

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Old Stories, New Media: Transmedia Adaptation of Chinese Antiquity

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7d10357p>

Author

Wang, Yiwen

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

**Old Stories, New Media:
Transmedia Adaptation of Chinese Antiquity**

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Yiwen Wang

Committee in charge:

Professor Daisuke Miyao, Chair
Professor Morana Alac
Professor Page duBois
Professor Pinghui Liao

2022

Copyright

Yiwen Wang, 2022

All rights reserved.

The Dissertation of Yiwen Wang is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, my grandad, my parents, and my peers in the historical fan communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiii
VITA.....	xviii
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	xx
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	34
CHAPTER 2	130
CHAPTER 3	207
CHAPTER 4	235
REFERENCES	266

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure i.1 Traditional Information Theory.	9
Figure i.2 Shanon’s Information Theory.	9
Figure i.3 Lacan’s inverted vase.	25
Figure 1.1 Zhuge Liang looking right.	43
Figure 1.2 Lu Su looking left.	43
Figure 1.3 Zhuge Liang and Lu Su.	44
Figure 1.4 Bordwell, 180 degree rule.	45
Figure 1.5 Outward Look.	46
Figure 1.6 Sunset.	47
Figure 1.7 Silhouette of Zhuge Liang and Lu Su.	47
Figure 1.8 Gou Jian.	51
Figure 1.9 Fu Chai.	51
Figure 1.10 Gou Jian.	51
Figure 1.11 Fu Chai.	51
Figure 1.12 Gou Jian.	54
Figure 1.13 The Qin Empire.	55
Figure 1.14 The Qin Empire.	55
Figure 1.15 Ying Qian.	55
Figure 1.16 Shang Yang.	55
Figure 1.17 The Great Revival.	57
Figure 1.18 Lacan’s Visual Paradigm.	59
Figure 1.19 Human Sacrifices.	63
Figure 1.20 Fallen Woods.	63
Figure 1.21 Running Horse.	64

Figure 1.22 Bao Si	64
Figure 1.23 Quanrong's Invasion	65
Figure 1.24 the King's Death	65
Figure 1.25 The King's Death	66
Figure 1.26 Baosi's Disappearance	66
Figure 1.27 Yellow Fire	66
Figure 1.28 Marching Troop	69
Figure 1.29 Running Baosi.....	69
Figure 1.30 Running Baosi.....	69
Figure 1.31: Running Baosi.....	70
Figure 1.32: Metamorphosized to a Horse	71
Figure 1.33 Gao Gong's Back	74
Figure 1.34 Yan Song's Back.....	75
Figure 1.35 Zhang Juzheng	75
Figure 1.36 Jiaping	75
Figure 1.37 Jiaping	75
Figure 1.38 Jiaping	76
Figure 1.39 Overview of the Court (High Angle Shot).....	76
Figure 1.40 Overview of the Court (Ground Level).....	76
Figure 1.41 Bordewell, 360 degree	77
Figure 1.42 Yan Shifan.....	79
Figure 1.43 Yan Shifan's Back	79
Figure 1.44 Yan Shifan's Sleeve	80
Figure 1.45 Resume to the Original Position	80
Figure 1.46 Yan Shifan in Black-and-white.....	81

Figure 1.47 Yan Song in Black-and-white	81
Figure 1.48 Flood (High Angle Shot).....	81
Figure 1.49 Flood (Ground Level)	82
Figure 1.50 Yan Shifan’s Back	83
Figure 1.51 Flood (High Angle Shot).....	84
Figure 1.52 Flood (Ground Level)	84
Figure 1.53 Looked Down.....	86
Figure 1.54 Looked Up	86
Figure 1.55 Looked Down.....	86
Figure 1.56 Looked Down.....	86
Figure 1.57 Looked Up	87
Figure 1.58 Looked Down.....	82
Figure 1.59 Ruyi (Side)	90
Figure 1.60 Ruyi (Back).....	90
Figure 1.61 Ruyi (Front).....	91
Figure 1.62 Ruyi (Back).....	91
Figure 1.63 Qianlong.....	93
Figure 1.64 Ruyi.....	93
Figure 1.65 Farewell.....	94
Figure 1.66: Farewell.....	94
Figure 1.67 Farewell.....	95
Figure 1.68 Farewell.....	95
Figure 1.69 Farewell.....	95
Figure 1.70 Roof.....	97
Figure 1.71 Roof.....	98

Figure 1.72 Roof.....	98
Figure 1.73 Roof.....	98
Figure 1.74 Riders	99
Figure 1.75 Riders	100
Figure 1.76 Riders	100
Figure 1.77 Crowd.....	100
Figure 1.78 Marriage	101
Figure 1.79 Marriage	101
Figure 1.80 Scroll	102
Figure 1.81 Scroll	102
Figure 1.82 Map	103
Figure 1.83 Arched Door.....	103
Figure 1.84 Arched Door.....	104
Figure 1.85 Wei Yingluo Sitting	104
Figure 1.86 Wei Yingluo in a Line.....	104
Figure 1.87 Wei Yingluo in a Line.....	104
Figure 1.88 Empress Fuca	107
Figure 1.89 Empress Fuca	107
Figure 1.90 Empress Nara	107
Figure 1.91 Empress Nara	107
Figure 1.92 Empress Nara	108
Figure 1.93 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover	108
Figure 1.94 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover	108
Figure 1.95 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover	108
Figure 1.96 Yanxi Palace: trailer.....	110

Figure 1.97 Yanxi Palace: trailer	110
Figure 1.98 Yanxi Palace: trailer	110
Figure 1.99 Yanxi Palace: trailer	111
Figure 1.100 Yanxi Palace: ending	111
Figure 1.101 Yanxi Palace: ending	111
Figure 1.102 Palace of Devotion: trailer	112
Figure 1.103 Palace of Devotion: trailer	112
Figure 1.104 Night Revels of Han Xizai	113
Figure 1.105 Palace of Devotion: trailer	114
Figure 1.106 Palace of Devotion: trailer	114
Figure 1.107 Palace of Devotion: trailer	114
Figure 1.108 Palace of Devotion: trailer	114
Figure 1.109 Palace of Devotion	116
Figure 1.110 Palace of Devotion	116
Figure 1.111 Palace of Devotion	117
Figure 1.112 Palace of Devotion	117
Figure 1.113 Palace of Devotion	118
Figure 1.114 Palace of Devotion	118
Figure 1.115 Palace of Devotion	118
Figure 1.116 Palace of Devotion	118
Figure 1.117 Palace of Devotion	119
Figure 1.118 Palace of Devotion	119
Figure 1.119 Palace of Desire	120
Figure 1.120 Palace of Desire	120
Figure 1.121 Palace of Desire	121

Figure 1.122 Palace of Desire	121
Figure 1.123 Palace of Desire	121
Figure 1.124 Palace of Desire	122
Figure 1.125 Palace of Desire	122
Figure 1.126 The Longest Day in Chang'an	125
Figure 1.127 The Longest Day in Chang'an	125
Figure 1.128 The Longest Day in Chang'an	125
Figure 1.129 The Longest Day in Chang'an	126
Figure 1.130 The Longest Day in Chang'an	126
Figure 1.131 The Longest Day in Chang'an	126
Figure 1.132 The Longest Day in Chang'an	126
Figure 1.133 The Longest Day in Chang'an	126
Figure 1.134 The Longest Day in Chang'an	127
Figure 1.135 The Longest Day in Chang'an	127
Figure 1.136 The Longest Day in Chang'an	127
Figure 1.137 The Longest Day in Chang'an	127
Figure 1.138 The Longest Day in Chang'an	127
Figure 1.139 The Longest Day in Chang'an	128
Figure 1.140 The Longest Day in Chang'an	128
Figure 2.1 Traditional Historiography	134
Figure 2.2 Postmodern Historiography	134
Figure 2.3 Historical Fanfiction	134
Figure 3.1 Invisible Chang'an bilibili Barrage subtitles.	222
Figure 3.2 The Wedding	230
Figure 3.3 The Drum	230

Figure 3.4 Liu Che.....	230
Figure 3.5 Weiqing.....	230
Figure 3.6 Zhuge Liang Playing <i>Guzhen</i>	233
Figure 3.7 Conquering Chengdu	233
Figure 4.1 Jiang Xin Looking Right.....	252
Figure 4.2 Liu Tao Looking Left.....	252
Figure 4.3 Zhang Min in a Long Shot	254
Figure 4.4 Zhang Min in a Long Shot	254
Figure 4.5 Wang Zuxian Looking left	254
Figure 4.6 Zhang Min Looking Up	254

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Yingjin Zhang, who has guided me to the wonderland of literary and film criticism since I was an undergraduate student, supervised my first undergraduate independent project, helped me with my first translation project, provided insightful comments on the revision of my first two published papers, and led me through my academic career, step by step. Although I cannot list Professor Zhang officially as my advisor due to his sudden retirement, I will always regard him as my advisor, and for me, he has been so much more than an advisor. I owe my academic career to Professor Zhang. I'm also profoundly grateful to Professor Daisuke Miyao, who introduced me to the field of film and media studies, taught me about basic cinematography when I was an undergraduate student, pushed me to think beyond the generic boundaries of different media platforms, and finally inspired me to venture into the field of transmedia studies. Profound thanks also go to Professor Pinghui Liao, who introduced me to the field of literary studies, cultural studies, and film studies during my time as an undergraduate student. Professor Liao's insights on the postmodern cultural and poststructuralist theory have always inspired me and have significantly motivated my dissertation.

I must certainly acknowledge Professor Page duBois, who has inspired me to delve deep into the adaptation of the classics, psychoanalytic theory, and feminist theory. My outside department member, Professor Alac, also set me on the road of interdisciplinary research and helped with the semiotic interpretations of multi-media works. Most importantly, Professor Alac has pushed me to think beyond the methodological premises of cultural studies and rethink my "double role" as an aca-fan who researches and actively participates in the fan community.

My research also owes much to the advice of Professor Norman Bryson, who has led me to the semiotic and psychoanalytic interpretation of art, helping me think beyond the limits of foundational theory when investigating new media. After leaving UCSD, I missed those weekly meetings with Professor Bryson on the balcony at the Price Center. The enlightening moments during my discussions with Professor Bryson remain sources of inspiration for me. Although I cannot officially list Professor Bryson as one of my committee members due to his sudden retirement, he was a de facto mentor of mine. I would be seriously remiss if I should fail to acknowledge Professor Alain Cohen, who has generously laid a solid foundation in the history of psychoanalysis and helped me with my specialization in Lacanian psychoanalysis. I will never forget our weekly meetings, sitting on that cozy sofa in his office. In addition, my dissertation would not have been possible without the seminar and independent study on performance theory with Professor Patrick Anderson, whose erudite and critical insights have helped me to complete rigorous research in psychoanalysis and think beyond the psychoanalytic interpretation of Queer theory. I also appreciate the generous advice of Professor Ari Heinrich, who has not only been a guide for my research on Queer studies but also served as a mentor for my teaching in a large classroom with a mixed body of students.

My career in literary studies would have been impossible without Professor Jed Stephanie's undergraduate course on literary theory. Furthermore, Professor William O'Brien's graduate seminars on Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and the Frankfurt school have solidly paved the way for my future pursuit of modernist and postmodernist aesthetics. I have also significantly benefited from my three years of experience reading the foundational texts in phenomenology with Professor Tolley Clinton, who introduced me to the field of modern and postmodernist philosophy when I was an undergraduate student. Professor Paul Pickowicz's insightful

advice on my works during the workshop and AAS conferences also helped me to better explicate my methodological innovation to non-specialists.

I must also extend my warmest recognition to scholars outside of UCSD who have generously allowed me to audit their seminars: Professor Catherine Malabou's seminars on Kant and Hegel and their legacies have helped me situate the postmodernist and poststructuralist theories within a problematic terrain that has not been resolved by German Idealists. Professor Akbar Abbas's seminar on Deleuze's Cinema II has significantly helped me with building my own theoretical framework for my dissertation on transmedia adaptation and thinking beyond the time-image that Deleuze anticipated by the end of his Cinema II, the information image. Professor Xudong Zhang's seminar on post-modernity has helped me to rethink the postmodern conditions as historical, philosophical, and economic. Professor Dan Morgan's seminar on new media has challenged how I think about the methodology of research on the new media, digital technology, and new practices of image-making. Professor Yomi Braester and Professor Carlos Rojas's advices on my work during conferences has also significantly helped me to streamline my theoretical frameworks. I would also like to extend my thanks to scholars in the New Lacanian School in London, Toronto, and Australia, who have offered rigorous training on Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Special thanks must go out to the guest editor of my published chapter on video remake, Jamie Zhao, who has advised me and helped me in publishing my chapter from scratch to the published form, as well as Nathanel Amar, who has gone a step further by suggesting relevant literature on Sinophone studies. I have learned a lot from Jamie's expertise in Queer theory and Nathanel's expertise in music ethnography. I deeply admire Jamie and Nathanel's kindness and willingness to help young scholars at an early stage.

I cannot leave out my friend at UCSD, Pai Wang, my roommate and my classmate, who has attended seminars, written papers, cooked, and played together with me for the last seven years. I also wish to remember my friends outside and inside of the department of literature who have inspiring conversations with me about my work: Vivian, Ningning, Trung, Yui, Zach, Xiaojiao, Jing, Yanqin, Yichen, Shiya, Yi, Ying, Dingding, Ziyang, Chenfeng, Wentao, Yazhou, Bolun, Chuncheng, Yukun, Shiqi, Linshan. My dissertation has also significantly benefited from the online reading group: our cartel group on Lacan's seminar and the media archeology reading group. My work is also indebted to my students in LTCH 101, whose presentations and discussions are a source of inspiration in my work and who have encouraged me to pursue this academic career.

I must, without fail, acknowledge kinyo for her special support during the hardest time when I was struggling to decide whether I would graduate; my childhood friend Yunqi Tian, who has constantly supported my intellectual pursuits, and my best friend, Jianbing Li, who has helped me through every step of my school year and provided invaluable advice and emotional support.

My love goes to my parents and grandparents, especially my grandmother, whose love, devotion, support, and unfailing faith in my intellectual pursuit are transcend mere words.

Above all, I would like to thank my peers in the Three Kingdom fandoms, whom I have known since I was an 11-year-old child, and who have taught me to love, to write, to do rigorous historical research, to be brave and vulnerable, to read and write fearlessly. I have had the most inspiring discussions and writing workshops with you for my entire life, and without you, I wouldn't be who I am right now. The story that we have created is like a knife,

like a spine, like a thread that has connected my fragmented life, like multiverses where I can live multiple lives all at once, and a moment of bliss that takes me away from the immediate realities that have shackled me—to that otherworld of absolute freedom. This dissertation is dedicated to you, and to all of us—to the alternative universe that we have constructed, lived, and thrived in, which may have vanished or may disappear in the future. This dissertation is not only about our works but also about our lives, our wildest dreams, and our struggles and courage during these turbulent times. For the works that have disappeared and become lost in time, this dissertation will be a historical record to pass along our collective memory before the last one in our community should forget about the world of dreams that we have created. As long as there is someone who remembers our story, the characters we created will continuously live in the story world. Recalling Whitehead's famous assertion that anything that is logically possible is necessarily possible and all of the unactualized possibilities will be stored in the eternal object of the universe, I firmly believe that the world of dreams we have constructed will find its eternal life in the universe of possibility, and we will definitely meet again in this alternative universe in the day to come.

Chapter 2, in part is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. The dissertation author was the primary researcher and author of this material.

Chapter 3, in full, is a reprint of the material as it appears in *China Perspectives 2* (2020): 15-23. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 4, in full, is a reprint of the material as it appears in *Feminist Media Studies* 20.4 (2020): 496-514. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

VITA

2017 Bachelor of Arts in Economics and International Studies, Literature, University of California San Diego

2022 Doctor of Philosophy in Literature, University of California San Diego

PUBLICATIONS

Wang, Yiwen. " Homoeroticising Archaic Wind Music: A Rhizomatic Return to Ancient China." *China Perspectives* 2 (2020): 15-23.

Wang, Yiwen. " The Paradox of Queer Aura: A Case Study of Gender-switching Video Remakes." *Feminist Media Studies* 20.4 (2020): 496-514.

FIELD OF STUDY

Transmedia Adaptation

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Old Stories, New Media:
Transmedia Adaptation of Chinese Antiquity

by

Yiwen Wang

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Daisuke Miyao, Chair

My dissertation explores transmedia adaptations of Chinese antiquity, including the fictional, televisual, musical, and video adaptation of China’s dynastic past in modern China. My dissertation intervenes into the field of media studies by breaking up the border between different media genres via the twofold implications of the “transmedia adaptation”: the translation of the same stories from one medium platform to another and the transgression of the medium convention in the process of adaptation. Accordingly, the four chapters of my dissertation are divided according to the established genres—televisual drama, fan fiction, cover songs, and fan video remakes—to investigate how each genre translates the stories of

the past to fit into the artistic context of its specific medium. However, my dissertation also addresses each genre's transgression of its own medium convention by incorporating the aesthetic signature of the source text from which it is adapted and anticipates the target text into which it will be adapted. The first chapter studies the extensive use of side light in historical TV drama to construct perceptual depth, yet it also occasionally frames its image as a pictorial scroll of a traditional Chinese painting that refutes light and shadow for surface effect. The second studies the negative recursion of online fan fiction, as opposed to the linear narration in TV drama from which it was adapted, yet its emphasis on the light and shadow in descriptive passages exceeds the convention of verbal narration and betrays the influences of televisual aesthetics. The third chapter explores cover songs adapted from online fan fiction, with the looping structure that dominates musical composition and lyrical prose, and its melodramatic tonality and love motif made it readily adaptable to fan videos. The last chapter studies fan videos made to reassemble the footage found in TV dramas, combined with a cover song as its background music, to narrate the plot of a work of fan fiction. As an aggregation of heterogeneous medium components, the fan video does not create its medium specificity via a coherent definition but rather establishes its potential of self-differentiation in its transgression of medium convention.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

the historical imagination in modern times

1. Historical imagination as adaptation

The fictional imagination of history is in itself an oxymoronic phrase that spirals into the paradox of facticity and fictionality. The term “historical” suggests the factual anterior from which its representation originated, yet the fictionality is by definition a departure from its factual origin. As Patrick Parrinder notes, “the historical fiction entails an inherent contradiction that “characteristically both affirm and undermine historical narrative, paying lip-service to history’s importance while revealing, in a sense, its impossibility” (95). Such paradoxes also permeated and dominated scholarly discussions on the very definition of historical fiction as it dwells in various genres and media platforms—be it novel, film or televisual drama. After the post-modernist revolution of literary history and historiography, and the discussions on the adaptation from literature to screen, fact and fiction have been preoccupied with the idea of blurring the boundary between historicity and fictionality. In her studies on the historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon envisions a parallel relation between fictionality and history, which functions as “a formal marking of historicity both literary and worldly” (4). Weiser elaborated further by referring to the adaptation of history as “self-reflexive, iconoclastic literature that highlights how the discourses of history and fiction are equally human constructs” (109).

However, Burgoyne contends that even though historical film branches into a wide range of subgenres, including “the war film, the epic, the biographical film, the topical film, and evolving new, contemporary forms such as the metahistorical film”, those subtypes are “limited to films which foreground historical events in a recognizable way” (168). The demand for a “recognizable” signal of pastness is drawn into the lure of authenticity; as Higson observes, even those films that develop an ironic narrative of the past end up celebrating and legitimating the “spectacle of one class and one cultural tradition at the expense of others through the discourse of authenticity,” and “the obsession with the visual splendors of period details” (119). The sense of authenticity can be authorized by a variety of techniques to produce a heightened sense of fidelity and verisimilitude, creating a powerfully immersive experience for the spectator (Burgoyne 8): commonsensical versions of the imperial past (Landy 13), canonized literary precursor that signaled a sense of pastness (Virchow 123), or era-appropriate clothes, historically convincing spaces for pro-filmic events, authentic speech and accents, and “lost” trades or crafts (Strong 176). Strong summarizes this inevitable factual reference and fictional invention as the destiny of biopics, revolving around “the fact of their addressing already-known life stories” which “seems at odds with an understanding of history as driven by a multiplicity of factors and agents, including chance” (171).

The conundrum between fictionality and history experienced with history-to-screen adaptations bears a striking resemblance to the decades-old debates between the fidelity discourse and its discontents (Weiser 6; Strong 167). The fidelity discourse evaluates the success of an adaptational work in terms of its “faithfulness or closeness to the original or source text” (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 444). The post-modernist and post-structuralist discourse reached its heyday in 1970; since then, the fidelity discourse has been harshly criticized and rendered

obsolete in the field of literature-film adaptation. This is because contradicts the very definition of adaptation: the change from source text to the target text, and the concept of fidelity or equivalence in the fidelity discourse, points to the opposite of adaptation, i.e., non-adaptation (Cattrysse 47). As the fidelity discourse ceased to hold water, it was replaced by the critical intertextuality from the late 1990s to early 2000s in the field of adaptation studies, which removed the source text from its privileged position and repositioned it as only one of an adaptation's intertext (Cardwell 8). However, as the intertextuality is the "condition of any text whatsoever", the field of adaptation risks dissolving into "a special instance of intertextuality (Cardwell 9). Indeed, intertextuality as a conceptual tool would lose its critical edge when analyzing the medium specific differences as a narrative trope travels across different generic conventions. Accordingly, the intertextuality is still a necessary but not sufficient condition for adaptation. (Cardwell 12).

If the a priori hierarchy between the pre-text and the post-text has already been deconstructed by the concept of "inter-textuality", an empirical analysis of the adaptation as a process still needs an *ad hoc* reference to its source text (44): the definition of the adaptation not only involves the changes, but also requires the invariance conditions as the minimum equivalence to sustain the continued identity of a given text, as adapted from something (52). To address the changes and equivalence, Cattrysse further demarcates the adaptation into two subtypes: the additive adaptation as transitive transformation (X adapts Y), and the ipsative adaptation as intransitive adaptation (X adapts to Y) (Cattrysse 40-41). The ipsative adaptation applies the adaptation to itself and deleted the previous self being adapted, while the additive adaptation adds something else to a separate entity (42). The difference between ipsative adaptation and additive adaptation can be summarized as follows (42):

ipsative adaptation: $P1 \Rightarrow P1'$

additive adaptation: $P1 \Rightarrow P1+P1'+P1''+P1''' \dots$

Cattrysse asserts that the adaptation involves both the ipsative and the additive adaptation: for example, bricolage is an ipsative adaptation, as it turns the original element into a new identity, thereby installing the “(dis)similarity relations with a thing and itself” (43). However, the initial status and the intermediate steps are not erased, but remain as the “manifest traces of the adaptation process, thus allowing the analyst to reconstruct how the initial item changed into its new state”(43). Cattrysse describes this process of adaptation as a self-referential evolution with a telos: that is the “fit-ness” into the dispositif of the targeted text, which is the hosting environment (51). However, Cattrysse neither clearly explains why the adaptation is self-referential, nor does he justify the goal of evolutionary as fitting into the hosting environment of the targeted text. Indeed, what Cattrysse implied in his evolutionary theory is a symbiotic relation between the guest and host, the source text and the target text, the medium environment that a given narrative adapted to and from. Only when the incompatible element between the source text and the target text is erased for the sake of fit-ness can the invariant constancy in the source text survived in the hosting environment. Nevertheless, what Cattrysse neglected is a particular relation between the host and guest that is not symbiotic, but parasitical. As Wallace defines, symbiotic interaction occurred when “both partners pursued the elements of their group interest within the area of overlap”, yet with “mutual parasitism” and “each partner attempts to achieve its own incompatible interest at the expense of the other” (6). If the source text receives the negative coverage in target text, or correspondingly, the source text aims at an incompatibility with the hosting environment, the relation would be properly

categorized as parasitical, with a pursuit of “teleology in reverse”: the pursuit of mutual incommensurability as opposed to a harmonious reciprocity.

The fitness vs incommensurability antagonism recalls the debates on the media specificity vs. media hybridity revolving along the axis of same vs. difference that has overshadowed the studies of adaptation since the establishment of the field. Similar to the fidelity discourse that has become a common target of critique in the field of media studies, Greenberg's original formulation of medium specificity has been violently attacked by Krauss as “specific by being reduced to nothing but manifest physical properties or essence” (7), and by Doane, as “caught in a self-reflexive spiral, referring only to itself and its own conditions of existence” (131). Krauss revised Greenberg's notion of the medium specificity by adding up “its condition as self-differing” (44). Doane further expands Krauss' notion of medium specificity in terms of the positive qualities (visibility, color, texture of paint, for instance) and its limitations, gaps, incompletions (the flatness of the canvas, the finite enclosure insured by the frame)' (130). As in case of the film, it possesses indexicality as the analogical media, and the potential for “a transgression of what are given as material limitations” with “a fantasy of immateriality” (131, 143). Kim reads the self-differing potential of medium specificity as stemming from “the heterogeneity and interdependence of its components: film consists of the celluloid strip, the camera that registers light on the strip, the projector which sets the recorded image into motion, and the screen” (116). Based on this, Kim developed his theory of the dialectic of media specificity and media hybridity: As in the film stilled, the static video camera embraces the pictorial and photographic system of composition, with the paradoxical co-habitation of still-ness and movement (79).

The debates over medium specificity vs. media hybridity are ignited by the inter-generic and intra-generic dynamic of the adaptation across different media platforms, as simultaneously self-referential and self-differentiating. The self-differentiating potential of a single media genre is preconditioned by its multimedia nature. As James Saxon defined it, it consists of a broad range of sensory processors (film, television, and computer) channeling different sensory modes (words, sounds, images), and structured by an idea of variance (2-13). What engages self-differentiation that transgresses its own medium convention is the remediation that the process of adaptation necessarily involves—that is, the “representation of one medium in another” (47), with a “double logic of hypermediacy and immediacy” (5). In the process of remediation, the relatively new media genre attempts to erase the old medium in the act of remediation for immediacy, or by asserting hypermediacy by aggressively refashioning the older medium and marking the discontinuity between the two (48-50). The reappearance of certain obsolete technologies, remediated in new media, has been widely discussed by media archeologists. For example, a loop that was prevalent in early cinema and pre-cinematic visual technologies was abandoned by narrative film and discarded to anime, then reappeared in avant-garde video art and in the special effects of commercial film. As Elsaesser summarized, the media archeological approach takes into account appropriation, self-reference, and re-enactment, along the lines of reevaluation of the obsolescence as the new authenticity of the avant-garde (23).

While the self-differential potential of adaptation has been fully explored in terms of intra-generic heterogeneity and inter-generic hybridity, the self-referential imperative of referring back to itself and its condition of possibility has remained unexplored. At first glance, the self-referentiality of adaptation can be attributed to the indexical nature of photography: for example, heritage film often features a collage of 19th-century photography to claim its historical

authenticity, as photography provides immediate access to the historical past prior to the representation. However, the indexical self-reference is challenged by the historical representation before the invention of analog media—photography—which can never be indexically accessed through only a detour of verbal or pictorial representation. Different from fictional representation enclosed within the world of trans-media storytelling (Jenkins 2011), historical fiction posits a factual anterior that can neither be reducible to representation, nor immediately accessed through indexical links. Rather, the factual prior is assumed inaccessible and grounded in a hermeneutic opacity, as opposed to the lure of transparency based on an identificatory project of recognition. In this respect, I propose that the fictional adaptation of history is neither an ipsative adaptation nor an additive adaptation, as it posits a negative relation to its source text by acknowledging the inaccessibility of historical pre-text. Based on Cattrysse’s formula of ipsative adaptation and additive adaptation, I would summarize my formulation of the fictional representation of history as follows:

ipsative adaptation: $P1 \Rightarrow P1'$

additive adaptation: $P1 \Rightarrow P1+P1'+P1''+P1'''$

Parasitic adaptation: $P1 \Rightarrow - P1(P1'(P1''(P1'''...)))$

The formula I propose above shows a recursive structure of eternal return, as every time the story is adapted from historical records to film, televisual drama, fan fiction, video remake, and music, the narrative loops back to the historical anterior that is posited but never accessed. However, each time the adapted post-text is looped back to its pre-text, it doesn’t follow a repetition of “what has been”, nor does it shows an interpretative gesture of “what could have been.” It refers back to itself and gestures towards “what it is not” and “what could not have

been.” As opposed to Henry Jenkin’s formulation of transmedia storytelling as additive comprehension in which each new text adds to the understanding of the story as a whole, and Cattrysse’s evolutionary theory of additive adaptation that assumes a harmonious fitness between the prior text and post-text, my analysis focus on deletion rather than addition. I argue that the cinematic, televisual, fictional, video, and musical adaptation of Chinese antiquity is not an “additive apprehension” that expands the original story world, but an alternative universe of “counter factual narrative” that addressed anything but what has been narrated in the historical records and its fictional representations.

Returning to the very definition of trans-media storytelling, I suggest that Jenkins hasn’t fully explored the connotation of the prefix “trans”. In its Latin root, *trare-* denotes “to cross”, and “*tra*” denotes “cross over, pass through, overcome.” Rather than a harmonious symbiosis between the host text and the post text alongside the generic border, “trans” implies a categorical border to be crossed for the post text to overcome itself and the prior text when transporting the information from one textual node to another. Media, in its broadest sense, can be defined as a screen for information display, an archive for information storage, and a channel for information transmission. The field of media has been dominated by screen studies for decades, and witnessed an archival turn in recent years with the rise of media archeology. Yet both of these approaches prioritized media as a fixed entity. To fully account for the adaptation as a dynamic process, my proposal of a counter-factual narrative as a mode of transmedia adaptation of antiquity is grounded in the information theory that returns to the minimum function of media—as a carrier of informational flow. In traditional information theory, the efficiency of the transmission is measured by the ratio of the information that was successfully transmitted from sender to receiver. Any deviances from the expected pattern are regarded as unwanted noises that

need to be excluded to ensure optimal information transmission, as can be seen in the graph below.

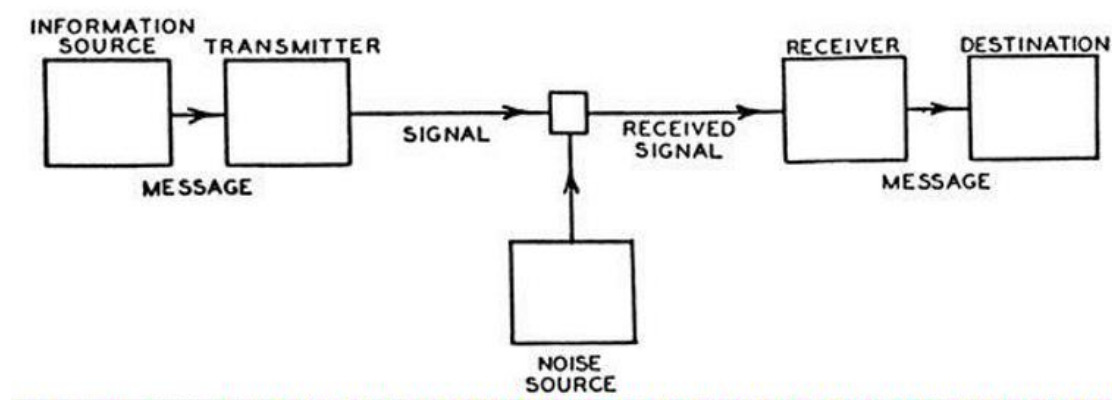


Figure i.1 Traditional Information Theory

However, in “A mathematical theory of communication,” Shannon suggests that the pattern that can be predicted and repeated is categorized as redundancy (36), because what is redundant is what is compressible; subsequently, it corresponds to the negative relative entropy (24). The increase in entropy, on the contrary, is defined as the negative sum total of all of the possibilities that can be predicted—that is, uncertainty, which is summarized by the formula below (19). As entropy measures the amount of information produced, it is the uncertainty, instead of predicted redundancy that constitutes the informational input (18).

$$H = -\sum p_i \log_2 p_i$$

Figure i.2 Shannon’s Information Theory

Shannon’s information theory is also supported by the Bayesian model of signal processing: what is recorded by the nerve system is the prediction error that is the difference

between the actual current signal and the predicted one, instead of the correspondence between the two (Clark 182). This is because the part of the input that can be perfectly fit into the prediction based on past records is redundant information that could be compressed into the predicted model to avoid redundancy, while the differences between the input and the output shows the increase in information and should be recorded. As in the case of the fictional representation of history, the narratives that already exist in historical records and fictional pretexts are regarded as redundant information by targeted audiences, who are already familiar with the backstory. Instead, it is the negative sum total of what can be expected by the audience—everything except for the factual accounts of “what has been” and the prior fictional narrations of “what could have been” that constitute the informational shock that brings the audience back to the lost paradise of historical origin that disappeared prior to the representation.

In my dissertation, I propose that the minimum creed of historical imagination is not a set of positive attributes delaminated by social norms and media conventions, but an impossible point of view located at the historical anterior that has been irrecoverably lost and cannot be occupied by any cognitive faculty or perspectival apparatus. It is from the ancestral past beyond the grasp of the imagination that the fictional narrative departs; it retroactively anticipates the becoming of historical figures already dead in an alternative universe that can never be actualized. As the historical narrative moves from its verbal form in historical records to televisual and cinematic imagery, the inaccessible anterior is not positively acknowledged by the indexical trace; it is negatively featured in the unintelligible form of obscurity, opacity, and anamorphosis that resists immediate apprehension. When the textual nexus of certain historical characters explodes into a universe of fanfiction, video remakes and cover songs, what is addressed is not a speculation of “what could have been” in the distant past that supplements the

historical records and fictional representations. Rather, the fan artists' compulsive revisiting of the past is driven by a carnivalesque pleasure of exploiting what has not been positively represented in various historical pretexts and could not possibly happen: historical figures transformed from biological males to females, time traveling to a modern universe parallel to the world in which they once lived.

I believe such negative recursion can reconcile the paradox of self-referentiality and self-differentiation that has haunted the field of adaptation for decades. The theory of negativity is nothing new in the history of philosophy, and has been extensively theorized by the Frankfurt school as negative dialectic. As in Adorno's dialectic of enlightenment, the negative dialectic primarily revolves around the logic of sublation that refers back to itself not for "what it is" or "what has been", but for "what it is not" in a logic of "neither-nor", which sets itself against the identificatory project of self-sameness. Even the most well-known opponent of the negative aesthetics, Gilles Deleuze, singled out one form of negation that he endorsed: the negation of sameness, and the elimination of average forms in the eternal return (55). What must be returned in each repetition are the formless differences that drive the metamorphoses and transformation (55). Deleuze's (mis) reading of Nietzsche's eternal return added a recursive and anti-teleological temporality to negative aesthetics, as the return is neither oriented towards a telos projected in the future—nor an origin posited in the past, but a returning of the differences between each return. In this respect, the negative recursion I propose is anti-teleological against the evolutionary adaptation proposed by Cattrysse, with a goal of eliminating the foreign element when the old medium and new medium clash, for the pre-text to survive in the convention of the target text (51). The negative recursion aims to destroy the pre-text and the target convention,

seeking a shock effect induced by the foreign element that neither concurs with the pre-text nor fits into the media environment of the target text.

2. Fictional historiography and historiographical fiction

The intertwining of historiography and fictionality is nothing new in the scholarship on pre-modern Chinese narratives. As Plaks pointed out, the historical and fictional branches cannot constitute a generic demarcation (316). The differentiation between the historical narrative and fictional narrative may only apply to sub-genres; *lieh-chuan* biography may tend towards official historiography, while the *pieh-chuan* pieces can be categorized as fictionalized biography, and the *chuan-chi* as classical tales (320). *Yenyi* lies at the overlap of generic categories, e.g. serious historical fiction and popular treatment of heroes, private lives and public affairs (320).

Accordingly, fiction becomes a subset of historiographical writing, the central mode of narration (314). As the epic form hasn't emerged in Chinese literary history, the historiography replaces its role in the Chinese narrative genre as the origin of fictional narrative (314). Historical fiction also occupies a central position in the history-fiction spectrum, as the historical subject and historiographical format predominate in Chinese fiction (312). Simultaneously, the prototypical official historiography of Ssu-ma Ch'ien draws from a great number of pseudo-historical sources, including *I Chou Shu* and *Wuyue Chun-chiu* (312). Though historical fiction and historiography shares a common generic root, traditional Chinese historiography places a strong emphasis on factual basis and draw a clear-cut demarcation between objective facts and the author's evaluative comments. Besides the ostensible emphasis on transmission of facts in historiographies and historical fiction, persuasion constitutes a major component, as in the case of *Records on the Warring States Period* 战国策 (324).

In historical fiction, notably in yenyi, persuasion scenes and speech appear repeatedly, suggesting an emphasis on judgment over mimesis of action (324). Plaks points out certain moments when the dynastic historian steps back from his pose of journalistic objectivity into the role of commentator and judge, as in the case of “Junzi Says”君子曰 in Tso-chuan, “Taishi Gong says”太史公曰 in Shih Chi, and “historian says”史臣曰/平曰 in later works (326). The very insistence on documentary evidence and full recording of dialogue, for Plaks, confirms the multiple points of view in the narrative (326). In unofficial historiography such as the yen-I genre, the authors intrude into the narrative and provide their personal overviews of historical background, yet they don't provide a rationale regarding the selectivity of the material (327). Plaks also noticed that historical fiction writers always imitate storytelling situation in the colloquial fiction genres, which he termed “simulated context”: The narrative is modulated into a tone as if the narrator and audience meet face to face (327). Plaks suggests that the illusion of a public storytelling is to divert the readers' attention from the linear sequence and mimetic specificity of the narrative details towards broader issues of human existence (328). Simultaneously, the storyteller simulates historical veracity in the recurrent use of rhetoric of historiography in the introduction, asides, and concluding comments (328).

Paradoxically, the pre-modern rhetoric of historiography, instead of content of narration, as the verification of historical veracity can be rediscovered in the post-modern historical fiction of the 1980s. As in the new historical fiction works of Su Tong and Yu Hua, the surrealist plot is modulated into a matter-of-fact tonality (197) to imitate the rhetoric style of historiographical writing. However, as opposed to the traditional historiographical narrative that aims at an effect of make-believe, post-modernist historical fiction deliberately makes the narrative unbelievable to the extent of absurdity in order to question the socialist past constructed by the official Maoist

discourse: After the Cultural Revolution, avant-garde writers found realist portrayals inadequate in addressing the traumatic experience, and instead pursued post-structuralist rhetoric, such as magic realism and surrealism, to bridge the gaps and fissures that are inaccessible for the chronological and teleological narrative.

Methodologically, the trauma-centered approach reveals the common thread of the works of David Wang, Yomi Braester, Ban Wang, and Micheal Berry in addressing the ethical imperative of historical writings: the representation of the unrepresentable. For David Wang, the representation of violence is a violence of representation against mimetic endeavors of traditional historiography, based on a moral deterministic approach to condemn evil and honor virtue, with a “call to appease evil and violence” (4). Ban Wang interpreted the allegorical vision of history as insisting on a gap between representation and historical materials (271); the gap is opened up by a series of catastrophes: death, murder, massacre, disappearance, injury, incomprehensible upheaval (4-5). Evoking the “unintelligibility of the past,” Braester further proposes that “history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (8). As traumatic events cannot be directly articulated by factual accounts, Wang and Braester chose to investigate these events in allegorical form, in cinematic and literary texts. Referencing to Benjamin’s philosophy of history, Wang clearly distinguished the symbol from the allegory. In “Origin of the German Tragedy”, Benjamin refers to the symbol as a partial object representing the “unbroken whole” (160), the “total” (164), the “necessary”(164), and the “origin” (164). The allegory is the “speculative counterpart of the symbol, the unrepresentable part, the inexpressible seeking expression. The clarity of vision is immediately destroyed, and all that remains is speech-less wonder (160, 164).” In a visual metaphor, Benjamin reads history as being caught on a fine line between the symbolic illumination that is “fleetingly revealed in the light of

redemption,” and the “hipporatica of history” that remains a “petrified, primordial landscape” (166). Different from the slogan of pre-modern historiography that claims factual account, and the post-modernist agenda of reducing history to a narrative construct, an allegorical reading of history is irreducible to either factual account or fictional representation. As such, an allegorical reading resists the reductionist approach to history, and leaves room for the unrepresentable part of history that always evades an epistemological grasp. This is precisely the thematic concern of the works of David Wang, Yomi Braester, Michael Berry and Ban Wang: trauma.

However, while their scope of analysis focuses exclusively on literary and cinematic representations of the revolutionary trauma in the 20th century, the fictional representations of the dynastic past in the age of the Internet and multimediality is left undiscussed. Grouped under the umbrella terms of “post-socialist”, “post-cultural revolution”, and “post-Mao”, cultural products emerging after 1976 are given close attention if and only if they directly addressed the socialist trauma. While I acknowledge the importance of the socialist past and its haunting effect in post-socialist China, I suggest that the trauma-oriented analysis overdetermined by the cultural revolution has overlooked a significant part of media history: the representation of the dynastic past prior to the invention of analogue media by digital media in the Internet age. On the one hand, the emphasis on photography, found footage, and direct cinema in documentary, biopic, and heritage films about modern history is rendered irrelevant to the cinematic representations of past dynasties before the invention of cameras in 1843. On the other hand, the rise of post-cinematic techniques in post-1990 China, such as television, computer algorithms, video remakes, and cover songs have further complicated a mediascape that was once dominated by analogue media with an indexicality obsession. However, the question of how would digital media, modulated by computer algorithms, represent a pre-analogue age when no indexical

traces are left remain unresolved. Guided by this question, I would frame my dissertation with the fictional narrative of ancient China before the invention of the camera in 1843, represented by the new media technologies facilitated by the ubiquitous accessibility of the internet in post-1990 China. Staging the clash between the antiquity and the postmodernity, I seek to investigate the media culture of modern China beyond the overdetermination of the revolutionary trauma under the umbrella term of “post-socialist” and “post cultural revolution”. Simultaneously, I seek to investigate multitudes of the verbal-visual-audio representation enabled by the internet culture, which extends beyond the indexical representation in the cinematic theatre or televisual screen.

Zhu Ying's pinoneering work “Television in post-reform China” was among the first books in the English-speaking world of China studies that focused on television. Ying declares her primary methodologies as institutional analysis (political-economic), and textual analysis (ideology and style), which she believes can explain the ascendance of TV dramas against the background of marketization, commercialization, and privatization of Chinese television. She pays particular attention to Confucianism as an antidote to the appeal of Western-style democracy (3). The major intellectual debates that Zhu Ying identified included neo-authoritarianism in the late 1980s, new conservatism in the early to mid-1990s, and Hu Jintao's call for a harmonious society in the early 2000s (20). This corresponds to neo-authoritarian ideology that dominated the late 1980s, which valued stability for economic growth, use of state authority and elites to accelerate the rapid expansion of the market, and negative attitudes towards the May Fourth movement (23). The core argument of the new left, led by Wang Hui, is that it is the unchecked liberal economy that led to economic inequality and corruption, and a strong central government could be an alternative path that best serves China (26).

Zhu Ying considers New Leftist ideals as echoing Hu Jintao's new central leadership in its harmonious society rhetoric that favors an authoritarian state (28): “Harmonious society is a policy initiative directed by Hu Jin Tao from the 2006 National People's Congress to address the income disparity, and a balanced growth of GDP” (40). Hu also initiated a new round of campaigns against corruption in January 2005 as a response to the New Left's call for incremental adjustments to economic policy, requiring a Confucian idea of sage leadership (36). Zhu Ying cited the surge of anti-corruption drama that favors a Confucian sage leader, as exemplified by the dynasty dramas *Yong Zheng Wangchao*, and *The Great Emperor Han Wu*. For Zhu, the anti-corruption-themed dynasty drama displayed a totalitarian nostalgia, with Yong Zheng embodying the myth of the clean official, and Hanwu Dadi as the Confucian sage leader.

Zhu Ying's work fills a gap in the English-language China studies that addressed historical drama and the political discourses of contemporary China from 1990 to 2008. However, Zhu's work suffered from a sweeping overgeneralization that overlooked the problematic aspect of Confucianism as an evolving concept that has significantly changed through the pre-Qin era, Han dynasty, Qing dynasty, and post-revolutionary China. This led to a mismatch between Zhu's central argument and some examples she gave. For example, in her contextual analysis, Zhu equated Confucianism with traditionalism, Hu's harmonious society and the New Left's call for an incremental reform in economic policy. However, the New Left never called for a return to traditionalist values; it called for a radical revolution of traditionalist values. However, Traditionalist values are also not exclusively dominated by Confucianism that emphasizes harmonious relationships and avoidance of aggression. Indeed, the totalitarian nostalgia that Zhu Ying identified in the emperor dramas is more in line with the legalism school of political philosophy in the pre-Qin dynasty that calls for radical revolution and aggressive expansion—

antithetical to the Confucianist school that seek to stabilize social hierarchy in a harmonious manner. Zhu's generalization of intellectual history and drama led to her absurd argument that Emperor Han Wu and Yong Zheng were portrayed as a Confucianist sage in line with Hu Jintao's call for a harmonious society and disillusionment with Western aggressivity. In fact, the Emperor Han Wu's focus was primarily on the aggressive expansion of the Han empire in the Han-Xiongnu war; Yong Zheng, as Hu Ying himself acknowledged, was against Confucianism, more resembling the Emperor Qin in *Hero* and the iconoclastic Mao (33).

The sweeping generalization of Zhu's work is largely due to her excessive devotion to the biographical account of historical figures and plot summaries, which result in a lack of close examination of verbal and visual materials. Even more problematic is the simple equivalence she drawn between the official propaganda imposed by the Chinese government, intellectual discourses, and allegorical representations of court politics in televisual works. As a supplement to Zhu's studies, Zhong Xueping approaches the television drama from the perspective of popular culture, that is the mainstream popular culture (47). Zhong believes that the TV drama emerges between 1980s to 1990s, primarily as a result of the reformation that brought about the modernization that inaugurates the "post-revolution" technology-aided mass culture (14). The "mainstream" at that time is primarily dominated by the new official policy guided "main melody" story, with its various stylistic multiplicity, including the social realism, critical realism, socialist realism, and revolutionary romanticism (14). As for the media form, Zhong believe that the Chinese television culture situates at the "crossover" between literature, theatre, film, and television drama, as narrative and culture form (19). Zhong asserts that the Chinese TV drama shares the melodramatic narrative, that is word centered as opposed to visual centered characteristic of television drama (22). The Chinese tv drama is more focused on developing the

plots, storyline, narrative structure, characters and their diegetic implications (23), while the visual style is passive and formulative and only used as complementary part of a dialogue (24).

Zhong's interpretation of Chinese TV drama as word-centered and symptomatic of the mainstream culture of the era extends to her analysis of the "history drama" on television. Zhong defines the television "history drama" as a subgenre that emerged in early 1990s, ranging from adaptations of classical novels and tales to modern writings of historical and legendary figures, which is often used substitutionally with the "costume drama" (47). The history drama can be theorized as "recollecting" history, which involves the deployment of a range of historical and fictionalized figures and fake historical objects to create a "make-belief," which can make an authentic appearance of the diegetic world in order to project the history as if it appears that way (49). The history drama initially emerged as an influx of the comedic form of history drama, *xishuo lishi*, exemplified by the *xishuo* style (playful style), *huanzhu gege*, which was imported to mainland China from Taiwan beginning in 1991 and has since been overlooked by Zhu Ying's book (49). The post-modernism of the playfully told drama meets this demand for collective retreating from the revolutionary ethos, including the random use of de-historicized time and space, request of suspension of disbelief, and excessive play of turning heroes to anti-heroes (32).

The "seriously told" style, on the contrary, stems from the "old fashioned grand narrative" from a "modern perspective" (57). The seriously told historical drama usually imitates the narrative style found in the adaptations of classical novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (57). The adaptation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is marked by its "crudely designed mise-en-scène" and large collection of characters and battle scenes (57). *Romance of*

the Three Kingdoms sets up the melodramatic prototype of the serious style historical drama, with the thematic concerns of “heroism, power struggles, good versus evil, and loyalty versus disloyalty” (57-58). Zhong argues that “Yongzheng Wangchao imitates the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in portraying Yongzheng as a tragic hero struggling within the logic of the political structure of the dynastic system” (58). The narrative structure of the drama revolves around the decision made by the individuals, who either actively engage in or passively participate in such struggle (58). The tragic hero Yong Zhen, is portrayed as “subject to the limitations of the system,” yet understands through a “sympathetic historical lens” (60). Similarly, the emperor Wu of Han is visually and verbally portrayed as “a lonely old man” from the modern perspective who is “the product of his own times, and yet living on through history” (65). Zhong asserts that the introduction of the emperor as a tragic hero shows that the modern hero has lost fame in the depoliticized politics of post-revolution China (65). Also, in the dialogue between emperor Wu of Han and historian Sima Qian, his biographer, the historian appears “uncertain about his own judgement,” and the emperor is depicted in an ambivalent light (64-65). However, what is overlooked by Zhong’s analysis is the visuality and media specificity of the televisual drama that exceeds the verbal narration, and the televisual drama as a phase in the transmedia adaptation from the literary work, which is subsequently adapted to fan fiction and fan video remake. Simultaneously, as Zhong restricts her interpretation to the “mainstream culture,” she overlooks the subcultural as a conglomerate of niche cultural groups that have not yet entered the mainstream culture.

Xiaofei Tian’s “The Halberd of the Red Cliff” fills the gap of historical imaginations in niche culture in her investigation of fan fiction and fan videos remake. The historical fan fiction can be defined as the homoerotic fiction between historical figures that are macho-masculine, and the

fan video remake can be defined as the video adaptations of homo-romance between historical figures with the found footage from costume drama. However, Tian's analysis of fan culture relies on the repression hypothesis and wish fulfillment based on the self-sameness identification between fan readers, fan writers, and the characters. Tian suggests that it is the realization of "suppressed homoerotic desire" in the canon that drives fanfiction (354), which questions the authenticity of official history (237). Tian draws a reference from Qu Yuan's poems, and suggests that the allegorical analogue between the lord/vassal relationship and husband/wife relation in Qu Yuan's poem is made literal in fanfiction (354): The sexual text capable of political interpretation could only be born in the space of separation, yet the slash fiction relishes the depiction of physically fulfilling sex in "female fans' communal production and consumption of sexual fantasies" (355). However, Tian suggests that the move from allegorical to literal portrayal of homoerotic desire is a reaffirmation of rather than subversion of the heteronormativity (354), and female readers more readily identify with the characters showing feminine traits (359).

The interpretations of male-female exchange in BL narratives as heteronormative assume that when assigning female traits to a male heterosexual, only the macho-masculinity of the original context is deconstructed. They assume that heterosexual femininity is reinforced, because the female fan-producers tends to identify with feminine traits based on a principle of similarity. Tian's assumption of appropriating the male body to satisfy unfulfilled female desire is widely accepted in the studies on gender-switching subgenres of "boy love" fiction. Feng (2013) notes the female-to-male transition in time-travel fiction produced in the BL community and suggests that sex-change fantasies can empower women by overcoming the disadvantage of the female body and identity (71). Yang and Xu (2015) find that the male protagonist in a male-

to-female story “lives as a heterosexual female with [a] male mentality,” whereas the female protagonist in a male-to-female story lives a “homosexual life,” which aligns with BL logic about “appropriating [a] male body to articulate female desire” (139). Yang and Xu (2015) argues that the uke typically undergoes a sex change and is positioned as the first-person narrator in the body change story because “women readers in general more readily identify with uke protagonists” (142).

