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by

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TITLE: DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE: STATE, CAPITAL, AND PRECARITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE DOCUMENTARY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jyotsna Kapur

Documentary filmmakers have been considered artists, authors, or intellectuals, but rarely as labor. This study investigates how the nature of work as well as life is changing for those who work in the expanding area of TV documentary in China, in the midst of China's shift towards a market-based economy. How do documentary makers reconcile their passion for documentary making with the increasingly precarious conditions of work? And, how do they cope with and resist the pressures of neoliberalism to survive in increasingly competitive local and global markets?

Based on data gathered through the interviews with 40 practitioners from January 2014 to August 2017 and my own experience as a director and worker in the Chinese documentary for a decade, I outline the particularity and complexity of the creative work in China. My research indicates that short-time contracts, moonlighting, low payments and long working hours, freelancing, internship, and obligatory networking have become normal working conditions for cultural workers. Without copyright over their intellectual creations, cultural workers are constrained to make a living as waged labor, compelled to sell their physical and mental labor in hours or in pieces. Self-responsibility and entrepreneurism have become the symbols of the neoliberal individual.

Following the career trajectories of my interviewees, I elaborate on the mechanisms by which cultural workers are selected, socialized and eliminated. When they decide to escape from

the production line, they use four types of strategies: going international, surviving in the market, switching to new media career, and sticking to journalistic ideals.

This dissertation also reveals that global production has intensified exploitation by increasing working hours through a 24/7 production line that works across national borders and time zones, amplifies competition by introducing global talent, and alienates local workers by imposing the so-called "universal" aesthetics of global production.

The crisis of cultural work is the outcome of the incapacity of the neoliberal imagination to imagine plausible and feasible futures for sustained creative work. It is through my research into the history of documentary production in China and conversations with cultural workers that I found explanations for the increasing precarity of work and possible forms of resistance to it in post-socialist China.

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In the end, I dedicate this work to my parents. Without them, I will not be the person I am today.

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CHAPTER 1

THEORIZING DOCUMENTARY MAKING AS CREATIVE LABOR

Introduction

Documentary production is an important sector of the Chinese cultural industries. Chinese television stations broadcasted a total of 70,000 hours of documentary programs in 2016. The investment in documentary industry in the same year was about 3.5 billion yuan (renminbi, the Chinese currency, approximately $508 million), yielding around 21 billion yuan ($3.1 billion) in advertising revenue (He, 2017). Thousands of people work from day to night, producing documentaries for the largest post-socialist nation today and the second largest economy in the world. The industry is also an ideological factory where cultural workers manufacture formulaic ideological products.

In this dissertation, I focus on the experience of labor in this industry. I explore the cultural practices and belief systems of documentary workers as they investigate the tension between autonomy and control, between the demands of the state and the market, and confront the difficult choice between pleasure in one's intellectual labor and the precarity of its working conditions. The subjects of my study are the practitioners, such as producers, directors, writers, camerapersons, sound recordists, gaffers, editors, musicians, fixers, and festival organizers.

I have personal experience in this industry. I started working as a documentary director in China Central Television (CCTV), the largest national TV station in China in 2004, and since then produced documentaries for various projects. I worked as an employee of television stations, as an independent filmmaker, and as a freelancer. I have experienced the same joy of self-expression as well as the depression brought about by the censorship system and market

insecurity that documentary workers shared with me during the course of writing this dissertation. When I began working as a filmmaker, I was motivated by the desire to find the truth through my camera, but I also worried about the life of financial insecurity of the temporary and freelance employment that I was entering. My coworkers, friends and I have had numerous discussions about the nature of our work in the past ten years. And, this dissertation is a way to grapple with the confusions that those conversations tried to clarify so obsessively.

I ask: What is the experience of working in the Chinese documentary industry? What are the attitudes and beliefs of documentary producers towards documentary practice as well as its role in society? What kind of factors shaped their documentaries? How do documentary practices change in response to the shift from a socialist to post-socialist society?

Historicizing the Chinese documentary

Documentary in China has played a different role from the liberal democracies in the United States or Europe. From its first propaganda forms to its recent transformation in the market economy, documentary has been explicitly stated as a mainstay of the nation-building project and national education in China. Following Lenin's view of documentary as the "visualization of political ideology," making documentary in China is like publishing the Party's newspaper (San, 2005, p. 354).

The development of Chinese documentary has passed through four stages: newsreel journalism, zhuanti pian (special topic documentary), independent documentary and commercial documentary. Since its birth in the 1920s, Chinese documentaries started as the newsreel. The function of the newsreel was to document historical moments, economic achievements and events of national pride. From the 1950s to 1980s, newsreel documentary was "not only ideologically driven but also systematically controlled by the government in terms of production,

distribution, and exhibition, including the organization of film viewers on a large scale" (Chu, 2007, p. 63). Under the influence of the Leninist view of documentary as the most powerful tool for mass education, documentary was considered a forceful form of visualized political argument in China at this stage.

In the 1980s, Chinese National TV stations began to produce documentary series called zhuanti pian (special topic documentary), literally special topic feature-length films that went beyond the focus in the newsreel to presenting a thesis or argument about culture. Notably, the three documentary series co-produced with Japan's NHK, *The Silk Road / Sichou zhilu* (Muto, 1980), *The Yangtz River/ Huashuo changjiang* (Dai, 1983), and *The Great Wall / Wang changcheng* (Liu, 1991), established a new television form that showcased grand national themes in a non-conventional way. The earlier documentaries completed scripting before shooting, relied mainly on staging and re-enactment as the main visual representation methods, and recorded sound in post-production, while zhuanti pian introduced spontaneous shooting, used location sound, replaced the voice-of-God narration with the presenter's on-site introduction, and focused on the local residents' lives instead of historical heroes. This new documentary genre was prevalent throughout the 1980s and since then, has remained the primary genre of non-fiction programming in China. Most of the 70,000 hours of documentaries produced in 2016 fall into this category.

From the early 1990s, documentary production has been divided into two camps: the "official" and the "independent." Wu Wenguang 's *Booming in Beijing/ Liulang Beijing* (1990) is widely regarded as the pioneering work of the independent documentary movement in China. The film portrayed the lives of five artists, all of whom have abandoned stable work, and lived a marginal, individualistic, freelance life, which was very rare in the country's collective

communist social life. The film is revolutionary, for it is the first time that Chinese filmmakers produced work outside of the national media system and represented the voice of individuals. The film drew on the fly-on-the-wall realistic style of American Direct Cinema. It attracted attention on international film festivals and established a documentary format completely different from the dogmatic "zhuanti pian" mode. Since then, more filmmakers joined this "new documentary movement", as Lu (2003) calls it, and produced ethnographic observational documentaries independently, among which are Duan Jingchuan's *No. 16* (1996)*, Barkhor South Street/ Bakuo nanjie 16* (1996) and Yang Tianyi's *Old Men/ Laoren* (2000).

In the meantime, China Central Television also launched a short documentary program called *Living Space/* Shenghuo kongjian in 1993, which presented a seven-minute story of ordinary, everyday Chinese life. It borrowed the observational documentary skills from the independent practitioners: handheld cameras, fly-on-the-wall observations, synchronous sound, and character driven narratives. Most of the current active Chinese documentarians are in one way or another influenced by this documentary program. They were either trained in this program or inspired by it to start their career in documentary production. I myself am one of them. I had a chance to intern in *Living space* in 1998 when I was a college student, and since then I was determined to be a documentary filmmaker in the future. I joined this program in 2004 and worked there till 2007 when I decided to make documentaries independently and then pursue my academic goals. It is in this phase that a dualistic structure of documentary production emerged in China.

The last stage is from 2011 up to the present, characterized by the industrialization of documentary production. Documentary works not only as a propaganda tool but also as a cultural commodity to generate profits. The commodity feature of documentary was not explored until

recently. The Chinese government was seeking to promote the nation's soft power internationally which, as defined by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability of a country to attract and persuade others do what it want without force or coercion (Nye, 1990, 2004). In this cultural war, documentary is considered as a powerful way of introducing Chinese culture to the outside world, and thus media organizations and the practitioners bear the pressure to produce more "universally appealing" work for the "go abroad strategy." As a result, China Central Television established a documentary channel in 2011, and the government published a regulation policy requiring each of the 34 satellite television channels to broadcast at least half an hour documentary programming every day starting from January 1st, 2014. The policies paved the ways for the fast growth of the documentary industry, which soon entered the era of "big-budget production." Documentary now turned into a big sector of the cultural industries that provided employment to a large number of its practitioners.

Significance of the dissertation

Documentary films have often been analyzed as film texts and as carriers of dominant or alternative ideologies but rarely are the practitioners considered as a social phenomenon in their own right. To fill the academic gap, this dissertation will focus on the life, play and work of the practitioners, and explore the nature of labor involved in documentary practice in China.

This study is significant because it brings documentary production into the purview of labor studies. When I look at documentary producers as labor, I am, like Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Stuart Hall (1980), talking about professionalism as a way of class formation. Documentary filmmakers have invariably been spoken of as artists, authors, or intellectuals, but rarely as labor.

Digging into the nature of labor in cultural work will help us find the secrets of exploitation in a post-socialist country (Berry, 2004; Naughton, 2017). It will further our

knowledge about the changing nature of life in the shift that deepens the relations of the market in everyday life. The post-socialist era brought about a profound change in Chinese people's attitudes toward money. There was initially a certain reticence towards money in socialist China. From the 1950s to late 1970s, Chinese people lived a collective life. The economy was planned by the central government, and no one was allowed to work for money or their own interests, but worked for the purpose of the whole collectives. Capital fetish was considered the cancer of the capitalism. It was taboo to talk about money, especially in the field of cultural production. With the economic reforms of 1978, China started to endorse market logics and the mode of capitalist production. But still, cultural workers usually feel embarrassed to talk about money. They have internalized the "ideology of the aesthetic" as Terry Eagleton (1990) describes it, i.e., art should be for art sake, and not for money. As Hans Abbing (2002) states in his book *Why Are Artists Poor*?, artists buy into the ideology that romanticizes poverty as a reward for artistic ambition. The reason why they accept it, Abbing tells us is that each one hopes one day to become famous and rich, a status granted only to a very few. Bourdieu's capital theory also helps to understand the art-capital tension. He stated that conventional economic rules of capitalism, i.e., the more money is made the higher the value of the work, are reversed in the artistic field. Here people seem to prefer cultural capital like recognition, reputation, and rewards over money.

In conclusion, this dissertation aims to contribute to labor theory by analyzing documentary practices in a post-socialist nation. It will also shed light into the stratified nature of the labors, as well as the multi-formed precarity that would otherwise remain hidden in the new cultural economy in the context of globalization and digitalization.

Literature review

The study of documentary practice works at the intersections of documentary studies, labor theory, political economy, and Bourdieu's theory of cultural production. In this part, I first take up documentary studies which have largely focused on documentary contents textually, aesthetically and economically in Western countries. I will then introduce the history of the development of the Chinese documentary industry as well as some academic debates over it. Existing literature focuses mainly on the independent documentary sectors and intends to take documentary as arts, while neglects a fact that the majority of the documentaries are made by and for television in China. In addition, television documentaries provide a large number of job opportunities to the in-house or freelancer practitioners. The social relations constructed around TV documentary's production, dissemination and consumption are under-explored.

The second set of literature is about cultural work and precarious labor. Documentary production is an essential sector of the culture industry. It provides a good case to reveal the hidden forms of exploitation in the cultural industries that were relatively underdeveloped in the time of Karl Marx. New terms, such as immaterial labor, affective labor, and emotion labor underscore that knowledge has been commodified to the extent that some like Yann Moulier-Boutang and Ed Emery describe the present as “cognitive capitalism” (Moulier Boutang & Emery, 2011). Passion, experience, and lifestyle have been institutionalized as soft compensation for the flexible and precarious employment in documentary industries. Self-exploitation remains the underlying mechanism that capital gain profits from creative industries. Artists are not considered a hero of resistance anymore, but “a model labor in the new economy” (McRobbie, 2002).

The third area of literature, I rely on is about cultural industry, creative industries, cultural economy, and neoliberalism. From Theodore Adorno's theory of culture industry to Richard Florida's concept of the creative economy, scholars have moved from critical tradition to a practical policy study, from criticizing the culture industries as an ideological states apparatus to embracing them as the core engine of the new economy. This study would draw from the critical tradition and integrate political economy and cultural studies in order to study the practice and subjectivities of the Chinese documentary workers.

The last group of literature is Bourdieu's theory of cultural production. Bourdieu suggests a historical, process-oriented research method. His division of the large-scale and restricted-scale production corresponds to the dualistic structure of television documentary and independent documentary production in China. Using Bourdieu's field theory, we can see how agents with different habitus use various position-taking strategies to compete for economic, social, and cultural capital.

Documentary studies: from textual analysis to production studies

Defining documentary

Documentary is an art form, an inquiry into reality, a scene for witness, a space for social engagement as well as an act of political intervention (Yu, 2016). The practice of documentary involves, as Michael Renov (1993) has suggested, the creation of a second-order reality, which aims 1) to record, reveal, or preserve; 2) to persuade or promote; 3) to analyze or interrogate; 4) to express (p. 25-35).

Several debates in documentary scholarship should be noted. The first one regards the truth claims of documentary. British filmmaker Grierson defined documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson & Hardy, 1966) in the 1930s. On one hand, this acknowledges

that the documentary is distinguished by its assumed ontological proximity to reality, or as Michael Renov asserts, “every documentary issues a ‘truth claim’ of a sort” (Renov, 1993, p. 55). This explains the ongoing power of the American direct cinema tradition in world documentary. Its longtime “fly-on-the-wall” observational style remains a powerful documentary method in China even now. On the other hand, critics question the blind faith in the transparency of the images and sounds, and ask that documentary be considered to be a set of “performative acts” (Bruzzi, 2006). Every step in the documentary filmmaking process involves manipulation, and there will never be one hundred percent truth or authenticity in documentaries. In addition, documentary has been associated with propaganda since the beginning (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2018). John Corner (2008) notes that during the 1930s British Documentary Movement, many documentaries were “self-conscious exercises in ‘propaganda’, intended to persuade as much as inform” (p. 23). I will explore this debate around the truth claims of documentary among Chinese practitioners, and how it is embedded in their work and lives.

The second area of debate is about “independent” documentary versus “official” documentary (or television documentary, because all Chinese television stations are controlled by the state, and all the television documentaries have to go through state censorship system and are thus considered “official”). Previous literature focuses more on independent documentaries in China but in this dissertation I will explore mainly the television documentary. Although the first official documentary Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) was released in 1922, documentary scholarship, according to John Corner, didn’t start until the mid-1970s when television became popular. Western scholars shifted their focus from cinema documentary to television documentary partly because of television’s fast development in the 1960s, and the emergence of some observational programs, drama-documentary, and current affair formats. At

that time, as Dai Vaughan (1976) said, “almost all serious documentary is now produced for Television” (p. 50). The debate over television's role in documentary development does not only happen in the United States but also in the U.K. (Dover, 2004; Sørensen, 2014; Zoellner, 2009), Australia (Roscoe, 2004; Williamson, 2007), New Zealand (Jackson, 2012; Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003) and many other countries. The division between official documentary and independent documentary raises important issues of institutionality as well as of cultural practice.

Chinese documentary studies

The main academic scholarship on Chinese documentary starts from the early 21st century, when scholars explored China’s post-1990s independent documentary movement (Berry, Lu, & Rofel, 2010; Cui, 2010; Lu, 2003; Robinson, 2013). Xinyu Lu is among the first scholars who noted and clearly defined the new independent documentary movement in China. She analyzed the social historical conditions in the 1990s and treated independent documentary as one of the aesthetic and emotional responses to the social change that happened in the 1980s, including the 1989 Tiananmen democratic movement, the rising consumerism, and the post-socialist nostalgia towards the austere socialist lifestyle (Lu, 2003).The frustration and anxiety among the young Chinese was expressed in various art forms including poetry, music, paintings and independent documentaries. Also, the digital video recording technology allowed the amateurs or semi-professionals to start shooting and editing documentaries outside of the TV system (Wang, 2005). A new underground documentary culture has emerged since then. Scholars did intensive textual analysis of classic independent documentaries, conducted ethnographic research in pubs and coffee houses where documentaries were screened, and interviewed practitioners to

understand their strategies of dodging censorship (Cui, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Pickowicz & Zhang, 2006; Zhang, 2004). Studies on Chinese independent documentaries have gradually gathered some momentum in the past decade.

Compared to the independent documentary, however, television documentary didn't attract much attention from film and media scholars in the English-speaking academic world. Yingchi Chu's (2007) book *Chinese Documentaries: From Dogma to Polyphony* is the first English book on Chinese TV documentary. Chu traces the development of Chinese TV documentaries from the earlier state-controlled "dogmatic mode" to the current "polyphonic mode," and contextualizes it in the transition from a planned economy to the market economy in China since the late 1970s. She discusses the struggles of Chinese documentarians caught between the demands of the state for propaganda and the pressures of the market for profits.

The interplay between the "official" and independent documentary films has also been taken up by scholars (Berry & Rofel, 2010; Nakajima, 2010). Berry questions the use of the word "independent." First of all, most of the early Chinese documentarians had connections with the official television organizations. They worked for projects of China Central Television (CCTV), used the institution's equipment, including cameras, tapes, lighting and sound equipment to do their work. Wu Wenguang's *Booming in Beijing* is a good example of this "hijacking" pattern of production. Secondly, most of the independent documentarians received their training from and practiced their expertise in public TV organizations. The first creative impulse of independent directors as they emerge in the 1990s is to begin "rethinking television documentary practices" (Lu, 2003). At the same time, their documentary philosophy also influenced documentary practices in public television stations, such as in CCTV's *Living Spaces*. The independent documentary makers like Jiang Yue produced the first group of TV

documentaries for *Living Spaces* and have helped establish the classic format of the TV documentary program.

Given this dialectical relationship between the indie filmmaker and the public TV system, Berry suggests, we use the term "alternative" instead of "independent" to refer to independent documentary practices. In addition, independent documentaries which were mostly screened in underground exhibitions, coffee shops and foreign festivals could work as a kind of "pressure release mechanism" (Pickowicz, 2006), helping to ease tension between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s strict control over cinema and the need for freedom for artistic creativity while also producing films that gained international reputation (Zhou, 2015).

The documentary form has developed rapidly in the last decade in China and sub-genres and new practices emerged. In *China's igeneration* (Johnson et al, 2014), Johnson and other scholars explore the video culture of the new generation in China: Tianqi Yu describes the female first-person documentary as an expression of resistance to the largely male-dominated film world; Yiman Wang uses the term "docu-ani-mentary" to investigate the animal presence in contemporary Chinese documentary making. Also, Shenshen Cai (2015) investigates the newly emerged form of web documentary and reveals how commercial media like Sohu (a Chinese internet service provider company) adapt the state-led nationalist discourse in their programming to enter the market. The documentary is ever-changing, and we should remain sensitive to the new documentary practices, as well as the power relations and the nature of labor underlying them.

From textual analysis to production studies

Previous documentary scholarship largely focused on documentary texts instead of documentary practitioners, and on cultural artifacts rather than the practice of documentary production. The

underlying assumption of these analyses was that the text is the work of an author, who inserts messages in the text, with the hope that it could change the perception or attitude of the readers towards certain issues. However, my personal experience as a documentary director tells me that the authorship is just a small portion of documentary filmmaking. The production process is composed of all sorts of practices, which are the result of the negotiations between creative workers and structuring factors, like socio-economic status, educational background of the documentarians, and ownership of the organization. The process also involves feelings like passion, frustration, desperation, and insecurity. These emotional factors attract people into the documentary industry, and it is these that keep them in or finally push them out of the industry. Emotions have been a key to understanding the new cultural economy (Hochschild, 1983, 2003, 2012). A holistic and process-oriented study is needed to explore what goes on in the process of documentary production. It requires scholars to approach the Chinese documentary practitioners not only as an author, but also as a human, fundamental to which is their relationship to their labor.

Production studies connects political economy and cultural studies. It is a human-centered approach that focuses on the capacity of humans to produce meaning in everyday practices. Toby Miller et al. (2005) criticize the political and social myopia inherent in textual analysis when it fails to account for outsourcing practices in Hollywood and their impact on the texts that get made. Based on over ten years of research on media workers in the film and television industry in Hollywood, John Caldwell (2008), has written extensively on the self-representation, self-critique, and self-reflection of these workers. Delving into behind-the-scene discourses and rituals of these media practitioners, Caldwell reveals to us what "production" means.

As Vicki Mayer, Mark Banks and John Caldwell (2009) say in the introduction of their book *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, we should "take the lived realities of people involved in media production as the subjects for theorizing production as culture. Production studies gather empirical data about production: the complexity of routines and rituals, the routines of the seemingly complex process, the economic forces that shape roles, technologies, and the distribution of resources according to cultural and demographic differences" (p. 4). Vicki Mayer (2011) investigates the real lives of the below-the-line television workers in the new television economy. David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2008) talk about the precarious lives of the independent media workers in the UK television industry. One of Caldwell's students, Qi Wang (2008), discusses the culture of the filmmakers born between 1960 and 1970 in China in her dissertation *Writing Against Oblivion*. She calls these filmmakers the "Forsaken Generation", a generation that is marginalized, forsaken by history. She provides a detailed analysis of how these filmmakers use "personal/individual filmmaking" to demonstrate unofficial personal historiography of recent Chinese history. In the next section, I will review the literature on cultural work and cultural labor in the Marxist tradition.

Cultural work, creative labor, and self-exploitation

From factory labor to creative labor

Documentarians are always considered artists, authors, intellectuals, but rarely, as labor. The nature of labor of those involved in Chinese documentary production has received little attention. "Creative labor" is a useful concept to understand the social relations involved in culture work. David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2011) trace the history of the concept "creative labour" in their book *Creative labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*, and explain that

"creative labor" was invented to differentiate from manufacturing, service and technical labor and other low-paid, low-status and menial jobs.

Karl Marx had disclosed the secret of capitalism—i.e., capital accumulates by the exploitation of labor through his observation of the low-paid, low-skilled, streamline factory workers a century ago. However, in neoliberalism, the further escalation of technological development and globalization have deepened exploitation by individualizing the worker even more.

The theorists of autonomist Marxism, like Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Mario Troni, and Maurizio Lazzarato have, since the 1970s, taken up the term, "immaterial labor" to discuss the nature of cultural work in the new capitalist system. Autonomist Marxism emerged from Italy out of the struggles of Italian workers and students in the 1960s and 70s. They consider the information society as the global triumph of capital. Work extends beyond the walls of the office. The factory is increasingly disseminated into society as a whole. It becomes "social factory" (Gill & Pratt, 2008), or as Negri calls, "factory without walls," and as a result, "the whole society is placed at the disposal of profit" (Negri, 1989, p. 79). The mass streamlined worker of the factory is replaced by socialized worker. The passage from Fordism to post-Fordism also brings a new relationship between capital and labor and "the new productivity of cognitive and affective forms of labour-power start to become hegemonic" (Hardt & Negri, 2018, p. 417). Affective labor, a specific and essential aspect of immaterial labor that requires intense but invisible work embedded in producing and managing emotions, such as caring, listening, smiling at work, furthers exploitation by manipulating subjectivities (Hardt, 1996). The control over the subconsciousness of workers can be more authoritarian than the older Fordist system.

In the new economy, cultural laborers such as artists, media workers and IT workers become what McRobbie called "the new labor" (2002). These new laborers have high wage, high skills, and high social status, but are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labor –always vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the market, which depresses wages for such workers as a whole. They are the iconic representatives of the "brave new world of work" (Beck, 2000), where human society is individualized, and risks are transferred from the society to individuals (Bauman, 2000, 2001).

The number of permanent employees in cultural industries has decreased greatly, and employment is increasingly taking the form of the "atypical worker" (Water et al., 2006) or "nonstandard worker" (Kalleberg, 2000), such as freelancers, part-time workers, flexible workers, unpaid interns, or other contingent workers (Ursell, 2000). Ross calls the new form of exploitation "flexploitation" (2009). The concept of "creative labor," together with a number of other newly invented terms, including immaterial labor (Lazzarato, 1996), affective labor (Hardt & Negri, 2000), emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983), lifestyle labor (Zendel, 2014), aesthetic labor (Hracs & Leslie, 2014) pointed to the new labor practice that bind the worker into the productive life of society.

