cantonese-accented Mandarin and Northeast Mandarin. In addition, without the approval of public screening in domestic cinemas, Jia's films are generally inaccessible to the vast Chinese audience,

⁴⁴ My interview with Jia Zhangke, winter 2004. Also see Jia's response to the similar online question posed by the viewers, as indicated in the footnote 15.

⁴⁵ Translations are from McGrath (2006, forthcoming).

⁴⁶ In an online Q&A with Jia Zhangke, some participants from Shanxi and Henan provinces who can distinguish Fenyang from Anyang Mandarin questioned the authenticity of Jia's films; see [http://ent.163.com/edit/001220/001220_67534\(2\).html](http://ent.163.com/edit/001220/001220_67534(2).html).

including Fenyang viewers.⁴⁷ Chinese underground films have to seek recognition through international channels to raise funds and obtain distribution. Yet for the international audience unfamiliar with Chinese, and particularly for the international film festival juries and art-house distributors, the unifying linguistic effect seems pointless, because their understanding of the dialogue depends on subtitles that do not convey the different dialects.

If linguistic unity can be achieved only by taking advantage of the audience's limited or nonexistent knowledge of Chinese local languages, from the filmmaker's perspective, to what extent can hybridized Mandarin still sound coherent and harmonious? The answer has to do with the director's vision regarding Fenyang as a microcosm of China and the consequent view of Mandarin varieties as a collective voice for the Chinese masses. Jia never set the reconstruction of a local Fenyang identity as his ultimate goal. In response to a question about his extensive use of local dialects and local features in an interview with Jian Ning (1999: 108), Jia said that his emphasis is not locality or regionalism, but the general existential state of the Chinese masses. His ambition to have his hometown, a small landlocked county in North China, stand for China is more explicit in a statement about shooting *Platform*. Without mentioning a word about Fenyang throughout the piece, his statement begins: "The film takes place over a period when the greatest change and reform were going on in China. ... The narrative of *Platform* follows the development of the characters against a background of constant change. The natural cycle of birth, age, illness, and

⁴⁷ A limited audience within China does have access to Jia's films. *Xiao Wu*, for example, was screened on film unofficially at four noncinematic locations in Beijing before 1999: a French elementary school in Sanlitun (the screening was organized by the Culture Office of the French Embassy), an auditorium in Beijing Film Academy, a critics' salon in Beijing University, and a painting studio in Zuo'anmen. The viewers totaled around 200, including directors, film critics, poets, professors, college students, and/or film buffs. In its "premier" screening in Sanlitun, Jia was reported to have translated Shanxi dialects into Putonghua Mandarin through an audio amplifier to the audience. See Wu Wenguang (2000: 205-206); Jian Ning (1999: 102).

death, life evokes a melancholic feeling of the impermanence of life” (Jia 2003b: 190). In a sense, Jia manages to transform the particular and the specific into the universal and the general. In an interview with Stephen Teo (2001), Jia, reflecting upon the delineation of characters in his films, says that he endeavored to “go beyond the local factor” and to “create real human beings who possess universality or universal human emotions.” Indeed, numerous critics read his films through metonymic, or more precisely, synecdochic substitution. For instance, Elbert Ventura regards *Platform* as “an allegorical epic that traces China’s snarled transition from Maoism to the economic liberalization of the 1980’s.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Xiaoping Lin (2005) tends to interpret many of the details in this movie in an allegorical way.

But the dialectic between particularity and universality in the film is not so easily reconciled. It is exactly his protagonists’ hybridized and impure dialects that reveal Jia’s limitation in forging a linguistic style through a negotiation between mimesis and diegesis. As Gunn (1991: 299) defines it in the Chinese language context, “mimesis is a concept of style as imitating conventions, as of speech.” By contrast, “diegesis is the concept of style as having elements belonging to a shared inventory (e.g. Chinese) but determined by an interpretation of phenomena (e.g. the adoption of a Modern Standard Chinese to present the world of a text as a modernized China), rather than by imitation, or mimesis, of the world portrayed in the text (e.g. regional speech idiom of a given historical time)” (Gunn 1991: 298). In analyzing Lao She’s hallmark use of Beijing speech in his novels, Gunn argues, “the more the local speech serves a mimetic function, the more it specifies the environment as a particular one ... The more particular the environment becomes, the more it restricts the sort of diegesis

⁴⁸ See Elbert Ventura’s review of *Platform* at <http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=1:220970>

that Lu Xun promoted, to avoid the interpretation of a story as about a single locale” rather than an allegory of China as a whole (Gunn 1991: 114-115).

The tension between diegesis and mimesis is a dilemma that troubled the great writers, such as Lu Xun, Lao She, and Mao Dun. Jia Zhangke is similarly troubled: although he takes pains to employ mimetic, descriptive features by peppering his films with the real-life experience of real people speaking their real dialects, he expects the audience to view his style as interpretive diegesis. As a result, he risks manipulating a real community to create a fictive community. In this respect, Yiu Wai Chu’s exploration of the “Hong Kong (G)local identity” in cinematic representation is particularly inspiring. As Chu (2005) problematizes them, post-1997 films that strive for an “authentic” portrayal of local Hong Kong history cast leading actors and actresses who are not native to Hong Kong and cannot speak a pure Hong Kong Cantonese. Using a postmodern cultural logic and postcolonial identity politics perspective, Chu concludes that the reconstructed Hong Kong local imaginary remains impure, hybridized, “inauthentic,” unstable, and mixed. In a similar vein, it could be argued that the protagonists’ hybridized and inauthentic dialects in Jia’s films make the local Fenyang community inauthentic and fictive. Generality can be achieved only at the cost of erasing a real local community.

In *Platform*, a nonprofessional actor, who is in real life Jia Zhangke’s cousin and a contracted coal miner, plays Cui Mingliang’s coal miner cousin, Sanming. However, the actor’s genuinely miserable story is simply dramatized and fictionalized, as the character Sanming speaking Shanxi Fenyang Mandarin has conversations with Cui Mingliang, who speaks Henan Anyang Mandarin. Although Jia likes to call himself “a director from the lower class” (*laizi jiceng de daoyan*), his vision as an intellectual or artist may undermine a total identification with his lower-class protagonists. At the end of *Xiao Wu*, surrounded by the gathering crowd, the

handcuffed Xiao Wu first stands by the utility pole, then hangs his head, and finally squats, burying his head between his legs. Han Min (2004) argues that Xiao Wu is brought low by the curious and despised gaze of the spectators and, more fundamentally, by Jia Zhangke, who, as an intellectual, presumes a moral superiority over lower-class petty thieves such as Xiao Wu. Moreover, as my discussion in the final section shows, although Jia's films concern the lower class, members of that class are hardly his intended audience, and it is unlikely that his acclaimed humanistic films will change their lives in any way. Many Sanmings are not only victims of the privately owned coal mines where human life has so little value, but also the "victims" of Jia's films where their real-life experience is appropriated, fictionalized, and relativized.⁴⁹ Just as the slippery nature of his brand of realism both deploys and denies the documentary impulse, so the mimetic imperative within the function of local language is "simultaneously the factor which both supports and subverts the entire interpretive enterprise."⁵⁰

Gendered Language Use in Unknown Pleasures

The inauthentic use of local language is carried forward in Jia's third feature film, *Unknown Pleasures*, in which the female lead, Zhao Tao, speaks her native Taiyuan Mandarin even though she plays an entertainment demi-star, Qiao Qiao, who is a native of Datong. Yet the use of local language takes a new twist in this film, which distinguishes the language of the female and male protagonists. The two male leads,

⁴⁹ The term "relativization" is borrowed from Chion (1994: 178-183). Chion refers to various techniques, including "multilingualism and use of a foreign language," designed to offset the power of the intelligible theatrical speech as "relativization." Here, it seems that the inauthentic language of the cousin relativizes and offsets the authenticity of Sanming and his real life story.

⁵⁰ See Grant Stirling 1995: 414. Stirling elaborates on this point: "the mimetic imperative supports the function of language variance by grounding the language of the literary text in a specific culture. But the mimetic imperative subverts that same function because of the numerous critical problems which inhabit any attempt to read literary texts mimetically."

Wu Qiong (playing Xiao Ji) and Zhao Weiwei (playing Bin Bin), speak Putonghua rather than dialect throughout the film. The difference in the male and female protagonists' language depicts a stratification among disaffected and disillusioned Chinese youth, a feature many critics have yet to discuss. Although broadcast-standard Putonghua Mandarin continues to be used in this film as the mainstream media language largely for its ideological connotation, the film seems to ironically confirm its elevated position in the hierarchy of linguistic practices. One of Bourdieu's main theses (1991) is that the educational system as an institution plays a decisive role in the standardization, legitimization, and imposition of an official language; the dialectical relation between the education system and the labor market conspires to devalue local dialects, which are often dismissed as uneducated and coarse. The Putonghua spoken by the high school-educated Bin Bin and Xiao Ji in this movie is therefore endowed with certain cultural and symbolic capital. That they are able and willing to speak unaccented Putonghua indicates their desire for upward social mobility. By comparison, their underprivileged parents, mired in the lower social strata, speak the local Datong Mandarin. Bin Bin's mother, a dedicated practitioner of the Falun Gong, works at a failing textile factory. Xiao Ji's father fritters away time working in a shabby motorcycle repair shop. The two native Datong teenagers never speak their parents' Datong Mandarin, implying that they are uncomfortable with their local identity, if not eager to abandon their local roots altogether. In one scene Xiao Ji expresses his wish to have been born in the United States instead of Datong. The influence of the upwardly mobile society is often revealed in their daily speech, as in their use of terms such as "international trade" and "laptop." Eager to embrace the outside world, they watch Hollywood videos such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and television news programming transmitted in Putonghua, including stories of China's effort to enter the WTO, Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Summer

Olympics, Falun Gong practitioners' self-immolation at the Tian'anmen Square, and China's condemnation of the controversial U.S. surveillance aircraft incursion. Their readiness to link their immediate surroundings with the outside world is amusingly portrayed: in one scene, upon hearing an explosion from a local factory, Bin Bin seems alarmed and says, "Fuck, are the Americans attacking again?"

By contrast, Qiao Qiao is very provincial. She was dismissed from middle school when her illicit affair with her gym teacher (who later becomes her ganster boyfriend) was exposed. Although she has less education than Xiao Ji and Bin Bin, she can argue furiously in Putonghua with a doctor over the hospital's neglect of her father's illness. Otherwise, however, she insists on speaking the local dialect. Here, a sociolinguistic gender approach may shed some light. A widely affirmed principle of women's linguistic conformity states that "women show a lower rate of stigmatized variants and a higher rate of prestige variants than men" (Labov 2001: 266). Women's careful behavior, Labov (2001: 278) argues, is "a reflection of their greater assumption of responsibility for the upward mobility of their children—or at least of preparing the symbolic capital necessary for that mobility." Yet Qiao Qiao's use of language serves as a contrapositive example of this principle.⁵¹ Showing a more radical attitude of nonconformity than Xiao Ji and Bin Bin, she makes no effort to reject her stigmatized local speech in favor of the more prestigious pattern. In contrast with the naiveté and awkwardness of the two young men, Qiao Qiao displays more social sophistication and ease with local practices. In the hotel scene in which the infatuated Xiao Ji finally gets a chance to touch Qiao Qiao, he is befuddled by the shower controls, which she manipulates with ease. Furthermore, as Labov (2001: 366) observes, "the leaders of

⁵¹ Briefly, the term "contrapositive" in logic can be explained as follows: for the statement "if p, then q," the contrapositive is "if not q, then not p." The general sociolinguistic principle states that if a woman prefers speaking the more standard linguistic form (p), she shows a tendency toward upward social mobility (q). But in the case of Qiao Qiao, who has no motivation for upward mobility (not q), she does not usually speak Putonghua Mandarin (not p).

linguistic change are often female members of the highest status local group, upwardly mobile, with dense network connections within the local neighborhood, but an even wider variety of social contacts beyond the local area.” Again, this is obviously not the case with Qiao Qiao, who shows no interest in building network connections with the outside world. Indeed, the blaring televisions of Bin Bin and Xiao Ji’s homes are absent from Qiao Qiao’s home. Her unsophisticated understanding of the Daoist philosopher Zhuang Zi’s *Xiaoyao You*⁵² as “free to do whatever you want” comes from her gangster boyfriend. Qiao Qiao, with an almost exclusive use of the local dialect, resigns herself to the local subsociety. The gender linguistic difference between Qiao Qiao and Xiao Ji and Bin Bin further distinguishes stratified layers of the disaffected Chinese youth.