However, if the female producers and consumers of gender-switching genres sought the narcissistic pleasure of seeing themselves represented, they wouldn’t claim the female body (or the body with feminine traits) as being possessed by a male. Instead, the primary reason for female fans to indulge in homoerotic love between two biological males is because the feminine image is excluded from the that love. Likewise, the gender-switching genre of boy love fiction further inverts male historical figures to biological females, because male historical figures can be anything *but* biological females: it is possible that male historical figures harbored repressed sexual desire towards men, or repressed gendered identification with women, yet it is impossible for them to occupy the body of a biological female. Rather than engaging in an identificatory project driven by the desire for recognition, female fans are taking pleasure in the double-negative effect of disidentification: By creating a world of male-male homoeroticism without female characters, female fans are investing in a fictional time-space in which they are absent. Appropriating the images of female stars to represent male characters in the fictional world provides a negative portrayal of malehood without masculinity. As such, I suggest that the gender-switching genre goes beyond the narcissistic identification with specular self-sameness, because the spectators of the genre desire a fictional world without being represented in it. They project their desired objects into the fictional world without representing their positive attributes.

With the double-negative structure of fan reimaginings of history, I propose that fanfiction and video remakes are neither a literal account of historical facts, nor an allegorical representation of female spectators' ideal ego. Rather, they constitute a carnivalesque play of counter-factual narratives. If any gendered attributes that can be assigned to a historical figure are fictional narratives that are socially constructed, the only fact that can be ascertained is their biological sex. It is based on the historical fact that those figures being narrated are biologically male, and that the gender-switching videos construct a counter-factual narrative of their negative predicates, the biological females. In a similar rationale, fan producers seek to construct historical fiction using a negative aesthetic of constitutional exclusion instead of allegorical projection: It is through the boy love narratives about historical figures, who are biological males, that female fans can enjoy a negative relation between themselves and a fictional world from which they are absent. Accordingly, fan imagination is not primarily driven by a desire to challenge authentic history by describing repressed desire and suppressed potentiality in the canon, as it doesn't share the postmodern historiography that rejects historical facts by upholding the relativist ideal of epistemological uncertainty. Instead, the fan imagination of history acknowledges the historical facts negatively and envisions an alternative universe of counter-factual narrative that is impossible to be realized.

I suggest that the negative recursion in the fan imagination has constructed a digital spectatorship that opposes the narcissistic identification that draws a self-sameness alliance between the spectator and the character. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for example, has restricted the scopophilic pleasure in its "narcissistic aspect", with a "fascination with likeness and recognition" (714). Mulvey then periodizes the cinematic identification as "mirror stage identification" along an imaginary axis, in which the ego

(mis)recognizes the image on the screen as the external projection of its ideal ego in a pre-subjective moment of image recognition (714-715). However, Mulvey's theory omits the most important insight of Lacan and Metz: mirror stage identification is not a mirror identification, and identification with the cinematic screen is substantially differentiated from mirror identification. As Metz has explicated, the child identifies itself as an object to be perceived in mirror identification, yet cinematic spectators are able to constitute a world of objects without recognizing themselves in it; they identify only with the fictional world from which they are absent (697-698). Accordingly, what the spectator identifies with is not a self-image, but a vanishing point in the image that marks one's absence (698).

Metz's analysis concurs with Lacan's original formulation of the "gaze" in seminar 11 as a "punctiform object" and a "point of vanishing being" that "the subject adapts itself to" (83). The common creed of historical adaptation, either in the form of film, televisual drama, fanfiction, video remakes, or cover songs, is to adapt to the vanishing point of the grid of intelligibility—the unrepresentable past that has already disappeared. Rather than inviting identification between the spectator and the historical figures on the screen, historical adaptation preserves the past-ness of the past by excluding the spectator from the fictional world of Chinese antiquity. Respectively, what the spectators identify with is not an image on the screen, but the impossible point of view behind the screen—to project a gaze upon the *mise-en-scene* of the distant past that has already disappeared. Lacan schematized this spectatorial position vis a vis the object of gaze in the apparatus of the inverted vase (Ecrits 565):

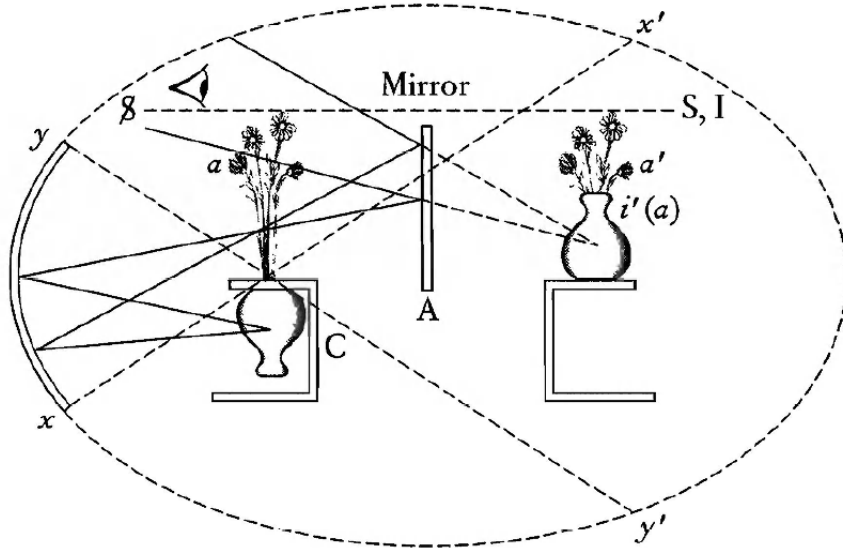


Figure i.3 Lacan's inverted vase

In lieu of an extended discussion of the physical laws involved, I cut to the chase and summarize the scopic relation as follows: the subject of “look” is barred from the immediate access to the object being looked upon, resulting a barred subject ($S/$) at the left hand side of the mirror. The barred subject ($S/$) imagines itself occupying the unbarred viewing position (S) that looks directly at the object projected on the screen (a). The relation between the neurotic subject of look and the object of gaze is formularized as $S/ \diamond a$, which can be interpreted as the subject of look approaching the impossible viewing position behind the screen for direct accessibility to the object. To approach this impossible position, the subject must erase itself from the image on the screen, which is symbolized by a bar on the subject. This corresponds to the spectatorial position regarding historical film and television that appears as a vanishing point excluded from the image. Accepting this impossible viewing position behind the screen, fan fiction writers and fan video producers take one step further and reverse the formular of neurotic fantasy, $S/ \diamond a$ to

the perverted fantasy a $\langle \rangle$ S/. According to Lacan, the object (a) serves to support the neurotic subject in its fantasy, yet the perverted subject actively wipes itself from the fantasy and occupies the position of the object (a) to actively “drill a hole” in the place of the Other (S/) (Ecrits 650). As in the case of historical fan fictions and fan video remakes, fan producers not only exclude themselves from the fictional world by occupying the impossible viewing position of the past, but also “drill a hole” in the text by keeping the narrative open and the wish unfulfilled.

Different from Zeitlin’s interpretation of the “past-oriented motif” that aims to “recall what has vanished from a place, to fill in what is missing or concealed from view at a spot” (89), fan fictions are not devoted to fill in the gap in official historical records. Instead, fan fiction writers are more interested in enlarging the gap by throwing the characters into an alternative universe constructed by counter-factual narratives: historical figures are transformed from biological males to females, time travel to the modern world, or haunt the land of the living as ghosts. Contrary to Tian’s interpretation of historical fanfiction as “consummation”, “realization” and an actualization of the repressed homoerotic desire, fanfiction writers usually keep the unfulfilled desire unfulfilled, either in the original historical records, televisual and cinematic adaptations, or their own fan adaptations. Fanfiction writers seldomly arrange a rendezvous between lovers separated by war and death, or satisfy their repressed desire, but keep their wish unfulfilled: the deceased is usually made to vanish again after returning to the world of the living as a ghost, the lovers reborn in the same world miss each other or are separated again, and the desire and demand, whether it is being repressed or not, is not satisfied in the alternative universe of fan fictions. If the cinematic and televisual representation of the history on screen preserves the inaccessibility of the past by structuring an impossible spectatorial position, fanfiction writers and fan video remakers reverse that relation, not by making the past accessible, but by actively

keeping the inaccessible gap open to enable the proliferations of the alternative universe of their counter-factual narratives.

The deceased in the historical imaginations are therefore trapped in what Lacan theorizes as “between-two-deaths”. In Seminars 7 and 8, Lacan discusses three figures as exemplified by the concept of “between-two-deaths”: Socrates, Antigone, and Sade. According to Lacan, Socrates and Antigone pursued the corporeal mortality to inscribe themselves on the signifying chain that is immortal and eternal (Seminar 8 127-128), which I interpret as in-between the “signifier of death” that follows the corporeal death and the “death of the signifier” beyond the symbolic chain. Such pursuit of eternity is accompanied by a destructive death drive, the purpose of which is not a decrease of the entropy and “return to a state of equilibrium”, but “a will to create from zero, a will to begin again” (Seminar 7 211-212). The cyclical rebirth of the deceased also evokes the temporality in the narrative that addresses Chinese past, that is not teleological, but structured as a loop that always repeats itself. With the rise and fall of dynasties, even the grand narrative of Chinese history, as Zeitlin points out, is conceptualized as a repetition of a single key pattern in a cyclical time (87). Plaks also suggests that the narrative of the traditional Chinese literature neither follows a teleological progression, nor does it show an eschatological withdrawal into nothingness, but a closed circuit of ceaseless alteration and cyclical recurrence (335-339). As opposed to the “mimesis of action” with a telos characteristic of Aristotelian poetics, Plaks suggests that the Chinese narrative shows a “mimesis of time” that is the “mimesis of decay and death” without an absolute finitude, as there is always a new generation of warriors, rakes and scholars that carry the ball in an endless flux (339).

However, neither Lacan nor Plaks have left a clue on what lies beyond the “second death” and the endless circle of ghostly rebirth. In an etymological decomposition of the Chinese

character “ghost”, David Wang suggests that it shares the same root with the phrase “that which returns” (211). However, the locale it returns to is not an abode in the human world, but to the site of eternal rest (211). This concurs with Zeitlin’s reading of ghost stories about the fallen dynasty, in which the palace lady tries to overcome the inaccessibility of the past but is made to vanish again and make the past even more inaccessible (97). Accordingly, Zeitlin suggests that the return of the ghost is a “social technique of forgetting”, to carry out anew the ritual of separation between the living and the dead and to lay the memory of the old dynasty properly to rest (121). In a similar vein, the “second death” of the deceased in the historical imagination is the forgetfulness, the “eternal rest” of the memories that the ghosts finally returned to, and the narrative is supposed to end up with the lived letting go of the memories and attachment to the dead. However, fan fictions and fan video remakes work to resist the natural life circle of the historical imaginations that head towards the end of mourning and remembrance but continuously brought the deceased from the “second death” back to the signifying chain for an endless rebirth. The direction of the “return” is not the homeostasis state of “eternal rest”, nor does it attempt to close the gap opened up by the narrative of the past for a reenactment of what the past “is”. Rather, the narrative of the historical imagination loops back to the alternative universe of what the past “is not”, for an experiment of the narrative of testing the same characters in different worlds. My chapter therefore proposes a mode of transmedia adaptation of Chinese antiquity as a mode of “recursion” that simultaneously incorporates the self-referential loop and self-differentiating potential, while the target text refers back to the source text for what the source text is not.

Methodological Notes and Chapter Outlines

Given the vast amount of textual productions in the Internet age, this dissertation is not a comprehensive encyclopedia of the verbal-visual-audio texts addressing the Chinese antiquity, however limited the scope might be. As Manovich suggests in his newly published book, "Cultural Analytics", the scope of traditional humanities research that concerns small data has been challenged by the Internet, which enables millions of people to create, share, and interact with images, videos, and texts. To enable a close reading of selected texts out of a large pool, the cultural studies approach has a long tradition of justifying its sampling method according to the principle of "significance", either qualitative as "political and ideological relevant" or quantitatively endorsed by "big revenue, large audience" (Voci 13). However, my preliminary statistical research on fan adaptations suggests that its population follows a "long tail distribution", as it is constituted by a conglomerate of unpopular works circulated in niche groups, instead of being dominated by several extremely popular works entering into the mainstream ideology. This makes the sampling targeted at the "most popular works" missing from the vast majority of online cultural productions that are unpopular. An alternative approach would be Franco Moretti's "distant reading" that extracts a dominant pattern out of a large population of textual productions and gives up the "close reading" all together. Nevertheless, the extrapolation of the "dominant pattern" is based on a principle of "repetition of the same", which contradicts the thematic concern of this dissertation and investigates the differences in the repetition of the transmedia practices that deviant from the dominate pattern. Manovich's solution to this paradox of selectivity is to not only stop the "close reading", but to give up the explanation and analysis all together, returning to the pure collection performed by AI technology, which preserves both the pattern and noises in the data visualization. No matter how

comprehensive Manovich's collection might be, a mere description and visualization would only show the positive content of the texts, while missing the speculative dimension of the negative correlation that constitutes the textual universe by excluding itself from it.

Instead of justifying his selectivity based on quantitative significance or engaging in an endless pursuit of comprehensiveness, Voci boldly claims in her studies of small screen video productions that she has adopted Michael Dutton's bottom-up research practice, with an "erratic journey", "ordered in a way that excited and made sense to me" (Voci xxvi). Voci's journey is "random and fortuitous", and "based on personal connections, occasional encounters, or intermittent browsing" (xxii). I concur with Voci in acknowledging the contingency and subjectiveness of my selection of the text, as the pursuit of the comprehensiveness would end up with epistemic inadequacy, and the representational approach with the selectivity bias. However, I would not claim that the textual journey I take in this dissertation is "random and fortuitous". Rather, I would select the textual nodes that mark the convergence and divergence as the adaptational flows traverse the generic and medium border, and speculate the positive or negative correlations that can be drawn between each textual nodes defined by its generic convention, the film, the televisual drama, the fanfiction, the fan video remakes and the cover song. Given the transgressive nature of the transmedia adaptations, I will not draw a clear-cut generic boundary at the end of each chapter but capture a snapshot of the medium form in the state of metastability, the critical point when the medium convention that achieved its meta-stabilized form begins to dissolve. The four chapter included in this dissertation is divided as follows:

The first chapter explores the historical televisual drama that emerges and flourished since 1990s, as literature and film no longer dominated the Chinese cultural sphere as did in

1980s. My analysis will revolve around the incommensurable juxtaposition of opacity and transparency, as an indexical “thereness” the visual verisimilitude of the mise-en-scene, including the architecture, the furniture, and the customs, and a symbolic “past-ness” of the archeological objects in the extensive use of the side light, Brechtian performance, and the reference to the pictorial aesthetics. I propose that the visual incommensurability of opacity and transparency of the historical drama features an allegorical time that situated in the non-correspondence between an anticipatory look from the past, and the retrospective gaze from the future. I would also suggest that the temporal non-correspondence of the historical drama constitute a “montage-within-the-shot”, and pseudo-continuity between the shots, for it to be readily disassembled and reassembled in fan fictions and fan video remakes.

The second chapter investigates the historical fanfictions that originally produced, circulated, consumed, and reproduced online. The historical fanfictions can be broadly as the fictional work that takes the Chinese antiquity background, and the sub-genre I examined in this chapter focuses on the way in which the deceased are plugged into the circle of the endless rebirth, including the ghost story, the alternate history, time-traveling, and the modern alternative universe. I will read through the texts through the concept of the loop and recursion, which sutures the traditional Chinese historiography that resist the teleological and apocalypse temporality, and the computer algorithmic that constantly feeds the output back into the input. However, rather than exploring the possibility of “what could be” that has been repressed in the historical records, “What has been”, the loop created by historical fanfictions follows the trajectory of a negative recursion, by feeding back the counter-factual narrative, what could not be. I will also investigate the way in which the language of “loop” in the historical fan fiction made it readily to be further adapted to the cover songs, that was literally designed to loop itself

as background music, and metaphorically loop back to a primordial scene of the past that has always already been lost.

The third chapter looks into the “archaic wind” music that orients toward an imaginary missed encounter between the modern traveler and the ancient cities that can never be concretized. The Archaic Wind music can be categorized as an Internet-based music genre characterized by its abundance of classical Chinese references. My chapter focuses on the sonic and lyrical components of the archaic wind music that represented the ancient cities as an empty signifier in the missed encounter between the sojourner and the historical locale. Investigating the thematic concern of missed encounter between the sojourner and the historical locale, I would suggest that the verbal-visual-audio narrative of the archaic wind music constructs a negative feedback loop that orientates the spectator away from the nostalgic site they seek to return to, and such spatial disorientation is translated into the gendered disorientation in the fan video remakes.

The fourth chapter studies the fan video remakes that re-assemble the found footage in the film or televisual drama. The aesthetics of the fan video remakes resemble the aesthetics of the video trailers that assembled the decisive moments in the original film or televisual drama to match the background music, which is usually the “archaic wind” music. However, the fan video remake addresses precisely what the original film or televisual drama is not about through the gender trope, which is different from the film trailer that provides a preview of what the film is about. In this chapter, I will trace the way in which the fan video remake fabricates itself as pseudo-trailer with implicit BL subtext, to the BL slash video with the couple stated in the paratext, and finally to the gender swap video that uses the footage of the female performers to resemble the male characters. I would propose that the queerness of the BL video remake always

lies between two identities in a dissociative force of "neither/nor" without locating in either one of them, and such dissociative force is visualized as the incommensurable link between the word and image, shot and reverse shot, footage and soundtrack. I suggest that the "dissociative link" in the video remake shows an alternative mode of gender performance that is neither anchored in what the performers appears to be nor what they are supposed to be but what they are "supposed not to be" in a double recursion. I argue that the negative recursion of the video remake can be categorized as a mode of queer negativity that challenges the self-sameness of the normative discourse of looping back to "what it is" in a negative feedback loop to "what is not."

CHAPTER 1

The Opaque Mirror: historical drama as an allegory of the past

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese mediascape has seen a tectonic shift, led by the boom of TV production and Internet-aided information technology. As Xueping Zhong observes, the televisual drama and Internet have challenged the central position of literature and film in the contemporary Chinese landscape (Zhong 1). Zhong suggests that the televisual drama epitomized the new era of the mainstream culture that China has ushered in since 1990. Since 2015, however, a new genre of drama series has emerged, which has quickly outnumbered television series: the Internet-based televisual drama produced, broadcasted, and circulated on Internet platforms hosted by technology giants, such as Youku, iQiyi, and Tencent. With the original fictions, drama adaptations, and fan recreations integrated into the Internet platforms, the Internet-based drama has reconfigured the viewer's habitual way of watching the moving image and enjoying their leisure time.

The historical drama with a setting in ancient China is one of the most popular subgenres of Chinese language televisual drama, which initially emerged in the 1990s. As Hu Ying contends, the abundance of historical drama is conditioned by the permission of private entities to produce and distribute televisual drama as well as the rise of neo-Confucianism, nostalgia of the dynastic past, and the anticorruption reforms since 1990s (20-34). The term "historical drama" is often used interchangeably with the term "costume drama," with the performers

wearing period costumes. However, in historical dramas, the protagonists are usually legendary figures or real historical figures, whereas the costume drama only involves the mis-en-scene, which simulates the setting of premodern China. Xueping Zhong further divided historical dramas into two categories, i.e., “comedies” or “serious drama” (48). For Zhong, the playful representations of history usually offer “unconventional” or “unorthodox interpretations” of historical figures in a comedic manner, while the seriously told drama represent the historical figures as the tragic heroes (57). Nevertheless, Zhong herself also acknowledges the lack of clear-cut boundaries between subgenres due to the vicissitudes of market demand and state policies (25). Further, the degree of seriousness or the tragic–comic divide can hardly constitute a clear-cut generic demarcation.

In my chapter, I will cover two of the most influential subgenres of the historic drama loosely categorized by male-oriented drama concerns of war and politics and the female-oriented drama that concerns imperial court romance. The historical drama as a genre initially emerged with the televisual adaptations of classical historical fictions, such as “Romance of Three Kingdoms,” which was released in 1994, and “Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms” released in 1998. At the turn of the century, a series of dramas that features the emperor of the ancient Chinese dynasty emerged, represented by the *Yongzheng Dynasty* (1999), *Kangxi Dynasty* (2001), *Qianlong Dynasty* (2003), and *Emperor Wu of Han* (2003). As Hu Ying contends, the emperor drama offers “exemplary emperors of bygone dynasties,” as “patriots struggling against internal corruption and social injustice as well as external threats (1). Concomitantly, the Chinese historical drama has seen a rise of the palace romance centered on the life stories of princesses and empresses, led by the *Palace Desire* (2000) and the *Xiao Zhuang Epic* (2002). As opposed to emperor dramas, which focused on the major political and

economic events of the Qing Court, the palace drama followed a formula of “romance-cum-political conspiracy,” which emphasized romantic affairs between heroes and heroin.

The popular prime-time drama continues to revolve around the interplay between the male-oriented drama on war and politics and female-oriented drama on palace romance. However, the thematic concern of the popular historical drama includes not only the splendor of the established dynasty and exemplary emperors but also the interdynastic period amid the turmoil of wars, such as “The Great Revival” (2007), “The Qin Empire” (2009–2021), “Three Kingdoms” (2010), and “Legend of Chu and Han” (2012). Concomitantly, “Ming Dynasty 1566” (2007) emerged as an outlier. Rather than featuring a splendid past led by an exemplary emperor, the “Ming Dynasty 1566” depicts one of the worst emperors of Ming Dynasty, Jiajing, who neglects his duties to practice with Daoist alchemists and tortured hundreds of dissidents to death.

In the post-2010 era, the “empress drama” had taken over the position of the “emperor drama” and became the most popular subgenre of the historical drama: “The Empresses in the Palace” (2011), a palace romance adapted from Internet fiction serialized on Jinjiang.com by Liulianzi, has achieved phenomenal success, as it is broadcasted in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and USA. “The Legend of Miyue” (2015) has also become the most popular Chinese televisual drama in 2015 (Entdata 2019). The last wave of the popular empress drama can be found in 2018, represented by “Ruyi’s Royal Love in the Palace” (2018) and “The Story of Yanxi Palace” (2018), the top two most popular Chinese televisual drama of the year (Entdata 2019).

However, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television banned dramas set in ancient times that “deliberately distort history,” the phenomenon popularity of the historical

drama has been called to an end, and, since 2019, the imperial court romance has evaporated from the market (Entdata, 2019). The historical dramas that nevertheless continue to survive in the market shift from the narrative-centered empress drama or emperor drama, to a visual centered specularization of ancient cities and the obsession of historical accuracy in staging the mise-en-scene. This trend can be found in the most-watched historical dramas in post-2019 era such as “The Longest Day of Chang’an” (2019), “Serenade of Peaceful Joy” (2020), “The Long Ballad” (2021), and “The Palace of Devotion” (2021). Despite its endeavor to achieve historical accuracy in portraying its mise-en-scene, its visual aesthetics transgresses the generic convention of the televisual drama, which is, by definition, a genre featuring the moving image on broadcasting or streaming platforms. Rather, the historical drama in the post-2019 era draws the aesthetic convention from the Chinese traditional pictorial scroll, animation, manga, and 360-degree virtual reality in the video games.

Although the historical drama stands as a significant nodal point in Chinese media history and has gained wide popularity among the audience, it has received little critical attention in academia. In her pioneering work “Television in Post-Reform China,” Zhu Ying (2008) approaches the Chinese televisual drama as a social-political institution, investigating the way in which the Chinese television drama profits by capturing the public sentiment and the party’s call (18). Hu’s study focuses on the televisual drama with politically charged motifs such as economic reform and anticorruption, in response to the Chinese state’s shifting social economic policy and invocation of Confucian ideology (18). Through a comprehensive plot summary, biographical notes on historical figures, historical setting of the stories, and contextual overview of the dynastic drama, Zhu’s analysis sheds light on the interplay between the social political institution and media industry on the macrolevel. Xueping Zhong’s monograph “Mainstream

Culture Refocused” shifted from the institutional analysis of the political-economical system to cultural studies and textual analysis. Zhong sees the Chinese televisual drama as the representation of “mainstream culture“ of modern China under the official production guideline that encourage the promotion of the “main melody” (24). Zhong suggests that the Chinese television drama is a “word-centered” as opposed to “visual-centered” genre and rests on a heavy linguistic presence that connotes, denotes, and naturalizes the images (21-22). With her word-centered approach, Zhong’s analysis focuses on the characters, plot, storyline, and overall narrative structure (23). The visual component of the televisual drama is subsequently subsumed under her dialogue analysis that concentrates on the narrative element.

This chapter will revolt against the primacy of the context and Zhu and Zhong’s work by devoting to the visual aesthetics of the historical drama. The selectivity of the fragments of the texts to be discussed in this chapter is neither based on the canonical ordering nor its mere popularity. Instead, I chose the particular shots and images that manifested the allegorical moment of the history, situated at the incommensurable juxtaposition between the known and unknown, the representable and unrepresentable, the intelligible and unintelligible. The “allegory” is defined by Walter Benjamin, as “speculative counterpart” of the symbolic time that refers to the “unbroken whole”(160), the “total” (164), the “necessary”(164), and the “origin (164).

As with criticism of the art, the symbol is cherished as the unity of the material and the idea, the appearance and essence, the representation and the represented (164). The allegory, on the contrary, refers to the “inexpressible” seeking for the expression, the destruction of the clarity of the vision, and the remainder of the speechless (164). The allegory can therefore be interpreted as the unintelligible remainder, one that threatens to destroy the symbolic totality guaranteed by what is visible and expressible. In a visual metaphor, Benjamin reads the history

as being caught in the fine line between the symbolic illumination that “fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption” and the “*hipporatica* of history,” which remains “petrified, primordial landscape” (166). As opposed to the reciprocal exchangeability between historicity and fictionality celebrated by the postmodern theorist, Benjamin, the notion of the allegorical time insists upon a nonreciprocal incommensurability between the history made intelligible in the “bright world of symbols” and the unintelligible “dark background” that remains obscure (161). The allegorical image is therefore situated at the incommensurable divide between the intelligibility and unintelligibility.

Fredric Jameson interprets Benjamin’s allegory as consistent in the “withdrawal of its self-sufficiency of meaning from a given representation” (122). What Benjamin described is the incoherency between the literal meaning or the appearance of the text and the represented that is withdrawn from the manifested content of the text. Jameson states that he is “tempted to say that every interpretation of the text is a kind of allegory: all positing of meaning always presupposes that the text is about something else” (122). However, Jameson also suggests that the representation of history stands as an outlier that limits such seemingly omnipresent interpretive activity, as it is “peculiarly allegorical and anti-allegorical at once”; it is allegorical, as it “certainly posits a reality and historical referent outside itself of which it claims” in the interpretive representation yet the “sheer fact of historical existence” closes off the process of representation (123).

I see the “allegorical” and “anti-allegorical” dimension of the fictional representation of history already addressed in Benjamin’s conceptualization of allegory, as it simultaneously indexed the historical anterior that it is supposed to represent, and the unrepresentable part of history that falls into the oblivion. The unrepresented past that cannot be cognitively grasped can

nevertheless be manifested in terms of the formalistic negativity in an image, as the repressed memories waiting to be redeemed in a messianic future to come.

In Benjamin's philosophy of the history, the allegorical history appears in the form of a stilled image. As Benjamin explicated in his *Thesis of History*, "the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably." What Benjamin described is a tension between the past "recognized by the presence" in an instant of illumination, and the past that has already disappeared or threatened to disappear into the darkness. Alongside of the formalistic divide between the represented and unrepresented, the allegorical image of history is also stretched by the temporal divide of the anticipatory retrospection, i.e., the retrospection of the past threatens to fall into oblivion, and the anticipation of a gaze from the future to recognize and redeem the past that has already been forgotten. The juxtaposition of the configuration of the past in the present moment and the prefiguration of the lost memories to be redeemed in the future can only be found in the still image, by which the chronological succession and teleological progression is arrested.

Benjamin's allegorical image shares a similar creed with Deleuze's time image in its resistance of the continuum of linear temporality, superimposition of past-present-future, and incommensurable juxtaposition of the retrospection and anticipation. In "Thesis of History," Benjamin characterizes the continuum of teleological history as measured by the "homogenous empty time," as the past and future become the extrapolation of the present. With this respect, only when the "time stands still" and is singled out from the continuum of homogenous time, can it be liberated from the self-sameness of linear temporality. As Benjamin offered a negative definition of the image of time as resisting the homogenous force of continuum, Deleuze

proposed a positive definition of the time-image, as the image that displays the incommensurable juxtaposition of past–present, present–present, and future–present. Deleuze proposes that the time image arises when there is “no common denominator” among past, present, and the future in the image (36) and no continuity between the action and reaction of a character (45). As with Deleuze, the present moment is split in two “dissymmetrical jets,” with “one of it launched towards future, while the other falls into the past” (81). The two series are not connected in a commensurable conjuncture but enter into the incommensurable relation that “connects them to each other, without forming the whole” (256). Such incommensurable disjuncture can only be found in a temporal interval between recognition and anticipation, action and reaction, which forestalls the progression of movement and the qualitative change embryotic in an image of time.

This chapter tackles the time image emerged in the historical drama and offers an allegorical reading of history via the temporal inconsistency, spatial incongruity, and epistemological incommensurability. Specifically, I will single out and elaborate on the particular moments when the televisual convention of the natural setting and zero-degree style are transgressed, and habitual way of watching ceaseless movement is suspended. This includes the postmodernist depictions of the premodern era that blatantly violate the rules of the perspectival grid and continuity editing montage-within-a-shot in “Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms” and the disjunctive point-of-view shot in “Ming Dynasty 1566”. The disruption of the continuous movement of the image go hand in hand with Benjamin’s disruption of the historical continuum, which challenges the viewer’s habitual way of watching the drama and interpreting the historical past. The transgression of the convention of moving image with pictorial aesthetics can also be found in “Palace of Yanxi” and “The Palace of devotion”, either as a direct reference or as an imitation of the traditional Chinese painting scroll. In what follows,

I will investigate the how such transgression of the medium convention has visualized the incommensurable divide between the light and shadow, past and present, the fact and fiction, the inaccessible scene of the past beyond the frame, and the fictional fabrications within the frame.

The Limit of Realism: between the light and the shadow

Romance of Three Kingdoms (1994), an 84-episode drama adapted from one of the best-known Chinese classics of the same title, is considered the prototype of the “serious style” historical drama (Zhong 47). The drama’s plot remains faithful to the original source material, with most of the lines delivered by the performers being direct quotes from the original *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. Considering its theme of tragic heroism, critics praised the drama as creating a grand painting scroll of an epic and a poetic drama with historical authenticity (Liu & Zhang, 2000; Zhou, 1995). Without fully elaborating on their appraisal, the critic’s interpretation is contradictory from the outset: on the one hand, the claim of portraying an authentic history and paying homage to the source material suggests a formalist realism. On the other hand, the compliment of the drama as being poetic suggests a stylistic component beyond the televisual realism. The metaphoric depiction of the drama as a still image, i.e., “a grand painting scroll,” even challenges the televisual convention that is considered to be the movement’s proper image. The critics’ comments address a paradoxical tendency of the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, which simultaneously erases the stylistic element to present the historical scene in its immediacy and emphasizes the stylistic effect to highlight the distance between the past and the present

The interplay between the transparency and the opacity, familiarization and de-familiarization, and zero-degree style and expressive style can be best exemplified by a scene in *Romance of Three Kingdoms*’ Episode 35. This scene is staged at the eve of the Battle of the Red Cliff, the most significant war in the Three Kingdoms period. The outbreak of war resulted from

the southern invasion led by the warlord Cao Cao, who had just united forces in Northern China and claimed to lead a troop of 800,000 soldiers against the southern alliances led by warlords Liu Bei and Sun Quan, a combined force with 50,000 soldiers. Because Cao Cao's forces outnumbered the Sun-Liu alliance by 16 times, and it seemed to be impossible to combat Cao Cao by force, the Sun-Liu alliance designed a ploy to trick Cao Cao: Huang Gai, one of the leading generals of Sun Quan's forces, planned to pretend to surrender to Cao Cao and send ships on fire to Cao Cao's warships to ignite them. To make his feigned defection authentic, Zhou Yu, the commander of Sun Quan's forces, beat Huang Gai harshly in public to make Cao Cao believe that Huang Gai had been humiliated and have good reason for a betrayal. In this sequence, Zhuge Liang, the strategist from Liu Bei's force discusses the public beating of Huang Gai with Lu Su, the strategist from Sun Quan's force.



Figure 1.1 Zhuge Liang looking right



Figure 1.2 Lu Su looking left



Figure 1.3 Zhuge Liang and Lu Su

The dialogue is filmed in a shot-reverse-shot series, which strictly follows the rule of continuity editing to create a realistic effect and erase the presence of the camera. Figure 1 frames a medium close-up shot of Zhuge Liang looking at Lu Su at the right side (Fig. 1.1), cutting to a reverse shot of Lu Su projecting a look at Zhuge Liang at the left side (Fig. 1.2). With two shots framed in a medium close-up, one can easily recognize the eyeline match between the two, as Zhuge Liang and Lu Su are looking in opposite directions when addressing each other. The mise-en-scene is staged according to the 180-degree system of continuity editing, as illustrated by Bordwell in Fig. 1. 4, with two cameras positioned on the same side (Bordwell 233). If a camera crosses the 180-degree axis to the tinted area, the system would be violated and the audience would confuse the characters' relative positions.

As in the sequence of *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, Zhuge Liang is always positioned at the left side of the screen and Lu Su at the right side, both of whom remain on the same side of the axis. Bordwell points out that the 180-degree system ensures consistency of the characters' positions; that the eyelines match the screen direction (233). Accordingly, the sequence is

concluded with a medium long-shot, confirming the relative position of Zhuge Liang and Lu Su sitting together and looking at each other during the dialogue (Fig. 1.3). The mise-en-scene is therefore framed in a realistic manner, as the action's spatial continuity and causality are ensured by the continuity editing, and the characters' facial expressions can be seen clearly under the natural light projecting on their faces in medium close-ups. Under the natural setting of the zero-degree style, the stylistic elements are eliminated, and the audience can hardly tell the presence of the camera and the cuts between each shot. The historical past is brought to the present, as if the viewers are witnessing the scene directly, without the mediation of the camera eye and the symbolic networks.

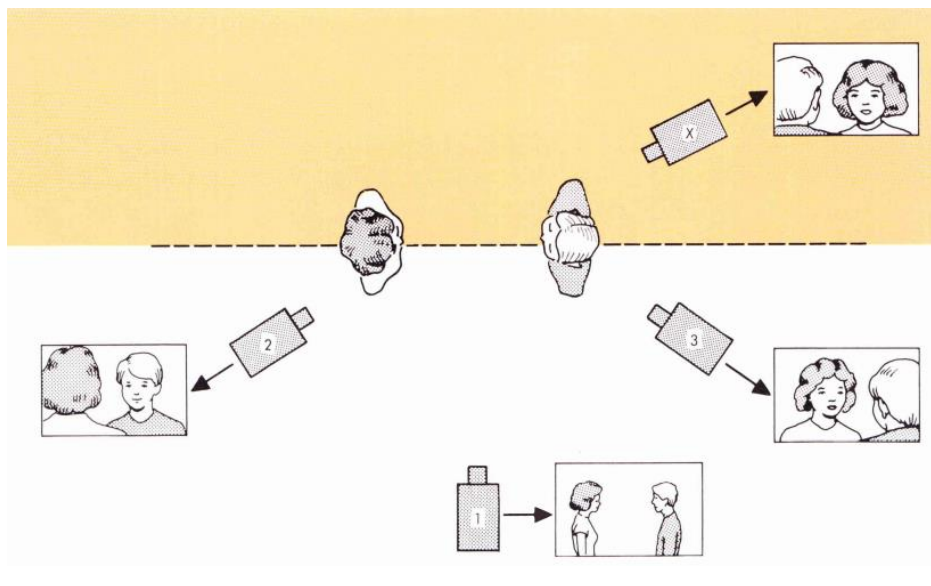


Figure 1.4: Bordwell, 180 degree rule

However, toward the end of their dialogue, after Zhuge Liang anticipates that Sun-Liu's alliance will win the war, the scene cuts to a point-of-view shot of Zhuge Liang and Lu Su projecting a look at the horizon (Fig. 1.5), along with the sunset they are supposed to be looking at (Fig. 1.6), which is the cover image of the drama. The camera then shifts to a long shot of Zhuge Liang and Lu Su standing on the ship, facing the river, with the backlighting outlining

their silhouettes (Fig. 1.7). Both characters are standing still, and there is limited movement within the camera, which zooms in from an extreme long-shot to a medium long-shot, with the theme song gradually entering into the frame. In this particular moment, the zero-degree style is transgressed by the expressive backlighting, the extra-diegetic music; thus, the style of the scene imitates a still image: the silhouette has reduced the image from a three-dimensional shot to a two-dimensional pictorial scroll.

As the continuity of the time is interrupted by the sudden change of lighting and style, the image of the boat and the historical figures is momentarily isolated from the flow of the movement and defamiliarized from the natural setting. The defamiliarization effect of the photographic stillness makes the image “quotable,” as if it is not naturally growing out of the dialogue and action of the characters but is a direct reference to the painting scroll that portrays the stories of the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. It is also the quotability of this particular scene that makes the sunset the cover of the televisual drama, as it is a decisive moment in the history of the Three Kingdoms and the original fiction the drama is adapted from, which distinguished itself from the flow of the narrative and the everydayness of the natural setting.



Figure 1.5 outward look



Figure 1.6 sunset



Figure 1.7 Silhouette of Zhuge Liang and Lu Su

The momentary scene has simultaneously imbricated the audience's gaze to the image and distanced the image from the audience. The sudden shift from the zero-degree style to highly expressive style, along with the arrest of the movement, has transformed the sunset (Fig. 1.6) from the object of the look of the characters within the frame (Fig. 1.5), to the audience outside the frame. Correspondingly, the historical figures themselves have retreated from the subject who is gazing at the sunset (Fig. 1.5) to the object that has integrated to the image of the sunset (Fig. 1.7). The perspective shift therefore separates the "look" of the characters and the audience

previously joined by the point-of-view shot: the characters are integrated into the image on the screen that is supposed to be quoted from the drama's original source material; the audience outside of the screen no longer passively follows the consciousness of the camera, as well as the perspective of the characters defined by the continuity editing, but have momentarily detached themselves from the screen. A reflexive distance between the viewer and the image is therefore opened, thus allowing the viewer to reflect upon, comment on, and interpret the historical moments quoted from the classical texts and the historical records.

However, the stylistic scene also distances itself from the audience by highlighting the past. With the zero-degree-styled setting and continuity editing, the vision of the audience is merged with the characters, and the presence of the camera is erased, as if the audience is situated at the same diegetic space with the characters. The highly stylistic expression and stillness of the image has confined the scene as the image within the frame and the audience as the external observer outside of the dramatic space. As the frame separates the audience from the image, the audience's vision is also limited by the frame and the *mise-en-scène*: the audience can no longer see the facial expressions of the two characters who are backing against the camera in a long shot; further, the backlighting has made the two characters and the boat's shadow untouchable by the search light of the camera eye and the gaze of the audience. The silhouettes immersed in shadow therefore represent the *hipporatica* of history, i.e., the radical inaccessibility of history that falls outside the limits of visibility and the cognitive grasp of modern viewers. At this particular moment, the distance between the past and the present is revealed, and the viewers acknowledge the limits of their vision and interpretation.

As represented by the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, the historical drama is symbolic and allegorical at once, illuminating history in its symbolic form by making heroic moments of the

past apprehensible for the modern viewer with continuity editing and a naturalized setting. Nevertheless, the fact that the scene refers to a historical facticity outside of the text that has already disappeared imposes a radical limit to the narration and visualization; further, there is always part of an historical event that cannot be illuminated via interpretation of modern viewers and has sunk into oblivion, literally represented by the shadow on the image. The shadow simultaneously calls for the interpretation of a future viewer, who is capable to decipher and redeem history that is repressed by the official narratives and imposes a radical limit on the interpreter's vision. The performance that anticipates the interpretation from the viewers is interpreted by Benjamin, as being characteristic of the Brechtian epic theatre, the effect of which "was anticipated and revealed" of the viewing crowd (19). Benjamin suggests that the condition of the epic theatre lies in the interruption of the action, to make the performer's gesture "quotable" (20). It is precisely at this particular moment when the movement is interrupted, the performance and the *mise-en-scene* become a text that is readable and quotable for a third party. However, I would like to step beyond Benjamin's interpretation by suggesting that even the most heroic moment of the epic theatre is not all about the revelation but always reserves the "petrified, primordial landscape" that has not been "revealed in the light of redemption." As represented by the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, the historical epic unfolds precisely along the limit that divides the illumination and the shade.

The expressive use of the sharp contrast between the light and the darkness can also be found in decisive moments of other historical epics with realistic schemes and expressive styles. The historical epic with a national revival theme, represented by "The Great Revival" (2007) and "The Qin Empire" (2009), is clustered around the year 2008, when China hosted the inaugural Olympics for the first time. According to Zheng Wang (2014), hosting the 2008 Summer

Olympics was a sign of China's recovery from the humiliating experiences in the wake of Western and Japanese incursion and the restoration of the nation's ancient central position on the world stage (Wang 154). During the press conference regarding the Beijing Olympics, Hu explained to a reporter from *Australian* that the dream in the slogan "One World, One Dream" refers to the "modernization of China" and the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Wang 154). As a result, "rejuvenation" became the keyword of the 2008 Olympic Beijing, as a showcase of China's historical glory and an end to the century's humiliation (Wang 154). The historical drama aired during this period, which often revolved around themes of humiliation, retaliation, and rejuvenation. It usually starts with a weak state that has been annexed by its neighboring nation with a strong military power or is at risk of being conquered by a hegemonic state. After a period of revolution and reformation, the weak nation struggled to increase its military power and finally defeat the strong nation and regain its central position in the world.

"The Great Revival" is most representative of the theme of national humiliation and revival. The drama was about the conflict between the Kingdom of Wu, one of the greatest military powers in the Spring and Autumn Period, and its neighbor, the Kingdom of Yue, with relatively weak financial and military power. After the Kingdom of Yue was defeated and annexed by the Kingdom of Wu, the king of Wu, Fuchai, asked the king of Yue, Goujian, to serve as his slave. In return, the residents of Yue would not be massacred, and the king of Yue would remain an independent sovereign. At the critical moment when Goujian has determined to accept Fuchai's deal for the sake of national survival, the mise-en-scene shifts from the naturalistic setting to a contrasting lighting scheme, as shown by the screen shots below.

:



Figure 1.8 Gou Jian



Figure 1.9 Fu Chai



Figure 1.10 Gou Jian, Side Light



Figure 1.11 Fu Chai

In Episode 19, the initial exchange between Fu Chai and Gou Jian starts with the door closed behind Gou Jian, indicating the only source of light is the dim light leaking from the fence. In a high-angle long shot, Gou Jian appears in full silhouette in the backlight (Fig. 1.8) and gradually walks out of the shadow to be projected under the side light (Fig. 1.10). Fuchai initially appears in the natural light in a low-angle long shot (Fig. 1.9); yet, as Goujian approaches him, the camera is pushed farther away, and he is exposed to the high key light and fill light that seem to be at odds with the dim environment and naturalistic setting. At the diegetic level, the contrast between the high-angle shot and low-angle shot, the high key light and the backlight, and the illumination and the silhouette represents Fu Chai's rise to the highlight of his life and Gou Jian's fall to the lowest point. As the winner of the war, Fu Chai has ascended to a god-like position: He is now in charge of the Kingdom of Yue, Gou Jian, and the narrative of history, symbolized by the intensive light projected onto him. Gou Jian, on the contrary, is excluded from the power struggle, loses his proper citizenship, and falls to the position of less-than-human, which is as Fu Chai's slave. Either as a light spot or silhouette, the facial expressions of Gou Jian and Fu Chai appear unintelligible for the viewer, and the contrasting light scheme is intentionally deployed for the purpose of obscuring the image. It is precisely at the moment when the performer's face appears unrecognizable in the shadow or the overexposure of the light that the historical figure is decoupled from the performer. As the faces of the historical figures are obscured, they are reduced to a point of representation, either appearing as names in the verbal narration or visualized as a point of light or faceless shadow. At this particular moment, the audience will recognize the inaccessibility of a scene from the past that has already disappeared.

Rather than trying to engage the viewers and creating the past–presence by deploying a naturalistic setting, the historical drama is obsessed with the aesthetics of shadow to distance the viewers from the past. Intuitively, the directors may strive to make the image clear and apprehensible at the critical moment of the drama. The viewers are also eager to see the struggle and determination on the performer’s face, when the historical figures they perform as are making decisions that will change their fates and the course of history. However, the historical drama extensively deploys shadow to obscure such a critical turning point in the history and the narrative of drama. As in “the great revival,” Goujian’s face is kept under the dark sidelight when he is making up his mind to be Fu Chai’s slave. With the low key-light projected from the left side of the screen with almost no fill light, half of Goujian’s face is completely immersed in the shadow, and half of his face is obscured by the shadow of his hair and the rim of his head. Due to the lack of rim light, the contour of his head also becomes indistinguishable from the background darkness. The performer’s facial expressions and bodily gestures appear inapprehensible for the viewers; the background is also diffused into the shadows and light spots, which are out of focus. From the historical hindsight, the audience is well aware that Gou Jian will be unbearably humiliated as a slave; yet, he will manage to defeat and annex the Kingdom of Wu motivated by the humiliation. Nevertheless, the audience can hardly tell the inner world of the characters from the actor’s performance when the image is intentionally obscured.



Figure 1.12 Gou Jian

Obsession with contrasting lighting schemes can also be found in another historical drama, *The Qin Empire*, which has a similar thematic motif. *The Qin Empire* (2009) features the State of Qin, as ruled by the Duke of Xiao, who has recruited Shang Yang as the prime minister to carry out a series of reforms, which ultimately transformed Qin from a minor state, at risk of being carved up and annexed by its neighbor states, to a strong military power that finally defeats the hegemonic power. The important part of Shang Yang's reformation is to impose the universal application of national law to every citizen. In the drama, Shang Yang's reform is initially supported by Ying Quliang, the Duke Xiao of Qin, and Ying Qian, his brother; together, they form a "reformation triangulation," struggling against the conservative aristocracies who are against the reformation. However, one day, the crown prince of Qin kills an innocent—yet he hasn't reached the age of majority to face corporeal punishment, according to Shang Yang's legislation in the drama. To uphold the impartiality of his legislation, Shang Yang, who is the supervisor and instructor of the prince, slices off Ying Qian's nose. Since then, Ying Qian has disappeared from the historical records; in the drama, he has retired from his role in the

reformation and finally frames Shang Yang as a traitor, which leads to his execution by the end of the drama.



Figure 1.13 The Qin Empire



Figure 1.14 The Qin Empire



Figure 1.15 Ying Qian



Figure 1.16 Shang Yang

The confrontation between Shang Yang and Ying Qian about the corporeal punishment of slicing his nose is staged in a room, with the natural light projected from the window situated at the left side of the screen. Shang Yang walks into the room in complete silhouette in a long shot, framing his relative position with the source of light from the window and other characters in the frame. As Ying Qian turns back and confronts Shang Yang, both are projected under the contrasting sidelight: Shang Yang walks out of the silhouette, with half of his face in shade and three-quarters of Ying Qian's face immersed in complete blackness with no fill light; as such, the audience can hardly perceive his countenance. At the diegetic level, the contrasting lighting in this particular scene is emblematic of the drama's narrative structure, which is based on the contradiction between good and evil. The shadow that covers Ying Qian's face can be read as his retreat from protagonist to antagonist, and the shadow on Shang Yang's face anticipates his future downfall and execution as a result of Ying Qian's revenge. At the extra-diegetic level, the shadow on Ying Qian's face can be read as his exclusion from the symbolic network and the major plotline of the drama at this moment as well as his disappearance from the historical records. The shadow, in general, can therefore be interpreted as facts that are lost in the record and disappeared from the narratives of the past, waiting to be redeemed by the future viewers.



Figure 1.17 The Great Revival

The opacity, as a representation of the historical facticity, can be best exemplified by the final scene of *The Great Revival*. After spending three years serving as a slave for Fu Chai for three years, Gou Jian manages to return to the Kingdom of Yue. To motivate himself for the revenge, Gou Jian refuses to live in the palace but chooses to make a thatch as his bedroom and sleep on sticks. He hangs bile in his bedroom and tastes it every day, to remind himself of the humiliation he has endured in the Kingdom of Wu. After 10 years of reformation, the Kingdom of Yue grows strong, and Gou Jian finally defeats and annexes the Kingdom of Wu. The last scene of the drama features Gou Jian returning to his thatch after winning the war, sitting on his stick bed, and looking up to the bile he used to taste to motivate himself. The scene is framed in a long shot, with the body of Gou Jian almost immersed in complete darkness; yet, the rim of his head is outlined by the backlight that is supposed to be projected from the window behind. In the long shot and the weak backlighting, the face of the Goujian is intentionally obscured, to make the figures appear on the screen neither as performers nor as roles in the drama but as the deceased historical figures, the appearance of whom is no longer accessible to the viewer. Correspondingly, the inaccessibility of the historical figure is represented in a manner of

formalistic negativity, as the shadow on the screen that cannot be touched by the light and appears unintelligible for the camera's eye.

The historical drama's obsession with shadow and backlight calls for a recalibration of the concept of the historical realism—not as deploying the technique of televisual realism to make the scene apprehensible but as acknowledgment of the limits of apprehensibility. As in the scene of Gou Jian determined to be Fu Chai's slave (Fig. 1.12), and the scene of Gou Jian returning to his stick bed after winning the war (Fig. 1.17), the contrasting lighting scheme strictly follows the lighting's realistic direction, as the backlight is not generated by artificial lighting but projected from the fences at the back of the performers. The dim light also shows the historical accuracy of mise-en-scene of a room in ancient times, where there is only natural light that can barely light up the faces of the historical figures. This way, the historical realism framed by the historical drama spirals into a paradox, in that it is not aimed to present the image on the screen in a realist manner. Rather, what it tends to feature is what is absent from the screen and fails to be captured by the image, i.e., the historical facticity that can only be represented negatively, as the shadow, silhouette, and darkness.