What are the differences between creative labor and non-creative labor? Scholars first refer to the content that creative labor produced. Creative labor engages in symbolic production. Most of their products are not tangible or touchable physical objects, but information or immaterial service. Lazzarato used "immaterial labor" to refer to "the labor that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity" which "involves a series of activities not normally recognized as work" (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 133).

Creative labor conceptually challenges the old dichotomy of mental and manual labor and puts the traditional elite groups of the former under the same labor conditions and power relations as the latter. The other difference lies in the discourse of "fun" that is attached to creative labor. Compared to Fordist factory work, cultural work is considered "intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time)" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p.15). Workers in the creative industries are supposed to work for pleasure and be willing to sacrifice secure contracts or stable payment for the "coolness" of cultural work.

However, it is problematic to use the term "creative" to distinguish certain forms of work from others. Hesmondhalgh (2002) reminds us that the differences between creative and non-creative labor are largely arbitrary, and labor is always open to temporary and contingent relations. Jim McGuigan (2010) furthers this debate by asserting that creative labor is a universal human attribute, and cultural work is a meaning-producing practice that materializes it. From their point of view, every job has creative components, and it is unfair to designate some occupations as "creative" while others as uncreative in the cultural policy discourse (Conor, 2014). Therefore, creative labor studies should focus on the experience of the contingent work in particular industry, such as television, film, new media production or documentary, and the conclusions cannot be over-generalized.

Precarity: exploitation in the new economy

The key to understanding creative labor in post-Fordist or post-industrial economy is "precariousness" or "precarity." Precarity refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work – including illegal, seasonal and temporary employment; homeworking, subcontracting and freelancing; and so-called self- employment (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005). It is a conceptual tool

invented to "aid in naming, understanding and ultimately transforming the conditions of labor under post-Fordism" (Brophy & Peuter, 2007, p. 180).

Precarity has become a central feature of cultural work. A Marxist approach can account for the processes, practices, and structures that have resulted in the increasing precarization of cultural work. Scholars have done extensive empirical studies on creative labors in different cultural fields, including screenwriting field (Conor, 2010, 2014), music industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Zendel, 2014), fashion model industry (McRobbie, 2004), video game industry (Dyer-Witheford, 1999). Each of these studies points to industry-specific and geographically unique forms of precariousness. However, they share certain stable features: a temporary, project-based jobs; long working hours; poor pay; lack the pathway of promotion; passionate attachment to the work; pride of being creatives; reliance on networking for job opportunities; a mix mentality of bohemianism and self-entrepreneurialism; and a profound feeling of insecurity (Banks, 2007; Caves, 2000; Jarvis & Pratt, 2006; McRobbie, 2002; O'Connor, 2010; O'Connor, 2012a).

Precarious work is largely understood in terms of time. The temporality of life becomes increasingly governed by work. Capitalists rely on punishing schedules and oppressive deadlines to realize the "flexploitation." Cultural workers have larger autonomy in deciding the pace of work, but they have to finish the work by the deadline. For instance, media work allows a flexible lifestyle, but the mentality of "the show must go on" forces cultural workers to organize their life around work and convert free time into free labor when the deadline is approaching. The fluid boundary between work and life balance is alienating and problematic (Weeks, 2005).

In addition, creative labors spend time in social networking, which becomes compulsory sociality for them to find job opportunities and survive. The lack of ladder of promotion or career

pathway in the cultural industries is both the reason and the result of this network sociality. As McRobbie argues, work "has been re-invented to satisfy the needs and demands of a generation who, 'disembedded' from traditional attachments to family kinship, community, now find that work must become a fulfilling mark of self" (McRobbie, 2002, p. 521). Moreover, the workers have to devote non-working hours to learn new skills and improve themselves as a more competitive laborer.

Chinese documentary filmmakers also work in precarious conditions. The documentarians are often employed on short-term contracts, with the lowest level of health care. The basic wage is low and salaries are irregular. They need to do multiple jobs, and their career trajectories do not follow a fixed hierarchical path. It is consistent with the findings in other countries. As Mark Banks and David Hesmondhalgh observe, "there is an oversupply of labor to the creative industries with much of it working for free or on subsistence wages" (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p. 420). The precarious working situation has profound personal, familial and social costs, and my project is concerned with investigating and revealing these in the context of Chinese documentary production.

Why do workers in the creative industries still seek work, even when they know the precarious nature of the work? The secret lies in the pleasure that the work can give. "Pleasure, self-expression, self-enterprise, and self-actualisation . . . seem to be at the heart of explanations of why people want to work in the media" (Ursell, 2006, p. 161). Creative industry workers are like the "industrialization of Bohemia" (Ross, 2003). People are motivated by the "cool" of the new economy, and the promise of autonomy and social prestige. As Jim McGuigan (2009) mentioned in his book *Cool Capitalism*, "cool hunting" is a feature of consumerism in late capitalism. The cool attitude has "three core personality traits, namely narcissism, ironic

detachment and hedonism" (Pountain & Robins, 2000, p. 28). Since most of the creative workers are young people in their twenties or thirties, there is also a "precarious generation," who is more ready to trade fun experience at the cost of work security than the older generation (Beck, 2000).

When we talk about labor, we should see not only exploitation but also the possibility of resistance and solidarity. We also need to recognize the agency of the cultural workers, their efforts to make work less alienating and their desire to realize their dreams as an autonomous artist. In this sense, freelancing presents an alternative to routinized jobs and the hope to have some degree of autonomy over one's time. As Andrew Beck (2003) notes, freelance cultural work can be viewed simultaneously as "labor at the margins" and as "a last space of resistance" (p. 4). Thereby, on the one hand, precarious work and self-exploitation have been the underlying mechanism of the new capitalist economy, while on the other, they constitute a new force of resistance and a challenge to the existing capitalist production and consumption.

However, the discussion of creative labor should not fall onto the simplistic pleasure/pain, labor/resistance dichotomy, rather, I see both tied up in a dialectical relationship that is lived day to day at work and underlies its complexity.

Cultural industries, creative industries, and cultural economy

The culturalization of the economy and the economization of culture

The tension between art and commerce is a core dynamic in the cultural economy. The past decades have witnessed the trends of "culturalization of economy" and "commodification of culture" (Lash & Urry, 1994) as creativity turned to the engine of the new economy. Cultural production was transformed to profit-oriented activities and was operated in an industrial mass-production mode as was the documentary production in China.

Scholars use different names to refer to the documentary industry: media industry, cultural industries, creative industries, the creative economy, or the cultural economy. These concepts refer to different things and represent different ontological stances, but they all connect to studies in political economy and share an industrial analysis approach, which fits the discussion of my project.

A lot of review articles have been written about cultural industries (Flew, 2013; Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; O'Connor, 2010, Raunig, 2011). Here I will start the discussion of the art-commerce relationship from Adorno's orthodox description of the culture industry. Adorno and Hokheimer (1997) criticized the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives that drove the system. For Adorno, art needs to be "the social antithesis of society" (Adorno et al, 1997). It represents the non-negotiable and awakens a critical consciousness toward the commercialized world. However, "cultural industries produced texts as profit-generating commodities," that have to be "operating within a context of great risk, and so needing to do what they can to get a 'hit'" (Garnham, 1987, p. 56). When mass production brings its assembly lines into the cultural domain, culture products become standardized commodities, "everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type"(Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 123). Although Adorno's analysis was criticized for holding up high culture reflecting an elitist nostalgic attachment to pre-industrial forms of cultural production, it serves as a powerful cautionary warning against commodification (Miège, 1989).

While Adorno described the commodification of culture by the capitalistic media industries, Bourdieu describes the process by which cultural work seemed, on the surface, to

have a certain autonomy from the rules of capitalism. Bourdieu studied the field of literature in the mid-nineteenth century and found that cultural production had achieved a relative autonomy, and cultivated a relatively mature "market for symbolic goods." Bourdieu furthers Adorno's discussion of the cultural industry by dividing cultural production into two subfields, large-scale production and restricted-scale production. What happens in the large-scale production is similar to Adorno's description of culture industries that is "characterized by the subordinate position of cultural producers in relation to the controller of production and diffusion media, principally obeys the imperatives of competition for conquest of the market" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 125).

From cultural to creative industries

Cultural industries studies have experienced a "policy turn" in the 1980s. Along with the development of the information and communication technologies and the globalization of the labor division, creativity has been reconfigured as engines of economic growth and social transformation. The Australia and British governments look upon creative industries, creative clusters and creative cities to pull up local economies. The U. K. was aiming to be the "world's creative hub" (Purnell, 2005). Some scholars from Australia and the U. K. turned away from Frankfurt school's critical attitude towards the industrialization of culture, to embrace the government's position of promoting creative industries. Scholars at the Queensland University of Technology, such as Terry Flew, Stuart Cunningham have written extensively to give theoretical legitimacy to "creative industries" (Cunningham, 2002; Flew, 2005, 2012, 2013; Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Hartley, 2005; Potts & Cunningham, 2008). They believe that the term of "creative industry" can capture the significant entrepreneur dynamic of the "new economy" that the "arts," "media," and "cultural industries" do not.

However, critical scholars like Toby Miller, David Hesmondhalgh, and Jyotsna Kapur point to the neoliberal logic underlying creative industries. For instance, Toby Miller (2005, 2011, 2016) point to the international division of cultural labor underlying Hollywood's profit-making strategies, as labor is outsourced to the Third World. This is exploitative of workers in the Third World and reduces wages and the negotiating power of labor union in the U.S. Jyotsna Kapur (2011) states that the creative industry policies "have exacerbated rather than eliminated inequality" (para. 12). As neo-liberalism continues the capitalist logic of using arts as commodity and making labor invisible, work in the creative industries has become increasingly precarious. The debate between the critical tradition and policy studies continues. In this project about the Chinese documentary industry, I would follow the critical tradition and use labor theory and class analysis methods to investigate the power relations in documentary production, dissemination, and consumptions.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural production

Field, habitus, and cultural capital

Bourdieu concerns how a relative autonomy of cultural sphere is made possible in a specific historical moment. Bourdieu described media, art, academic settings, and various areas of intellectual production, as fields that appear to be autonomous. However, he showed that this autonomy was only apparent and would change according to the expansion or regulation of capital and that it had its own internal relations which were economic in nature.

Bourdieu distinguishes cultural production from other economic manufactory field using the interlocking conceptual tools of field, habitus, and capital. He summarizes the relationship between the three concepts using the following equation: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice. It means that practice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position

in a field (capital), within the current state of the social arena (field) (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 101). Therefore, in order to study the practices of cultural workers, we need to first know field, habitus, and capital.

A field is not a concrete place, but rather a social-spatial arena and a relationship that is always being negotiated. It is a system of social positions where agents are located. Fields interact with each other, but most are subordinate to the larger field of power and class relations (Bourdieu, 1983). Bourdieu further divides the field of cultural production into two subfields: large-scale production and restricted-scale production. The subfield of large-scale production is organized under the principle of heterogeneous public, that is, to compete for profit and market, or in Bourdieu's term, economic capital. On the contrary, the field of restricted production applies an opposing principle – "the economic world reversed" (Bourdieu, 1983), where cultural producers compete not for economic capital, but for cultural capital and symbolic capital, that is, reputations, recognition, certifications, etc. "Arts for the sake of arts" is the ideal motto in the restricted field. The restricted production is not oriented to the recognition from the general public but to the appraisal from peer producers.

Within these apparently autonomous fields, such as art, Bourdieu explains are internal rules by which people come to occupy positions (Bourdieu's term, "Post") in relation to their attributes and dispositions (what Bourdieu terms, "Habitus"). Habitus is a system of embodied dispositions, tendencies that organize the ways in which individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. These dispositions are usually shared by people with the similar background (in terms of social class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, profession etc.), Habitus makes difference and work as a way of class formation. In Bourdieu's theory of cultural consumption, certain goods tend to be favored by the dominant fraction of the dominant class,

and others by the dominated fraction of this class. Fields of cultural production are associated mostly with the dominated fraction of the dominant class. The documentary practitioners are in this group.

Key to determining habitus, Bourdieu explains is "Cultural Capital," a concept by which he deepens Marx's concept of capital beyond the economic area and into the more symbolic field of culture. He sees symbolic capital (prestige, honor, attention) as a crucial source of power. Cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, and credentials that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. The practices are determined by the interaction between habitus and positions of the agents. According to Bourdieu (1993), cultural capital is a major source of social inequality. Cultural capital comes in three forms—embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. One's accent or dialect is an example of embodied cultural capital, or what Bourdieu literally defines habitus, while a luxury car is examples of cultural capital in its objectified state. In its institutionalized form, cultural capital refers to credentials and qualifications like degrees or trophies.

Bourdieu's field theory bridges agency with structure. In his eyes, agents negotiate their positions in a field, but the position they occupy is confounded by their habitus and the rules. Bourdieu's theory of cultural production is a conceptual tool, and scholars, including Bourdieu himself, have used the framework of field theory in analyzing cultural production in various fields, including education field (Bourdieu, 1998), journalistic field (Benson, 1999; Benson & Neveu, 2005; Champagne, 2016; Willig, 2013), literacy field (Albright & Luke, 2010), new media(Benson, 2006), and others (Couldry, 2003).

Critiques of field theory

Bourdieu's field theory does not provide a perfect model for understanding cultural production. First, Hesmondhalgh (2006) and Goran Bolin (2012) both point out that Bourdieu seems obsessed with the small-scaled elite cultural production subfield, while neglecting the less elite and more industrialized mass production subfield. He didn't make the detailed analysis of the mass production, and thus overlooked the complexities within this part of the production. In this dissertation, I will provide a thorough case study to large-scale production (television documentary production) to reveal how Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, capital, interact within this subfield.

Secondly, scholars argue that although Bourdieu's model talks about agency and structure following Marxist tradition, he didn't talk about the alienation, exploitation, and labor's subordination to capital. Instead, he focused on explaining the mechanism of the agency and autonomy of the creative agents. I disagree with this critique. Although Bourdieu didn't use the terminology of labor, alienation, exploitation, he still clearly revealed the exploitative nature of the capitalist production by pointing out the conversion among different forms of capital. Taking French literacy field as an example, he writes that the fast-growing cultural production in the nineteenth century seemed to bring the writer a certain freedom from patronage. However, Bourdieu showed us that autonomy was for them just an illusion. Taking the example of the French writer, Flaubert, he explains that these writers were dependent upon the taste of the bourgeois and thus the market. Furthermore, Flaubert and others like him confronted the irony of ridiculing in their work the very class they relied on for purchasing their work. In my dissertation, I take up the critiques of labor in the creative industry in conjunction with

Bourdieu's field analysis, to elaborate on the shifting nature of work in the documentary field in China.

In the era of globalization, cross-national corporations have become bigger players in the field of cultural production. Capital, labor, and technology are all flowing constantly across national borders and reconfiguring organizations and the industry. Documentary production in China has been actively engaged in cross-border co-production. As Ursula Huws (2007b) describes, information is broken down into small interchangeable standard units which can be reconfigured by people from different places, and jobs migrate seamlessly from continent to continent over the internet searching for the best skills at the lowest price.

Research questions

The Chinese documentary industry has gone through the transition from socialist to the post-socialist mode of production, and as a result, its conditions of employment have also changed fundamentally. During this process, the traditional “Danwei” and “Bianzhi” system loosed up, and the permanent positions have been replaced by flexible, intermittent, contracted jobs. The documentary workers have gradually changed from state officials to the precarious labor in the last forty years. This study will trace the history of the employment relations in the TV documentary industry. Therefore, I propose the first set of questions as follows:

-- How has the employment system of the Chinese documentary industry changed over time?

-- How has this change affected the working conditions of the documentary workers?

In addition, I want to explore the precarious lives of the Chinese documentary workers. Drawing on the labor process theory, I will investigate the laboring practices of the workers,

including the payment, working time, social welfare, freelancing, and internship. I will analyze the pyramid structure of the documentary workers. The second set of questions about precarity is as follows:

-- What forms of precariousness have the documentary workers experienced?

-- What is the mechanism behind forms of self-exploitation inaugurated by the erosion of permanent jobs?

-- What leads to the precaritization of cultural workers?

Moreover, I explore the laboring practices of the documentary workers in the ideological factory of the China Central Television. The career trajectories of the workers reveal the subtle interaction between the individuals, organizations, and the broader structure. From entering the industry and sustaining the status, to exiting, the documentary workers employ various strategies to seek better positions in the documentary field. The third set of questions is:

-- What is the mechanism of rationalizing documentary work in the ideological factory?

-- How do the cultural workers experience and feel about their jobs?

-- How do they reconcile the political and economic pressure in this industry?

Finally, I investigate how the Chinese documentary producers embedded themselves into the global market. Globalization has been a trend that left no nations out of a global market. The technological development makes co-production more convenient. Also, the Chinese government considers documentary as an essential way to promote its soft power in the global scope. Therefore, co-production has been largely growing, and most of the big-budget

documentaries are co-produced across borders. It has reconfigured the documentary production process and the laboring conditions of the documentary workers. The third set of questions is:

-- What are the new labor practices in the global co-production in China?

-- How do Chinese documentary workers join the International Division of Cultural Labor in the cross-border co-production?

Methodology

This study aims to explore practices, beliefs, and contextual factors of Chinese documentary production, and thus methodologically, it goes beyond textual analysis of the film contents and deploys ethnographic methods to look at the real production practices of the cultural workers. This project relies mainly on qualitative methods to collect data, including in-depth interviews and participant observation. I also reflect on my own working experience in the Chinese documentary industry.

Positioning and self-reflexivity

I undertook this study as both a practitioner and an academic. I have worked in the Chinese documentary industry for over ten years and participated in various types of documentary practices. I worked as a documentary director in China Central Television (CCTV) for three years between 2004 and 2007 and produced several social issue documentaries. The CCTV workplace is like an ideological factory where creatives live a schizophrenic life, criticizing the government in private while hiding all negative words at work. The pay and working condition of documentarians worsened over the years, and the work became more and more precarious. I have also worked as a freelancer, taking projects from different TV stations and production companies. My role in these projects varied from director, to production manager, to writer. The

nature of the projects was also diverse, from critical feature documentaries targeting international documentary festivals, to propaganda documentaries of the TV stations, to marketing documentaries. The feeling of insecurity brought on by the flexible work pattern was a root cause of my move from the industry back to academia.

My personal experience in the Chinese documentary plays a vital role in this dissertation. I do not intend to indulge in an autoethnographic study, and as Bourdieu states in the beginning of his book *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (2008), "I analyze myself not out of a narcissism need, but for connecting to the broader society" (p. 2). Firstly, my experience determined the topic of this study, a continuation of my journey of self-exploration. My experience and perspective could be a conduit, through which an understudied area of cultural production could be opened for academic scrutiny. I am curious about how people started their career with love and passion but ended with frustration. If this result is a shared feeling within the documentary community, what is wrong and how can we improve it? Secondly, it influences my way of selecting interviewees and doing interviews. I started by talking to the people with whom I worked. Some of them have arrived at a top rank in the community after ten or fifteen years of work. They can provide me with information about changes in the working conditions and their feelings towards their careers over time. Also, my understanding of the documentary industry enables me to identify key personalities, as well as people from different layers of the practitioner community. Thirdly, I am aware of the limitations of thinking as a practitioner. As a practitioner, I only knew a limited area of the industry and was acquainted with the lives of similar-minded people. Also, documentary making ten years ago was very different from the way it is today. For example, it was hard to get in touch with any international co-production ten years ago. It is hard to imagine the impact of globalization of documentary making on the workers' lives from merely past experience. To get

a bigger picture of the industry, I conducted extensive fieldwork from January 2014 to August 2017.

I observed the international documentary marketplace. In April 2014, I worked as a volunteer on the organizing committee of the 2014 Asian Side of the Doc (ASD) festival, which was jointly held by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio and the French Sunshine Documentary Festival. This four-day festival provided a venue where the international documentary sector gathered to see projects, buy programs and find partners. I helped with translating the catalog of the festival and assisting in the business negotiation of two global co-productions. Documentary festivals are where filmmakers learn to price documentaries and understand the tastes of international buyers. They are the right place to investigate the flow of capital and labor in this industry, for it is the place to observe capitalization of the cultural product directly.

I have also participated in global production. From June 2014 to July 2016, as part of my field studies, I worked as a director in a documentary series *A Book a City*, which filmed in global cities like London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. This cross-border project was fully funded by Zhejiang TV, a state-controlled television station in China, but it relied mainly on geographically mobile laborers. The project recruited crews globally: the editor was based in Hong Kong; the photographer came from Germany; I, the director, was based in the U.S.; and the producer worked out of Beijing. Other crew members, such as fixers, sound recordists and gaffers were recruited locally in the cities of filming locations. This project enabled me to feel, observe, and experiment with new ways of organizing documentary production.

Qualitative interview

Qualitative interviewing provides an efficient way of gathering opinions and life experience from a subject's perspective. I deploy semi-structured interview in this project. Regarding the degree of the uniformity of the questions, interviews range through a continuum from structured, semi-structured, to unstructured interviews (Bryman, 2001). For structured interviews, researchers can only ask a predetermined set of questions using the same wording and order of questions as specified in the interview sequence. It does not fit into an explorative, grounded-based study like this project. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews give researcher freedom in terms of content and structure and allow them to explore complex topics and issues in a flexible manner. Due to the broad nature of the field in this study, I chose to use semi-structure interviews. I also take the interview as an interpretive practice. In the moment of storytelling, the interviewees are actively constructing a life world. The meanings of the interviews are "contextual, improvised and performative" (Dillard, 1982, p. 32).

I interviewed 40 documentary practitioners in China, including documentary directors, producers, photographers, gaffers, editors, production assistants, and festival organizers. The interviews lasted from half an hour to two hours and were conducted from February 2014 to August 2017. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face except three Skype interviews. The locations of the interviews include cafés, tea houses, restaurants, production studios, and film festival venues. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese. They were recorded and transcribed. Due to the large amount of the transcription, I only translated the assert that I intended to use in this manuscript. In order to protect the privacy of the interviewees, I assigned a pseudonym to each of them. (Please see Appendix B for the background information of the interviewees). The only exception is two documentary experts (informant 1 and 20), who talk

about the documentary industry in general instead of their own working experience, and I will use their real names.

Snowballing was the main sampling method to recruit the subjects. I started with the people I knew in my previous and current documentary working experience, and then connected with the candidates they recommended. The whole interview process stopped when I felt that the data reached saturation and no new knowledge was to be gathered. Snowballing, or chain referral sampling, suit for the study of subcultural groups. It is an efficient way to gain access to a relatively closed community, which requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people of research interests (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The saturation here refers to the theoretical saturation, which means "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61).

Participant observation

My experience of working in the Chinese documentary industry gave me access to various scenes of documentary practices, find key interviewees, and build rapport with the informants. I had the opportunity to take part in and closely observe the following:

1) A big-budget documentary series featuring global filming from 2014 to 2016;

2) Three international documentary festivals: Asian Side of Doc in 2014, Hong Kong; film festival in 2014, Westlake International documentary festival in 2016;

3) A project of importing and subtitling American documentary series in 2014;

4) An online community of documentary filmmakers from 2014 to 2017;

5) Numerous gatherings of the documentary practitioners.

Participant observation, a principal research method used in qualitative research, involves both participating in and observing a culture, and gathering authentic qualitative data of the real interactions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). There are four types of observation roles that a researcher can take based on the degree of immersion: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete participant (Gold, 1958). The researcher could live a life of total immersion with a native culture, often for several years at a time; or live lives of partial immersion, taking a minor role in the field and spending more time in observing, for a relatively short period. But most of the time, a researcher has to shift among these positions during the whole field trip. However, it also has the implied pitfall of the researcher becoming a "native" or "complete insider", who takes things for granted and loses the distance needed for reflexive analysis. I was cautious about the danger and, most of the time, I maintained ethnographic sincerity and took the position of a partial insider or a "professional stranger" (Agar, 1996).

Layout of the dissertation

I begin chapter 2 with a discussion of the major shift that has occurred in Chinese documentary production from permanent employment in state service to the precarity of temporary, contract-based, self-employed labor. I first introduce the "danwei" (work unit) and "bianzhi" (quota of personnel) system in the socialist period. I will then divide the transition of employment system into three phases: that is, the permanent employment system era starting from 1958, the producer-responsibility system starting from the early 1990s, and the commission system starting from the 2010s. By locating the documentary production in a historical framework, I argue that

the analysis of the precarious work of the Chinese documentary labor is significant because it reveals what happens in the Chinese documentary industry when communism meets capitalism.