As much as Putonghua and its association with higher education facilitate the teenagers’ status seeking, the educational system, according to Bourdieu (1991: 24-25), “involves a certain kind of objectification” and becomes a “mechanism for creating and sustaining inequalities,” enabling “those who benefit most from the system to convince themselves of their own intrinsic worthiness, while preventing those who benefit least from grasping the basis of their own deprivation.” In the film, such inequality is exemplified by a minor character, Bin Bin’s girlfriend, who speaks Putonghua properly and correctly. As a studious and upright high school student, she is excited by China’s entry into the WTO and hopes to major in international trade in a Beijing university. By passing the national college entrance examination, she can leave her hometown. However, for more typical teenagers, such as Bin Bin and Xiao Ji, who fail the exam, unaccented Putonghua rather indexes a sense of “spatialized

⁵² The first chapter of *Zhuangzi, Xiaoyao You* (translated as “The Happy Excursion” by Feng Youlan), conveys the Daoist idea that “there are varying degrees in the achievement of happiness. A free development of our natures may lead us to a relative kind of happiness; absolute happiness is achieved through higher understanding of the nature of things” (Feng 1966: 105).

alienation and nonlocatability,” terms used in Michael Silverstein’s observation of an “accent eradication” program in mid-1980s New York. The standard register is a voice “from nowhere in particular.” By contrast, “To talk from ‘somewhere’ is to be from ‘somewhere’; it is to belong.” (Silverstein 1999: 112-113). In the spectrum of potential social mobility, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin are cast between Qiao Qiao and Bin Bin’s girlfriend. The two male protagonists experience a type of limbo: they are stuck in a detestable birthplace, yet they resist the sense of belonging they could enjoy if they used the local language; they are teased by the promise of upward mobility that Putonghua affords, yet that language carries the taint of rootless, nonlocatable subjectivity. The unemployed and disenchanting teenagers drift between the erotic massage parlor, the pool hall, the disco, and the private KTV bar, never escaping from their stagnant hometown. In the end, after their abortive bank robbery, Xiao Ji flees on his motorcycle until it splutters and stops; Bin Bin, having been arrested, is ordered by a policeman to sing Richie Xianqi Ren’s pop song *Ren Xiaoyao*. The talismanic significance of the movie theme song lyric “英雄莫问出身太单薄” (Don’t ask a hero how humble his origin is) resonates with the small-town teenagers. The futility of struggle and resistance conveyed in the film’s ending scenes recalls the mundane closing scene of *Platform*, where Cui Mingliang is found dozing on a lazy afternoon, while his wife and toddler play in front of a whistling kettle. The hometown, a humble and isolated backwater, is the site of the local youths’ hopeless rebellion—a place they want to escape but cannot.

Intellectuals’ Representation of the Subaltern in Recent Underground Films in Local Languages

Jia Zhangke’s documentary filmmaking style, featuring local languages, small-town settings, marginalized protagonists, nonprofessional actors, long takes, and digital

video (DV) shooting, set an agenda for independent feature films in the new century. Recent movies in local languages deal unsparingly with sensitive and controversial topics in contemporary China, such as prostitution, unemployment, peasant migration, illegal mining, homosexuality, and religion. For example, Li Yang's *Mang Jing* (Blind Shaft, 2002), in Henan Mandarin, is a crime story that is both chilling and provocative. Two con men murder fellow workers in the illegal coal mines and claim compensation by posing as relatives of the victims. In a sympathetic light, the film explores the social factors responsible for the criminals' moral decline. Wang Chao's *Anyang Ying'er* (Orphan of Anyang, 2001), in Henan Kaifeng Mandarin, is about a laid-off worker who, after adopting the baby of a prostitute from the Northeast, ends up imprisoned for killing a local gangster, the orphan's alleged birth father. Liu Bingjian's *Kuqi de Nüren* (Crying Woman, 2002), in Guizhou Mandarin, is a black comedy about a debt-ridden woman who becomes a professional mourner, putting on a show of wailing at funerals. Gan Xiao'er's *Shan Qing Shui Xiu* (The Only Sons, 2002), in Cantonese, explores how Christianity offers comfort to impoverished rural Chinese such as Ah Shui, who has to sell his only baby boy to raise money to commute his criminal brother's death sentence to life imprisonment. Yet after both his brother and wife die, the dying Ah Shui despairs: he is unable to take care of his baby who is returned to him in the state's crackdown on baby traders. With a similar concern about China's moral and spiritual anarchy, Ning Hao's *Xianghuo* (Incense, 2004), in Shanxi Datong Mandarin, depicts a young Buddhist monk who tries every means, including swindle, to collect money to repair a statue of the Buddha in his rural temple, only to find that the temple is about to be torn down to make way for a road. Promoted as the first Chinese lesbian film, Li Yu's *Jinnian Xiatian* (Fish and Elephant, 2001), in Mandarin with local accents, eloquently depicts the pulse of lesbian life in Beijing by unfolding an elephant keeper's relationship with her (ex-

)girlfriend, while her mother desperately sets her up with prospective husbands. Against the backdrop of metropolitan life as well, Cheng Yusu's *Women Haipa* (Shanghai Panic, 2001), in Shanghai Wu and adapted from Mian Mian's novel of the same title, exposes the decadence, self-indulgence, violence, and ennui of the big city's *linglei* (alternative) generation.

Although earlier films occasionally made extensive use of local languages,⁵³ the recent profusion of underground and independent films deviating from Putonghua Mandarin marks a turning point in film dialogue. Film scholars Sheldon H. Lu and Emily Yueh-yu Yeh (2005: 7) even propose a new category of "Chinese-dialect film" as a subgenre of Chinese-language film. Consistent with Gunn's findings in films of the 1990s, the rhetorical use of local languages in recent Chinese underground and independent films is largely associated with the aesthetic of the marginal and the unassimilated. The protagonists—laid-off workers, migrant peasants, prostitutes, criminals, homosexuals, illegal mineworkers, and monks—are marginalized from mainstream society, where Putonghua Mandarin dominates. To borrow Wang Xiaobo's book title *Chenmo de Daduoshu* (The Silent Majority), these underprivileged people remain silent most of the time. When they do speak, the dialogue is usually laconic. An extreme example occurs in Gan Xiao'er's second feature film, *Juzi Chentu* (Raised from Dust, 2006), which explores religious beliefs in rural China. The female protagonist, Lin Sao, a stoic and suffering Henan villager and a Christian, speaks so tersely that her speech is mostly monosyllabic, one-word sentences such as *zhong* (okay).⁵⁴

⁵³ Films such as Zhang Yimou's *Qiuju Da Guansi* (The Story of Qiuju, 1992), Zhou Xiaowen's *Ermo* (1994), and Li Shaohong's *Hong Fen* (Blush, 1996) have been dealt with in Gunn (2006).

⁵⁴ *Zhong* is a Henan Mandarin word meaning "okay" or "all right." Information is based on the film script provided by the director.

Here, subaltern theory may be helpful in exploring the common feature of the silent protagonists and their sparse dialogue in the films just mentioned. Ranajit Guha (1988: 35) explains that subalterns are nonelite groups, the people of “inferior rank” in a society, “whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.” Gayatri Spivak’s seminal article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” asserts that in the context of (post)colonial production, the subaltern cannot speak. The subaltern may make an attempt at self-representation yet fail to achieve the dialogic level of utterance between speaker and listener. She notes elsewhere that “subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive” (Spivak 1988a: 11). Taking the notion of “subaltern” in a more empirical sense, Hershatter (1993) argues instead that the subaltern can speak: the disenfranchised Chinese underclass, or more specifically the prostitutes in early twentieth-century Shanghai whom Hershatter studies, left discursive traces for a historian to investigate, identify, and analyze. At the same time, Hershatter agrees that Chinese intellectuals in semicolonial Shanghai employed prostitution to articulate their own sense of subalternity. Insofar as the present study is concerned, the otherwise-invisible underclass, in Hershatter’s sense of “subaltern,” becomes publicly visible and thus seems empowered in these quasi-documentary independent films. Yet the question posed here is whether we can *trace* the intellectuals’ or elites’ voice in their seemingly objective re-presentation of the subalterns’ lives.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Spivak (1988b: 275) distinguishes two “related but irreducibly discontinuous” senses of representation: “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy.” The underground filmmakers’ representation of the subalterns is presumably closer to the second sense of “re-presentation,” as staging or signification.

To accept Hershatter's view of the possibility of multiple, relational degrees of subalternity, the previously mentioned independent filmmakers could be regarded as "subalterns." These movies were debut features for most of the directors, who were amateurs lacking formal training in directing films. Li Yang had been an actor,⁵⁶ Li Yu a TV hostess. Neither Jia Zhangke, Wang Chao, Gan Xiao'er, nor Ning Hao majored in film directing at the Beijing Film Academy (BFA), the most orthodox of Chinese film institutions to produce directors. In the Chinese film world, then, these newcomers are relegated to the margins, in comparison with the established Fifth Generation directors and recognized independent filmmakers such as Zhang Yuan. Having become a German citizen, Li Yang, for example, faced questions about whether his film should be classified as a German or a Chinese production. He was aware of being "on the margins as a Chinese filmmaker working illegally in China and basing himself outside the country" (Teo 2003). Jia Zhangke had a different experience of marginality. Having twice failed to pass college entrance exams, Jia was not officially enrolled by BFA in 1993 and was permitted only to audit paid courses, without guarantee of a graduate diploma four years later. His major was not film directing but film theory in the department of literature—a marginalized field.⁵⁷ In many senses, Jia felt himself to be (and was seen to be) profoundly subaltern with respect to his filmmaker peers. While shooting *Xiao Shan Going Home*, he developed an increasingly strong sense of himself as a "migrant worker type of filmmaker" (*dianying mingong*) (Hao 2005: 133). Jia's representation of the migrant peasants becomes something of a self-representation, or a re-representation. In the words of Hershatter (1993: 111-112), "their sense of their own subordination shaped the rhetorical uses that intellectuals made of subaltern groups," and they use an "even

⁵⁶ Li Yang had been an actor for a long time before he studied film directing in Germany.

⁵⁷ As in the interview with Wu Wenguang (2000: 187-189), Jia admits that he chose this major not out of personal interest but as a strategy, because it gave him a better chance of getting enrolled.

more subordinated group as a metaphor through which to articulate their own subordination.”

In this light, Jia’s passionate advocacy of amateurism can be viewed as asserting a higher position for directors who lack the symbolic capital in the field. He declares that shooting movies should not be the privilege of those with BFA degrees, especially those who majored in directing; everyone has the right to make films. Jia’s influential article “The Age of Amateur Cinema Will Return” (1998) passionately defends the importance of “amateurism” at the dawn of the DV era: it is a call for an individualistic, creative, sincere filmmaking spirit to stand against the rigid, repetitive, soulless conformity to professional formulas. Zhu Wen, the writer-turned director of the DV film *Haixian* (Seafood, 2000), believes that art has to come from amateurs in order to sustain its vitality. Professional training is not important for shooting films, which is, to the contrary, enabled by artistic imagination and creativity (Li 2002: 103). Wu Wenguang, a documentary filmmaker, shares the optimistic view of DV filmmaking as a means of individual expression. When reflecting upon his DV-shot documentary *Jianghu* (Life on the Road, 1999), about a rural traveling circus, Wu said, “it is a really weird feeling, as if I’m shooting my own life, kind of an autobiography. I’m not certain if this performance troupe can be representative of troupes in China, but I’m pretty sure it’s about my own life” (Mei 2002: 76). Exhibitions and competitions of DV works have flourished on campuses, on websites, and on TV, especially since 2000. For young, aspiring people, the DV is regarded as a mode of individual expression: they can turn their DV cameras on any person they would like to shoot. In the process, though, they assign protagonist roles to the subalterns, who are at the same time objectified to embody, carry, and project the intellectuals’ imaginary. In this regard, the later underground filmmakers’ representations of the subalterns do not differ significantly from those of the artists portrayed in earlier

independent films. As Cui (2001: 80) describes it, the director-author's selection of the artist as subject and protagonist of the film "engenders a subjective self-representation, as the film directors themselves share with the characters a marginal position and insignificant status."

The point is not to cast aspersions on the young DV filmmakers by questioning the sincerity of their humanitarian concern and sympathy for their lower-class characters. A paradox arises: although underground films concern the lives of subalterns, the movies themselves are not readily accessible to the subalterns,⁵⁸ and therefore there is little understanding of how this audience might perceives the films.⁵⁹ The circulation of these underground films within China is limited almost exclusively to the cultural elites and intellectuals in big cities. According to Yu Aiyuan (2004: 90), there are three major channels for underground film distribution in China: sales and circulation of pirated VCDs or DVDs—the most common channel—Internet downloads, and screenings in bars or universities organized by "unofficial film clubs" (*minjian guanying zuzhi*) in major cities. Yu is also quick to point out that the underground films are still "invisible" in the sense that they are not screened on *film* in cinemas, although watching these films in the form of *videos* has become a noticeable part of urban youth subculture. The interest in these films culminated in a heated online debate, ignited by conflicting comments about Wang Chao's *Orphan of Anyang*, in film critic circles in the summer of 2002. The debate included discussion on the mentality of intellectuals and the authenticity of mimicry and representation of

⁵⁸ Chinanews.com.cn (08/10/2005) has reported that the first theater for migrant peasant workers in Beijing had screened more than 100 films between November 2004 and August 2005. Among their favorites were revolutionary films such as *Jimao Xin* (The Little Messenger) and *Zaochun Eryue* (Early Spring in February), and the recent commercial films such as *Tianxia Wuzei* (A World Without Thieves) and *Gongfu* (Kungfu Hustle).