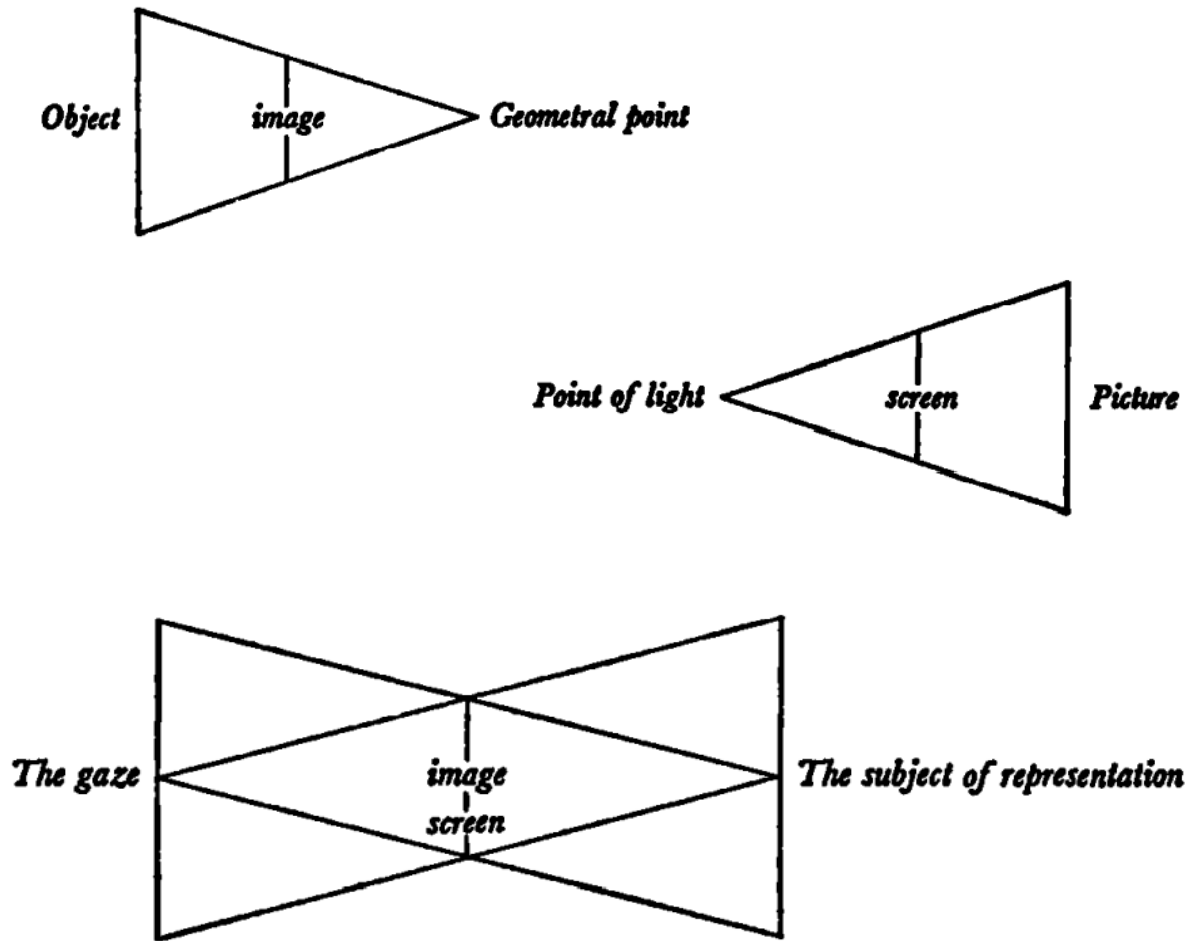


Figure 1.18 Lacan's Visual Paradigm

As elaborated above, the historical drama is not only framed as a cognitive apparatus that features what can be known about the past but also sets up the limit of vision, tending toward historical facticity that is withdrawn from cognition and perception. Such negative aesthetics are achieved through inversion of the perspectival grid, which defines a spectatorial position on the other side of the screen—one that projects a gaze upon the object of historical facticity, the immediate accessibility of which is blocked by the image on the screen. The perspectival grid of historical drama can be best illustrated by Lacan's visual paradigm in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (106). The first triangular diagram presents a compositional

structure of an image, as representing the object at one side, and the subject's look is situated at a geometrical point at the other side of the image. The second triangular diagram sketch is the image presented on the screen, as conditioned by a source of light projected on the image, and the viewing subject as a receptor of the picture situated at the other side of the image. The picture is available to the viewer when the image and the screen coincide with each other, as represented by the combined diagram: It situates the source of light and the object behind the screen, which cannot be directly accessed by the viewers in front of the screen but can be indirectly represented by the image on the screen. The image on the screen in the third diagram blocks the viewers' immediate access to the object and conditions the mediated access to the object, which is the object that has been illuminated by the "point of light."

The perceptual diagram is inversed when the viewer is identified with the gaze on the other side of the screen, to immediately perceive the object that is blocked by the image on the screen. As in the combined diagram, the "geometrical point" that the subject is corporally situated at is folded back to coincide with the "point of light" at the opposite side of the screen, giving rise to an inaccessible position of gaze that the audience hypothesizes when looking at the image. In the case of the historical drama, the "object" represented and blocked by the screen is the primordial scene of historical facticity that has already disappeared and can only be represented by the image on the screen. The claim to historical realism therefore spirals into a paradox: How can the unrepresentable facticity be represented as an image on the screen? The solution provided by the historical drama is the formalistic negativity: If what can be perceived on the screen is the image illuminated by the light, the unrepresentable scene of the past cannot be captured by the light and what has been blocked by the screen, such as shadow, silhouette, vanishing point, and inapprehensible images. In this respect, the historical drama finds the visual

equivalent of the historical facticity in the aesthetic of negativity, to distance the past from the present with the shadow of the *hipporatica* of history.

The time-image: beyond the limit of realism

The previous section explored the historical drama's representation of historical facticity that cannot be visualized on the screen via negative aesthetics, shadow, backlight, sidelight, and silhouette, which have not been illuminated by the gaze in modern times. As in the three historical epics discussed above, scenes are filmed in realistic settings, with identifiable sources of light, and edited according to the rule of continuity. The unrepresentable historical facticity can only be found in blackness that fails to be illuminated by the source of the light and is therefore unable to be visualized on the screen. However, one may wonder if there is a positive manifestation of the historical facticity that is impossible to be represented on the screen. I suggest that a positive manifestation of the unrepresentable would demands a move from the epistemological impossibility to the aesthetic of incommensurability, which is based on the noncorrespondence between the human cognitive faculty and the image on the screen. The principle of the incommensurability is characteristic of Deleuze's time-image, which allows the "impossible through the possible" and the virtual through the actual (Deleuze 274-275). This section studies the two outliers of the historical drama, *The Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms* (1998) and the *Ming Dynasty 1566* (2007), which transgress spatial continuity and chronological succession established in the realist setting of the historical drama, to redeem the repressed past in the time-image that proceeds "what could happen" through "what has happened." In what follows, I will show how these two dramas not only confront the viewer with the historical facticity in the limits of visibility but actually cross such limit with the aesthetics of incommensurability.

What is most representative of the aesthetics of incommensurability is the first episode of the televisual adaptation of the *Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms*, a historical novel that begins with the collapse of the Western Zhou Dynasty into smaller states and the unification of the states into the Qin Dynasty. The first episode begins with a classical Chinese story depicting an incident that supposedly led to the fall of the Western Zhou Dynasty: tricking the lords with a beacon. The story starts with the last king of the Western Zhou Dynasty, King You of Zhou, who is obsessed with one of his concubines, Bao Si, a beauty who never laughs. To amuse Bao Si, King You lights the warning beacon on Lishan, which is supposed to be used to signal the invasion of the barbarians and summon the warlords to protect the city. When the noble warriors travel a long distance and finally arrive with the armies, King You tells the troops that they were tricked and there is no enemy. Bao Si finds this scene amusing and finally laughs. The next time when barbarian Quanrong actually invades, the warlords no longer trust the sign of the lighting beacon, and King You is killed by Quanrong, which results in the fall of the Western Zhou Dynasty.

For thousands of years, Baosi has been described as a female fatale in official historical records and the canonical historical fictions, who is responsible for the fall of the Western Zhou Dynasty; yet, the *Eastern Zhou Chronicles* offer an alternative history, which is subsumed by the master narrative. The episode begins with the burial ritual of King Xuan of Zhou, the father of King You of Zhou. The voiceover reveals that the king has to be buried with hundreds of human sacrifices, including concubines, slaves, and courtiers. As revealed in the screen shot, the camera is positioned in the tomb pic, capturing the human sacrifices walking into the frame in a low-angle shot. The human sacrifices are completely in black and appear with their faces and their bodies invisible. After the coffin beams fall one by one, the screen is covered in complete

darkness, which is what the human sacrifices see as they are buried alive. Filmed from the point of view of the invisible and the unheard, the establishing sequence defined the purpose of the drama as redeeming the histories of the oppressed that are literally buried by the grand narrative of the dynastic past that is told from the king's perspective, the aristocracies, or at least the free male citizens. Different from the silhouette of the heroic figure in history epic that symbolizes the totalization of the history in a monumental moment, the slave in complete blackness manifests a point of view that has been repressed and fails to be totalized in the grand narrative. As opposed to the historical drama that momentarily implies the untold histories in the shadow of the side light, the narratives of the *Chronicles of the Eastern Zhou Kingdoms* unfold from the impossible point of view of the shadow.



Figure 1.19 Human Sacrifices



Figure 1.20 Fallen Woods



Figure 1.21 Running Horse



Figure 1.22 Bao Si

The negative aesthetics of the shadow and the invisibility has found its positive expression in a surrealist movement: a horse sacrifice struggles to escape from the sands that almost fill up the tomb pit and appear in complete silhouette in the long shot capturing the horse running in the horizon of the plain. Not coincidentally, the first time Bao Si enters into the narrative of the drama, she is also in black as the human sacrifice and appears in complete silhouette as the horse sacrifice. The silhouette has therefore established a visual equivalent between the horse and Bao Si, both of whom are seen as subhuman and have been silenced by the official historical narrative yet manage to escape from burial and disrupt the grand narratives. The metaphorical equivalent is subsequently confirmed by the following plot of the drama. After

Bao Si has been sent to the court and won the obsessive favor of the king, the queen suspects that Bao Si is not a human being but the horse escaped from the burial, because she never smiles as a human does. Subsequently, King You of Zhou tries anything to amuse Bao Si in order to prove that she is a human being. Once King You of Zhou hears that Bao Si smiles when she looks at a fire, he decides to light the beacon to make her smile. However, Bao Si doesn't smile when she sees the fireworks but laughs fiercely when she sees that the troops of the nobles have been tricked by the beacon to protect the city. The nobles thereby no longer trust the beacon as a sign of invasion, and King You of Zhou is killed by Quanrong without reinforcements from the noble.



Figure 1.23 Quanrong's invasion



Figure 1.24 the King's Death



Figure 1.25 The King's Death



Figure 1.26 Baosi's Disappearance



Figure 1.27 Yellow Fire

The ending of the drama features the fall of the Western Zhou Dynasty in a surrealist manner. The invasion of the Quanrong, the murder of the King You, the marching of the troops, and the mythical disappearance of Bao Si are featured in a series of fades, which substitutes the montage that streamlines the continuity of the movement. The chronological succession and logical causality of the events connected by the montage are therefore replaced by the diachronic substitutions of the still images. As shown in the screen shots above, the sequence starts with the shot of Quanrong soldiers rushing into the palace in red filter, thus highlighting the expressionist contrast among the red flames, light, and smoke as well as the black shadow of the soldiers (Fig. 1.23). The still image of Baosi lying with the corpse of King You fades in and is shaded by the semiopaque image of the red flames and intruding soldiers (Fig. 1.24). With the red layer of Quanrong soldiers fading out, the still image of Baosi and the corpse appears in its original color without a filter in a realistic manner (Fig. 1.25). The camera then zooms into the face of Baosi, which is superimposed by another layer of intruding Quanrong soldiers with yellow flames and no color filter fade in and finally fades out, leaving layers of yellow flame and the silhouette of soldiers in a riot.

The still image of Bao Si lying with the corpse of King of You has intruded into and interrupts the continuous movement of the montage: It is neither temporally continuous with the previous scene nor does it appear spatially contiguous with the following scene. Rather, it stands as a singular image that subsists in the interstices of the process of fading, when the previous image has not yet disappeared, and the following image has not appeared fully intelligible. The still footage of Bao Si and the corpse is therefore framed as a time-image. In terms of the temporal order, the image is superimposed with the previous shot, representing the past–present that has not yet faded; in the following shot, the anticipated future–present has not yet fully

unfolded. The still image itself stands as a present–present that is always in the middle of the process of fading and the substitutions of the layers of images and never fully actualized. Along the imaginary–real axis, the image can be colored by the layer of the red flame, representing the imaginary scene fabricated by the fictional rewritings, and the layer of the yellow flame in a relatively realistic setting, indicating the fading of the virtuality into the world of reality. The still image itself is a proper time-image that does not occupy any duration in time but stands as a temporal dislocation that pushes the virtual into the real and exchanges “what could be” with “what has been.”

Substitution of the layers of images involves a process of disconnection and reconnection that conditions the time-image. As Deleuze explicates, the time-image involves a disruption of the external succession that is used to link the shots and rearrange the shots into a “co-existence of all the sheets of past” and “sequence of images” tending toward a limit (274). As in the fading series of the chronicles, the images are no longer connected according to the external succession that connects a montage but literally separates into sheets of images. However, the images are not reconnected according to the logical sequence or the spatial contiguity, as the still images of Bao Si and the corpse stands in between the fading images are not extended from the yellow or red fire. Rather, it is a “common limit” that the layers of red and yellow fire run into, without being integrated into either of them. As a historical facticity, the image of the death of King You is framed as a still image in a high-angle long shot, as if it is photographed at the site where the murder has taken place, which cannot be covered by layers of fictionality symbolized by the red flame. Also, the factual account cannot explicate the mythical appearance and disappearance of Bao Si, which prevents the image to be seamlessly integrated into the layer of the facticity represented by the layer of the yellow flame. Instead of standing as the common measurement of

the layers of red and yellow flames, the image of Baosi and the point of incommensurability makes the layers of images incompatible.



Figure 1.28 Marching Troop



Figure 1.29 Running Baosi



Figure 1.30 Running Baosi



Figure 1.31 Running Baosi

The series of fading images is contracted into a montage-within-a-shot in the last sequence of the drama. The sequence starts with the voiceover announcing the relocation of the capital from Hao Jing, the old capital of the Western Zhou Dynasty, which has been ruined by the Quanrong invasion, to Luoyi, which inaugurates the establishment of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. The voiceover is accompanied by the long shot of a troop marching eastward at the horizon of the plain field (26). Led by a disembodied female laugh, the image of Baosi running down a hill fades into the image of the marching troop (26). After the layer of Baosi running down the hill is about to be fully faded in, and the layer of the marching troop is on the verge of fading out, the horizon that Bao Si steps on merges with the horizon of the plain field, as if Bao Si and the troop are situated within the same space but at different planes. However, the two planes are not compatible with each other due to the violation of the rule of proportionality: the marching troop in the foreground should be larger than Bao Si running in the background according to the perspectival grid; yet, Baosi's shadow is situated at the vanishing point of the image, appearing disproportionately large compared with the troop and the mountain. This is because the image combines a perspectival image of the marching troop, and the inverse perspective of running Bao Si, without a common measurement that connects the two planes proportionately. The incommensurable superimposition of the perspectival shot of the actualized

facticity, marching troop, and inversion of the perspective shows the virtual images of Bao Si running down filmed at an impossible point of view.



Figure 1.32 Metamorphosized to a Horse

The coexistence and contraction of the opposite perspective make the image of the marching troop and running Baosi a genuine time-image, i.e., a crystal image. As Deleuze explicates, the crystal image involves doubling between the actual and virtual, the actual and the real, the limpid and the opaque, and a contraction of the doublet to their common limit (99). Deleuze suggests that the crystal image is characteristic of the paradox of the nonchronological time, which constitutes the coalescence of a past that has already disappeared and a future that is yet to come in a most contracted degree (99). Accordingly, the epistemological impossible doubling is visualized in the crystal image, which allows the “impossible to proceed from the possible, and the past may be true without being necessarily true” (130). In the last sequence of *The Chronicles of Eastern Zhou Kingdoms*, the actualized image of the marching troop fades out, in exchange with the virtual image of running Baosi that becomes both limpid and opaque: the contours of her body are clarified after the troop disappears; yet, she appears in complete silhouette. The limit between imaginary and the real is crossed accordingly, and the image of the

past is deactualized into shadow, the imperceptible, and the field of milieu with unactualized possibilities. What follows the crossing of such limit is the constant metamorphosis of the historical facticity of “what has been” to “what could possibly be,” which has not been actualized. In the last image of *The Chronicles of Eastern Zhou Kingdoms*, the silhouette of Bao Si has fallen into the ground, her hair whipped back as she climbs upward, which simulates a horse whipping its hair. The imaginary and the real and the fact and the fiction therefore spiral into a point of discernability, which is crystalized in Bao Si’s image: One cannot tell if Bao Si is a human being, historical figure, or horse that escaped from the tomb pit in the burial ritual. Accordingly, the impossible story that has been buried by the grand narrative finds its positive expression in the metamorphic process of becoming a woman, becoming imperceptible, and becoming a horse.

What lies at the heart of crystal image is its disruption of the sensorimotor schema (Deleuze 272). The sensory-motor schema is a link that connects the stimulus and response, the perception, affection, and movement (Deleuze 272). The viewer who passively follows the sensory-motor schema will be subjected to the mechanical succession of time, the spatial contiguity, and the causal consistency established by the continuity editing in the montage. In the *Chronicles*, the sensory-motor schema is disconnected in a dissembling of the montage into layers of images and crystalizes the layers of incommensurable images into a single shot. *Ming Dynasty 1566* expands the contracted version of the crystal image into a montage of irrational cuts and aberrant movements. As Deleuze explicates, the associations between the images are broken and relinked according to noncommensurable relations and irrational divisions (279). Unshackled by the mechanistic associations of the temporal continuity and spatial contiguity, the time-image is put into contact with the cut, the interstices, and the out-of-field outside of the

frame (279). With this respect, the image no longer refers to the wholeness of the drama but to the “unthought, the unsummonable, the inexplicable, the undecidable, and the incommensurable,” tending toward “an outside and an observer” (279). In this respect, the time-image has produced a shock to the viewer’s consciousness and opens up the reflexive distance between the reception and the reaction of the image.

At the macro level, the narrative structure of *Ming Dynasty 1566* transgresses the causal relation, as the succeeding event is never a result of the preceding event but is determined by the exteriority of immediate realities. The drama depicts the last year of the reign of Jia Jing, the twelfth emperor of Ming dynasty, who has obliged his duty and refused to appear at court for 12 years yet was able to maintain a totalitarian regime via constant surveillance and the rule of terror. Because of Jiajing’s retreat from the court, he has delegated the administrative affairs to the prime minister Yan Song and his son Yan Shifan to deliver his commands to the eunuch and allow his crown prince to lead the group that claimed themselves to be upright and opposite to the party led by Yan Song. At that time, if any minister wishes to be hired, promoted, and to execute their policies, they have no choice but to bribe Yan’s party. As a result, the government’s administrative system is severely corrupted, and the national treasury runs into a severe budget deficit. The episodes start with the court meeting for the next year’s budget planning, and Yan Song proposes a revenue-increasing plan: He will ask the farmers to stop growing rice and grow mulberry instead. Jia Jing accepts his proposal and asks the provincial governor, Hu Zongxian, to execute the policy.

The court meeting scene is edited in a disoriented manner that violates the principles of continuity editing. Even though the meeting is sustained by fierce debates and question-and-answer that are based on one-on-one correspondence, the sequence seldom uses the proper shot-

reverse-shot to film the dialogue between the addresser and the addressee. As shown in the concluding long shots of the sequence (Fig. 1.39), all of the ministers are standing at the two sides of the aisles, except for Yan Song, who is sitting at the right-hand side next to Jia Jing. An incense burner is situated at the axis of the aisle and divides the two lines; all of them are relatively taller than the incense burner. However, the camera is frequently placed at the middle of the burner, 30 degrees to the axis that the line of burner is situated at and rotates around a central point between the first and the second burner. As shown in the screen shots, the camera turns 270 degrees, from 45 degrees west of the axis (Fig. 1.35) to 45 degrees east of the axis (Fig. 1.34) and rotates between 30 degrees east of the axis (Fig. 1.36, Fig. 1.38) and 30 degrees west of the axis (Fig. 1.37). With this respect, each cut violates the 180-degree rule, as the camera rotates 360 degrees across the incense burner, a point of view that is impossible to be occupied by any character within the diegetic space. The disoriented effect is accentuated in the long shot that captures the bird's-eye view of the conference participants (1.39). Although the incense stands as the object connector that generates the graphic continuity the disoriented shots, the camera's eye momentary disconnects from the circle when it is positioned at the back of the characters (Figs. 1.33 and 1.35). The disoriented circulation of the camera generates a disembodied gaze, which can neither nurture the gaze of the audience, nor can it be anchored at a specific character within the diegesis.



Figure 1.33 Gao Gong's Back



Figure 1.34 Yan Song's Back



Figure 1.35 Zhang Juzheng



Figure 1.36 Jiaying



Figure 1.37 Jia Jing



Figure 1.38 Jiajing



Figure 1.39 Overview of the Court (High Angle Shot)



Figure 1.40 Overview of the Court (Ground Level)

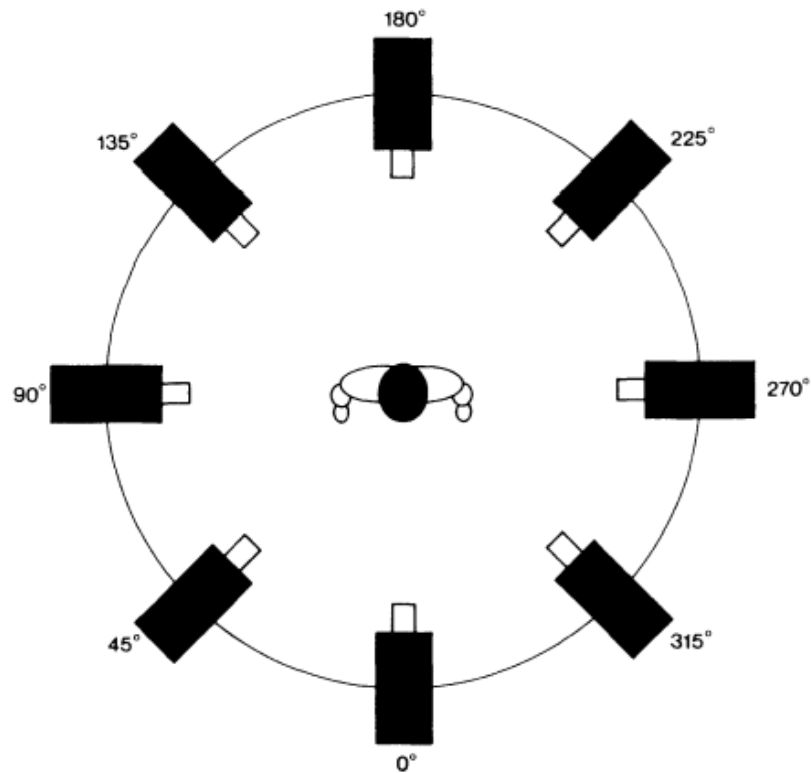


Diagram 1

Figure 1.41 Bordewell, 360 degree

As the continuity principle of the shot-reverse-shot is violated, the sensory-motor schema that links the action and reaction and the stimulus and response is therefore violated, which generates the disoriented gaze and disembodied voice, which are categorized as opsigns and sonsigns (Deleuze 6). For Deleuze, the opsigns and sonsigns and the pure optical image and the pure acoustical images have conditioned the emergence of the time-image with disconnected space and the characters being unable to respond or react (Deleuze 2). With the slackening of the sensory-motor connections, each shot is disassembled into irrational points in a dissonant series (Deleuze 183). In *Chronicles*, the opsigns and the sonsigns are unlinked and reentered into the irrational relation by superimposing two incommensurable layers of images in a single shot. In

1566, however, the time-image is extended into a montage that is not connected by the temporal continuity or spatial contiguity but joined by an irrational cut that delinks the two series of images. As Deleuze explicates, the irrational cut “determines the noncommensurable relations between images,” which deframes each shot to the framing of the following (213-214). The dissembled *opsigns* and *sonsins* are reorganized by the irrational intervals and false continuities in a disconnected space.

The irrational montage in *1566* can be best exemplified by the sequence depicting Yan Shifan, the son of Yan Song coming up with a plot to force the farmers to give up the rice they have grown and sell their lands to the silk merchant. Although the silk produced by the mulberry land will technically yield a higher revenue than the rice produced by the farmland, seldom will the increasing revenue be collected as tax or benefit the farmer. Rather, most of the surplus profit will be appropriated for bribery, and the silk tycoon will have a chance to annex the farmers’ land in this highly corrupted system. As a result, most of the farmers still insist on growing rice and refuse to grow mulberry. Yan Shifan then decides to blow up the dam and flood the rice field, so that the farmers will be out of food storage and forced to sell their lands to the silk tycoon.

The sequence starts with Yan Shifan asking his assistance to draft a letter on his behalf to command the governor of Zhejiang Province to flood the rice field. The camera first cuts to a medium shot of Yan Shifan standing by the shelf that exhibits the antique; then, he walks out of the frame. The camera then shifts 360 degrees and captures Yan Shifan walking to the bookshelf under the gaze of his assistance in a long shot from his back. The following shot shifts 90 degrees and cuts to the close-up of Yan Shifan’s sleeve passing the frame, which occupies half the screen and obstructs the audience’s vision. The final shot resumes to the medium shot of Yan

Shifan standing by the shelf, which establishes a graphic match between the first shot of Yan Shifan standing by the antique shelf in a 45-degree angle and Yan Shifan facing the book shelf in a 45-degree angle. Rather than explicating the spatial continuity and direction of the movement, the graphic match has generated a visual illustration, as if Yan Shifan has not moved at all. The flow of movement is also disrupted by the rapid jump that constantly moves across the 180 axis, the characters who walk in and out of the frame, and the close-up of the sleeve of the characters that blocks the view of the audience. The shot and reverse shot, the stimulus and response, and the action and reaction are therefore disjointed in the aberrant movement of the camera.



Figure 1.42 Yan Shifan



Figure 1.43 Yan Shifan's Back



Figure 1.44 Yan Shifan's Sleeve



Figure 1.45 Resume to the Original Position

The disconnected shots subsequently enter into an irrational disjuncture that consists of multiple mental images that cannot be anchored in the time-space in which the characters are situated. The sequence of Yan Shifan walking to the shelf ends with a freeze frame that abruptly turns the coloured image into black-and-white, which rapidly fades from the screen. The subsequent shot cuts to a black-and-white image of Yan Song laughing—he is neither present in the current setting nor is his involvement in the plot of flooding the rice field shown in the ongoing dialogue. The following shot suddenly cuts to the flooding wave in a high-angle shot verticle to the surface of the flood and then turns 90 degrees to film the flood in a horizontal vision. With disruption of the multiple jump cuts, the temporal continuity and the spatial contiguity that naturally link the shot and the reverse shot is substituted with mental images that describe and erase the objects in physical reality (Deleuze 46). As Deleuze explicates, the shot

and reverse shot relinked by the mental image are “contradicting each other, joining up with each other, forking, and will simultaneously constitute the layers of one and the same physical reality” (Time-image 46). The narrative has thereby moved from the historical facticity and the recorded history into the “physical reality,” to the interpretation of “what might have happened” in the past that has been lost in the historical records, which allows the potentiality to be proceeded through reality in a positive manner.



Figure 1.46 Yan Shifan in Black-and-white



Figure 1.47 Yan Song in Black-and-white



Figure 1.48 Flood (High Angle Shot)



Figure 1.49 Flood (Ground Level)

In this particular scene, the mental image that describes the potentiality of the history has fractured the temporality into three layers: the actualized present–present that fades as it unfolds, represented by the black-and-white image of Yan Shifan that literally fades from the screen; the virtual image of Yan Song laughing, as he might have contributed to the conspiracy or acquiesce in the decision; and the image of the flood, as the consequence of Yan Shifan’s conspiracy, which has not yet been actualized in the present moment but will be passed into reality in the future. The series of the mental images has therefore constituted a circuit of deactualization, which has passed the actual image of “what has happened” (Fig. 1.45) to a series of virtual images, including, “what has happened but has already disappeared” (Fig. 1.46), “what might have happened but is never actualized” (Fig. 1.47), and “what will be happened in the future but has not yet actualized” (Fig. 1.48, Fig. 1.49). Nevertheless, all of the virtual images have been erased by the concluding shot of the scene of Yan Shifan standing by the shelf (Fig. 1.46), which indicates that none of the virtual images have been actualized into the action and the reaction at the present moment.



Figure 1. 50 Yan Shifan's Back

The sequence of Yan Shifan's conspiracy therefore represents the crystal image in a series of montages. As Deleuze points out, each moment of time has to be split into two dissymmetrical jets, "between the immediate past which is already no longer, and the immediate future which is not yet" (81). The time-image always lies at the limit between the vanishing past–presence and the absent future–presence, which constantly "turns on itself" and prevents itself from reaching completion (82). In *1588*, the limit between the past–present (Fig. 45) and the future–present (Fig. 1.49, Fig. 1.50) is replaced by another virtual image that has never been actualized (Fig. 1.47): The image of Yan Shifan, which has passed into the virtual, indicated by the black-and-white color scheme, has been actualized before when still colored (Fig. 1.46). The flood that has been planned in this sequence will be actualized in the future, when the image of the flood in Episode 2 (Fig. 1.48) reappears in Episode 3 (Fig. 1.48, Fig. 1.49) after the dam is blown up. However, the colored image of Yan Song laughing (Fig. 1.47) has never appeared in the entire drama, which indicates that this image has never passed into reality (Fig. 1.50, Fig.

1.51). With all of the virtual images accumulated in the 20-second sequence in multiple jump cuts and aberrant movements, the sequence of Yan Shifan's conspiracy manifests as the "peak of present" that crystalizes the "sheets of the past." As Deleuze defines, all the sheets of the past coexist in the crystal image in "a most contracted degree" (98). Compressing the past-present, the future-present, and the virtual-present in its extreme limit, this 20-second sequence is also a point of exchangeability between the opaque and the limpid, for the past-present that has actualized to pass to the opacity, as the image of Yan Shifan fades out in black-and-white (Fig. 1.46). The future-present is also clarified in the peak of the present, as the images of the flood appear in full color (Fig. 1.40, Fig. 1.51).



Figure 1.51 Flood (High Angle)



Figure 1.52 Flood (Ground level)

The second time the black-and-white image of Yan Song appears is in Episode 12, after the plot of forcing the farmers to grow the mulberry tree fails. Yan Song finally decides to force

the merchant to buy the land with a high price to prevent the farmers from revolting against the government. The sequence starts with a close-up shot of Yan Song lowering his head and looking at the table, suggesting that the official can pressure the merchant to buy the land (Fig. 50), and suddenly cuts to a black-and-white image of Yan Song looking up at the upper-right corner and smiling in a jump cut (Fig. 1.53) then resumes to Yan Song's previous position, which has barely moved in the frame (Fig. 1.55). When Yan Song explains that it is only the farmer who will revolt, and the merchant will never lead a revolution, he barely lifts his eye and looks at the right side. The following shot cuts again to the black-and-white image of Yan Song looking up at the upper-right corner and smiling (Fig. 1.56), which appears symmetrically opposite to the previous shot (Fig. 1.55). In the last shot, Yan Song has returned to his previous posture of looking impassively down at the table. The limited facial expressions and mobilities of Yan Song within the frame reveals a sharp contrast with the black-and-white image of Yan Song fiercely laughing, which fails to be integrated into the continuous movement indicated by the preceding shot and the following shot. Rather, the abrupt insertion of the black-and-white image stands as a disruptor that delinks the continuity of the movement motivated by the sensory motor schema and the pure virtual image that describes the image without being actualized as action and reaction. With this respect, the time-image in *1566* manifests a peak of "de-actualized," as a sensory disjuncture that disconnects the habitual movement from the past to the future, shot to the reverse shot, and stimulus to the response and opens up a reflective distance to comment, interpret, and rewrite the historical facticity. It is precisely in the interval opened up by the sensory disconnecter in which the unrealized possibility that has not been recorded finds its positive expressions in the virtual images that have never been actualized.



Figure 1.53 Looked Down



Figure 1.54 Looked Up



Figure 1.55 Looked Down



Figure 1.56 Looked Down



Figure 1.57 Looked Up



Figure 1.58 Looked Down

In violation of continuity editing and perspectival composition, *Ming Dynasty 1566* and *Chronicles* have superimposed the actualized image “what has been” and the unactualized potentiality “what could be” in a surrealist manner. It can be achieved by bringing the virtual images and actual images together as incommensurable planes in a single shot as in *Ming Dynasty 1566* or via inserting the virtual image between the actualized shot and the following shot in a montage of movement. The deactualizing effect in these two outliers of the televisual realism is not limited to the contrasting lighting scheme, which still operates within the paradigm of the realist principle. Rather, it violates the aesthetic convention of the movement image within its momentary suspension of movement and reduction of dimensionality via its exaggeration of the interstices between the layers’ images within a single shot, between the shots, and the following shot in a montage. This way, the historical drama is distinguished from the everydayness by pushing itself away from the conventional editing and composition of the movement image and drawing itself closer to the aesthetic of the still image. With the presence of the media highlighted, the viewers’ habitual way of watching the video will be suspended and recognize that the fictionality of the story world unfolded on the screen as well as the inaccessibility of the factual anterior beyond the frame.

A Pictorial Scroll: from metaphorical to literal

As shown in the previous discussion, the decisive moment in the historical drama often involves a suspension of continuous movement and return to the aesthetic of the still image. At

that particular moment, the viewer will be distanced from the screen and recognize the temporal distance between the past and present, when the image is framed, as if it is a photograph taken on site or a picture painted by the ancients who are witnessing the unfolding of historical events. As briefly addressed in the previous section, critics typically describe the male-oriented historical epics as having the features of “a grand painting scroll” of the heroic past. Nevertheless, the aesthetic of pictorial scroll usually finds its litreal expression in the female-oriented court romance, which Chinese critics usually regraded as nonserious. In what follows, I will offer a visual analysis of the sequences in the female-oriented televisual romance that imitate the pictorial aesthetics via pictorial composition, movement of the camera, length of shot, and sliding of the layers.

The simulation of the pictorial aesthetics may not be a direct reference to the painting but can also be achieved by the mise-en-scene and surface movement of the camera that avoids perspectival depth. One of the best examples is *Ruyi's Royal Palace*, which depicts the tragic romance between Emperor Qianlong and the Empress Nara in the Qing Dynasty. In the drama, Nara is an ancient woman with the modernist pursuit of love, which contradicts the dynastic norm of the obedient wife. In *Ruyi's Royal Palace*, such confinement is usually visualized by the mise-en-scene as the palace wall and palace gate that impede the spectator's horizon. As shown by Figs. 57 and 58, Ruyi is sitting by the door, holding her forehead, with the palace gate closed by her side. As the vanishing point that occupies the center of image is replaced by the closing door, the field of depth is substantially shallowed. The flattened effect of the scene is further enhanced with the backlight that immerses Ruyi and the door of the chamber in sillhouette, as if the image only consists of two layers: the layer of the entrance door of the palace illuminated by the sunset and the layer of Ruyi and the door of the chamber in complete darkness.

As analyzed in the first section, the shadow produced by the contrasting lighting scheme in the male-oriented historical epic is usually deployed to visualize the “inaccessibility” of the past that has been lost in historical records. A similar rationale can also be applied to the female-oriented imperial court romance, as the private life of the empresses inside the palace has never been illuminated by the masculine narrative of historical grandeur and falls into the shadow of the unknown, which is inaccessible to modern viewers. This can be found in the reverse shot of Fig. 1.60, in which Ruyi is holding her chin, with the interior chamber completely sunk into blackness, representing the unknowability of the inner world of the empresses imprisoned by the palace, which is never touched upon by historical records. However, the shadow in the male-oriented epic exaggerates the volumetric effect and highlights the image’s depth of field. The shadow in the female-oriented imperial court romance, on the contrary, flattens the image by presenting the layer of shadow and the layer exposed to the light, as two planes in a single image without a vanishing point. The flat composition of the image generates a visual illusion, as if what is presenting on the screen is the quoted image from the ancient pictorial scroll instead of cinematic footage. Correspondingly, because the objects inside of room are completely sunk in the shadow, the zooming in and out of the camera never generates a sensation of moving into depth but only moving closer to and farther away from the image. Similarly, with the lack of depth of field, the shot of Ruyi immersed in the shadow (Fig. 1.59) and the reverse angle shot of Ruyi exposed to light (Fig. 1.60) are framed, as if the camera is capturing the front side and back side of the same image.



Figure 1.59 Ruyi (Side)



Figure 1.60 Ruyi (Back)

The surface effect can also be found in another set of the shot. In Fig. 1.61, Ruyi is sitting inside of the palace, back to a blurred painting, facing the circular frame. The image can be divided into three planes: the circular frame in the foreground, Ruyi in the middle ground, and the painting in the background. However, both the circular frame and the painting are blurred in shallow focus, the three planes merge with each other, appearing as if layers within the same image. The following reverse-angle shot in Fig. 1.62 confirms such an illusion, as the circular frame in the foreground is excluded out of the frame, and the field of vision is obstructed by a wall that Ruyi is facing. Although the drama is edited with three-dimensional cinematic footage and performed by a real actress, the footage still generates a surface effect of a two-dimensional plane with the vanishing point blocked by the palace wall and the foreground blurred with the

background. Without the accessibility of the room's interior, and the exteriority of the world outside of the room, the scene's space is reduced to a flat surface within the frame, door, performer, and background layered up. The frequent use of the 180-degree reverse-angle shot also eliminates the image's depth by canceling the distance between the characters within the frame and between the performers on the screen and the audience outside of the screen. The two shots give a combined impression of a flat image, and Ruyi emerges as the only cubic figure in the painting's surface.



Figure 61 Ruyi (Front)



Figure 62 Ruyi (Back)

The performers as cubic figures emerging from the painting can be found in the title sequence of the drama. The image of the two major characters, i.e., the emperor and the empress performed by the actors, is digitized into quasi-animated image and blurred with the layers of a

dragon pattern. The filter also furthers the merge between the image of the performer and the front layer with the color scheme of the morandi brown, as if the characters' images are not photographed or filmed by a digital camera but cut from a painting in the Qing Dynasty. The title sequence also generates an illusion of the male and female protagonists walking out of the pictorial scroll painted by a court painter. The picturization of the two actors is also reflected in the plot of the drama: When the emperor and the empress are in love with each other, they ask Giuseppe Castiglione, the Italian Jesuit who has served as the court painter for three consecutive emperors of Qing, to paint a picture of them sitting together. However, after they have broken up due to the emperor's visiting of the whore during his trip to southern region, the empress has cut her image off the painting and burned it. In the official historical records, the reason for Empress Nara to break with Emperor Qianlong has never been revealed, and it only includes Qianlong's narrative that framed Empress Nara as suddenly going mad for no reason. The painting of Empress Nara is absent from the collection of Castiglione's paintings, which includes Qianlong's first wife Empress Fuca and almost all of Qianlong's concubines. The picturization of Empress Nara therefore suggests twofold connotations: by picturing her as the image quoted from the painting in the Qing Dynasty, the drama seeks to establish its historical accuracy of its mise-en-scene by referring to archeological sources. However, as the only accessible historical references are the official historical record and the archeological objects, it also signals the radical inaccessibility of Nara's story, which has been erased by the official history controlled by Qianlong.



Figure 1.63 Qianlong



Figure 1.64 Ruyi

Similarly, *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* (2020) also involves frequent use of the palace wall, palace gate, and frontality of the camera angle to reduce the depth of the field. *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* (2020), which is adapted from Milan Lady's novel, *Held in the Lonely Castle*, is about the reign of Emperor Renzong of Song and Empress Cao. As indicated by the original story's title, the plot of the drama is about the emperor who rules the Song Empire with peace and social stability while shackled by the "lonely castle" of the social norm and conservative institutions. While carefully maneuvering a balance between the progressive and conservative factions, the reformers suffer significant backlash from conservative politicians. The emperor also chose to marry the empress endorsed by the powerful minister, the Empress Cao, who chooses to be a dutiful and obedient queen and gives up her hobbies of martial arts and mechanical engineering as well as her pursuit of free love with the emperor, which is considered improper for the gender norm by the time. In Episode 7, Emperor Ren gives up the girl he loves, i.e., the

daughter of the merchant giant, Chen Xichun, who has traveled around the country with her father and is skilled in mechanical design. When Chen says farewell to the emperor at the court, she asks the emperor what kind of woman would be chosen as the empress. The emperor replies by saying it would be the woman who can bear and survive a life in the court. Chen looks around the palace surrounded by the walls and the doors and leaves without a word. After Chen leaves the court, the emperor sighs that, even though he is supposed to own the whole empire, the place he has actually visited for his entire life would be less than 10% of Chen's accomplishments. The plot development has therefore echoed the title of the original story, as the emperors and empress are imprisoned in a lonely castle enclosed by walls and doors.



Figure 1.65 Farewell



Figure 1.66 Farewell



Figure 1.67 Farewell



Figure 1.68 Farewell



Figure 1.69 Farewell

The visual composition of the mise-en-scene is also kept as a perfectly rectangular surface. The sequence of the farwell dialogue between Chen and the emperor starts with the two standing by an opened gate and facing each other, captured by a establishing long shot perpendicular to the wall by their side (Fig. 1.65). The dialogue is filmed by a reverse shot that

follows the 180-degree rule, with a 45-degree angle featuring the two performers along the z axis (Fig. 1.66, Fig. 1.67). By the end of the dialogue, when Chen decides to leave, the camera resumes to its initial position perpendicular to the wall, without any variation along the z axis (Fig. 1.68). The concluding shot shifts 90 degrees to feature Chen walking to the exit door behind her and leaving with the cargo waiting for her (Fig. 1.69). The 90-degree cut has generated a rigid rectangular space delimited and confined by the palace walls and the palace gates. However, the lack of the variation along the z axis, i.e., the wall that blocks the field of vision, has made the scene with the open door into a rectangular surface rather than a volumetric square (Fig. 1.65, Fig. 1.68, Fig. 1.69). The frame of the shot outlined by the doorsill and the pillars at the two sides of the wall also flattens the image. To generate a sensation of depth of field, there should be proper distance between the spectatorial position of the camera taken by the emperor, the door, and the wall behind, with the intermediary objects along the passage that decrease in size according to proportionality. Nevertheless, with no space between the emperor, the door, and the wall shown in the frame, the three planes collapse into a single image without any depth. As a result, this sequence generates a visual illusion, as if it is a series of four plane images in animation instead of cinematic footage performed by a real person.

The flat composition that combines the cinematic movement and animetic layers can be best exemplified by the intro sequence of the drama. The opening sequence is an animated series that starts with an imitation of a camera's pan movement scanning down the tower from the roof (Fig. 1.70, Fig. 1.71). As the camera moves down to the window of the tower, the spatial relations of the objects surrounding the tower also change accordingly, as if it is a dolly shot that physically moves the audience away from the scene (Fig. 1.72). However, the size of the tower stays relatively the same, with a flower suddenly moving into the frame and appearing

disproportionately large. Accordingly, the flower adds up to the scene as another plane of the image, instead of appearing as an object in the mise-en-scene. While the frames moves farther down the image, the flower slightly decreases in size, and the artificial hill beside it moves into the frame, while another image plane with a girl standing by the top of the wall suddenly adds up to the image. Counterintuitive as it may seem, the change in frame in this particular scene resembles a three-dimensional movement of the camera, as the layers of flowers and the artificial hill blocks part of the building, and the relative size of the objects between different layers also changes, to generate an illusion that the viewing position of the audience has shifted backward as in a dolly shot. However, the lack of the gradual change of the intermediary objects between different planes has further exaggerated the gaps between the layers rather than closing them off. Although the movement between frames simulates the moving camera position, the opening of the arithmetic gap still generates animated movement that, according to Lammare, shows the movement between the layers, as opposed to the cinematice movement that moves in depth (Lammare 6).



Figure 1.70 Roof



Figure 1.71 Roof



Figure 1.72 Roof



Figure 1.73 Roof

The introduction's sequence multilayer composition is best exemplified by the transition of the scene, which accentuates the gap between different layers rather than closing it off. After the frame moves down to show the wall that the girl is standing by, another layer of three men riding horses appears on the screen. Without showing hooves touching the ground, the scene is framed according to the perspectival realism, as the object situated in the foreground is larger than the background (Fig. 1.74). However, when the image further zooms out and reveals the

ground level, one may find the dirt road has been simplified into a block of sand color, which fails to generate a sense of depth (Fig. 1.75). This has generated an illusion, however, as if the hooves are not stepping on the ground but floating in the air, and the riders are situated at the front layer that adds to the image instead of being intergrated into the space occupied by the middle and background layers. The gaps between the layers are made even more apparent in the transition of the scene, with the layer of the three riders and the wall behind shifted left, pushed by a giant stem that crosses the whole screen, gradually revealing the crowd listening to an officer announcing the imperial edict. The depth of field in this transitional scene is generated not by a camera moving in depth but by the gap between the surface of the screen with three riders that gradually shifts out of the frame (Fig. 1.76) and the background that is uncovered by the shifting layer (Fig. 1.77). As Lammare indicates, the flat composition of the animation series brings the depth to the surface, which enables the rapid shifts from plane to plane via the “plays of layers within the image” (32). Correspondingly, the transition of the scene in this introduction sequence is enabled not by cutting or editing but by adding and removing layers of the image from the screen’s surface.



Figure 1.74 Riders



Figure 1.75 Riders



Figure 1.76 Riders



Figure 1.77 Group

The multilayer composition of the flat surface is made more explicit in the subsequent transition of the scene. The first frame features a marriage ritual, with the sedan of the bride held by a group of bearers to move across a bridge. However, the following frame neither zooms in to the frame nor does it shift to the screen but starts to fade into the screen with several lines of words. The next scene appears as it gradually turns opaque, and the scene of the marriage ritual is fully covered by the paper scroll the words are written on, read by a crowd of people, which

adds to the scene as another plane of image. Accordingly, the animated series of the drama has not only eliminated movement within the field but also movement between the shots in a cinematic montage. Rather than imitating the cinematic shot, the sequence has amplified the animatism via its multilayer composition, with the scene's transition only enabled by the plane that continuously adds to the screen's surface. The elimination of movement and depth of field in the animated sequence can be interpreted via twofold connotations: On the one hand, it emphasizes the textuality of the historical records and the archeological objects, i.e., the original sources that historical fictions are adapted from—not as an immediate manifestation of the past but as animated recreations. On the other hand, it also approaches the interpretations and fictional recreations about the past, as the adding up of the layers of narrative to the past, which gradually covers up the historical facticity that remains inaccessible to modern readers.



Figure 1.78 Marriage



Figure 1.79 Marriage

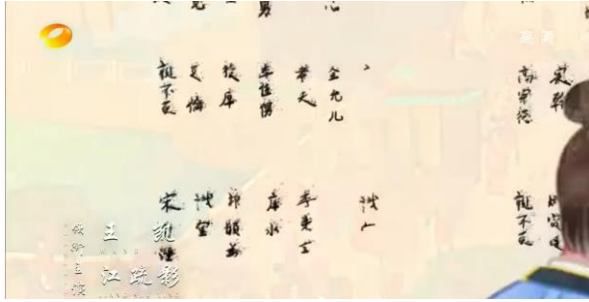


Figure 1.80 Scroll



Figure 1.81 Scroll

As with the introduction sequence of the *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* (2020), the trailer of the *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2019) also involves an animated flat composition, as the camera moves across the screen and in between the frames, without moving in depth of the scene. Similar to *Ruyi's Royal Palace*, the *Story of Yanxi Palace* also features the court romance of the Qianlong emperor. However, the female protagonist is not Empress Nara but the concubine Wei, the owner of the Yanxi Palace who has beaten Empress Nara for the emperor's favor and risen to the highest title for a concubine, "Imperial Noble Consort." As indicated by the original Chinese title of the drama, *Yanxi Gonglue*, which can be literally translated as the "Walkthrough of Yanxi Palace," the drama carries a videogame connotation in its title. The "Walkthrough" is a strategy guide for the videogame play to familiarize players with the necessary skills to overcome the obstacles, combat the boss, achieve the level-up, and finally win the game. The major plot of the

Story of Yanxi Palace (2019) also follows the basic structure of the videogame narrative, as the concubine Wei enters the court as a court servant, defeats her enemies in the court one by one, starting from other court servant against her, to other concubines, and finally the empress herself. Concubine Wei is also elevated from court servant to the emperor's concubine and finally to the imperial noble consort, the highest level of the concubine. The hierarchical structure of the concubine system and the "level-up" narrative closely resemble a strategic videogame in which the player follows the rules of the game, defeats all of the enemies along the way, climbs up to the top of the highest level in the hierarchical structure of the game, and finally wins the game.



Figure 1.82 Map



Figure 1.83 Arched Door



Figure 1.84 Arched Door



Figure 1.85 Wei Yingluo Sitting



Figure 1.86 Wei Yingluo in a Line



Figure 1.87 Wei Yingluo in a Line

The opening scene of the introduction sequence of *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2020) is similar to that of a videogame trailer, i.e., it opens with a CGI-generated panoramic scene to overview the “map” of the site in which the game takes place, i.e., the Forbidden City (Fig. 1.82). The following scene shows an attempt to zoom into the image of the female protagonist, concubine Wei, with the depth of field generated by layers of the arched door, which decrease in number as the frames are brought closer to concubine Wei, who is situated at the vanishing point of the image. This particular scene features the mythical “depth” of the history enclosed by the palace walls and layers of narratives, which get closer to the audience as the camera pushes in. However, the next scene resumes the flat composition, as the image of the layered door fades out, and the image of the concubine Wei sitting in the corridor fades in (Fig. 1.85). Similar to the compositions in *Serenade of Peaceful Joy* (2020) and *Story of Yanxi Palace* (2019), the wall has blocked the viewer’s vision of the depth of the field and flattened the image. The subsequent shot cut to a scene of the concubine Wei standing with a line of court servant. Although the background’s depth of the field has been established with two lines of court servants extending to the vanishing point at the upper-left corner of the image, the foreground of the concubine Wei in focus appears as if it is another image floating on the surface (Fig. 1.86). The gap between the layers is further amplified, as the foreground layer slides across the background layer, with concubine Wei’s face shifting left and covering the hairband of the court servant standing in front of her (Fig. 1.87). The relative movement between the foreground and background planes has disintegrated the image into a cubic photograph with depth of field and a painted image with a flat surface.

Sliding between the layers of painted images and layer of a photographic figure is commonly used in *Yanxi Palace*'s introduction sequence. For example, the scene of the Empress Fuca initially appears as a zoom-out from a close-up of her face (Fig. 1.88) to a medium profile shot (Fig. 1.89). However, in a zooming shot, the relative position between the frame remains the same, while the relative position between the foreground plane of the fan, the middle ground layer of the actress, and the backdrop in the background constantly changes along with the movement of the frame: the fan that initially covers the mouth of the actress (Fig. 1.88) shifts downward to the right to reveal the entire face of the actress (Fig. 1.89); the background also shifts right relative to the actress to expose more patterns on the backdrop. The changing of the spatial relations between the objects is characteristic of the dolly shot, with the camera moving into the field with the world around the characters changing accordingly. Nevertheless, the movement in this scene is not generated by the movement of the camera position in depth of field but by the gap between the layers, which generates a relative movement of different planes of the image. This is more salient in the subsequent scene, which begins with the foreground layer of the artificial hills that cover the face of the actress (Fig. 1.90) and reveals her full portrait (Fig. 1.91) as the frame shifts left. However, as the frames shifts further right to reveal another artificial hill by the left side of the actress, the relative position between the larger hill by the right side of the actress and the smaller hill by the right side of the actress remain unchanged (Fig. 1.92). This indicates that there is only relative movement between the foreground plane of the digitally generated image of the hill and the background plane of the photographic image of the actress. In the subsequent frame, the direction of movement is reversed: the foreground plane of the hugging lovers stays the same, while the background plane of the plum tree moves left to

reveal a longer stem. This has confirmed the relative movement between surfaces and the characters within the image.



Figure 1.88 Empress Fuca



Figure 1.89 Empress Fuca

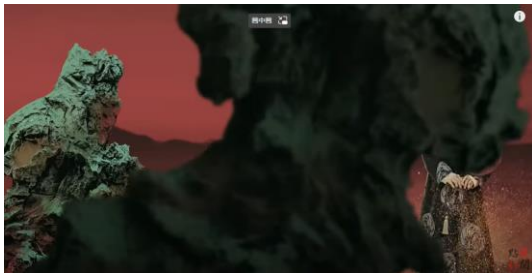


Figure 1.90 Empress Nara



Figure 1.91 Empress Nara



Figure 1.92 Empress Nara



Figure 1.93 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover



Figure 1.94 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover



Figure 1.95 Yingluo Hugging Her Lover

Sliding between the layers has made the images of the actors and the actress detachable from the surrounding environment. It is as if the plane of the characters performed by the actors and actress is cut from the photograph of the historical figures they play, which can be freely copied and pasted in any form of background, be it a painting from a pictorial scroll, a computer-generated image in the animation or video game, or photographic background in a live-action scene. The beginning of the sequence includes multiple frames in which the photographic images of the actors and actress are superimposed on the paintings with a flat composition. As shown in Fig. 1.96, the river and the lotus in the background are digitally generated to simulate an oil painting, while the image of concubine Wei sitting on the boat is recreated by the actress. Also, in Fig. 1.97, the image of a group of court embroiders is recreated by the actress, while the backdrop plane is ostensibly a computer-generated image. The flatness and stillness of these two images are highlighted, as there are only camera movements across the images, panning up and down, shifting left to right. However, the last frame of the introduction sequence resituates the two major protagonists of the drama, concubine Wei and Emperor Qianlong, to the scene of a palace entrance with depth of field, which is established by another palace that is situated at the vanishing point of the image and the prolonged shadow on the floor. The last frame functions as a smooth transition from the introduction sequence with an animated background with a flat surface, to the televisual drama taken on site with depth of field. It also echoes the last scene of the televisual drama, in which the same image of the concubine Wei hugging with Emperor Qianlong flips over and reappears inside the palace building. If comparing the last scene of the introduction sequence and the last scene of the drama, one may find that the photographs of the performers remain unchanged; it is only the background image that is shifted from a computer-generated image of a palace with a deep field to a photograph taken of a real scene with a

shallow field. The correspondence between these two scenes can be read as a self-reflection of the adaptation process, i.e., as a process of recontextualization of the same historical figures in different background stories, while the original scene of historical facticity remains covered by the layers of fictional narratives.