Chapter 3 is on the precariousness of creative labor in the Chinese documentary industry. The chapter starts with a description of the pyramid structure of the Chinese documentary workers. The workers have been stratified according to their employment status. They have formed what Bourdieu has named the "dominated fraction of the dominant" and the "dominant fraction of the dominated." For the latter group, short-time contract, moonlighting, low payment and long working hours, freelancing and internship have been a normal working condition. They also have to hold multiple jobs and spend time in social networking. The analysis shows the pathway for the cultural workers to transit from documentary personae to a neoliberal individual.

Chapter 4 is based on interviews and observation of the career trajectories of the media practitioners involved in the production of CCTV's documentary program, *The True Story*. Through these life stories, I describe the double pressures from the political sphere, i.e., through state censorship and the economic world, i.e., market driven audience research.

Chapter 5 addresses the impact of globalization upon the laboring practices in the Chinese documentary industry. Global co-production increased as the government decided to promote its soft power internationally. The technological development also leads to deterritorialization and sets people free from time-space limitation. The co-production is increasingly organized globally, seeking the best skills with the lowest price. This chapter talks about how creative workers in the Third World embed themselves into the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NIDCL). My observation of the documentary series *A Book a City* will illustrate the new mode of documentary co-production. I will also critically analyze the labor hierarchy in this new division of labor.

Finally, the dissertation concludes with an overview of the precariousness experienced by the Chinese documentary workers. It also discusses the theoretical implications of this study of creative labor in the Chinese documentary industry for understanding the dominance and exploitation in the cultural economy. I will then discuss the resistance and the solidarity of the documentary workers. In the end, I bring up the concept of "good work," envisioning a less precarious, more autonomous form of documentary work.

CHAPTER 2

DOCUMENTARY MAKERS IN TRANSITION: FROM STATE EMPLOYEES TO PRECARIOUS WORKERS

> We used to be queens, but now we are slaves.
>
> — Hummel et al., 2012

Roman Hummel, who is a US journalist, describes the fall in his working conditions from that of royalty to a slave. This is, however, a global shift. In my research and experience, I find this assessment to apply equally strongly to Chinese documentary filmmakers, who have witnessed a steady decline in autonomy in the midst of increasing precarity. In fact, precarity has become the central feature of documentary work in China.

In this chapter, I describe the major shift that has occurred in Chinese documentary production from permanent employment in state service to the precarity of temporary, contract-based, self-employed labor. I ask: How has this change affected working conditions of the Chinese documentary makers? What are the changes it has brought about in the cultural workers' conditions of living? How do documentary makers reconcile their passion for documentary making with these new conditions, which clearly lean towards self-exploitation? And, how do they cope with and resist the pressures of neoliberalism to survive as an entrepreneur in an increasingly competitive market where each is responsible or his or her own welfare?

In answer to these questions, I must start with an introduction to the political administrative system of danwei (work unit 单位) and bianzhi (quota of personnel 编制), which has defined the distinctive class status of Chinese documentary workers, as compared to those

from other nations. I then trace the history of the Chinese documentary and analyze the social, economic contexts that led to the deteriorated class status of documentary workers.

"Danwei" and "Bianzhi": the withering away of "iron rice bowl"

Media industries of the advanced capitalist society have witnessed the increase of temporary, casual employment relations. Beginning in the 1950s, major Hollywood studios started using "putting-out systems" to replace traditional "term contracts," under which writers, actors, and skilled production technicians worked exclusively for one studio full-time for a guaranteed period. Under the new system, contracted workers were assembled on a project basis for the completion of a single movie (Christopherson & Storper, 1989). This Hollywood practice had become global by the end of the twentieth century. The Hollywood fine-tuned ways of working grew pervasive under the paradigm of post-Fordist production on the whole. Gillian Ursell (2000) has traced this development in the casualization of television jobs in the United Kingdom. Due to privatization and escalating competition in the 1990s, relations between broadcasters and television workers were deteriorating, manifested by the rapid decrease of permanent positions and increase of casual work. The wages for freelance television workers were also declining.

However, China has a different story because of its socialist system, where media organizations are not private companies as is the case in the United States, but are all state-owned enterprises. Two central institutions are important here. The first is "danwei" (work unit 单位) and the second is "bianzhi" (quota of personnel 编制). "Danwei" refers to the organizations or institutions where people work, and "bianzhi" is the number of persons and the budget allocated to each organization by the State. For example, if an organization, i.e., danwei has a bianzhi of 20 but employs 30 personnel, the finance bureau will only allocate funds to pay

for 20 employees (Ang, 2012). Both systems are product of the planned economy under the socialist period of China from the1950s till now.

The Danwei system

"Danwei" (work unit) literally refers to the place of employment. But it means much more than just the place of people. A danwei is not only an economic affiliation but also a political and social entity, which played a substantial role in Chinese society especially during the period when the Chinese economy was heavily socialist before Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in 1978 (Lu & Perry, 1997). At that time, danwei was the basic social unit of the society. The central government made budgets and allocated resources to individual danwei according to the number of employees. A danwei usually had its own housing, childcare, canteens, schools, clinics, shops, and provided exclusive services to its employees. It also controlled every aspect of their lives. The workers had to obtain permissions from the danwei about travel, marriage, or even giving birth to children. For an extended period, from the mid-1950s to early 1980s particularly, the State employed a system of planned purchase and supply to monopolize the selling and buying of food. A danwei distributed grain ration coupons to its employees according to the number of family members and their ages, which was the only guarantee that the employees could buy grain, flour, rice, oil, eggs, cloth, and bicycles. At those historical times, a person without a danwei could barely survive in China.

The danwei system also represented permanent employment in the planned economy period in China from 1949 to 1978. It echoed a national education policy where the State provides jobs to college graduates (Baofenpei 包分配). In the early national building period, the government needed a large number of skilled, highly educated workers, while the number of graduates from college or professional schools was very limited due to the small size of high or

middle-level education. When a person graduated, the State automatically offered him a job and sent him to a danwei. The person would have this job his whole life. The danwei was not going to dismiss workers with bianzhi because strictly speaking, the workers were employees of the State, not the danwei. However, a shortcoming of the system was that the workers could not choose jobs of their interests. For instance, the first generation of documentary makers started their career not because they loved it, but because the State needed them to do this job.

The Bianzhi system

Media workers occupy a contradictory class location in China. Chinese television was born and developed as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China from the very beginning. Chairman Mao Zedong spoke of the importance of the mass media and regarded it as a weapon for class struggle. Based on his ideas, media in China are considered a loyal servant of the party-state.

Before the 1980s reform, journalists who worked for the party media were all recruited by allocating them positions within the political administrative system (bianzhi system) (Bao, 2008). The bianzhi system is closely related with the former Soviet control system of nomenklatura (ruling class) which, as Bohdan Harasymiw defined (1969), refers to "a list of positions, arranged in order of seniority, including a description of the duties of each office" (p. 121). People with an inside-the-system position (tizhinei 体制内) are leading personnel in the State and Party organs, who have the guarantee of a life-long job, or as they say in China "an iron rice bowl", a promising career, a riskless stable income, and no competition (Brødsgaard, 2002). Not only does the government allocate numbers of personnel to each industry, it also fixes levels within that industry. By controlling the bianzhi the party-state exercises control over the entire administrative apparatus from central to local level.

There are three main categories of bianzhi: administrative bianzhi (xingzheng bianzhi 行政编制), enterprise bianzhi (qiye bianzhi 企业编制), and the bianzhi that applies to service organizations (Shiye danwei bianzhi 事业编制) (Brodsgaard 2002). The administrative bianzhi specifies the number of administrative organs and the number of personnel in these organs. The enterprise bianzhi refers to the number of personnel in state-owned profit-oriented economic enterprises. Shiye bianzhi refers to the number of authorized personnel in public service organizations, such as media organizations.The number of bianzhi remains stable over the years. For instance, the number of employees with bianzhi in China Central Television (CCTV) is about 2,500 to 3,000, and it did not change much in the past thirty years.

In the bianzhi system, media practitioners were more like government officials, mandated to obey the party principle and integrated into the orbit of the party as a means of political control. The State subsidized and paid the salaries of these party organ media as if they were "state employees" (Lee, 2001). Thereby, the first generation of documentary filmmakers occupied a privileged class location. They were the "dominated fraction of the dominant group," using Bourdieu's concept (Bourdieu, 1988). They are high in cultural capital, that is, an intelligentsia based in fields of symbolic production, but lower in economic or political capital than the dominant fraction based in fields of material production and power.

The decline of permanent employment

The bianzhi and danwei structures loosened up when Deng Xiaoping started the "Reform and Open the Door" policy in 1978. With increasing liberalization of the economy, private enterprises came up as an important economic sector. The bianzhi system could not satisfy the needs of these fast-growing firms for talent. Although state-owned enterprises still kept main elements of the danwei system, private or foreign companies employed a more flexible

employment system and started recruiting temporary workers (Linshigong 临时工) who were willing to take jobs without bianzhi but with higher pay.

Since the 1990s, however, permanent employment was no longer guaranteed. Two national policies have led to the end of the permanent employment system. In 1991, the reform of housing system started removing housing from the responsibility of the Danwei, and in 1998 a national policy banned the Danwei from providing housing to their employees. Additionally, in 1996, the Education Ministry of China released a policy, "Regulations on the State stopping providing jobs to college graduates," saying that college graduates were no longer offered a job by the State and they had to look for jobs in the markets by themselves. In 2003, people could get married or divorced without the permission from one's work unit. As a result, permanent employment relations began to wither away in the big cities of China from the late 1990s.

Transition of employment system in the Chinese documentary

Like other industries, the Chinese documentary industry also began to see a decline in permanent positions and the growth of the population of temporary work. A brief history of the shift is helpful at this juncture. Scholars have different ways of dividing the history of the Chinese documentary into periods. He Suliu (2012) draws the following timeline for China's television documentary: political period (1958-1977), the cultural period (1978-1992), the individual period (1993-1998), and the commercial period (1999-2004). In particular, he singles out the year 2011 as the beginning of a new era because of the launch of China Central Television (CCTV) documentary channel. Yingchu Chu (2007) makes a similar division of time periods but employs a different naming strategy. She characterizes the period from 1957-1977 as the Mao period, also the "dark ages" of documentary; the period from 1977 to 1992 as the transitional period; and the period after 1992 as the reform period (p. 31).

Aiming to address the employment relations in the documentary history of China, I divide them into three phases according to the dominant documentary formats and the employment system in each stage, that is, the permanent employment system era starting from 1958, the producer-responsibility system starting from the early 1990s, and the commission system starting from the 2010s.

The permanent employment system and special topic documentaries

The start of Chinese television documentary was in 1958 when the first television station of China was established. The first group of television workers came mainly from radio stations and Central Studio of Newsreels Production, one of the earliest centers of documentary production in China.

The Central Studio of Newsreels Production remained the official production center of documentary films in China until the 1990s. Established in 1953, the Central Studio of Newsreels Production was called “Royal Photographers,” which had exclusive access to significant events and moments of the State, recording the activities of national leaders, covering major events, and documenting national achievements. It has the most extensive video footage concerning the history of the People's Republic of China. It was similar to Soviet Union's Central Studio of Documentary Films which was the particular newsreel division of Sovkino producing newsreel series like news of the day, foreign newsreel, Soviet sports, Soviet cinema, etc. The then Deputy president of the Central Studio of Newsreels Production, Qian Xiaozhang, received a four months training in the Soviet Union in 1954.

Chinese documentary films in this period were mainly a cinematic illustration of governmental policies, adhere to the Leninist view of documentaries as visual propaganda. Central Studio of Newsreels Production produced three types of documentaries: scripted

documentary, compilation film, and newsreel (Chu, 2007). Films typically dealt with the following areas of subject matter approved by the State: 1) significant national political events; 2) socialist construction projects in industry, agriculture, defense, science, and technology; 3) military; 4) minorities; 5) foreign affairs; 6) culture and art; and finally, 7) sports (Chu, 2007, p. 70). These scientific or educational films produced by other domestic film studios were generally called documentaries. Guided by the aesthetic of socialist realism, these documentaries aimed to inspire socialist consciousness in the people and to serve the mainstream political ideology of the State using the Leninist call for political visualization (Lu, 2016). It was the aesthetic style of the Central Film studio that led to the special form of zhuanti pian (special topic documentary) that has been popular on Chinese TV screen for decades.

Central Studio of Newsreels Production also produced a weekly 10-minute media outlet entitled News Clips, which functioned as the primary source of news to the Chinese people prior to the era of television. It also supplied content to television stations after they were established in 1958.

Both Central Studio of Newsreels Production and China Central Television were state-owned enterprises, and people working there are state employees. The employees relied on the danwei for salary, housing, and healthcare. The first group of television workers was composed of young graduates, experienced journalists and technicians from other media agencies, demobilized serviceman, and supporting workers. As mentioned before, they did not choose their own career on their free will but were allocated to the jobs according to the needs of the nation.

A telling case is Liu Xiaoli, the president of the Chinese TV Documentary Committee and the series director of the 1990s' influential Sino-japan co-production *Odyssey of Great Wall/ Wang Changcheng* (1991). Liu was an army officer who had served in the Chinese People's

Liberation Army (PLA) before being transferred to Beijing TV station (later renamed China Central Television) in 1966. According to Premier Zhou's opinion, the Central Radio Department of China started selecting some editors and reporters from the army soldiers at that year. The candidates had to be Party members, with high school diplomas and at least the position of an army captain. Liu was one of the candidates. In an interview, he said that he had never watched or even know what television was.

In 1966, Liu and other 29 army officials were transferred to the Central Radio Department and assigned to three television stations (Dong, 2014). “The leader of the television station, Dai Linfeng, told us: ‘television work requires both physical and spiritual strength, so your grain ration is higher than ordinary intellectuals. You can have 34 jin (17 kg) of rice per month,’” said Liu (as quoted in Dong, 2014). Zhu Ying in her book *Two Billion Eyes* also documented that “employment practices at CCTV prior to the early 1990s followed the general practice in China’s state-run enterprises, which put family and political background and connections ahead of professional credentials. China’s State Administration of Radio, Film and Television enforced a similar practice at CCTV, and it meant that the first generation of CCTV employees were mostly former army officers and people with the “right” family pedigrees (Zhu, 2014, p. 52).

Why did the State choose army officials to participate in the newly emerging television industry? What was the impact of military training on the media production practices? The first quality of army officers is loyalty. Being loyal to the Party and the State is the first prerequisite for state employees. They need to execute orders from above without question. This quality was considered essential in an era when class struggle was considered the major problem of China.

The second quality is the so-called “tough-minded military mentality,” that is, the ability to stick to a goal regardless of obstacles.

The influence of the army mentality in documentary production may be illustrated with the 1988 case of CCTV collaborating with Nippo Hoso Kyokai (NHK, the Japanese public service broadcaster, to produce a documentary series on the Great Wall. NHK's documentary production was more sophisticated than Chinese in terms of production experience and storytelling skills. Liu Xiaoli, the then director of the military department of CCTV, volunteered to be the director of the Chinese team and was approved. Most members of Liu's team were former army soldiers. They felt driven to make stronger visual representations about the Great Wall, their national heritage although the quality of their training and equipment were much lower than their Japanese counterparts. Liu explained his feelings in an interview, “I had an unspoken word to myself: ‘We, the Chinese soldiers, must fight for our nation. We must not lose in this competition against the Japanese. We should perform better than them’” (as cited in Dong, 2014).

The documentary series *Odyssey of Great Wall* was a huge success when it was broadcast on the Chinese TV screen in 1991. It created a new aesthetic style: location sound instead of the “voice of God” narration and a focus on the people who resided along the Great Wall instead of historical heroes (Chu, 2007). Several documentary series, such as the *Silk Road* (Muto, 1980) and the *Yangtze River* (Dai, 1983), reinforced the style of the zhuanti pian (special topic documentary). These two TV documentaries became classics for future generations of filmmakers. Since the 1970s, the special topic documentary became the mainstream form of TV documentaries, most of which document the cultural heritage of China or stage national achievements in the form of documentary series.

Coming back to the role of the documentary makers, the first generations were all permanent employees of CCTV, who traveled a clear professional upward career path. For example, Liu Xiaoli (series director of the *Odyssey of Great Wall*) had been the director of the military department of CCTV, and after retirement, worked as the director of China's Documentary Academic Committee, in charge of the highest-level national documentary festival. Wei Bin, an episode director of the *Odyssey of Great Wall*, was the director of CCTV documentary channel from 2015 to 2017. The documentary makers who started their careers in the 1970s and 1980s are now at the top of the pyramid in the documentary industry. They control the distribution of resources including funds, projects, personnel, and rewards, making sure that TV documentaries function as the ideological apparatus of the Party and the State.

The producer-responsibility system and "telling ordinary people's lives"

The period from the early 1990s is often viewed as the golden age of Chinese TV documentary production (Chu, 2007; He, 2012). The media reform that started in 1992 changed the Chinese media substantially. In that year, Deng Xiaoping made a speech on his tour of Shenzhen announcing the advancement of the halted economic reform process. The State stopped subsidizing media organizations and allowed them to make profits in the market. The media experienced rapid commercialization, marketization and restructuring in the 1990s (Zhao, 1998). As a result, a total of 676 TV stations were established in 1992, with one national broadcaster – CCTV, 30 provincial stations, 295 municipal stations, and 350 county stations. These neoliberal policies created the double bind that while media remained state-owned, they could no longer rely on state funds. Television producers now had to fund themselves with advertisement revenues while at the same time fulfilling the propaganda duties of state media.

The birth of the news magazine TV program *Oriental Space* in 1993 is a signature achievement of the television reform in CCTV. *Living Space* was one session of this news magazine, which screened realistic mini-documentaries focusing on ordinary people's lives daily. The character-driven realistic aesthetic style has challenged the previous zhuanti pian (special topic documentary) by creating a revolutionary narrative structure. Its slogan – telling ordinary people's lives—has been a household name to this day.

Yet, the period also opened up new opportunities for explorations in documentary form. A proliferation of counterculture and Avant-garde arts happened in the early 1990s. The pro-democracy student movement and the Tiananmen Square event of June 4th, 1989 had brought cultural lives to a halt for nearly three years. The depressed cultural forces outburst dramatically after Deng Xiaoping's tour of Shenzhen Special Economic Zones and proposed to further the economic reform in 1992. Cultural pioneers responded to the social change with different art forms. In this period, seminal works emerged in music, paintings, dramas, and poems. Rock bands like Cui Jian, Tang Dynasty; theatre drama directors like Meng Jinghui, poets like Haizi, pushed their respective disciplines to new heights.

It is essential to understand the change of the documentary field in the broader cultural movement of the early 1990s. The birth of the first independent documentary film, Wu Wenguang's *Booming in Beijing* in 1991 shows a new way of using videos to investigate ordinary people's lives. The launch of the first daily documentary program *Living Space* in CCTV in 1993 provided platform to showcase realistic character-driven documentaries. Documentary makers came from various backgrounds and brought the artistic inspiration to their films. There was not a clearly marked line between television documentary and independent documentary. For instance, CCTV invited independent documentary directors like Jiang Yue, a

well-known independent documentary director who directed the award-winning film *the Other Bank* in 1995, to make short documentaries for the *Living Space*. Wu Wenguang's *Booming in Beijing* came out of his work for a CCTV project called *The Chinese*, which started in 1988 but was stopped because of the Tiananmen events in 1989. Also, the new documentary field attracted talents from various art disciplines, such as writers, painters, sculptors, and musicians. At this time, TV documentary emerges as a legitimate art form of self-expression in addition to its function of propaganda.

The media reform also led to the change in the employment system in media industries and brought the Producer Responsibility system into practice in CCTV. To innovate program formats and expand programming, CCTV needed to attract capable talents. However, the permanent employment system dictated that CCTV had to ask for the permission of the State to hire even one permanent employee, and it had no say on who would be allocated to them. To bypass the permanent recruitment system, Yang Weiguang, the then director of CCTV, innovated within the recruitment system and started to hire talents on temporary contracts. This came to be characterized as the Producer Responsibility System. Lifelong employment was no longer secured for the new recruits, but CCTV offered higher pay to attract talents away from their steady jobs.

The producer' responsibility system allowed program producers to recruit their own crew, outsource projects to freelance filmmakers and manage their own budget. Du, a former employee of *Living Space*, states:

> Chen Men (the former producer of *Living Space*) found all sorts of weird persons. They came from all over the country. They quit previous jobs and came here for a dream. Everyone felt they were part of a big thing. The quality of the programs is high even when evaluated by today's standards. *Living*

> *Space* was at the apex of fame at that time. Even people in the remotest villages liked our program. (interview 2)

Mao, a senior producer of CCTV's current affairs department, notes:

> We had a decent salary. Not as high as today, but higher than ordinary professions. We were young at that time. There were not many to consider. We were working in rented offices and living in underground dormitories provided by the program. No one talked about money. We were completely concentrated on improving skills and the quality of our documentaries. (interview 8)

As a result, two types of employment conditions have coexisted since the 1990s. There are the permanent workers under the bianzhi system, who are treated similar to state officials. Then there are the contracted or temporary workers under the market system, who have to sign yearly contracts with the organization. The workers who entered the media after 1992 tend to be in the market system.

Documentary workers today are more likely to be in temporary contracts because most documentary programs or companies started after 1993. The *True Story* was one of the two main documentary programs in CCTV in the 2000s. It was the weekend version of the legendary *Living Space*, which produced and broadcasted weekly 45-minute documentaries about current affairs. It had about 40 employees in 2006. None of them were permanent employees, not even the producer. Only about five people signed a contract with the station (Taipin 台聘). Most of the rest were in a lower level contract with the News Commentary department. The new employees did not have basic welfare, usually referred as five insurances and one fund (Wuxianyijin 五险一金), which included pension, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, work-related injury insurance, childbirth insurance, and housing accumulation funds. Without the necessary insurance, they were vulnerable to illness or accidents. For instance, a post-

production technician had an emergency surgery and stayed in the hospital for two months in 2005. He could not afford the medical expenses, which had exceeded his annual salary. He had no insurance. Private insurance was still a new thing at that time. In the end, the producer allocated part of the program's budget to pay for his medical expenses. After this event, the program bought commercial medical insurance for each of its employees.

While the new employment system attracted high-quality talent to the documentary industry, it has also been the source of inequality within television stations. Today, CCTV has 2500 to 3000 permanent employees (bianzhi yuangong 编制员工), but the number of overall employees of CCTV has increased to about 20,000 (Zhu, 2012). A large number of temporary workers were recruited with various sorts of contracts, corresponding to the different level of salaries and welfares. The complicated hierarchical salary system has led to the precariousness in the documentary industry, which I will discuss in detail later.

The commissioning system and CCTV documentary channel

In the 2010s, the Chinese government started to promote its soft power internationally, which is "the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce and use force" (Nye, 1990). Documentary is a powerful way of introducing Chinese culture to the outside world. Thereby, media organizations and the practitioners bear the pressure to produce more "universally appealing" work for the "go abroad strategy."

As a result of this national policy, China Central Television launched a documentary channel in 2011. Also, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) published a regulation policy requesting each of the 34 satellite television channels broadcast at least half an hour documentary programming every day from 6

am to 1 am starting from January 1, 2014.The policies paved the way for the fast growth of the documentary industry. The investment of documentary has increased from 800 million yuan ($116 million) in 2010 to 3.5 billion yuan ($508 million) in 2016 (Zhang, 2011, 2017) and the number of documentaries produced increased from 5094 hours in 2010 to 22,000 hours in 2016 (He, 2011, 2017). Documentary has turned into a rather big sector of the cultural industries that employed a large number of practitioners. Scholars like He Suliu call the year of 2011 "the start of the new era of the Chinese documentary industry" (He, 2011).

By 2012, Chinese television has seven professional documentary channels: CCTV 9 (documentary channel), CCTV 10 (science and education channel), CETV Channel 3 (Chinese education television), Beijing documentary channel, Shanghai SMG documentary Channel, Hunan Golden Eagle documentary channel, and Chongqing Channel 3. The documentary channels aired a total of 29,870 hours of documentary programs in 2016. Also, the 34 provincial satellite TV stations aired at least half an hour documentary each day to conform to the regulation from the SAPPRFT. The total investment of Chinese documentary production was 3.5 billion yuan ($508 million) and attracted a total of 23.3 billion yuan ($3.38 billion) advertising in 2016. At the same time, according to He's (2017) documentary reports, the public broadcasting services of the United Kingdom invested 540 million pounds ($710 million) and produced 16,954 hours of documentaries in 2016, and Australia invested 0.15 million Australian dollars ($120 million) and produced 447 hours of documentaries. From 2011, Chinese documentaries have turned into a large and fast-growing market.