⁵⁹ Jia Zhangke used the word "interesting" to characterize his experience of video-screening *Xiao Wu* to the Fenyang townsmen engaged in making the film: "The viewers were completely unconcerned with the film's content. Their primary thrill derived from identifying friends and relatives appearing in the film" (Wu Wenguang 2000: 207).

subaltern lives, regional differences between the director's origin and the film location, and the politics of films.⁶⁰ As film critic Hao Jian asserts in a different context,

What is most interesting is that these filmmakers are able to augment their own cultural and economical status by shooting the subalterns. It would be challenging, perplexing, and paradoxical to examine how these “migrant worker type of filmmaker,” taking advantage of both domestic film systems and international cultural operation modes, become cultural aristocrats and celebrities traveling around the world, providers of cultural productions to the white collar class, or filler in the glossy coffee-table magazines such as Trends Magazines, Avant-Garde Today, and Popular Music: Rock 'n Roll edition. (2005: 133)

Even a cursory review of these recent underground films would reveal problems of authenticity in the use of local languages, much like those encountered in Jia's films. Consider *Blind Shaft*: the two male leads play peasant murderers but speak the urbanized Mandarin varieties of the Henan cities of Zhengzhou and Kaifeng. As a viewer from Henan has commented, their city-bred accents are inappropriate for rural characters.⁶¹ Similarly, in *Orphan of Anyang*, although both the film title and the script suggest that the story is set in Anyang, the actual locale is Kaifeng, and the male lead

⁶⁰ The debate was conducted in a major online film bbs forum in China, www.xici.net, and prompted about 350 threads. In a sense this sort of informal debate in film circles echoes a larger and more scholarly debate in poetry: the polemic between intellectual writing (zhishifenzi xiezu) and popular writing (minjian xiezu) in the years 1998-2000. For a detailed analysis of the Intellectual-Popular polemic in Chinese poetry, see van Crevel (2006, forthcoming).

⁶¹ As noted, the two leads' speeches are full of expletives, which may convey masculinity or draw attention to their violent, nasty, and filthy environment. Still, to this anonymous poster, the uncensored words seem to be the language of the underclass city dweller, not of the rural peasant. See <http://wj1.cn/bbs/simple/index.php?t15241.html>

playing the laid-off worker speaks Kaifeng Mandarin. In *Fish and Elephant*, the elephant keeper speaks a strongly southern-accented Mandarin, and her mother speaks Shandong Mandarin. In *The Only Sons*, the uneducated Cantonese peasant Ah Shui, played by the Henan-native director himself, speaks a quite unnaturally pronounced, schooled language. Typical of these directors' dismissive responses to such criticisms is that as long as the audience cannot tell, the actual accent does not matter.⁶² Obviously, without subtitles, the local-language dialogues would be unintelligible to most Chinese as well as to non-Chinese audiences. And for young underground filmmakers, the international film circuits, where subtitles must be added, are the primary place to seek recognition and distribution.⁶³ Without exception, the previously mentioned films in local languages received a succession of awards in international film festivals. Take Jia Zhangke as an example: his Hometown Trilogy has won him numerous big-name international film awards, including a *Palme d'Or* nomination in the 55th Cannes Film Festival for *Unknown Pleasures*, Best Asian Film Award in the 57th Venice Film Festival for *Platform*, and Wolfgang Staudte Award in the 48th Berlin Film Festival for *Xiao Wu*.⁶⁴ Seemingly, the documentary filmmaking style appeals to the aspiring, first-time filmmakers not only because of its feasibility in a low-budget setting, but also because of its potential to attract cultural, social, and economic capital. In this sense, the use of local languages is often criticized as a component of a "formula of success," a term Geremie Barmé (1999: 194-198) uses to criticize Zhang Yuan. In a widely circulated online article, "Filmmaking Guide for

⁶² Personal communication with the director, Gan Xiao'er, summer 2004.

⁶³ Jia Zhangke clearly sets a model for his followers. The award-winning *Xiao Shan Going Home* debuted in a Hong Kong film festival and earned him funding for *Xiao Wu*. This budget film (RMB 300,000; US\$37,500) in turn brought in profits from the sale of distribution rights to overseas countries. The market success of *Xiao Wu* then financed his later, higher-budget projects. *Platform*, which cost RMB 5,000,000 (US\$625,000), is a transnational production backed by investors from Hong Kong, France, Japan, Switzerland, and China.

⁶⁴ Jia's most prestigious award so far was given for *Sanxia haoren* (Still life, 2006), which won the Golden Lion in the 63rd Venice Film Festival in September 2006.

Underground Films,” Zhang Xiaobei (2004) notes satirically that an actor’s ability to speak the desired local dialect is an underground director’s only screening requirement. Chinese subtitles can be omitted because of budget constraints, but employing a skillful English translator is paramount to a film’s success. As Sheldon Lu writes with regard to the New Chinese Cinema represented by Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, the Chinese directors are often maligned for their strategic self-orientalism, with China being “exoticized, eroticized, or politicized to create visual effects for the international community” (Lu 2001: 20). The young generation of Jia Zhangke and others face similar criticism. For the critics like Zhang Xiaobei, the use of local languages, together with marketable, attractive phrases such as “banned” or “underground,” seems more a tactical decision than an aesthetic choice or a political gesture.⁶⁵

In the context of relaxed censorship brought by reforms in China’s film industry since 2004,⁶⁶ increasing numbers of young underground filmmakers are able to work within the mainstream system. As Jason McGrath observes, they are encountering a double predicament: “in order to have any significant audience, they must successfully move either towards the international art cinema market, in which case they may be accused of pandering to foreigners, or towards the Chinese studio system, in which case they risk accusations of caving in to the authorities or to the mainstream audience” (McGrath 2007). Nevertheless, local languages continue to be employed in some new aboveground films despite the national language law promoting Putonghua in the media, therefore symbolizing “an unsettled vision of China’s culture” (Gunn 2006: 203). Jia Zhangke’s first approved film, *Shijie* (the World, 2004), on migrants’ failure to integrate into the seemingly easy-access global

⁶⁵ For a critical examination of the connotation of being “banned” or “underground,” see Jaffee (2004).

⁶⁶ Some changes explicit in the new regulations by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television include encouraging private and overseas investment, and submission of a script outline instead of full script to get a license. For details, see Zhu (2004) and Jaffee (2004).

culture, continues his hybrid linguistic style by blending Shanxi Mandarin, Henan Mandarin, Wenzhou Wu, Putonghua Mandarin, and even Russian. Gu Changwei's debut feature *Kongque* (Peacock, 2004), in Henan Anyang Mandarin, is a drama about the unfulfilled dreams of small-town youth in the late 1970s and 1980s. Li Yu's melodrama *Hongyan* (Dam Street, 2005), in Sichuan Mandarin, deals with an Oedipal relationship between a Sichuan Opera performer and her son. These movies share an overlapping trend with certain earlier studio productions in local languages, such as Lu Chuan's *Xun Qiang* (Missing Gun, 2002), in Guizhou Mandarin, Yang Yazhou's *Meili de Dajiao* (Pretty Big Feet, 2001), in Shaanxi Mandarin, Wang Guangli's *Heng Shu Heng* (Go for broke, 2001), in Shanghai Wu, and Ji Jian's *Tiangou* (Tiangou, 2006), in Shanxi Mandarin: local languages, spoken by protagonists scattered in the obscure corners of the country, continue the aesthetic of the marginal and the unassimilated. Through the lens of local languages, China as represented in film consists of fragmented subcultures, no longer reducible to a unified and coherent national culture.

CHAPTER 7

THE UNASSIMILATED VOICE CONTINUED IN RECENT FICTION IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

Gunn (2006: particularly 157-188) examines contemporary fiction that employs local language in mainland China through the 1980s and 1990s. His major argument is that local languages represent unassimilated, marginal voices. In the fiction of “supplementary history,” rendered in Beijing Mandarin, Shanghai Wu, and Cantonese, the urban local languages are associated with an unconventional, oppositional subculture that provides a narration beyond the official, master narrative of history. In the fiction on “rural themes,” rural local languages, representing a marginalized, irrational, premodern, traditional discourse, are employed to repudiate the central, rational, modern discourse signified by the use of standard Mandarin. The dialogue between the two discourses not only negates the significance of each other but also manifests mutual inadequacy and dependence in providing a holistic representation of human experience. Besides critically examining the aesthetics of local language through a close reading of the texts, Gunn also studied the writers’ conscious awareness of local language as a formal style. Whereas Wang Shuo finally finds Beijing Mandarin as an edge for him to assert a position in the literature field, Hong Ying and He Dun achieve a stylistic distinction by demonstrating the ability to control both a standard style and a local style. For writers who employ local languages such as Han Shaogong and Li Rui, the dialect writing powerfully demonstrates the insufficiency of a single national language in representing China’s diverse and distinct cultures. As for writers who practice a Putonghua style, for example, either Yu Hua in

the south or Jia Pingwa in the north, employing standard language is equally a compromise after failing to write in their native languages.

This chapter tracks new developments since 2000 in fiction writing that employs local language by focusing on two subgenres: nativist fiction and educated-youth fiction. A number of established writers of nativist fiction, who used to stick to the standard Mandarin writing style, now experiment with writing novels in the local languages of their native places. For example, Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Impalement* (Tanxiangxing, 2001), in Shandong Gaomi Mandarin; Zhang Wei's *Scandal or Romance* (Chouxing huo langman, 2003), in Shandong Dengzhou Mandarin; Yan Lianke's *Pleasure* (Shouhuo, 2004), in western Henan Mandarin; and Jia Pingwa's *Qin Opera* (Qin Qiang, 2005), in southeastern Shaanxi Mandarin. In the first part, I will discuss these writers' heightened awareness of local language and show how a) the local language and the rural world continue to constitute a marginal space where the writers critique the modern, urban center, b) folk opera rendered in local language is rediscovered as an indigenous cultural resource to resist western influence, and c) a vanishing rural community is detailed as a memory to be cherished. By comparison, the appreciation of the local in nativist fiction is not shared by writers of recent educated-youth fiction (*zhìqing xiǎoshuō*) who provide nostalgic accounts of the history of the "Educated Youth Go Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages Campaign" (*zhìshìqīngnián shàngshān xiàxiāng yùndòng*), from around thirty years ago. For example, Yan Geling's novella *Celestial Bath* (Tian Yu, around 1994)⁶⁷, Shi Xiaoke's novella *First Love* (Chulian, 1998), and Dai Sijie's novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise, 2000/2001)⁶⁸ all

⁶⁷ Yan's novella got the No. 1 literary award for the college students in the United States in 1994 (Yan 2002: 109). So it was probably written around/before 1994.

⁶⁸ The novel was written originally in French in 2000 and became an immediate bestseller in France. It was translated into English in 2001 and into Chinese in 2002. The citations in this study are based on the English version.

employ Sichuan Mandarin, and Yi Ling's novel *To Separate the Sheep from the Goats* (Ba Mianyang he Shanyang Fenkai, 2002) uses northern Shanxi Mandarin. I will analyze these novels and the adapted film versions in the second part of this chapter, and will show how the texts make a distinction between the local villagers' speaking rural dialects and the sent-down educated youth's speaking Putonghua or the urban local language. The uneducated, traditional, rural local languages are condemned, transformed, ignored, or negotiated by the educated urban narrators, thus making a difference from the use of local language in recent nativist fiction.

The Rural Local Languages in Recent Nativist Fiction

Since 2000, there has been a growing conscious awareness of local language among Chinese writers. When writing the novel *Reams of Rubbish* (Yi Qiang Feihua, 2002a), Liu Zhenyun (2002b: 28) increasingly realized the insufficiency of writing solely in Putonghua, an opinion similar to those held by Han Shaogong (1997) and Li Rui (2000). As Liu claimed, "the Chinese language has become an obstacle for creative writing. To a large degree, the imagination of the language has been desertized like the riverbeds of the Yellow River and Yangtze River. It's so dull and dry that its capacity to capture life has been destroyed. This language may be enough for those idealist-type writings, but for my works such as *Reams of Rubbish* that are meant to convey a very nuanced tone, it's far from enough." If Liu had just realized the problem of using "Chinese language" (here referring to standard Mandarin) and hadn't dealt with it when writing *Reams of Rubbish*, which is still in the standard style, he made use of local language in his next novel, *Cell Phone* (Shouji, 2003). Here, the rural local language and the primitive, unassimilated rural society become the cure for the ubiquitous moral bankruptcy of a technology-charged urban society. The hero of the

novel, Yan Shouyi, raised in a rural village in Shanxi,⁶⁹ becomes a famous television talk show host in Beijing. Indulging in the Putonghua-speaking urban life, Yan keeps lying and deceiving his women, his wife and two lovers, over the cell phone. Only after he returns to his hometown, where the virtues of fidelity and honesty are still preserved by his Shanxi-Mandarin-speaking grandma and other townspeople, is his conscience pricked, and in the end he throws his cell phone away.