Figure 1.96 Yanxi Palace: trailer



Figure 1.97 Yanxi Palace: trailer



Figure 1.98 Yanxi Palace: trailer



Figure 1.99 Yanxi Palace: trailer



Figure 1.100 Yanxi Palace: ending



Figure 1.101 Yanxi Palace: ending

The portrayal of the historical figures in dramas as the cubic figures walking out of the paintings can be found in most female-oriented televisual dramas after 2019. The best example is the *Palace of Devotion* (2021), which is about the court romance between Zhao Heng, the emperor of the Song Dynasty, and his empress Liu E. It starts with an introduction sequence with the images of the actors and actresses integrated into a traditional Chinese painting scroll, which consists of multiple famous paintings in Chinese history. The one that most frequently appears is

Night Revels of Han Xizai (韩熙载夜宴图), which depicts Han Xizai, the minister of the Southern Tang Dynasty, hosting a night banquet, in which Han Xizai and his guests enjoy the female musicians playing the instruments and dancing and also participating in the performance themselves. The paintings can be divided into five sections: Han Xizai and his guests listening to Pipa; participating in the performance of female dancers by striking a drum; relaxing and chatting; listening to the flute performance; and finally seeing off the guests. Different from the printed book, which has separate scenes on different pages and sections within the pages, the pictorial scroll unfolds without cuts and interstices, which continuously reveals the narrative of the stories from right to left. The temporal continuity and narrative continuity are substituted with the spatial continuity, with the start of the banquet physically positioned at the first scene of the right-hand side, of Han Xizai listening to Pipa's performance with his guests, and the end of the banquet of Han Xizai seeing off his guests situated in the first scene at the left-hand side. The divisions between different scenes are spatialized as the screen, the curtain, and the pillar, which separates different rooms, as opposed to the abstract line that divides different narrative segments.



Figure 1.102 Palace of Devotion: trailer



Figure 1.103 Palace of Devotion: trailer



Figure 1.104 Night Revels of Han Xizai

The introduction sequence of the *Palace of Devotion* (2021) starts with the scene that simulates the section of a flute performance in *Night Revels of Han Xizai*, with a man sitting by the screen, and a group of female musicians playing flutes with each other. However, the image is slightly changed, as the photographic images of the characters performed by the actors and the actress are added to the image, superimposed upon the flat surface of the background image. The movement of the frame also imitates the continuous unfolding of the scroll painting, as the whole introduction sequence is featured in a single long take and long shot. The frame moves from left to right to reveal the unfolding scenes, without cuts, gaps, or interruptions in the transition of the scenes, which perfectly matches the continuous unfolding of the scroll with no lines, interstices, or shift of pages between different scenes. However, the photographic images of the historical figures performed by the actress momentarily transgress the pictorial stillness of a scroll painting. For example, the arms of the photographic figures in Figs. 100 and 101 slightly move along with the scanning of the frame to simulate a conversation. The movement is highlighted in the scene of the dancing, in which the female dancers shake up their sleeves back to the audience when entering the frame from the right side (Fig. 1.105), while turning around to face the audience and holding their sleeves to drop a courtesy when exiting the frame from the left side (Fig. 1.106).



Figure 1.105 Palace of Devotion: trailer



Figure 1.106 Palace of Devotion: trailer



Figure 1.107 Palace of Devotion: trailer



Figure 1.108 Palace of Devotion: trailer

The dancing scene not only breaks the generic boundary among the pictorial scroll, animation, and televisual drama but also the screen as the “fourth wall,” which separates the

audience from the performers: the dancers who drop the courtesy in Fig. 1.104 face the audience directly, as if they are taking a curtain call to the spectator in front of the screen. The breaking of the fourth wall can also be found in the subsequent scene, in which the photographic images of the empress and the female court servant looking outside of the pavilion is painted as a flat image (Fig. 1.107). As the frame shifts from left to right, the female servant raises her hand and points at the screen while looking directly at the audience (Fig. 1.108). The character's gaze and the pointing finger has made the spectator the object to be looked upon and thereby brings them into the diegetic world within the screen. This way, the historiographic convention of inaccessible past is transgressed, when the generic convention of the medium that mediates the past is transgressed. The screen is no longer an unsurpassable limit between the characters and the spectators but a window that opens the world of the past in which historical figures reside for the modern audience.

The drama also includes a direct reference to *Night Revels of Han Xizai* in Episode 2. As director Li Shaohong explains, the difficult situation faced by Lord Qin is similar to that of the protagonist in the painting, *Han Xizai*. The *Night Revels of Han Xizai* is painted by Gu Hongzhong, a painter who is ordered by the monarch of the Southern Tang Dynasty to spy on the private life of Han Xizai, the minister of his court. Gu Hongzhong paints the party that Han has held, as evidence of his decadent life. Similarly, in the drama *Palace of Devotion*, the emperor suspects that his brother Lord Qin is plotting a conspiracy to take his crown. Lord Qin knows that the emperor has lost his trust in him and has possibly sent someone to spy on him, so he has arranged a decadent party to show that he is a hedonistic person with no political ambition. Accordingly, the scene of Lord Qin's party has closely imitated the scene shown in *Night Revels of Han Xizai*. The entire scene is taken in a single long take, with the camera moving from right

to left, which is the right order to read a traditional Chinese painting scroll. There is no cut, dissolves, or interruptions between the scenes, and the division of different sections of the painting is spatialized as the doors, pillars, and screens (Fig. 1.109, Fig. 1.110). Similar to the original painting, in which the male protagonist Han Xizai appears in all five sections of the painting, Lord Qin appears in all five consecutive scenes in the televisual drama. As an invariant constancy, the repeated appearances of Lord Qin ensures the temporal continuity of the unfolding scroll and shows that the five scenes are spread across different points in time, as Lord Qin cannot appear in five rooms at the same time. Accordingly, the chronological continuity is smoothly translated into the spatial contiguity in the long take of the unfolding scroll.



Figure 1.109 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.110 Palace of Devotion

Nevertheless, the televisual sequence is not an exact copy of the pictorial scroll because it shows a depth of field instead of imitating the flat composition of a picture. Rather than framing the scene in an omniscient long shot, in which the spectator can see everything happening within the frame, the camera adopts a limited perspective: The vision of the spectator is constantly

blocked by the door, pillar, waitress, and musicians walking in and out of the frame, which simultaneously acknowledges the presence of the audience and the limits of its vision. Further, the camera doesn't move across the surface of the scene to simulate a flat painting but frequently dollies in to focus on the protagonist, Lord Qin, by changing position, which creates three-dimensional movement to emphasize the depth of field and generates an illusion of the changing spectatorial position. In the last scene of the sequence, the camera suddenly reverses direction of movement, from left to right, and dollying in to show Han Xizai sitting on the bed, which generates a three-dimensional space that extends across the x , y , and z axes. The emphasis on the changing camera position and depth of field allows the audience to move into the world inhabited by historical figures, which implies an epistemic seeing of the spectator who actively investigates history by affectively engaging with scenes of the past.



Figure 1.111 Palace of Devotion

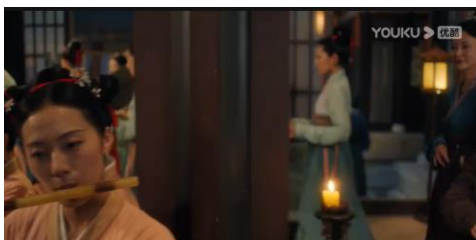


Figure 1.112 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.113 Palace of Devotion

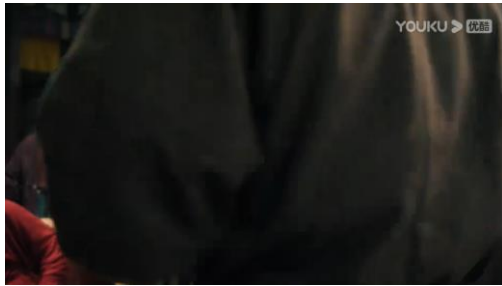


Figure 1.114 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.115 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.116 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.117 Palace of Devotion



Figure 1.118 Palace of Devotion

The camera movement that imitates the three-dimensional pictorial scroll can also be found in the early work of Li Shaohong, such as the *Palace of Desire* (2000), which depicts the life of Princess Taiping of Tang Dynasty. Princess Taiping was the daughter of the Emperor Gaozong of Tang and Emperor Wu, the only female emperor in Chinese history who claimed a throne. Princess Taiping is the most famous princess of the Tang Dynasty, known for her political ambition and power that exceeded the emperor's. However, she was forced to commit suicide by her nephew, Emperor Xuanzong, who believed she was plotting to overthrow him. The televisual drama *Palace of Desire*, however, focuses not on the court coup that involved Princess Taiping but the tragedy of her family, with her husbands in her two marriages committing suicide in the end, and all of her brothers dying in the court coups. The televisual adaptations also changed her relationship with her nephew, from the political rivals to the incest

lovers, and the drama ends with Taiping voluntarily committing suicide to clear the political obstacles for her nephew. The last scene of the drama features Taiping performing a shadow play with her nephew before she decides to commit suicide. The sequence starts with an outdoor scene of the palace in the night on a circular track and then wanders into the interior of the palace in a long take. Similar to the *Palace of Devotion*, the camera tracking across three rooms without the cut and interruptions in between to imitate the unfolding scroll, while maintaining a limited perspective with the pillars, lamps, and doors occasionally obstructing the viewers' field of vision. After the long-take fade-out from the frame with a scene of the room with a screen of the shadow play (Fig. 1.123), the camera shifts to the opposite side of the room (Fig. 1.124) and rotates around the room in a circular track (Fig. 1.125). The long take simulates a gaze that scans across an unfolding pictorial scroll, while the circular track features a three-dimensional space and a camera that penetrates the depth of the scene.



Figure 1.119 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.120 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.121 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.122 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.123 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.124 Palace of Desire



Figure 1.125 Palace of Desire

The “three-dimensional pictorial scroll” generated by Li’s camera work has shown the epistemic desire to access scenes of the past and the epistemic inaccessibility of the past. As Whissel points out, the depth effect of a three-dimensional image implies an epistemic mode of perception with a desire to “see and know the picture” (236). As in the long take of the *Palace of Desire*, the camera dollies in and tracks around the room to show an epistemic desire to search inside of a scene from the past and immerse oneself in the scene rather than distancing oneself from the scene with a gaze that scans across the image. However, the obstacles that block the viewers’ vision shows the impenetrability of the past: Throughout the entire sequence, the audience can hear the diegetic voices of the male and female protagonists delivering the lines of the shadow play; yet, the two protagonists are hidden behind the screen. The pillars, doors, and

screen stand as the epistemic limit of the audience, who can only hear the acousmatic lines delivered by the voiceover, without accessing the corporeal incarnation of the voices, i.e., the historical figures. As a result, the three-dimensional camera movement has structured a spectatorial position of seeing in-depth, which translates the surface of the unfolding scroll into a zone of inquiry. Paradoxically, the desire to see and know the scene of the past is not provoked by accessibility but by the limit of the visibility that blocks a spectator's penetrating gaze. Accordingly, rather than expanding itself for the omniscient gaze of a spectator as a flat painting, the three-dimensional scroll has made the depth of scene unknowable and unperceivable due to the irretrievability of the past.

The aesthetics of the three-dimensional pictorial scroll can also be found in another televisual drama, *The Longest Day in Chang'an* (2019). The drama is staged at the Lantern Festival of 744 CE of the Tang Dynasty, when a group of terrorist seeks to attack the capital Chang'an, and the peacekeeper corps are trying to deter the attack via intelligence-gathering. The establishing scene of the drama simultaneously features the "surface effect" of an unfolding pictorial scroll, and the depth of field of a three-dimensional space. The camera starts from an impossible viewing position, i.e., the sky above the building (Fig. 1.126), and scans down the building (Fig. 1.127) to show the roof, the hanging lantern (Fig. 1.128), and the female musician playing Pipa by the window (Fig. 1.129), which simulates a camera scan across the surface of a painting. However, the camera then shifts to the side of the window, with another female standing by the window and looking downward (Fig. 1.130). Without any cut in between the point-of-view shot, the camera then follows the gaze of the female down to the street, in a diagonal line that cuts across the x , y , and z axes (Figs. 1.131, 1.132, 1.133). After wandering down to the street, the camera temporally settles at ground level and then rotates across the street

along the x and z axes in 90 degrees and rotates back to the street to witness a lantern that accidentally caught on fire (Fig. 1.135). The camera then moves to a close-up of the lantern with the fire dying out (Fig. 1.135), moving ahead along the z axis, while projecting on the mud ground with the legs of the passersby moving into the frame. As the camera moves up to resume to shoulder level, the passersby block the entire frame and look back to the camera, as if the camera holder also participates in the same diegetic space (Fig. 1.136). Correspondingly, the camera also circumvents the passersby and shifts 30 degrees along the x - z axes, to feature the two spies whispering to each other while uncovering the piles of pancake they prepared to sell (Fig. 1.137). The camera then passes the pancakes, head on, and stops at the end of the road, where a door is about to open (Fig. 1.138). However, the camera hasn't shown the scene outside of the opened door but tilts up to the upper level of the city wall, where an official announces the lifting of the curfew for 24 hours (Fig. 1.139). The last scene of the long take passes the shoulder of the official and looks down to the side street in a high-angle long shot (Fig. 1.140).

The opening sequence of the drama shows the paradoxical tendency of the historical drama, with an epistemic desire to look “into” the depth of the scene of the past, and the self-established limit that restricts the epistemic inquiry at the textual level. In Whissel’s analysis of the 3D cinema, the depth effect is associated with the “epistemic seeing” along the continuum of the z axis (236): It is only with the extension of the “ z axis” that the spectator can “feel its way into the very depth of the image” (235). In a similar vein, the epistemic “look” into the depth of the past beyond the textual record is parallel to the camera’s three-dimensional movement into the depth of field. The tracking shot that moves into the field, along with the camera that rotates across all directions, not only facilitates the spectator to see into the field but also moves the audience into the scene with the changing spectatorial position. However, the epistemic inquiry

stops at the moment when the textuality of the scene is revealed, when the camera scan across the scene as if it is a surface, and the camera's limited perspective is shown with the shaky camera. As the epistemic seeing of looking in depth defines the scene within the frame as a zone of inquiry, the surface of the scene and the limited perspective establishes the threshold of the knowability and visibility of the past: The spectators can go as far as they can into the scene of the past, but they can know nothing beyond the text, the historical records, or the historical fictions.



Figure 1.126 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.127 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.128 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.134 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.135 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.136 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.137 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.138 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.139 The Longest Day in Chang'an



Figure 1.140 The Longest Day in Chang'an

Conclusion

This chapter explores the time-image in Chinese historical drama as crystalizing the doublet of the historical facticity that “has happened, and the interpretation of unexplored possibilities, that “could have happened” but has been lost in the official historical records. Such doublet of the historicity is visualized in an indiscernable exchange between the limpid and the opaque, the imaginary and the real, and the perceptible and the imperceptible. In the historical dramas that frame itself within the limit of realism, the contrast between the monumental moment of the epic that has been repeated in historical records, and the “hipporatica of history” that has been lost in the records, is visualized as the contrast between the light and the shadow. As with the historical dramas that stepped beyond the limit of realism, the potentiality finds its positive expression in the crystal image that superimposed the virtual image upon the actualized image in its most contrasted form.

Situated the historical televisual drama within the media history, one may find it can hardly be confined within a self-sufficient aesthetic convention of televisuality. Rather, it

establishes its media specificity by differentiating itself, in its retrospective reference to the relatively old media prior to the invention of the moving image, and its influence on the new forms of artworks emerged in the age of the internet. As shown in the analysis of this chapter, the historical televisual drama has transgressed the convention of the moving image by drawing from the aesthetic convention of the still image, such as the pictorial scroll and the photography. In the following chapter, I will show how the contrasty lighting scheme, and the time image have been adopted by the internet fanfictions, and how the principle of continuity editing that the televisual drama transgressed haunts back to the internet fan video remakes.

CHAPTER 2

...Else if?

Historical fanfiction as a loop of negative recursion

Introduction

Historical fanfiction (*lishi tongren*), literally translated as “the same characters in history,” can be broadly defined as the fictional rewriting of stories of historical figures. Historical fanfiction is among the most influential subgenres of online writing birthed by the Internet in the 1990s; it has flourished in the age of discussion boards since 2003 and has continued its symbiotic relationships with personal blogs since 2015. Historical fan communities have also produced a considerable amount of works online, with more than 1 million works on zonghengdao, the largest discussion board of historical fanfictions, and 0.78 million works on the historical fanfiction Postbar, the discussion forum hosted by one of the largest tech giants in China, Baidu. Given the fact that zonghengdao has not been accessible since 2018, and Baidu Postbar has blocked access to posts uploaded before 2017 in May 2019, most of fans have chosen to upload their works to their personal blogs or individual discussion forums specifically devoted to the couples they write about. The statistics summarized above are only a tip of iceberg compared with the entire population of historical fanfictions.

What is historical fanfiction? Despite its immense popularity, historical fanfiction cannot be neatly fit into the existing categories and subgenres associated with fanfiction. Originated from the fan communities of Japanese manga and Euro-American televisual, fanfiction is traditionally divided into two subgenres: the *tongren* (same character) fiction, which depicts the homoerotic love between a fictional character in the source text, such as manga, televisual

drama, and fictions; the real person slash (RPS) that fabricates male–male love between real people who are usually actors performing fictional roles in television adaptations of the original story and whose life story is irrelevant to the story world in the source text. However, historical fanfictions have problematized the divide between *tongren* and RPS: the historical figures in historical fanfiction are real people instead of fictional characters and thereby cannot be neatly categorized as *tongren* fiction. Nevertheless, historical fanfiction does not fit into the genre of the real person slash, as the fan’s accessibility to historical figures has been blocked by death, and their interpretations and fictional recreations are based on certain historical texts, which necessarily imbricates the fictional narrative no matter how it attempts to approximate itself to a factual account.

This conundrum has also troubled the historical fan community itself, which is subsequently divided to two opposing camps: some fans believe that historical fanfictions are RPS fictions, as historical figures are real people whose existences are independent of fictional texts. Other fans insist that historical fanfictions are *tongren* fictions, which are based on the source texts that are either historical records or secondary rewritings, which are substantially different from the immediate perception of the real person that the RPS is supposed to be based on. Fan xinghedaozhuan describes the process of writing of historical fiction as taking the skeleton frame from historical records and fleshing it out with a fan’s own imagination. Fan Jishengyuheqiliao is even more radical in asserting the fictionality of historical records. She asserts that there is no such thing as primary historical records, and all the records written in classical Chinese language are storytellings with “thick wrappers.” Despite their divergence in classifying historical fanfiction as *tongren* or RPS, the historical community agrees upon two basic principles of historical fanfictions: judgment of the existence of historical figures as real

people who lived in the past and the acknowledgment of the impossibility of the immediate accessibility to these real people.

At the first glance, the assertion of the historical records as storytelling seems to conform to the postmodernist historiography motivated by the constructivist approach, which interpret the historical facts as constructed by the fictional narrative. This results in Xiaofei Tian's interpretation of historical fanfiction as seeking to blur the boundary between the historicity and fictionality; she argues that the fanfiction writer genuinely believes that the homoerotic romance that is not present in historical records must have happened. However, this assertion cannot encompass the vast volume of historical fanfictions that involve time-travel, male pregnancy, alternative universes, ghost stories, etc., which could have not possibly happened on a factual basis. Rather, the writers of historical fanfiction try everything to set up a clear boundary between the facticity and the fictionality: they are endeavored to match every detail in their stories to the official historical records that can be classified as hard facts, e.g., date of certain historical events and the object appears in the story.

In the case of Three Kingdoms fan community, the "records of three kingdoms" is referred to as "the Quran," which is set as the gold standard that every fanfiction is measured against. However, fans also indulge in the carnivalesque pleasure of fabricating blatantly counterfactual materials in their stories, such as male pregnancy. As a fan described in sarcastic tonality, "Some of the Three Kingdoms fans would be concerned if, for example, Lu Xun changed his name. What is Cao Pi's profession? If Zhong Hui's father is dead, where is Guo Jia? If Zhuge Liang has married at a certain historical moment, while they have no problems with these biological males getting pregnant, delivering a child, being a bi-gendered with female vagina, and nursing childs." This sarcastic remark sheds light on the historical fans approach of

history in their fictional narrative, i.e., an obsessive fidelity to the “hard facts” in the historical records and a carnivalesque drive to the counterfactual ruminations of male figures changing their biological sex. Rather than bridging the gap of historical records by exploring the possibilities of “what could have been happened” in the past, historical fans are rather indulging in widening the gap, by juxtaposing “what has happened” that has been recorded and “what could not possibly happen.”

The historical fanfiction’s approach to the history runs opposite to traditional historiography and the postmodern historiography. Counterintuitively as it may seem to be, the traditional historiography and postmodern historiography both strive for a convergence between history and fiction, despite their seemingly opposite approach. Traditional historiography regards any fictional narrative that corresponds to the historical records and archeological evidence as historical and excludes any fictional narrative that has been backed by the historical evidence as nonhistorical. Postmodern historiography, on the contrary, argues for the equivalence between the historical and the fictional, by suggesting that historical records are actually subjected to the fictional constructs.

While traditional historiography excludes the fictional account that doesn’t overlap with the historical records, the postmodernist historiography proposes the complete overlap between the historical and fictional. Historical fanfiction, however, doesn’t seek to extend the overlap area between the historical and fictional, as did the traditional historiography and the postmodernist historiography, but rather leaves the overlap region aside. For the fanfiction writer, the narrative of the story could either be historical facts that are subjected to no fictional recreation, such as the date of certain historical events, or the counterfactual narratives that could

not be possibly historical, such as the biological males getting pregnant. The three different approaches can be illustrated by the diagram below:

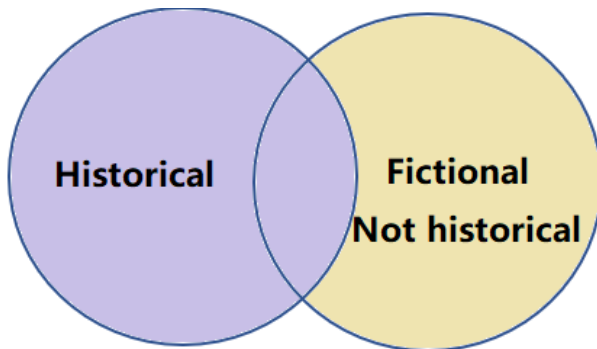


Figure 2.1 Traditional Historiography

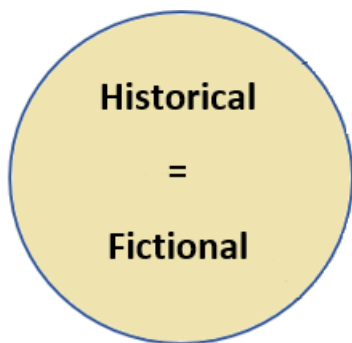


Figure 2.2 Postmodern Historiography

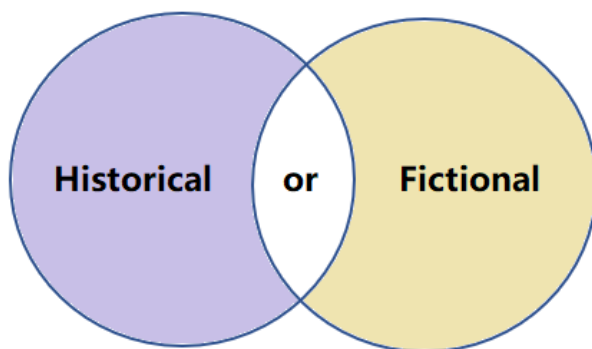


Figure 2.3 Historical Fanfiction

As illustrated in the graph above, traditional historiography and postmodern historiography emphasize the overlap between historicity and fictionality: traditional historiography privileges the “history” and excludes historical fiction that fails to overlap with factual basis, while postmodernist historiography sets up an equivalent between the two and see history and fiction as overlapping. Historical fanfiction, on the contrary, rejects the overlap between historicity and fictionality, i.e., as opposed to traditional historiography, fanfiction writers insist that the nature of fictional writing is nonhistorical. Contrary to postmodernist historiography, fanfiction writers believe that historical fact cannot be accessed by the narrative construct and interpretive grasp. The historical fanfiction’s challenge of traditional historiography and postmodernist historiography resembles the two paradigmatic shifts in the realm of archeology and continental philosophy, i.e., the ontological that turns away from the constructivist approach (Marila, 2020; Harman, 2011; Edgeworth, 2016), and the speculative turns that “entails a rethinking of epistemology as a form of anticipatory world-making” (Marila, 2020; Barad, 2007; Kirby, 2011). The speculative turn in the field of archeology, continental philosophy, and literary theory rejected the reductionist approach of the constructivism that reduced the texts to the interpretation, and the positivist approach that reduced the interpretation to mere description.

The historiography of the historical fanfiction steps beyond the speculative archeology by turning the speculation to fabrication. On the one hand, the historical fanfictions share the positivists’ skepticism of the interpretations and postmodernists’ making of the history by upholding the radically inaccessibility of the historical facticity. On the other, the infinite regression of the skepticism quickly spirals into a rejection of the epistemology and the interpretation as such: the fans no longer consider their works as a way of “knowing,” “making,”

and the “constructing” of the history but approach the overlap between history and fiction as a point of elimination. Contrary to postmodernist historiography, which approaches history as constructed by narrative, historical fanfictions see historicity as irreducible to the narrative construct and acknowledges the facticity as imposing a radical limit to narration and interpretation. However, fans also resist the positivist approach of reducing narratives to the description of facts. Rather, they see their narratives as the counterfactual fabrication rather than interpretation, which destructs rather than constructs historical facticity. The epistemological black hole in historiography is turned to the formalistic negativity in fictional works, as the factual anterior that is absent from the narrative yet preconditions the unfolding of the narrative fabrications.

Accordingly, historical fanfiction further problematizes the paradox of historical fiction rather than giving it a resolution. When facing the double-bind of choosing to be either historical or nonfictional, the fans head toward the other end of the oxymoron by writing historical fiction that is nonhistorical, thereby maintaining a negative relation to the historical facticity. This seemingly perplexed and self-contradictory relation between the facticity and historicity can be simplified by a computer language of “else if,” i.e., historical facts that are inaccessible for interpretation. Furthermore, what the fanfiction offered is not an alternative interpretation of the facts cherished by the postmodernist but the alternative universe of counterfactuality counter to the very facts that have been confirmed. For example, the period of Three Kingdoms is ended by the kingdom of Jin defeated and conquered the Kingdom of Wei, Shu, and Wu, which is a historical fact independent of interpretations. However, the historical fanfiction Chang’an unfolds with a counterfactual hypothesis: What if it is the kingdom of Shu that has finally united the three kingdoms? To highlight the counterfactual nature of the story, the author tags the story

as #if line (#if 线), led by a hash. In python programming, the hash is used to index the line as a “string” instead of a variable, usually for the purpose of separating the comments marked by the hash, from the code that it commented on. With this respect, the fanfiction Chang’an operates according to the programmatic language of else if, as the plot unfolds according to the counterfactual logic of anything but what has happened in the history.

This chapter delves into the two paradoxical premises of historical fanfictions: a positivist epistemology that assumes the radical inaccessibility of the historical facticity, and the postmodernist aesthetics of a counterfactual narrative that expands rather than closing off the epistemological gap. In the historical fanfiction, the epistemological blackhole finds its figurative expression in the formalistic negativity, as the shadow on the face of the characters, as the characters failed attempt to change the pasts, and as the ghosts who can never fulfill its wish in its lifetime. However, the epistemological inaccessibility can also find its positive expression in the forms of the counterfactual narrative, as the loop of impossibilities and as the manifolds of the alternative universe, which includes anything but the original story world that the historical figures inhabited. The aim of this chapter is to trace the logical move from the negative epistemological hole’s lack of a factual anterior, to the positive expression of the counterfactual universe of “else if.”

Inspired by Stiegler’s *Technics and Time*, I would approach the recursion of else-if in historical fictions as a generative technique. According to Stiegler, the invention of the first technology, i.e., writing, is quintessentially a mnemonic technique, motivated by a speculation of the original loss of memory and anticipation of an individual’s immediate memories to fall into oblivion. The invention of the mnemonic tool to externalize individual memories and pass them to collective memories, so that one can carry on the prosthetic memories of the deceased that one

has not corporeally participate. In a similar vein, I propose that historical fanfictions are also motivated by speculation of a past that has not been written down in any form of historical memorial, and their work as the technique to reinvent the quasi-memories of a world of antiquity that they have never participated in and probably have never before actualized.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections: the first approaches the historical fanfictions as the technique of probability, which explicates historical fanfictions as enumerations of improbable events that are impossible to have happened in the past. This self-conceptualization of historical fanfictions is based on a skeptic epistemological stance that upholds the radical inaccessibility of the past that has already disappeared, and a poststructuralist fabrication of the “condition of impossibilities” for the historical events to unfold. The second section is about time-travel fiction that concretizes the epistemological inaccessibility and the aesthetic of counterfactuality: On the one hand, the fans assume the past as nonaccessible and unchangeable for modern viewers; thus, the fictional world of backward time-travel fiction is framed in a counteractualizing manner without affecting the real world outside of the fiction. On the other, fans find a way out in forward time-travel fictions by reinventing a world that has never been in the future.

The last section studies historical fanfictions as a technique of recursion by exploring the future-oriented loop, alternative universe, and past-oriented loop, i.e., the ghost story: the phenomenon popularity of the alternative universe that posits a world that is anywhere but the one that the historical figure reside in the historical records and the canonical fictions, which shows that historical fanfictions are motivated by a desire to replace rather than repeat and expand the story world in the source text; the ghost story that started with the haunting back of an unfulfilled wish of the deceased and ends with the wish unfulfilled also disprove the wish-

fulfilling hypothesis of fanfiction studies. Rather than close the gap of trauma and oblivion in historical records, the final end of the fanfiction writings is to return to the original forgetfulness, for the future narrative loop to start over from point zero. In what follows, I will trace the way in which the fanfiction writings unfold between an initial drive to bring the deceased back to the counterfactual world, ultimately ending with the void of oblivion that has been deferred.

The technique of probability: the condition of impossibilities

How can a story be simultaneously historical and fictional? This is the question that troubles any writer, scholar, or reader who seeks an epistemological basis with which to justify historical fiction as the thematic concerns of their writings, or as the subjects of their research. While positivist historians seek to exclude the fictional part for pure description, postmodernist constructivists reject the differences between the two by pointing out that the facts are constructed by fictional narratives. Whereas the positivist historian strives for factual accuracy, the constructivist approach seeks to reconstruct the context as “conditions of possibilities” for the facts to be narrated. Writers of historical fanfiction, however, never consider their work to be an epistemological search of the fact or condition of facts. Rather, they approach their work as an experimentation of exploring the “condition of impossibilities” for the counter-factual narratives they fabricate, which is irrelevant to historical records that their works are supposedly based upon.

Historical fanfiction as the condition of impossibilities for the counter-factual events can be best exemplified by *The King of Yue and his Court* (越君允常及其宫廷) written by Chouti. *The King of Yue and his Court* is a collection of the love stories between Yunchang (? – 497 BCE), the King of the Yue during the Spring and Autumn Period, and Fei Lian, Yunchang’s

guard, a fictional figure created by Chouti. The life story of Yunchang is absent from historical records of the era, and none of the stories mentioned in Chouti's collection is relevant to historical events in Spring and Autumn period. In the short story “交叉的秘密”(the crossing secrets), Chouti described the counterfactual stories she fabricated as secrets:

这就是相互交叉，时而绕行的秘密海港，飞廉与允常，他们在这块大地上毫无知觉地驰骋，足迹碾过了城墙和时光，偶尔被历史压弯了腰，却一往无前，等待某一时刻，某一地点，在某一束阳光的眷顾下，拖着彼此的命运和粘液，像蜗牛一样碰面，留下一道交叉的亮印。这种永不停步得期待，这种永不满足得胃口，这种要把天空与星斗都屯下去得欲望，把他们俩生生地拽过许多铺垫和阻拦，拖过许多格命运的棋盘，终于在荷花盛开的背阴处，让飞廉遇见了迷路后的允常

.....

一个时代的爱与死，从目光交叉的那一刻，正式上演

The world that we are currently situated is nested with the crossing secrets, and the conjunctures of these secrets are the places where we live and die

— From South to North

Yun Chang experienced a happy exile when he was young. He peeped at the uneven shoreline of his homeland, as if it is jumping at the horizon and farewelling to him... Stepping at the finely divided sunshine, it heads towards the south with a rhinoceros....Along the endless ship route, many travelers died, and their corpses were thrown into the sea, as if they are navigation mark waiting to be lost, and pointing towards the invisible homeland.

— From west to east

Feilian wanders from the Gobi at southern to the Qin Kingdom, to the Estuary with rainstorm... When he has arrived at the Yue Kingdom, his horse has already dead, and it belongs to a bygone era. Being abandoned at where he was, Feilian can do nothing but to throw the bridle on his shoulder, and keep marching to the place that impossible for him to step further.

The quoted passage above bears an explicit reference to Borges's short story, “The Garden of Forking Paths”. Similar to the “Forking Paths” that maps all of the possibilities as paths that can be taken by a fictional figure in the labyrinth of the story, the “crossing secrets”

also spatialized all of the trajectories that can be taken by the protagonists in “a world of crossing secrets”: a historical figure, Yunchang, who is walking from the south to the north. A fictional figure, Feilian, is heading from west to east. However, with the “forking” changed to “crossing”, the “paths” changed to “secrets”, the story departs from Borges’ fiction in two aspects: Borges’ original story unfolds as a “forking path” in a bifurcation of the opposing possibilities in a simultaneous manner, while the progression of Chouti’s story is motivated by the encounter between two male protagonists in the diegesis, and encounter between the protagonists and the reader outside of the diegesis at the crossroad. Borges’s story verges on the protagonists’ selectivity over certain paths that have been already paved for him, which signifies the predestined destiny and the planned deaths of the protagonists by the author. Chouti’s story, by contrast, centered on the “secrets” that went unrecorded in the official history, ones that are waiting to be uncovered as the narrative of the story progresses.

The unfolding possibility of historical past in “the crossing secrets” is complicated by a split, between a past-past that has already disappeared, and the past-future that has not yet happened. The “corpses thrown into the sea” witnessed by Yunchang, and the “dead horse that belongs to the past that never returns” that Feiliang abandoned on his way south both symbolize the past whose traces are constantly erased. The image of the corpses can be read allegorically as the missing historical records, pointing towards the “invisible homeland”, that is, the inaccessible historical facticity that is home to the narratives of the history, be it fictional or factual. Accordingly, the metaphorical equivalent set up between the “invisible homeland” and the “horizon” that “says farewell” to Yunchang has two connotations: the ontological existence of historical facticity is the foundation for any description or imagination that account for it, and the phenomenological unintelligibility of this factual base is a condition for the manifold historical

fictions to come. However, even the corpses that stand as a sign pointing towards the past are disoriented as the narrative proceeds, yet it is not “always-already lost” in a present-perfect tense as historical facticity that precedes any narrative, but “waiting to be lost” in a futuristic tense. Paradoxically, such “future” that Feilian is heading towards after abandoning the dead horse, the symbol of his past, is described as “a place that is impossible to march on”. The story is therefore trapped in a non-space in-between the “past-past” that erases itself as it unfolds, and the “past-future” that is foreclosed before the protagonist has reached this point in time.

What lies at the heart of this non-space, is the paradox of historical fiction: it cannot claim itself as historical in the form of factual account, as historical events have already passed at moment of its actualization; it can neither be purely fictional in a futuristic sense, as the unfolding of the event in the story is blocked due to the very fact that the narrative is about the history, the event in the past that has already happened. The journey of Feilian and Yunchang is therefore destined to lead to a non-space oriented towards a missing past and impossible future, the formalistic negativity of which prevent it from unraveling in time. However, the closure of the “crossing secrets” in time permits its extension in space, in which the multiple possibilities played out in simultaneity, waiting to be explored by the protagonists in the story:

这就是相互交叉，时而绕行的秘密海港，飞廉与允常，他们在这块大地上毫无知觉地驰骋，足迹碾过了城墙和时光，偶尔被历史压弯了腰，却一往无前，等待某一时刻，某一地点，在某一束阳光的眷顾下，拖着彼此的命运和粘液，像蜗牛一样碰面，留下一道交叉的亮印。这种永不停步得期待，这种永不满足得胃口，这种要把天空与星斗都屯下去得欲望，把他们俩生生地拽过许多铺垫和阻拦，拖过许多格命运的棋盘，终于在荷花盛开的背阴处，让飞廉遇见了迷路后的允常

.....

一个时代的爱与死，从目光交叉的那一刻，正式上演

Such are the harbors that are crisscrossing and occasionally sidestepping. Feilian and Yunchang unconsciously galloping on this landscape, stepping on the time and the city wall, occasionally weighted down by the history, but they keep marching forward, dragging their mucus along the way and hitting each other like snails, leaving a shining trail of intersections. Such unceasing expectations, insatiable appetite, the desire of savoring the sky and the stars, dragging them across manifolds of the barriers and obstacles, cells on the chessboard of destinies, and finally, at the shadow of the blossoms of lotus, Feilian meets Yunchang who has just gotten lost.

An age of love and death unfolds at the moment when their eyes meet.

In the paragraph above, the author translates the duration into extension, and historical events that happens sequentially in time, to the “cells on the chessboard” that juxtaposes simultaneously in space. At the first glance, the transcription of the time into space opens up a map of infinite potentiality, reversible temporality, and a history of changes that constantly differentiates itself, which allows the protagonists to freely experiment with the multiple paths on the “chessboard”. As Chouti describes in the passage, the chronological time that bars the unactualized possibilities from happening is spatialized as a “fortress” that can be easily surmounted by the protagonists. As such, the “chessboard of destiny” seems to be a space of indeterminacy, with a “certain time”, “certain locale”, “certain beam” that contextualized the encountering of the protagonists unspecified. However, as Bergson asserts, the spatialization of temporality that confused duration with extensity and succession with simultaneity is deterministic (xxiii-xxiv). This is because everything that happened—the transcription of the events happened in time into space, the trajectory taken by the protagonist to the paths outlined as the grid, historical events represented by the cells of the chessboard—will be necessarily predetermined by the arrangement of the “chessboards”. Accordingly, the chessboard that records the trajectories of the protagonists is named as “the chessboards of *destiny*”, which predetermined the fate of these two protagonists, and precluded the chances, changes, and

contingencies that prevents the fatalistic encounter between Yunchang and Feilian. Although Yunchang and Feilian can choose any path on the chessboard, the time and place for their encountering is undetermined; all the possibilities in their way would collapse to their fatalistic determined destination and the end of the story. Feilian meets Yunchang, the predestined encounter between the two protagonists that is preestablished before the story begins, and its actualization ends the story.

The paradoxical combination of radical indeterminacy and the deterministic fatalism in Chouti's narration has opened up the freedom and its limit in historical fanfiction. Demarcated by the genre of historical fiction, the story has only one predetermined end that precedes the narratives. However, fanfiction writers can freely fabricate fictional paths that lead to that predetermined end. This paradox is literally addressed in Fenru's short story "The Border". "The border" has participated the fiction contest hosted by the Zhuge Liang post-bar, a forum where the fans of Zhuge Liang gathered. The contest requires each participant to write a short story based on a line from the televisual drama *Three Kingdoms* (2010), and the line is distributed to each participant by lottery. The line that Fenru received was: "If you cannot fall in love with me, I will not lay a finger on you". In the original drama, this is a line delivered by the warlord Liu Bei to Lady Sun, the sister of the warlord Sunquan, who had just married Liu Bei. The wedding is initially a political marriage that designed to strengthen the alliance between Liu Bei and Sun Quan, but in *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, Lady Sun finally falls in love with Liu Bei. In the TV drama, Liu Bei wants to assure Lady Sun that although they are married, there will be no intimacy unless and until she falls in love with him. In Fenru's fanfiction, however, the protagonists have been changed to Zhuge Liang and Luo Guanzhong, the author of the *Romance of Three*

Kingdoms. In the beginning of the short story, the author has fabricated an imaginary dialogue between Luo Guanzhong and Zhuge Liang as follows:

他的眼睛是黑夜的颜色。茶的热气慢慢渗入了一对眸子….

或许他需要我为他完成一个不同于事实的结局，比如兴复汉室还于旧都。我用毛笔敲敲脑袋，却只听见脑袋中传出几声断裂的叹息，好像一个老人费力地喘气。

“这也是你自己的竹筒。他，他不曾在庙堂上舌战，也不曾在江上纵酒”他眼睛里反射着肮脏、热闹的城市的光芒，“我是另一个你，我们一起去三国走了一遭。那也是你，或者说我，幻想的故事，当你将自己放置在幻象中时，我是你的倒影。”

所以……所以这有什么差别呢。一旦被写下，无论以何种形式一旦被确认，他剩余的旅程和结局都将是无可辩驳的唯一和必然。他那发生在过去的经历是隐藏于帷幕之后的盘根错节，而在五丈原上被确认的一刻，最终的帷幕也徐徐落下，点缀着新鲜的露水。

His eyes are shaded by the color of the night. The heat of the tea permeates into a pair of irises...

Probably he needs me to construct a counter-factual ending for him, like the revival of the Han dynasty and the returning to the old capital. I hit my head with the brush pen, but I only hear the echoes of several fragmented sighs from my brain, as if it is an old man breathing arduously.

“This is also your scroll. He, he has never debated with people on the court, and he has never debated on the court, and has never abused alcohol on the Yangtze River. I am another “you”, and we travel together to the Three Kingdoms. That is to say, a story I imagined, and when I place you in my imaginations, I am a shadow of you.

So... what's the difference? When it is written down and confirmed, no matter what form it takes, the rest of his journey would be inevitably singular and necessary. The twists and turns of his past experiences are hidden behind the heavy curtain, and the last curtain will gradually fall at the moment when everything is confirmed at the Wuzhangyuan, dotted with the fresh dew.

The passage above starts with Luo Guanzhong's ruminations of the multiple possibilities for fabricating the plots that have not happened in the history of three kingdoms: Zhuge Liang disputing with the southern scholars and Zhugeliang drinking wine on the boat on his way to

“borrow arrows” from Cao Cao. Both of these plots are present in *Romance of Three Kingdoms* but do not take place in the Three Kingdoms period. In the fanfiction, Luo Guanzhong is also thinking about fabricating an alternative ending that is different from historical fact, such as restoring the Han dynasty and returning to its old capital, which neither happened in the past nor is present in *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. However, with an analog between historical fiction and the drama onstage, the author stated that the complication and fabrication in the story of past makes no difference, as it all happened behind the “curtain”, which will ultimately fall after the end of the story. Similarly, Luo Guanzhong, as the author of historical fiction, can freely fabricate any paths taken by historical figures, no matter how “counter-factual” they are. However, what he cannot change is the end that all the possible paths ultimately lead to: the death of the figures as a historical fact, which necessarily has to match his “second death” in historical fiction.

This way, the story has plugged into heart of the paradox of historical fiction: historical facticity is simultaneously the anterior to any form of historical narratives originated from, while also the only possible end that any fictional narratives of the past must reach. As the author explicitly stated, “once the narratives are being written down”, the “rest of his journey has only one end that is necessary and indisputable”. Even though the experience of historical figures in between his corporeal death in the past, and his second death in historical fiction can infinitely branch out in the imaginations of the reader and writer, all the branches will converge to one end: Wuzhangyuan, the place where Zhugeliang died in fiction and in reality. The branching narratives that start as a probability tree inevitably twist into a circular narrative, with the factual anterior serving as start and the end of the story. Wuzhangyuan, the site where Zhuge Liang dies, therefore serves as the ancestral prior that preconditions the starts of the fictional narrative due to

the factual death of its protagonists, and impose the radical finitude of the fictional narratives, his second death in the story. Subsequently, the archeological site reappears in the end of the story, as Zhugeliang's tomb that located in Dingjun Shan, as the signifier of his corporeal death that converges with the end of the story, his second death, the death of the signifier:

无数人经过，无数人离开，而你将永久地、永久地在此处驻留。对于我，你的影像一直都是我不自知的自身灵魂的倒影。当我死去，你会褪去那身透明的外袍，看着它在书商手中化为灰烬。生命在无数对瞳仁中延续下去，如果有人想起过去的你，他们会找到你，循着那条通往定军山墓的小径。

Countless travelers come and go, and you will forever stay at where you are. For me, your shadow is the unconscious reflection of my soul. After I have died, you will take off your transparent coat and see it burned into ashes in the hands of the book sellers. The life is sustained by countless pairs of irises. If you happen to pass someone's mind, they will find you through the pathway to the tomb at Dingjun Mountain.

The paragraph above focuses on the symbols of transparency and that of obscurity. The mutual reflection between historical figures in the story, the writers, and the readers make them transparent to each other, as Fenru states multiple times, Zhuge Liang is the shadow of Luo Guanzhong. The transparency of historical figure to the reader and writers is close to the constructivist historiography that approach historical narrative as fictional construct, past as a reflection of the present, and the narrative of historical figure is just a shadow of the writer. The hermeneutic transparency is symbolized by the "transparent coat" that Luoguan Zhong dressed him up in his story, and his iris is portrayed as a specular surface that reflects the "messy and chaotic city lights" in Luo Guanzhong's background, which signifies the context of the writers and readers. However, the "transparent coat" and the reflective surface of the iris only projects the writer's interpretations and fabrications without touching upon the real historical figures behind the story. The only path to historical figure who actually lived in the past is the path towards his tomb, which represents his corporeal death, and the radical inaccessibility of the

antiquity, that imposed a limit to the hermeneutic chain and narrative reconstruction. The factual opacity is also symbolized as Zhuge Liang's iris, that appears "as black as the night" that cannot be penetrate by any spotlight projected by the modern readers and writers. The ending of the story evokes the line from the TV drama that motivates the story: "Before you love me, I wouldn't lay a finger on you". This love can be interpreted as the affective attachment between Luo Guanzhong and Zhuge Liang in the fictional narrative, yet the fictional narrative cannot lay a finger on the Zhuge Liang who actually lived and died.

Another set of contradictions that the story plugged in is the ephemerality and the eternity of the narrative of historical fictions. On the one hand, Luo Guanzhong's reflection upon Zhuge Liang's image is invisible and ephemeral. His original intention and authorial control are inevitably lost, as the story is further sent to the readers that opened to the re-interpretation and re-creation. The hermeneutic transparency and its ephemerality are symbolized by the "transparent coat" that will be "burned into ashes" as the story is "sent to the booksellers", as the affective resonance and the moment of recognition between historical figure and the writers disappeared as the story begin to circulate. At the same time, historical figures live an eternal in the fictional narrative of re-imaginings. Despite of Zhuge Liang's corporeal death engraved in his tomb as historical facticity and the mortality of the writer, his afterlife as a signifier will be infinitely extended by the fictional narrative, as Fenru writes: "Countless people come and go, but you will permanently be there." Nevertheless, his permanent life in the story is sustained by the ephemeral eyeline-match between "infinite pairs of irises" that left no historical records or archeological traces, yet keeps the story alive and infinitely postponed the "second death" of historical figure in the story. The eyeline-match in Fenru's "borderline" evokes the mutual gaze

that permeate Chouti's story, albeit not between the reader and writer, but between the two male protagonists, which motivates the start and the end of the story.

允常的视线在非自然光中搜索，最后停在大厅的另一边，飞廉似乎正被人催促着，也许是催账人，催账人越说越激烈，也许有关亡妻的葬礼欠款，失败的男子，甚至无法保障妻子体面地死去……众人的目光追逐允常的航线，抵达这名年轻侍卫。大厅万籁俱静，众目睽睽，犹如蹭蹭火焰，飞廉怔了一下，回溯直通航道，向允常报以一个微笑，微笑与微笑之间，仿佛流水中的倒影。

素昧平生的越国小公子，素昧平生的楚国侍卫官，他与他只跳进湖水一刻钟，因为太阳把他们烤得发烫。就在那一刻，句乘山成为他们的林中空地，飞廉的眼，没有失明的右眼，曾在那样的阳光下发光；就在那一刻，在句乘山的另一边，那位绝望的妻子，正在不为人知地死去，如果飞廉不与允常相遇，他也许能及时阻止……经过那么漫长的夏天（从三月到九月），他们的畅游仿佛才刚刚开始。

Yunchang's gaze searches in the "unnatural light" of the room and finally stops at the other side of the lobby. Feilian seemed to be pressed by someone, probably the debt collection agent, who yells faster and more intensely, and probably it is about the debt concerning his wife's funeral. He is a loser who cannot even guarantee a decent funeral of his wife...The gaze of the crowd follows the ship route of Yunchang, and finally reaches this young guard. The silent lobby burned in the gaze of the crowd. Feilian paused for a second, and looks back via the channel and smiles at Yunchang. Their smiles reflect each other like as shadows in a stream.

The little prince of the state of Yue and the guard of the state of Chu have never met each other before. They just jump into the lake for a moment, burned by the heat of the sun. At that moment, the Juncheng mountain becomes an empty space in the woods. Feilian's eye, his unblinded right eye, used to shine under the sunlight. At that particular moment, at the other side of the Juncheng mountain, his desperate wife dies unknowingly. If Feilian has never met Yunchang, he may be able to stop this...after such a long summer (from March to September), their journey seems to just begin.

The paragraph starts with a de-naturalization of the scene in a pseudo-cinematic setting: the "unnatural light", the point-of-view shot that pan across the room in a long take, and stop at "the other side of the lobby". The diegetic sound of the conversation moves from the background noises to the foreground, and the volume gradually turn down when the point-of-view shot

finally reach the target. Feilian smiles back at Yunchang in a reverse shot. The fateful encounter between the homoerotic lovers, as elaborated previously, is posited as the factual anterior that precedes the unfolding story, yet the fabricated nature of their encountering is crystalized in the metaphor, the shadow on the water. The image of the “shadow on the water” simultaneously connotes the fictionality of the homoerotic romance that is not supported by any evidence, and its ephemerality as the secondary recreation based on the real historical figures. However, the secondary recreation is soon developed to what Baudrillard called the “third order of simulation”, wherein the shadow in the fictional representation generates the real historical figure that is supposed to be its origin. This can be found in the surrealist movement of the sentence, as the water that is metaphorical in the image of “shadow on the water”, transformed into the lake that Fei Lian and Yun Chang can jump into in the following sentence. As the third order of simulation has displaced the factual anterior that supposed to precedes it, it leaves an empty space for the fictional histories to be generated in creation *ex nihilo*, which is literally symbolized as the “empty space in the wood” in the paragraph above.