The industrialization of the documentary industry includes rationalizing documentary production and inventing new ways that labor is organized in documentary production. The commissioning system has been trying to build up a more efficient documentary streamline. If

Living Space of the 1990s represents a small workshop, CCTV documentary channel has updated to a modernized ideological factory in the 2010s.

The separation of broadcasting and production has made the commissioning system possible. CCTV documentary channel works mainly as a broadcaster rather than the production center. Initially, only 30 CCTV employees were assigned to launch and run the 24-hour broadcasting channel. The employees had to shift roles from frontier directors or photographers to commissioners and producers, who initiate and supervise these outsourced projects. They had to mobilize various units in the production to produce programs.

The CCTV documentary channel makes documentaries in two ways. The first one is the in-house production. A CCTV producer takes a project and then recruits freelancers to form a temporary team. Usually, the producer initiates the topic and proposes outlines. When talking about how to start topics, Zhang Jie, former deputy director of *News Probe*, an investigative reporting program of CCTV, states that the stories will be evaluated by three criteria: their appeal to national interests, audience needs, and media interests. Zhang argues that it is in the overlapping area that producers could find the most valuable topics and engage their creative autonomy (as cited in Luan, 2016). Freelancers work closely with the producer to develop the plot and doing field research. When production is over, the freelancers do not share the copyright. In some cases, the names of freelancers may not even be shown in the credits. Thereby, the freelancers do not own any copyright, and in some cases, have to yield the right to authorship too.

The second is the commissioning system. CCTV documentary channel outsources projects to social production companies. A CCTV producer supervises the production process to guarantee the quality of the finished product. The documentaries will broadcast on CCTV, who

provides funds and owns the copyright. This is the mechanism of the CCTV documentary commissioning process. In 2011, the documentary channel launched a bid-inviting press conference, calling projects to bid for the fund of 10 million yuan ($1.45 million). A total of 51 production companies participated in the bid, among which 31 companies submitted 42 project proposals, and in the end, 13 projects from 6 companies were chosen. “We have invested 1 million yuan ($145,000), a lot more than we get from CCTV. We did not expect to make money from this project. It is a promotion for our company,” says Feng Ji, manager of Yixiang Oriental production house (as quoted in Zhang, 2012).

In both cases, television stations need an interconnected network of suppliers, from whom they can recruit freelancers, outsource projects, or buy finished documentaries. The launch of CCTV documentary channel has led to the boom of independent productions. As Lin Xudong, a senior documentary expert, recalls, “Almost overnight, hundreds of production companies came up in the market. Before, there were less than ten in Beijing, among them only two or three with relatively high influence in the market” (Lin, interview, July 25, 2014).

Lin’s feelings are also verified by the statistics, which shows that only 31 production companies submitted proposals to the 2011 bid conference, less than one percent of the registered 4,678 production companies in China. But the number of registered production companies increased three times, to 14,386 in 2017, among which a more extensive portion has incorporated documentary production into business scope.

Freelancing has also turned to a career option for documentary makers. An annual report on Chinese documentaries of 2017 shows that 34 percent of the surveyed documentary practitioners consider independent production and freelancing as ideal for their career (He, 2017). The biggest hit of 2014, *A Bite of China*, demonstrates the high professional qualities of

the freelancers. The production team of this CCTV documentary series about Chinese food and cuisine culture were all freelancers, except the producer.

Conclusion

From the brief overview of the history of the television documentary in China over a half-decade, we can see the social-economic contexts under which the forms of employment evolved. The documentary workers have transformed from state officials in the permanent employment system to contracted workers in the producer responsibility system, and to freelancers in the commission system. Job security deteriorates during this process. The *iron rice bowl* is withering away. The cultural workers were increasingly engaged in irregular, seasonal, atypical, and project-by-project jobs. In the next section, I will explore the precarious working conditions of the documentary workers, with an aim to find the secrets of exploitation in the new cultural economy.

CHAPTER 3

PRECARIOUS WORK OF THE DOCUMENTARY WORKERS

> People in this industry age fast because they work like machines. They work non-stop until running out of fuel. They think they are the best and push themselves to the limit to win the competition.
>
> — Jing, interview 5

In this chapter, I explore the precarious working conditions of the practitioners, regarding their pay and working time, holding down multiple jobs, networking, freelancing, internship, copyright, and labor unionizing. The data I used in this chapter comes mainly from the interviews with forty documentary practitioners conducted in my field studies in China from February 2014 to August 2017. My personal experience of working in this industry for a total of ten years also informs my analysis.

As the State began to retreat from media industries and encourage commercialization of television production from the late 1990s, documentary workers were transformed from state employees to cultural laborers. Lack of employment security and the process of precaritization are felt hard among the cultural workers in the current documentary industry of China. Forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work, including illegal, seasonal and temporary employment, homeworking, subcontracting, freelancing, and so-called self-employment have become common.

Two theoretical frameworks guide my analysis in this section. The first is the particular nature of cultural production in post-socialist societies. Several scholars, including Paul Pickowicz (1994), Chris Berry (2007; 2004), and Zhang Yingjin (2004), have investigated the Chinese independent documentary filmmakers under the framework of "postsocialism". I draw

on their conceptual tools to shed light on the experience of cultural workers themselves in post-socialist cultural production.

The second is the creative labor theory and the concept of precarity. Precarity is a term invented to refer to the widespread condition of temporal, flexible, contingent, casual, intermittent work in post-industrial societies, brought by the neoliberal labor or market reforms that have strengthened management and weakened the bargaining power of the employees since the early 1970s (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005). It tries to explain how a large part of the population is subject to flexible exploitation (low pay, high blackmailability, intermittent income), and risk of existential precariousness (high risk of social exclusion, welfare cut, high cost of living, etc.). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) have argued that the flexible labor force has now moved from the peripheral position it had under Fordism to a core position in the process of capitalist accumulation under Post-Fordism, which is thought to be increasingly based on the casualized efforts of affective, creative, immaterial labor.

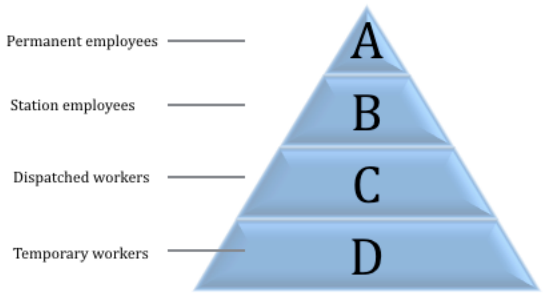
The significance of my research is that I reflect on an untouched media sector in a post-socialist nation where the planned economy has dominated cultural production for several decades. What is unique about the precariousness in the documentary industry in China? What can my study contribute to the theoretical debates on precariousness? I want to find answers to the following questions: what is the mechanism behind forms of self-exploitation inaugurated by the erosion of permanent jobs? What leads to the precaritization of cultural workers?

Pyramid structure of the documentary makers

Before proceeding to the analysis of their working conditions, I would like first to identify different types of documentary makers, as they are not a homogenous group. Rather, the workers

were located in different positions, facing different extents of exploitation, and thus showing different attitudes towards precarious lives.

Here, I am using China Central Television (CCTV) as an example, but keep in mind that most television stations in China share the same pattern of employment relations. They have a highly hierarchical employment system, consisting of permanent workers (bianzhi 编制), station employees (taipin 台聘), dispatched workers (qipin 企聘), and temporary workers (lingshigong 临时工). Employees differ in basic salary, annual bonus, housing fund, transportation allowance, and overtime allowance. Their access cards have different looks and authorizations. The access cards are categorized in A, B, C, and D, corresponding each to a different status.



At the top of the pyramid are the permanent workers. They have usually entered this industry prior to 1992. They share all the welfare that the old system has promised them, like residence permit (Hukou), housing, medical insurance, and a pension plan. They have a better salary and share advertisement revenues. They are now in the highest position in the industry and charge of the resources including economic, cultural and symbolic capitals. According to public statistics, the number of permanent workers of CCTV is 2,098 in 1992, 2,503 in 1998, and hasn't grown to this day. But the number of Channels of CCTV has increased from 3 to 17.

Below the workers of class A are employees who signed contracts directly with the station. They do not have a bianzhi, but other than that, they are treated similarly to the

permanent workers. Station employees usually began their career in the early 1990s. They are typically middle-level managers, like producers of television documentary programs or deputy directors of documentary departments, studios, or companies. They have a relatively high power of making decisions on creative, financial or human resource issues, but also have to take commands from above. Their duties include mediating between the commands of high managers and the needs of lower status workers. Limited by the contract status, workers in class B cannot go any further, and the upward ladder stops in middle-level managing.

The dispatched workers in class C, strictly speaking, are not considered the real employees of the station. The form of dispatch labor started in 2002. Workers signed contracts with a labor dispatch company, which then sent them to work at television stations. By 2006, CCTV had at least 10,000 dispatch workers, five times more than its permanent workforce.

The lowest section of the pyramid is comprised of temporary workers of class D. They work for individual programs or projects. Some of them do not even have contracts. They have a low basic salary and rely mainly on project compensations. The last two groups of workers comprise the majority of the population of Chinese documentary makers, and my study focuses on these two groups.

The stratification within the documentary workers have reshaped the class relations. Very few people go upward to the top and become the "dominated fraction of the dominant group." Their success stories remain the attraction to the new members. On the other hand, most cultural workers sink to the bottom, becoming the "dominant fraction of the dominated group" or even the proletariat. The declining class status is accompanied with the dropping of the salary. Their working conditions are as bad as if not worse than some of the manual labor, such as construction workers or domestic helpers who do not require high education. A survey on the

working conditions of documentary workers (He, 2017) finds that 23 percent of the respondents earn a salary less than 3,000 yuan ($435) per month, 29 percent between 3,000 and 6,000 ($435 and $870), and 25 percent between 6,000 and 10,000 yuan ($870 and 1,450). About half of the documentary workers admit that their salary can hardly cover the family expenses. Instead of calling themselves "uncrowned kings," the documentary workers are more frequently using the term "documentary labor." This proletarianization process provides a framework to understand the precarious working conditions of the documentary workers.

Precarious labor in the Chinese documentary industry

Pay and working time

The payment of documentary filmmakers is a universal question. One of the documentary filmmaking panels at the Sheffield Doc/Fest in 2013 asked a question: "how do filmmakers get paid?" The independent filmmakers used this chance to complain about their declining working conditions. Previously, British documentary filmmakers were treated as employees of the networks, and the sentiment among British filmmakers is that they want those days back. The same sentiment is seen in the Chinese documentary industry.

The hierarchical structure of the employment status leads to unequal pay discrimination. "Doing the same jobs while earning different pay" is a big problem in Chinese television stations, and also in documentary departments or documentary channels. The payment is not based on the positions, capability, or experience but employment status. This is the outcome of the complicated system combining the bianzhi and market systems. The permanent workers and station employees can share the advertisement profits annually, ranging from 7,000 to 10,000 yuan ($10,200 to $14,500) (Yin, 2014). Dispatched workers, and temporary employees,

however, do not have that. Many temporary workers have worked in television stations for many years and have been the mainstay of the programs, while still receiving unfair treatment in salary and welfare. The sense of insecurity and inferiority influences their production in the long term.

Lack of insurance or social welfare prevented young documentary makers from staying at their jobs longer. As Nanchu He (2015) has demonstrated, media work may be fun for young people, but once they get married and have a family, they usually rethink the decision about the flexible work. Wang, a photographer, explains his decision of leaving CCTV for a position in a production studio:

> I will always be a temporary worker, even after having worked there (CCTV) for all my life. I will just be a life-long temporary worker. I feel like a second-class citizen there. There is no chance for me become a permanent worker. If I have to change jobs sooner or later, it is better to do it now. (interview 10)

Most permanent employees have been in management positions and stopped doing the shooting, reporting or editing work, while contracted workers, on the other hand, have undertaken most of the frontier production work but were compensated much less. A fair compensation system is vital in retaining and motivating employees while losing the internal pay equity remains a significant threat to the harmony in the work environment.

In addition, documentary workers have to face the external pay equity. Station projects pay less than the market rate. The disparity in prices partly has led to the outflow of talents from TV stations to independent production companies. The precarious working conditions prevented the employees from staying long. CCTV has lost its most talented documentary directors and producers recently. In 2017, there was a wave of middle-level managers and producers resigning from CCTV, and among them, Chen Xiaoqin, a signature director of CCTV documentary channel, quit and joined an Internet video company.

Secondly, default or being behind in payment is not unusual. The production of a standard size TV documentary series takes several months or years. The production companies usually receive 50 percent of the production budget in advance, 30 percent upon the acceptance of the finished film, and the remaining 20 percent after the airing of the program. Freelance directors and screenwriters get paid in a similar three-step timeline. Photographers, sound-recordist, and gaffers charge a daily rate and usually get wages after each workday. In this sense, the core creative persons, like the directors and screenwriters, take the most significant risks. They provide services in advance, without knowing when they will get fully paid. It could be one month or one year depending on the programming schedule of the TV stations, which is entirely out of the workers' control. As Karl Marx (1976) pointed out, the capital enjoyed the labor and paid for it later on. In the UK, after years of fight, workers gained the rights to get paid weekly instead of monthly. But in the Chinese documentary production, late payment has been normal for the commissioning projects.

Thirdly, lack of upward mobility prevents documentary makers from serving a long time in documentary programs. In the first several years of the career, documentary makers have had a slightly higher salary than their peers working in other professions. Non-monetary rewards like flexible schedule, traveling to exciting places and meeting influential people have provided extra compensation. But as contracted workers, they did not have the chances of getting promoted to the positions of program producers or department directors. They were repeating the same work routines from project to project. Their salary or welfare even became worse as they were deskilled by the introduction of new recording or editing technologies. Therefore, ten years later, documentary makers find themselves left far behind by their peers who might have been promoted to manager levels. Sheng, a documentary director of CCTV, notes:

> My friends used to call me 'artist' and admired my lifestyles ten years ago… What they envied most was that I did not need to stay in office from 9 am to 6 pm. Those flattery words created an illusion for me. Especially when my work showed on TV, the feedback from friends made you feel like a star…But now, I am in my mid-30s. The friends who used to look up to me have been promoted to department directors or managers and have a much higher salary than I do. They have a house, a family, and a stable job. What do I have? Nothing. I am still traveling around and repeating similar projects… I love documentaries, but it is not a job that allows me to raise my family. I am thinking of switching jobs. (interview 15)

Karl Marx (1976) points out that the length of the working day, the intensity of labor, and increasing the productivity of labor are all crucial for capital to increase the surplus value it can draw from the exploitation of labor. To increase surplus values, capitalists must extend the labor time, increase the work intensity, or increase their productivity. However, by simply increasing the criteria of the product quality, company owners can extend labor time and increase work intensity. The most mentioned term in documentary programs or production companies is "Zuopin" (work, particularly artwork 作品), that means, to treat a documentary as a piece of artwork, instead of just an industrialized cultural commodity. To make an industrial product, documentary makers provide services of average or slightly above average level, but creating an artwork (Zuopin) requires perfection, which takes much longer working time.

Some documentary companies systematically used the documentary makers' artistic pursuit of craftsmanship as a means of exploitation. They tacitly transform large-scale production to small-scale production, where economic rules can be discarded, and create an environment that people feel ashamed to calculate working hours or request more monetary compensation. In this way, documentary making is turned into a "labor of love," and filmmakers invest more working time into the project than they should. Here they are working for investors, not themselves, because documentary makers do not share the copyright or any further profits.

Freelancing

As He's (2017) survey shows, one-third of documentary makers aim to work as an independent producer in the future. However, what does independent production mean to them? What do they want to get from doing independent production? Do they want a higher level of autonomy in controlling the contents and ways of expression, or do they just want to work for themselves instead of being employed by organizations? The answers to these questions are related to different mentalities. The first one relates to the drive of art expression, while the second one links to the neo-liberalist self. The two mindsets are distinct but interconnected for documentary makers.

Independent production has its prototype derived from a US ‘‘publishing model’’ in which production is sub-contracted out to the independent sector. The US network television initiated such a business model during the 1950s. The independent production moment occurred in Europe during the 1990s due to the privatization of public channels and the licensing of new commercial channels

However, freelancing as a career does not have a long history in China. It only began in the early 2000s when the State stopped providing jobs for the college graduates. Until then, the social system, including house registration system (Hukou 户口) and social welfare system, was not designed to encourage freelancers. Instead, it had proven to be a barrier against self-employment. For instance, Beijing is the center of the documentary industry, and people passionate about making a career in documentary gather here seeking jobs. But, under the current household registration system, it was hard for a freelancer to get a resident permit in Beijing without a proper Danwei. Without the resident permit, freelancers are not eligible to buy houses.

Their children are not accepted by most elementary schools unless they pay extra fees. As a result, most freelancers are unable to settle down permanently in Beijing. They come and go.

Many freelancers were previous TV station employees. They thought that freelancing would allow them higher autonomy in self-expression. They are either self-employed or open a small company and take projects from various employers. However, the majority of documentary projects come from national or provincial TV stations. They find themselves in a harder situation. Firstly, they no longer have the rights of suggesting topics to the stations as they did before. In this sense, they have lower control over the content they are producing. They can only compete for the existing topics provided by the station. Secondly, freelancers are more vulnerable to censorship. When they were working in the station, middle-level managers like the producers or department directors would usually represent them to negotiate with higher ranked censors. But now, as outsourcing companies or freelancers, they have to treat the TV station as clients and meet their needs and requirements. Thirdly, freelancers usually give up the rights to copyright and yield the rights to share the profits. They are more alienated from work and lose connection with the final documentaries once the projects are over.

Furthermore, streamlined contracts put freelancers in a vulnerable position. It is common for documentary workers to work on temporary projects with no contract. Freelancers lack the negotiating power to defend their rights in the contract. In a short-term project, employers intend to rely on verbal commitment or deal memos rather than a formal written contract. In a big and long-term project, usually, the commissioners provide a standard form contract, which protects mostly their own interests. Very few freelancers hire a lawyer to go through the contract and adjust agreement terms to protect themselves. If freelancers actually do that, get a reputation of being a difficult person, which may cost them further work opportunities. For the same reason,

when employers violate the contract or verbal agreement, most independent freelancers would have to accept the consequences instead of taking the matters to court. Do not go to law if you can help it. In addition, it is time-consuming and expensive to file a suit against a company or organization. These are additional costs that freelancers have to worry about. Guo, a senior documentary director, mentions his unpleasant collaboration with a big television network in his interview with me:

> Guo: I have worked in a big budget documentary series for two years. We agreed on the rate in the beginning. But the television started a new financial policy last year, and as a result, all ongoing projects were halted. We, the eight directors including me, only got half of the payment in the beginning. But for the rest, I have no idea when to expect. The situation of post-production companies is even worse. They have invested a lot but got nothing.
>
> Me: Did they sue the television station?
>
> Guo: No. They won't. The station is their biggest client. They have many collaborations projects. Also, it is not that the project producers are not willing to pay. I believe they will if they can. It is the station's new policy. The project staff can do nothing about it. (interview 23)

Liang, a post-production director, had this to say:

> We care about long relationship. Usually, when the clients pay me less this time, they may pay me more in other bigger budget projects to make it even. But default in payment will definitely weaken their reputation. No one wants to work for you. That is the punishment. (interview 28)

Added to above-mentioned risks, freelancers also have to struggle to fulfill the crucial tasks of securing work, self-promotion, training and skills development, invoicing and chasing payments, and the various tasks involved in maintaining a freelance career.

Multiple job holding

Documentary making is not a career to make people rich. Documentary workers need to do other jobs, most of the times commercial projects of advertisement or feature films, to raise money for themselves and their family. Private jobs provide a higher compensation. They then use the money to subsidize the projects of their interests. It echoes with what Fast et al. (2016) called the hobbyist approach to the documentary. As a hobbyist, you do not make money from it. Instead, you invest in it. Gao Feng, the director of Central Newsreel Production Studio, states in the interview, "you have to do commercial work to raise yourself. Documentary making is like a hobby. You shall not expect to make a living with it" (Gao, interview, March 19, 2014).

The flexible working schedule makes moonlighting possible. Documentary makers do not work on regular hours of nine to five. Some of them even need not show up in office most of the time. What they need to do is to finish the projects assigned to them. TV station employees are not supposed to take second jobs, but similar to most industries of China, there is a significant grey area where people can negotiate spaces for moonlighting. The managers (producers) show tacit understanding of their behaviors. Mao, the producer of a documentary program, states:

> My bottom line is that their outside jobs shall not affect their work in our danwei. If the program needs them, they need to be available without any hesitation. Based on this consensus, I will not punish the persons who take outside projects. I understand that they need more money for life, and I know they deserve more than they get now. (interview 8)

Multitasking is another strategy to maximize job opportunities or improve work efficiency. To survive in an uncertain working environment, documentary filmmakers have to master different skills such as directing, photographing, editing, sound recording, or lightning, so

as to broaden the scope of work opportunities. One-man-band is widely seen in independent productions as a way to reduce costs, especially for longitudinal character-driven documentaries. Huo, an award winning director , usually works as the director, photographer, and editor of his own projects, with his wife working as a sound recordist. In this one-man-band way, Huo avoids extra investment in hiring additional crews and maintains better control over the project.

Networking sociality

Freelancer documentary makers find it obligatory to socialize with peer documentary makers, commission producers, and potential sponsors. While the old generation of documentary with permanent status has carved up the territory of the documentary field, the younger generation is trying to connect with each other in social media in order to seize limited opportunities to survive in the commercialized market. They have to frequent film festivals, to get publicity and socialize with potential buyers. They also stay active in social media, responding to posts, sending birthday wishes, commenting on the new release of group members' projects, and congratulating someone's work getting awards. The documentary makers do it in the hope that people think of them when there are chances for new jobs. They are no longer proud artists or professionals waiting for new projects to fall on their laps. Instead, they have to continually look for new employment opportunities, potential buyers, and investors.

Networking is the major source of employment information for documentary makers because cultural jobs need many extra functional skills, which are hard to tell with traditional recruitment methods. This informal network of recruitment of documentary talents has its root in the early 1990s. The documentary program *Living Space* recruited most of its employees through the friend networks of the founders. This has been mythologized as successful experience in

news coverage on the golden age of the media reform. Currently, a personal recommendation has been the major means of finding suitable talents for the documentary projects. For a short-term collaboration, it is hard to make the sound judgment on people's skills, aesthetic styles, and temperaments, which are core to the success of cultural productions.

Only people familiar with both the quality of the people and the requirement of the projects can recommend the right ones. The recruitment posts in job finding websites did not bring good candidates. That is a waste of time and resources. Also, the recommender functions as a sponsor, guarantee the capability and reliability of the candidates. If the employee made troubles in the project, such as touching sensitive topics, the recommenders would have to take responsibility too.

I observed the online interaction of a WeChat (a Chinese messenger) group that consists of 178 documentary makers for two years. The central conversations within the WeChat group are about sharing job opportunities. The social media network has worked as a non-standard form of recruitment. For example, On January 05, 2018, someone posted, "I am working in Shenzhen, can anyone recommend a local photographer?" "Does anyone have contacts of the crews of *Rhythm Earth*? I want to talk about the business collaboration with them."

The organizer, Mu, is a documentary freelancer who has participated in several large-budget television documentaries. He is the most active person and always posts recruitment advertisements:

> Looking for documentary directors. *Totem China* is looking for directors for individual episodes. Total of ten episodes, 45 minutes each. The project starts in April. Please forward this information to anyone interested. (post by Mu, on Feb 15, 2017)
>
> A friend is looking for a bilingual local production manager in Shanghai. A foreign crew is going to film in Shanghai for 11 days this April. Working duties

> include coordinating interviews and one-day B-roll shooting in Shanghai Square. The candidate needs to speak fluent English. (crying emoji). (posted by Mu, on March 5, 2017)

The person interested in the job will then message Yan asking for more details. The point of networking is not to keep track on the recruitment posts, but to get the personal recommendation of the person who posts. To do that, WeChat members spend time chatting, hoping to impress others with their capability or artistic tastes, acting as if they are in a labor market.

Documentary festivals are the networking hubs. It is the market where people sell ideas by pitching to potential buyers and sell finished documentary films to international markets. Festival networking is not only time consuming, but also expensive. Attending a documentary festival, for instance, Guangzhou International Documentary festival, one needs to pay round tickets, registration fees, and hotels, which is at least 1000 dollars. Usually, it is hard to establish the relationship for the first time you met unless you are very successful documentary makers. People have to meet in different festivals in different countries or cities, and then build up the relationship. It is vital for young professionals to publicize their projects and to sell their projects in pitching sessions. I will discuss documentary festivals in details in the next chapter.