Zhang Wei is famed for writing novels on rural life in his hometown in the northern Shandong peninsula, yet he didn't experiment with extensively using his native local language, Dengzhou Mandarin, until the appearance of *Scandal or Romance* in 2003. He describes this first experience as follows: "When I wrote in Dengzhou Mandarin, I experienced a pleasure I had never had before. All kinds of voices of the characters first made my ears ache, but soon brought me an unprecedented pleasure. This is a state I have been dreaming of in my long-time writing career. ... In some sense, only the dialect is the real language. Fundamentally speaking, literary writing can't depend on Putonghua, because it's a compromised language" (Han Xiaodong 2003). Instead of making a black and white distinction between the rural and the urban, as in Liu Zhenyun's *Cell Phone*, Zhang's novel puts the heroine Liu Mila in a situation that oscillates between the rural and the urban. Liu is a village girl with "big breasts and full hips." She is inspired to love studying and writing by her school teacher, Lei Ding, who is sent down to the village because of his rightist father in the 1970s. Liu is soon forced to marry Xiaocuozi, a militia officer in the neighboring village, and experiences inhuman tortures one after another. Because of her unbearable suffering and her desire to search for her lovers, first Lei Ding and

⁶⁹ In the film version, *Shouji* (2003), directed by Feng Xiaogang and screenwritten by Liu Zhenyun, Yan Shouyi's hometown changes to Henan, Liu's home province. Correspondingly, Yan's townspeople speak Henan Mandarin.

later on Tongwa, Liu escapes twice, and thereafter leads a vagrant life on the road for about twenty years until she meets Tongwa in the provincial city in the 1990s.

Although she speaks her native Dengzhou dialect, Liu Mila's local language is that of education. She is described as uttering educated words such as “shaonian” for “teenager, adolescents” rather than the local word “wa” or “hai'r” (17). Her local language is also that of romantic love, which is most manifest in her consistent writings about her romance and relationships with her lovers on the road. Liu's local language makes a sharp contrast with that of the evil powers, represented by Xiaocuozi, his father Laohuan'r, and their villager head Wuye. Their Dengzhou dialect features local slang, argot, and idioms with a connotation of cruelty, brutality, viciousness, and violence. For example, *quan* 圈 (lock up), *poda* 泼打 (exert oneself to beat hard), *liaojuezi* 尥蹶子 (not obeying, originally referring to mules or horses giving a backward kick), *niao* 鸟 (fucking, curse word prefix), *wujian* 物件 (referring to human beings as things), *titoudaozi kaiding*——*haoxian* 剃头刀子开腩——好险 (to shave one's butt with a razor: very dangerous). Although speaking the same local language, Liu can't understand Wuye's argot “*kaca*” (喀嚓), an onomatopoeia actually meaning “beheaded” (110). She also rebukes Lao Huan'r that he utters too many “dirty words” (113). Incompatible and irreconcilable with the dominant linguistic community in the village, Liu has no choice but to leave for the city. Her flight away, from another perspective, becomes a process of losing her native language. After being identified as having a Dengzhou accent several times on the road (135, 137, 157), Liu decides to change her intonation, which first sounds like that of the foreign missionaries in the old society (166). Later, heading to the provincial city where Lei Ding spent his childhood, Liu starts to work hard at learning the “broadcasting” city language from a parrot, the “niaoyu” (bird language), as the novel sarcastically describes. However, the urbanites she encounters in the city are an unfaithful wife, a

picky hostess, a subordinate currying favor with the leader, a restaurant boss using waitresses as sex workers, a domineering and unfilial son and daughter-in-law, and an aberrant and hypocritical artist. Experiencing comparable suffering here as when she was in the village, Liu finally tells Tongwa, the lover she seems eventually to settle with, “let’s speak Dengzhou dialect from today on” (303). However, speaking with an accent that even her Dengzhou townsmen cannot identify (270), Liu Mila has lost her rural identity and roots. With an accent neither rural nor urban (261), she seems stuck in a dilemma with nowhere to turn. Neither the village nor the city is the destination of her journey.

If the dialect world in Zhang Wei’s novel has been sullied and made impure so that the heroine cannot return, the dialect in Yan Lianke’s novel *Pleasure* constitutes a minimalist utopian world that is free from any ideology and any form of modernity that the contemporary society should return to. The novel takes place in a village called “shouhuo” in the Palou mountain area of western Henan. The shouhuo villagers, although physically disabled and handicapped, used to lead a carefree and happy life when they were cut off from the outside world. But after Grandma Maozhi leads the village to join the socialist commune in the 1950s, the shouhuo villagers experience political movements and traumas one after another. So Grandma Maozhi decides to withdraw the village from the commune, an effort thereafter continued for the next forty years. In the 1990s, Liu Yingque, the head of Shuanghuai county, to which shouhuo village belongs, plans to build a Lenin memorial hall to attract tourists as a part of his ambitious political dream. In order to collect money to buy Lenin’s corpse from Russia, he organizes the shouhuo villagers into two troupes of freak show performers on national tour. However, when his fantastic dream is shattered, Liu not only signs the official contract to free shouhuo village from the control of the county, but also joins the shouhuo community after deliberately crippling himself.

One of the most innovative features of the narrative is the padding part (*xuyan*), which takes the form of footnotes and provides lexical annotations and explanations for certain words in the story proper. These lexical entries are of the language specifically used in this community and those that only the shouhuo villagers can make sense of. So all the footnoted words could be regarded as part of a “dialect,” if that term is broadly defined, as in Han Shaogong’s novel *A Dictionary of Maoqiao*. However, Yan Lianke seems to have his own definition of “dialect.” Examining the twenty-four words that the writer explicitly denotes as “dialect,” more than half of them are simply about nature and objects, devoid of history and politics. For example, *rexue* (“the snow in the summer,” 3), *chudi’er* (“place,” 3), *manquanlian* (“the whole face,” 25), *dingmen* (“forehead,” 184), *wogua* (“pumpkin,” 224), and *erguasheng* (“peanut,” 224). Having a close relationship with nature and the earth, the shouhuo villagers value *shouhuo* (“pleasure, implying to seek joy while suffering in the Palou mountain area,” 3) and denounce those with a “*sileng*” (cold and hard) heart (12) and those without “*erxing*” who forget what shouldn’t be forgotten (171). By comparison, Yan doesn’t regard those words that have complex ideological and political connotations and are associated with a specific historical period as “dialect.” For example, *shejiao* (“aka socialist education movement. This is a specific historical noun. *Shejiao ganbu* refers in particular to those cadres who are engaged in the socialist education movement.” 16), *gouliekuan* (“this refers in particular to the special money to purchase Lenin’s corpse; this is the most frequently used technical word since Shuanghuai county decided to buy Lenin’s corpse.” 33-34), *rushe* (“this is an abbreviation of a historical expression that only the shouhuo villagers can understand, a historical story that solely belongs to the shouhuo village ...” 80-86). Yan Lianke’s understanding of dialect as a minimalist language divorced from history and politics, with their overloaded connotations, is most manifest in his footnote for the word

“titan”: “*titan* is not a dialect, but a special noun that the history leaves. On one hand, it refers to the terraced fields; on the other hand, it refers to the revolutionary form embodied in the unprecedented laboring in the ‘Villages Learn from the Dazhai’ movement” (224). Yan’s concept of dialect in this novel partially echoes Gunn’s analysis of the Putonghua spoken by the character Jigongzuozu in Lao Cun’s *Prurient Earth* (Sao Tu, 1993). As Gunn (2006: 178) incisively points out, “the expressions in Putonghua Mandarin are those of a particular moment in history, while the expressions of Yan’gucun [village] are not bounded by historical events, and thus appear to endure as the authentic legacy lying outside official history of the nation.”

In the interview with Li Tuo, Yan claims that language is, not only a form of expression, but also content by itself, an integral part of the story. Since dialect has been suppressed by Putonghua to an unprecedented degree, his use of dialect is to return the language to its normal state (Yan/Li 2004: 26). “Return” is a major theme of the novel. In analyzing Yan’s fictional world in *Pleasure*, Jianmei Liu (2007: 8) rightly points out that the return to the timeless, useless, traditional utopia is a critical negation of the two modern utopian dreams, “both the socialist utopia of the revolutionary period and the economic utopia of the market-reform era.” For Yan Lianke, the “return” to dialect and the dialectal utopian world in literary writing also becomes part of his rethinking of the definition of literature and literary mode. In the postscript, Yan (2004: 207-209) vehemently condemns the dominant literary mode of realism as the biggest obstacle to the development of literature. He denounces the works under the cliché label of realism as hypercritical, exaggerating, superficial, conceptualized, and dogmatic. This would echo Wang Shuo and Lao Xia’s observation that Putonghua is a hollow, exaggerating, and overpoliticized language since the Maoist era (2000: 209). Therefore, the “normal state” that Yan hopes dialect

to return his readers to would be a minimalist language that is not as ideologically and politically loaded as Putonghua in the classic works of socialist realism.

If Yan Lianke draws on local language as a reaction to the socialist legacy, in the writing of his novel *Tanxiangxing*, Mo Yan consciously explores local folk opera rendered in local language to resist western literary influence. Like his famous Red Sorghum series, this story also takes place in his hometown, Dongbeixiang town in Gaomi county in Shandong. It is set around 1900 when the Germans are building the Jiaoji railway through the farmland of the town. Sun Bing, a master of the local opera *Mao Qiang* (cat tune), kills a German railway technician who is sexually harassing his second wife. The German soldiers then take revenge and kill his wife, his two children, and many townspeople. Sun Bing therefore joins the Boxer Rebellion against the Germans. But, under pressure from the pro-German Qing government, the county magistrate Qian Ding has to hunt down and arrest Sun Bing, despite the fact that his lover is Sun Bing's daughter, Meiniang. Sun Bing is finally caught and impaled on a sandalwood stake (*tanxiangxing*). And this cruel death penalty is devised and executed by Meiniang's father-in-law, Zhao Jia, a court chief executioner who used to serve the Dowager Empress and the General Yuan Shikai before retirement.

In the postscript, Mo Yan says that this novel is about sound, a book to read with one's ears (Mo Yan 2001: 561, 566). One of the two major sounds is the local opera Cat Tune. To a large extent, the novel dwells on a Cat Tune opera with the same title "Tanxiangxing," and therefore many original lines from the opera are well integrated in the text. Sun Bing and his villagers embody the carnivalesque spirit of the folk culture in the Bakhtinian sense. Through the Cat Tune and all the folk sounds, the novel depicts a folk world, a primitive, irrational, vital, and violent world that transgresses the order the authorities try to maintain. Associated with the folk-performing art tradition, the structure of the novel is allegedly inspired by a principle

in the traditional story-telling narrative, that is, a beautiful and interesting beginning like the head of phoenix (“fengtou”), a well-developed middle part like the pork tripe (“zhudu”), and a powerful ending like the tail of a leopard (“baowei”). In the beginning and ending parts, the major characters speak out one-by-one as first-person narrators. According to Zheng Jian (2003: 68), this “modern” technique of articulating multiple subjectivities can also be viewed as borrowing from the formal device of role speaking (*daobai*) in traditional opera performance. As for the middle part, in Mo Yan’s own words, “it is seemingly written from an omniscient (third-person) perspective. As a matter of fact, it records a folk legend in a story-telling way” (2001: 561).

Mo Yan views his return to Chinese folk tradition as a reaction to the reception of western literary modes. Like most writers in his generation, Mo Yan has been influenced by Western literature and literary theories that were introduced to China in the 1980s. He expressly acknowledges his indebtedness to Faulkner as an immediate source of inspiration (Mo 1992).⁷⁰ He also admits that some of his early novels, such as *The Yellow-haired Baby* (Jinfa ying’er) and *Explosions* (Qiuzhuang shandian) in the late 1980s, bear strong evidence of influence from magic realism (Wang/Mo 2002: 16). Yet, gradually he realized that his writing should be firmly rooted in Chinese folk culture rather than being a derivative imitation of Western models.⁷¹ In the postscript to *Tanxiangxing*, he wrote, “after writing about 50,000 words, I found it has an obvious flavor of magic realism. So I decided to write it again. ... The richness of my work could be weakened consequently [in re-writing], but in order to maintain more pure Chinese folk essence, I made this sacrifice without any hesitation.” He continues,

⁷⁰ Inge, Thomas M. (1990) also writes an article entitled “Mo Yan and William Faulkner: Influence and Confluence.”

⁷¹ On this point, he shares views with the earlier roots-seeking movement in vogue in the mid-1980s, but he thinks that the folk culture he tries to explore is less exotic and grotesque than most roots-seeking fiction (Mo/Wang 2002).

“the Chinese novels used to be rooted in the folk singing and talking performing arts. But today, the novels gradually revolve into a highbrow art which borrows much from Western literature. In this context, I would call my book as a ‘great leap backward,’ and I haven’t stepped backward enough yet” (566). In an interview, he further elaborates his point, “when I said ‘I haven’t stepped backward enough yet,’ I mean that the language in my novel is still mixed with many western features; it’s not as pure as Zhao Shuli’s language. In my future writing, I hope to step backward further and use a really rustic but very vibrant language” (Zhang Huimin 2001).