What is generated by the “empty space in the wood” that displaced historical facticity is the branching of possibilities that spirals into the “crystal image”, a category of the cinematic image that Deleuze proposed to schematize the mirror image in Orson Welles’ s film such as *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Citizen Kane*, both of which juxtaposed the actual and the virtual, past and present, alone the same plane. In his theorization of the crystal image, Deleuze delves directly into the paradox of the time: the image of the presence is the actualized image, yet the present always passed at the moment of its actualization, passing the actual image of the presence to the virtual image of the past-present (79). However, the empty space left of the present-present that has left by the past-present that has already happened, index a future-present

to come, which is a virtual image waiting to be actualized. This results in an asymmetrical split between the dilation of the past, the virtual image of the past-present, which is preserved, and the actual image of the present that passes, leaving an empty space, waiting for the unactualized possibilities of the future present to come (81). Accordingly, the crystal image generates a dynamic circuit between the presence and *its own* past, the actual image and *its* virtual image (81). Deleuze's time image can therefore be interpreted as an epigenetic schema for time, for each moment to generates *its own* condition of possibilities via the virtual image, which is constituted by the actualized presence that has passed into the virtual image of the past, and the unactualized past that stays as the virtual image.

Chouti's narrative in the second paragraph also portrays an image that generates its own condition of possibilities through the virtual images in a double movement of dilation and contraction. The dilation involves the branching out of virtual images: the image of the past that has already happened and has been preserved as the virtual image of recollections and remembrances, "Yunchang's *unblinded* right eye that *used to* shine under the sunlight"; the image of the presence that is immediately passed into virtual image of past-present, "that desperate wife *is dying* without being noticed"; the unactualized possibilities that haven't happened in the past that permanently stored as the virtual image in the universe of potentiality, "If Yunchang hasn't met Feilian, he could have prevent it from happening..." The split between the past and presence is spatialized as a divide on either side of Jucheng mountain: on the one side lies the virtual image of the past, Yunchang's unblinded eyes; on the other, the virtual images of the presence, that consists of the past-present that is actualizing, the dying wife, and the unactualized possibilities that is prevented from unfolding if Feilian can prevent the wife from dying. This way, it is the ramification of the virtual images that has either already passed,

or has not happened, that are contracted into the crystal image within “a single moment”, an explosion of possibilities within the shortest unit of time. It is the virtual possibilities generalized by the actualized event that retroactively commemorate the starts of the actualized event: “their swimming just begins”, a sentence that paradoxically ends the fiction. As a result, the unfolding of the narratives is not genetic, i.e., induced from certain factual records, but epigenetic, as it formulates its own condition of possibility that kickstarts the story and imposed its radical limit that ends the story. With this respect, the circular structure of Chouti’s story is not an automatic loop that repeats itself, but a cybernetic recursion that, as Yuk Hui (2019) suggests, returns to itself to determine itself. Chouti has also explicitly expressed the virtuality of the “condition of (im)possibility” for the unfolding of the homoerotic encounter between Yunchang and Feilian:

就像一场生与死的预演，没有人把他们记录进《春秋》或者《左传》，一切都被梳理，被淡忘，只留下《诗经》中无法署名的歌咏几行，这些小事难以公开，应当自行消亡于两个朋友之间。(254)

It’s like a rehearsal of the life and death. No one has recorded them in *Spring and Autumn* and *Commentary of Zuo*. Everything has been forgotten and lost in the editing and only several anonymous lines from the Book of Song has been left. These trivialities can hardly be publicized, and should be kept between two close friends.

Contrary to the historical fan community’s hypothesis of historical fanfiction as being supported by the factual account of the period, Chouti’s narratives above shows that the foundation of historical fanfiction is precisely the *lack* of historical records to support the fictional narrative. As Chouti writes, no one has recorded her story in Chunqiu, the ancient Chinese chronicle *Spring and Autumn Annals* that covers the history of a period from 722 to 468 BC, and its commentary, *Zuozhuan*, that contextualizes the annals into the narrative account of the history. Chouti states that the story is being forgotten as the annals and its commentary are organized into the formal historical records. Likewise, her story cannot be found in the poetic

narratives of the past either, as the few lines of the poems in the *Book of Song* are left anonymous, the author and the protagonists of which cannot be attributed to Feilian and Yunchang. This is because, Chouti writes, these trivial matters should disappear “between two friends”. However, it is precisely because of the lack of historical records, and the anonymity of the ancient poems, that opens up the absent origin, for historical fanfiction to fabricate the encounter between Feilian and Yunchang. Similarly, it is because the story has been “forgotten” and has never been “publicized”, the homoerotic romance between two friends that has “disappeared” is kept unactualized in chronological time, as the virtual image that can reverse temporal succession and the chronological order. This can be found in Chouti’s phrasing in the beginning of this sentence: “it is like a pre-emptive *rehearsal* of life and death”, which is only happened retroactively after-the-fact, in a historical fanfiction published in 2012, more than 2500 years after Yunchang’s death in 497 BC.

The counter-factual fiction that is written chronologically after the fact, that logically “rehearse” the history that has never been recorded, and never happened, paradoxically conditioned the unfolding of the narrative of historical fiction. This can also be found in the ending of Chouti’s another fiction, *The Veil and Somniloquy* 隐姿梦咄, a collection of short stories about historical figures in western Jin dynasty, yet none of the stories in the book can be supported the official historical records. There is no single storyline that governed the whole book, which consists of the fragmented mini stories freely associated with each other, without the temporal continuity or logical causality that connected them together. The only connections between the mini stories and the collections is the spatial continuity: the setting of all of the short stories is located in Luo Yang, which was the capital of the western Jin dynasty. One of the major story lines is the tragic love story of Ji Kang, one of the seven sages of the Bamboo Grove,

a group of the Daoist philosophers who live in a secluded life who detaches themselves from the political turmoil of the western Jin dynasty. However, despite of his efforts to in distance himself from the court politics, Ji Kang was still executed by the first emperor of Jin dynasty, Sima Zhao, because Ji Kang has defended for his friend who has been imprisoned on false charges. The story ends up with a dream-like scene of a rendezvous between Ji Kang and his wife after his death, which is impossible to occur either historically or fictionally.

深秋之夜，它从时空的另一端听见琴弦爆裂之音，如火焚身…突然间所有似曾相识汇聚而成的因果本末，无非记忆与狂想，贯穿它不存在的尺木，醍醐灌顶般的悔悟与飞升，它终于明白，降雨或是吐珠，这些事它本来就无法做到，因为它是一尾火龙！

时空对于它来说，是任意穿行的通道，它的记忆无谓先后，不分尊卑，众生悲哀汇聚一心，它的觉醒，就像太古的宇宙，混沌不安！

At the night of the late autumn, it heard the breaking of the string at the other end of the universe, as if being burned by the fire...Suddenly all of the familiarities crystalized into the causes and the effects. It is nothing but the memories and the chimeras, traveling across the inexistent beams in an epiphanic moment of repentance and sublimation. It finally realized that it cannot call the rainfall or spit the dragon peril, because it is a fire dragon!

The time-space is a channel for the dragon to freely traveled and the temporal sequence and hierarchical order are absent from its memories. Amidst the constellation of the sorrows of all of the living beings, its awakening is like the chaotic *chronos* in the prehistoric cosmos.

The architectonic structure that supports this counterfactual story, as Chouti depicts, is “the memories and the chimeras”, which constitute the “inexistent beams” that frame the counter-factual story. Accordingly, the condition of possibilities for a factual event actualized in history supported by authentic records or archeological relics is substituted with a condition of impossibility that engines the counter-factual fictions of the history. What follows this reversal is the substitution of the chronological time that preconditioned the diachronic unfolding of history, to the cosmological time that synchronized and the causes and the effects, anterior and posterior.

With the proceeding of the narrative metonymically represented by the fiery dragon, the time is spatialized as the channels that the fiery dragon can freely travel, as there is no chronological or logical ordering in the space when all the possibilities are juxtaposed. Instead of tracing back to historical facticity as the anterior of the fictional narrative, the narrative proceeds to the anterior of the history, the “chaotic *chronos* in the prehistoric cosmos”: the total condition of possibilities of all actualized fact and unactualized potentiality. In another of Chouti’s collections of minifiction, *The 81 Anecdotes*, Chouti plugs into the heart of this paradoxes and begins to enumerate the impossible possibilities in the era of the Three Kingdoms:

【二】调戏

每次董卓都会让貂蝉详细描述吕布调戏她的过程，这使他们俩都产生了强烈的兴趣

【三】汉臣

王允先向吕布控诉了董卓夺走貂蝉的坏处，又接着说匡扶汉室的好处，吕布想：又来了，又来一个老头想送我女人“，于是杀了王允。吕布的后房塞满了各位汉臣义士送给他的女人

【四】刻臂出血

吕布突然同意匡扶汉室，对着王允，刻臂出血盟誓……吕布很快死于破伤风

Flirting

Dong Zhuo asks Diaochan about the details of Lu Bu flirting her every time they having sex. They are both interested in these and get excited by talking about it.

The Loyalist of Han

Wang Yun first explains the disadvantages of Dong Zhuo carrying off Diao Chan, and then he explains the benefit of assisting the Han dynasty. Lu Bu thinks: again, another old man wants to send a woman to me. Then he killed Wang Yun accordingly. His backyard is filled by the woman that the loyalists send to him.

Bleeding Cut on the Arm

Lu Bu suddenly agrees to assist the Han dynasty, and he sworn to Wang Yun by cutting his arm with a bleeding wound...Lu Bu soon dies of tetanus.

The 81 Anecdotes is a pastiche of *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shi Shuo Xin yu*), a collection of around 100 anecdotes about historical figures from the Three Kingdoms period and the Jin dynasty. Compared to the official historical record, the *Book of Jin* (*Jin Shu*), *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* is more factually accurate, as most of the characters, conversations, and events covered in the collection are historically attested to, albeit with moderate literary embellishment and dramatic exaggeration (Liu xiii). However, *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* is classified as one of the earliest Chinese fictions rather than authentic history by traditional Chinese historians such as Ji Yun, despite its relative accuracy compared to official historical records (Lu 6). Accordingly, *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* often stands as a salient example for scholars to argue for the undecidability between the fictionality and historicity in early Chinese writings, as historical evidences can be also attested in the collections of anecdotes that are categorized as historical fiction (Eoyang 54).

However, *The 81 Anecdotes* reverse-engineers *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* that imbricates historical facts within the anecdotes, as the anecdotes fabricated in this series are a collection of counter-facts. For example, the series of the short story above are selections from *The 81 Anecdotes*, which are satirical rewritings of a story in the 14th-century historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in which Wang Yun asks his maid Diao Chan to seduce the warlord Dong Zhuo, and his adopted son, a mighty warrior, Lu Bu, to turn them against each other. The story ends with both of them falling in love with Diao Chan, and Lu Bu finally kills Dongzhuo. However, in Chouti's first story, Dong Zhuo get excited when Diao Chan talks about how Lu Bu flirts with him, instead of getting angry and turning against Lu Bu, and Wang Yun's plan fails accordingly. Chouti's second story ends with Lu Bu refusing to accept Wang Yun's proposal and kills him, which is neither factual nor does it appear in the narrative of the *Romance of the Three*

Kingdoms. Chouti's third story provides an alternative possibility complementary to the first one, with Lu Bu accepting Wang Yun's proposal and agreeing to kill Dongzhuo to take Diao Chan as his wife, yet the story still ends in a counterfactual manner: Lu Bu cuts his arm for the blood oath and dies of the tetanus, which obviously did not happen in real life and was not in *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. Instead of bridging the gap in the narrative of historical records or historical fiction to reach the only outcome that has been actualized in the history of Three Kingdoms and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Lu Bu kills Dong Zhuo, the series of the short stories is the sum total of the unactualized possibilities towards the alternative end where Wang Yun's assassination attempt fails.

The series of short stories above can be interpreted as structured by a video game narrative that doesn't lead to the ultimate end of "mission accomplished", but an experiment of failures at each stage that diverts the player from reaching the actual historical event. With every possible path towards the actual historical event ruled out in Chouti's experiment, Chouti's story opens up to the radical contingency opposed to the deterministic, as all pre-registered possibilities failed along the way. What is irreducible to the probabilistic prediction is not the factual anterior or logical *a priori*, but the fictional counter-fact: Wang Yun's assassination attempt fails. That cannot neither be induced logically, nor can it be deduced through the supporting evidence. However, the fictional fabrication of the failed assassination is neither speculative nor hypothetical but based negatively on historical facts that Lu Bu has actually killed Dong Zhuo. Accordingly, the branching of the virtual images finally converges to a definitive end, in which the unfolding of the counter-factual possibilities is foreclosed:

【十三】 坞主

张方曾经提议：我脱掉将军的盔甲，你挂起侍郎的靴子，离开洛阳到随便什么地方去，到西凉去，那里到处都是东汉遗留下的壁坞，到处是子的的坞主。春夏耕种，再山谷中放牧猪羊，猎杀废关内外的野狼，冬天你教他们读孟子，我令他们疏浚壁下的沟渠，偶尔也接济西来的僧人，听他们念《法华经》，与强酋每人同时吹两管羌笛伴奏，只是过往商旅太狡猾，粗茶也敢叫高价，我们只能和上红糖，奶酥一起煮着喝，一边远眺落日，不过是等候扬尘而已……嵇绍笑而不语。

张方问：你笑是认为不可能呢还是不愿意？

笑容从两人的脸上飘逝了。张方后来再也没有重提……后来他只是一心一意掘断了千金堰攻陷了洛阳。

The host of the stone fort

Zhang Fang once suggested: I will take off the armor of the general, and you can leave the uniform of the minister in idle. Then we can leave the city of Luo Yang and travel wherever you want. We can travel to Xiliang, and you can find the forts left by the eastern Han dynasty and the proud hosts of the fort everywhere. We can farm during the spring and the fall, graze in the valley, and hunt wolves inside and outside the pass. In the winter you teach the children to read the Mengzi, and I will lead them to dredge the channel. Sometimes we can receive the monk from the west and listen to them delivering the Fahua verses and playing the flute with bandits. As the merchants sell the inferior tea with high price, we can only have the milk tea with black sugar and watch the sunset, waiting for the falling dust.... Ji Shao smiles without a word.

Zhang Fang: are you smiling because it is impossible or you are not willing to do this?

The smiles disappeared from their faces and Zhang Fang never mentioned it again. Afterward, he just destroyed the Qianjin weir and conquered Luoyang.

In “The Host of the Stone Fort”, Chouti constructs a fabricated dialogue between Zhang Fang, the cruel general who conquered the city of Luo Yang (the capital of west Jin dynasty) and controlled the royal family; and Ji Shao, the assistant minister who died protecting the royal family and the city of Luo Yang. In the passage above, Zhang Fang is proposing the possibilities of physically transported themselves to a non-space beyond the immediate realities they are corporeally situated in: first he proposes that they quit their jobs and travel to Xi Liang, the northern border of the Western Jin dynasty. While physically transported to the exotic place beyond their habitus, Zhang Fang suggest that

they can reside in a stone fortress, a relic of the Eastern Han dynasty, which further suggests a temporal transportation to the non-space in the ancient time. Breaking the temporal-spatial constraint that shackled them, Zhang Fang has enumerate the possibilities that they can explore in this non-space, where anything can happen: they can farm in the spring and winter, graze in the valley, hunt outside of the fort, read with the children, listen to lectures delivered by the western monks...However, all of the branching possibilities all closed down to Ji Shao's silent smile and Zhang Fang's sarcastic remark: "Do you think it is impossible, or are you just not willing to do it?" The short story ends with the facticity of Zhang Fang conquered Luo Yang, a historical fact that calls a sudden halt to all of the fictional fabrications:

“千里 “ 有人呼唤他。

阮瞻仰起头，那是魏华存。

她一身青衫道袍，微笑向他致意。

他曾见过她罗袜生尘，在洛水上荡漾；他曾与她裘马扬扬，飞奔过西凉与许昌；他们有时只是无语地躺在毡毯上，愉快地燃烧松果取暖，消耗生命的平淡。他们曾堕于爱河，不在乎上不上天堂。现在，通过她一袭井然的道袍，太虚圣境的南天门朝阮瞻关上了。“再见，千里。” 她一手挽起一个幼子，微笑，道别，再见，被匈奴摧毁的洛阳，魏华存告别了阮瞻的新坟。蔓草还未穿透阮瞻腐坏的肋骨，攀出泥层呼吸，明春，望风轻摇的草尖，才能向永嘉南渡的人潮挥手，那时她已无从知晓。

“Qianli.” Someone calls her.

Ruan Zhan raised his head, and he sees Wei Huacun.

She wears Daoist robes and smiles at him.

He used to see her gauze slipper stir the dust by the river of Luo; He used to ride with her and speed through Xiliang and Xu Chang. Sometimes they just lie down on the carpet silently, delightedly burning the pinecones and killing the time. They used to fall in love with each other and no longer care whether they could ascend to the heaven. Now, thanks to her Daoist robes, the southern door of illusory land of great void closed to Ruan Zhan. "Goodbye, Qiali", she holds one child at each arm, smile and farewell to the city of Luo Yang that has destroyed by Xiongnu, and Ruan Zhan's new tomb. At that moment, the weeds have not yet sprouted from

Ruanzhan's rotten limbs. It is only after the next spring that it will wave to the migrants towards south, and she wouldn't know about it then.

The short story depicts a romantic story between Wei Huacun, the famous female Daoist in the Wei-jin period, and Ruan Zhan, a famous intellectual in Wei-jin period who argues against the existence of ghosts. Although there is no historical record that Wei Huacun engaged in a romantic relationship with Ruan Zhan, Chouti fabricates one in a series of virtual images that have never been actualized: Wei Huacun and Ruan Zhan racing horses, lying silently on a carpet, and burning pinecones to warm themselves. However, all of the unactualized possibilities have closed down to the limit of historical facticity, Ruan Zhan's tomb, where historical fact and fictional narrative converges. The next sentences, "The weeds have not yet sprouted from Ruan Zhan's rotten limbs" has imbricated the material facts, Ruan Zhan's death symbolized by his rotten limb, that is irreducible to the narrative construct and stands as the radical limit of the fictionality. However, what follows such limit of the facticity, is the anticipatory gesture indexed by the seeds that has "not yet" sprouted from Ruan Zhan's limbs, bending by the wind and waving to the next historical event following Xiongnu's conquering of Luo Yang, Yongjia southern journey, which describes Sima Rui, the emperor of the Western Jin, fleeing south with the residents of Luo Yang and ending the dynasty. The short story reveals the paradox of historical fiction in a temporality of "will have done" in three sets of the paradoxes: What stems from the "corpses" of historical facticity that resists the symbolic construct, the death of Ruan Zhan, and the conquering of Luo Yang, is the waving seeds that projects a futuristic look and anticipates the next historical event. However, the forward look of the waving seeds is actually projected "backward", to the historical event of the residents of Luo Yang fleeing south. The paradoxical temporality of future anterior has the narrative into the fatalistic circle of "the

anticipatory gestures towards the future is destined to historical past”. This can also be found in a fanfiction of Liu Heng and Jia Yi written by Luo Zhou

刘胜是刘恒最疼爱的儿子，有他父亲一样圆圆的面孔，他眉目温和与我的儿子相得益彰。我想刘胜要是能当上皇帝，也会像他的父亲般迅速地消瘦下来，那样他就会成为一个很好看的情人，坐在金碧辉煌的殿堂上，等待我的儿子衡口若悬河，滔滔不绝。我的这些想象在得到刘胜的死讯之后生长，繁衍，很奇怪那个孩子活着时我从没将他与衡联系起来，也很少真的将他当作了刘恒的儿子来看待和爱惜…。想象真是一种奇怪的东西，死亡阻隔了通向未来的可能，我却在一遍遍回味再不能发生的未来（212）

Liu Sheng is Liu Heng's favorite son. He has a rounded face like his father, and his tenderness complements my son. I think if Liu Sheng can ascend to the throne in the future, he will soon lose weight as his father did. Then he will be a pretty love who sits in the golden court, waiting for my son to deliver his eloquent speech. These imaginations branch out after Liu Sheng has died. It is strange that I have never related him to Heng when he was alive, and I have not loved him as Liu Heng's child...The imagination is an odd thing. Death has barred us access to the future, but I am keep reflecting upon the future that is impossible to unfold.

The paragraph above is the monologue of the wife of Jiayi, the minister of Liu Sheng, the emperor of the western Han dynasty. Jia Yi was a promising young scholar who was appointed by Liu Heng as the tutor of his son, Liu Sheng, and attempted to initiate an institutional reform with Liu Heng. However, the reform was violently opposed by a group of conservative officials, and Liu was forced to banish Jiayi to appease them. Liu Sheng fell to his death from a horse, and Jia Yi blamed himself for it. The narrator, the former maid of Liu Sheng and wife of Jiayi, begins to imagine the scene Liu Sheng ascending to the throne and scene of her son delivering his speech as the minister. Paradoxically, the narrators state that it is only after she is informed that Liu Sheng is dead that her imagination begins to ruminate, grow, and flourish. The narrator then comments that the death has barred the possibility for her imagination to march towards the future, yet she is remembering the future that cannot happen. The last sentence of the paragraph can be read meta-textually, as a self-reflexive remark on the paradoxical temporality of historical fanfictions: If historical writing is a remembrance of the past, the fictional narrative would be

anything but what happened in the past, which is the sum total of the unactualized possibilities. This twists the backward gaze of the retrospection into a forward look of the anticipation, and connects the imaginations of the past and the remembrance of the future. However, the actualization of the unrealized possibilities is prevented from evolving into the future by historical facticity, which paradoxically motivates the proliferations of the imaginations of the pasts that can never be actualized.

The technique of time: the reverse engineering of history

If the epistemological access of the past is foreclosed for the modern reader, then what if the modern readers travel to the past, to witness the story unfolds in the past and seek to change the course of historical progress? Is historical facticity no longer inaccessible, and the modern travelers can not only investigate the past that supposed to sink into the darkness, but also change the fate of historical figures and the deceased? This scenario can usually be found in the time-travel historical fiction, one of the most popular subgenres of historical fiction, which often involves a heroine travel back in time for a romantic encounters of historical figures in the dynastic past, represented by *Dreaming Back to the Qing Dynasty* (夢回大清), serialized in 2004, and *Startling by Each Step* (步步驚心), serialized in 2005. Before the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television banned the time-travel television series, TV adaptations of time-travel books were among the top 10 most popular dramas and gained overseas attention and popularity. The female protagonist is often motivated by a desire to change history and inform her beloved one of the future developments of history to avoid certain bad decisions. However, the very attempt of changing the history will result in a logical paradox, as specified by Asimov (1995) as follows:

The dead giveaway that true time-travel is flatly impossible arises from the well-known “paradoxes” it entails. The classic example is “What if you go back into the past and kill your grandfather when he was still a little boy?” ...So complex and hopeless are the paradoxes...that the easiest way out of the irrational chaos that results is to suppose that true time-travel is, and forever will be, impossible.

What lies at the heart of the grandfather’s paradox is the rule of the linear temporality, and the consistent causality: if you kill your grandfather, at least one of your parents (and, by extension, you) would never be born. The grandfather can be read as the “cause of the cause”, the event 1 as the logic anterior that cause the event 2, the necessary cause that conditions the very existence of the time traveler, which can be marked as the event 3. If the logical chains are connected to each other, then changing one cause in the past will alter all of the subsequent events , including events that preconditioned the time-travel itself, such as the birth of the time traveler. To ensure the principle of non-contradiction, what can be actualized by the time-traveler, is historical facts that are already actualized, the event1, event2, and event 3. As a result, Asimov concludes that the backward time-travel that can change the past “is, and forever will be, impossible.” Then what if the linearity of time, and the causal relations that linked the chain of event is disrupted in the fictional works? Unshackled by linear time and the Euclidian space, the postmodern fictions seem to be the optimal solution of the grand father paradox.

Counterintuitive as it may seem to be, time-travel historical fanfiction does not provide a post-modernist solution to the grandfather paradox by presenting reversible temporalities or multiple histories in their fictional recreations. Rather, in the stories, the modern travelers’ every attempt to changing the pasts fail, and their presence is erased in historical records, which resolves the grandfather paradox by preserving the linear temporality and keeping historical facticity as it is. The time-space the time-traveler occupies will cancel itself by the end of the trip, and the changes made by the time-travelers will be erased accordingly. For example, in

Dreaming Back to the Qing Dynasty, the female protagonist accidentally travels back to Qing dynasty when she is visiting the Forbidden City. After all of her attempts to fix historical mistakes fail, she wakes up in the modern world to discover that she succumbed to sunstroke and was unconscious for two days, and everything that happened to her in Qing dynasty was a dream. Similarly, in the TV adaptation of the *Startling by Each Step*, the protagonist Zhang Xiao leaves the twenty-first century, travels forty-eight hours and then arrives in the Qing dynasty in 1704. After she dies in Qing dynasty, she wakes up in modern times and realizes that she was hospitalized. Then she searches online and figures out that the fate of the historical figures she encountered did not change. She cannot even find her name in any records.

The time-travel scenario has thus run into a paradox, as the very condition of its occurrence is its self-cancellation, which results in its non-occurrence. As in *Dreaming Back to the Qing Dynasty* and *Startling by Each Step*, the time-space that time-travelers travel to is a dream, which guarantees that the dreamers' actions will never be actualized in the reality outside of the dream. In some cases, the time-space that the heroine travels to is not a literal dream, but a dream-like scenario in which everything that happened is canceled out, and the traces left by the time-traveler is erased. One of the most salient examples of the motif of counter-actualization can be found in *Living in Three Kingdoms: The Lovers*, which is about a heroine who travels back to Three Kingdoms period and tries to change the progress of history with her modern knowledge. Unsurprisingly, she fails. By the end of the story, she asks Zhuge Liang to marry her before he dies, and they step into a stream for a quasi-marriage ritual.

I let him hold my hand, and kneeled with me shoulder by shoulder. He hold together our hands, and immersed them in the mild stream. Suddenly I realized what he wants to do. We hold a handful of water with the shadow of the moon, smile to each other, and gradually drink our future. "So I bring you here". He hits

my shoulder and smiles, “how was it? You will have it as you wish”. Our hands are the gourd in the marriage ritual, and the water tastes better than the wine.

我由着他拉我并肩跪下，他把他的手与我的手靠在一起，浸入了温凉的溪水里。我立即明白了他想做什么。我们掬了手，捞起芬芳的、有月亮在里面的清水，相视一笑，慢慢喝下了我们的未来。“所以才带你到这里来。”诸葛亮轻轻撞撞我的肩，会心笑道，“如何？你喜欢便会有的。”我们的手便是偕老的盃，水的滋味比酒更好。

Depicted above is a somewhat slapdash wedding ceremony that lacks the proper ritual needed to be considered valid in ancient China. In the traditional Chinese ritual, the consummation of a marriage requires the bride and the bridegroom to hold a gourd split from the same melon for a toast. However, there is no wine and no gourd in the river, so they used their hand as gourds and water as wine. The rhetoric is modulated in a realist manner, yet the minor shifts from the immediate reality to dreamlike virtuality occurs when the author describes the two protagonists carrying a gourdful of the moon and drinking their future. The metaphorical equivalent between the wine, the moon, and the future has twofold connotations: as the moon reflected on the surface of the water is the shadow of the real moon on the sky, the time-space that the time-traveler inhabited is just the simulation of the real world outside of the story world. However, the reflection of the moon will disappear immediately it takes shape, without the possibility of concretizing into a real moon, which precludes the water moon from becoming the postmodern simulacra that reversely determines reality (Baudrillard 21). The future actualization of the pseudo-marriage in the real world, as described by the author, is similar to the water moon, foreclosed at the moment when it unfolds. By the end of the story, the historical figure has died as recorded in the official history, and the heroine died without any trace of her existence left in the historical recorded. As a result, most of historical time-travel fiction ends up with an aporia: the only condition of the happening of the time-travel journey is its non-happening.

The most intuitive solution of such paradox is the reversal of the direction of time-travel from backward to forward and its origin from the past to the future. If the past has to be kept as it is to ensure the linearity of time and consistency of causation, then the unexpected changes and encounters can be staged at a future time-space that has not yet fully unfolded, wherein anything is possible. The switching of the setting of the story seems to resolve the problem of the “changes” that have shackled not only time-travel historical fanfiction, but also historical fiction and adaptational works in general: if the transformations are foreclosed in historical past or the original story world that has “already happened”, then it can definitely take place in a futuristic setting that is “not yet”. However, the switching of the context in the forward time-travel fictions will generate a problem of “consistency” that has troubled historical fanfiction and any forms of transformational writing: for the constructivist reader, the identity of a historical figure is usually defined by the sum of one’s attributes defined by historical contexts, the locales one is situated in, one’s profession, and historical events in which one has participated. However, how can a historical figure travel to a completely different time-space, such as the modern world and be recognized as the same person?

The definition of one’s identity according to the contextual envelope has therefore failed in the forward time-traveling scenario, as the identity of the time-traveler neither endures in time nor consistent in space after leaping to the futuristic time-space. Fanfiction rewriters have subsequently searched for the internal consistency that defined the identity of the time-traveler in modern time, that is, the memory. The motif of memory as defining the identity of historical figure and its potential pitfall can be found in the forward time-travel fanfiction, “The Man Who Exists,” which depicts a historical figure in Three Kingdoms who travels to modern times after his death. Fabricating a false identity, he survives and thrives as a professor of classical Chinese

literature. One day, he lectures on “Crossing the river to pluck hibiscus flowers”, a poem about a sojourner who picks a hibiscus flower but is unable to hand it to his or her faraway lover. He suddenly feels that this is a line that he himself has written before, but he can’t remember why he wrote it or to who he was thinking of. At that particular moment, he begins to question his memories, his identities, and his very existence. By the end of the short story, the author writes:

他无法平静。他说也许是他有意把这段记忆抛弃，以免伤害自己，也许是记忆终于抛弃了他。他好像一个从时间的牢狱里跃出的逃犯，为自己的聪明沾沾自喜了很久，如今却发现其实时间从不曾在乎他是否关在自己脚边。在他说着这些令人费解又明白通晓的话时，他的表情好像一块历经多年风雨的墓碑，让人分辨不出哪些是墓碑本身的颜色，哪些是青苔和后人的涂鸦了。

I guess he is terribly plagued by this fact: he finds a small but awkward gap in the continuity of his lifetime, this makes him disquiet. He said he has abandoned this part of his memories on purpose to prevent it from harming him, but probably it is his memories that finally abandoned him. He was like an escaped prisoner who just sneaked out of the prison of the time, and is pleased with his subtle ploy. However, he finally finds that the time never cares about if he stands by it. When he delivers this elucidate but abstruse speech, he looks like a tombstone that endures for years, as the graffiti and moss become indistinguishable from the original color of the tombstone.

The paragraph above also probes into the fundamental question of the personal identity. If the persistence of the personal identity is defined according to the continuity of the consciousness, then the immediate memories of the present moment should be extended to the recollections of the memories of the person’s past experiences. However, the continuity of memories that support the diachronic identity is disrupted when the gap of oblivion appears, either because of a traumatic event whereby “he has abandoned his memories”, or because of the natural forgetfulness such that his “memories has abandoned him.” The gaps in historical figures’ memories have split them into a narrative self in his past memories and his immediate consciousness, and the self who lived in the past but has lost in the oblivion. Correspondingly,

the time has been split into the linear temporality that progresses mechanistically as a facticity, and the lived time experienced by historical figures that is discontinuous and reversible.

Nevertheless, contrary to post-modernist historiography, which cherished non-linear temporality as deconstructing the linear narrative of the past, the gaps in the memories become a testimony of the linear temporality as a historical facticity in this story. Although historical figures can “escape from the prison of time” and live an eternal life by entering into the endless cycles of rebirth in the fanfictions, his actions in the alternate universes of the counterfactual world can never affect the linear temporality that keep progressing linearly, “which never cares about if he stands by it.” The past experience that cannot be found in historical records, collective memories, and has been forgotten by himself, has been lost in time and remains inaccessible to any form of narrative account. The past events that fall into oblivion is symbolized as the “tombstone” in the last sentence of the story, the objectivity of which stands as the testimony of historical facticity and the limit to the narrative account. However, such historical facticity appears unintelligible to the visitors, as its “original color” has been obscured by moss, represented the lapse of time has made the past increasingly inapprehensible, and indistinguishable from the graffiti, represented the counter-factual narratives irrelevant to its factual anterior. As such, the “tombstone” in the last sentence of the story represents the epistemological black hole of historical facticity, which has been covered by the counter-factual narratives of the graffiti and appears unintelligible to the visitors.

The oblivion that marks the inaccessibility of the past and memories as a technique to extend the prosthetic identity of the deceased are recurrent motifs in historical fanfiction. “The Chip”, for example, is a futuristic piece of technology that fabricates a particular chip that can store the memories and the consciousness of the deceased. Once the chip is implanted into the

consciousness of a particular person, he or she can carry on the memories and the talents of a loved one who has died. In the story, the memories of Zhuge Liang are stored in the chip, and implanted into the brain of Jiang Wei, his successor, to inherit his wisdom. In the beginning, everything works well, and Jiang Wei managed to be as invincible a commander as Zhugeliang, with the help of the chip that saves the military tactics and strategies in Zhuge Liang's memories. However, Jiang Wei gradually finds Zhuge Liang's memories in the chip unbearable, as it also saves his affection towards his wife. He then comes to the technician to discuss the possibilities of fixing this problem, and the technician suggests removing chip, but Jiang Wei refuses to do so:

“如果‘芯片’不再包含一切记忆和情感，那它应该包含什么、又不该包含什么呢？如果我竟十分憎恨丞相给我留下的负担，决意把他的痕迹全然删去，那今后的人岂不是压根不知道他曾经存在了？何况，这样的负担也不是所有人都能承受的。”

我承认自己想的不够周全，于是转而问道：

“那么……那以后，您还见过她么？”

他顿了一下，艰难地答道：“总是能见到的。我最后一次看见她，她的头发已经全白了，——这让我痛苦得难以忍受。今年年初，她在长安过世了。”

太阳斜了下来，透过窗子火辣辣地照在面孔上。我看到他的脸一半在光里、一半在阴影里，看不出喜悦，也看不出悲伤。我还想找点话题，却不知道该说些什么了。

“If the ‘chip’ no longer contains any form of memory or affect, then what should it include, and what should it omit? If I do hate all of the burden that the prime minister left to me, and determined to delete all of the traces that he has left, then no one will know that he has once existed before? Let alone that hardly anyone can bear this burden.”

I admit that I haven't think this thoroughly, and then I turned to ask him:

“Then.... after that...Did you ever see her again?”

He hesitates for a moment, and then replied with difficulty: “In the end I happened to meet her. I saw that her hair had turned completely white. This was unbearably painful for me. In the beginning of this year, she passed away in Chang'an.”

The sunset has declined westward, and burned one's cheek through the windows. I see half of his face exposed to light, and half of his face immersed in the darkness. I try to come up with a topic to continue the conversation, but I don't know what to say.

If reading the dialogue above as an allegory of historical fanfiction, one can find the premises of historical fanfictions emblematic in the metaphor of the chip: the identity of historical figure is defined by the totality of his memories of his experience, and his prosthetic identity can be extended by the mnemonic technique, either as “the chip” that can store his memories in this fanfiction, historical records and fictions that extend his “second life” in the collective memories. As Jiang Wei explained, if all the traces of the deceased have been deleted, then Zhuge Liang risked his “second death” in the collective memories: “Then no one will know that he has once existed before.” Historical fanfiction therefore functions as the chip in the story, as a prosthetic technique that extends the posthumous identity of a historical figures in the collective memories of other beyond the individual consciousness of the deceased. However, the mnemonic technique can only extend the memories that can be externalized in the narratives, yet what has been lost in the remembrance of the collective memories is the internal affect that cannot be exteriorized, such as Zhuge Liang's affection towards his wife. In the story, Zhuge Liang's love for his wife does implant into Jiang Wei's consciousness with the chip, yet it is unbearable for Jiang Wei, who inherits his memory, and inaccessible for any external observer. As depicted in the last the sentence, the face of Jiang Wei appears unreadable under the side light of the dawn. With “half of his face exposed to the light, half of his face immersed in the shadow,” the external observer cannot tell if Jiang Wei is happy or sad. Accordingly, the author has defined historical knowledge of a modern viewers, as limited to the narratives of collective memories that can be exteriorized in historical records, historical writings, or even the fanfiction

writings. Nevertheless, what can never be accessed, is the past that has been fallen into oblivion, the trauma that is impossible to articulate, and the affect that finds no external reference.

The contrast between the collective memories that accessible to the external observer, and the internal memories of an individual that cannot be externalized is visualized as the contrasty lighting scheme in an imitation of the televisual aesthetics. The illuminated half of the face of historical figures represents the moment of revelation, when historical narratives, be they factual or fictional, have shed light on the past of the deceased that will otherwise be forgotten. The shaded half of the face is a representation of the limit of the collective memories, the part of the past that cannot be externalized and therefore sink into the shadow of oblivion, which is radically inaccessible for the readers and the viewers. The light and shadow as the figurative representation of the illumination of the modern narratives of the history, and the radical inaccessibility of the past can be best exemplified by a forward time-traveling historical fanfiction, “Zhuge Liang’s modern life”. The story is about Zhuge Liang traveling to modern times after his death, and carries all of his memories about the past in the modern world. One day, he has found his wife in the past, Huang Yueying has also traveled to the modern world, and visited her home accordingly. The opening scene of the story starts with the sudden power outage that has plunged the entire room into darkness:

这时他的优势就显现出来了，诸葛亮想，毕竟他过了五十多年不知电为何物的生活，却只有过一年用电的经历。忽然一个巨大的、黑色的影子带着黄色的热气出现在墙上：他回头，看见黄月英把一根蜡树立在茶几上。

“这下 wifi 也没了，我只能拿 pad 看剧了，”她说，“好在今晚没什么事儿。你明天能去买电吗？我把银行地址发给你。”

他一口应承，打算拿着黄月英的 kindle 看书。出乎他意料的是，他很快适应了这种称不上黑暗的黑暗，——现代的蜡烛质量很不错。他们经历过的黑暗是毫无光亮的。他走到窗前，把百叶窗推开。没有月光，当然，涌进来的是城市夜晚的光芒。天空灰暗，但非常寂静。窗子对面是同样的公寓楼，整

齐、高大、一个个窗格透着光。这时他听见背后传来混乱的交谈声，——是美剧里的对话，他猜，他听不懂。然后是耳机插孔的声音：房间像天空一样平静了。

Now his strengths come out, Zhuge Liang thinks. At least he has lived for 50 years without knowing what electricity is, and he has only had the experience of living with electricity for one year. Suddenly, a gigantic black shadow appears on the wall with yellow heat. He turns back and sees place a candle on the tea table.

“Now we don’t have wifi anymore, and I have to watch the series on my iPad,” she says. “Fortunately I have nothing important to do tonight. Can you pay the utility bill tomorrow? I will send you the address of the bank.”

He consents without hesitation, and is about to read a book on Huang Yueying’s Kindle. To his surprise, he quickly gets used to the darkness that cannot even be counted as darkness for him – the quality of the candle in modern times is great. The darkness they experienced is light-less. He walks to the window and opens the shutters. There is no moon light. Of course, what is cascaded into the room is the city light. The sky is dark and quiet. There is a tall apartment in neighborhood, with lights from the well-ordered windows. Then he hears the chaotic noises from the back – that’s the dialogue from an American TV drama, he guesses, but he can’t understand a single word of it. Then he hears the headphone plugged in, and the room becomes as quiet as the sky.

Rife with cinematic language, this scene outlines several sets of contrast between the light and the darkness, the noise and the silence, the past and the presence. The first set of the contrasts is the lightness and the darkness, with the light generated by the candle inside of the room, and the city light from neighboring apartment. The candlelight can be considered the darkness of the past when regarded in modern times, as epitomized in the “point of view shot” that introduced the candle into the scene: what comes first is not the light generated by the candle, but the “gigantic black shadow”. However, the room with the candlelight is still “the dark that cannot be considered as dark”, as they have experienced the “light-less dark” in the past, which signifies the absolute darkness of the ancient time that cannot even be lightened by a candle. Beyond the lightness and the darkness is the contrary between the noises and the silence, with the noises comes from the dialogue in the American TV drama, the shutting off of which

makes the room “as tranquil as the sky” that is “dark but quiet”. The metaphorical parallel drawn between the darkness and the silence can be interpreted as the absolute impenetrability of the ancient past, which is blocked from the perceptual faculties, sight and sound. Surprisingly, the revelation of the past does not come with the candlelight in the ancient time, but with the artificial light generated by the electricity in modern time, as depicted in Zhuge Liang’s encounters with his wife as he traveled back to the modern times:

他把头凑过去，看见她漆黑的眼睛有点嘲讽地盯着他。她的眼睛里反射着屋顶上节能灯的光芒，比从前——一千多年前，他是说——更亮、更透明。即使许多年过去了，有些事也是难以遗忘的。这时电视里 policemen 和坏蛋的声音忽然弱了下来。他搂过她的头，吻上她的嘴唇。

He leaned towards her and saw her pitch-black eyes stared at him satirically. The light of the energy-efficient bulb was reflected in her eyes, which appeared lighter and more transparent than they appeared one thousand years ago. Even though many years had passed, something like that could be easily forgotten. The voices of the policemen and the bad guys suddenly faded away. He clasped her around her head and kissed her lips.

In the quasi-cinematic rhetoric, the kiss scene progressed with the diegetic sound from the television dying away, and the hypothetical camera eye moves from close-up to extreme close-up to show the light of the energy-efficient bulb reflected in her irises. Paradoxically, it is the light from this energy-efficient bulb, a most mundane modern object, that makes her face brighter and “more transparent” than a thousand years ago, the ancient time in which she is supposed to reside. The term “transparent” is strange, if reading this sentence dietically, as the face cannot be transparent in the literal sense. If we interpret this sentence extra-diegetically, the term “transparency” can be understood as the “translucent” effect of the face on the screen under the three-point light, or the accessibility to the perceptual faculty and cognitive interpretation. It is only the electric light produced by the modern technology, that can isolate the face of an historical figure from its contextual envelope of the ancient time and makes it accessible in the

process of de-naturalization and decontextualization. A contrast between natural and artificial light can be found in the passage below that depicts Zhuge Liang strolling on the street with Huang Yueying:

灯光已经亮了起来，街道变成了红色和紫色，霓虹灯管好像散发着金色的烟。黄月英也一样，她的头发是金红色，脸颊和牙齿是粉红色的。诸葛亮觉得一千余年前清晨的天空在他眼前出现了。但她从前比如今苍白得多，他意识到，仿佛自然的颜色无法给她增添任何热度和光亮，只有人造的灯光可以。这多奇怪啊。

The lights have been turned on, and the entire street is colored by red and purple neon lights, as if it is sending out golden smoke. In a similar vein, Huang Yueying's hair has been colored by rose gold, and her cheek and teeth appear pink. Zhuge Liang feels like that the sky from thousands of years ago reappeared, and Huang Yueying is paler than compared to now. He realized that the natural light cannot intensify the heat and light of her image, but the artificial light can. How strange it is.

As depicted above, what intensifies the heat, the light, and the sensibility of Huang Yueying's image is not natural light, the symbol of the ancient past in which she "naturally resides", but the artificial light from the neon tube, the symbol of modern city. However, what the modern lighting sheds light on is not her personality or the buried historical past unknown to the modern reader, but the surface of her skin that fluctuates with the changing color of the neon lights. The vicissitudes of Huang Yueying's image reveals nothing about historical fact but the meta-reflection of the modern rewriting of the story of the past: the image of historical figures are just empty signifiers that are colored and concretized by the modernist articulation and change every time the story is retold. Instead of historical figures to be interpreted in historical fiction, what is illuminated by the neon light is the process of interpretation and recreation. With this respect, the neon light can be understood meta-textually, as the floating signifier surround the empty subject position, the shifter I that is defined relative to the signifier accidentally falls into its place. The intertextual references between the "neon light" and its postmodernist theme is

further revealed in a scene depicted Zhuge Liang and Huang Yueying sitting in a movie theatre, watching the postmodern canon, “Blade Runner”:

他抬头看见一张老海报上的字，“银翼杀手”……他专注看字幕、看懂情节，完全没顾上黄月英在他身边做什么。他以前没怎么看过这种电影：湿漉漉的城市，许多身份不明的人隐藏其中，满街霓虹灯什么都无法照亮。

诸葛亮听见 Roy 说：“我见过你们永远无法相信的景象。我看见猎户座的边缘着火的攻击舰。我看见 c 光束在唐豪瑟门旁的黑暗里闪亮。所有这些时刻都会消失在时间里，……就像泪水消失在雨中。我的死期到了。”

他忽然觉得自己听不见接下来的台词了。泪水大量地涌进他的眼睛，而所有的声音只剩下一条刺耳的、细细的尖啸。他抬手捂住耳朵，然后捂住脸。太蠢了，他想，他在这个世界里头一次哭泣竟然是因为一部该死的电影，而他甚至都不知道 c 光束和唐豪瑟是些什么东西。所以他一定不能发出声音、被人察觉。他依然睁着眼睛，但他看不见自己手掌的纹路；在想象中，在模糊不清的视野里，他看见一个被黑夜染色的、高大的影子。伯约？不可能，姜伯约该是一具坚实的身体。影子转过身来：他看见了自己的脸。这一切忽然变得如此荒谬又真实。

He looks up and see a line on the poster, “Blade Runner”...he keeps concentrating on the subtitles and trying hard to make sense of the plot, unaware of what Huang Yueying is doing. He has not seen this type of film before: the bombardment of neon lights cannot light up such a foggy city, wherein the identified hide themselves in it.

Zhugue Liang heard Roy say, “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe...Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion...I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain...Time to die.”

I suddenly feel that he can no longer hear the following lines. The tears flood into his eyes, and the background noises converge into a shrill scream. He tries to cover his ears with his hands, and then moves his hands to cover his face. I’m too dumb, he thinks. The first time he cried in this world is because of a damn film, and he even doesn’t know what c-beam and Tannhäuser Gate are, so he has to carefully keep silent and avoid being noticed by anyone. He still keeps his eyes open, but he cannot see the lines on his palm. In his imagination and his vague vision, he sees a tall shadow shaded by the night. Boyue? No, it’s impossible. Boyue should have a toned body. The shadow turned to him, and he sees his face. Everything seems so absurd and real.

The film begins with a scene of a city swamped with neon lights. Different from the previous scene, in which the images of historical figures unfold like a Möbius strip with only external surfaces exposed under the city lights, the neon light in this scene cannot light up anything, so it is the perfect asylum for the identity-less subjects like the replicant in *Blade Runner*, to hide in shadow of the city. Towards the end of the film, Zhuge Liang finds himself as a black shadow colored by the night, which draws a metaphorical equivalent between the replicants and historical figures, both of whom are reincarnated into corporeal bodies that are not theirs and are parasitic to the memories they inherited. However, the memories cannot find their positive manifestation in the external reference and are unintelligible to the cognitive faculty, as Zhuge Liang finds himself a shadow untouched by the light, and a speechless scream that can be heard by no one but himself. The moment Zhuge Liang relates to the replicant the most is when the replicant talks about his memories that defined his being, yet will be “lost in time”. In this sense, Zhuge Liang’s identity in this story is constituted by yet irreducible to the positive attributes associated with him in historical narratives, either in the official historical records or the play of signifiers in the postmodernist retelling of his story. Historical facticity, which is left outside of the grid of intelligibility, is the memory that has no witnesses and leaves no trace. The insistence upon the “shadow of history” has marked the divergence between meta-history in fanfiction and the constructivist approach: there will always be a blind spot that evades the signifying chain and is left untouched to the narrative construction of the past.

Nevertheless, fanfiction writers who are skeptical about the narrative context do not seek the evidential proof from archeological objects or material history. In this story, the prosthetic memories of the diseased that cannot be expressed in the positive account of the history finds its home in the signifiers that are foreign to historical figures: C-beams glitter in the dark near the

Tannhauser Gate, though Zhuge Liang “even has no idea what C-beams and Tannhauser Gate are.” Paradoxically, the expressionless memories of the ancient time, the voiceless voice, and the invisible image, can only seek for its positive expression in the futuristic projection of a foreign landscape, the symbols of a post-human world that historical figures cannot make sense of. A similar scenario can be found in the paragraph below:

醉汉的声音在他耳膜里停留，越来越响。他觉得对方的手指一定在他脖颈上留下了什么难看的痕迹。他希望现在是诸葛亮的手指放在他额头上，告诉他从噩梦里醒过来。

直到他终于分辨出了那个声音。

那不是诸葛亮；不是他的陛下；不是给他下绊子的敌人；甚至也不是他的妻子。

是他自己对自己说：好好活着。

诸葛亮死于希望尚未泯灭之时，他死于敌人刀剑之下；诸葛亮有个工作等着升职，他刚刚从垃圾堆里出来。好吧，的确如此。但他还是想活下去。他想到一个词，像想到自己的一块骨头：南极，——那他妈究竟是什么地方？他忘了。

他举起拳头。

The voice of the drunk rings in his ears and grows louder. He thinks his finger must have left some ugly traces on his neck. He hopes it is Zhuge Liang’s finger that softly touching his forehead, and waking him up from the nightmare.

Until he finally recognizes that voice.

It’s not Zhuge Liang, not His Majesty, not his enemy, and even not his wife.

It is he himself that said to him: stay alive.

Zhuce Liang died when hope was not completely destroyed, and he was killed by the sword of his enemy; Zhuce Liang has a career and is waiting for promotion, while he has just climbed out of the garbage dump, but he still wants to live on. A strange world crossed his mind, as if he is thinking of a bone of his own: the South Pole. Where the fuck is the South Pole? He has forgot about it.

He lifts his fist.

The scene above depicts an accident encountered by Jiang Wei, commonly known as Zhuge Liang's successor, the last major general of state of Shu, who died in a failed rebellion against the state of Wei after it conquered the state of Shu. In this story, Zhuge Liang is reborn into the modern world as a young man just starting his career, yet Jiang Wei travels to the modern world as a 60-year-old man who knows nothing about modern life or technology and becomes homeless, living on fast-food leftovers. One day he is wandering on the street aimlessly, sees a drunk man beating his wife, and stands up to stop the abuse. However, the drunk man strangles him, and at the moment when he is about to pass out, what motivates him to fight back are not his loved ones or his enemies from his previous life, but "the South Pole", a place Jiang Wei has never been, either in the ancient time or the modern age. Similar to the "C-beams" and "Tannhauser Gate" in the previous scene, "the South Pole" brings the residue of the history that is left out of the discursive construction that steps beyond the index of formalistic negativity, and grants the inarticulable past the positive content: what can signify the memories of the deceased that is impossible to articulate is the signifier of the impossibility that neither dwells in its habitual home in ancient time, nor can it find the contextual anchor in modern China, but appears as a non-sensical noise that cannot be deciphered by historical figures. What further complicates this description, is the allegorical resemblance between "the South Pole", an exotic place that Jiang Wei has never been and a signifier that is foreign to his imagination, and "a bone of his own", part of himself that is most familiar to him. The parallel between "the South Pole", and the "bone of his own" stands as an impossible knot of the radical interiority, the memories that support the existence as a backbone, yet is not visible outside, and the radical exteriority, the non-place that historical figures have never been, either in historical past, or the imaginary presence in the story.

The metaphorical equivalent between “the South Pole”, and the “bone” of a historical figure is illustrative of the basis of historical fanfictions: the “bone” can be interpreted as historical facts that cannot be denied by the narrative fabrications, which serve as the backbone that support the existence of historical figure. However, the “bone” is interior to historical figures and remain inaccessible to the epistemological search of the readers and writers. In historical fanfictions, the factual anterior supposed to provide the skeleton frame of the story is displaced by the fictional fabrication that is ostensibly counter-factual. Accordingly, the deceased is reborn into historical fiction, not as who he is in the natural world, but as anyone but who he was. With this respect, historical fanfiction steps beyond the fidelity discourse of approaching itself to “what has happened” in the past based on the factual account, or the postmodernist narrative that offer the “what could be” in the interpretation and narrative reconstruction and recontextualization. Rather, fiction displaces the factual anterior with the counter-factual origin, which redirects historical figures from where they have been, in this case, ancient China, to where he currently resides in the fictional world, modern China, to a non-place to which they have never been, “the South Pole”. Accordingly, the basis of historical fiction is neither historical fact nor fictional reconstruction, but a nonsensical noise that Jiang Wei cannot decipher in the counter-factual imagination.