A sense of community is central to documentary makers. The individual artistic entrepreneurs have to build up solidarity that has been destroyed by the media commercialization. Marita Svensson (2012) mentioned the importance of a "community" of investigative journalists sharing similar ideals and finding moral support, a sense of home, a shelter, and a spiritual home in shared ideals and struggles. This is more of an interpretative community rather than a clearly defined one. In the first month of my entry in the documentary

industry in 2004, one of my coworkers told me, “this is a lonely profession, and you would need friends.”

Internship

Apprenticeship is a traditionally employed method of educating new talents and socializing new members at television stations. In pre-modern Europe, skilled occupational training primarily took place through apprenticeships, and apprentices made up a substantial portion of the workforce (Paul, 1977). Apprentices were not only trained but also simultaneously incorporated in the production of goods. In some industries, people would serve a at least three-year apprenticeship with a master and in return gain a right to practice the craft they had been taught. It is also the case to use long apprenticeships in traditional Chinese film studios before the commercialization of media sectors. One has to work as a production assistant for two years and a camera operator for two years before working as an independent photography director. Documentary making, especially feature-length documentary, is also a complicated visual art form that practices long time apprenticeship.

On the other hand, scholars also explored the exploitation of internship in journalism (Madison, 2014), film and television production (Paterson, 2001; Gillian Ursell, 2000), advertisement (Gugerty, 2011), and computer game production (Nieborg & van der Graaf, 2008). The internship is a traditional way to lower the threshold for entry into an organization. Interns represent an essential part of what Murdock (2003) called the “reserve army” of cultural workers. Cultural firms now offload financial risks onto individuals. To be a cultural worker one must accept and adapt to intermittent employment, low wages, and precarity, drawing out the romanticized notion of suffering for one’s art into industrialized, highly capitalized cultural

industries (Miège, 1989; Ross, 2009). The investigation on the internship can reveal the secrets of free labor in the Chinese documentary.

Most Chinese television stations provide an insufficient quota for the formal internship. As television stations ceased recruiting new employees through public employment, internship represents a lower threshold for entry into an organization. The competition for internship opportunities is increasing because as a result of the separation of production and broadcasting, television stations intend to recruit administrative staff, rather than creative persons. Mao, the producer of a weekly television documentary program, states:

> To be honest, our program does not need interns. We have been short of creative people and cannot put extra efforts into supervising them. Each intern here has strong recommenders in the back that we cannot reject. I told the employees in our program not to use them for trivia office work, like ordering food or cleaning offices. They came here to learn skills of documentary making, and we should teach them something that they could use in their future jobs. (interview 8)

On the other hand, the fact that documentary making requires long apprenticeships prevents the interns from being promoted to official employees.

> It is almost impossible to find qualified employees from interns. They stay here for at most two months, but it takes years to cultivate a documentary director. I only promoted one from interns to official employees in the past ten years. She interned here in the third year of her college. After that, she went back school and made a documentary under the supervision of our experienced director. She came back to our program after graduation, taking some minor jobs, like directing a five minutes story for a larger project. Gradually, she became a qualified one. That is the only successful case. (interview 8)

Social production companies, however, have substantial needs for interns. These profit-oriented corporations always strive to maximize profits. Following this capitalistic logic, high profits correlate with low wages. Interns provide cheap, free and willing labors. The number of

projects fluctuates seasonally in these production companies, so they have to employ temporary workers for emerging projects. The young interns, although lacking experience in creative production, can still do supportive work, like doing research, contacting interviewees, etc. The apprentice is performing what Kathleen Kuehn and Thomas F. Corrigan (2013) have labeled "Hope labor," i.e., work done for absolute little or for free in the hopes of getting a better-paid job later. An intern puts in extra unpaid hours in the hope of getting a permanent position. It is up to the interns to prove their worth to management. If the interns fail to create value, the employers have a good reason to terminate the internship. Thus, the risk is firmly put on the apprentice rather than the employers who can cherry-pick among competing hopefuls (2013). Scholars have coined the term "intern economy" (Frenette, 2015) to refer to the systematic exploitation of the interns as free labor. When you see on a recruitment advertisement that a cultural production company wants to recruit 20 interns, and the description of the work duties are almost the same as regular directors or post-production technicians, it is easy to figure out how they are going to treat the interns.

However, there is still a need to consider the agency of the interns. They actively seek experience as a stepping-stone of the entry to this industry. The internship is part of their choice for self-interests and self-realization. The interviewees tend to consider the intern experience as a learning process. Li, an independent documentary director who once interned one year in a CCTV documentary program, says:

> It depends on how you think about it. I think I learned a lot from the internship. I got a chance to work with fantastic directors. They treated me well. I knew a little bit AIVD, so they used me as the second post-production editor. I benefit from the knowledge I learned there even today. I love to consider it as a training session. It is free. I don't pay tuitions. I even get paid for it. Is there anything better than that? (interview 9)

Copyright

Copyright is the exchange value of documentary products. Economists view copyright primarily as providing the economic incentive for creators to produce intellectual and artistic works (Bettig, 1996; Towse, 2002). What matters to companies is not the time and money spent on a project or the control over the labor process, but ownership over the final product, which can be re-published, re-licensed, and re-purposed, generating extra surplus value and lowering labor costs. Thereby, copyright is the domain where the exploitation takes place.

First, neither television contracted workers or freelancers share the copyrights of documentary projects they produce. As Zhang Zhaowei (2002) described, documentary workers are like the OEM (original equipment manufacturer) home factories that manufacture or assemble cultural products according to the demands of the clients. Once they finish the production process, they have no connection with the final products, and thus do not share the profits generated by the brand effect, the reproduction, and redistribution. A telling case is *A Bite of China*, the most commercially successful documentary series in CCTV by so far. All the directors and photographers were freelancers, except Chen Xiaoqing, a senior employee of CCTV, who worked as the producer of the series. Ren Changzhen, the series director who built up the crews and organized the production, is widely seen as the real soul of the films. But when *A Bite of China* were broadcasted on CCTV and achieved the tremendous success in audience rate, it is Chen Xiaoqing, the representative from CCTV, that appeared in all the awarding ceremonies. The name of Ren Changzhen was never mentioned in any awarding ceremonies or any media coverage of the enormous success. *A Bite of China* has turned to be the number one television documentary brand in China, which attracted 100 million yuan ($14.5 million) in advertisements for the second season and 210 million yuan ($30.5 million) for the third season.

However, Ren and his team have never shared any rights to the copyright or patent of the documentary series. Ren Changzhen states, “We want to participate in the huge success. We have never experienced that, and we have the rights to experience it.” (as cited in *Unpublished inside stories*, 2014). The extent of exploitation is cruel in the outsourcing production in cultural industries. According to the same article, Ren Changzheng got 70,000 yuan ($10,200) for directing an episode. But the value she created for the brand of *A Bite of China* is worth 200 million yuan ($29 million).

Secondly, Chinese television and documentary funds underprice the copyrights of documentaries. The copyrights of documentaries are cheap, and documentary practitioners are not getting proper compensations. A monopoly of state-owned television has limited the price of documentaries. In 2007, the cost of a television documentary was less than 100 yuan ($14.5) per minute. Today, the rate that television stations offer is about 2,000 yuan ($290) per minute, but the cost of production has increased to the maximum of 80,000 yuan ($11,600) per minute (Zhang, 2017)

Documentary funds also exploit documentary makers by acquiring copyrights of the selected projects at a low price in the name of providing funds. CNEX (the short form of “Chinese Next” and “See Next”), the oldest NGO documentary fund in China, used to fund several independent documentary films each year. They provide the fund 50,000 yuan (around $7,250) to selected projects in exchange for the copyrights. The fund has provided crucial financial support for desperate independent filmmakers and has supported many influential in the past two decades. But the exploitation through copyright shall not be overlooked either.

Thirdly, lack of protection of ideas turns people into volunteer labor. Copyrights protect expression and patents protect inventions, but neither protects ideas. In the brainstorm sessions

of pre-production, senior directors are invited to contribute their ideas and perspectives about how to explore the ideas of the projects. No one thinks that ideas are intellectual properties, and people just use the valuable suggestions without paying anything. Documentary filmmakers are not considered as professionals like lawyers or doctors, who charge for providing advice.

Exploitation in copyright also demonstrated in free fan work. As smaller, cheaper and portable digital cameras became popular, documentary making has been an activity that everyone can participate. It blurs the line between producer and consumer. As Jenkins (1992) says, media fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also participate. The existing literature on fandom and the rising interest in fan labor market have investigated the amateurization of cultural production as a site of free labor (Fast et al., 2016; Sotamaa, 2007). Chinese documentary channels, production companies, and commercial video websites have actively promoted all sorts of Youth DV competitions and mini-documentary competitions, promising to broadcast the winning projects on television or video websites. A small amount of rewarding money could mobilize the amateurs from all over the country to produce documentaries enthusiastically. The fans' acceptance of free labor is something that media industry has learned to take advantage of in recent years (Fast, 2012; Jenkins, 2006).

Conclusion: from documentary personae to neoliberal individuals

From the above analysis of the development of the Chinese documentary and their current working conditions, we can see the pathway from documentary personae to a neoliberal individual. What is the impact of the precaritization of documentary production on production values? And how does it affect the autonomy of the cultural workers?

Previous generations of documentary makers learned and polished their skills on the job over years of accumulated experiences. In the Danwei, the steady employment relations with a commitment between the employer and the employees allow documentary makers to develop the spirit of crafts. They take pride in the documentary career, witnessing and recording the transition of the society, speaking for the voiceless ordinary people, and promoting social responsibility.

However, the transformed production environment has a detrimental effect on the spirit of craftsmanship, and instead, it promotes the mentality of neoliberal individuals. The emerging attitudes that dominate the Chinese documentary industry emphasize commercialism, competition, flexibility, and self-entrepreneurs. It is the worker's responsibility to develop skills and to meet the requirement of the fast-changing production environments. It is natural for the company to fire the workers if they cannot adapt themselves quickly enough. A capable and enterprising person should have found a better place in the market, opened their own companies, or worked for themselves. Only the incapable persons are still staying in the television stations where traditional bureaucratic values and socialist propaganda streamline still dominate.

Contrary to the popular imagination, independent documentary workers have experienced a higher level of precariousness. They invest an enormous amount of time and energy in maintaining a steady flow of work, through networking and socializing (Paterson, 2001). As such, the traditional values and skills of documentary production are being replaced by those of the entrepreneurs seeking market opportunities.

CHAPTER 4

IDEOLOGICAL FACTORY: BECOMING AN IDEOLOGICAL WORKER

> The institution (tizhi) means the ideological bondage. Those who quit the official TV jobs do not automatically regain freedom of mind. Many of them are now chasing awards or money. They can't go back to the beginners' mind. The hope is in the new generation. They haven't worked within the official system. They make documentaries for self-expression, not for broadcasting. They are the future of the industry.
>
> — Guo, interview 23

A factory is a site where laboring and exploitation happen in industrial society. In post-Fordist society, a factory has extended its exclusive domain to the whole of society. The concept of "social factory" (Gill & Pratt, 2008) or a factory without walls, refers to a situation where the production and reproduction relationship have spread into all sorts of venues including schools, modern artistic offices, or even homes.

State-owned television stations in China function as ideological factories with the documentary film being one of its elite product lines. These TV documentaries have consistently staged and celebrated the national heritage, national achievements, traditional cultures, and heroes of the country. Very few documentary programs cover contemporary issues in daily life or launch any kind of critique of state policies. *The True Story*, a weekly documentary program of China Central Television (CCTV), is an exception to this rule. From 2000 to 20010, *The True Story* has produced a total of over five hundred 45-minute documentaries. It sought to both fulfill the propaganda functions of the state on the one hand, and express alternative ideas and monitor the government on the other. Thus, it turns documentary production itself into both an act of reinforcing state dominance as well as articulately resisting it.

Therefore, investigation of this particular documentary program, *The True Story*, will provide valuable information about ways in which the ideology factory operates, the lives and

experiences of cultural workers, and ways they react to political and economic pressure. The data in this chapter comes from my in-depth interviews with ten cultural workers from 2014-2017. It relies on my personal experience working on *The True Story* program from 2004-2006 and documents the production manuals, the program list, the author notes for each of the documentaries, and the media interviews that workers have given over those years.

In this chapter, I first introduce the workplace of documentary workers, and the routine lives they have lived, juxtaposed with idealized narratives of the lives of cultural workers. I then explore why and how documentary workers enter the industry, and the politics governing the inclusion and exclusion of documentary programs in general. I also investigate how cultural workers learn to work, as both red socialist ideological comrades and creative laborers under the market system, and what success means to them. In the last part, I explore how cultural workers exit the TV documentary industry, for what reasons, and what kind of strategies they utilize to cope with their situations. For the sake of preserving the anonymity of workers who are still in the process of production, I do not identify the individuals who are sources of the quotes.

The True Story and the documentary production line

China follows the Soviet policy regarding media, under which all the media are state-owned, and the Central Publicity Department, formerly known as the Central Propaganda Department, takes responsibility for all media. China Central TV is the only national TV station.

Depending on the definition of TV documentary, in a narrower sense, CCTV only had two documentary programs from 2000 to 2011, before the launch of the documentary channel; one was *The True Story* in the news center, and the other was called *Documentary* in the science and education center. Why did they need this documentary production line? In Chapter 2, I indicated that CCTV began to experiment with new television forms and employment relations

in the 1990s. The news magazine TV program *Oriental Space*, as I discussed there, was an example of such experimentation. Lin Xudong, a documentary expert and consultant for *Living Space*, states:

> Documentary programs like *Living Space* were supposed to be affiliated with the science and education department of CCTV because it charges in documentary production. The news commentary department should be focusing on investigative journalism. But it is hard to tell the difference... *Living Space* was not initially planned a documentary program, but a program teaching people common sense knowledge for daily life. (Lin, interview, July 25, 2014)

Later, when contracted documentary filmmakers like Jiang Yue made a short documentary, *Mysterious Three Heroes* in 1993, the current realistic style was gradually taking shape. It started to focus on stories of ordinary people, and *Living Space* became a TV column showcasing mini-documentaries about people's lives. The unexpected popularity contributed to the status of *Living Space* as a classic TV documentary form. It produced eight-minute, character driven mini-documentaries every day from 1993 to 2000.

However, the audience gradually got tired of repeated themes and similar story plots in the series. In 2000, *Living Space* launched its weekend version, *The True Story*, which produced and broadcasted 20-minute, and later 45-minutes, documentaries.

Entering the industry

It is hard to depict the lives of the Chinese documentary workers, because there are a variety of experiences and lifestyles, depending on their backgrounds, work types, regions, and genders. Lacking statistical data poses another challenge to a labor study such as this one. The only available statistics show that there were 988 documentary makers in all the provincial TV stations in 2010, among which three documentary channels employed 330 (Shanghai 150;

Hunan, 80; China Education TV 3, 100) (He, 2011). This group of people played a vital role in producing ideological products, but we have only some vague ideas about their lives. How did they live, what did they think, and how did they react to the changing media industry? In this chapter, I would like to use a CCTV documentary program, *The True Story*, as the topic for a case study, to illustrate the dynamics of the work and lives of TV documentary workers.

A career trajectory approach

Tracing a documentary maker's career trajectory is a common strategy in reconstructing the lived experience of cultural workers. The trajectories are highly particular, depending on the workers' positions in the cultural domain, their social and educational backgrounds, and the goals they want to achieve. Many documentary maker interviewees for this project entered this industry not because of passion for documentary work, but because of desire for a television job. Many of them "have a clear goal of finding television work" (Mu, interview 37), and for them "documentary was an unexpected thing" (Han, interview13). Mao, a senior documentary director at CCTV documentary channel, having entered the industry in late 1993, states, "I never heard of the term 'documentary' at college. Our producer, who later was dubbed the 'Godfather of the Chinese TV documentaries,' didn't know what 'documentary' meant either. It was a new concept then" (interview 8).

Others took the job because of love for audio-visual expression. Compared to the fictional film industry, documentary is a much less expensive and convenient form of self-expression. It does not need a big budget or a large-sized crew. It does not need scripts either. Director Fen spoke demonstratively about her creative drive as a documentary maker:

> I love audio-visual arts. Documentary is one of them, an easy and inexpensive one. So, I did it. Fictional films are very industrial and expensive, costing at least millions of dollars. I would not even think about it. Documentary making allows personal expression. You only need a mobile phone, and everyone can engage in this self-expression. (interview 34)

Documentary production at *The True Story* rarely recruits fresh graduates, so many of the filmmakers had previous work experience in video production sectors. They consider documentary making as a way of personal expression. Director Mu states the appeal of documentary work to him:

> I was an advertising director for 12 years. That job made me sick, due to endless meetings with clients. I had to try my best to beautify their product, even when it was dogshit. I was tired. So, I switched to documentary work. At least now I don't need to socialize with people, except the interviewees. (interview 37)

For others, documentary making is merely a job. Documentary director and photographer, Li, states:

> Li: I have no other option. I have no firm recommendations, nor money. It is so hard to get a job on *The True Story*. I produced a short documentary at school, which received an award in *The True Story's* competition. Then, I got an opportunity to intern there.
>
> Me: Have you thought about documentary making as a vocation?
>
> Li: No. When a person with nothing to his name finds a path, he will grasp his only choice. Documentary making for me is a way of making a living. I have no plans, no goals. No, nothing. (interview 19)

While many interviewees mention their pragmatic attitude towards TV documentary work, some expressed the reason why they refused to enter this industry or exited this industry after a while. Huo, an awarding winning director who worked for national media for ten years, notes:

> A filmmaker with an independent character will not enter the TV documentary industry. Think about independent documentary filmmakers, like Hu Jie, Zhao Liang, and others. It is hard to imagine that they work on a mainstream television documentary project. I watched the documentary series Peking Opera, by Kang Jianning and Jiang Yue. I was shocked by their schizophrenia. The pioneers of the independent Chinese documentary have degraded their craft to endorse and promote dominant ideology through their cultural product. It is a shame. They should leave this industry. (interview 4)

In the neoliberal economy, employers prefer ready-to-use labor and tend to pass the bulk of training and social welfare to individuals. The door is closed to the cultural worker "wannabes." Internships, no matter how long, will not get newcomers a permanent position in the television documentary industry. The workers accumulate experience project by project, and gradually polish skills by themselves. In a competitive commercial environment, the calculation of cost-profit correlations for employers will naturally skew towards hiring experienced labor.

The precarious nature of documentary work is obvious when compared to what happened in the old socialist system, in which a fresh college graduate was assigned to a job of which he/she had no prior knowledge. Back then, he/she had the time needed for personal growth, chances for making mistakes, and space for self-exploration in any occupation.

The appeal of documentary making

One needs to ask two questions: Why does the documentary industry hold such fascination for young people? And which forms of cultural or social capital do they value and seek?

TV documentaries have been considered the pearl of the news commentary department of CCTV. There are several reasons for this from the point of view of workers. First, work in the documentary field comes with more autonomy in comparison with other television forms. The directors can develop ideas according to their interests. The TV station provides funding, time,

and other resources to support their full expression. They can spend a long time on self-initiated topics. For example, ecological problems, social stratification issues, and the impact of new technologies on society are topics of current interest. The lure of autonomous creation is immensely appealing to the workers.

Second, documentaries have more extended value than instantly consumed television news products, which disappear in the flow of news information. A film offers analysis and expression whose value, if it resonates with history, increases as time goes by. Moreover, documentaries travel further than news. Besides screenings on television, documentaries are also screened at domestic and international film festivals and circulated in the form of DVDs or books. Also, some documentaries produced by *The True Story* directors inspire fictional films. For example, Li Yang's film *Blind Mountain* (2007) was inspired by a documentary from *The True Story*, which tells a story about a young, female college graduate being drugged, kidnapped and sold as a bride to a villager in China's Shaanxi province.

Third, documentaries are one of the most comprehensive forms of TV arts. Making a documentary requires a full set of visual-audio skills. Documentary filmmakers possess the most comprehensive capabilities in video production, like developing ideas, shooting, directing, sound recording and editing. At TV stations, documentary makers are usually considered “masters” of TV production and staff members look up to them.

Prejudice in selection

The process of recruiting new members reveals the practices of inclusion and exclusion that underlies the documentary industry. While some groups of people can access opportunities for

documentary jobs, others cannot. From the selection criteria and process, we can see prejudice towards specific groups of cultural workers in the documentary industry.

The interviewees mentioned that video production skills are the top concern of employers. The industry tends to rank capability and personality above educational backgrounds. Director Wu states, “The criteria are straightforward. Can you do it? Stay if you can and leave if not” (interview 25). Director Fu mentions the same experience:

> All the newcomers must show Mr. Chen their films. If he thinks it is OK, then he will keep you. He will then start to torture you. For my first film, I made seven revisions. I was driven crazy. Ten minutes, seven editions. Can you imagine? Editing was not digital at that time. I had to reshoot from the beginning for every revision. I got sick of it. I asked him if I could let go of that project and make a new one. (interview 7)

When recalling the educational backgrounds of the 40 members of her team, the former producer of *The True Story* states:

> There is not a clear pattern in the educational backgrounds of the documentary makers I have recruited. Chinese higher education is not successful, so graduates do not necessarily fit the jobs in their major. I personally don't use people from film schools. They are obsessed with light, frames, and equipment. But the most challenging task during documentary shooting is to take good shots in an unprepared state. Workers have to make decisions every second. (interview 8)

Besides educational background, other factors like gender also factor into the unequal treatment of newcomers to the profession. The directorial team of *The True Story* has a somewhat balanced gender composition. There are seven female directors and nine male directors. Its executive management is primarily female. Both the producer and the chief director are female. In the media industry, it is a common saying, “use women as if they are men, and use men as if they are oxen.” However, this neglects to acknowledge the domestic labor of women, who still have more responsibility as far as domestic labor is concerned. Female directors are less

likely to do the post-production at night, which is a notorious habit of documentary people. Director Guan, a 45-year-old director who left CCTV to work in a production house making commercial and customized documentaries, says:

> Working overnight brings more harm to women than to men. This industry is tough and unfair to women. I once worked overnight for five consecutive days. I have been doing that for each of my projects. You see, my body has been ruined. You can look at other female coworkers. They are the same. Now, I insist on not working at night. My boss gave me a name, "Honeysuckle." Why? Because it thrives in full sun and sleeps after the sunset. I don't care. Why should I sacrifice my body for making those streamline documentary products? I already finished my duties by working during the day. Microsoft even forbids employees to work overtime by locking the office. (interview 6)

While the job of documentary director is for both males and females, the photographer has been a muscular vocation in China. Female photographers are very rarely seen. Producer Zhao states:

> The first time I went to the Amsterdam documentary festival in 2006, I was surprised to see so many female photographers. They are as strong and as big as guys. Physical disadvantages seem not a problem for them. I have never seen a female photographer in the Chinese documentary industry. Maybe there are some in the film industry, because directors of photography in fiction film do not need to operate the heavy cameras. (interview 21)

However, when equipment becomes light and portable, especially when SLR cameras like Canon 5D (950g) and Sony a7r (625g) became the mainstream models for documentary filming, documentary photography opened its doors to women. Digital advancement is reducing exclusions that have previously been based on gender.

Sustaining status

Learning censorship

The newcomers entered the editing room with passion and excitement, and soon they found the idealism and professionalism taught at college classrooms unfit in the real workplace. Chinese TV stations take a Grierson view of documentary, using it in the service of the government. For John Grierson, "Propaganda is education…We are medicine men hired to mastermind. We are giving every individual a living conception of the community which he has the privilege to serve"(Grierson & Hardy, 1966). The mold waiting for the new members ahead is to become a propaganda worker, producing the symbolic product that represents the state as a totalized and unified nation with a bright future. TV stations need and encourage a particular type of creativity, that is, to make the documentaries appear not to propagandize.