Although Mo Yan takes Zhao Shuli as his model, for the critic Zhou Zhixiong (2004), Mo Yan’s folkification (*minjianhua*) is different from Zhao Shuli’s nationalization (*minzuhua*). As Zhou argues, it is true that Zhao tried to avoid Western literary devices so that his novels appear very “Chinese,” but his language is fundamentally of the modern, intellectual, enlightening discourse. Ge Hongbing (2003) shares a similar view with Zhou. Comparing Lu Xun and Mo Yan, Ge acclaims that Mo Yan’s folk, “pre-enlightenment” language raises loud the voices that have been silenced and obscured by the May Fourth intellectual discourse exemplified by Lu Xun. For example, the executioner Zhao Jia, a character in Mo Yan’s novel depicted as devoted to his career, would become Uncle Kang in Lu Xun’s *Medicine* or Ah Gui in his *The True Story of Ah Q*, an object to be criticized and condemned, rather than a subject who can speak out. So for Ge, Mo Yan rediscovers folk culture, not only to resist western influences since the 1980s, but also to challenge the May Fourth tradition that was influenced by the West as well since the beginning of the twentieth century. Gao Yuanbao (2002) does not totally agree with Ge. He warns of the danger of repudiating all the modern traditions and resorting to one purely premodern tradition. Moreover, he doubts the possibility of returning to the literature prior to the

May Fourth period since the writers at the turn of the twenty-first century, willingly or not, have been exposed to rich and varied linguistic resources across time and space.

Mo Yan explores folk language and folk culture less to search for a pure national language and national literature than to establish a distinctive personal writing style. In his interview with Zhang Huimin, Mo Yan said, “I think the biggest pursuit for a writer should be language and style. He should always strive to own a voice different or somewhat different from others. This pursuit may have nothing to do with the issue of ‘national language,’ or the Chineseness of their novels. It’s a writer’s own business.” As “minjian” (folk)⁷² became a buzzword for Chinese critics when commenting on *Tanxiangxing*, Mo Yan interprets this overused term as “to stress individualism.” He made this point clear in his interview with Wang Yao: “if a writer can make a distinction with other writers, his writing can be regarded as folk writing” (Mo/Wang 2002: 15). He further criticized the increasingly homogenized leisure literature since the 1990s that is obsessed with details of the material life on which the dreams and values of the emergent middle class are established, noting “this trendy style appears very elegant. It favors transitional words and those exaggerating adjectives. If there were just a few writers employing this linguistic style, it would be refreshing. But if everyone tries to imitate the style like a swarm of bees, it’s really tiresome.” As such, he views his resorting to folk language and folk opera as a resistance to the prevalent writing styles, whether translation style, *gangtai* style, and/or the leisure style (Zhang Huimin, 2001).

Similar to Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa also sets local folk opera as the subject for his novel entitled *Qin Opera*. In contrast to Mo Yan who optimistically returns to folk opera in hopes of finding a distinctive style, the local opera in Jia Pingwa’s fictional

⁷² For the nuances of the term translation, please refer to the footnote 52 in the Chapter Four of my dissertation.

world becomes a sad symbol of a disappearing peasant culture. This epic novel presents a marginalized and vanishing rural community with China's increasing marketization and urbanization, detailing the everyday life for over one year in the late 1990s of the Xia family and other villagers in Qingfengjie village in southeast Shaanxi. Xia Tianyi, the long-time village head in the socialist period, views land as the life of a peasant. Despite the objection of his nephew Xia Junting, the current village head who advocates building a farmer's market, Xia Tianyi calls on villagers to fill in a waste ditch called Qiligou and to transform it into arable land. Depicted in a tragic, heroic light, Xia Tianyi ends up being caught in a landslide and buried under the earth he has been so attached to.⁷³ If Xia Tianyi symbolizes the collective socialist tradition, his brother Xia Tianzhi represents the folk culture tradition. For this retired school principal, Qin opera is the spirit of the Qin land and the fundamental feature of local peasants' daily life. He is so obsessed with folk art that he wishes to use his book on the Qin opera masks as a pillow and to cover his face with opera masks when he dies. He finally dies of cancer, yet the final misery is that the whole village cannot find enough male laborers to carry his corpse to the graveyard due to the massive exodus of peasants to the cities. Among the younger generation depicted in the novel, Bai Xue (snow white), the beautiful and kindhearted Qin Opera actress, is portrayed as the incarnation of Qin opera. She marries Xia Feng, the son of Xia Tianzhi and currently a writer in the provincial city. Unlike his wife, the modern-style Xia Feng strongly dislikes Qin opera and intends to find his wife a different job in the city. But Bai Xue insists on staying in her beloved local troupe, although it is to be disbanded as the traditional opera is gradually marginalized by modern popular songs. This fundamental divergence between the two dooms their marriage to failure. Their

⁷³ Through the character Xia Tianyi, the author seems to be sympathetic to Mao's socialist narrative, which becomes a local one however.

ultimate divorce, coupled with the birth of a premature, abnormal baby, signals the incompatibility between the modern and the traditional.

In the postscript, Jia Pingwa stated that this book was written as a tombstone inscription for his vanishing hometown. In remembrance of something he would rather forget, he adopts “a detailed, dense, chronicle-style writing” to record “the trivialities of everyday life” in his hometown Dihucun in southeast Shaanxi (565). Local language is thus extensively employed to serve the mimetic function. The use of local language is usually limited to the dialogue, as opposed to the narration. Yet a remarkable feature of this novel is that it’s largely composed of dialogues. Therefore, *Qin Opera* makes use of much denser local language than do most novels allegedly written in a local language, more dense than even Lao Cun’s *Prurient Earth*. For example, randomly picking twelve pages from page 126 to page 138, there are around thirty distinctive southeast Shaanxi Mandarin words. For example, *wai* 口外 (that), *houpao* 后跑 (diarrhea), *wang* 汪 (spicy), *ta~xia~* 弹嫌 (to dislike, to grudge), *erliuzi* 二流子 (hooligan), *sigeng* 厮跟 (to go together), *jiu* 蹴 (squat on the heels), *pa~mia~gidatang* 拌面疙瘩汤 (a local porridge made of flour), *zengchu maobing* 挣出毛病 (get some illness), *zhiqi* 致气 (get irritated or annoyed), and *gouzi* 勾子 (the butt of a person or animal).

Associated with this colloquial style is a fragmentary, incoherent, and disorganized narration by a madman, Zhang Yinsheng. As the first-person narrator, Yinsheng plays an important role as a narrative device. Through his “insane” narration, the 557-page-long novel chronicles the daily life of as many as 170 characters, without a central plot or a unified thread. There are no chapter divisions either. Furthermore, as the narrator identifies himself as a local villager without much education, the novel makes no distinction between the narrated peasant characters’ language and the narrator’s language, which normally would be assumed to be an

intellectual one if the I-narrator is an alter-ego of the writer. Xia Feng, as mentioned above, is the only college-educated intellectual in the novel, but he is relegated to be a minor character, to be narrated rather than to narrate. Thus the novel depicts the totality of a rustic dialectal world, without much intrusion or interference by an assumed authoritarian, intellectual discourse. Following this line, Gao Yuanbao (2005) is quick to point out, the absence of a controlling, dominating narrative, an organized structure, and a unified plot reveals the author's inability to control his writing since the rural changes are beyond his understanding or interpretation. Jia's response confirms Gao's observation: "The village I witnessed is too complex for me to fathom. I really feel powerless, and it is painful. As a matter of fact, I tried to grasp something (to comment on or to judge), but I couldn't" (Jia/Gao 2005: 61). Thus, Jia Pingwa's experience of the anxiety of losing control compels him to document and record the authentic reality that will soon slide into memory.

Lydia Liu (1990) analyzed the voice of the madman as a pioneering voice in modern Chinese fiction. I found her analysis of Lu Xun's *A Diary of a Madman* (Kuangren riji, 1918) and Zhang Tianyi's *Notes by an Abnormal Man* (Jiren shouji, 1936) relevant to understanding the madman Yinsheng in Jia's novel. Liu interprets the insane voice of the I-narrator in Lu Xun's pioneering story as a Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse, upon which the multiple ironies of the story are based: "a series of reversals that operate on dialogized categories of reason and madness, of sense and nonsense, of cannibalism and humanitarianism, of society and the individual, of complacency and terror, and of classical and colloquial Chinese" (45). In Zhang's story, set in the 1930s, a period of "confusion about self-identity and about new and old values" (59), the voice of the I-narrator is not so assertive in terms of condemning the Confucian tradition as that of Lu Xun's madman. As Liu points out, "a group of Chinese intellectuals who have survived the triumph of the New Literary Movement

of the first and second decades are no longer content with the black and white division of tradition and revolution, and now turn to the traditional ways of life in hopes of finding more permanent values” (60). Zhang’s narrator finds himself trapped by confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity after returning to his village hometown. Experiencing a comparable cultural and social transition in the reform years, Jia Pingwa contributes to the tradition of the insane narrative voice with the image of the madman Yinsheng. Compared with Lu Xun’s double-voiced narrator and Zhang’s split-identity narrator, Yinsheng experiences a different mental anxiety and tension. On one hand, he shows an unambiguous commitment to upholding tradition, either the folk tradition or the socialist tradition. He is obsessed with Bai Xue, as the novel begins: “if I’d say it, the woman I most like is Bai Xue.” He is also one of the two villagers who follow Xia Tianyi to fill in the Qiligou. On the other hand, he is helpless and powerless in the face of the unavoidable demise of tradition. This is the dilemma he and/or the author face. Therefore in the novel, Yinsheng’s affection for Bai Xue results in his own self-mutilation. She is sympathetic to him but nothing more. Yinsheng can’t save her, her marriage, nor the declining Qin opera. Neither is he capable of organizing the villagers to carry on the unfinished Qiligou project after Xia Tianyi dies.

Yinsheng’s contradictory and ironic character is also illustrated by his attitude toward the use of Putonghua. On pages 179-180 (Jia 2005), when Junde’s daughter returns from the provincial capital to visit, she greets Yinsheng with “nihao” (hi) in Putonghua, rather than in the usual way that villagers greet each other, such as “have you had meal?” or “are your elderly healthy, your kids well?” The girl’s way of greeting at first sounds unanticipated to the narrator, yet very quickly, he reproaches her for “not speaking human words,” and asks her to “put her tongue right and say again.” Here, at first Putonghua is associated with urbanity. As the narrative continues,

the girl brags of the life in the skyscraper, the bar, and the Internet café in the provincial city, which is seen as all very exotic to her villager audiences. Yet for Yinsheng, such urbanity is earned at the sacrifice of abandoning the land and her rural roots. He knows the girl's father, Junde, had to go to the city to collect junk after failing to take good care of his land at home. In addition, it is hinted that this girl may make a living as a prostitute, as most of the village girls do after migrating to the cities. Both occupations seem despicable to Yinsheng, although they may bring them economic capital. Second, it is likely that since Putonghua is often associated with education, speaking this language would endow the girl with a certain amount of cultural and symbolic capital. Yet for Yinsheng, the economic capital is not necessarily equivalent to the cultural capital. Viewed in this way, it's not surprising to find later on that the narrator himself recites in Putonghua a literary poem that is written in classical Chinese and devoted to Bai Xue (341). It appears that he is attempting to associate Putonghua with an educated, cultural language in order to elevate his love for Baixue. But his attempt is thwarted by his inability to speak standard Mandarin. As the narrator admits, "I can't speak Putonghua well, and my Putonghua has a vinegar flavor" (341). As a result, he renders the poem in the Qin opera speech style, which sounds rather odd to Li Shangshan, the village accountant who is also good at singing Qin opera. Li quickly rebukes Yinsheng: "put your tongue right and read it well. What's the point of speaking Putonghua?" (342) Yinsheng's criticism of the girl's Putonghua is thus ironically reversed by Shangshan's dismissal of Yinsheng's Putonghua.

The Local Language in Recent Zhiqing Fiction and Films

In recent educated-youth fiction rendered in local language, it is more manifest that Putonghua, as an educated language, is largely spoken by the sent-down educated

youth, while dialect, as an uneducated language, is spoken by the local people. In this part, I will explore how uneducated, rural, local languages are condemned, transformed, ignored, or negotiated by the educated urban narrators, by examining three recent novels and their adapted films as well as one novel without a film version. In Joan Chen's film *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl* (1998), adapted from Yan Geling's novella *Celestial Bath*, the protagonist speaks her native urban Chengdu Mandarin at home. Yet, she speaks Putonghua after being sent down. Her language shift from a private space to a public space parallels the gradual exposure of her body in public, which is seduced, violated, and ruined by the local men who speak various rough rural dialects. In Dai Sijie's novel and film *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2001/2002), the two educated youths with urban accents try to transform a mountain girl and her rural accent with exposure to Western literature and art. Lü Yue's *Foliage* (Meiren Cao, 2003), adapted from Shi Xiaoke's novella *First Love*,⁷⁴ focuses only on the Putonghua-speaking educated youths and ignores the local people who speak various dialects. In Yi Ling's novel *To Separate the Sheep from the Goat*, the sent-down girl Tang Xiaoya from Beijing tries to integrate with the local people by speaking the local dialect and adopting a local name Xiaokuazi. Yet she experiences a split-identity dilemma because of her double appellations. Moreover, her identification with the local people is recognized neither by the villagers nor by her intellectual teachers.