The transition from counter-actualization to counter-factuality in “Zhuge Liang’s Modern Life” therefore signals a shift from the negative use of the limit of historical knowledge to its positive use in the domain of fabrication: historical facticity as the unapproachable prior of historical fictions, is replaced by a counter-factual prior that preconditions any forms of the changes and creative acts. Correspondingly, the “backbone” that supports the identity of a historical figure travel across the time, is not historical a prior defined by the original time-space

at the time of the Three Kingdoms, but the “South Pole”, the non-place that is any place but Three Kingdoms, thereby allowing anything to take place. Therein lies the positive use of the lack of historical anterior, as a point zero, from where the manifolds of fabrications emerged such as the identities without the contextual predetermination, and the fictional narratives of the past with no ancestry. Herein lies the path from the negative use of the limit of historical knowledge in fanfiction, the narrative of counter-actualization, and the shadow of oblivion, to its positive use that concretized the “condition of the impossibilities” in an unassignable place that is anywhere that Three Kingdoms have actually taken place.

Technique of the Recursion: of that must return

a. The alternate universe: why the story always returns with a different version?

The forward time-travel genre projects an unassignable non-space that is anything but the original historical past. It has led to its sister genre, the parallel universe or alternate universe. Different from forward time-travel, the concept of the alternate universe can resolve the grandfather paradox without changing the direction of the trip. Vranas, for example, proposes that time-travel fiction will either violate the logic of contradiction, as illustrated by the grandfather paradox, or generate an alternate universe that has not been actualized. In “Do Cry Over Spilt Milk”, Vranas proposes that there are two ways to versions of changing the past through time travel as follows (373):

(P1) There is a possible world w in which, at some time t , I perform an action which makes the past of t in w different from what the past of t in w is.

(P2) There is a possible world w in which, at some time I perform an action which makes the past of t in w different from what the past of t in a is (a is a name of the actual world)

The critical difference between the first proposition and the second proposition is that the latter involves two alternate universes or parallel universe, the universe w and the universe a , whereas the first one is restricted within a single universe w . In the first proposition, *making the past of t in w different from what it is, the past of t in w* , would violate the principle of non-contradiction. However, the second proposition posits the w as an alternate universe of the actual world a , the consistency of the past that has happened, t in a would not be affected, as their actions have engendered an alternate universe, t in w . Vranas proposes that the first proposition is a *transformation* of the past, t in w , which is logically impossible, whereas the second proposition is possible because it involves a *replacement* of the past, t in a , with t in w . With this respect, the parallel universe that engendered by the time-traveler's action is the necessary condition of changing the past without violating the principle of non-contradiction.

This will necessarily lead to a subsequent question: are alternate or parallel universes possible? Tegmark (2003) proposes that because space is infinite in size, there must exist the multiple universes parallel to each other (42). Derived from elementary probability, one may come to the conclusion that in infinite space, even the most unlikely events must take place somewhere (41). As a result, there must be infinite numbers of universes, where there are infinite numbers of people "with the same appearance, name and memories as you, who play out every possible permutation of your life choices" (41). Tegmark's argument can be broken down into two parts: 1. Anything possible can be actualized somewhere. 2. Because space is infinite, anything possible must be realized, either in the universe we inhabit, or in an alternate universe. Reformulating Tegmark's rationale, we can justify the existence of alternate universes in a path from the impossibility to necessity, and finally to contingency: if Event 1 has happened in t_1 of Universe 1, it has rendered the actualizations of other events in this particular time-space

impossible. The sum total of the impossible events (Event 2, Event 3, Event 4....) can be marked as negative of Event 1 (- Event 1), which will necessarily happen in another time in Universe 1 (t2, t3, t4, t5..), or in the same time at another alternate universe (u2, u3, u4, u5....). In this respect, all of the possible events must be actualized, while its upon the contingent encounter that we may meet this actualized event or not. This rationale can be found in “Zhuge Liang’s Modern Life”, when Zhuge Liang is discussing the logical necessity of something to happened for multiple times with his wife:

“好吧。我记得你说过，一件事如果发生就不可能只发生一次，就是说，只发生一次的事情等于没发生过……”

“我说过这个？”他真的会说自己都不懂得的话吗？

“Fine. I remember you said that: If something happened, it would not just happen. That is to say, something that just happened once wouldn’t seem to happen at all.”

A similar rationale can be found in his reflection after he meet another time-traveler, Jiangwei. He has begun to consider the possibility for there to be other time-travelers than himself, his wife, and Jiang Wei:

还有别人吗？也许，——或者说，肯定有，因为一件事只要发生了就不可能只发生三次。但世界太大，也许他遇不到了，也许他能遇到

Would there be anyone else? Probably, or in other words, there must be, because anything that happened would not happen just three times, for the world is too big. Probably he won’t meet anyone, and probably he will.

In the quoted sentences above, the author presents a condition of impossibility: If an event has happened, it is impossible that it has or will happen only once. This is followed by another affirmative assertion: If an event has happened twice, it is impossible that it has or will happen only three times. Following this logic, such assertion can be extended to a formulaic

structure: if an event has happened, it is impossible to happen only x times. With the frequency of occurrence x undefined, it can be added up to any finite value, which amounts to a statement of necessity in a negative manner: if anything has happened, it is impossible for it to have happened only for a finite number of times. Conversely, any actualized event will necessarily be repeated infinitely, and its actualizations cannot exhaust all of the unrealized possibilities. However, although the repetitions of a given event can occur infinitely across different time-spaces, the encounter between Zhuge Liang, other travelers, the readers, and the writers is purely contingent. Accordingly, the infinite repetitions that is proposed in “Zhuge Liang’s modern life” can neither be purely categorized as necessity, nor can it be attributed to as the pure contingency. Rather, the assertion is probabilistic: if the time and space extend infinitely, the probability for anything to be repeated will amount to one, and thus a given actualized event can be repeated infinitely. However, given that the protagonist in the text and historical figures outside the text are finite beings, their encounter with a particular time-space is contingent, and only certain possibilities can be actualized by chance, as Zhuge Liang asserts: “The world is too large, maybe he can meet them, maybe he cannot”. Such a probabilistic statement that knots together the necessity of repetition and contingency of actualization evokes Nietzsche’s theory of eternal return:

If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force-and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless -it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more: it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combination conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game in infinitum
(*Will to Power*, 549)

In *Will to Power*, Nietzsche sketches two conditions of the eternal return: in the contingent world where human beings exist, one can only encounter finite possibilities by chance, the “calculable number of combinations” appears in the “dice game”; However, in the eternal universe of necessity, the time extends infinitely, in which “every possible combination would at some point or another be realized”, and “it would be realized an infinite number of times”. Accordingly, if a possibility is logically possible, it will be necessarily actualized in a universe of infinite time-space and will be repeated infinitely in a circular movement of eternal recurrence. Nietzsche’s rationale finds an almost verbiage repetition in “Zhuge Liang’s Modern Life”, both of which structured a computational process of infinite loop, that returns every possible result and repeats it infinitely. Whereas the *Will to Power* outlines an impersonal logical *regressus ad infinitum*, he brings back the subject “I” in the interrogation regarding the eternal return in *The Gay Science*:

The greatest weight: What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence--even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

With the imbrication of the second person pronoun “You”, and the first-person pronoun, “I”, the computational test of infinite loop is turned to the existential test of living being: if one can bear the weight of the repetition of all the events that one has lived through, and the totality of conditionalities, what is the temporal-spatial ordering of the succession and the sequences of the events? For Nietzsche, the weight of the eternal return is the repetition of the same in the most radical sense, and the existential test can be passed only if one can bear the infinite

repetition of the same sequences of the events without a single alteration. Deleuze, however, runs counter to Nietzsche's test of the repetition of the same in his (mis)interpretation of eternal return. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze contends that the eternal return "carries a practical selection among differences", and it is only the differences that can pass the test and return (41,299). Although *Difference and Repetition* is known for its criticism of negation, Deleuze singles out one type of negation as the result of full affirmation: the negation of the repetition of the same that cannot pass the test of the eternal return (55)." With this respect, one can deduce that the eternal return that Deleuze put forth is parallel to the theory of the alternate universe: what insist on returning is not the repetition of the same universe that has already actualized (universe a), but all of the universes that have not been actualized (- universe a). The eternal return of the alternate universe therefore operates as a machine of the negative recursion, that returns anything but the same actualized universe, be it the story world or the factual anterior. With a similar thematic concern, the eternal return and the weight of repetition in the works of Nietzsche and Deleuze are cross referenced in the alternate universe historical fanfiction "The Seven-Year Itch". "The Seven-Year Itch" can be categorized as being within the alternate universe subgenre, based on the hypothesis that there are multiple parallel universes with different "versions" of the same residents live in each of them. Alternate universe fiction is similar to the time-travel fiction, as both of them fabricate an alternative time-space substantially different from the original one that the protagonists reside. However, time-travel fiction enables the same protagonists to carry their memories in their previous life and travel across time and space, whereas alternate universe fiction supposes two versions of the same characters who live in two parallel worlds without transportation or communication between the two. As opposed to the time-travel fiction like "Zhuge Liang's Modern Life," which specifies the way in which the

protagonist travels to the modern world, the modern setting in “The Seven-Year Itch” is portrayed as a status quo: the story starts right away with Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang living an ordinary life in the modern world, getting up in the morning, having their breakfast together and going to work. However, neither of them goes to the workplace to fulfill their job obligations, but instead drives to a jewelry store. Without communicating with each other, they both figure out that the other has decided to propose this night and has already procured an engagement ring.

刘备笑道：“你不答话，我就当你愿意了。” 他从那黑色的小盒子里拿出戒指，戴在诸葛亮的手上，又将他拉起，俩人在沙发上并排坐着，刘备伸出手，道：“你刚刚没有看见，我手上已经有了戒指。”

诸葛亮只是握住了他的手，低声说道：“现在，我也有了”

20:45

“你有没有听说过‘永恒轮回’的理论？” 诸葛亮忽然道，他正倚着厨房的门，看刘备洗碗。

“我觉得你该去修哲学。”

“我不可能读一辈子书”

“…说回你的轮回，那是什么？”

“总体上来说，就是你所经历的一切，会在未来的某一段时间，以我们所经历过的方式再现，并且无限的轮回。你可以说它是永恒反复。”

“听起来很不科学，你想要说什么？”

“如果是这样，那你手上的戒指，会让你感到沉重的过分吗？”

刘备将碗倒扣着丢进架子里，弄出乒乒乓乓的声响，“这个世界没有什么时候不让我感到沉重。” 他伸出手，戒指上的钻石闪了闪，“这个当然也是。”

他又笑了笑，说：“我需要它，也需要你，要不然，我将不知道我的生命将归于何处”

Liu Bei smiles and said: “If you refuse to respond, I will take it as you are willing to”. He takes the ring out of the box and put it on Zhuge Liang’s hands, and then pulls him up. They sit side by side on the sofa. Liu Bei shows his hand and says: “Now you can see, I have a ring on my hand as well”

Zhugue Liang just holds his hand and whispered: “Now I also have one.”

20.45

“Have you heard about the theory of eternal return?” Zhuge Liang asks suddenly. He stands by the door of the kitchen and looks at Liu Bei doing the dishes.

“I think you should study for a degree in philosophy.”

“I can’t stay in the University for all my life.”

“Then tell me about your eternal return. What’s that?”

“Long story short. It basically says everything you have experienced will be repeated in the future in the way that we have experienced it before, and it will repeat itself infinitely. You can also call it the infinite repetition”

“This sounds unscientific. What do you want to say”

“If so, would the ring on your hand makes you feel heavy?”

Liu Bei noisily throw the bowls onto the shelf upside down. “There is nothing in this world that wouldn’t let me feel heavy,” and he shows his hand with the ring gleamed, “Including this, of course.”

He smiles again, “I need it, and you. Otherwise, I don’t know where my life will return to.”

After the dinner, Zhuge Liang abruptly mentions the eternal return when Liu Bei is doing the dishes: what if everything we experienced will be repeat infinitely? When Liu Bei ask for clarification, Zhuge Liang doesn’t explain directly, but suddenly ask him if the ring weighs too much and Liu Bei responses by saying that he feels everything in this world is heavy, including this ring. However, he needs the ring and Zhuge Liang, otherwise he doesn’t know where his life will return to. As the bearer of the “greatest weight” of eternal return that Nietzsche addressed in *The Gay Science*, the marriage ring binds together the weight of the repetition of the difference and the repetition of the same. What happens in the story is anything but what has been recorded in the official history, *Records of Three Kingdoms*, and the fictional canon, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in which Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang live in an ancient world, and never try to marry each other. With this respect, the ring crystalizes the repetition of the differences of what is impossible to happen in the past. However, the ring also serves as the minimum invariant consistency that connects each parallel universe, no matter how different they are: in each story world, Liu Bei will meet Zhuge Liang, which preconditions the homoerotic fanfiction starring the two. Accordingly, the “eternal return” also bears the return of the same and the return of the differences: in each cycle, Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang will return to an alternate universe with different temporal-spatial configurations, and have different adventures in each universe. However, the story in each alternate universe will return to the same destination, the fatalistic

rendezvous between the two, where all parallel universes converge. The duration of the story is thus the waiting time for the protagonists to return to the alternate universe where they meet again. The motif of the waiting can be found in another alternate universe fanfiction, “Thought”:

他们都睡着了。

刘备的微信还停留在“凌晨到家”的那一条，诸葛亮盯着它看了一会儿，缓缓地打了几个字，这时候他恍然间有一种甜蜜的错觉，这种来自心灵深处的柔情蜜意可能会透过冰凉的电子屏的另外一端也说不定呢？他于是尽可能的放慢速度，心情由面对孩子的柔软慢慢转变为另一层柔软。“路上注意安全，等你回家。”他发送到。

并没有很快等到回应。但实际上他并不着急。

他总会等到回信的。

They all fall asleep.

Liu Bei’s WeChat stops at the line, “will be back at midnight.” Zhuge Liang has stared at it for a while. Suddenly he has a sweet illusion: could his affection penetrate the cold screen and reach the other side of the screen? He slowed down the typing accordingly, and his tender affection towards his kids is transformed to another layer of tenderness:

“Have a safe trip! Waiting for you to return home,” he sent.

He doesn’t receive an immediate reply, but he is not in a hurry.

He will get one eventually.

In the short story “Thought”, Zhuge Liang is an elementary school teacher who has married Liu Bei and adopted his child. One day, Liu Bei is on a business trip and Zhuge Liang takes care of their child. After his child fall asleep, he texts Liu Bei while waiting for him to return home, and slows down his typing when envisioning Liu Bei’s reply. The story ends with the lines, “He doesn’t receive an immediate reply, but he is not in a hurry. He will get one eventually.” The “reply” that Zhuge Liang is waiting for can be interpreted diegetically, as the

message Liu Bei sends back to him, and the rendezvous between the two after Liu Bei comes back to their home. At the extra-diegetic level, their fateful re-encounter is prescribed as the end of the story before the starts of the narration, and the counterfactual narratives unfolds as the postponement of such a definitive end, the reply that has not yet be received but will ultimately reach its destination. With this respect, the line, “he slows down accordingly” can also be interpreted as the writers’ reflexive narrative of her narration, as a deferral of the fateful end of the story: Liu Bei meets Zhuge Liang, the invariant constancy that keeps repeated in historical facts, fictional canon, and every alternate universe in fanfiction. What defers the repetition of the same that ends all of the narrative alterations is the repetition of the different time-space and conditions for Zhuge Liang to meet Liu Bei. The duration of the narrative is therefore the waiting time between the story that start with repetition with different story world, and the end with the repetition of the same encounter between the two protagonists. The motif of waiting can also be found in another fanfiction, “the unbearable length of life”:

“他并不轻生，但就跟等待晚点的飞机是一个道理，他只只有一个目的，那就是把自己活着的时间消耗完。然后突然有一天，因为某件事，他意识到，他可以为了某件事，某个人活着。于是活着对他而言不再是一件很必须完成的事，而是一件必不可少的事。”

He wouldn’t undervalue his life, but it is similar to the way in which one waits for a flight that has been delayed. He only has one goal: to use up his life. One day, because of a certain event, he suddenly realized that he could live for someone and something. Then the life becomes a necessity for him, rather than a task to be completed.

他确实等了不短的一段时间。从刘玄德第一次听他的课到第三次见到他中间隔了整整一年，而在他真正意义上“见到”诸葛孔明前又等了他整整十一个小时，但他们终究还是没错过第三次的。他比刘玄德聪明多了，也比他高、走得快，更重要的是他比刘玄德运气好。刘玄德四十六岁，经历了无数次无疾而终的感情和一次失败的婚姻以及一段教科书级别的失败创业史，才遇到可以相伴一生的人，而二十六岁的诸葛孔明只需要睡一个午觉，他的爱人就

会自己走到他的面前来，为他点亮一盏不算亮的破台灯，给他盖一件勉强能保暖的时髦外套。
但这就够了。

He has been waiting for quite a while. A year has been passed between the first time Liu Xuande has audited his lecture to the third time he actually meets him. But before Zhuge Liang actually meets him in person, he has waited for 11 hours. They don't miss each other a third time. He is much more smarter, taller, and faster than Liu Xuande. Most importantly, he is luckier than Liu Xuande. Liu Xuande is 46 years old now. It is only after he has experienced several relationships end for no reason, a failed marriage, and a classical startup failure, that he finally meets the right person to spend his life with. However, the 26-year-old Zhuge Kongming just need to take an afternoon nap, and then his lover will come to him by himself, light up a shabby lamp, and cover him with a fashionable coat that can barely keep him warm.

But that's enough.

In “The Unbearable Length of Life”, Liu Bei is the founder of a pharmaceutical company, and Zhuge Liang is the chief executive officer of that company. The setting of the story is modern times, with nothing resemble the Three Kingdoms. The author also explained that the alternate universe is parallel to the universe we inhabit now. In the alternate universe of “The Unbearable Length of Life”, there is no “Three Kingdoms” period: the eastern Han dynasty ends in 220, and Northern and Southern Courts period starts in 420, with the 200 years of the Three Kingdoms and Jin Dynasties completely omitted from the timeline. The omission of the Three Kingdoms period is a manifestation of the selection and negation in the process of eternal return, that excludes anything related to historical facts of Three Kingdoms. This way, the fanfiction “the unberable length of life” is neither a recontextualization of historical facts nor a decontextualization or reinterpretation of the fictional canons of the history, but a complete omission of the contextual envelope of the universe of Three Kingdoms. The selective process of the eternal return is therefore a repetition of differences, in a negative loop that returns anything but “what have been”, and “what could have been” in the period of Three Kingdoms.

The sameness that is repeated in this alternate universe, is neither the allegorical resemblance, nor the contextual similarity, but the structural homology that revolves around the motif of the “waiting”. As shown in the quotation above, the waiting is originally stated literally, as in the plot, Liu Bei has waited for three years to see Zhuge Liang after auditing his lecture, and another 11 hours to see him in person after he has unsuccessfully attempted to visit him two times. The narrative then shifts to the metaphorical level, depicting the waiting time for the story to start, the encountering of the two protagonists when Zhuge Liang was 26 and Liu Bei was 46, with an explicit reference to historical fact: as recorded in the *Records of Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei has visited Zhuge Liang for three times to see him in person, which happened in 207 BCE, when Zhuge Liang was 26 and Liu Bei was 46. However, the fanfiction’s “unbearable length of life” starts directly after Zhuge Liang has already met Liu Bei and became the chief executive officer of his pharmaceutical company. Liu Bei’s three visits and his waiting time for them to meet for the first time is dropped and relegated to the backstory before the narrative unfolds, and is only revealed at the end of the story. The story is thereby twisted in a cyclical structure, with starts of the narrative preconditioned by the exclusion of historical facts, and the progression of the narrative ends by the returning of historical facts. The motif of the “waiting” can therefore be interpreted extra-diegetically, as the waiting for the definitive end of the story, the repetition of the same that converge the universe of historical facts, and the alternate universe of the fanfictions. At the meta-level, the repetition of the differences can also be interpreted as the prolonging of the waiting time through the narrative detour in the alternate universe of the counter-factual setting, to suspend and defer the ultimate end of the story: the repetition of the same that closes up the differences between fact and fiction.

The negative recursion in the alternate universe fanfiction that knots together the repetition of the same and the repetition of differences evokes the two waves of cybernetic theory. The repetition of the same corresponds to Wiener's cybernetic theory that propose a feedback loop in a control system that eliminate the errors in the transmission to maintain the homeostasis (Novikov 12). However, Shannon's cybernetic theory suggests that the repetition of the same pattern is redundant as it can be expected without further informational input, while it is the noises and errors that fall outside of expectation that can increase the entropy and resist the homeostasis. As in alternate universe fanfiction, the story ends with the convergence of historical facts and historical fiction, the repetitions of the same that results in homeostasis. The unfolding of historical fanfiction is sustained by the increase in the entropy generated by alternate universes, the repetition of the differences between the counter-factual narratives and historical facts. Accordingly, historical fanfiction operates as a negative feedback loop, which constantly returns the counter-factual noises to increase the entropy in the fictional laboratory of alternate universe, in which historical figures freely experiment their lives in an endless cycle of rebirth.

b. The ghost stories: where the story returns to?

If the alternate universe subgenre offers a probabilistic explanation of historical fanfiction, as a generative model that plugs historical figures to the feedback loop of rebirth and regeneration, one may ask: what is the driven force that initiates this automatic machine of recursion, and what stops this endless loop of the deceased returning to the human world as living dead? Specifically, in the case of historical fanfiction, why the author obsessed with bringing the deceased back to the story world, and what makes them ready to let the deceased go by ending the story? One answer may be Henry Jenkins' repression hypothesis of the fanfiction, which suggests that fanfiction usually starts with a desire to consummate repressed love and ends

with the actualization of unrealized possibilities in the original work (24). However, Jenkins' theory can hardly explain historical fiction that starts with the "condition of impossibilities" rather than unexplored possibilities and ends with the unfulfilled wish unsatisfied. For example, the ghost story, one of the most popular subgenres of historical fanfiction, usually stages an impossible encounter between the living and the dead in an alternate universe. Rather than a happy ending of the resurrection of the ghost, such encounters usually result in a failed reunion, with the ghost disappearing without being recognized by the living. This chapter seeks to provide an alternate theory of fanfiction by investigating those ghost stories in which the deceased literally returns to the human world at the start of the story and returns to the underworld of eternal rest by the end.

What drives the deceased's first return to the human world and its second return to the underground? Lacanian psychoanalysis proposes that the phantom of the "living dead" is trapped in between two deaths: the first death is the death of the corporeal subject, leaving an empty subject position in the narrative, as the "living dead" that enjoys an eternal life as long as the narrative proceeds. (Seminar 7 295). The second death is the death of the narrative subject, "the point at which the very cycle of transformations of nature are annihilated" (Seminar 7 278). I interpret the Lacanian between-two-deaths, as situated in-between the signifier of the death, the fictional narrative that inscribed the living being as a signifier, and the death of the signifier, that ends the regeneration of the fictional narrative. Bringing together cybernetic theory and Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan proposes that the living dead in fictional works are trapped by a "will to destruction" of decreasing entropy, driven by an "instinct to return to the state of equilibrium of inanimate sphere" (212). However, the "will to destruction" is also "a will to create from zero, a will to begin again" (212), a desire to keep the narrative proceed by increasing the entropy and

reducing the redundancy. Drawing from Lacan's insights, I suggest that the narrative of the ghost story unfolds between the "will to recreation" that initiates the story by returning the ghost to disturb the equilibrium of the human world, and the "will to destruction", that ends the story by returning the ghost to the state of inanimate equilibrium.

The phantom of the eternal return can find its literal expression in the story of the ghost (鬼 *gui*), the Chinese character of which connotes the "return" (归) according to *Erya* (尔雅), the earliest Chinese glossary (Zeitlin 4). The most common interpretation of the location for the ghost to return to, according to Zeitlin, is its origin, home, and the root (4). However, the direction of return is not headed to its adobe in human world, but the underground of eternal rest (Zeitlin 4; Wang 266-267). Even though Wang acknowledges that the etymological root of the *gui* is a returning the "source where the source from which all creatures have come", the death, the ghost still longing for their home in the human world, and thus "retain the human meaning of return" (Wang 267). Zeitlin further specifies that the returning of the neighboring concept of *gui*, *huan hun* (还魂) has an unambiguous connotation of returning to the human world (4). *Hun* connotes the soul separated from the body that does not necessarily result from the mortality, while the *gui* is represented by the disembodied soul after death, which can be seen as a sub-category of the soul (Zeitlin 5). The returning of the soul unequivocally means that *huan* means unequivocally "to come back," returning to "the here and now to haunt the world of the living" (Zeitlin 5). Resituating the etymological interpretation and psychoanalytic interpretation of the "return" to literary interpretation, I suggest that the issue of "return" in the ghost story can find a simpler reconciliation: the ultimate return to the underground in the diegesis and the inanimate state of homeostasis necessarily lead to the end of the story. The returning of the soul to the human world, on the contrary, will result in the disturbances that increase entropy and defer its

ultimate end of the story, the return to the inanimate underground outside of the text where there is no unfolding narrative.

The traditional Chinese cosmology is predicated upon a symbolic axis of *yang* (陽) that connotes the positive, the living, the masculine, and *yin* (陰) that connotes the negative, the dead, and the feminine. The ghost that occupies all the attributes associated with *yin* causes the disorder in the human world that belongs to the realm of *yang* upon its return, and such disturbances can only be cleared upon its second return to its proper home outside the world of living and beyond the narrative text. By bringing what the world of *yang* is not to the human world, the ghost violates the contradistinction between the *yin* and *yang* that ensures the homeostasis of the narrative world. As in premodern Chinese ghost story, the *yin* attributes of the ghost is manifested in the “hyper-femininity”, as the protagonist is usually a female specter with a repercussion of masculinity, the proper *yang* quality (Zeitlin 28). However, Zeitlin observes that the female ghost also possesses a *yang* quality that at odds with its *yin* attributes that associated with death and destruction: fertility. As Zeitlin suggests, the impregnation of a female ghost is prevalent in the ghost stories from the Ming and Qing dynasties, which shows a desire to block out the anxiety inflicted by death (32). I find the motif of death and potency that Zeitlin finds in the ghost story illustrative of the inherent paradox of historical fiction: on the one hand, historical fiction presupposes the natural death of historical figures as factual anterior preconditioned the narrative of historical fiction, and the progression of the narrative will ultimately bring the hauntological reappearance of historical figures to their second death at the end of the story. On the other, historical fiction that brings historical figures back to the narrative world, and resists their second death in the story world, corresponds to the thematic concern of ghost stories that center on the resurrection, rebirth and re-incarnation of the deceased. The

fertility of the ghost therefore shows the desire for a “second life” to resist the natural death of the living being, and the recreation of the fanfiction to resist the end of the story.

The reversal of the natural order of the death can also be found in historical fanfiction “ten years”. The setting of the story is a parallel universe, with Zhuge Liang framed by his enemies as committing treason, sent to jail by Liu Bei, and tortured to death. After Liu Bei learns that Zhuge Liang was innocent, he is plagued by regret and nearly dies. The ghost of Zhuge Liang, however, was initially incarnated into the pear tree, and the pear flowers flourished due to the nourishment of the power of *yin* from the ghost. When Liu Bei near death and forced into a political marriage with a girl from the neighboring countries, Zhuge Liang then incarnates the girl and engages in sexual intercourse with Liu Bei on the wedding night. After that night, Liu Bei’s disease is then miraculously cured without treatment and the girl is also impregnated. The nourishment of the flower, the miraculous cure of the disease, and the impregnation of the girl all show the fertility of the ghost for the bodily rejuvenation, which corresponds to historical fiction that renews the story of the dead through rewritings. However, as the conceptual operator of negativity, the ghost not only reverses the natural order of the world of the living, but also the natural context of historical fiction: the historical fact that Liu Bei died before Zhuge Liang is reversed in this parallel universe, which is impossible in the original context. The factual reversal in the ghost story not only involves a temporal spatial transportation, as in the alternate universe, but also the corporeal transfiguration: Zhuge Liang, the biological male per historical fact, must incarnate the body of the biological female to give birth to a child. The fertile ghost in this story therefore partakes the double connotation, a positive prolongation of the second life of the characters in the story, and the negation of the factual condition of historical fiction.

However, the mortality side of the ghost reappears at the end of the story, which brings the second life of the fan recreation to its second death. When the girl is about to give birth, her labor is very difficult. The medical magician suggests that it is the power of the *yin* from the ghost that encumbered the success delivery of the child. After the ghost of Zhuge Liang is forced to be visible by the medical magician, it tells Liu Bei that their connection has come to an end, and then disappears. At the end of the story, the child is successfully born, and Zhuge Liang never appears again. The story therefore set up a parallel between the “second death” of historical figures in the ghost story, and the “second death” of historical fanfiction as a secondary recreation of historical records and canon. To prevent the second death of the characters and the story, the un-fulfilled wish of historical figures must be kept opened, which could be the unification of the state, the rendezvous of the lovers, or in this case, the birth of a child between the two lovers. At the moment when the wish is fulfilled in the corporeal form, as the ghost of Zhuge Liang takes its shape, and the child is delivered, the story is brought to an end, and the ghost is return to its proper place: the underground in inanimate state for eternal rest.

The intrusion of the element of the *yin* to the world of *yang* can thereby be interpreted as a systematic disorder, which increases the entropy of the system and motivates the counter-factual narrative by disrupting the factual account. However, the counter-factual narrative also has to follow the rule of counter-actualization: childbirth, as the ultimate consummation of male-male love, can only be realized after the ghost disappeared and the systematic disorder is cleared, which subsequently ends the story. With this respect, the narrative of the ghost story in historical fan fiction runs counter to Henry Jenkins’ hypothesis of the fanfiction as aiming at romantic consummation, wish fulfillment, and the actualization of the unexplored possibilities in the original canon (140-144). In Chinese historical fanfiction, the progression is sustained by the

unfulfilled wish, and the actualization of the unfulfilled wish will lead to the “second death” of the ghost of historical figures, and their “second return” to their true home in the underground world.

The explicit reference between the return of the ghost and the theme of the “home-coming” can be found in another historical fanfiction, “Utopia”. Similar to “Ten Years”, “Utopia” is also set in a parallel universe of counter-factual context, in which Liu Bei has successfully unified the country and Zhuge Liang dies at the date of victory, which is coincidentally New Year’s Eve. In memorial of Zhuge Liang, Liu Bei has issued a ban on celebration, because it is the anniversary of Zhuge Liang’s death. One day, Zhuge Liang’s ghost return to the human world and meets Liu Bei. The ghost of Zhuge Liang has its corporeal form, yet his body is “cold as iron” and has lost all of his memories, with an instinctual drive to destroy the human world with fire. Liu Bei asks him why he harms innocents, and Zhuge Liang said that Liu Bei has prevented him from returning his home. Liu Bei asked the Wizard about it, and the wizard replies by saying that:

“陛下所言，确有其事。臣曾在古书上读到，人之鬼魂确会因某些特殊之事，而不能至地府，入轮回，只能飘零在阳间，阴魂也会逐渐消散。这样的鬼魂，往往失了前世记忆，焦虑之下，自会不顾一切打破桎梏，只求魂归九泉，从而得以安息。因此，对陛下而言，那仍是丞相，不过是个失了记忆，又出于本能、极力想要‘回家’的丞相罢了。”

“What Your Majesty said did happen sometimes. I once read a classical text that recorded a particular type of ghost that cannot get back to the underground and enters into the cycle of rebirth. It can only linger in the human world, and its spirit will gradually disappear. This type of the ghost usually loses its memories of its former life, and will break everything shackling him to the human world for the sole purpose of getting back to the underground and enjoy an eternal rest. As such, Your Majesty, it’s still the prime minister, but it is a prime minister who has lost his memory and wants to get back to his ‘home’ out of pure instinct.”

The wizard’s explanation specifies the status of the ghost as being displaced from its proper place in the cosmic order and the direction of its return to its proper home at the

underground for eternal rest. As the wizard explains, the ghost should be rest in the world of *yin*, and appears anomalous if it wanders in the world of *yang*. Without the memories of his pre-life that define Zhuge Liang as a living being, his ghost is described as a manifestation of the instinctual drive of “home coming” and will clear any obstacles on the way. In the end, Liu Bei decides to let Zhuge Liang go, and arranges a proper farewell ritual for him. On New Year’s Eve, Liu Bei drink three cups of liquor with Zhuge Liang. After the first cup, Zhuge Liang’s ghostly body becomes warm and vital, and he seems have to regain his memory. After Liu Bei drinks the second cup, he confirms to Zhuge Liang that he will let him to go back to his “home” in the underground. After the third cup, Zhuge Liang said that he has no regrets and then disappears. This story marks the “death drive” and the “life instinct” in historical fanfiction: the ghost, as synonymous with death, manifests itself as a conceptual operator of negativity, to destroy everything in the living world, and to return to the state of inanimation, which terminates its existence and the future unfolding of the story. The “life instinct” is sustained by two forms of memories, the memories of the ghost in his pre-life, and the memories of the living that extends its second life. As in the story, the ghost is recognized as Zhuge Liang after he retain his memories in his pre-life, which stands as a connection between the back story and the unfolding narrative, historical facticity and the counter-factual fictionality. The second life of Zhuge Liang as a ghost, is brought back by the memories of other that sustain his afterlife in the story. Historical fiction can therefore be interpreted as the process of the mourning that with a desire to extend the second life of the deceased in the collective memories, and brings the hauntological presence to the original forgetfulness at the end of the story.

“Utopia” and “Ten Years” shed light on memory as the determining factor of the identities of historical figures: the memory of a historical figure as an extension of his

consciousness that unified his manifold identities across his multiple lives in parallel universes, and the collective memories sustained by the remembrance of the others that extend his posthumous presence. The memory as the extension of the living identity and the posthumous identity corresponds to Stiegler's theorization of the primary retention, secondary retention, and the tertiary retention. For Stiegler, the primary retention occurs in the "present of perception" that lags behind the immediate perception of an object, while the secondary perception constitutes the "past of consciousness" that needs to be reactivated in the process of remembrance. The tertiary retention, however, can be categorized as the prothesis memory beyond one's memory of the past and consciousness of the presence (36-39). What Stiegler specified are two types of memories: the secondary retentions as memories within the phenomenological subject that defines its living identity, and the tertiary retentions as the prothesis memories outside of the subject that defines its posthumous identity. In "Utopia" and "Ten Years", the memory of the ghost as the secondary retention extends its consciousness to its afterlife, while the remembrance about the ghost serves as the tertiary retention that sustains the afterlife of the ghost, until the livings are ready to let the deceased go. As Schmit pointed out, the rituals of memoria performed by the living "functioned in reality as a technique "to 'cool off' memory under the guise of maintaining it, to soothe the painful memory of the deceased until the memory became indistinct" (5-6). Similarly, as in "Utopia" and "Ten Years", the Chinese historical fanfictions are motivated by a ritual of memoria with a desire to defer the second death of the deceased, and the story ends with the ghost's second death as the living are ready to forget.

The mourning ritual as a technique of remembering and forgetting can be best exemplified by the short story, "The Incense Fire on Earth". In the traditional Chinese memorial ritual, mourners burn the incense for the dead, which is believed to be necessary in maintaining

the underground life of the dead. However, if a dead person wants to return to the human world and be reborn as a living being, he must forget everything in his former life by drinking the soup of forgetfulness and crossing the river of forgetfulness. The story takes place by the river of forgetfulness, the liminal space between the human world and the underground. Liu Bei, who is supposed to die in 223 CE, has went to the bank of the river of forgetfulness first, to wait for Zhuge Liang, who died in 234 CE. However, he has waited for years without seeing Zhuge Liang. Luckily, Liu Bei's ghostly presence at the underground is sustained by the constant supply of burning incense provided by mourners on earth who come to Wuhouci, the memorial temple that shared by Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang. Nevertheless, the ghost who does not receive their burned incense from the living will gradually disappear. For example, one day Liu Bei meets the ghost of Ying Quliang, the emperor of the Qin dynasty, and finds him appear as a skeleton whose flesh and consciousness has disappeared due to the lack of burned incense from the mourners or worshippers. Accordingly, the mourning ritual in this story can be interpreted as a mnemonic technique of tertiary retention that extends the "second life" of the ghost in human world.

Similar to "Ten Years", "Incense Fire on Earth" also ends with the "second death" of the ghost, signals by the living who have forgotten the dead. One day, Liu Bei is told that Zhuge Liang has refused to drink the soup of forgetfulness, because he wants to meet Liu Bei again with his memory. The God of death asked Zhuge Liang to be reborn ten times before he can meet Liu Bei again, yet each time he will die at the age of 17. Against the advice of the god of the dead, Liu Bei travels to the human world and possesses his statue at Wuhouci, where he has met Zhuge Liang. This time, Zhuge Liang was 17 years old after he was reborn, and possesses no his memories of his former life. He cannot perceive the ghost of Liu Bei. Suddenly there is an

earthquake, and Zhuge Liang asks the statue to save him. The statue props up the roof that is supposed to collapse, and Zhuge Liang is saved from the curse, yet Liu Bei's spirit has disappeared and can never be reborn into the human world. Accordingly, the story starts with the desire to prolong the tertiary retention of the second life of the ghost, via the mnemonic technique of mourning. However, the story ultimately progresses towards the loss of memories, the end of tertiary retention, and the proper separation between the living and the dead, the mourner and the loved one. The work of mourning in the story dovetails with Schmitt's insight on the ritual of memorial, as trapped in the ambivalence between "the obsessive remembrance of deceased loved ones and of the will to forget them". If read the story meta-textually, historical fanfictions can be read as the fans' obsessive remembrance of historical figures via plugging them into the endless cycle of rebirth, whereas the story end with the separation of the lover, and one of the lovers, and one of historical figures who disappeared into the void of the oblivion.

The failed reunion in "Incense Fire on Earth" is a repeated motif in historical fanfictions, which is best represented by "Dingjun Mountain." The story is taken place during the early western Jin Dynasty, immediately after the fall of the Three Kingdoms. One day, a young man goes for an expedition in the Dingjun Mountain, but gets lost in the mist. Fortunately, he has met a stranger who claims to have lived in the mountains for years and volunteers to be his guide. The protagonist finds the stranger uncannily familiar, and the stranger seems to have known him for many years and claims to have waited for him for years. The protagonist invites the stranger to come out of the mountain to work with him, and he is willing to invite him three times, as Liu Bei invited Zhuge Liang three times. The stranger says he is willing to work with him, but he has wandered in the mountains for too long, and he has to return home. At the end of their journey, the stranger walks into the mist alone and disappears. Many years later, the protagonist is visiting

the Shrine of Zhuge Liang and finds a painting of him that is strikingly similar to that of Zhuge Liang. He suddenly realized, “in his distant memory that seemingly to be inexistence”, he seemed to be Liu Bei, who has promised to walk with Zhuge Liang in the Dingjun mountains. The “seemingly nonexistent” memories can be read diegetically, as Liu Bei’s former life before he has been reborn, and the prosthetic memories that he has not lived in in his second life. At the extradiegetic level, such prosthetic memories are extended by historical fanfiction, with an obsession of remembrance that pulled historical figures back to fictional world. However, the seemingly endless repetition of their afterlives has to be called to an end, where the ghost of “seemingly nonexistent” memories disappeared into the mist of inexistence. The narrative stops at the very moment when the living forgets the deceased, which will necessarily result in the disappearance of the ghost, the permanent separation of the lovers in the story, and the fans who are ready to stop the cycle of rebirth of historical figures in the fictional world and end the story.

The narrative of “Incense Fire on Earth” is representative of a fundamental split between the counter-factual narrative of rebirth and historical fact that is inaccessible for any narrative account. Towards the end of the story, the young man has an epiphany that “the stone can remember what human beings has forgotten, but the stone cannot speak.” The stone in the story stands as the silent testimony of historical fact that is not covered by either the narratives of the official histories or the collective memories in the unofficial histories, and is left outside of the fictional narratives in the fans’ recreations. Paradoxically, such narrative void of the inaccessible fact serves as the original source for historical fictions to emanate from, yet it also imposed a radical end for the fictional narratives. The paradox of historical fanfiction evokes Benjamin’s conceptualization of the allegorical historical, as a petrified, primordial landscape, the *facies hippocratica* that the observer is confronted with (166). In “Incense Fire on Earth”, the petrified

landscape, the *facies hippocratia*, and the primordial landscape are manifested in its literal form, as the stone, the corpses of the deceased, and the wasteland of the hardcore historical fact that that has been lost in the narrative of history. Simultaneously, its precisely the stone of historical facts that grounds the substratum of the fictional narrative of the past, without which the deceased cannot live endless life between his second birth and his second death in fanfictions.

In “Incense Fire on Earth”, what knots together historical facticity and counter-factual narratives is an archeological object, the Caltrop. The Caltrop is a tiny metal tripod with four spikes, which is used as the weapon to disable the horse and stop the marching of the horse troops. The Caltrop is recorded as being invented by Zhuge Liang in “Collected Essays of Zhuge Liang” (诸葛忠武侯文集) and is currently exhibited at the Chinese National Museum. In the story, the young man’s horse is injured by caltrops that are dropped in the woods, and the young man is trapped in the mist. Later, the ghost of Zhuge Liang comes to the young man and cures his horse, which starts their journey in the woods and the narrative of the story. As an archeological object that sutured the correspondence between historical records and historical fictions, the caltrop is the bare minimum of historical facts that cannot be denied by any forms of the narratives and would deny the unfolding of counter-factual narratives. The caltrop that injures the horse and results in the immobility of the protagonist can therefore be interpreted as the intrusion of the facts in the fictions, an obstacle that must be cleared for the narrative to proceed. Respectively, the curing of the ghost enacted by the ghost of Zhuge Liang can be read as the counterfactual narratives that negates historical facts and the natural cycle of death and permits the cyclical rebirth of the deceased in the alternate universe of fanfictions. As such, historical fanfictions stage a negative relation between the historicity and fictionality: historical

facts supported by the archeological objects that serves as an absent origin of historical fiction, and the counter-factual narratives that run counters to its factual anterior.

As a provocateur of the story, the caltrop operates simultaneously as a testimony of historical facticity, and the unknowability of historical facts: “what has been” in the past, the factual origin that never corresponds to its narrative speculation, “what could be.” The fanfiction writer’s response to this paradox is to substitute the factual origin with the counter-factual prior, and the speculation with the fabrication, to stage an impossible homoerotic love that did not happen in real life and could not be realized in the fictional world: what cannot be. As in “Dingjun Mountain” and other ghost stories, the story starts with a rendezvous between Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang that did not actually happen and has not been realized in the fictional recreation. With this respect, the history provides a generative machine of condition of impossibilities of a counter-factual story world that operates according to the rule of counter-actualization. The unfolding of the story is sustained by the increasing in entropy, as the ghost returns to the human world and introduce the counter-factual disturbances. The story world usually ends with the facts and the fictions converges on an archeological object, which returns the ghost to the underground and the narrative to the inanimate state. Nevertheless, as the unfulfilled wish is never actualized in the story world, which opens a narrative gap for the machine to keep recurring, with further alterations, appropriations, and adaptations adding the “counter-factual noises” to the story world.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has explicated historical fanfiction as the cyclical repetition of the counter-factual narratives and revolves around a posited factual anterior, which is paradoxically inaccessible for the narrative fabrications. The split between the limpid and

opaque, as well as the incommensurability the facticity and fictionality, cannot be confined within the generic convention of historical fanfiction but is already exemplified by the aesthetic of historical drama. Retrospectively, historical fanfiction has inherited the contrasty lighting scheme, and the time image that have been widely used in historical drama by portraying a incommensurable divide between the illumination and the darkness. However, historical fanfictions are substantially different from historical dramas, as they are no longer devoted to exploring the unrealized possibilities of the past, but rather indulge in a carnival of fabricating counter-factual events that cannot possibly have happened in the past, nor do they have any potential to be realized in the future.

Paradoxically, the seemingly post-modernist narratives of counter-factual fabrications is based on the traditional historiography that regarded historical facticity as radically inaccessible and withdraw from any forms of narrative accounts. With this respect, historical fanfictions are set in a time-space of an alternate universe that is neither past nor the future, for an impossible rendezvous that hasn't happened and impossible to be actualized to take place. Not coincidentally, the non-space and the missed encounter between the lovers are not only prevalent in historical fanfiction but are also the recurrent motifs in fan music about ancient China. In the next chapter, I will illustrate how the fan music of Chinese antiquity has shown a looping narrative about a distant past that is impossible to reach and the encounter between the lovers that can never be realized.

Chapter 2, in part is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. The dissertation author was the primary researcher and author of this material.

CHAPTER 3

Blowing the Archaic-winds Music: A Rhizomatic Return to the Ancient China

Introduction: Gravitating towards the “Archaic-winds”

The term “archaic-winds” (*Gufeng* 古风) denotes a musical style with an overabundance of symbols that are characteristic of ancient China. As an Internet-based musical genre, *gufeng* music originated and was circulated on Chinese-language websites such as 5SING, Baidu Postbar, Sina Microblog, Youku, and Bilibili. *Gufeng* music first appeared in 2005 on the Decibel website (*Fenbeiwang* 分贝网) as cover songs or musical adaptations of the martial arts (*Wuxia* 武侠) video game, Chinese Paladin (Ye 2018, 115; Zhou and Xiong 2016, 101). Since then, archaic-winds music has begun to proliferate on the music-sharing website 5SING, where amateur singers, lyric writers, and composers upload their works. The first *gufeng* music band, *Momingqimiao* (墨明棋妙), was established in 2007 and gradually gained popularity, with more than 10,000 audience members in attendance for a live performance in 2012 and more than 2,000 ticket sales for their first offline performance, “Jinling • Dream of Qinhuai” (*Jinling • Qinhuaimeng* 金陵 • 秦淮梦), in October 2013 (Xue 2015, 45). The success of *Jinling Qinhuaimeng* has triggered numerous offline performances in subsequent years: The Ancient Wind (*Taiguyifeng* 太古遗风) tour visited Beijing, Wuhan, Xi’an, and Ningbo in 2014, and the New Era (*Xinshiji* 新世纪) concert was held in the bird's nest, generating over 3,200,000 Yuan in ticket sales (Wang and Wang 112). Alongside *Momingqimiao*, more than 50 major music

bands specializing in *gufeng* had emerged on 5SING by 2018, most of which produce cover songs with existing melodies and new lyrics (Wang and Wang 2018, 112). The groups are formed voluntarily online, with members specializing in lyric writing, music composition, singing, post-production, video editing, and poster designing (Sun 2017, 205). Although sporadic offline performances have appeared since 2012 with soaring ticket sales, *gufeng* music REMAINS A subcultural ONLINE PHENOMENON. As one of the major *gufeng* music producers, Xiao Xu estimated that the maximum population of *gufeng* fans would not exceed 100,000 (Xue 2015, 46).

Gufeng's definition has attracted heated scholarly discussions. He Shiru, Hou Dongyi, Yao Tingting, and Ye Shuyang explore the lyrical aspect of archaic-winds music and defines it as an intertextual reference to the cultural products of premodern China, either by directly incorporating specific Chinese classics into the lyrics; adapting such classics as canons, myths, or legends; or appropriating the motifs or recurrent symbols of classical Chinese literature in their original writings (He 2017, 85; Hou 2015,105; Yao 2017, 124 -126 ;Ye 2018). Yao Tingting and Jin Shasha investigate the melodic component of the “archaic-winds” music and suggest that it usually adopts the five-note scale of Chinese traditional music, namely, 宫(do), 商(re), 角(mi), 徵(sol), 羽(la), and in rare cases, employs the six-note scale by adding modified tones such as 清角(*qingjiao*), 变徵 (*bianzhi*), 变宫(*biangong*), or 闰(*run*) (Yao 2016, 44; Jin 2014, 117). Xue Dongyan, Tujin Mei, and Zhou Hangyu define archaic-winds in terms of its use of classical Chinese instruments such as the *guqin*, *pipa*, *erhu*, *dizi*, or *zheng* (Xue 2015, 43; Tu and Zhou 2018, 52). While it is impossible to pin down the many ramifications of archaic-winds music, its style can be understood as a constellation of verbal or audio symbols associated with ancient China (Xue 2015, 46).

Scholarly debate revolves around the distinction between “archaic-winds” and its neighboring concept, “China-winds” (*Zhongguofeng* 中国风), both of which reflect an obsession with symbols of China. As Chow and de Kloet(2010) suggest, “China-winds” is a hybridized genre, as it juxtaposed the “classical Chinese melodies and/or instruments with trendy global pop style, particularly R&B and hip pop” (60). Aiping Wang (2014) argues that archaic-winds is more local and authentic than China-winds, which incorporates Chinese elements into Western-styled R&B music, as its melody sticks with the five-tone composition and its lyrics emphasize the meter in classical Chinese poetry (142). Xue Dongyan, Zhou Xianbao, and Xiong Chuyue find such a distinction blurred by the inevitable hybridization of archaic-winds. Since most the bands are based online, the music composition, recording, mixing, and other post-processing procedures rely on software such as MIDI, FruityLoops Studio, and Adobe Audition (Xue 2015, 43; Zhou and Xiong 2016, 103). As with the background music in the video game Chinese Paladin 2, the composer, Lin Kunxin, could not find notes equivalent to those produced by Chinese traditional music instruments in the GM sound font: He could only use Atmosphere 4 software for sound mixing to approximate the intended tone (Zhou and Xiong 2016, 104). The ubiquitous use of electronic software makes the “Archaic-winds” deviate from its vintage intention and thus more vulnerable to electronic and western popular music: One can find the incorporation of rap, soft rock, R&B, and jazz in the “Archaic-winds” music (Xue 2015, 43). As such, it is impossible to separate archaic-winds from China-winds according to the principle of authenticity, since both have taken a hybridized form that juxtaposes elements of traditional Chinese music and the popular music of other cultures. Sun Weibo (2017) further suggests that the critical difference between archaic-winds music and China-winds lies not so much in its use of Chinese elements but in its producers and targeted audiences: China-winds music is usually

made by professional music companies for the mass market, while *gufeng* music is made by amateur musicians as cover songs or theme songs for video games or comics, circulating within its Internet fan communities (206).

In this article, I argue that while *gufeng* is an Internet subcultural phenomenon, the music itself is not an end product within the fan community but undergoes further appropriation during its video remake. The lyrics of the “archaic-winds” cover songs usually use soundtracks to produce fan music videos (MV), the video remake of a film or TV series that narrates Chinese history. The fan-produced MVs were first uploaded to a traditional video-sharing website such as Tudou or Youku and then gradually migrated to *bilibili*, a barrage-subtitled website that displays viewers’ comments onscreen instead of clustering them in a special comments section (Zheng 2016, 371). The floating comments that are superimposed on the images, coined by the fans as “bullet subtitles” (*danmu* 弹幕), not only provide interpretation on the corresponding footage but also initiate certain debates on problematic aspects of the videos that resist the narrative closure of the streaming materials. In this respect, the archaic-winds music videos uploaded to *bilibili* formed a heterogeneous assemblage of background music, found-footage videos, and viewer-generated comments without being fully integrated into a coherent narrative. Without a clearly defined author, its narrative flow is rerouted in the process of cross-media adaptation, which deconstructs the source texts as modified by the lyric writer, video editor, and commentator, making *gufeng* music a production process rather than a finalized product.