When asked how and when they learned to practice censorship, some interviewees mentioned the weekly meeting in which the leaders of the TV station would explicitly announce the guidelines for the coverage plan, including what to cover and what cannot be covered. But actually, they could feel the influence of censorship in every step of the production process. Director Guo reflexively analyzed his own attitude towards the internalized self-censorship:

> You spent one month on a documentary, but it did not pass the review because of some ridiculous reasons. You love your work, and you want it to be on TV. Then gradually you learned survival skills. You had to learn both how to express yourself, and how to pass the censorship tests.... It was a natural process. For any young people who want to go upward, they must learn these things by themselves, unless they do not want to succeed in this society. TV stations and documentary productions are just a microcosm of the society. Self-censorship is a necessary skill for success in the society. (interview 23)

Some documentary makers prize their autonomy and actively challenge censorship by covering semi-sensitive topics or adding subtle messages into their films. Director Lu, who left the industry ten years ago, notes:

> In my time, it was glory if one's documentary got censored. It was like a badge for the courage of the director to touch upon sensitive areas. However, the author still feel frustrated because after so many sleepless nights, the audience can't watch their work. In addition, he will not get paid. (interview 40)

Censors are not entirely the Other. They come out of the ranks of filmmakers. The senior director will tell newcomers his understanding of the rules, the producer will do the first review, and she/her is the first censor.

What do you want?

This is a speech that documentary director Chen Xiaoqin delivered at the 2015 China Academy awards for Documentary Films:

> I remember how poor we were when we started making documentaries. What has supported us for so many years? I can describe it in one term, 'passion.' Now, passion also has a price tag. I remember a story happened at *Living Space,* of the News Commentary Department in the early 1990s. The team was talking about whether a bonus should be distributed to each director as other programs did. The directors of other programs have saved enough money to buy an apartment in a suburb of Beijing. But the directors of *Living Space*, the directors with documentary dreams, were upset and left the meeting, leaving word with the producer, "we are not working here for stinky money! We are here for our documentary dream!" (applause) However, times have changed. How much are documentary dreams worth? Can they carry us through our whole documentary career? (He, 2016)

Poverty has been accepted as normal by documentary practitioners. None of the documentary makers who completed interviews considered making money as their primary goal. As Bourdieu (1996) observed about the perceived autonomy of cultural production, it stemmed

from the apparent contradiction that fundamental economic rules of capitalism were upheld or even reversed in the restricted production field. Rather than value those who made the most money, for example those working in mass entertainment, the arts granted high status to the high arts. In other words, creatives look for recognition from peers, rather than from the masses. In fact, economic success in some way contaminates the purity of the pursuit of cultural or symbolic capital, embodied in tangibles and intangibles, such as reputations, awards, skills, or experiences. Director Guan says, "my goal is to make documentaries of self-expression and films with social meaning. Also, I hope the job can feed me." Guan's husband is a screenwriter, living an even more precarious life than hers. She expresses her concern about her documentary career:

> I must survive first. In any case, making a documentary film is not the ultimate goal. My goal is self-improvement. I learned things from the lives of the interviewees and the production process. I had a meaningful life and I made useful films. That's good for me. I don't want to make streamline rubbish. Totally meaningless, right? You throw it away when it is finished, and don't even look at it yourself. Why should I waste my life doing that? (interview 6)

Capitalism produces poverty to prevent resistance. When a person is held up with the burden of making a living, he/she is less likely to utilize documentary as a way of resistance to the system. In addition, censorship also limits the autonomy of artistic creation. Some of the cultural workers realized that their dream of self-expression was impossible to realize within the TV system:

> I don't wanna be a TV director, a director in the system (tizhinei), but a successful international director. I'm not talking about winning awards at international festivals, which is not feasible at this stage, but becoming a director with global vision. TV has its propaganda duties. I want to step out of the propaganda framework to make documentaries that record real lives of people and investigate real social problems. (interview 23)

Proletarianization of documentary workers has made documentary making not a perfect option for a lifelong career. Many workers began to exit the system to look for other futures.

Exiting the streamline

Precarious work is contingent, temporary, seasonal, or project-based work. It is not sustainable. At some point, documentary workers have to think about ways to exit the profession. The lack of upward mobility prevents senior workers from staying. They cannot enter middle-level management. Moreover, in the neoliberal market of China, people always like new stuff, new ways of storytelling, new cameras, new lights, and new sound effects.

New technologies also erode the authority of senior workers. Self-training becomes harder with age. They do not operate as well as young people on the SLR camera, aerial filming, the GoPro, or the Final Cut Pro, and no longer provide the best, latest, and most efficient resolution. In the meantime, their salaries decrease. Salary levels in the whole industry remain static while housing prices have increased tenfold in the last ten years.

On the other hand, many young people believe in individualistic success stories and take risks for flexibility. They have grown up in a neoliberal environment and are willing to work for free or low pay just for the experience. This large "reserve army" of labor has lowered salaries and social welfare of older cultural workers.

Li, the producer of a crime program, states, "I am about 40 now. It is the age to do managing jobs. I cannot hold the camera and do front-line filming anymore. I can think bigger and have more perspective. There is no way to get promoted, so I have to leave" (interview 19).

The True Story has gone through several revisions in 2008 and been renamed *Documenting* in 2009 and *Baixin Stories* in 2010. It gradually transformed, from a realistic

documentary program into a regular news program. Documentary workers have had to decide on their future. Is TV documentary work in China sustainable? Can the practitioners do it all their life? If not, what is the exit mechanism and what strategies they will choose?

The True Story had 30 directors, cameramen and post-production technicians, among whom seven have stayed, while five have switched to other TV programs, and 11 quit their jobs at CCTV. Among the people who resigned from CCTV, two worked as independent directors and now work on their own film projects; three established a studio producing social media videos and VR videos; four joined social production houses and freelance on temporary projects; and two went into graduate school. The cameramen and post-production technicians did not switch jobs because they would do the same jobs elsewhere as well. For them, it makes better sense to say in a more prominent company to retain full workloads.

In this section, I try to analyze the position-taking strategies applied by these documentary filmmakers to survive or succeed in the industry.

Going international

Some documentarians started to pursue careers as critical documentary filmmakers who investigate social issues and send their films to global film festivals. Fan Lixin, who had worked on *The True Story* in 2005 and 2006, is one of them.

In the past ten years, Fan's documentary film *Last Train Home* has been one of the most influential documentary films, winning 24 international awards and getting permission from the Chinese government to screen in Chinese theatres. In China, most critical documentaries were underground. Many internationally awarded documentaries have been banned in China for not going through the censorship tests of the government or getting permission to attend foreign film

festivals. Fan's success in both the critical documentary community and official state system makes him a good case for tracing the necessary strategies for making a career through international recognition.

We shall account for Fan's success not just by attributing it to his personal qualities, but also consider broader structural factors that helped make it possible. First, his training in the national television system made him implicitly aware of rules of censorship and how to maneuver through them. Unwritten rules of censorship can only be learned during daily operations – you learn while initiating topics, working on-site during shoots, and editing. Censorship is detrimental to creativity, but it is not the reason to not pursue creativity. Instead, it calls upon filmmakers to respond creatively, to devise ingenious ways to survive in the system.

An unstated method of categorizing operates among filmmakers. Topics are categorized into three zones, according to their risk of being censored. The first is the red zone, i.e., the strictly forbidden topics, including religion, homosexuality, ethnic minorities. The filmmakers must be very careful in this category. The second one is a green zone, where the State allows or encourages topics such as sports, entertainment, and economic issues. In between is the gray zone, where topics are somewhat sensitive but can still be touched upon if the filmmakers can find the right perspective and not explicitly challenge the social system or the regime. Recent independent documentaries are increasingly located in the green and gray zones. Fan's *Last Train Home* portrays the lives of rural-to-urban migrant workers in the context of globalization and deals with intergenerational conflicts in the family. This is a safe topic. It is not celebratory of, nor does it challenge existing power relations in China. The earliest version of the film was broadcast on *The True Story* on CCTV in 2005. This sensitivity to censorship helps Fan reach a

balance between the demands of TV broadcasting in China and the demands of international film festivals.

The second factor in Fan's success is his experience of working on global productions. Fan has worked as coordinator and gaffer on the Canadian documentary project *Up to the Yangtze* (Yung Chang, 2017), produced by the Canadian production company Eyereal. Eyereal also co-produced Fan's film. The post-production is in Canada and the U.S. Thereby, the way Fan conceptualizes topics and organizes production, fundraising, and distribution is very international.

The third factor is Fan's language ability and communication skills. Fan is an English major, and he speaks fluent English. He can speak impromptu and take questions from the audience in English during global screenings of his films, including at prestigious festivals like Sundance and Amsterdam. He has given interviews in perfect English on CNN and other mainstream Western media. The accumulation of his media coverage from both domestic and international sources has built up his substantial cultural capital.

This case illustrates several factors contributing to the success of a director in the global market: finely trained professional skills, state television background, English speaking ability and international connections.

Surviving in the market: the dark forest self-rescue plan

Very few people go to the top of the industry, and their success is a complex interaction between position, habits, and their position taking strategies. However, many documentary makers are struggling within the commercialized market. They try to find a way of adapting from the TV production mode to the independent production mode.

Some cultural workers were forced to leave jobs at TV stations and pushed unprepared into the market. Many documentary makers left CCTV in 2007 because of the new labor law that was passed on June 29, 2007 and took effect in January 2008. The new law sought "to specify rights and responsibilities of management and labor, protect labor's rights, develop harmonious labor relations" and to tilt the labor-management system toward workers (Chang & Qiu, 2011, pp. 43–47). It specifically required firms to give workers open-ended contracts if "the employee has been working for the employer for ten consecutive years, or where a labor contract was concluded as a fixed-term labor contract on two consecutive occasions or if a written contract is not concluded where it should be" (Becker & Elfstrom, 2010). The new law strikes many media organizations, because many of them apply casual employment, and a large number of workers do not have written contracts. The law's stated aim is to protect the workers, but it ends up ruining the lives of many workers.

As a reaction to the new law, CCTV fired almost all temporary workers to avoid an open-ended contract. There is not a precise number of sacked workers. CCTV said the number is 1800, but media estimated that it is over 4000 (Cheng, 2007). Half of the workers on the documentary program *The True Story* had no contract, although many of them had worked there for many years. The workers were told that because of the policy change of the TV station, they had to leave.

The cruelty of employers has made workers feel betrayed. Many workers are highly educated, with master's degrees from the best colleges in China. They came for opportunities to make documentaries and gave up written contracts and social welfare. But now, they know that when there is an iceberg ahead, they will be the first group of passengers who are thrown into the water. This is a case of asymmetrical relationships between temporary workers and permanent

managers. Precarious work includes not only low pay, longer working time, no social welfare, no pensions, no contracts, but also the possibility of being sacrificed in the interests of employers.

Guan is one of the sacked workers. By 2007, she had worked in the documentary program for seven years. She had a law degree and was working in a law company before joining a documentary program. She sued the TV station and got a settlement fee of 200,000 yuan ($29,000). This firing was a severe blow, effectively ending her documentary career. CCTV was and still is the biggest player in the documentary industry that most production houses rely on for commissioning workers on their projects.

Guan has responded with a plan, which she named "dark forest self-rescue plan," and she kept diaries about it. The core of the plan was to build up a career as a modern entrepreneurial artist. The first step, according to her plan, was going back to school to attend a two-year program on screenwriting. To be a cultural worker, one needs various types of cultural and social capital, like skills, certifications, and networks. A college education can provide all of them. A degree from a film college functions as a stepping stone for entering the industry. Classmates plan to join the industry in the future and provide mutual support to each other. Professors in communications at universities and film colleges are especially essential resources. They cultivate generations of students, many who occupy central positions in the industry. Some of the professors work informally in the social network. Guan had to invest 200,000 yuan ($29,000) in self-improvement and get ready to work as an entrepreneur for herself in the cultural marketplace.

After film academy studies, she started taking documentary projects. There, she felt driven into slave labor:

> I know that I am belabored in both places. But at least, in *The True Story*, I was pleasantly belabored, and here, I feel like I'm living in a nightmare. No one cares about the quality of the program. Cost control is their most important concern. People work fast, with low pay, like rats in cages. They heavily rely on commission projects. The production model is very vulnerable. (interview 6)

In her dark forest self-rescue plan, Guan invests economic capital in the hopes of shoring up social, cultural, and symbolic capital. In the "resume building" race in cultural industries, symbolic capital, like awards, honors or box office, is the hard currency that brings job opportunities. Only self-entrepreneurs can survive in the neoliberal market.

Future-oriented entrepreneurs: switch to the new platform

New technologies have restructured the organization of documentary production. Online video sharing platforms such as Youku, Tencent, and Iqiyi have emerged as crucial players in the documentary market. They have replaced TV stations as ideal employers of documentary makers, according to the 2017 annual report on the industry (He, 2017). These multinational companies, listed in the New York stock market, represent a new production mode, a new invest-profit model, and a new management style in the documentary industry. Initially, their documentary channels functioned as platforms for video sharing and distribution. They bought copyrighted documentaries and promoted them online for click-through-rates and advertising. But as copyright law tightened up online content, these companies started to produce their own films.

In this context, some of the CCTV documentary talents joined the online platforms as high-level managers. For instance, the manager of Youku's realistic video production department, Yu Hongmiao, used to be chief director of a CCTV documentary program. The director of Tencent's documentary center, Zhu Lexian, used to be the producer of CCTV's

blockbuster *The Bite of China 2*. The extensive work experience at CCTV has cultivated their professional judgment and built up their production network. They can easily find the right filmmakers for outsourced projects. For instance, Youku has a long-term relationship with Fan Jian, a director from *The True Story*, and has invested in and produced his awarding-winning documentary film *Still Tomorrow* in 2015. In *Tencent*, Zhu has invited his old partner, Chen Xiaoqing, director of *The Bite of China 1 and 2*, to produce a food series. To some extent, the video-sharing companies have become significant players in documentary production and distribution in this field.

New technologies also foster new opportunities for the development of the industry. Two directors of *The True Story* have established their own companies and produce videos for social media platforms, include WeChat, Weibo and Youku. One of them started making VR videos and opened VR theatres across the country.

Journalism ideals: the last soldiers in the field

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, many documentary makers started their TV documentary careers because of the potential for getting a TV job, not because they were specifically interested in documentary. Thus, it was natural for some of them to switch positions within TV. For instance, two of *The True Story* directors went to work on *Focus Stories*, which is an investigative reporting program, and another director went to a crime reporting program, which analyzes crime cases by visual restaging.

These documentary directors are more likely to consider themselves journalists and take social responsibility and truth-seeking as primary career goals. For them, it is a step forward, rather than the opposite, to join *Focus Reporting*, because it is the most prominent watchdog

program aiming to find hidden evidence of wrongdoings. It investigates corruption, scandals, financial crises, and other wrongdoings to assist and watch local governments and warn against disorder. Like other TV documentary programs, it requires advanced analytic and storytelling skills.

Education plays a critical role in this career trajectory. All three of these cultural workers graduated with degrees in journalism. Their education in journalism predisposes them to stay with an influential television station. Qiu, one of the three documentary makers, states:

> We must survive at TV stations. They are platforms, battlefields. I am not sure if we are making art or doing journalism, but I must stay on the battlefield. If we survive here, there is hope, hope to convey some message to viewers. We must live with censorship and keep working as watchdogs, as we did in previous documentary programs. Quitting is easy. I can find a job with better pay and better benefits. But I doubt that my successors would defend journalistic ideals and documentary values as I did. (interview 3)

Working and surviving censorship in the Chinese media system requires a high degree of proficiency in production skills and a skilled sensitivity towards censorship. People with less experience are more likely to practice self-censoring and circumvent sensitive topics. Experienced filmmakers and journalists can approach issues from a smart perspective that may pass censorship. The first producer of *The True Story* once said that any topic could be covered when you find the right perspective, and the mission of TV documentary makers is to explore the censorship scale and find more space for expression. As Bai Yansong, a renowned host and producer at the news commentary department of CCTV, expressed in an interview:

> The censorship department will never publish an official document stating publicly that some sensitive topics can be covered now. It is always a bottom-up game. You make the documentary first. If the censors let it pass, then it is fine. Next time, your co-workers know they can keep going on this topic or perspective. (as cited in Liu, 2013)

It is always a cat-and-mouse game in the Chinese media industry, and cultural workers who choose to stay must struggle and creatively expand the space for autonomous journalistic practice.

Conclusion

TV documentary is work that combines both journalism and film arts. Cultural workers enter the industry with different imaginations and goals. They are motivated by the pleasure of visual expression, the ideals of journalism, the aura of cinema, or the need to make a living. These different goals lead them to different trajectories.

This chapter provides a case study of cultural workers on a documentary program at the national TV station of China, illustrating the lives and feelings of the cultural workers in an "ideological factory." The flexible nature of labor now conditions their terms of employment. The so-called younger, ready-to-work workers and those with strong personal recommendations have better chances of entering this program. Once they become part of the team, new members go through a process of socialization. They learn ideological parameters and unspoken rules of censorship through daily work, including compulsory weekly meetings and intensive reviews of their documentary work by producers, department directors, and TV station directors.

Precarious work is not sustainable for the individual worker. Consequently, cultural workers must think about exiting the system as they find that the work cannot be a life-long vocation. Some of them seek cultural capital in the international documentary market. Others reinvent themselves into self-employed entrepreneurs and struggle to survive in a more precarious market. Others embrace new business opportunities and new platforms brought on by digital technologies. Still, a group of workers chooses to stay in national television to fight for

more discursive space and protect their journalistic ideals. In the next chapter, I will discuss the lives of cultural workers who enter global documentary production.

CHAPTER 5

GLOBAL DOCUMENTARY: MOBILE PRODUCTION, LOCAL LABOR

> A co-production with the Americans…usually turns out to be another U.S. film shot on location.
>
> — Gaumont, Variety, 1994, quoted in Miller, 2001

As the national documentary labor market of China turns increasingly precarious, characterized by the insecurity, marginalization, and deterioration of working conditions, it has driven some creative workers to the international film market in search for a way to continue making their films. The global market, however, is not a paradise for autonomous artistic creation. Instead, global capitalism, represented in the documentary sector by multinational companies like Discovery and National Geographic Channel, has aggressively explored the cheap labor and broad market of developing countries for higher profits. As Miller (2001) states in *Global Hollywood 2*, when the advanced capitalist countries moved onto the global stage, new forms of labor were institutionalized. Chinese documentary workers, disembedded from the local production system, are increasingly integrated into this global production line. On the one hand, global funds and awards provide incentives to individual filmmakers seeking alternative ways of documentary production. On the other hand, they mask the exploitation and the alienation imposed upon Chinese cultural workers by global capital.

Miller's International Division of Creative Labor (IDCL) is a U.S-centered model. It focuses on the role Hollywood capital plays in this global production network. However, it does not account for the lives and subjectivities of the cultural workers in the peripherical countries, like China. What is the impact of the IDCL upon their lives? What are their attitudes? Are they embracing or resisting it?

The Chinese government, on the other hand, is seeking to introduce its culture and promote its soft power internationally. Soft power, a concept coined by Joseph Nye (1990, 2004), refers to the ability to attract and persuade rather than coerce and use force. In view of the role that Hollywood films and American documentaries play in spreading American cultures and values, the Chinese government realizes that documentary, with its claim of objectivity and authenticity, can be a powerful way of introducing the Chinese culture to the world. For the last ten years, "telling Chinese stories with international appeal" has been the main theme of the development of the Chinese documentary industry.

How will Chinese documentary workers react to the push and pull of pressure from global markets? How will they restructure and redesign the labor process? How do they cross barriers of language, culture, time zones, censorship systems, and intellectual property laws to embed themselves into this global network? This chapter will address these questions by examining emerging forms of labor practice among Chinese documentary workers within the context of the globalization.

Global hegemony and the Chinese documentary market

Rather than a cultural and economic activity on a national scale, documentary making has become a much more global production. There are two approaches to bridging the gap between Chinese documentaries and Western ones. The first is the American mode of TV documentary, represented by the Discovery Channel and the National Geographic Channel. They have occupied a large global documentary market with their Hollywood style storytelling, fast-paced editing and science or wildlife focus which is presented along Hollywood codes of glossy production, slick edits, and easily consumable narratives. The other is the European

documentary tradition, represented by documentary festivals and documentary markets such as in Amsterdam, Berlin, Sunnyside, and so on. Film festivals started in Europe in the 1930s because of the need to counteract the domination of Hollywood-style films.

Documentary trade

How does the globalization of the labor process take place? Miller (2001) proposes a model for analyzing the global film industry by dividing the world into three international foundations. They include, first, a world center such as Hollywood, second, intermediate zones nearby of secondary importance (Western Europe, North America and Australia), and third, outlying regions of labor subordinate to the center (the rest of the world). He argues that it is difficult for cultural products from the periphery to make their way into the center as imports. His arguments are supported by statistics concerning China's documentary trade in the 2010s.

China imported many documentaries from Europe and the United States but could only export very few of its products overseas. According to statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, from 2011 to 2015 the number of imported documentaries increases from 36.8, to 59.8, to 92.7, and 74.9 million yuan (renminbi, the Chinese currency, equal to 5.3, 8.7 and 10.9 million dollars), while the exports decreased from 18.3 to 9 million yuan (2.7 and 1.3 million dollars). The deficit in China's balance of documentary trade has increased 37.39% from 18.5 to 65.9 million yuan (2.7 and 9.6 million dollars). Also, the prices for imported documentaries range from 10,000 to 40,000 yuan (1,450 and 5,800 dollars), while very few exported documentaries are higher than 10,000 yuan ($1,450).

Europe is the primary market for documentary imports, about 1000 hours per year. America is the principal market for exported Chinese documentaries. The average exported

documentaries are 967 hours in the past five years with a price of 4,000 yuan ($580)/hour at average, far lower than the price of the imported documentaries from America (Zhou, 2017). The Chinese documentary industry relies heavily on the European and American markets. Sixty percent of the imported documentaries come from these two markets, while sixty percent of the exported documentaries go to the American market, eighty percent of which go to the United States (Zhou, 2017).

The trade deficit in the Chinese documentary industry indicates an asymmetrical cultural influence. There is a gap between China and the U.S. in every aspect of documentary production, in terms of storytelling, artistic aesthetics, values, equipment, experience, management, and budget size.

The documentary markets in the U.S and Europe has existed for a century. The production, distribution, and consumption of TV documentaries have become increasingly industrial. The western markets have made a clear set of rules, which China, as a late player, needs to learn from the beginning. Chinese documentary workers are learning the narrative structures, video storytelling techniques, and marketing strategies before playing as equals in a game with existing western competitors.

On the other hand, most Chinese documentaries focus on local Chinese history, culture and heritage, which are not familiar to Western audiences. In recent years, the CCTV (China Central Television) documentary channel began producing so-called ‘blue-chip’ documentaries, which focus on universal topics about human beings, wildlife and adventure. The ‘blue-chips’ also encourage cross-border filming to explore diversified topics, scenes and cultures. They try to avoid controversial, ideological elements but rather focus on shared concerns about the lives of human beings and the planet they co-reside on with other species.

Learning to labor for multinational companies

Cultural industries are about tastes, and western documentaries have dominated tastes internationally through a variety of methods. In development meetings on documentary projects, films such as *Planet Earth* (BBC, 2006), *Braka* (Ron Fricke, 1993), or *Civilizations* (BBC, 1969) are often cited as models for new projects. The goal is to create a film that does not seem as if it has been made in China.

Multinational companies, like Discovery channel have been active in the Chinese market since the early 2000s. However, Discovery cannot operate its own channel and get subscriber fees and advertising because of a government policy that forbids foreign companies from providing TV services in China. Discovery can only sell its contents through agencies to Chinese TV stations, a practice which does not generate much profit.

The multinational companies, however, will not stop seeking continued expansion. They search for new areas of expansion in human life and space, seek out new sources of raw materials and new markets (Luxemburg, 2003), as well as new places to invest surplus in, or "sites of accumulation" (Harvey, 2005), and new supplies of labor (Froebel, Heinrichs, & Krey, 1977; Huws, 2007b, 2014). In the documentary industry, the Chinese market has many of these resources.

Discovery soon switched strategies and considered China not only as a market but also as a production base (Liu, 2009). China has rich sources of stories and topics that can be developed, translated and manufactured into documentaries and sold on the global market. It is, as far as the West is concerned, still a mysterious land that is undergoing rapid changes. More importantly, China has a large number of cheap documentary workers. In the early 2000s, the production fee

for a 30-minute documentary was about 50,000 yuan ($7,250), less than one-tenth of the standard American fee.