The film *Xiu Xiu* narrates the tragic experience of a sent-down urban girl in Chengdu, named Xiuxiu. In the beginning shots, the teenage protagonist spends her final days in her urban home. Here, she speaks Chengdu Mandarin with her family and with a teenage boy in the same school who falls in love with her. In this native-language-speaking world, Xiu Xiu enjoys parental affection, neighbors' care, and

⁷⁴ My analysis will be based on the film version only, since I cannot locate Shi's novella.

dawning romantic love. However, in the film *Xiu Xiu* begins to speak Putonghua Mandarin after she is sent down to a remote Sichuan-Tibet borderland.⁷⁵ That she never speaks Chengdu Mandarin again indicates that she is forever deprived of the intimacy and pure love that only her native language could afford her. Since Putonghua is generally a language used in the public domain, *Xiu Xiu*'s body, in parallel with this public language, can no longer be concealed in a private space. Yearning to go back to her urban home, the innocent and helpless *Xiu Xiu* has to sell her body for a return permit. As her body is tortured and gradually exposed in public, her image is transformed accordingly. She used to wear colorful clothes and wear her hair in two braids. But after suffering one sexual exploitation after another, *Xiu Xiu* always wears an oversize military overcoat and leaves her hair disheveled. An interesting detail is that she begins to scratch her hair from down to up, an ape behavior she previously identified as being different from a human being's. Her change in body image that indicates her reduced humanity is a sarcastic reversal of the revolutionary slogan in the classic *White-Haired Girl*, in which a girl is transformed from a ghost into a human being by the new society.

Largely regarded as a feminist work (both the director Chen and the screenwriter/author Yan are females), this film implicitly intends to denounce men and prove that all the patriarchal discourses are in bad faith. First and foremost, the film is a bone-chilling indictment of the patriarchal figure of Chairman Mao and his infamous rustification movement that victimizes his numerous loyal and obedient children. *Xiu Xiu*'s journey from the city to the farm, and eventually to the nomadic tent on the steppes, could be an emblem of the loyal following of Chairman Mao's call in many senses. The cliché propaganda is broadcast by a male voice over a loudspeaker at the

⁷⁵ The use of her language in the film is different from that of the original novella by Yan (2002) and the published film script by Yan and Chen (1998). In both versions, *Xiu Xiu* always speaks her native Chengdu dialect. So far I haven't found out the reason for the change of language in the film version.

beginning of the film: “When we go to a place, we must integrate (*jiehe*) with the local people there; must take root and blossom at that place. Go to the countryside, go to the borderland, and go to wherever the homeland needs you most.” As the director comments in an interview, her film is full of metaphors and allegories (Li Feng 1999: 18). This sublime and grand rhetoric could become double-voiced and ambiguous, with a taint of erotic sexuality in this filmic context. For example, the word “*jiehe*” could also mean “the combination or unity between a male and a female,” and “what is most needed” turns out to be the satisfaction of the insatiable sexual desire of the local men, who speak various local dialects.⁷⁶ Taking advantage of Xiu Xiu’s innocence and helplessness, these morally corrupt men seduce and violate her, with the promise of getting her a return permit to Chengdu. But none of them keeps his promise, which proves to have been made in bad faith. For example, the local personnel officer at the headquarters of the farm, who assigned Xiu Xiu to learn horse herding in the more remote grassland, told Xiu Xiu that they will pick her up in six months; after she returns, she will form an educated-youth girl cavalry to compete with the local Iron Girl Cavalry. But the film later reveals how brutal the facts are: Xiu Xiu is not picked up in six months and has been forgotten and abandoned forever; the Iron Girl Cavalry has been disbanded for a long time; moreover, this official, who wears leather shoes with two lines of shoelace holes, turns out to be one of her persecutors. At the same time, the film does depict two morally good father figures, Xiu Xiu’s father and Lao Jin, a Tibetan herdsman with whom Xiu Xiu stays in the tent on the steppes.⁷⁷ However, neither of them can be regarded as fully a man or a

⁷⁶ Some speak Putonghua Mandarin with a strong local accent; some speak with a Sichuan local dialect, and one man speaks Tianjin Mandarin. In the film script, the various accents of these bad guys are also indicated, one with a Shaanxi accent (Yan and Chen 1998: 155) and one with a Northeast accent (165).

⁷⁷ Portrayed as a Tibetan, Lao Jin speaks rather flawless, standard Mandarin in the film, which is different from his use of local language in both the original novella and the film script. His standard Mandarin in the film version sounds odd to Chen (1999). As he argues, Lao Jin’s language seems to

masculine patriarch.⁷⁸ Xiu Xiu's father is portrayed as very feminized and domesticated. He is briefly presented in the film as sentimentally using a sewing machine to make an undershirt for Xiu Xiu before she leaves home, a household duty usually carried out by the mother in China. Lao Jin shows a mixed fatherly care and Platonic love to Xiu Xiu during her reeducation days. But he is not a man in the full sense because he was castrated twenty years ago in a tribal war. His physical impotency parallels his being incapable of protecting and saving Xiu Xiu. At the end of the film, the dignified yet powerless Lao Jin chooses to shoot the desperate girl to death as a means of salvation. He also takes his own life and dies beside Xiu Xiu's body, holding a ceremony that is both a funeral⁷⁹ and a wedding.

Like *Xiu Xiu*, the writer/director Dai Sijie's film debut *China, My Sorrow* (Niu Peng, 1989) tells a similar victimization story of a thirteen-year-old boy in a labor camp (the more derogatory term for which is *niupeng*, "cowshed") in Canton in the beginning years of the Cultural Revolution. The teenage boy is condemned as a counterrevolutionary, an "obscene disc convict" (*huangse changpian fan*), because he plays Zhou Xuan's 1930s song "Songstress of the World" (*Tianya Gen ni*) to a girl he likes. The film contrasts the use of local language and Putonghua. All the reeducated counterrevolutionaries in the labor camp speak Cantonese, regardless of their former social and cultural status.⁸⁰ By contrast, the grandiose revolutionary propaganda is broadcast from the loudspeaker in standard Putonghua, and Putonghua is used as well in the stage performance of an acrobatic troupe, which performs by mistake for the counterrevolutionaries instead of for the intended peasant audience. The troupe leader,

suggest Tibetans' assimilation to the Han culture, therefore, the film seems to lend support to the Party line of "harmonious integration under Communism" (40).

⁷⁸ Feng Lan (2004: 197-198) makes a similar observation as mine.

⁷⁹ The ending shots of hovering eagles after Lao Jin shoots himself suggest "Tian Zang" (Celestial Burial), a distinctive Tibetan funeral ceremony for a dead person in which the corpse is left under the open sky to wait for eagles to find it, so that the soul can go to heaven.

⁸⁰ One of them was formerly a university professor, and another was an artist.

who is negatively portrayed by suggesting a sex-privilege exchange with one of the female performers, speaks Putonghua, a language thus associated with abuse and corruption.

The brutality and horror of the Cultural Revolution is most aesthetically manifested in a mute character, an old Daoist monk, whom the teenage protagonist befriends in the same camp. As the film gradually reveals, the old monk is not a case of physical *muteness*, as the boy had assumed, but of *mutism*, which Michel Chion (1999: 96) defines as “the refusal to speak, for so-called psychological reasons, with no physical damage to nerves or organs.” According to Chion, the mute character or *the body without a voice*, similar to *the voice without a body*, is often “presumed to have virtually unlimited knowledge, and vision, and maybe even unlimited power” (Chion 97). In the film, the old monk is presented as detached and transcendent despite the excessively hard labor and inhuman treatment to which he is condemned. He tells the teenage boy with gestures that “freedom is in one’s heart,” when the boy asks him where and how to escape from this intolerable life. He even wears a careless smile while the chief leaves him barefoot by burning one of his Daoist boots as a punishment for his informing others in writing of the next day’s Qingming festival, in which people worship at ancestral graves. However, after the pigeons, which always accompany him during meditation, are caught and killed to improve the meal quality, the old monk is desperately driven to commit suicide. Exactly at the moment when the boy is cleaning the blood of the old monk he has just saved, the old monk uttered his “final word” in Cantonese: “You shouldn’t save me. It’s even crueler to save me than to kill me.” According to Chion, “the unveiling of his voice brings a reversal and the character’s ‘fall’ to a common destiny” (Chion 101). In the film context, the old monk has gone to his extreme of spiritual transcendence. He cannot bear the unbearable any more. The mute character utters the “great secret” he is supposed to keep, the inhuman

experience everyone in the camp is suffering yet are too oppressed to speak, which is also the crucial message the whole film is conveying.

With a similar concern about repressed humanity during the Cultural Revolution period, Dai's first novel, entitled *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2001), and its film adaptation with the same title in 2002 narrates how literature, particularly the novels by Balzac and other great French writers, awakens the repressed love and passion of two reeducated young men from Chengdu, and furthermore, changes the life of a girl in an isolated and remote mountain village in Sichuan province. Although both the male and the female protagonists speak local Sichuan Mandarin, the film as well as the novel sets up a binary opposition in their accents—the urban versus the rural, the educated versus the uneducated, and the civilized versus the primitive. The two reeducated young men, the narrator Ma Jianling and his best friend Luo Ming, both from intellectual family backgrounds, speak urban Chengdu Mandarin. In contrast, the virtually illiterate Little Seamstress, whose appellation is rather an epithet following her (grand)father's profession as a tailor, speaks a dialect with a distinct rural accent.⁸¹ Commenting on her as “uncivilized enough” (2001: 29) in the novel and on her accent as “too rustic” (*tai tu le*) in the film, Luo is determined to transform the village girl into “a refined, cultured, and urban girl” (64). In this smooth transformation, the Little Seamstress seems to embrace everything associated with urbanity and civilization that Luo and Ma introduce to her: the violin (a western instrument) and the Western tunes, the “high-tech” modern clock, and most significantly, the novels by Balzac. Along with her gradual transformation, the Little Seamstress also changes her language by imitating the two young men's urban accents. At the end, learning from Balzac that a woman's

⁸¹ The urban/rural distinction is hard to discern in the film because only one leading actor is native to Sichuan and the other two just hastily learned the accents on site. But the difference is indicated in their dialogues.

beauty is a treasure beyond price, she decides to leave the two men and the mountain to go to a big city. Her surface rebellion against the two Chinese men is fundamentally influenced by a more remote, Western male, Balzac. In this sense, the text is often read as a postcolonial text of the Western male's enlightenment of the Other, Oriental female.⁸²

Although the use of Sichuan Mandarin is dominant in both the film and the novel, the latter provides an interesting chapter in which Putonghua Mandarin is used. In order to trade some French novels from another sent-down youth, Four-Eyes, Ma and Luo volunteer to help him collect some “sincere, authentic folk songs full of romantic realism” (67), which Four-Eyes would capitalize on to facilitate his return to Chengdu. During their encounter with the old miller, a master of local folk songs, Ma pretends to be a revolutionary cadre from the capital city Beijing and Luo, his secretary. In order to match his fake official identity, Ma intentionally speaks Putonghua Mandarin instead of his native Sichuan dialect (71). Putonghua is first portrayed as an unintelligible language to the old miller, as he asks Luo “what language is he [Ma] speaking?” (71) This suggests that although Putonghua is the conventional language used to convey Party ideology and propaganda to the masses in broadcast media, it malfunctions as a communicative tool here, and therefore a translator, whom Luo plays, is needed to mediate between the “Party” and the masses. Yet, once the old miller figures out that what Ma is speaking is the official language of Beijing or the former Beiping, which the miller is more familiar with and is pronounced as Baiping, he “threw me [Ma] a look of deep respect” (72). The symbolic power of the official language is thus manifest. Despite the fact that the old miller is so isolated that he is unaware of the capital city's name change from Beiping to Beijing, he is aware of the pervasiveness and ubiquity of Communist control.

⁸² Among others, Wang (2003) provides an interesting close reading in this regard.