Secondly, I propose that *gufeng* music not only demonstrates a root-seeking tendency toward a “cultural China,” but it is also a rhizomatic movement that deconstructs the cultural root in its production, circulation, and appropriation. Tu Weiming (1991) deploys an arborescent model that defines “cultural China” as the “symbolic universe,” with a “definable core [that]

remains deeply rooted” and geopolitically diasporic communities that are pulled to this cultural root (3–16). Szeto (2013) introduces the “rhizomatic monadology” as a mode of Sinophone articulation alternative to the arborescent model, which favors “intertextual,” “difference,” and “contradiction” in a transnational network, as opposed to the vertical identity politics of Sinocentrism and Westerncentrism (193). I find that Tu and Szeto’s theorizations correspond to a set of catchwords that *Momingqimiao* proposed for archaic-winds music as a genre that listed on its website: “[There are] universal gravitations toward the ‘archaic-winds’”, that evokes a vertical and centripetal force that gravitates toward the root of cultural China, as Tu proposes. The horizontal and centrifugal movement in Szeto’s rhizomatic monadology is best exemplified by another motto, the “relativist theory of popular music”: Archaic-winds music is not intended to exclude popular music but to incorporate fashion trends to maximize the magic effect of music. The relativist theory therefore implies a two-way motion: Relative to the global popular trend, the archaic-winds blow in an opposite direction with its past-oriented thematic concern. Relative to authentic classical Chinese music, the archaic-winds are pulled to the pole of popular music with its modern adaptations and culture hybridization. The double-movements of the relativist theory show a paradoxical desire for returning to the root of traditional China and deconstructing its genesis.

Theoretically informed by Deleuzian and Laclau’s aesthetics, I suggest that the homoerotic adaptation of the archaic-winds music demonstrates a rhizomatic mode of articulation with a double movement of “returning to” and “escaping from” the root. As Gilles Deleuze (1988) contends, the rhizome is not completely exterior to the arborescent system but comes out of the roots, intersects with the roots, or even merges with the roots (13). *Gufeng* music starts by returning to the primordial root of cultural China in its lyrical and melodic composition, yet the

visualization in its video adaptation distorts the pathway back to the authentic root of Chinese music in a rhizomatic movement. In lieu of providing a comprehensive overview of *gufeng* music as a whole, this chapter focus on the lyrics in *gufeng* music that address the city of Chang'an and Luo Yang as the root of Chinese antiquity and a case study of the homoerotic fan adaptation that deconstructs such primordial roots in a rhizomatic route. Closely reading into the narrative of the lyrics, I argue that Chinese antiquity is phrased as an empty signifier, under whose name an “imaginary community” of archaic-winds fans has formed online to collectively mourn a glorious past that has already disappeared. As Ernesto Laclau points out, the emptiness of the signifier enables it to over-code the heterogeneous demands of the populace and claim itself as the embodiment of totality (Laclau 2005, 96). Ironically, the very emptiness of the signifier led to the ultimate failure of the totalization and thus opens up the permutative function of the signifier. Such a paradoxical move from imaginary nostalgia to rhizomatic homoeroticization is manifested in the gender coding strategies of its video adaptations that fabricate a homosexual romance between male historical figures (*lishitongren* 历史同人): The historical locales and heterosexual love in the original song are decoded as empty signifiers, combining with fragmented shots to generate the homoerotic subtext that blatantly betrays the intention of their source texts. In the following literary and visual analysis, I will show how imaginary nostalgia is coded as empty signifiers in the verbal text and how the visual adaptation has manifested the rhizomatic impulses of decoding.

Mourning the fallen City

With the nationalist tract “China Can Say No”, the rejection of Western-centric modernity has sparked various attempts to seek alternatives to Chinese modernity rooted in traditional Chinese cultural heritage (James Leibold 2010, 546). While the Maoist generations find their

cultural refuge in the Maoist era, the post-Mao generation reaches farther back for their imaginary community into the imperial past (Leibold 2010, 546). Most archaic-winds music lyrics do not address a specific dynasty, but frequently locate the setting of the story in the great ancient cities, such as Chang'an 长安 or Luoyang 洛阳. Since Chang'an and Luoyang were both declared the capital thirteen times until the Tang dynasty, the lyrics refer to the splendid past of Chinese antiquity to the heyday of the Han and Tang dynasties. Unable to anchor their imagined community onto a specific chronotope as the loyalists did, the discourse of archaic-winds fans demonstrate what David Wang calls the "post-loyalist sentiment". Similar to loyalists, post-loyalists mourn the loss of past polity and culture, but they go a step farther by "forcing the 'absence' into 'presence'" (Wang 2013, 82). If they cannot find solace in a previous dynasty or existing polity, they choose to fabricate a historical object to recover or restore (Wang 2013, 82). In the case of archaic-winds music, fans can neither find their roots in the Maoist era nor the Qing dynasty, but use signifiers that vaguely refer to ancient China to bring the absent past into the present.

The post-loyalist sentiment of archaic-winds music can be found in the song "The Flower of Luoyang" (*Luoyang hua* 洛阳花) by Yoshi (2017). The title implies the central figure of the poem is a peony, which is the symbol of the city of Luoyang, and the national flower of China. The lyrics reference a couplet of lines of Liu Yuxi's 刘禹锡 poem, 唯有牡丹真国色, 花开时节动京城 ("Only the peony is really a national beauty with its bloom shocking the capital"). Liu's poem implies a series of metonymical shifts from the state to the capital city, and then to the flower: Since the capital, Luoyang, is a signifier of the Tang dynasty and the time the poem was written, the peony as a metonymic object of the capital could be narrated as synecdoche of ancient China. After the Tang dynasty, Luoyang was no longer the capital of China, yet the

peony is still referred to as the national flower of modern China. The title of the poem, contrary to this modern convention, insists upon naming the peony as the “flower of Luoyang” rather than the national flower of China. By repositioning the peony as a symbol of Luoyang instead of a partial representation of China, the author highlights the aura of the flower in the vanished glory of the past, illustrated by the first four lines of the lyrics:

当时倾国看婉转，如今倾城消悲欢
一脉疏痕遣梦痕，万籀无情起无端

At times you look at her, the extreme beauty of whom causes the fallen of a state
Now her splendor could still level a city, yet her joy and sorrow vanish without a trace
A stream of loose trace traces the trace of a dream,
Emerging without a cause are ten thousands of affectionless smiles¹

The past to be mourned is symbolized in the first sentence of the lyrics as the fallen state and the leveled city, the object that has always already been lost. The phrases “fallen state” and “leveled city” are taken from Li Yannian’s 李延年 poem “There is a beauty in the north”, which describes the extreme beauty of a *femme fatale*, upon the first glance of whom “the soldiers lost their town”, and on the second glance “the monarch would lost his crown”.

北方有佳人，绝世而独立。
一顾倾人城，再顾倾人国。
宁不知倾城与倾国。
佳人难再得。

The last two Chinese characters “婉转” (*Wanzhuan* sweet and agreeable) are taken from Li Bai’s poem “the long regret” that depicts the *femme fatale* as Yang Yuhuan (杨玉环 Yang guifei), the queen of emperor Xuan of Tang. The intertextual reference to Li’s poem draws an analogy between the *femme fatale* and the fallen state, both of which have disappeared due to their extreme beauty. The second line attempts to bring the “fallen state” from the absent past

¹ My Translations.

into the present by introducing its metonymic object, the “leveled city”. Nevertheless, the line states that the leveled city also disappeared following the fallen state. The metonymical shift between those two lines substitutes an absent state with an absent city, and the attempt to bring the disappeared past into the present results in another signifier of disappearance. Such thematic obsession with loss can be best categorized as the post-loyalist sentiment that is “unable to carry a particular tradition forward, and what is lost still passed on” (Wang 2013, 83). As in the first two lines of the song, only loss, absence, and disappearance have been symbolically exchanged, without any positive attributes attached.

Trapped in the posture of mourning for a cultural root that cannot be recovered, the post-loyalists, paradoxically as David Wang suggests, find their permanent home in imaginary nostalgia; that is, the “limitless exaggeration of loss, deficiency, and death as metaphysical topics” (Wang 2013, 85). In the lyric “flower of Luoyang”, the nostalgic sentiment of the imagined disappearance of a city and state is addressed by a line that captures such disappearance, the “affectionless smile that emerges out of nothing”: The “affectionless smile” in this line is the empty signifier of the creation *ex nihilo* that can only be situated in a non-space, the imaginary space in the dream. This can be shown by the Chinese character 靛 (*ye*) that denotes the smile in the dream. Correspondingly, the imaginary space in the dream is still a trace of the traces, a referent of a referent without an object to be referred to, as indicated by the third line, “a stream of loose trace traces the trace of a dream”. The opening lines have therefore construed an empty gesture towards the absent past and the failed attempt to trace the traceless past. The performance of the empty gesture quickly turns to the rehearsal of death in the following lines:

惊听蕊动如雷绽，恻闻瓣舒似江缓
折颇肯折貌绝世，名花宝刀相见欢

Astoundingly I heard the whimper of the bud like a thunderstorm
Secretly I detect the blossom of the petals as the slow-moving stream
The head of a rare beauty could only be cut off,
In a joyful *rendez-vous* between a famed flower and a treasured knife²

The narrator splits into a subject of enunciation who can decode the “whimper of the bud” and appreciate the “blossom of the petals”, and a subject to be enunciated, the peony that is willing to be beheaded by a “treasured knife”. The split subject in the stanza shows the expected encounter between ancient and modern China. Since one’s self-consciousness demands recognition from the Other, the awareness of the beauty of pre-modern China needs a modernizing gaze to be recognized. Without the arrival of the Other, the lyrics stage a rehearsal by incorporating the gaze of the expected Other as its alter ego and appropriate the othering gaze back upon itself in a narcissistic self-gaze. However, the rehearsal will not be actualized into a performance for spectators, and such a moment of recognition between the self and the awaited Other can never happen, since the “treasured knife” will cut off the flower if it recognizes its “rare beauty”, which suggests that ancient China can only be acknowledged by modernity at the cost of its own disappearance. The stanza can thus be read as a detour that ancient China has taken towards a belated modernity, the encountering of which, paradoxically, would have marked its own limit. In this respect, the hypothetical synchronicity of “joyful *rendez-vous*” could never happen, and the recognition of this impossibility is further developed in the last two stanzas:

从来枯荣不沾身，毕竟风流本偶成
欲载流光驶芳海，且纒日月巡香阵
悬榻遥睇中宵夜，露团摇曳朦胧灯
坐观千年复千年，可曾觅得簪花人

Never tainted with the rise and fall of history, purely accidental is its charisma
Driving the flowing light towards the perfumed sea, it bridled the sun and moon to gallop in
the fortress of fragrance.
Hanging in the bedroom it gazes at the distant night, a ball of dewdrops swings in the dim
light

² My Translations.

Standing idly thousands years after thousands of years, has it ever meet the one who wears flowers in her hair?³

The first four lines of the song demonstrate an attempt to erase the anterior historicity of the signifier of the flower, to show the universality of its ahistorical beauty. As portrayed in the lines, the aura of the flower is purely “accidental” (*oucheng* 偶成) and is unaffected by the rise and fall of the dynasty, since it could “bridle” the “sun and moon”, symbols of the inevitable passage of time, for an atemporal beauty. The Chinese character 偶 (*ou*) has a double meaning: either “by accident” or “pairing”, which suggests that timeless beauty can be brought about in a mutual recognition between the self and the Other. The polysemous nature of the character 偶 has shifted the othered self from incorporating the Other, as evidenced in previous stanzas, to the self that yearns to be incorporated by the Other. As exemplified by the following lines, the narrative proceeds towards the disappearance of the singularity of the flower in the pre-individuated mass of the “perfumed sea” and the “fortress of fragrance”. As soon as the Chinese antiquity is recognized by the modernized Other, it disappears into the universal history of world-liness. Such yearning of disappearing is expressed by the first lines of the last stanza: The flower “gazes” into the distant night, waiting for the expected spectator to come, and metonymically transforms the dewdrops on the pedals to the “lamp with the dim light” that guides the spectator and prepares for its arrival. However, the hypothetical synchronized moment of recognition never happens, and the lyric ends with an out of synch temporal disjuncture. The peony “waited thousands of years after thousands of years”, without having a chance of meeting the “treasured sword” that can cut off the petal and the one who can appreciate its beauty. The movement of the symbol of ancient China towards the disappearance is therefore arrested and altered to a

³. My translation.

prolonged waiting for a mourning loss to be recovered and recognized.

The paradoxical temporality that structures this poem lies at the heart of the post-loyalist discourse that both prefigured and postscripted the diasporic subjects (Wang 2013, 84). Facing a profound loss in the temporal rupture of the modernizing condition, the narrator tries to recapture a prehistoric past of a fallen state before the fallen city rather than initiates a future-oriented project to catch up with modernity. As Wang explicates, the loyalists adhere to an orthodox political ideal, yet the post-loyalist discourse revolves around a “pre-loyalist” identity that resides in the “prehistory” before the birth of the current reign and “act[s] as if this reign were something lost in the past” (Wang 2013, 84). In this lyric, the “as if” dimension of such “prehistory” is made explicit, as the empty signifier, the “affectionless smile” of the peony, emerges out of nothing, and one can only find the nothingness if tracing back to this “prehistory”. As a result, only the traces of the traces can be traced back, and the prehistorical peony can never meet its modern spectator.

As “The Flower of Luoyang” describes ancient China waiting for the never-coming modern spectator, “Invisible Chang’an” (*Bujian Chang’an* 不见长安) depicts the repeated failure of a modern subject to find its prehistoric roots. The song is produced by the famous archaic-winds band *Momingqimiao* and the lyrics tell of a sojourner who travels outside of his hometown to visit Chang’an, which he knows about from books and paintings (Hetu 2013). Similar to the structure of “The Flower of Luoyang”, “Invisible Chang’an” marks the object to be mourned as irredeemably lost even before the narrative unfolds. The title is taken directly from an historical anecdote in *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo Xinyu* 世说新语) that recorded the dialogues of the elites from the Late Han (25 - 220 AD) to the Wei Jin period (220 - 420 AD). The story takes place after the fall of the Western Jin dynasty and the conquest of the capital

Chang'an by the northern minority people Xiongnu (316 AD), and the elites of the Jin are forced to migrate eastward and establish the Eastern Jin dynasty. When Sima Rui, the first emperor of the Eastern Jin dynasty, asks his son, "How far away is Chang'an compared with the sun?", the son answers, "The sun is farther away; since I never heard of anyone coming here from the sun, we can know it for certain" (Liu, Liu, and Mather 2002, 319). However, when Sima Rui asks his son again at a banquet in front of all his ministers, his son replies, "The sun is nearer", since "by just lifting your eyes you can see the sun, but [even if you lift your eyes] you can't see Chang'an" (Liu, Liu, and Mather 2002, 319). The reference to this anecdote in the title sets up Chang'an as a primordial object that has been lost in the traumatic encounter with the minority Other.

This lyrical adaptation has obscured the historical context of the traumatic fall of the state, yet the yearning to recover this prehistorical loss persists in the undertone of the music. What motivates the narrator to depart from his hometown is "Chang'an written on the paper", "Chang'an in the story", the Chang'an that he dreamed of, and the Chang'an painted on the scroll he envisioned. The desire to see Chang'an exemplifies the imaginary nostalgia felt by the post-loyalist, in that the narrator never meets the Chang'an he longs for, and the Chang'an he desires to return to is an empty signifier of the imaginary place he has never been to. Since the real city to be denoted remains unknown for the narrator, Chang'an in the lyrics can only be narrated as an analog to signifiers of Other places—the crescent moon in the town, the scholars sleeping on the willow bank of the Yangtze River, the girls in Luoyang embroidering the peony—all of which remind the narrator of Chang'an. This echoes the anecdote that the title of the lyrics refers to, in which the accessibility of Chang'an has been foreclosed prior to the unfolding of the narrative. In a similar vein, the name of Chang'an in the lyrics appears as a void

in the signifier chain, the presence of which can only be implied by substituting Other signifiers to it.

The disappearance of the signifier in “The Flower of Luoyang” is actualized as the narrator of “Invisible Chang’an”, and the ideal spectator finally recognizes the empty signifier and its very emptiness. When the narrator arrives at Chang’an, he is disappointed since he finds out that the actual city does not match the idealized image he imagined. The narrator’s disappointment marks his acknowledgement of the signification of the idealized image of Chang’an, the idealization of which prevents its actualization. Upon reflection, he finally realizes that, as recounted in the monologue, everyone has his or her own Chang’an. Though he has spent his whole life finding Chang’an, he has not really arrived there; as revealed in the final lines, the signifier of “Chang’an” he has in mind is not the destination of his journey, but the little town from which he departs. At this moment, the eternal mourning of the narrator is twisted into a temporal paradox, as described in the first sentence of the monologue: “I have never felt lonely when I travelled thousands miles alone. It is not until I reached Chang’an that I started to feel desolated” (Hetu 2013). The narrator can only find the desired object retrospectively, yet the object is already lost at the moment of retrospection. The narrative thus reaches its conclusion in a self-cancellation: The narrator can never find the Chang’an he strives for, since what he tries to recollect is not a signifier of the eternal loss, but the eternal loss underlying the signifier.

The names of the fallen cities of ancient China, such as Chang’an and Luoyang, have become empty signifiers that call for the collective mourning of the diasporic subjects. Admittedly, a significant number of the singers, composers, and lyricists of archaic-winds music are overseas residents who studied abroad. The author of “The Flower of Luoyang”, for instance, is currently a Lancaster student. In her biographical notes of the song, she says that the

inspiration of her lyrics comes from the experience of seeing the green peony in Luoyang, and upon the completion of the lyrics, she wanted to return to China (Yoshi 2017). However, the diasporic sentiment expressed by the producers and consumers of archaic-winds music are not necessarily spatially and geographically grounded. As shown by the comments of the video adaptation of “Invisible Chang’an” uploaded to *bilibili*, most of the commentators are not physically dislocated, and some of them are even current residents of Chang’an, today known as Xi’an. Though the name “Xi’an” dates back to the Ming dynasty, it is still considered a modern name met with discontent by archaic-winds fans. The comments state: “You are just born in Xi’an, not Chang’an”; “Chang’an no longer exists anymore”; and “Chang’an, what a good name. Why do people want to change it to Xi’an?”(Qiaoqiaoqiaomi 2014). The fans find irredeemable loss because the name is changed, and Chang’an is believed to be the signifier representing the loss of a bygone era. Since Chang’an was the capital of ancient China from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty, what is believed to be represented by the signifier “Chang’an” is the glorious past of China, which is shown by one of the commentators stating that they are devoting their “whole life to restor[ing] the glory of Han and Tang”(Qiaoqiaoqiaomi 2014). Disenchanted with modern China, the fans find their home situated in the image associated with the splendid past of China during the Han and Tang, and trapped in the melancholy sentiment of being disconnected from that vanished place they fabricated. As a result, archaic-winds fans share a diasporic sentiment towards ancient China signified by “Chang’an”, even if they are physically situated at the very place whose disappearance they are mourning.

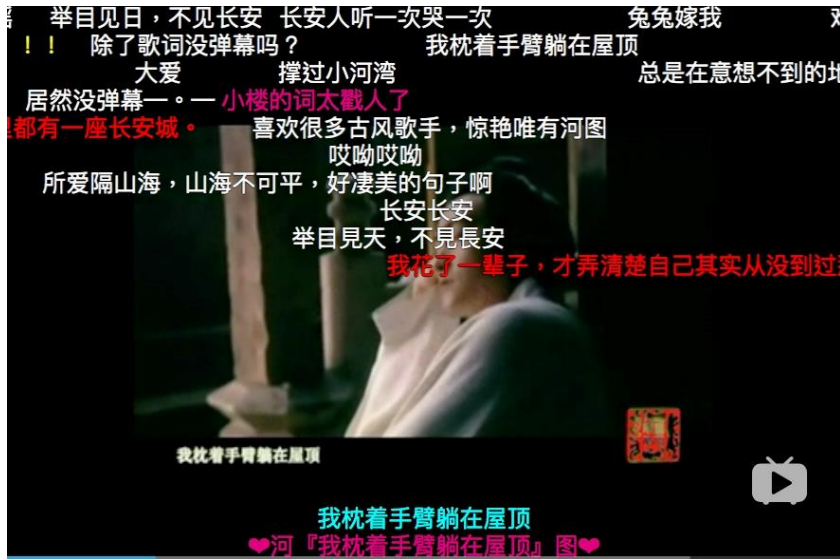


Figure 3.1 Invisible Chang'an bilibili Barrage subtitles.

The quasi-synchronicity of the media structure of the website *bilibili* has facilitated the collective mourning of the fan community of archaic-winds music. Since the barrage subtitle system of *bilibili* superimposes all of the comments being discussed regardless of the time that they are uploaded, the pseudo-synchronic setting of the website has evoked a pseudo sense of collective watching (Zheng 2016, 334; Li 2017, 248). Moderated by the video adaptation of archaic-winds music, viewers that distribute across different time-space find a virtual chronotope for ritual performance of communal mourning. For instance, most of the comments are simple repetitions of the lyrics, such as “You can see the sun, but you can’t see Chang’an”. However, the meaningless repetition of the lyrics serves as “counter-transparent writings” that divert the viewer from understanding the streaming content (Johnson 2013, 306; Zheng 2016, 337). What the commentator is concerned with in this ritual performance is not the repeated content, but the act of repetition itself. In a similar vein, archaic-winds fans are not as concerned about the object to be mourned as they are about the ritual of mourning.

The name of the fallen cities of ancient China, Chang’an and Luoyang, are therefore empty

signifiers formed by a virtual community for collective mourning. As the lyrics state, everyone has his or her own version of Chang'an, and what fans share in common is not the positive description of Chang'an, but its negativity, the loss of the Chang'an they desired. In the video, what corresponds to the lyrics "I need a scroll in my mind painted in the shape of Chang'an" is not a city with clear boundaries, but a blurred image of the ancient architecture. One can never know about what has been painted on the "scroll" and what is signified by "Chang'an". What bind the viewers together are the emptiness of the signifier and the blurriness of the scroll that prevents one from clearly recognizing Chang'an. Without a concrete image to be shown, the empty signifier "Chang'an" can only be defined negatively with respect to its modern name, Xi'an, which can be found in a floating comment that interprets the modern name of the city as "Xi'an" that is, "turning westward towards Chang'an". The mourning in archaic-winds music is thus an orientation of (re)turning towards the vanished place in the past, without a clearly defined destination to be reached. The relativism of the lyrics corresponds to the "relativist theory on popular music" that *Momingqimiao* proposes, that is, the vanished past of ancient China that can only be defined in opposition to the modernized present, as modernity can only be defined with respect to antiquity.

It is the relativism of the lyrics that reciprocally affects the emptiness of the signifier. As Laclau points out, the emptiness could not be confused with abstraction, and the demands to be expressed by the empty signifier share nothing positive (96). Instead, the only thing that the demands share is that they all remain unfulfilled, and it is that negativity that combined the heterogeneous demands. In the case of archaic-winds lyrics, every lyricist and commentator envisioned the ancient cities of Chang'an and Luoyang differently, which makes it impossible to derive a common denominator out of their imaginations. It is precisely the profound loss of the

ancient cities that bind them together into the ritual of collective mourning, which crystalizes into the lyrics as empty signifiers without any positive descriptions. Since the empty signifiers of Chang'an and Luoyang can never be materialized into a concrete form, the yearning to return to the splendid past of ancient China remains an unfulfilled wish, and archaic-winds fans are trapped by eternal mourning for the fallen city that has already been lost.

Homoeroticizing the History

The past-oriented motif of Archaic-wind music that emerged in China after the year 2000 had features both consistent and inconsistent with the root-seeking music movement of the 1980s. As Baranovitch (1997) pointed out, the root-seeking movement was closely intertwined with the post-revolutionary identity crisis of Chinese intellectuals in the early 1980s, who were “deprived of history and tradition after the Cultural Revolution” and who were also “cynical about communism and the whole revolutionary ethos” (20). Unable to find an ideal national image in contemporary China and dissatisfied with the inundation of Gaingtai culture, rock bands such as Xibefeng (Northern Wind) sought to enhance national pride by reconnecting with the primordial roots of the country from before the Cultural Revolution (Baranovitch 1997, 21). As a nationalist reaction against the influx of Gangtai (Hong Kong – Taiwan) reflected by songs marked by the “soft, sweet, and slow melody” considered feminine, Xibefeng’s quest for a primordial image for mainland China was heavily coded as macho, hyper-masculinity which manifested in its “loud and rough vocal delivery, fast and forceful beat, powerful bass line, and bold melodic leaps” (Baranovitch 1997, 20). The assertion of masculinity in expressions of patriotism and nationalism in Chinese rock of the 1980s, paradoxically, as Baranovitch, suggests, takes its inspiration from the Western macho-male ideal. However, after the June 4th incident that brought about disillusionment with Westernization and the commercialization of 1990 (47),

the fad of virile rock music declined and Gangtai music, with its soft, slow, relaxing melodies, dominated popular music culture.

Though it shares a past-oriented motif with the 1980s root-seeking movement, the Archaic Style of music differs in its dialectical reversal in terms of gender coding. With the saturation of the Gangtai style, it was no longer macho masculinity that was valued by the public; rather, it was the refined, delicate melodies that were seen as feminine by rock musicians in 1980 that achieved phenomenal success (Baranovitch 1997, 119-120). The fad of the Gangtai style of 1990s continued in the China-winds music that emerged after 2000 in China, initiated by a group of Taiwan-based artists and significantly influenced Archaic Style music. China-winds music is usually produced collaboratively by pop music stars such as Jay Chou, S.H.E, and Leehom Wang and lyricists such as Vincent Fang (*Fang Wenshan* 方文山), who is considered the genre's most important lyricist (Chow & de Kloet 2010, 70). The melodies of China-winds music produced by Jay Chou and Fang Wenshan in "Chrysanthemum Terrace" (*Juhua Tai* 菊花台) and "Inn of the Mortal World" (*Hongchen Kezhan* 红尘客栈) have been appropriated by many Archaic Style lyricists. The motif of heterosexual romance and the refined tone of China-winds music can be interpreted as a continuation of an effeminate ideal present in a "new wave of nationalism" (Baranovitch 1997, 189). As Baranovitch pointed out, the refined maleness that might even be considered feminine focused on a traditional male image that was popular before the Cultural Revolution, as opposed to the Western masculine ideal that was prominent during the pursuit of nationalism in the rock era of the 1980s (Baranovitch 1997, 139). The rising popularity of China-winds music signalled a desire to embrace a sense of femininity and desire to return to a refined image of traditional China. In the context of domestic politics, the fall of macho masculinity can be understood as, imitating Western views of masculinity was no longer seen as a viable choice,

and Chinese people newly sought a self-image encoded with traditional Chinese qualities of harmony and refinement (Baranovitch 1997, 139; Woon 2018, 74). In a larger geopolitical context, the return to an effeminate image of traditional “Chineseness” could be seen as a yearning for a traditional culture that was not territorially bound but that could unite China and Taiwan despite their political separation (Chow and de Kloet 2010, 62; Woon 2018, 74).

The gender-coding of Archaic-Winds music is neither a simple continuation nor a direct refutation of the national image of a cultural China, be it the Western-influenced macho masculinity celebrated by Xibefeng or the feminized image in the narrative of heterosexual romance inspired by Gangtai music. Instead, it is manifested as a rhizomatic deconstruction of the “Chineseness” of the preceding two waves of nationalist sentiment in the 1980s and 1990s in its gender-coding strategy: the homoerotic romance. As an internet based sub-culture, such a rhizomatic transformation takes place in the production, circulation, and re-adaptation of its hypertext, i.e., the videos adapted from Archaic Style music, rather than its source text and context. Most of the video adaptations of Archaic-Winds music are known as “historical fanfiction” (*lishi tongren* 历史同人), in which the fiction depicts homoerotic love between the historical figures who are usually heterosexual males. Historical fanfiction is a subgenre of Chinese internet fanfiction inspired by Japanese Yaoi or boy’s love (BL) culture (Wang 2008, 7-12, Feng 2013, 55-36). The fan music video (MV) is a cross-media adaptation of BL fanfiction that re-edits footage from a television program with background music to narrate homosexual male love. In the case of historical fan MV, the footage is usually drawn from an archaic video, and the background music is the cover song of the Archaic-Winds music genre. However, the original figures in the original video are portrayed according to standard male behaviour, and the original songs that the cover song is adapted from usually depict heterosexual romance. By re-

editing the footage and rewriting the lyrics, the fan MV decontextualizes the source text to produce a homoerotic subtext that is not expressed by the original program or song yet is shared by the fan community.

I argue that the fan MVs of *lishi tongren* have de-territorialized the masculine story in a rhizomatic movement of metamorphosis. As Deleuze (1988) explains, the system by which the rhizome originates is always “ $n - 1$ ”, namely, to “subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted” (6). What Deleuze suggests is a paradoxical movement of returning to the roots and selecting the internal difference of the roots, and pushing it to such an extent that the root overcomes itself and becomes something other than itself – that is the rhizome. In the case of “Archaic-Winds” fan MVs, loaded symbols within the original television dramas and the “Archaic-Winds” music are selected and isolated from their contextual roots and are thusly transformed into something other than themselves in the superimposition of the video images and the soundtrack. In what follows, I will elucidate how the cross-referencing between the scenes and the lyrics has made *lishi tongren* a rhizome that de-territorialized its source texts and the official history.

The production process of the well-known fan-made MV entitled *The Constellation of Shen and Shang* (参商) shows how the cover song of Archaic-Winds and the fan-made MV de-territorializes and reterritorializes the masculine history (Lanno 2018). Footage in the MV is taken from the TV drama, *The Emperor Wu of Han* (2005), a biographical story about the life of the emperor Liu Che (156 B.C to 87 B.C), and the background music is “The Constellations of Shen and Shang,” a cover song that narrates the homoerotic romance between two male figures in the martial arts video game, *Jx3*. The melody of the cover song derives from the theme song *Promise* from another TV series, *The Phoenix*, which features the palace fighting drama during

the Tang Dynasty under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. What makes this audio-adaptation particularly problematic is that *Jx3* and *The Phoenix* pertain to heterosexual romance, yet the cover song appropriates the melody and rewrites the lyrics to narrate a homoerotic romance between the two figures in the video game, Li Aoxue and Ye Wenshui. However, as the lyrics are integrated into a song video with footage from *The Emperor Wu of Han*, the narrative of the video game as the “source text” of second-hand adaptation is ignored. The remade video has nothing to do with the video game *Jx3*, nor does it follow the “third-hand” source text. Neither in the primary historical text, *The Historical Records*, nor in the TV series it is adapted from, *The Emperor Wu of Han*, is the emperor Liu Che or the general Wei Qing described or depicted as a homosexual couple. Rather, it is the textual poaching process of the fan adaptation that arbitrarily interprets the emotional attachment between those two male figures as homosexual love, a notion blatantly opposed to the intention of the original text. The video adaptation for *The Constellation of Shen and Shang* therefore demonstrates the prototypical steps taken to remake the Archaic-Winds video to escape from the territory of the masculine history, thereby reflecting a de-territorialization process of de-contextualizing the heterosexual narrative in the source text, and a re-territorializing the source text by implying a homoerotic narrative as pretext and subtext.

What makes *Constellation of Shen and Shang* ready to be decontextualized and appropriated is the separation between the “spoken part” (*nianbai* 念白) of the song, which provides a pretext and a context for narration of the lyrics by voiceover, and the song’s melodic lyrics. The spoken part contains a dialogue between the protagonists to make clarify the terms “Shen” and “Shang” in the lyric refer to two characters in the video game, Li Aoxue and Ye Wenshui. In the video adaptation of *The Constellations of Shen and Shang*, however, the spoken part of the lyrics is

removed and substituted by the wedding scene depicting the heterosexual male emperor, Liu Che (156 B.C. – 87 B.C.), and his first queen, Chen Ajiao (? – 110 B.C.) in *The Emperor Wu of Han*. However, the shot featuring Chen Ajiao is intentionally left out of the frame in the reediting process. Instead, the next image features the drumstick knocking on the drumhead in a low angle shot and the drumhead rotating in a counter-clockwise direction until it is perpendicular to the ground. After the image of drumhead is faded to an upright position and reappears in the subsequent shot, the camera rotates clockwise to turn the vertical drumhead to its normal position of parallel to the ground. The lyrical part of the music starts after the rotation of the drum, and the first line of the lyrics, “Who knows the darkling skies and yellow earth. One couldn’t prophecy the asynchrony between the Shen and Shang” is accompanied by the shot-reverse-shot between Liu Che, and Wei Qing (? – 106 B.C), the heterosexual male general. The rotation of the drumhead therefore functions as a metalanguage that connects the wedding scene and the shot-reverse-shot, and metaphorically replaces the former with the latter: as the drumhead is turned vertically, the sexual orientation between heterosexual couples is disoriented, and the “bride” and “husband” in the wedding scene are turned to an emptied subject position that is gender neutral. Correspondingly, the clockwise turn of the drumhead reorients the romance to a homosexual relationship, and designates the couple, namely, “Shen” and “Shang” and the “bride” and “husband”, as Liu Che and Wei Qing. In this respect, the separation of the spoken part has transformed the lyrics into free-floating signifiers, ready to be appropriated and resignified by the visual substitutes, turning the marriage between a queen and a king into a symbol of homosexual romance.



Figure 3.2 The Wedding



Figure 3.3 The Drum



Figure 3.4 Liu Che



Figure 3.5 Wei Qing

As The Constellations of Shen and Shang shows how the nouns in the lyrical text are

converted into an empty subject position, primed for the imbrication of homoerotic content, the verbalizing of the lyrical text in the video adaptation can also be deployed to obscure the agents of the action. This construct can be best illustrated by the song video *Fireworks Easily Turn Cold* that narrates the romantic love story between Liu Bei (161.A.D. - 223 A.D.) and Zhuge Liang (181 A.D.- 234 A.D.). The original Archaic-Winds music is authored by Vincent Fang, who narrates a fictional love story between a general and a young girl in the northern Wei dynasty, employing an intertextual reference to *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang*, a work composed in approximately the sixth century (Tian 2015, 234-235). In the lyrics, composed by Fang, the young girl and the general are separated by the war; the general is deployed to guard the city of Luoyang while the girl remains behind in the village, waiting for the general's return. However, after the general is defeated and returns to the village, the girl has already died. The general themes of waiting, longing, love and war are crystalized into one line in the lyrics: "I heard that you are still guarding the isolated city". The line can be interpreted metaphorically as "the girl desolately waiting for the general in the alienated village". Yet it also carries a literal reference to the general who is guarding the city that has been surrounded by the enemy. The ambiguity of the pronoun has made "I" and "you" shifting subjects that can be occupied by any character of any gender or sexual orientation. As a result, the video remake of *Fireworks Easily Turn Cold* exploits the ambiguity of the lyrics by retaining the act of "guarding" in the original lyrics and defining the subject of the act as Zhuge Liang. The footage selected to match the sentence is the scene in the TV series featuring "Empty City Strategy" (*Kongcheng ji* 空城计), in which Zhuge Liang plays his *guqin* on the viewing platform and opens the city gate, manipulating a reverse psychology to make the enemy to believe that the empty city is full of ambush. The object to be "guarded" in this scene can be understood *denotatively*, as the fort to be

guarded in this military legend, or *connotatively*, as the secret love between himself and Liu Bei to be guarded, which rhizomatically transforms the connotation of a heterosexual love in the original lyric to a homoerotic romance.

The rhizomatic narrative of the fan-made video is made possible by its emphasis on the verb phrase rather than the predicated noun. Specifically, the homoeroticization of the video is completed by removing the nominal subject in the original lyrics and video footage and retaining the verb phrase in its rhizomatic transformation. For instance, the phrase “passing the doorstep” in the lyrics connotes a traditional Chinese marriage ritual: after the bride steps into the doorstep of the bridegroom’s household upon marriage, she is officially considered to be his wife. In the video adaptation, it is only the verb in the lyrics, “passing”, that remains the same, with the subject of “passing” and the object to be passed undergoing metaphorical transformation. The footage chosen to match the phrase is the high angle shot capturing Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei passing into the city fort of Chengdu after conquering it. With the bridegroom and the bride substituted by Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei, and the doorstep supplanted by the city fort, the connotation in the original lyrics, the heterosexual romances, and the grandiose history of conquering the cities and states in Three Kingdoms, are subverted into the homoerotic narrative. Inspired by this video adaptation, *Fireworks Easily Turn Cold* becomes the most popular Archaic-Winds music for fan-made videos. With the original works ranging from television dramas, to video games, to fan fiction, there are more than 400 video adaptations that use *Fireworks Easily Turn Cold* as its background music. In this cross-reference between the lyrical text and video adaptation, the heterosexual context is substituted by a homoerotic subtext, and the return to the root of ancient China and its history is distorted via a rhizomatic route.



Figure 3.6 Zhuge Liang Playing *Guqin*



Figure 3.7 Conquering Chengdu

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates a paradoxical narrative underlies the Sinophone articulation of the “Archaic-Winds music”: In order to return to the root of the “Chineseness” of which the Archaic-Winds fan conceives, the absent past of the Chinese antique must be brought to the present through the empty signifiers in the lyrics. Paradoxically, it is in the process of forcing the past into the present that the orientation towards the past is disoriented in the rhizomatic ramifications of the video adaptations. In this respect, “Archaic-Winds” music manifests itself as an alternative mode of Sinophone articulation: The verbal lyrics initiate with a post-loyalist sentiment of returning to the primordial roots of cultural China, yet the visual adaptations de-

territorialize the very genesis of generating such roots in a rhizomatic movement.

Examining the website-user as symbiotic with the “archaic music” fan community, this paper suggests that such rhizomatic routes are animated by a paradoxical coexistence of past and present embedded in cross-media practices. On the one hand, the sublimated beauty of ancient China is portrayed lyrically as a glorious past that has been lost, and the melancholic melody is charged with the effect of imaginary nostalgia that helps foster a fan community devoted to the communal mourning. However, since the lyrics and footage are decontextualized into empty signifiers required by the communal mourning, the emptiness of the signifiers paradoxically makes them more vulnerable to an appropriation which deviates from the intention of returning to the authentic root of Chineseness. As in the case of the fan MVs of Archaic-Winds music, masculine proper in historic drama and the heterosexual romance in the lyrics are subverted by the homoerotic subtext of its video adaptation. Consequently, the subject matter of the lyrics shows a past-oriented melancholy; yet the way in which these audio-visual materials are presented rhizomatically deconstructs the arborescent genealogy they initially seek to reconstruct.

Chapter 3, in full, is a reprint of the material as it appears in *China Perspectives* 2 (2020): 15-23. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

CHAPTER 4

The Paradox of Queer Aura:

A case study of gender-switching video remakes

Introduction

“Gender-switching” refers to a genre of video adaptation featuring the gender transformation of characters. Gender swapping as a theme can be traced back to Japanese *shōnen'ai* (boy love) stories in *shōjo manga* (comics for girls) starting in the 1970s, in which male characters take drugs or undergo surgery to become women (Fujimoto Yukari 2004, 89). Boy love (BL) stories were first introduced to China with the influx of *shōnen'ai manga* in the early 1990s, and flourished around the 2000s on commercial websites such as Hongxiu Tianxiang (红袖添香)⁴ and Jinjiang Literature City (晋江文学城)⁵ aimed at a mostly female readership (Yang Ling and Xu Yanrui 2015, 134). Similar to Japanese *shōnen'ai*, Chinese BL stories, named *danmei*, involve a male-male romance between a *seme* (攻/attacker) and a *uke* (受/receiver), and many of them involve a body change from female to male via time travel (Yang and Xu 2015, 138-139). According to Feng, Yang and Xu’s research on this female-male subgenre, body-change stories share themes with BL stories and are extremely popular among the BL communities on Jinjiang (Yang and Xu 2015, 139; Feng Jin 2013, 71)

⁴ *Hongxiutianxiang* is a Beijing based literature website established in 1999.

⁵ *Jinjiang Literature city* is a Beijing based literature website established in 2003.

The male-to-female subgenre attracted little attention within fan communities until the number of gender-switching videos on the website *bilibili* (哔哩哔哩)⁶ increased dramatically after 2016 with the explosive popularity of *Destiny* (2016), a gender-switching video that offers a “group portrayal” of historical male figures from the Three Kingdoms period, who are presumed to be heterosexual. In the gender-switching videos made by BL fans, a male-male romance is represented by remixing found footage of female stars performing female characters in films unrelated to the BL narratives fabricated by fans. Unlike its Japanese counterpart in *shōjo manga* or Chinese body-change fictions on the Jinjiang site that present the BL narrative in the main visual or verbal text, in these gender-switching videos male-male homoerotic narratives are not directly presented in the main footage but rather implied in the subtext added to the video by fan producers, which may include a title, short biographies, and comments.

Most of these gender-switching videos were uploaded to the website *bilibili*, initially the most favorable platform for the anime and manga fan community, and which has gradually become the most popular video-sharing website for all kinds of subcultural communities. As Xiqing Zheng (2016) notes, what distinguishes *bilibili* from English language video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Vimeo is its “barrage-subtitle system” that superimposes comments, dubbed “bullet-subtitles” (*danmu*) by the website, on the moving images in the relevant video (317). Jinying Li (2017) argues that the special attraction of this system lies in the structure of quasi-simultaneity that facilitates virtual live chat between commentators (235–248). However, Li (2017) sees in addition a “spectral past” persisting in this virtual live characteristic of pseudo-real-time chatting (249). Accordingly, the “spectrality” of the website can be defined

⁶ *Bilibili* is a Shanghai-based video sharing website devoted to the streaming of anime, comic and games.

as the viewer's temporal experience of seeing absent materials that "haunt" the seemingly living presence of the website.

Li (2017) asserts that the spectrality is not "unique" to the barrage-subtitles but rather evidences a "fundamental contradiction of computer interfaces" always showing "hidden specters" in seemingly real-time interaction (248–249). However, in the case of the gender-switching videos uploaded to *bilibili*, the spectrality of the absent-presence experienced by viewers stems not only from the nature of the computer interface but as a result of state-imposed sanctions on videos uploaded to the website. As reported by Human Rights Watch (2006), the Chinese government has enforced censorship on internet materials recognized as harmful to government rule and the "stability of the society," beginning at the router level in filtering out politically sensitive websites and gradually making website owners responsible for content control. *bilibili* was able to brand itself as a website experiencing little intervention in the form of censorship until August 2016, when the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, the executive institution for internet censorship, asked the website to tighten control over "barrage-subtitles" (*Legal Evening* 2016). On February 10, 2017, *bilibili* announced on its website that it would not accept any politically related materials (*bilibili* 2017), and concurrently initiated a rigorous process of self-censorship that included deleting all videos identified as BL, lesbian love, *danmei*, and same-sex. On January 9, 2019, *People.cn* released "management specifications of online short video platforms," stating that videos containing "pornographic materials" and "non-mainstream ideas about the marriage and love" were strictly prohibited. Accordingly, the staffs of *bilibili* has stated that in compliance with these specifications the site will remove "gay content with visuals that include kissing, or go beyond kissing" (Feng Jiayun 2019).

Gender-switching videos provide a tactic for fan-producers to retroactively salvage these disappeared BL narratives by hiding them under female footage, and hinting at the implied BL subtext via title, short biographies (short-bios), and comments. This is enabled by the tripartite structure of gender-switching video which includes the main text of the video with footage of female performers; titles and short-bios describing the Three Kingdoms male-figures represented by female performers; and viewer comments that interpret or supply a plot for footage from different sources. The author usually tags the male-male couple in the title by putting the abbreviation of the name of the couple in square brackets, and identifying the male character represented by each female performer in a “cast-list” in the short-bio section. Viewers can then discuss their envisioned BL subtext in their comments and barrage-subtitles. Compared with female-female or male-male videos, in which the couple are tagged in the title and the discussion in comments revolves around the performers in the footage or the roles they perform, the tripartite structure of the gender-switching video makes its thematic concerns harder to locate. Only fans within the community can decode the BL subtext behind the footage through hints and inter-textual references, which gives gender-switching videos an advantage in evading censorship compared to the other genres.

The tripartite structure of gender-switching videos enables hints about the BL subtext to move between title, comments, and barrage-subtitles in response to censorship. Gender-switching videos initially gained popularity in 2016, two years after the 2014 net-cleansing campaign targeting homoerotic male fiction on Jinjiang, but a year before *bilibili* publicly announced its video censorship guidelines. Producers of gender-switching videos took advantage of this gap to hide censored male-male bonding in fiction under the guise of female-female footage of soft-core erotic scenes in films such as *Swordsman II* (1992) and *The East Is Red*

(1993) which survived the cinematic censorship. This is because, as Sang Tze-lan (2003) has shown, the Chinese government has categorized male-male sexual behaviors as “hooliganism”, which makes cinematic footage of male-male erotica difficult for fan producers to access, while female-female sexual activity has not been explicitly criminalized (329). In gender-switching videos such as *Golden Millet Dream* (2016) and *Lonely Sword* (2016), male-male “couples” are tagged to suggest a BL subtext, and viewers use barrage-subtitles and comments to discuss the censored materials in Jinjiang alluded to by the video. However, after *bilibili* publically flagged its intention to censor in 2017, some uploaders became reluctant to directly tag BL couples in titles, as can be seen in the video *The 12th Year of Jianxing* (2017) and *Wind and Rain in the Fall of Jianmen* (2017). After *bilibili* extended censorship to barrage subtitles in 2019 and officially announced its prohibition of pornography and “non-mainstream” love, some viewers began to place the BL related comments on other platforms such as *Weibo* and *Lofter*, two Chinese-language microblogger websites. As censorship rules on Chinese websites are vague and inconsistently enforced, the fan community has adopted pre-emptive measures that retrospectively salvage the censored materials in anticipation of their future disappearance.

A spectral temporality is thus inscribed in the barrage-subtitles and comments of gender-switching videos by which viewers make references to the censored homoerotic materials in the light of which they are “reading” the current footage, a spectrality which shows a specific type of “queer aura”. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin (2006) describes the aura of the painting as “a strange weave of space and time: the unique *apparition* of a *distance*, however near it may be” (105). Accordingly, Benjamin’s description of the aura suggests an *apparitional* reinsertion of *disappeared* extra-textual materials into the *appearance* of the main text that can be immediately perceived. This absent-presence evokes the

ritual-based “cult value” of the aura that is present but invisible and opens up an *imaginary distance* between the manifest content and latent content, as opposed to the “exhibition value” of the spectacle immediately accessible to the viewer (Walter Benjamin 2006, 106). In his subsequent discussion of aura, Benjamin situated the cult value in the ritualistic “remembrance of the dead or absent love one”, which translates the *imaginary distance* between the seen and unseen to the *temporal distance* between the anticipated disappearance at the moment of production and the delayed recognition of the absence in the image at the moment of reception (108).

The gender-switching videos are auratic because they show an apparitional temporality of an absent presence and an imaginary relationship between the seen and unseen. The BL subtext veiled under the guise of female performers—which has been “disappeared” and continues to disappear due to state-imposed censorship—is belatedly recognized in the collective remembrance of the viewer. However, Benjamin’s conceptualization refers to a “here and now of the original [that] underlies the concept of its authenticity,” (103), and can be interpreted as a “contextual aura” grounded in the continuity between the authentic fictional or physical world in which the source text was originally situated and the time-space in which it is currently situated. The “queer aura” of a gender-switching video, in contrast, possesses a “sub-textual aura” with a double negative structure of “neither-nor”: it refers neither to the immediate appearance of the audiovisual *main-text* of the video itself nor to the authentic *context* that is supposed to surround it. Rather, it is constituted by the *subtext* as the emergent effect of the montage of video remakes. Instead of referring back to an absent wholeness as with the contextual aura, the subtextual aura derives from the excessive subtext that producers have intentionally created out of the original context, which deconstructs rather than affirming its authenticity.

The notion of subtextual aura I am proposing is thus a queering appropriation of, rather than a faithful subjection to, Benjamin's notion of contextual aura: the double-negative structure of the gender-switching aura manifests a performative "queerness" that Judith Butler (2002) described as double inversion, negating both appearance and inner essence, the "original" and "imitation" of gender identities (186–187). However, in the gender-switching videos, the excessiveness of the gender performance that negates the source text and its identical copy is not the bodily act of the performer, as Butler envisioned, but what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988) have characterized as the "collective assemblage of enunciation" (78). The notion of "collective assemblage of enunciation" could be interpreted as a subtext outside of the statement of enunciation collectively produced and presupposed by the enunciator that confers meaning upon the statement. In the case of the gender-switching videos, the collective assemblage is the disappeared queer subtext that lies beyond the statement of enunciation that is the appearance of the video and the context of original sources of the footage, which opens up an auratic distance between manifest content and latent content, disappearance and appearance.

In contrast to Benjamin's original formulation of aura, which refers to a context that supports the authenticity and internal coherency of the aesthetic semblance, the "queer aura" of these gender-switching videos works by decontextualizing, fragmentizing, and collaging the source text, gesturing toward a homoerotic subtext beyond the manifest content. I suggest that "queer aura" is not merely an aesthetic strategy but also represents a political choice to challenge gender "authenticity" and survive symbolically amid a regime of crude censorship. For the current study, rather than undertake a broad overview of the gender-switching videos circulated online, I decided to conduct a case study of the subgenre of such videos related to the theme of the *Three Kingdoms*. Gender-switching videos based on the *Three Kingdoms* comprise a subgenre of

historical fan fiction in which the fan producers fabricate a homoerotic romance between heterosexual male historical figures. Sorting on *bilibili* based on popularity reveals that the most-clicked video in this subgenre is an adaptation neither of a manga nor of a popular television drama but a video concerning the historical figures of *Three Kingdoms: Destiny*. However, in contrast to other homoerotic fan videos that source footage from film or television adaptations of the *Three Kingdoms*, the male figures in gender-switching videos of the *Three Kingdoms* are “performed” using footage of female stars in television dramas that are, in most cases, irrelevant to *Three Kingdoms*. I suggest that the gender-switching videos of *Three Kingdoms* challenge the gender norms of normative masculinity and femininity by tactically circumventing and subverting Chinese government censorship that has sanctioned materials related to “unhealthy ideas about marriage and love” and “deviant representations of historical figures” (People.cn 2019). In the subversive video remixing carried out in this subgenre, the “contextual aura” of the male historical figures and of the heterosexual female performers are deconstructed in terms of visual, audio, and archival aesthetics while being supplemented by the “subtextual aura” of the BL narratives fabricated by fan producers and viewers out of “authentic” *Three Kingdoms* texts, including *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. In what follows, I will examine how the aesthetic technique of the gender-switching videos, “pseudo-continuity editing” and “acousmatic aesthetics”, and the online circulation of the videos under censorship exemplify a subtextual aura, with an imaginary distance between manifest content and latent content, and a temporal distance between appearance and disappearance.

Towards a negative aesthetics

The problematic relation between the construction of gender and gender-swap as a genre has sparked numerous scholarly treatments of Western fan culture which have mainly examined the

male-to-female subgenre of texts in comics and fiction. Situating gender-swap within the theoretical schema of Butlerian performativity, Kristina Busse and Alexis Lothian (2009) argue that the “cross identification” in the “double gender-masquerading” of the genre exposes the constructivist nature of gender. Ann McClellan (2014), however, warns against overemphasizing the performative aspect of gender, as it may overlook the materiality of the body, yet gender-swap as a genre “highlights and complicates the interconnectedness between the physical embodiment of sex and gender behaviors.” Lucy Baker (2016) suggests that the performance in the gender-swap genre fits into Henry Jenkins’s (2012) theorization of how the slash genre recontextualizes the original work with male-male subtexts to transgress a particular habitus of gender norms (29–30). Yet gender-swap is not the “most transgressive” act, as it relies on a male-male masculine default, with only the apparitional presence of lesbianism, which replicates the gender-imbalance in the attention economy and risks fetishizing the female body (Lucy Baker 2016, 29–30).