Since 2002, Discovery partnered with Chinese TV stations to hold an annual national selection for documentary film directors in China, first titled “New Directors Plan,” then updated to “Outstanding Directors Plan,” and “Elite Directors Plan.” The competition attempted to find local talent, who could co-produce documentaries with the Discovery network. The Discovery Network Asia-Pacific decides on a theme and calls for proposals from TV directors, independent directors, and college students. Each year, 12 projects are selected and placed on a short list. The directors then receive a two-day extensive training on idea development, scriptwriting, shooting and editing. After that, five projects are placed on a final list. Each of the projects start production under the supervision of a senior producer from Discovery.

Discovery has specific rules about documentary making. For European documentaries, one can tell the names of the directors from their styles. But for Discovery documentaries, you can’t tell the names of the directors, but you can tell they are Discovery documentaries.

Discovery documentaries are made for a “surfing,” “glocal” cable audience (Yang, 2014). They must have both local flavor and global appeal. It is vital to balance between stories and information, as well as factual content and entertainment value. Also, all Discovery documentaries must be re-edited and revised into different versions for different markets.

The network also has a specific standard for storytelling. They adapted skills of storytelling and editing from drama and movies into documentary storytelling, including a sensational opening, bringing out the theme in the first 3 minutes, and presenting a small conflict every several minutes.

This win-win idea gives young directors a chance to learn and make their dream come true; for Discovery, it is an economical and effective way to gather ideas and sources. For each proposal, Discovery spends $25,000, so they spend less than $200,000 for six projects (Liu, 2009). As a return, they get six projects and trained, sophisticated, creative talents. They also build up a pool of potential directors. Through the competition, Discovery promotes its philosophy of documentary making and improves the brand in China.

Many of the documentaries produced this way have won awards at international festivals. The directors also signed contracts with and produced documentaries for Discovery Asia Pacific. For example, Zhao Liang, winner of the 2004 competition, directed *Confucius Food* (2005), and *Kong Linghe* (2005) for Discovery Asian Pacific channel in the next year.

The Discovery channel reproduced its taste and ideology in China by cultivating local filmmakers. Controlling the knowledge that is valued, sanctioned and rewarded within the system, Discovery has created a group of documentary makers with a distinct culture, and has stratified documentary workers. Discovery directors soon became elite filmmakers in China and spread Discovery values to other filmmakers. After several years, Discovery production rules and procedures have been studied and practiced by most documentary makers in China's national TV stations. Ping, the producer of a documentary program on CCTV, states:

> We started learning the Discovery style in 2004. We studied the editing techniques used on Hollywood films, analyzed the audience ratings and used extensive background music. We wanted to make documentaries that would be pleasant to watch. (interview 35)

In addition to reproducing their production style, Chinese documentary funders and charity organizations have imitated the Discovery model to hold competitions. As mentioned in chapter 3, CNEX, a non-profitable fund cooperatively implemented by Chinese managers from

Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, has held similar annual competitions. It solicits entries in the Greater China area and provides 50,000 yuan ($7,250) to each of the finalists, in exchange for the copyrights to the final documentaries.

The globalization of the Chinese documentary industry also encourages the importing of international talent. To make documentaries with international appeal, the TV stations started to collaborate with international producers, directors, photographers. The expats are also invited to work as juries for film festivals, hold master classes, or work as consultants. For instance, French film editor Matthieu Laclau edited Jia Zhangke, Fan Jian and Xu Bing's award-winning documentary films. Also, the blockbuster film *A Bite of China 3* (CCTV, 2017) used Dutch photographer Reinout Steenhuizen. *Chinese Life Style* (CCTV, 2015) used Iranian editor Bahman Kiarostami, whose father is the renowned film director Abbas Kiarostami.

In addition, China also brought western festivals and markets to China. The modern documentary festival is more of a documentary market than an award ceremony. It provides a platform, bringing together all broadcasters and filmmakers. Cultural producers look for potential investors or buyers for their films, proposals and ideas in the market. In 2014, the annual French fest, "Sunny Side of the Doc," set its sights on Chengdu, China, bringing over 600 documentary producers, directors, distributors and executives to the trade fair. Gao Feng, the director of Central Newsreel Group, states:

> China documentary industry is big. But it is only big in documentary consumption, not in production. Bringing in the French documentary festival help our filmmakers get familiar with the rules of international documentary trade, because not many filmmakers have the opportunities to go abroad to attend international documentary festivals. (Gao, interview, March 19, 2014)

Overall, Chinese documentary makers are increasingly integrated into a global assembly line of documentary financing, production and distribution professionals.

Financing and the pitching system

Pitching is a new practice of fundraising for documentary projects in development and early stages of production, whose producers and directors are looking for funding from broadcasters, distributors, and other funders. The filmmakers each have a fifteen-minute slot. In that slot, they have seven minutes to present, or pitch their ideas. That includes any clip(s) that they want to show. After that, there are eight minutes for questions from the decision makers on the floor. If people go over your 8-minute time limit, they have less time to get valuable feedback from decision makers. Also, there are one-to-one meetings organized with some decision makers to follow the discussion.

The pitching sessions train Chinese documentary makers in effectively using speaking methods for the forums that take place around the world to enable producers to talk about their projects.

The process of pitching is a process of self-commodification. The filmmakers must package their ideas and present them in ways different nationalities can understand. The decision makers come from different cultures and background, and the pitchers need to make them believe that their projects are worth the money they claim. Each selling point will be discussed. An Australia filmmaker describes the commercial atmosphere of the film market in China like this:

> The infrastructure in the commercial world is not set up to be able to invest in this kind of content easily. They want to invest in it, but where you can sit down and apply a set of rules to a television program that says: if we get 1.5 million viewers, then we can

> charge a cost per thousand for advertising of AUD$100. We are going to get AUD$150 thousand for a prime-time ad, bingo. (as quoted in Meiklejohn, 2017))

Usually, only topics of global interest are appealing to the buyers. Documentary filmmakers can send projects on a variety of issues, but the ones being accepted share some qualities. The so-called 'global documentaries' have some formulas. The western audience is not interested in cultures and histories that require a lot of background knowledge. They want stories they can understand.

Pitching means extra work for Chinese documentary makers. First all, it is a job utterly different from filmmaking. It largely involves business skills. Tian, a senior documentary maker, states:

> I had to learn a new vocabulary like copyright, distribution fee, pre-sale, grant. All these words are nonexistent in my previous world. Also, I have to tell the difference between a commissioning editor, an executive producer, and a broadcaster. When I worked for CCTV, I didn't need to think about these things. I studied Russian when I was young. It is even harder for me to participate in the communication with English speakers. (interview 31)

It is rare for filmmakers to find one crucial foundation, which is going to write one fat check to cover all the expenses. The filmmakers must attend different festivals and pitching conferences repeatedly. The fundraising activities are embedded into the whole filmmaking process, including production, post-production and distribution. While workers are hard-pressed to meet deadlines, they must compete with hungry filmmakers for a limited amount of funds. This necessity is a significant distracting factor.

When award-winning, independent filmmaker Fan Jian produced his documentary, the funding process was as time-consuming as the production itself. To make the documentary, he had to pitch for a pre-sale deal of about 50,000-100,000 US dollars with the largest Japanese TV

network, NHK. The process involved a lot of energy. There were many rounds of business negotiations back and forth through emails. He also had to report on the progress of the project regularly. He only got the funding after half a year, which was already one of the fastest possible results for such a process. Documentary filmmakers wishing to take this pathway must secure plenty of investors to get the project off the ground.

Unfortunately, not many filmmakers succeed in obtaining a pre-sale or co-production deal. Even if they do, many deals still fall short of their proposed budget. They have to rely on their savings and persuade teammates to work for free, promising to pay them more once the film is finished and if, luckily, there are profits left. During the production process, creative workers do not take any salaries, essentially turning their labor into a financial investment in the project whose returns may or may not come back.

Global co-production

Ursula Huws (2007b) argues that, in the new international division of creative labor, jobs migrate seamlessly from continent to continent over the internet in an incessant search for the best skills at the cheapest price. In a parallel and contrary motion, multitudes of desperate workers, disembedded from the economies in which they grew up, travel the world in search of a livelihood.

When the professionalization of the industry arrives at a certain level, the increasingly standardized skills and competencies will enable most ambitious documentary projects to look for talent with a global scope.

Nomadic production

The labor process has been reconfigured and redesigned to fit mobile production practices for global documentaries. A production team on a global documentary project consists of members from various countries and regions. It also films across countries and continents. For instance, a good case here is the documentary series *A Book a City*, in which I worked as the series director from 2015 to 2016. The documentary was commissioned by a Chinese TV station. It filmed in 16 different cities. The crews were recruited globally. The core creatives, including directors, directors of photography and writers, came from Beijing (China), Hong Kong (China), the U.S., and Hamburger (Germany). It also required local labor for below-the-line work, including local fixers, sound recorders, production assistants, interpreters and drivers. All the people gathered in the city where filming took place worked together for a short period. After the project, they left for home, waiting for the next task in another city. This nomadic production style has restructured labor relations.

A 24/7 production line

New technology has transformed the nature of documentary making and made possible the ‘seamlessness' in organizing the work across spatial and cultural divides. Documentary making is no longer a location-sensitive practice. Miller argues that "Labour-market slackness, increased profits and developments in global transportation and communications technology have diminished the need for co-location of these factors, depressing labor costs and deskilling workers" (Miller, 2001, p. 127). Global talent has replaced local labor in important positions on the creative team. But what happens in practice when the work of documentary production is re-structured? What are the interactions among individuals, institutions and global forces?

Global collaboration comes with its own sense of temporality and spatiality. The work can be distributed to people in different locations and different time zones so that at any time at least one person is working. This is a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (24/7) non-stop production line. I am going to use my own remote collaborative project, *A Book A City*, as a case study to explain the virtual production line.

As the director, based in the U.S., I had to remotely direct the team filming in Germany, while at the same time, supervise the post-production in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong editor Liang could only do the editing at night. He usually finished the work at 5 or 6 in the morning. He sent the offline version to me, then took a 20-minute nap. He had a full day job that day. At night, when Liang went back to the office at about 9 pm, he had already gotten comments from me. Then, he spent the night making another revision. The same thing repeated several times.

On the other side of the world, I spent the whole day preparing detailed comments. I had to go over all the footage to find the exact shots and write down the timeline code. It took a long time. After sending out the comments, I had to have a Skype video conference with the German production team to talk about the shooting plan.

The German production team consisted of a Hong Kong photographer, a German location manager, and a Chinese presenter. They had no time to recover from the jet lag and started working in the early morning to make good use of the light at sunrise. They could only get off work after sunset, usually after 10 pm in the summertime. Then, a video conference started.

Once the German production team finished an interview, it would upload the audio file to a cloud service. In half an hour, a translator from Chongqing, China would download and start to transcribe it. In three hours, the director in the U.S. would get the full transcripts and then be able

to decide on the stories and B-rolls and make a shooting plan for the next day. The German production team would receive the director's plan when they got up at 5 am.

It was like a never stopping machine. No one in the team could stop. The situation lasted about two months, until all eight episodes were broadcast on the TV stations. I wrote in the field notes:

> I am so worried that Liang can't last long if he doesn't get enough sleep. He is too busy. He is doing several projects simultaneously and has slept for only one or two hours for four consecutive days. If he gets sick, we are all dead. Too much work accounts on him. (Fieldnotes, October 5, 2014)

Liang said in the phone meeting about the editing, "My wife threatened to throw my computers to the streets because I have slept in the office for a week".

The new technologies, especially instant messaging, have turned workers into part of a non-stop, 24-7 streamline. They offered both opportunities and uncertainties. The intensified work pace brought on by global collaboration has profound implications for workers' stress levels and emotional well-being.

Not only the core creatives, but also the below-the-line workers in the global network of documentary production and distribution are more likely to experience exploitation. Their working conditions could be worse. Translators and subtitle graphics editors are two of them. As mentioned above, China imported 342 hours of documentaries in 2014. Among them, the company in which I have done participant observation imported three U.S. documentary series, a total of around 90 hours. I oversaw this project. The main task was to translate the English scripts into Chinese, subtitle them in the films, and send them to a national television station. The schedule was very tight. The company formed three subtitle groups, mostly college students. It also outsourced part of the work to an established documentary subtitle group. The computer lab

was in a film and television technical school. There were three computers, and each computer could subtitle two episodes each day. This capacity meant that the translators had to finish translating at least six episodes per day. It was a very challenging mission as most translators needed two or three days to finish translating one article, and another half day to proofread the translation.

When the invisible machine starts, it cannot stop. No people in this streamline can take a break. In the field notes on April 16, 2014, I wrote:

> It is no fun to translate in such a tight schedule. I am just like a robot. It is like a streamline that will not stop. We need to put coal into the stove every day. We are feeding the machines with our flesh and minds. (Fieldnote, April 16, 2014).

One of the student translators expressed the frustration in the interview:

> I had nightmares every day. The translating is always behind schedule. I visited the computer lab where the young kids were adding subtitles. They were teenagers, and they look so tired. They looked like having worked overnight. They barely understood English, so it took long for them to put the Chinese subtitles in the right place. I felt sorry for them. For myself too. We were the same. We were laborers working at different links of the same production chain. As long as the computers were working, they had to work, and I had to provide the subtitle texts for them. We could not take a break. We could only rest when the computers were out of condition. I understood then why the factory workers destroyed machines in the old days. I just wanted to stop the constant running streamline and have a sound sleep. I could have escaped but I promised the producer to finish it. I didn't want to disappoint him. (interview 12)

As Miller (2005) suggests, the above-the-line workers lie within the critical sector of budgets and includes supposedly proactive workers, such as writers and producers, while the below-the-line workers, including reactive workers, or proletarians, such as production assistants, interns and gaffers, are more likely to be impacted when the budget is limited.

In the co-production project in China, the above-the-line workers are more likely to provide contingent employment to foreigners, because they are more familiar with the so-called international tastes, aesthetics and visual grammars of documentary films. The positions of director of photography, director of post-production and special effects director were more likely to be taken by foreigners, as western workers have higher skills in these areas. However, the directors were rarely foreigners. Directors are the soul of a project, author of symbolic products, and they need to be familiar with the guidance of the State and guarantee the political correctness of the themes.

Alienation of co-production

The "floating factories" documentary production mode is very different from the traditional production organization style, which is from the 1990s, as illustrated in chapter 4. At that time, documentary making was mainly produced in weekly TV programs. A program usually had about 20-30 employees, mainly directors and photographers. They shared offices where they held meetings to review each other's films. They shared editing rooms. A production team consisted of two people, the director, who also worked as the editor in the post-production phase, and the photographer who was also responsible for recording sound. For some teams, when the director came from a photography background, he/she could finish all the work by him/herself, from scripting and shooting to recording and editing. In this way, the author had good control over the final product.

The transition of the production organization has been the result of the industrialization of documentary making. It has been what Ursula (2007a) called the "module." Once the work has been divided into task pieces, then each part could be outsourced to different companies, which

theoretically could be in any country, if the communication among each module was well coordinated.

The new division of labor in the documentary has alienated the workers from the final product. Workers, engaged in the tasks of the small pieces in the chain, have been deprived of the whole picture of the project. As Millers (2001) says in *Global Hollywood*, "Work may be subject to the local, national, regional and international fetishization of each component, matching the way that the labor undertaken is itself largely fetishized away from the final text" (p. 114). The projects rely on the supply of experienced freelancers with standardized skills. They need to have the mentality to work without knowing the whole picture of the project. Chao, a renowned filmmaker participating in a big budget global production, notes:

> It is a global blockbuster. A collaboration of directors from different countries. I am making Chinese Stories. I have no idea what other directors do and what the final film will look like. I can only focus on my part, a small part. Although it is a good experience of participating in the global production. I feel like a worker in the Dongguan assembly line. (interview 22)

This alienation takes place not only between the workers and the product but also among the workers themselves. The workers in different task modules come from different cultures, nations, and speak different languages. Their lives have no intersections with each other. It is hard to develop a feeling of camaraderie or collegiality, which was referred to by most interviewees as the most significant wealth they got from work. Also, as professionals who receive a daily wage, they must focus on each other's jobs. The collective, communal work of documentary making has become isolated. The solidarity of the team has been eroded. Documentary maker Lu expressed the nostalgia towards the old time:

> My photographers are in Germany, and one of the producers is French. I don't know their background and have no cues about their tastes and philosophy. It is hard to communicate about the subtle understandings of the story, the characters, and scenes, light. We have different working habits too. I used to work with a stable team. We have been working together for about ten years. We got the same training, had shared philosophies, and stayed in the same office. I liked the sense of working as a team. (interview 40)

The international filmmakers from the place with advance film production culture have skills and professional attitudes. Also, they physically embody the "international" appearance of the team and will be emphasized in the media coverage of the projects. For example, in *A Bite of China 3* (CCTV, 2017), the Dutch DOP (director of photography) and Taiwanese director had been reported on intensively, to highlight the international makeup of the team. It is fashionable, and a guarantee of high quality. The cultural industry gradually turns into a colony, where the creatives come from the cultural center. The U.S., the U. K., European countries, or even Hong Kong and Taiwan, have been portrayed as having mastery of the "higher" skills. They know what to do, they know what sells, and they know how to achieve goals. As a result, they earn very high pay compared to local cultural workers. The asymmetry in international and domestic workers has been striking.

Distribution of profits

The co-productions have brought about a new idea of copyright. As mentioned in Chapter 3, most documentary workers did not think about copyright, as TV employees were employed to work and get a monthly salary, so they did not share in any copyright. The contracted workers were paid for their labor and would not share the copyright either. However, in the international documentary market, copyright is all people care about. All the business negotiations and trade are centered on the copyrights. For instance, when a pitch project won the first prize in the

CCTV pitching competition in 2014, CCTV wanted to buy all the copyrights in exchange for investing 120,000 yuan ($17,400). However, the producer's budget was 5 million yuan (about $725,000). She consequently sold the distribution rights in Europe and North America and negotiated with potential buyers about the distribution rights in Asian area. One needs to invest about 1 million yuan (about $145,000) to get the distribution rights in one area. However, for Chinese organizations like CCTV, they still think that a documentary project costs only 100,000 or 200,000 yuan (around $14,500 and 29,000), which has been the market rate in China for about a decade.

In the 1990s, CNEX, a non-profitable documentary fund, started a pitching conference, and it usually results in investments in the selected project of 80,000 yuan (around $11,600) with all the copyright. Documentary director Huo states:

> There is a pyramid. Some people at the top, while some others at the bottom. The young documentary professionals who want to enter this industry have to experience severe exploitation. For example, the Shanghai MIDA (Magnolia International Documentary Awards) would buy all your copyrights with 80, 000 yuan (around $11,600). When I was in my starting phase, I had to accept it. The young people who wanted to make something of their own has to take it too. Unless you are very established documentary makers and have substantial bargaining power. The young people in their 20s, no way. You have to accept it. Then they become the ones exploited. (interview 4)

The commissioning editors are more straightforward, and more streamlined in terms of budgetary, editorial and licensing negotiations. Many channels, particularly in the USA, insist on taking all the rights to a program so they can transmit and exploit it as they like. This exploitation can extend to worldwide transmission through their international network without having to pay the filmmaker additional licensing fees. The producer is effectively employed on a work-for-hire basis. They are given the budget to make the program, from which they keep a 10-15% production fee.

Copyright is the only thing that can be traded in the market. Another interviewer talks about the importance of copyright: “Copyright is like you have bought a house. You owned it. Distribution right is like a rented apartment, you can use it but do not own it” (interview 26). The secrets of the cultural industry or the precariousness in the Chinese cultural industry lie in that the documentary workers do not share in the copyright. Only capital owns the copyrights. Almost all the interviewees consider it reasonable and take it for granted. “It is normal. You did not invest money in the project, so it is natural that you do not share the copyright,” says investor Jiang during the interview (interview16).

However, in Canada, contracted creative workers share the copyright. In Taiwan, the documentary worker Gird has proposed to the public TV stations, that for commissioned projects, once a documentary has been broadcast three times on TV, its copyright should automatically be returned to the creators. They can decide to whom to sell the distribution rights. The latest exploitation of cultural workers lies in the deprivation of a share of the copyrights for cultural workers. Thus, the workers are separated from the product permanently. As Nicole Cohen (2012) has noted, the capitalist production of cultural products, especially the video product, has changed, as the reproduction phase has replaced the production phase as the phase that generates the most significant portion of the profits.

The lack of copyright has raised problems for the development of the market. The Art Film Cinema Line, a government-sponsored agency aiming to promote art films and documentaries, has contracted over 300 cinemas all over the country that are willing to screen art films and documentaries. However, a staff of the Art Film Cinema Line expressed the frustration of being unable to find enough films because of the copyrights:

> Most independent films do not have a clear copyright. Some do not have a copyright contract at all. Some had several investors but cannot find all of them now. We cannot screen the films without clear copyright. What a shame. (interview 32)

Social control

The emerging of the blockbuster, blue-chip global documentaries have reinforced the social control of the Chinese government. When the budget concentrates on a few big-budget projects, it is easier for the censorship department to control. For instance, in the *True Story*, the creative team will propose about 40 topics with nearly 3 million yuan ($ 435,000), and some of them may deal with the sensitive social phenomenon. The censors must carefully find the message hidden in every word and every frame of the videos. There is still some space to negotiate for self-expression. But now, a blue-chip documentary costs about 10 million yuan ($1.5 million). Because of the vast influence it may generate, only high-ranking officials can decide on the topics and perspectives of the big-budget production. The filmmakers are degraded in favor of the executive teams. All creative workers participate in is executing the project. Also, the blue-chip documentaries not only reduce political risks but also have substantial potential for business rewards.

Also, the state-owned TV stations have played essential roles in the international documentary festivals and compressed the space for independent documentary makers and alternative voices. Previously, Guangzhou international documentary festival has acted as the only platform for domestic independent filmmakers looking for funding and meeting international commissioning editors and producers, but now it has become more and more "official." Among the 30 shortlisted projects for the "International Pitching Forum," quite a few are submitted by directors at CCTV 10 – Science and Education Channel, or Chinese corporate production companies affiliated with governmental agencies, like CICC (Intercontinental

Communication Center). Tianqi Yu (2014) argues that such projects with more "official" content were carefully chosen by the judiciary committee before pitching to avoid sensitive issues being exposed on such an international platform.

Conclusion: new labor practice in the global documentary production

While some TV documentary workers consider global production as an alternative path for achieving autonomous creation, it acts as another site of laboring and exploitation.

The international division of creative labor represents an asymmetric power relation between the cultural center and periphery. The U.S. and Europe have exported not only documentary products but also values and standards about the documentary to China.

They have turned China into a documentary production base. The multinational companies like Discovery and National Geographic Channel, and the global film festivals and funds like Sundance, have used Chinese topics and the cheap labor to produce global products. To assist the transportation of the documentary product when crossing borders, they set up a set of standards for the global commodities and instilled them into the heads of the Chinese filmmakers through pitching or co-production.

In the production process of blue-chip, global co-productions, Chinese cultural workers experience new forms of laboring and alienation. Guerrilla-style mobile production practices have alienated workers from each other and prevented solidarity of workers. Also, the production process taking place across temporally and spatially remote boundaries increased the length and the intensity of the work.

The autonomy of cultural workers further decreases as the government seeks control of documentary festivals and blue-chip documentaries. Through promoting global co-production

and blue-chip documentaries, China's state ideological department has achieved its goal of extending soft power to the global market. In addition, the TV stations have gained economic rewards by advertising and increasing overseas copyright sales. Considering this situation, researchers may ask, how can Chinese society protect the autonomy of documentary filmmakers in this era of capitalist globalization? I take this up in my concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: RESISTANCE AND SOLIDARITY

The goal of this study is to contribute to the latest debate on the nature of labor in cultural work by investigating the life and work experienced by the documentary makers in post-socialist China, and seek potential ways to change them.

I began with a short review of my intervention in the debate on creative labor. I then investigated the various forms of resistance that cultural workers have used to contest neoliberal working conditions. In the end, I would like to discuss the normative aspects of documentary work: what kind of cultural work is good work, and what the study can contribute to disrupting the precarious working condition of the cultural workers in the documentary world of China.

In Chapter 2, we saw the historical development of the employment system in the Chinese documentary industry, under which TV documentary makers, within a generation, moved from state officials with an "iron bowl" to precarious workers relying on temporary, contracted-based projects. Freelancing and a commissioning system have gradually replaced state-owned production studio as the main way of organizing production and distribution of TV documentaries. Temporary work and flexible employment have since then been a systematic way capital uses to cut costs and maximize profits. Only when people understand the sense of job security guaranteed by the “danwei” and “bianzhi” system in the socialist system, can they understand the local meanings of the current "precarity." The withering of the socialist planned economy and the expansion of neoliberalism set up the context for us to understand the "precarity with Chinese characteristics."