Nonetheless, the narrator repeatedly describes his own Putonghua Mandarin, which imitates the language in the propaganda revolutionary films at the time, as “shaky” (72) and “very poor” (74). In other words, this is a fake, artificial, and unreal language. And the artificiality of Putonghua serves as a foil to the authenticity of the local language that the miller speaks and the folk songs rendered in his local language. As the narrative continues, after the old miller sings a “ditty,” which he doesn’t consider as a “folk song,”⁸³ the two educated youths hail this as a “sincere, authentic, romantic mountain song” (79). For the first and only time, they seem identified and aligned with the local people. At the end of the chapter, the authenticity of the old miller even powerfully restores Ma’s own original, authentic identity. Cheering on the old man’s singing, Ma drinks lamp oil instead of liquor by mistake, which makes him forget his role and he blurts out Sichuan Mandarin, “What’s your moonshine made of?” (79) In an interview, Dai said that he wrote this part with much emotion, and it is to his great regret that the shots about this chapter were cut out from the film due to censorship (Wu Fei 2003). Without this part on the old miller, the film unfortunately becomes a text exclusively full of the educated youth’s superiority over the local people, the urbane elite’s enlightenment of the rural, and civilization’s triumph over the primitive.

The clear demarcation between the educated youth and the local people is also seen in the language use in the film *Foliage* directed by Lü Yue. The film narrates a love triangle among three educated youths in Yunnan. The female protagonist Ye Xingyu finds her love and passion in her chance encounter with Liu Simeng, another sent-down youth. Her struggle to balance her feelings between Liu and her longtime boyfriend Yuan Dingguo is worsened by the fact that Liu and Yuan are in hostile

⁸³ This would be reminiscent of the dialogue between Cui Qiao’s father and Gu Qing in Chen Kaige’s *Yellow Earth*. See the analysis in Leung (2003).

clique-like military regiments. The film is noteworthy for using multiple local languages and accents, such as Sichuan Mandarin, Henan Mandarin, Hunan Xiang, and many Yunnan Mandarin varieties, including those from Kunming, Honghe, and Jinghong. The director may see the multiple use of local languages as a realistic representation of the time when the sent-down youths in Yunnan came from all over the country (Jiang Wei 2003). However, the distribution of the language use is still largely based on education and urbanity. Except for one minor character, Lin Shan, who speaks Sichuan Mandarin, all the urban educated youth, regardless of their origins, speak Putonghua. For instance, Ye Xingyu speaks Putonghua, although she is portrayed as from Kunming city.⁸⁴ In contrast, the various local languages are mainly assigned to the local rural people, including the local military officers.⁸⁵

As the film is preoccupied with young intellectuals, including the love relationships among them and the violence between the two military units, Putonghua serves as the intelligible “theatrical speech” that conditions the film’s mise-en-scene (Chion 1994: 171), while the local languages are largely reduced to function as “emanation speech” that is not essential to the narrative (177). Correspondingly, the depiction of the local people is minimized, isolated, and fragmentary. In the beginning, the military personnel officer, speaking Henan Mandarin, suggests an erotic message to Ye Xinyu, who hopes to return to her urban home to take care of her sick father. Yet he never appears again in the rest of the film. The regimental commander, who gives a harsh lesson in Yunnan Mandarin to his subordinates who are obsessed with bloody fights, later on suddenly becomes lunatic after a deadly

⁸⁴ Ye’s Putonghua carries a noticeable Taiwan accent, as the actress Shu Qi, who plays Ye, is originally from Taiwan.

⁸⁵ This distribution of language use largely based on level of education is consistent with the director’s previous film *Mr. Zhao* (Zhao Xiansheng, 1998), in which the college professor Zhao speaks Putonghua, while his wife (a laid-off worker) and her friend (an ordinary local citizen) speak Shanghai Wu.

military conflict.⁸⁶ The local character that the film seems to pay most attention to is a thirteen-year-old wandering orphan, Goupi (Dog Fart), who speaks Kunming Mandarin. As a loyal follower of Liu's clique, Goupi helps Liu to contact Xinyu several times. But still, his cinematic presentation is partial and incomplete. An interesting inconsistency in the ending reveals that although the credits list the actor's name for the grown-up Goupi, the film itself provides no scene about the adult Goupi. Paralleling the carelessness of the production crew, Wei Hong, Xinyu's best girlfriend in the film, is contemptuous toward the local rural people. Wei refuses to teach a literacy class (*saomang ban*) because she thinks that the illiterate local people "are too dumb to learn." She cites the classical phrase "Xiumu buke diao ye" (rotten wood cannot be carved) from *The Analects* to describe them. Xinyu then takes Wei's teaching position, but she seems more motivated by viewing teaching as a break from physical labor. In one scene, Xinyu asks, in Putonghua, her rural students to review at home the new characters that denote all kinds of cooked meat, yet one of them argues in his Yunnan dialect the uselessness of this assignment: "practicing those words would make them hungrier." Although this detail is presented in a comic tone, the film, intentionally or not, reveals a contrast between their living conditions. In the next shot, Xinyu receives a bag of cans of meat from Goupi on behalf of Liu. The local people are thus presented as both spiritually and materially impoverished compared with the educated youths.

If *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is still about how the educated youths transform the local people and their rural accents, *Foliage* is mainly concerned only with the educated youth and ignores the local people. Nevertheless, in both texts the educated youth keep a conscious distance from the local people, and there is a

⁸⁶ The presentation of the two officers may be interpreted to be consistent with the film's theme: the irregularity, coincidence, and destiny of life. But still, the editing seems too abrupt for many audiences.

clear distinction in their languages and accents. In this sense, Yi Ling's novel *To Separate the Sheep from the Goats* seems to present an image of a counter-stereotypical educated youth who is eager to be integrated with the local people by learning their dialect. Set against the background of the tide of education return (*jiaoyu huichao*) at the end of the Cultural Revolution, the novel revolves around a fifteen-year-old educated youth from Beijing, Tang Xiaoya or Xiaokuazi, and her romance with her math teacher, Jiang Yuanlan, in the Xicheng middle school in North Shanxi. As mentioned above, the teenage heroine has two appellations. As the first-person narrator narrates, "in the city, I am 'Tang Xiaoya' 唐小丫, and my nickname is 'Xiaoya' 小雅. I heard from my mother that my father won her heart for citing the piece "Caiwei" (to collect Wei) from *Xiao Ya* (Minor Odes in the Book of Poetry), so my name became a mark in memory of their love. In the village, my name is 'Xiaokuazi' 小垮子, with a nickname 'a very stupid gourd'" (5). "Ever since I came to the village, the villagers call me 'Xiaokuazi' because of my terrible outsider accent. In the beginning, I asked Hudie, Niubanjing, Quhubao, and other villagers to teach me the rustic language (*tuhua*). ... Soon, I spoke the *tuhua* very fluently, and I also became integrated with the local fellows who taught me the dialect." (9) Here two different identities are associated with the two appellations. Her original name is not only a typical girl's name in North China but also indicates her intellectual family background. By contrast, with the local name "Xiaokuazi," the heroine is depicted as a rough, uneducated, and genderless local teenager. She speaks a coarse North Shanxi dialect featuring the local expletives such as "qiu" (fuck) and "ye" (I, your grandfather, similar to the Putonghua "laozi"). She is a daredevil who often volunteers to carry corpses, a deed even the guys are scared of (6-7). Unlike the two book-loving educated youths in the *Little Chinese Seamstress*, Xiaokuazi hates school and rather prefers heavy labor, or in the local word, "shou." Always consciously speaking with

the villagers in their dialect, she is ready to be integrated with the local peasants, who have some qualities she admires. For instance, she comments on Wei Fengyan, one of her best peasant friends, that “her roughness and chivalry are just what I want” (97).

To a large degree, the dialect-speaking heroine, aligned with the local peasants, seems intended to contrast with her school teachers, those purged rightist intellectuals who graduated from some of the most prestigious universities in China. The contrasts between Xiaokuazi and the intellectuals are twofold in terms of language use. First, all the intellectual teachers speak Putonghua. This is consistent with the principle of body matching voice. For example, the hero Jiang Yuanlan, who got his BS degree in math from Nankai University and his MS from Xiamen University, speaks a language featuring math jargon, classical Chinese, literary Chinese, and even German and other foreign language words. His intellectual language makes a sharp contrast with Xiaokuazi’s uneducated dialect. Second, all the intellectual teachers are portrayed as speaking nonstandard Putonghua with heavy accents, which would mark their outsider identity. Among these are Jiang Yuanlan’s Cantonese accent, the Politics teacher’s Shanghai Wu accent, and the Chinese teacher’s Hakka accent. In the novel, Xiaokuazi frequently uses *women* (we, our), a word with a strong exclusive implication, to underscore her assumed inclusion in the local linguistic community, while she uses *nimen* (you) to categorize her intellectual teachers as *waishengren* (persons from other provinces). Interestingly, the first-person narrator often assumes a superior position when describing the intellectuals’ accents. On page 100, the narrator details a chaotic class in which Xiaokuazi and her classmates mock the Hakka accent of their Chinese teacher, who pronounces “chu” (beginning) as “chuo,” “yāoqiú” (demand) as “yǎoqiú,” and “nanfang” (south) as “lanfang.” Xiaokuazi’s ability to judge and evaluate the “nonstandardness” of the intellectuals’ Putonghua, a linguistic superiority the narrator may extend to other villager students here, implies her competence in

Putonghua and the associated “educated youth” identity. As a matter of fact, the novel does briefly reveal one occasion when Xiaokuazi deliberately speaks Putonghua and explicitly states her *zhiqing* identity in order to avoid paying the train ticket (120).

Nonetheless, the heroine’s willingness to identify with the local people and her intention to be differentiated from the intellectuals are not necessarily recognized by either group. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator “I” feels alienated when she finds that the village head enrolls her name on the school rooster with “Tang Xiaoya” rather than “Xiaokuazi” (5). Yet, as much as she embraces her local identity and prefers her local name, that name paradoxically indicates her outsider identity forever. As implied earlier, *kuazi* literally means someone with an outsider accent, a local term that the local villagers should easily make sense of. Although most teachers are insensitive to her local name, which may conversely confirm their nonnative identity, the politics teacher can still make an inference from her name and judge her as “at least a *waishengren*” (56), the very term Xiaokuazi often uses to distinguish her “outsider” teachers from herself. Besides her local name, her fluent local language is not sufficient to achieve a local identity. Jiang, who falls in love with Xiaokuazi later, seems to negate her local identity at the very beginning. As he later tells Xiaokuazi, “when I first saw you in the cinema, I didn’t think you’re native here, although you speak Xicheng dialect very well” (353). So from the very beginning Jiang distinguishes Xiaokuazi from the rest of the villager students and aligns her more with himself and other intellectuals.

As the teacher, mentor, lover, and “father,”⁸⁷ Jiang serves as the agent for Xiaokuazi’s self-realization of her identity. It is mainly through memories evoked in her daily make-up sessions in Jiang’s dorm that Xiaokuazi gradually reveals her

⁸⁷ The narrator recalls her hostile relationship with her father, who is often absent from home. Jiang, who is about twenty-seven years older than she, seems to be the “lost father” she is looking for.

internal, urban identity. The food in Jiang's dorm, such as *jizaibing* (a kind of Cantonese cookie) and *yezitang* (coconut candy), reminds Xiaokuazi of her grandma's home in Guangzhou and of her urban, educated lifestyle in Beijing. Moreover, Jiang's Cantonese accent is simultaneously presented both as an outsider accent indicating differentiation and exclusion, and as a sound from her hometown evincing proximity and empathy. On page 68, when assigning Xiaokuazi a math question, Jiang pronounces "ershi tou xiaoyang" (twenty lambs) as "aoxi tou xiaoniang," "xiaoniu" (calf) as "xiaoyou," and "jiushisi tou xiaozhuzai" (ninety-four piglets) as "jiuxixi xiaojuzai." On one hand, his nonstandard accent is depicted as laughable to the Putonghua-competent protagonist. On the other hand, as the narrator immediately writes nostalgically, "the sound from my hometown (*xiangyin*) transcends space and time, and I don't know where my real hometown is." Confused by her split identity, the heroine seems to keep her local peasant identity at the conscious level and her urban intellectual identity at the subconscious level. There are two moments when she unconsciously speaks Putonghua. On the first occasion, the crayons in Jiang's dorm remind Xiaokuazi of her drawing class in elementary school in Beijing. While drawing two ducklings, she unconsciously utters, supposedly in Putonghua, the popular ballad-like instruction in duck drawing. It is also at this moment that Jiang confirms her educated-youth identity (223-224). On the second occasion, when making a call to the village, she unconsciously speaks in a soft, polite Putonghua, which is mistaken as the voice of a female spy by a villager, who therefore hangs up the phone (318). In this context, Putonghua is associated with an explicit gender identity (female) and a different class identity (spy). Still, it is Jiang who redefines her gender identity and class identity. Toward the end of the novel, too eager to marry Xiaokuazi, the idiosyncratic Jiang fabricates a crime, "I raped the Beijing educated youth Xiaokuazi, no, not Xiaokuazi, but Tang Xiaoya" (513). By correcting his slip of the tongue

regarding her name, Jiang negates the heroine's local peasant identity and reclaims her identity as an urban educated youth. Furthermore, by using the word "rape," Jiang confirms the female gender of the object of his discursive violence and restores her female identity, which had been erased by her genderless local name. As such, Jiang's love for, and transformation of, Xiaokuazi is far from the urban intellectual's enlightenment of the rural masses, as some Chinese critics have misinterpreted it. The novel is still a love story between two intellectuals. As narrated in the epilogue, Xiaokuazi, now a college graduate in Beijing, returns on a visit to Shanxi to look for Jiang during the 1990s. No matter how eagerly she had tried to identify with the local people, Yi Ling's heroine ends up joining with the educated-youth characters as previously analyzed.