By contrast, scholarship on Chinese fan culture has focused on the female-to-male subgenre in BL stories with a body change theme. Feng (2013) studies female-to-male transition in time-travel fiction produced in the BL community and suggests that sex-change fantasies can empower women by overcoming the disadvantage of the female body and identity (71). Yang and Xu (2015) find that the male protagonist in a male-to-female story “lives as a heterosexual female with [a] male mentality,” whereas the female protagonist in a male-to-female story lives a “homosexual life,” which aligns with BL logic about “appropriating [a] male body to articulate female desire” (139). Yang and Xu (2015) find that the *uke* typically undergoes a sex change and is positioned as the first-person narrator in the body change story because “women readers in general more readily identify with *uke* protagonists” (142). Though not touching upon the sex-

change theme, Xiaofei Tian (2017) in her study of *Three Kingdoms* fan fictions and videos also acknowledges the similarity between the *uke* protagonist, Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮 181–234), and the role of wife, suggesting that this simultaneously subverts macho-masculinity while reaffirming heteronormativity (356).

These interpretations of male-female exchange in BL narrative as heteronormative assume that when assigning female traits to a male heterosexual, only the macho-masculinity of the original context is deconstructed, while the heterosexual femininity is reinforced, because the female fan-producer tends to identify with feminine traits based on a principle of similarity. However, had the female producers and consumers of gender-switching genre are seeking for narcissistic pleasure of seeing oneself being represented, they wouldn't have claimed the image of female stars as representing the males. The video genre also works in a way opposite to Fung's claim "appropriating male's body to represent female's desire" because it is the females' corporeal images representing the male's desire. As a self-reinterpretation of the BL genre, the double-negative structure of the gender-switching video challenges the existing explanatory frameworks of the genre based on the hypothesis of narcissistic identification, which assumes the female fans are pursuing the pleasure of self-same-ness either in the literal sense as in the image of female body, or in the allegorical sense, as positioning the "idealized masculinity" (Feng 72) as an ideal ego of female fans. Rather than engaging in an identificatory project driven by the desire for recognition, the female fans are taking pleasure in the double-negative effect of disidentification: By creating a world of male-male homoeroticism without female characters, the female fans are investing in a fictional time-space that they are absent from. Appropriating the images of female stars to represent the male characters, the fictional world provides a negative portrayal of male-hood without masculinity. As such, I suggest the gender-switching

genre go beyond the narcissistic identification with specular self-sameness, because the spectators of the genre desires a fictional world without being represented in it, and projects their desired object into the fictional world without representing its positive attributes.

The interpretation of the gender-switching genre as narcissistic identification that projects the female desire into the male body betrays the entrenched understanding of feminized masculinity as either literal or allegorical in the field of China studies. In his reading of *Farewell my concubine*, Song Hwee Lim (2006) proposes that the trans-gendered performance of femininity in the film should be read allegorically, as a projection the film director's feminized position vis-à-vis the state institution, rather than literally, as the feminization of homosexual males. Xiaofei Tian (2017) suggests that the historical BL fiction shows a transformation from representing the homosexual desire as an allegory of the relation between the lord and the feminized minister, as did in Qu Yuan's poem, to a literal portrayal of homosexual love between the lord and feminized minister. However, the gender-switching video shows neither a literal portrayal of male body with masculine proper, nor does it represents a feminized masculinity metaphorically, as biological male with clothes, make-ups or behaviors that are stereotypically considered as feminine personality. Counterintuitively as it may seem to be, the gender-switching genre represents the three kingdom males not by positive attribution, as "what they are" or "what they could possibly be", but in negative predicates of "what they are definitely not", that are the biological females. In this sense, the gender-switching video shows the aesthetic tenet of postmodern deconstruction by appropriating the images to represents the homoerotic loves between historical figures that are considered as heterosexual males. However, the gender-switching video doesn't share the postmodern historiography that rejects the historical facts by upholding the relativist ideal of epistemological uncertainty, but narrates the counter-factual facts

in a rhetorical inversion: If any gendered attributes that can be assigned to a historical figure are fictional narratives that are socially constructed, the only fact that can be ascertained is their biological sex. It is based on the historical fact that those figures being narrated are biological male, that the gender-switching videos construct a counter-factual narrative of their negative predicates, the biological females. In a similar rationale, the fan producers seek to construct their historical fiction in an negative aesthetics of constitutional exclusion instead of allegorical projection: It is in the boy love narratives between historical figures who are biological males, that the female fans can enjoy a queering relation between themselves and a fictional world that they are absent from.

The negative aesthetics of the gender-switching video further problematizes the feminist theory adopted by the critics of western fandom studies, with the implicit value judgement that valorizes the presence over the absence, affirmation over negation, exhibitionism over voyeurism, iconic over symbolic. These polemics are crystalized around the nexus of veiling and unveiling, as exemplified by the Butlerian and post-Butlerian performance theories. In her initial formulation of *Gender Trouble*, Butler asserts that by performing the socially constructed identity, the constructiveness of the gendered identity under the ideological mask would be unveiled. Though she hasn't explicitly refer to Brechtian performance theory, Butler's rationale is in line with "*gestic criticism*" proposed by Brecht, that reveals the hidden contradictions in the performance at the moment of alienation, de-familiarization, and in a reflexive distantiation between spectator and spectacle. However, Butler doesn't make it explicit that if it is the signifying absence (184), or if it is the excessive corporeal presence (189) that subverts the ideologically construction of the gender on the surface of bodies. In a reductive reading of Butler's performance theory, Ann McClellan criticizes Butler for overlooking the corporeal

reality from the vantage point of a materialist critique, which fails to address the full complexity of Butler's theorization. Ann McClean's misreading betrays her self-positioning at the side of corporeal presence against the signifying absence, and its implication for value judgement is brought explicitly by Baker's criticism of the gender-switching genre as resulting in a "gender-imbalance" with the apparitional absent-presence of the lesbian narrative. Baker's criticism of such "default" BL subtext as resulting in a gender-imbalance is relevant in the context of a neoliberal "attention economy" operating without explicit censorship as in the Western fan community. However, on the Mainland Chinese internet, where explicit BL fictions are censored, BL narratives can only symbolically survive as a "default" subtext under the guise of the female body. Rather than categorizing the female-to-male subgenre of genderwap as a narcissistic self-identification or heteronormative, the gender-switching genre in Chinese context can be interpreted as a survival strategy under the explicit censorship. Simultaneously, the lack of positive attribution of the male-hood in the gender-switching video can also be read as a refusal to reduce the gendered other into an imaginary projection of its positive attributions, and recognition of the radical alterity of the Other in its negativity.

I suggest that the "gender-switching" video demonstrates a "Queer Aura" with its negative aesthetics of iconic resemblance and signifying negation. In "a little history of photography", Benjamin initially theorizes his notion of aura as "the unique *appearance* or *semblance* of distance", which stages the inner-contradiction between the *appearance* that manifest itself at surface level, and the *semblance* that refers outside of itself, to something absent from appearances (105). This contradiction is brought explicitly in Benjamin's (2005) classification of semblance, as "behind which something lies concealed", and "behind which nothing lies concealed" (223). The semblance is theorized as a sensuous imitation of *appearance*

that concealed nothing, yet the phrase “something lies concealed” betrays a signifying absent of the non-sensuous universe under the veil of the appearance. In “Work of Art” essay, Benjamin attempts to resolve this paradox, by substituting the *appearance or semblance* with *apparition*, to address the paradoxical temporality of resembling the disappeared through the appearance. I argue that gender-switching videos shows an aesthetics of queer aura with an iconic re-*semblance*, and an *apparitional* distance of signifying negation to make the unperceivable perceivable. In the case of the gender-switching video of Three Kingdoms, the pseudo-continuity editing and the acousmatic aesthetics imitates the historical event in an iconic resemblance with a sensuous similarity. However, the perceivable female image refers outside itself, to an unperceivable homoerotic male-male subtext, which generates an apparitional distance of queer aura: the rhetorical reversal of using what is appeared to represent what disappeared has opened up an imaginary distance between the seen and unseen, heard and unheard, intelligible and unintelligible. Respectively, a need to salvage the disappeared or about-to-be-disappeared BL subtext has resulted in a temporal lag between appearance and disappearance.

Remixing Strategy: Pseudo-Continuity Editing

When examining the “gender-switching” video remakes, one can notice that the pleasure of producing and watching such videos stems from a peculiar dialectic of de-familiarized familiarity. As Jenkins (2012) states, the pleasure of slash videos as a form of expression centers on the fascination of “watching familiar images wrenched free from their previous context” and “assigned alternative meanings,” specifically by “putting words into a character’s mouth and making the series represent *subtexts* it normally represses” (233). In “Gender-Switching Videos” of Three Kingdoms, the auratic *subtext* that supplements pleasure is visually generated in two steps: First, by tactically selecting the lyrics with an empty subject position, and then by

employing close-up shots of the video to decontextualize the original source text. Second, the verbal and visual materials are recombined in a rhythmic montage of “pseudo-continuity editing,” to suggest a homoerotic subtext between the characters through the “point-of-view shots” and “shot reverse shots” that the fan producers fabricated. The homoerotic relation implied in the video shows apparitional aspect of the aura, in that it is the non-visible subtext that haunts back to what is visualized on the screen through, opening up an auratic distance between seen and unseen, appearance and disappearance.

The video remake *Destiny* connects fragmented footage from over thirty films and television dramas using background songs from the video game *The Imperial Dragons* with sexually ambiguous lyrics. The repeated stanza matched to the footage always starts with two indeterminate entities identified only as “who” and “whom”. Although certain specific historical locales or events are named that allude to the context of the lyrics, the certainty of the context is undermined by the concealment of the identity of the “doer” behind the “doing.” For instance, the line, “Lost in the Eight-Diagram tactics. The fragrance diminished, and the jade perished,” constructs an undefinable subject position. In the original context of *Three Kingdoms* from which the lyrics were adapted, the subject is Lu Xun (陆逊 183 - 245), a male general who has lost in “Eight-Diagram tactics,” yet the clause, “The fragrance diminished and the jade perished,” is traditionally associated with a female beauty who dies young, and in the video game from which the background music is adapted, it refers to a female character. However, when the two clauses are juxtaposed, the contexts of both *The Three Kingdoms* and *The Imperial Dragon* are subverted. The former clause de-substantiates the female subjectivities indicated by the latter clause, and the latter clause destabilizes the former clause’s implication of the male general. Divorced from its original context, the hypothetical subject position in the lyrics functions as an

empty signifier, upon which undefinable subjectivities are crystallized.

The video editor does not resolve such internal contradictions of gender identity but rather appropriates footage of female stars to “perform” the male generals in *Three Kingdoms* and provides a “cast list” with the names of the male generals “played” by the female performers. To decontextualize the image of the female stars from the original film or television drama from which the footage is drawn, the video editor has selected close-ups and medium shots that separate the female performers from the surrounding context of the drama. For the shot corresponding to “lost in Eight-Diagram tactics, the fragrance diminished and the jade perished,” a female figure is shown looking at a bamboo scroll, yet the scene cuts abruptly without revealing what is written on the bamboo scroll, who wrote it, or the female figure’s reaction to it. Without such information in the subsequent shot, the viewer no longer identifies the body of the female performer according to the role performed in the original footage but can only make sense of the image by referring to the male general shown in the “cast list” and implied by the line “lost in the Eight-Diagram tactics.” As a result, the contradictory gendered position in the line is manifested as a split between the female performer and the male roles performed, and the contextual auras of the female performers and the male historical figures are diminished, because the coherence between the character and the original fictional or historical world is disrupted in this hybridized juxtaposition.

As the footage of each female performer is separated from its context in fragmented shots, the pseudo-continuity editing used by the editor of the video connects decontextualized footage from various television series and thus makes sense out of the senseless fragments. Since the close-up image of the female performer is detached from the background in this shot as well as from the subsequent action in the following shot, the footage becomes an “affection-image”,

theorized by Deleuze (1986) as a face isolated from its milieu with only associative or anticipatory roles, which formulates a movement of expression rather than that of extension (87-91). This editing tactic turns the movement of *extension*, with the face of the female performer dissociated from the continuous movement in the extended space of its source text, to *expression*, with only an expressive glance without an object, and an associative potential that anticipates the object of gaze to come. The editor of the video skillfully constructs an “eye-line match” between the female performers in contiguous shots, giving the impression that the two characters are looking at each other. For example, at the beginning of the video, the female performer Liu Tao (刘涛) is sitting on a horse and looking toward the left of the screen; the following shot cuts to a close-up of the eyes of another female performer, Jiang Xin (蒋欣), above a veil, looking to the right, and quickly cuts back to the same shot featuring Liu Tao advancing on the horse, looking left. In fact, the footage is taken from two separate films: that of Jiang Xin from the historical drama, *City of Desperate Love* (2015), and that of Liu Tao from *Nirvana in Fire* (2015). However, the pseudo-eye-line match that the editor has manipulated connects the footage as if it is a shot-reverse in a single film, visualizing Guan Yu (关羽 160–220), the male general “performed” by Jiang Xin (figure 1), exchanging glances with Lu Su (鲁肃 172-201), the male strategist “performed” by Liu Tao (figure 2). Though the eye-line match becomes perceivable in the pseudo-continuity editing, it is not meaningful without a narrative: thus, the editor uploads a historical anecdote of a meeting between Lu Su and Guan Yu that corresponds to this scene. As such, the pseudo-continuity editing creates the impression of the visual coherence between fragments of footage, while the original context indicated in the historical records, uploaded as bullet-subtitles, provides a plausible interpretation of the eye-line match.



Figure 4.1 Jiang Xin Looking Right



Figure 4.2 Liu Tao Looking Left

In some cases, the editor manipulates a transitional object to create a visual illusion of a pseudo point-of-view shot between seemingly disconnected gazes. The trick of using a transitional object can be found in a sequence in the middle of the video, starting with footage of a high-angle long shot taken from *Kung Fu Cult Master* (1993), showing female performer Zhang Min (张敏) sitting on a horse, accompanied by a group of soldiers, with a railing included in the shot. The camera imitates a downward gaze at Zhang Min, positioned on a high angle (figure 3), and dollies in to focus on Zhang Min up to the railing left out of the frame (figure 4). However, with the previous shot in the original footage removed, the source of the gaze is obscured. Instead, a close-up follows from *A Chinese Ghost Story II* (1990), featuring Joey Wong sitting in a sedan chair and lifting her veil as if to look out through the window of a chamber (figure 5). The editor then cuts back to the previous scene, using a medium close-up of Zhang Min on horseback looking upward, and directing her gaze to the viewer (figure 6). Only after the final shot can the viewer retroactively understand that it is Zhou Yu (周瑜 175–210), performed

by Joey Wong, who is looking downward at Sun Ce (孙策 175–200), performed by Zhang Min.

While the pseudo-point-of-view shot that connects the footage from different sources might lead to spatial confusion, since the sedan chair can only proceed on the ground level, the continuity editing indicates that Zhou Yu remains upstairs, projecting a downward gaze. Such spatial discontinuity is eliminated by a graphic match of the transitional object: the railing in the first shot bleeds into the lower part of the railing in the second shot in a quick cut, which creates a visual connection between two disparate settings. The apparent disconnection between the two scenes prevents the viewer from passively assuming spatial contiguity between the shots, yet the editor's suggestive attempt to connect the incongruous locales motivates them to make sense of this seemingly senseless connection in their bullet-subtitles by fabricating BL narratives for the plot-less video. One subtitle indicates that Zhou Yu married Sun Ce because of the glance that they exchanged, which is a BL subtext the viewer fabricated out of the original historical materials. Another tries to explain the spatial inconsistency by suggesting that Sun Ce was already dead at that time and the images shown represent Zhou Yu reminiscing. As such, the pseudo-point-of-view shots in this sequence provoke a carnivalesque play of homoerotic subtexts that supplement the aura of the queer couples implicitly suggested by the video: removed from the streaming images on the screen, the homoerotic subtext remains at a distance from the manifest content of the video, yet it returns to the screen in an apparitional manner via the suggestive power of the pseudo-continuity editing.



Figure 4.3 Zhang Min in a Long Shot



Figure 4.4 Zhang Min in a Long Shot



Figure 4.5 Wang Zuxian Looking left



Figure 4.6 Zhang Min Looking Up

Acousmatic Aesthetics: “Brain Supplementing” the Voiceless Voice

The phenomenal success of the gender-switching video *Destiny* inspired numerous video adaptations within the *Three Kingdoms* fan community. Rather than provide a group portrait of

the famous historical figures in the *Three Kingdoms*, video editors' adaptations tend to focus on the fabrication of homoerotic relations between two or three figures in a historical event. Subsequent video editors within the fan community have continued to use the pseudo-continuity approach established by *Destiny*. The homoerotic subtext also shows a spectral aura that subsists within the video materials in an absent-presence, not only as a (in)visible subtext imbricated in the visible image in the pseudo-continuity editing, but also as a voiceless voice not clearly stated but alluded to by a fictional dialogue constructed by the author between characters via video subtitles, bullet-subtitles, or a soundtrack appropriated from different sources. However, the dialogue is still too fragmented for viewers to construct a coherent narrative; consequently, the gaps are filled in by the imaginings of fan viewers uploaded as bullet-subtitles in *bilibili* or as comments on other media platforms. These comments are typically marked as *naobu* (脑补), a term from Chinese cybertalk that translates as "brain supplementing". This term was originally coined in the context of Japanese anime and refers to the fictional narrative constructed by fan viewers to cover certain inconsistencies within the text or elaborate on certain cues within the text. The use of this term "brain supplementing" shows that fans willingly acknowledge their interpretations as misappropriations in a self-parodic tone, supplementing the *contextual aura* enveloping the original text with a *subtextual aura* while maintaining the incongruity between the text and the subtext.

The heterogeneous collage of verbal, visual, and audio materials and the "brain supplementing" by the homoerotic subtext exemplifies the acousmatic aesthetics that challenges gender norms by disrupting the internal coherency of voice and body. The regulatory practice of heteronormativity rests upon an internal coherence of the subject and must be made intelligible in the continuity of a normative relation between sex, gender, sexual practices, and desire (Judith

Butler 2002, 23). The cinematic apparatus establishes female proper by projecting a female voice onto a female body under the name of a female as if the voice is internal to the body of the performer (Kaja Silverman 1988, 150). However, the unsynchronized “voice” imposed by fan producers and viewers upon the body of female performers disintegrates such acousmatic consistency in an “acousmatic aesthetic.” According to Michel Chion (1999), the acousmatic denotes an artificial integration of body, voice, and name, including such situations as someone speaking in the voice of someone else, disembodied voices removed from an image, a name without identity, or a body without a place (36–48). The acousmatic pastiche deconstructs the proper gendered body by showing body, voice, and name not as internally linked but rather as combined by external relations. In a similar vein, by removing the soundtrack of the original footage and substituting subtitles or a soundtrack from other sources, gender-switching videos disintegrate the organic relation between spoken lines voiced by the performer, the body of the performer, and the role played by the performer. The audiovisual materials within the video thus become an assemblage of meaningless fragments, and the homoerotic narrative outside of the video as “brain supplemented” by users is what connects them and provides the source of the “aura” of the video.

The fan video *Coldness of the Northern Wind* is a classic example of a gender-switching video that employs acousmatic aesthetics to fragmentize the original source narrative and that calls for “brain supplementing” on the part of the fan viewers. The video features a homoerotic romance between male historical figures Cao Cao (曹操 155–220) and Xun Yu (荀彧 163–212), represented by footage of the female performers Zhao Wei (赵薇) from *Red Cliff* (2008) and *Painted Skin II* (2012) and Gao Yuanyuan (高圆圆) from the *Great Qin Empire I* (2009). The video is based on the historical event of Xun Yu’s death, which was suspected to have been a

forced suicide due to his opposition to Cao Cao's ascension to duke. The erotic dynamics are not only implied by a pseudo-eye-line match as in *Destiny*, but are also actualized in artificial "dialogue" between the characters. The soundtrack and subtitles of the original footage are removed, and the mute bodies of the female performers are matched with new subtitles added by the editor. For example, in an artificial dialogue constructed by the editor, Xun Yu, performed by Gao Yuanyuan, is captured in a middle shot, speaking silently; the subtitle reads, "a nobleman cares for people with the code of ethics, so you should not do that," which comes from a letter written by Xun Yu as documented in *The History of the Later Han*. However, the lip movements of the female performer do not match the pronunciation of the line, preventing the voice from being internalized into the body of the female performer. In this respect, the video generates an acousmatic inconsistency between the body and the subject position of the male strategist presupposed by the line, and the contextual aura surrounding the female performer and the male characters is deconstructed accordingly. Supplementing the aura of this video is the homoerotic relation "brain supplemented" by the fan commentator to make sense of the fragmented audiovisual materials in the video.

The acousmatic pastiche can be achieved not only by subtitling the words to match the performance of the mute body but also by adding a disembodied voice onto the voiceless body. This is shown in a climactic shot in the gender-switching video *Wind and Rain in the Fall of Jianmen* that features a homoerotic relationship between the historical male figures Zhuge Liang, Wei Yan (魏延 ?–234), and Jiang Wei (姜维 202–264). The video revolves around the last days Jiang Wei and Wei Yan spent with Zhuge Liang before his death. As Zhuge Liang, represented by footage of the female character Princess Taiping from *Palace of Desire* (2000), turns around, Jiang Wei, represented by footage of the female character Mu Nianci from *The Legend of the*

Condor Heroes (2003), looks up and cries out, “Prime Minister!” (丞相) in a female voice. The lip-synching between the sound “Prime Minister” and the female performer gives the disembodied voice a corporeal register and anchors the character’s physical presence in the fictional space of the diegesis. Though the female voice offers the image of the female performer an imitation of corporeal reality, the fan persists in identifying the image as the male general, Jiang Wei, instead of the female performer or the female role being performed in the original footage. As exemplified in one of the barrage-subtitles that says, “Jiang’s cry breaks my heart,” fan viewers recognize the subject position of the cry according to the “name tag” inscription in the bullet-subtitles that states it is the male general Jiang Wei being represented here. In this pastiche, by putting the words to be vocalized by a male into the body of a female performer, the disjuncture between the subject position of the enunciation and the flesh of the subject to be enunciated is maximized. Making the video even more ambiguous, the female voice is taken not from the footage of *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* but from the soundtrack of the television series *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (1994). In this respect, not only is the gap between the gendered subject position and the corporeal body enlarged, but also the artificiality of the consistency between body and voice is revealed.

The disintegration of the visual, verbal, and acoustic consistency of the subject can also be manifested as the vocal part of the human voice separated from a corresponding image, or a musical soundtrack to moving images without dialogue. In *The 12th Year of Jianxing*, the author has constructed a pseudo prelude consisting of a black screen accompanied by lines vocalized by actresses from different television dramas. After each line is pronounced, the names of the male figures gradually appear on the screen, suggesting under whose name those words are spoken in this video. When the sentence being voiced is detached from the visualized body of the female

performer in the original footage, it becomes a meaningless voice off and could be recontextualized and spoken by any of the subjects. For instance, at the end of the prelude, a female voice says, “Don’t think you know everything,” spoken by Zhou Xun in *Painted Skin II*, and another female voice responds by saying, “I don’t want to live by knuckling under you, just kill me,” spoken by Lin Ying from the adaptation of *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber* (2002). However, as the line is divorced from its context in the original drama, it is unclear who is speaking to whom. Only when the names Fei Yi (费祎 ?–253) and Yang Yi (杨仪 ?–235) appear on the black screen is it possible to ascertain that the narrative subject “I” in the sentence is Yang Yi, the “you” being addressed is Fei Yi, and the dialogue indicates that Fei Yi kills Yang Yi. The killing scene is actualized in a pseudo-point-of-view shot in the main body of the video following the prelude, in which Fei Yi, represented by Zhou Xun, turns back and looks at the camera, with subsequent shots featuring a wine cup falling to the floor and Yang Yi, represented by Lin Jing, dying. The “voice off” in the prelude is, therefore, made into a “voice on” by the bodily performance of the female performers, yet the voice, body, and name of the subject remain in separate parts of the video without being integrated into a consistent whole.

The acousmatic inconsistency builds an apparitional time-lag into the video as the immediate meaning-making of the lip-synching is postponed, waiting for “brain supplementing” by a future viewer. This phenomenon is aptly demonstrated by one of the fan comments on the video *12th Year of Jian Xing*, posted two years after the video was uploaded, that read: “triggered by this cry of ‘Prime Minister,’ I have ‘brain supplemented’ a hundred thousand words of the homoerotic fiction of Wei/Liang”. Based on the ambiguous line “don’t think of yourself as knowing everything” spoken by Fei Yi in *12th Year of Jianxing*, another fan fiction writer made her own gender-switching novel adaptation of the video, suggesting that what Yang Yi doesn’t

know is the presence of a homoerotic triangle between Zhuge Liang, Jiang Wei, and Wei Yan. In this respect, the meaning-making process of the video is disrupted as the contextual aura is deconstructed by the acousmatic aesthetics. It can only be made sense of through the subtextual aura “brain supplemented” by viewers familiar with the *Three Kingdoms* who are able to draw a secret connection between the fragmented visual and audio texts which are occasionally addressed by the title and comments.

The queer subtext “brain-supplemented” by fan producers is auratic as it shows a temporal distance between production and reception, and an imaginary distance between perception and conception: the time-lag between the time of production and the time of reception that the lip-synching technique attempts to suture is augmented by the acousmatic aesthetic of the video remake. From the fragmented collage of the audiovisual materials, the viewer might notice the spectral presence of a secret connection between sound and image that disrupts the synchronicity of the streaming materials, and enlarges the imaginary distance between the audiovisual materials and the subtext that is not immediately perceivable. This secret connection, however, does not reside in the lost origin of the corporeal consistency between name, sound, and body at the time of production, as in the case of a contextual aura. Instead, its absent-presence can only be found in the commentator’s retroactive interpretation or appropriation that disrupt the audiovisual consistency and bring about the subtextual aura of gender-switching videos.

The (Im)possible Homoerotic Archive

Pseudo-continuity editing and acousmatic pastiche are not simply aesthetic choices to enhance the audiovisual aura of the homoerotic subtext but result from a strategic negotiation with state-imposed sanctions on homoerotic materials. As Yang and Xu note, the sexual conservatism of the CCP has established a social taboo against “abnormal sexual behaviors” that

is often enforced by anti-pornography campaigns using a censorship logic of “homosexuality = abnormality = pornography” (Yang and Xu 2016, 169). Under this conflation of homosexuality and pornography, the anti-pornography campaigns initiated in 2004, 2007, and 2010 not only resulted in the shutting down of more than 10,000 pornographic websites, but also forced the closure of thousands of BL forums, websites, and personal blogs (Yang and Xu 2016, 170). Following this mass closure of BL forums, Jinjiang Literature implemented a system of self-censorship with automatic filtering of sensitive words, manual review by the administrator, and the recruitment of readers for self-checking. However, such efforts didn’t shield Jinjiang from the 2014 anti-pornography campaign that resulting in a ban on materials deemed pornographic or relating to sexual minorities (Yang Ling and Xu Yanrui 2016, 174). Since then, all chapters within fictional works uploaded to Jinjiang containing homosexual intercourse are temporarily locked and not published until the author has revised the content in line with website censorship guidelines.

At this initial stage in which censorship primarily targeted words, fan fiction producers attempted to evade the censorship machine by making soft-core erotic scenes in gender-switching videos a visual substitute for the verbal depiction of a sexual scene. For example, chapter 16 of the fan fiction *Youth of Jiangdong* was revised to remove a scene involving sexual intercourse between Zhou Yu and Sun Ce. The missing erotic scene was migrated to a gender-switching video, *Unsayable Thoughts*, which attempted to make visible the censored homosexual intercourse from *Youths of Jiangdong* by appropriating the footage of sexual scenes between two female performers from the film *The East Is Red*. The series of montages begins with the close-up of a flame being blown out by the wind, signifying the start of the sexual act, followed by a hand gently stroking a leg beneath its covering fabric, a hand caressing a naked leg after the

jump cut, finally ending with the camera tilting down from a naked back to a hand clasping a sheet. However, such attempts have proved vain, as censorship has continued to extend its scope from the verbal to the audiovisual, and penalties have grown increasingly severe. Since 2018, *bilibili* and other video-sharing websites have been shut down to remove illicit sexual materials under pressure from the Cyberspace Administration of China, and on January 10, 2019, bullet-subtitles were finally included in the scope of the censorship. Concomitantly, the homoerotic fiction writer, *Tianyi* was sentenced to prison for ten years for selling “sodomy novels,” triggering significant panic among the fan community. Subsequently, the video *Unsayable Thoughts* has not been accessible since May 2019: it is uncertain whether it was deleted by website censorship or if the author preemptively removed the work to avoid prosecution.

The gender-switching videos that have survived censorship conceal homoerotic stories that are not verbally, visually, or audibly manifested but are hidden within an implicit subtext that draws on the collective memory of the fan community. Because content that is explicitly shown in a video can be easily detected and censored, fan producers and viewers have tried to enable homoerotic materials to survive symbolically by encrypting them in the form of intertextual relations between television dramas, historical records, fan fictions, and other gender-switching videos, embedding messages that can only be decoded by members of the fan community who are familiar with the fan fiction subtext and the source text of the film footage. For example, the video *Golden Millet Dream* depicts a BL story between Zhou Yu and Sun Ce, represented by footage of Joey Wong and Zhang Min from *Kung Fu Cult Master, A Chinese Legend* (1991), and *Swordsman II*. The storyline unfolds through intertextual allusions between Xu Ke’s film *Swordsman II* and the video *Promise a Half-life*, both of which depict a protagonist’s return to a lover after a pseudo-death without revealing their former identity. As stated in one of the bullet-

subtitle comments, “Recommend the fan fiction *Promise a Half-life*, you can’t understand the video without reading it.” Without prior knowledge of major works in the fan community, it is not possible to understand the intertextuality that undergirds the unfolding of the story’s narrative. Likewise, what finally bypass the censors are the collective memories of the homoerotic subtext that are not manifested in any targetable text but concealed in the intertextuality between the source text and the hypertext.

Generating a referential framework of homoerotic materials that are no longer available due to censorship, each remade gender-switching video functions as an archive that salvages the collective memories of the fan community. As Wolfgang Ernst (2012) suggests, digital platforms such as YouTube differ from institutional structured archives in being generative archives dependent on tagging by content providers (9–10). A gender-switching video uploaded to *bilibili* can accordingly be categorized as a digital archive in that the self-tagged titles and subtitles operate as a meta-library to guide the viewer in navigating the fan fictions that are still available, as well as those that have already been deleted. However, unlike digital archives such as YouTube or Wikipedia, the tag in each bullet-subtitle does not refer to the image beneath it but rather to the homoerotic subtext the image conceals. Likewise, the videos and the bullet-subtitles sampled represent not only the fan fictions circulated online but also the fans’ memories of homoerotic materials that are no longer accessible. As such, the video functions as an impossible archive of disappearance with an apparitional *tempaurality*, theorized as a “delayed transfer of what would otherwise vanish into the darkness” (Wolfgang Ernst 2012, 144), which implies a temporal disparity between the time of reception and the time of production. The gender-switching video therefore manifests the “queer aura” with *tempaurality*, a time-lag between the “here and now” of the manifested content of the video and the “there and then” of the queer

subtext already censored in the past and waiting to be decoded by a future reader in their interpretations and appropriations. It is only by deferring immediate access to homoerotic materials to the future interpretation of viewers that the gay subtext can symbolically survive censorship and pass on the collective memories of the fan community.

Conclusion: Writing Toward Disappearance

This chapter suggests that gender-switching videos show a subtextual aura with an imaginary distance between perceivable and unperceivable, and a temporal distance between absent and presence. This homoerotic subtext can neither be immediately perceived in the appearance of the appropriated materials nor traced in its original context. Rather, it is through the detour of a temporal distance that it is possible to see the homoerotic materials disappeared via censorship come back to haunt the appearance of the video remake, retrospectively anticipating their future disappearance in an anticipated government campaign.

Accordingly, the gender-switching video can be seen as a form of writing toward disappearance that is aimed at reproducing not the manifest content or context, but instead the now-unavailable homoerotic subtext in the ritual performance of their collective memory. It is significant in providing a nomadic tactic for fan producers to evade censorship, as the BL subtext moves from fiction to video, from main text to comments, and from titles to barrage-subtitles, a strategy which was especially effective between 2016 and 2019. Once censorship became more severe in its magnitude and intensity in 2019, when *bilibili* publicly announced its censorship guidelines, the effectiveness of this tactic has become questionable. It is the anticipated disappearance of the genre and the retroactive urgency to salvage the censored materials that structured the auratic distance of video in times of profound uncertainty.

Chapter 4, in full, is a reprint of the material as it appears in *Feminist Media Studies* 20.4 (2020): 496-514. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

REFERENCES

- 315littlecat. 2019. "Utopia." *Weibo*. <https://weibo.com/u/2886204390>
- Asimov, Isaac. *Gold: the final science fiction collection*. Harper Prism, 1995.
- Baker, Lucy. "Girl! Version: The feminist framework for regendered characters in fanwork." *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, 4(1) : 23-36. 2016.
- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. duke university Press, 2007.
- Baranovitch, N., *China's new voices: popular music, ethnicity, gender, and politics, 1978-1997*. University of California Press. 2003.
- Benjamin, Walter, and John Osborne. *The origin of German tragic drama*. London: nlb, 1977.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Little history of photography." In *Selected Writings, Volume 2. Part 2: 1931-1934*. Translated and edited by Michael W. Jennings, Gary Smith, and Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Belknap Press. 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Critical theory and society a reader*. Routledge, 2020. 255-263.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Selected Writings, Volume 3: 1931-1934*. Translated and edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: Belknap Press. 2006.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Understanding Brecht (New Edition)*. Verso, 2003.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and free will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. Routledge, 2014.
- Bilibili. 2017. "Announcement on the Advanced Management on Politics Related Content." Accessed July 1, 2019. <https://www.bilibili.com/blackboard/activity-shizhengmanager.html>
- Bordwell, David, and Yasujiro Ozu. *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*. Vol. 19. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith. *Film art: An introduction*. Vol. 7. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.
- Bortolotti, Gary R., and Linda Hutcheon. "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and "Success": Biologically." *New Literary History* 38.3 (2007): 443-458.
- Braester, Yomi. *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

- Burgoyne, Robert. *The Hollywood Historical Film*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
- Busse, Kristina and Lothian, Alexis. "Bending gender: Feminist and (trans) gender discourses in the changing bodies of slash fan fiction." In *Internet Fiction (s)*, edited by Ingrid Hotz-Davies, Anton Kirchofer, 105–27. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2009.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge. 2002.
- Cardwell, Sarah. "Pause, rewind, replay: Adaptation, intertextuality and (re) defining adaptation studies." *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*. Ed. Cutchins Dennis, Krebs Katja, and Voigts Eckart. Routledge, 2018 : 7-17.
- Cattrysse, Patrick. "An evolutionary view of cultural adaptation: Some considerations." *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation*. Ed. Cutchins Dennis, Krebs Katja, and Voigts Eckart. Routledge, 2018. 40-54.
- Ch'ing, Liu, Liu Chün, and Richard B. Mather. Shih-shuo Hsin-yu. *2002A New Account of Tales of the World, Second Edition*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2002.
- Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1999.
- Chouti. "The King of Yue and his Court". *Not Worth Recording*. Heilongjiang Art Press. 2013.
- Chouti. 2010. *The 81 Anecdotes*. Douban. <https://site.douban.com/106422/widget/works/15119/>
- Chouti. *The Veil and Somniloquy*. New Era Press, 2009.
- Chow, Y.F. and de Kloet, J., Blowing in the China Wind: engagements with Chineseness in Hong Kong's zhongguofeng music videos. *Visual Anthropology*, 24.2 (2010.): 59-76.
- Clark, Andy. "Beyond the Bayesian blur': predictive processing and the nature of subjective experience." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25.3-4 (2018): 71-87.
- Deleuze, Gilles. and Guattari, F. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* , translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press. 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The time-image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and repetition*. Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "The indexical and the concept of medium specificity." *differences* 18.1 (2007): 128-152.
- Edgeworth, Matt. "Grounded objects. Archaeology and speculative realism." *Archaeological dialogues* 23.1 (2016): 93-113.

Elsaesser, Thomas. *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema*. Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

Ernst, Wolfgang. 2012. "Aura and Temporality: the Insistence of the Archive." *Barcelona, España: MACBA. Web*. Accessed July 1, 2019. https://www.macba.cat/uploads/20131220/QP_29_Ernst_F.pdf

Feng, J., *Romancing the Internet: Producing and Consuming Chinese Web Romance*. Leiden: Brill. 2009.

Feng, Jin. *Romancing the Internet: Producing and consuming Chinese web romance*. Leiden: Brill. 2013.

Fenru. 2010. "The Border". *Tieba*. <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/832249467>

Fenru. 2011. "The Man Who Exists". *Tieba*. <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/1001478290>

Fenru. 2014. "The Chip". *Tieba*. <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/3102377680>

Fenru. 2015. "Zhuge Liang's Modern Life". *Tieba*. <https://tieba.baidu.com/p/3661519228>

Freyr. 2018. "the unbearable length of life." *Lofter*. https://sunnyfreyr.lofter.com/post/34a9cf_12b375a32

Fujimoto, Yukari. "Transgender: Female hermaphrodites and male androgynes." Translated by Linda, Flores and Kazumi. Nagaike; translation edited by Sharalyn Orbaugh. *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* (27): 76–117. 2004.

Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Zero Books. 2011.

He Shiru 何世茹. 古风歌古典意象的传承和思考.(Gufeng Ge Gudian Yixiang de Chuancheng He Sikao, the inheritance and reflection on the classical symbolism in Archaic-wind Music). *Beifang Wenxue*, no.2 (2017) : 85-85.

Higson, Andrew. "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film." *British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Ed. Lester Friedman. London: UCL Press, 1996: 109–29.

Hou Dongyi 侯冬意. 试论古风歌曲的起步与现状以及前景(Shilun Gufeng Gequ de Qibu Yu Xianzhuang Ji Qianjing, A preliminary study on the starting up, status quo, and prospect of archaic-wind musics). *Wenxue Jiaoyu*. no.11 (2015): 104-107

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av13600500?from=search&seid=9111411845474907952>.

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av30268183?from=search&seid=8450343981823219155>.

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av942958?from=search&seid=9885254690964709081>

Huanhuncao. 2011. "Dingjun Mountain". *Jinjiang*.
<https://www.jjwxc.net/onebook.php?novelid=1333002>

Jenkins, Henry. "Transmedia 202: further reflections." *Confessions of an aca-fan* 31 (2011).

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge. 1992.

Jin Shasha 靳莎莎, 浅析古风音乐的创作 (Qianxi Gufeng Yinyue De Chuangzuo: A Preliminary Exploration of the Production of the Archaic-winds Music). *Yishujiaoyu*, no.1(2014) :116-117.

Jishengyuheqiliao. "the historical fanfiction is not RPS". *Weibo*.
https://weibo.com/u/2706415410?refer_flag=1001030103_&is_all=1

Johnson, Daniel. "Polyphonic/pseudo-synchronic: Animated writing in the comment feed of Nicovideo." *Japanese Studies* 33.3 (2013): 297-313.

Karavika. 2016. *Lonely Sword*, [策瑜]孤剑. *bilibili*. Video, 02:11.
<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av3654208?from=search&seid=15146327571837635868>

Kim, Jihoon. *Between Film, Video, and the Digital: Hybrid Moving Images in the Post-media Age*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016.

Kirby, Vicki. *Quantum anthropologies: Life at large*. Duke University Press, 2013.

Lacan, Jacques, and Jacques-Alain Miller. *The ethics of psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The seminar of Jacques Lacan*. Routledge, 2013.

Lacan, Jacques, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Alan Sheridan. *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*. Routledge, 2018.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: The first complete edition in English*. WW Norton & Company, 2006.

Lacan, Jaques. *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V III*. Polity Press, 2017.

Laclau, E. *On Populist Reason*. New York : Verso. 2005.

Landy, Marcia. *Cinematic Uses of the Past*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996.

Lanno 爱泡芙. "刘卫同人——参商"(Liuwei Tongren Shenshang). *bilibili*. August 25, 2018. Accessed February 13, 2019.

Legal Evening. "Official Requirements on Assessing Security of Barrage-subtitles" October 20. 2016.

Leibold, J. 2010. More than a category: Han supremacism on the Chinese internet. *The China Quarterly* 203 : 539-559.

- Li, Jinying. "The interface affect of a contact zone: Danmaku on video-streaming platforms." *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4.3 (2017): 233-256.
- Lim, Song Hwee. *Celluloid comrades: Representations of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006.
- Liuwan. 2010. "Ten Years." *Shugong*.
http://shugong.igetbbs.com/default.php?mod=forum_post&a=list&forum_topic_id=109036
- Luomanyu. 2016. *Golden Millet Dream*, [策瑜][三国][性转]黄粱一梦. *bilibili*. Video, 01:49.
<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av3840792?from=search&seid=60829402819302691>
- Manovich, Lev. *AI aesthetics*. Moscow: Strelka Press, 2018.
- Marila, Marko. "Introductory notes to a speculative epistemology of archaeology." PhD dissertation, 2020.
- McClellan, Ann. "Redefining genderswap fan fiction: A Sherlock case study." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 17 (2014).
- Metz, Christian. "From the Imaginary Signifier." *Visual and other pleasures*. Eds. Baudry, Jean-Louis, and Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 694–701.
- Momingqimiao, 墨明棋妙的小站(*Momingqimiao de Xiaozhan*, website for *Momingqimiao*) , accessed February 13, 2019, <https://site.douban.com/mmqmusic/>.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Baudry, Jean-Louis, and Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 711–722.
- Nianyuxi. 2016. *Destiny*, 天命. *bilibili*. Video, 05:01.
<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av3583713?from=search&seid=4955130820781469025>
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The will to power*. Vintage, 1968.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche: The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Novikov, Dmitriĭ Aleksandrovich. *Cybernetics: from past to future*. Vol. 47. Springer, 2015.
- Parrinder, Patrick. "Memory, Interiority and Historicity: Some Factors in the Early Novel." *New Directions in the History of the Novel*. Eds. Patrick Parrinder, Andrew Nash, and Nicola Wilson. London: Palgrave, 2014: 91–102.
- People.cn*. 2019. "Management Specifications of Online Short Video Platforms." Accessed July 1, 2019. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0110/c1001-30513562-2.html>
- Plaks Andrew. "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative." *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Ed. Andrew H. Plaks, Princeton University Press, 1977.

Puyuansongdedao. 2017. *2017. Wind and Rain in the Fall of Jianmen*, 风雨剑门秋. *bilibili*. Video, 03:59.

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av13132239?from=search&seid=15981858840453781698>

Puyuansongdedao. 2017. *The 12th Year of Jianxing*, 建兴十二年. *bilibili*. Video, 03:44.

<https://www.bilibili.com/video/av10573521?from=search&seid=2974270205906803644>

Quendianna. 2018. *Coldness of the Northern Wind*, [曹攸彧][性转]北风其凉. *bilibili*. Video, 03:59. <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av19466748?from=search&seid=1149168712599463298>

Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London, 2000.

Sang, Tze-lan. *The emerging lesbian: Female same-sex desire in modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2003.

Sexton, Jamie. *Music, sound and multimedia*. Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Shannon, Claude Elwood. "A mathematical theory of communication." *ACM SIGMOBILE mobile computing and communications review* 5.1 (2001): 3-55.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1988.

Simondon, Gilbert. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Translated by Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing. 2017.

Strong, Jeremy. "Straight to the source? Where adaptations, artworks, historical films, and novels connect." *Adaptation* 12.2 (2019): 165-184.

Sun Weibo 孙炜博. 文化批判视野下的网络古风音乐探析 (Wenhua Pipan Shiye Xia de Wangluo Gufeng Yinyue Tanxi- An exploration of the internet gufeng music under the perspective of cultural studies). *Yinyue Chuanbo*. no.3 : 52-57. . 2017.

Szeto, M.M. "Intra-local and inter-local Sinophone: rhizomatic politics of Hong Kong writers Saisai and Wong Bik-wan". In *Sinophone studies: a critical reader*, edited by Shi, Shu-mei, Chien-Hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, 191-206. New York : Columbia University Press. 2013.

Tegmark, Max. "Parallel universes." *Scientific American* 288.5 (2003): 40-51.

Tian Xiaofei. Slashing Three Kingdoms: A Case Study in Fan Production on the Chinese Web. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27. 1 (2015.): 224-277.

Tian, Xiaofei. *The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center. 2017.

Tu Jinmei and Zhou Hangyu 屠金梅,周航宇.竹笛音乐在当代大众媒介环境中的继承与创新——以竹笛在“古风音乐”中的运用为例 (Zhudi Yinyue Zai Dangdai Dazhong Meijie

Huanjing Zhong De Jicheng yu Chuangxin, the inheritance and innovations of the music of bamboo flute – A case study of the usage of the bamboo flute in the archaic style music). *Yinyue Chuanbo*. no.3 (2018) : 52-57.

Tu, Wei-ming. Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center. *Daedalus* 120. 2 (1991) : 1-32.

Voci, Paola. *China on video: Smaller-screen Realities*. Routledge, 2010.

Voigts-Virchow, Eckart. "Heritage and Literature on Screen: Heimat and Heritage." *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*. Ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 123–37.

Vranas, Peter BM. "Do cry over spilt milk: Possibly you can change the past." *The Monist* 88.3 (2005): 370-387.

Wang Aiping 王爱苹. 找寻歌声中的“完整自我”——由古风音乐谈自觉民族文化意识的苏醒 (Xunzhao Gesheng Zhong de Wanzheng Ziwo – You Gufeng Yinyue Tan Zijue Minzu Wenhua Yishi de Suxing”, Searching for the integral self in the song – from the archaic style music to the revival of national consciousness). *Anyang Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao*, no.3 (2014): 142-145.

Wang Cao and Wang Ruiqi 王操, 王睿琪. 古风音乐发展与研究述评 (Gufeng Yinyue Fazhan Yu Yanjiu Shuping, A study on the development of the Archaic-winds Music and the Research Articles on It) . *Wenxue Jiaoyu*, no. 11 (2018) : 48.

Wang Zheng 王铮. 同人的世界, 一种小众文化的研究 (Tongren de Shijie, Yizhong Xiaozhong Wenhua de Yanjiu, The world of fan fiction, a study of a kind of online minority culture). Beijing : Xinhua Chubanshe. 2008.

Wang, Ban. *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Wang, David Der-Wei. "Post-Loyalism." In *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Shi, Shu-mei, Chien-Hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, 93-116. New York : Columbia University Press. 2013.

Wang, David Der-wei. "Post-loyalism." *Sinophone studies: A critical reader*. Ed. Shumei Shih, Chien-Hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernard. Columbia University Press, 2013 : 93-116.

Wang, David Der-wei. *The monster that is history: history, violence, and fictional writing in twentieth-century China*. University of California Press, 2004.

WeirdA_ . “the Three Kingdoms fanfiction writer”. *Weibo*. <https://weibo.com/u/5745184867>

Weiser, Frans. "Contextualizing history-as-adaptation: An interdisciplinary comparison of historical revisionism." *Adaptation* 12.2 (2019): 105-117.

Wenzijun. 2008. “Living in Three Kingdoms: the lover.” *Jinjiang*. <https://www.jjwxc.net/onebook.php?novelid=304429>

Wenzijun. *The Flower Across the Ridge*. Self-published, 2013.

Woon, C.Y., China's contingencies: Critical geopolitics, Chinese exceptionalism and the uses of history. *Geopolitics*, 23(1), pp.67-95. 2018.

Xinghedaozhuan. "Is historical fanfiction RPS?" *Weibo*.
<https://weibo.com/5529415972/KwhdGbPga?type=comment>

Xue Dongyan 薛冬艳.从网络传播到现场表演——中国当代“古风音乐”观察与思考 (Cong Wangluo Chuanbo Dao Xianchang Biaoyan, from the internet circulation to on-site performance – Observations and Reflections on Contemporary Chinese “Archaic-winds music”). *Yinyue Chuanbo*, no.1: 42-49. 2015.

Yang, Ling, and Xu Yanrui. “‘The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name’: The Fate of Chinese Danmei Communities in the 2014 Anti-Porn Campaign.” In *The End of Cool Japan: Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Challenges to Japanese Popular Culture*, edited by Mark McLelland, 163–183. London: Routledge. 2016.

Yang, Ling, and Xu Yanrui. “Queer Texts, Gendered Imagination, and Popular Feminism in Chinese Web Literature.” In *Queer/Tongzhi China: New Perspectives on Research, Activism and Media Cultures*, edited by Elisabeth L. Engebretsen, William F. Schroeder, Hongwei Bao, 131–152. Shanghai: NIAS Press. 2015.

Yanzixi. 2020. “‘The Incense Fire on Earth.’” *Jinjiang*.
<http://www.jjwxc.net/onebook.php?novelid=4991180&chapterid=4>

Yao Tingting 姚婷婷.中国当代古风歌曲的歌词特征. (Zhongguo Dangdai Gufeng Gequ De Geci Tezheng, the characteristics of the lyrics of contemporary Chinese Archaic-Winds musics). *Puyang Zhiye Jishu Xueyuan Xuebao*, 30. 1 (2017) : 124-126.

Yao Tingting 姚婷婷.中国当代古风音乐曲式形态特征探析. (Zhongguo Dangdai Gufeng Yinyue Qushi Xingtai Tezheng Tanxi, A Study on the musical form of contemporary Archaic style music in China). *Xiju Zhijia*. no.17: 44-46. 2016.

Ye Shuyang 叶舒阳.古风音乐”歌词中的文化符号解读. (Gufeng Yinyue Geci Zhong de Wenhua Fuhao Jiedu, a semiotic interpretation of the lyrics in Archaic Style Musics], *Yinyue Chuanbo*). no.2 (2018) :115-120.

Yiweihei. 2018. “Seven Years Itch.” *Sosadfun*. <https://sosadfun.link/posts/34044>

Yiweihei. 2018. “Thought.” *Sosadfun*. <https://sosadfun.link/posts/34046>

Yoshi. "洛阳花."(*Luoyanghua*, The flower of Luoyang). 5SING. May 13, 2017. Accessed February 15, 2019. <http://5sing.kugou.com/fc/15938593.html>.

Zeitlin, Judith T. *The Phantom Heroine*. University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Zheng, Xiqing. “Borderless Fandom and Contemporary Popular Cultural Scene in Chinese

Cyberspace.” PhD dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle. 2016.

Zhong, Xueping. *Mainstream culture refocused: television drama, society, and the production of meaning in reform-era China*. University of Hawaii Press, 2010.

Zhou Xianbao and Xiong Chuyue 周显宝,熊楚月.民间文艺复兴: 草根乐风与多元审美——中国网络古风流行音乐考察与研究 (Minjian Wenyi Fuxing :Caogen Yuefeng Yu Duoyuan Shenmei – Zhongguo Wangluo Gufeng Liuxing Yinyue Kaocha Yu Yanjiu, Folk Renaissance: grass root music style and aesthetic diversity – the exploration on the on-line Chinese archaic style music). *Nanjing Yishu Xueyuan Xuebao* no.1 (2016.): 101-109.

Zhu, Ying. *Television in post-reform China: Serial dramas, Confucian leadership and the global television market*. Routledge, 2013.

心如中箭枯木(Xinruzhongjiankumu), ”【新三国玄亮】烟花易冷"([Xinsanguxuanliang]yanhuayileng, Fireworks Easily Turn Cold). bilibili. August 20, 2017. Accessed February 13, 2019.

悄悄悄弥(qiaoqiaoqiaomi), "【河图】不见长安 MV."([hetu] bujianchangan MV, [hetu] Invisible Chang'an MV), bilibili. February 3, 2014. Accessed February 13, 2019.

河图(hetu), "不见长安."(*bujianchangan*, Invisible Chang'an). 5SING. March 26, 2013. Accessed February 13, 2019. <http://5sing.kugou.com/yc/1705474.html>