Thus we see that the uneducated, traditional, rural local languages are either condemned, as in *Xiuxiu*, transformed, as in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, ignored, as in *Foliage*, or negotiated, as in *To Separate the Sheep from the Goats*. The voices of local people are still silenced, obscured, marginalized, or unassimilated in these recent educated-youth fiction and films narrated by urban cultural elites.

CONCLUSION

My dissertation examines recent cultural productions in the fields of television, film, popular music, the Internet, and fiction in mainland China since 2000 through the lens of local languages. Drawing on cultural and literary theories, media studies, sociolinguistics, and dialectology, this interdisciplinary research argues that local language plays a prominent yet diversified role in contemporary China's culture. In television, local language functions as a humorous and satirical mechanism to evoke laughter that can foster a sense of local community and assert the local as the site of distinctive cultural production. In film and fiction, local language serves as an important marker of marginality, allowing filmmakers and writers rhetorically to position themselves in the margin to criticize the center and to repudiate the ideologies of modernism. On the Internet, local language has been explored by the urban educated youth to articulate a distinct youth identity in their negotiation with a globalizing and cosmopolitan culture.

Although television proves still important to the continued promotion of local languages in mass media since 2000, the Internet, which has the potential to bring together the traditional media, plays an increasingly prominent role in disseminating the use of local language. There are many regulations to contain the use of local language in the traditional broadcast media, but there is no such censorship on the Internet yet. The TV programs banned from broadcasting are still accessible on the Internet. For example, one can still watch and download the shows in the short-lived dubbing program *Ju lai feng* of Shandong TV on a youtube-like website tudou.com. Qingdao MC Shazhou's albums, after being banned in the local audio-video market, are still available for download on his website mcshazhou.5d6d.com. Moreover, many local TV stations upload their dialect shows online, for example, Hangzhou TV's

Aliutou shuo xinwen on the www.hangzhou.com.cn. The programs, which used to be watched by a limited local audience in a specific locale (such as in Hangzhou), are now consumed and enjoyed by a “local” audience (such as Hangzhounese) who transcend the spatial and temporal limitations. The locality is inextricably intertwined with the notion of transnationality in the age of the Internet.

The few studies on the new technological media and transnationality concerning China, such as Mayfair Yang (1997), Guobin Yang (2003), and Kang Liu (2004), are preoccupied with nation-state border crossing and thus have a strong feel of cultural politics. Briefly speaking, the imagined transnational Chinese community is viewed as a larger space beyond the national borders; what the transnational subjectivity is associated with is a deterritorialized national border and a disembedded state space; either the Chinese within the national border or the overseas Chinese seem to be identified as a homogeneous and undifferentiated whole. These nation-centered studies fail to notice that the media, especially Internet, could also be the vehicle for imagining a local community, such as the SHN virtual community for the diasporic Shanghai youth all over the world. As my study in Chapter five shows, these basically apolitical Shanghai youth employ local languages mainly to articulate a distinct and unique youth identity. Such constructed local identity may have little or no impact on the national border redefinition or deterritorialization. Whether and how this local identity would foreground, negotiate with, and challenge the national identity seems to me still an open question, as Chineseness per se is rarely an issue of concern for the Hip Hop generation.

The new millennium also witnesses a trend of the rehabilitation and resurgence of traditional folk culture: the national popularity of Zhao Benshan’s Northeast *Errenzhuang* troupe performances, the enthusiasm in 2006 for the *Xiangsheng* performer Guo Degang, who insists on performing the comic cross talk in teahouses,

the sold-out performances of *huajixi* opera played by the comedians-turned TV hosts in Hangzhou area, and the buzzword “folk” or *minjian* in Chinese literary critique within China, to name a few. Although the modern media such as radio and television have long been viewed as posing a competitive threat to the premodern folk culture, it seems in fact to have played a role in the re-appreciation of the traditional art. Nevertheless, as the previous chapters have revealed, the local folk culture has been appropriated and transformed in a variety of ways. The staging of *Errenzhuan*, folk operas, and other folk forms in the CCTV Gala, the most prestigious cultural spectacle of the mainstream media, seems to convey a cultural message from the state and the mainstream society that no valuable cultural heritage has been sacrificed, victimized, or will perish in China’s modernizing process. The local television stations and radios capitalize on the entertaining function and commerciality of local performing arts, and furthermore, use local cultural heritage to assert a distinctive cultural identity. The writers such as Mo Yan rediscovered the folk opera as an indigenous cultural resource to resist western literary influence. The current revival of Chinese local, traditional, and indigenous culture has to be considered in the context of globalization, as it joins a wider trend of the global and local synergy. Examined in Rob Wilson’s edited book *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (1996), the cultural appropriation and nativist resistance take place worldwide. Among others, Liao Ping-hui mentions the resurgence of Taiwan’s aboriginal cultures with the help of the bilingual intellectuals’ cultural criticism columns. Likewise, to draw on local folk cultural resources to resist global homogenization has also become a knee-jerk response from China and the Chinese communities.

Nevertheless, to what degree the media use of local language can foster a sense of local community is still debatable. As local languages themselves participate in a linguistic and cultural hierarchy, the local media productions often perpetuate the

regional stereotypes in the use of local languages and confirm the elevated status of the local language that enjoys the regional hegemony. It is not difficult to find that the major, positive characters usually speak the hegemonic local language of the region, be it Chengdu Mandarin, Chongqing Mandarin, Xi'an Mandarin, Guangzhou Xiguan Cantonese, Hangzhou Wu, or the urban Shanghai Wu, whereas the comedic characters and/or the characters of less prominence speak the “stigmatized” rural local languages of lower status, for example, the often manipulated and defeated cat dubbed in Zhongjiang Mandarin in the Sichuan version of *Tom and Jerry*, the illiterate, impetuous cook Big Mouth Li speaking Chongmingdao Wu in the Shanghai Wu version of the sitcom *My Own Swordsman*, and the clownish, “rustic” cook Ah Jiao speaking the rural Huazhou Cantonese in the Cantonese sitcom *Native Husbands with Outsider Wives*. As expected, the audiences who are not in the regional center have been offended or alienated by the hierarchical use of their local languages in the media. Furthermore, due to the vast linguistic variety of Chinese local languages, the media use of the “central” local language may only evoke linguistic and cultural proximity among the audience speaking that dialect, and not among any other audience outside that geographic center. For example, the Taiyuan Mandarin in the Shanxi news talk show “Laoxi'r pie ba” (Laoxi'r chat bar, 2005—) can hardly strike a responsive chord among the audiences in Linfen in the south Shanxi, where the dialects are much different from Taiyuan Mandarin/Jin. Therefore, the media use of the regional hegemonic local language has the chance of dividing and fragmenting the region more than fostering a unified sense of local community.

Regarding research approach, intonation, the peculiarity of the Chinese language as a tonal language, provides an intriguing point of view in my analysis of the use of local language. In the various dialect-speaking comic sketches shown on CCTV's Galas examined in Chapter Four, I found that a key difference between the

staged Mandarin varieties and the standard Putonghua Mandarin is the Chinese characters' tonal change in the phonetic sense. Sometimes, a certain degree of the tone distortion would lead the pronunciation to be identified as a northern Mandarin variant. So I argue that the staged or rendered Mandarin varieties, identifiable or unidentifiable as specific dialects, could be viewed as forms of accent liberation from the single Putonghua Mandarin. The intonation of the official language can relatively freely undergo deployment and differentiation within the range of its basic, standard tone. In this sense, Putonghua is no longer uni-accentual, isolated or closed, but can be exaggerated, distorted, or diffused, thus becoming multi-accentual, plural, unfinished, and unpredictable. Again, intonation becomes an issue when I compared the rock songs and rap songs both employing local languages in Chapter Five. Whereas migrant rock musicians largely employ the intonation variations of local language to signify a marginal outsider identity, the urban rap singers capitalize on the local vocabulary resources to articulate a privileged local identity that celebrates their home cities. Furthermore, recognizing the influence of the Chinese tones on the musical composition, the musician Zhang Guangtian championed the traditional principles of the melody-tone relationship in folk music, particularly that of "yi zi xing qiang" (the melodic pattern of the composition in accord with the tonal pattern of the Chinese characters), whereas Cui Jian found the four tones of the Putonghua impose an undue restriction on the globalization of Chinese music. A more integrated research is needed in the future to explore the emotive-affective aesthetics and decentering, political implications of Chinese intonation in the mediated stage performance.

This research explores the use of local language by considering distinction of fields of cultural productions and audience. As much as this approach proves necessary and right, we should be aware of the fact that functions of local language may overlapp between different fields that interact with and mutually influence one

another. Gunn (2006: 124-125) pointed out that the use of local language in CCTV-Henan docudrama *Hei huaishu* (The black ash tree, 1992) as “a cultural emblem of marginalized society” might be inspired by Zhang Yimou’s film *Qiuju da guansi* (The story of Qiu Ju, 1991) released one year before. In the film field, I would argue that the mainstream, officially approved comedy films in local language, which this study has not yet explored much, bear more resemblance to the sitcoms and telenovelas than the underground and independent films. For example, the close relationship between Feng Xiaogang’s series of New Year’s Comedies (*hesuipian*) in the 1990s and Wang Shuo’s 1990s media productions is obvious, not only because both depict the Beijingers’ urban life experiences and feature a distinct Beijing Mandarin flavor, but also because many productions, such as the sitcom *Bianjibu de gushi* (Tales of an editorial department, 1991-1992) were collaborations by Feng and Wang. Moreover, most mainstream comedy films portray the slice of life of ordinary citizens, a theme shared with most sitcoms analyzed in Chapter one. Correspondingly, the protagonists of the comedies are those ordinary members of the urban *shimin* class, for instance, the three-member family in Shanghai who are involved with various exams and contests in *Kaoshi yijia qin* (Family tie, 2000), in Shanghai-Wu accented Putonghua; the factory worker Zhang Damin and the pedicab driver Liu Hao (both played by the comedian Feng Gong) who lead a not-well-do yet optimistic life respectively in *Meishi touzhe le* (A tree in the house, 1998), in Tianjin Mandarin, and *Xinji chibuliao re doufu* (You can’t swallow hot tofu by being impatient, 2005), in Hebei Baoding Mandarin; the three middle-aged, unemployed performers in the local Henan opera troupe in *Jiquan buning* (One foot off the ground, 2006), in Henan Mandarin; and the security chief Bao Shihong in a failing state factory in Ning Hao’s blockbuster *Fengkuang de shitou* (Crazy Stone, 2006), mainly in Sichuan Mandarin. Nonetheless, it is hard to argue that the laughter evoked in the mainstream comedy films, which

target a national audience, helps foster a sense of local community, as most local telenovelas and short-story TV programs shown to a local audience have done. At the same time, these comedy films differ from underground films at least in two senses. One is audience. The officially approved comedies are allowed to be shown to a national audience, yet the underground films are often largely inaccessible to the domestic audience and may target an international audience. Related to this, the local languages in most underground films are virtually nonsensical to most Chinese audiences if without subtitles, whereas the accented Mandarin varieties in the comedy films are largely intelligible to a national audience. Thus, unlike the underground films, the mainstream comedies do not use local language to achieve an aesthetic effect by replacing the clarity of theatrical speech.

Finally, compared with mass media, fiction is often exposed for its limitation in representing local language as a sound. However, the writer Chen Zhongshi offers an interesting defense for rendering local language in the written text. Commenting on the play version of his novel *Bailuyuan* (White deer plain, 1993), which was staged by Renyi artists in Shannxi Mandarin in 2006, Chen Zhongshi (2007) said that some local vulgarities, such as “ri yi hui” (screw you) used by the secret lovers in his novel, sound jarring when heard in the public stage; his narration of the private conversation between the two involved parties only is for visual effect and not suitable for reading aloud. In other words, the play version erased ambiguity, intimacy, and privacy in the process of audio rendering. In comparison, the young Internet generation offers a different aesthetic effect of defamiliarization and reorientation in transcribing the audible local language into visual written text. Unlike most writers, the Internet-savvy youth avoid using the original characters for the dialect words but rather pick the characters that denote the same or similar sounds to transcribe the dialects. Nevertheless, the thorny problem of the transcription of Chinese local languages has

been a perplexing issue for Chinese intellectuals in various local communities. As one topic in my future research, I will survey the debates, proposals, and practices in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and explore how factors such as representation of subalterns, the politics of writing, local identification, stylistic distinction, and youth entertainment vary in time and space.

My dissertation is part of the endeavor to explore a new area of research which examines popular culture from the perspective of (local) language. As many materials merit further and deeper analysis, and as still newer materials continue to emerge, my work becomes a project of “becoming.” As such, many topics and issues discussed in this part serve more as outlines for future studies than assertive conclusions.

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