While cultural workers enthusiastically believe in autonomous creation and self-realization, many of them are unaware of the systematic exploitation and suppression they have

experienced. In Chapter 3, I examined the precarious working conditions of the documentary makers. The co-existence of both planned and market employment systems establish a strict pyramid hierarchy among cultural workers. Compared to the old workers who were employed in the old system, the new workers are inferior in promotion opportunities, salary, social welfare, working hours, and many other aspects of lives. Also, the cultural workers performed various forms of precarious practices like the internship, freelancing, moonlighting, and obligatory networking. In addition, the cultural workers are authors without copyright. Copyright has been the core site of exploitation in media industries. Neither TV employees or freelancers share copyrights of the product they produced. Without copyright, the cultural workers are constrained in the role of wage labor selling physical and mental labor in hours or in pieces. They are deprived of the rights to share long-term profits from the reproduction and distribution. The highly competitive, unprotected, and social Darwinist working condition has formed the neoliberal personae of the documentary makers.

TV stations are ideological factories manufacturing consent and documentary making is its elite production line. As Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002) argue, mass media "are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without overt coercion" (p. 306). In Chapter 4 and 5, I examined the processes, practices, and social relations of culture work nationally and globally.

Chapter 4 provides a case study of a documentary program on China's national TV station. By focusing on the career trajectories of the workers in *The True Story*, I explore the complexity of their lives and thus, examine the underlying mechanism of the ideological factory governing, selecting, socializing, and eliminating workers. I also investigated the subjectivities

of the cultural workers in the constrained working environment: what they actively seek from the cultural work, how they pursue their goals, how they exit the factory, and above all, what they can do after having left the factory.

Part of the crisis of cultural work under neoliberalism today is the failure to imagine plausible and feasible futures. However, in real life, cultural workers employ different strategies to survive in or exit the official production line. In my interviews recounting their life stories, I found four such strategies. The first is to seek global resources and compete in international markets. The second is to invent oneself as an entrepreneur and survive in the independent production market. The third is to explore opportunities of new media technologies and try to reconfigure the documentary production. And, the last one is to stay in the TV station, stick to the ideals of journalism, and fight the censorship from within. However, there is no pathway out of neoliberalism. When people quit from one production line, they just find themselves in another one. When they are excited by the new collaborative possibilities and autonomy brought about by global production and new technologies, they soon find out it too is ruled by the capitalist law to depress the share of labor. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1967) state, "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (section 1.9).

Chapter 5 illustrates that, more than ever before, control and resistance on cultural production have extended out of national borders and become a global production line. The increasing numbers of global productions and co-productions in the Chinese documentary is a collision of the global capital and the State government. On the one hand, global capital needs to find new markets and cheaper labor. Multinational companies like Discovery Channel have

exported documentary products and, more importantly, the aesthetics and professional codes to China. They have obtained a dominant position in defining what is a good, global appealing documentary. They disseminated the values to a generation of new Chinese filmmakers by providing training through their local production plans, internal training sessions of Chinese TV stations, and various film festivals and pitching forums. On the other hand, the Chinese government wants to extend its influence globally through the global distribution channels of multinational companies. Thus, as a result, big-budget co-productions have emerged as a dominant documentary genre in China.

The precarity felt by the cultural workers in the global production is more profound, although masked by the novel ways of spatial and temporal organization. First, workers are working 24/7 now as task "modules" (Huws, 2007a) are outsourced to people across different time zones. Second, the introduction of global talent has impacted local workers in terms of job opportunities, salaries, and social welfare. Talent from Western countries take the more creative jobs. Also, a foreign face is often highlighted in media coverage as a symbol of the global production. Third, local workers are forced to update their skill sets fitting global production, fundraising, and distribution. Above all, they have to develop a "double consciousness" as W. E. B. Du Bois called it, "looking at one' self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 1994, p. 8). To an extent, the Chinese documentary makers become the workers doing OEM (original equipment manufacturer) work in the cultural industry.

After looking at the lives and feelings of the cultural workers in a neoliberal market, in national ideological factories, and in global production chains, I want to conclude that, documentary making is increasingly characterized by precarity and exploitation, and the position

of the cultural workers grows more precarious and instrumentalized. Precarity becomes the new tenure.

Agency and resistance

At the heart of this study is an attempt to articulate and disrupt the feelings of helplessness, meaninglessness, and uselessness felt by the documentary makers. It is crucial to identify the processes, practices, and social relations that undermine autonomy in cultural work so that they can be interrupted.

Classical Marxist scholars were criticized for neglecting the agency of the cultural workers. The cultural workers are not merely waiting to be dominated or exploited, they also organize resistance to fight for the values of work and the meanings of life. The paradoxical relationship between control and resistance have been an eternal theme of intellectual debates. As Michel Foucault says, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (1978). Karl Marx argues that "It will be the workers, with their courage, resolution, and self-sacrifice, who will be chiefly responsible for achieving victory. The petty bourgeoisie will hesitate as long as possible and remain fearful, irresolute and inactive."(Marx & Engels, 1850) The shifting status of documentary makers between "dominated fraction of the dominant group" and the "dominant fraction of the dominated group," the terms coined by Bourdieu, have determined the ambivalent ways they organize resistance.

What is the cultural workers' reaction to the precarious working conditions? Are they embracing or resisting it?

If they do resist, what forms of resistance and what kind of strategies will they adopt? What kind of goals do they want to achieve? And will this resistance take effect? Huws (2007),

in her article *The Spark in the Engine*, has depicted a picture of the reactions of knowledge workers of the new economy. Some workers were discarded and replaced by the young people who were passionate and ready to work for less payment and unstable welfare. Some actively participated in and reinforced the commercialization process. Some have a "cynical semi-acceptance" that guarantees some personal security while in the meantime offers some passive resistance to the expansion of the market. Some switch gears and transfer their creativity to other areas of cultural production.

I find answers from the real lives of the documentary makers and the strategies they have used to survive in the working world. Sometimes, it is hard to tell the difference between survival, resistance, or obedience, as they are intertwined with each other: Survival can be the best resistance; obedience can be resistance too. From the interviews, observations, and my personal experience, I found some patterns of resistance, which I categorize into five types. Documentary makers have actively engaged in performing resistance at work, participating in anti-institutional practices, developing non-consumerist lifestyles, retreating from global co-production to indigenous creation, and articulating discourse of resistance.

Resistance at work

Jim Shorthose (2004) argues that resistance has always been integral to many art forms and movements. Documentary making itself is a TV art form of resistance. One of its functions is to watch the existing power relations: checking government and speaking for the subordinate. For the cultural workers, being professional is to resist, especially when facing political or economic pressure. As illustrated in Chapter 5, some documentary makers consider themselves soldiers on a battlefield where they actively explore the discursive space of the Chinese TV. It requires

wisdom to promote the democratic practices without explicitly violating the guidelines of the state publicity department.

Cultural workers creatively insert subtle subversive messages into the texts and pass the censorship. Also, when the pressure of profits has turned documentaries into soft advertising for government, corporations, or individuals, cultural workers still try their best to find space for expressing concerns about fairness, justice, and social responsibility.

Asides from being professionals, documentary makers are also moral agents. They feel the obligation to safeguard their personal integrity apart from fulfilling their professional duties. So, if the propaganda or commercial constraints grieves the cultural workers' conscience to an unbearable extent, they are morally bound to resist. Cultural workers deemed it an honor when their films were censored. It is like an "unofficial" award saying that the filmmaker has critically touched real social problems that are prohibited from the discussion.

Anti-institutional practice

The intuitive understanding of resistance for many interviewees are anti-institutional practices, that is, refusal to work for the official institutions and state ideological apparatus, or more specifically, ceasing to work for State-owned TV stations. In this sense, freelancing is a declaration of a break from the system (Tizhi 体制) in China. Stepping out of the ideological factory shows the courage of the cultural workers. It is an important act of resistance in that when one can't change the world, he will at least not let the world change him.

As illustrated in chapters 4 and 5, retreating from the TV station system does not mean an escape from exploitation or labor-capital antagonisms. TV stations are the largest employers of documentary jobs. They have monopolized the TV documentary funds and controlled major

distribution channels. Working directly for them as employees or indirectly as freelancers do not make a difference in nature. The ideological factory is not limited within the wall of the TV stations. Rather, it has extended to the home, the streets, the home or the living room of the cultural workers. It is hard to escape from the fate of laboring like a piece of the screw. While freelancing is presented as the ultimate freedom for workers (Pink, 2001), it is also an ideal arrangement for capital.

Paradoxically, self-entrepreneurship is not only a form of resistance, but also a means of social control. The logic of self as an enterprise is that it operates according to the principle of active self-regulation rather than extrinsic discipline. Passive submission of this nature eliminates the capacity for autonomous thought and critique. Freelancers are more likely to practice self-censorship than TV station employees, as they are more risk-sensitive and vulnerable.

The anti-consumerist lifestyle

Documentary makers not only produce films, but also produce lifestyles, and the associated cultural experiences, meanings, and emotions. In a way, the lifestyle of documentary making is as appealing as, if not more than, the films themselves. Many of the interviewees in this study have admitted that one of the main reasons for them to choose documentary making as the career is the admiration of the documentary filmmaker's anti-commercial lifestyle.

Documentary making represents a mode of cultural production that rises above temptations of excessive consumerist lifestyles, or using Bourdieu's terminology, a field of "economy world reversed" (Bourdieu, 1993), in which people pursue recognition instead of financial rewards. Documentary work provides models, encouragement, and inspiration for those who want to live meaningfully, love their work and pursue creative challenges.

Some cultural workers take documentary making as a hobby, rather than a profession. When the industrialization of the cultural industry turned cultural workers into assembly line labor, some of them started lowering the desire for success and retreating from the competition for mass production. They take documentary making as a craft, a hobby, a means of self-exploration and self-expression, rather than the pragmatic purpose of money or fame.

There is a famous Chinese saying, "No desire is just." In the book, *How to Ignite the Low Desire Society*, management theorist Kenichi Ohmae (2015) describes the general pessimism among the younger generation of Japanese. The slow-growing salary, unclear future, and heavy burdens of professional insecurity have made the young generation less ambitious about the future. Rather than fighting for higher status, accumulating more wealth, buying real estate and cars, or getting married, people are consuming less, and turn to small enjoyments. With lower desires, the pursuit of "Little certain happiness" well describes the current portrait of the society. In the fast-developing Chinese society, cultural workers might be the first group of people who start to form the low desire group, actively or passively. This is also a resistance to the consumerist society.

However, lifestyle can also be packaged and sold as recruitment advertising to attract “reserve army” who are encouraged and motivated to work for low or no pay. The commercial society sells not only products, but also lifestyles, and after all, identities.

Demystifying global production

As illustrated in chapter 5, there are counter-hegemonic struggles that contextualize Chinese documentary makers within the political-economic structures of global capitalism. Global production represents a priority put on the global audience instead of the local audience. It is

more a documentary genre out of the incentives of maximizing profits. Global production is the "McDonaldization" of cultural production. It represents a process of standardized and rationalized production. The U.S and Europe invented a genre, which with their market reach proved saleable across countries. Then it established direct selling stores or franchise stores in developing countries. It is not only about exploitation. It is also about the diversity of the culture. When filmmakers from different countries make the same kind of documentaries, it is detrimental to the diversity of documentaries. When all the big-budget projects target to the global audience, who will attend to the aesthetic tastes and spiritual needs of the local audience? Documentaries are supposed to be a location sensitive cultural product, as it needs to inform and enlighten citizens, articulate indigenous identity, and celebrate shared cultural roots, and build solidarity.

Some Chinese filmmakers start to develop critical reflexivity on global productions and deal with the culturally specific topics instead. In the early 1990s, Chinese TV documentary recorded the lives of the marginalized people, like the minority groups in remote villages, the old people, the floating artists, and the homeless people. By showing their lives on screens, the documentary makers initiated and participated in a public discussion on how to resolve the social problems and make the world better. Now, some of them want to resume the mission of using documentary making to build up the indigenous community and participate in the local development, rather than packaging local scenes and stories to fulfill the desire for exotic scenes or experiences from the audience. Documentary filmmakers like Huo taught peasants to use DV to record when their houses were demolished by the government. Huo collaborated with NGOs to teach children to use DV to document their lives and exhibit in Beijing. The shift from seeking global production to attending to the cultural specificities represents a new type of resistance.

Narratives as a resistance

Documentary making embodies a particular set of creative frustrations and disappointments in a neoliberal production system. Cultural workers must confront and articulate the normative bounds placed upon their work in order to mobilize and unify the cultural workers and people outside. To do so, they have invented vocabularies that can be used to speculate on the situation and name the issues so that they can be publicly discussed. For example, "TV labor" is a term invented by themselves to refer to the declining status of the TV workers. My research comes from this very motive.

A good thing is that self-discursive practices are common in video production industry. They have written books, published internal journals, made documentaries, and produced films on their lives. The self-reflexive materials have helped form a universe of discourses that address the shared precarious lives.

News Commentary Department of CCTV was the base of factual programming of CCTV in the 1990s. It had several factual programs, such as *Living Space* (Later *The True Story*), *Investigative Reporting*, and *Focus Reporting*. *Nonsense,* the internal distributed journal of the News Commentary Department launched in 1994, provides a platform for the workers to freely exchange opinions and ideas about their lives and jobs. In a 2015 *Nonsense* article, Cui Yongyuan talks about the difficulty of finding true love for the cultural workers. Since the cultural workers frequently work out of the town and work at nights, it is hard to coordinate time for dating. Also, some of them have met many elites and celebrities at work, and their standard for potential partners are pushed high which prevent them from finding a peaceful familial life (Cui, 2015). These vivid descriptions of the precarious life are valuable. Once it becomes public knowledge, it could be reproduced in other forms of arts. For example, it will lead to my

theoretical speculations about the phenomenon. Bourdieu's theory of distinction can account for the conflicting self-perception of the documentary makers. The newly emerging petty bourgeois are doing fancy cultural work and hanging out with social elites and celebrities, but in reality, they live a proletarian life. Many of them live in a rented apartment, spending half of the income paying the rent. They work overtime. They are vulnerable to financial or social risks. If they get sick or experienced accidents at work, they could be broke. The filmmakers try to move upwards with the cultural and social capital, but the society has dragged them downwards in the real class status. They have fallen from the uncrowned kings to the TV labor.

Similarly, para-social relations with celebrities can explain the filmmakers' distance to the real life. They are used to observe others' lives rather than participate in their own. They like the lives in the tapes and monitors, which they can pause, fast forward, backward, zoom in/out, and edit. In the documentary world, they can control everything. They are the creator of the stories. Filmmakers' particular sense of time and space of the distance themselves from the real life of their own. Actually, because of the same quality, the documentary filmmakers can speak for the marginal group and the subordinate groups, but when they themselves become the subjects of the dominance or exploitation, they are less likely to stand up and protect themselves. They are not the bravest ones to resist.

Besides complaining through the journal articles, some documentary makers make films about their own lives. Zhang Xiao, a music editor of *Oriental Space*, directed a film entitled *My Internship Life* (2007), telling a story about an intern being sexually harassed by a TV producer. Through the film, Zhang is dealing with the problems in the real lives of the TV documentary makers.

Also, a documentary named *Mouthpiece* (2009) by Guo Xizhi, a former documentary maker in Anhui TV and Shenzhen TV and now a professor in Shenzhen University, uses an ethnographic way to record the daily lives of a TV station. In the film, the director of the TV station says, “As reporters, you shall not simply consider us as the recorder of the social events. Actually, you are doing political work. You shall try to avoid the topics that are harmful to the Party and the lives of the people” (*Mouthpiece*, Guo Xizhi, 2010).

Cultural workers have developed a cynical way of discourse, laughing at themselves to gain the balance in the life. The disappointment towards the declining status is clearly illustrated by the term, "TV labor", that they used to demean themselves in the public discourse and private gatherings. In the 1990s, the popular term of "uncrowned queens" showed the pride of the cultural workers towards the surveillance function, the mobility out of the social orders, the power to speak for the subordinated group, and the clean and decent work conditions. The filmmakers can monitor the power and speak for the suppressed voices. They can also reinvent the lives of ordinary people on screens.

Fragmented solidarity: from union to community

Formal institution of cultural workers functions differently in the Chinese cultural industry. In Western countries, the unions or guilds of the professions such as filmmakers, screenwriters, television workers, bring the workers together and protect their rights. Empirical studies on creative labors in the U.S, the U.K or Canada tend to emphasize the importance of the Union or the guild (Banks, 2010; Corner, 2011; Putnam & Fuller, 2014)

In China, however, only state-owned enterprises, television stations included, have unions. But the functions of the Chinese unions are different from the Western one. The Chinese

unions are products of the old socialist planned economy. They represent not the interests of workers but the employers. Usually, the directors of the union are the same persons in charge of the Danwei. For instance, the director of the CCTV union is the vice director of CCTV. The primary duty of the union is to make sure the workers accept their current status quo and do not organize protests or demonstration (He, 2017). In the interviews, most cultural workers state that they seldom feel the existence of the union. Zhang, a documentary director and music editor, demonstratively states:

> I don't know what the union does. I can only recall that they arranged our annual medical tests and distributed labor safety product, like Shampoo, soaps, gloves, and movie tickets. Usually, retired television station managers work there. If I have a conflict with the station, I definitely won't seek help from them. They won't stand on my side. (interview 11)

The situation is more laborious for freelancers, as there is no union for freelancers who do not have a danwei. The freelancers became atomized and disembedded from the danwei system.

Lacking formal institutions for themselves, the cultural workers can only seek support from informal communities where they exchange ideas, provide support to each other, and achieve a limited degree of solidarity. New technologies, like the social media of Weibo and WeChat, have broken the spatial limitations and brought filmmakers together. Among the hundreds of WeChat groups, I am going to use one example here. This WeChat group has a name of Documentary Family (jilu yijiaqin). It has 178 members by September 10, 2018, including directors, photographers, producers, managers, distributors, teachers in the documentary industry. The group originated from an underground documentary screening club, which was the first amateur club that started screening documentaries in café and bars weekly

since 2002. From 2010, they began screening award-winning documentaries in an art cinema. So, the members actively engage in both online and offline interactions and forms strong ties with each other. The group shared information about industrial development, events update, and recruitment. The informal community cannot replace unions in protecting workers in a formal and legal way, but it brings the atomized individuals together, and to a certain extent, builds up shared experiences and practical resolutions which helps to form the professional identity in a supportive environment. In the documentary community, culture is produced and responded to in an alternative, non-consumerist way, rather than as something supplied by official institutions and markets. The bonds achieved there formed 'new sensibilities' (Shorthose, 2004) that is, new forms of cultural solidarity and conviviality.

However, resistance also constitutes an alternative form of laboring. As mentioned in chapter 4, networking in various communities occupies a large amount of time and energy of the cultural workers, which constitutes another form of exploitation. Control and resistance are just two sides of the same coin.

What is a good documentary work for the cultural workers?

During the interviews, several of the filmmakers asked me the same question: now I know we are laborers; we are exploited; we are the vulnerable victims; but what can I do to change it? It is the hardest question I have ever been asked. I myself have sought the answer with half of my life but didn't feel I am getting any closer. Finding meanings within the neoliberal trap is like looking for the faint light of stars in the dark night. Only when people can judge what is “good” work and what is "bad" work, can they calibrate the direction and mobilize the courage to go forward. It is

also what I attempt to contribute to with this dissertation, and with the lives and stories of the practitioners and myself.

Hesmondhalph and Baker (2011) mention that normality is key to understandings of creative labor. They pointed out a "normative vacuum" in previous production studies, "effacing reasonable normativity in poststructuralist studies of work" (p. 50) and suggested to establish a framework for scholars and practitioners to investigate the difference between "good" work and "bad" work. Furthermore, they argue that "Good work" is located in both process—fair pay, professional autonomy, self-esteem, interest and involvement, sociality and self-realization—and products—products that are excellent and contribute to the common good. (p. 36). Michael Kean (2009) argues that the fundamental goal of creative industries is not creating wealth and jobs, but improving and renewing society.

However, in reality, what kind of futures can the cultural workers expect? And what kind of futures can they manage to achieve? A "good" work firstly has to be sustainable. The cultural workers need to have decent pay so that they can support themselves and their family, and do not need to take multiple jobs. They should have full social welfare so that they are not afraid of accidents. They shall not live in the fear of losing their working ability. People should not be paid differently for doing the same jobs.

Autonomy and creativity are also vital to "good" work. However, creativity is a Western concept, and there is a misunderstanding about the use of the term in China (Keane, 2009, 2013). Anthony Fung (2016) proposed a need to redefine creative labor, saying that in countries like China, where political priorities prevail, "creative labor might benefit from top-down support for their industries, even though key elements of creativity, such as free expression, cultural tolerance, and the marketplace of ideas, maybe stringently limited" (p. 202). In China, the

alternative type of creativity must be understood in its relation to the Party leadership. Documentary industry is one of the most politically sensitive industries, as in most cases, it is the direct visual illustration of the national policies. Thus, documentary making has to follow the national policies and the guidelines of the State Publicity Department.

Also, documentary production shall become more visible, diverse, and autonomous. As the market expands, it accommodates diversified forms of documentary, instead of focusing on the big-budget global productions or main melody documentaries projects. Cultural workers can choose from the different genres and get support from the resources. People can find their futures in the industry, instead of taking it as a temporary fun experience during youth and being forced to switch gears when they want to settle down.

Moreover, new media technologies and new forms of communication also led to the restructuring of documentary production and distribution. They brought opportunities for documentary makers to reimagine more diversified forms of work: interactive, cross-platform, convergent, virtual, immersive, collaborative, participatory, or transmedia. They also reconfigured the ways of organizing production and thus reshaped the social relations.

As this study makes clear, the work of documentary making in China provides a particular case into the worldwide debate on cultural work. By investigating the live experience of the contemporary Chinese cultural workers, it reveals what happens where west meets east, capitalism meets communism, and global capital meets the authoritarian government. When organized resistance seems suppressed, the future of the cultural workers lies in the micro-resistance in everyday life. In this sense, this dissertation works as part of my efforts to foster and promote a less alienating, more diversified, and more autonomous kind of documentary work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FILMOGRAPHY OF CHINESE DOCUMENTARIES

Bakuo nanjie 16 / No.16 Barkhor South Street /八廓南街 16 号 / (Duan jingchuan / 段锦川, 1996)

Guitu Lieche / Last Train home / 归途列车 / (Fan Lixin / 范立欣, 2009)

Hou she / Mouthpiece / 喉舌 / (Guo Xizhi / 郭熙志, 2009)

Huashuo changjiang / The Yangtz River /话说长江 / (Dai Weiyu / 戴维宇, 1983),

*KongJia cai / Confucius Food /孔家菜/ (*Zhang Liang / 赵良, 2005),

*Kong Linghe/ Kong Linghe / 孔令和 / (*Zhang Liang /赵良, 2005)

Liulang Beijing / *Booming in Beijing / 流浪北京 /* (Wu Wenguang / 吴文光, 1990)

Mang Shan / Blind Mountain /盲山 / (Li Yang/李杨, 2007)

Old Men / Laoren / *老人* / (Yang Tianyi / 杨天已, 2000).

Shejian shang de zhongguo / A Bite of China / 舌尖上的中国 / (Chen Xiaoqin / 陈晓卿, 2012)

Shejian shang de zhongguo 3 / A Bite of China 3 /舌尖上的中国 3 / (Liu Hongyan / 刘鸿彦, 2017)

Sichou zhilu / The Silk Road/丝绸之路 / (Muto / 石坂浩二, 1980)

Wang changcheng / *The Great Wall 望长城 /* (Liu Xiaoli / 刘效礼, 1991),

Wo de shixi shenghuo / My internship life /我的实习生活 / (Zhang Xiao / 张骁, 2007)

Yanjiang er shang / Up to the Yangtze /沿江而上 / (Zhang Qiaoyong / 张侨勇, 2007)

Zhongguoren de huofa / Chinese Life Style /中国人的活法 / (Liu Hongyan / 刘鸿彦, 2015)

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Number	Pseudonym	Job Title	Gender	Age	Date of interview
1	Lin	Editor and professor	M	60s	7/25/14
2	Du	Director and writer	F	50s	7/25/14
3	Qiu	Director	M	40s	7/14/17
4	Huo	Director	M	40s	3/18/17
5	Jing	Director	F	40s	5/14/17
6	Guan	Director	F	40s	5/15/14
7	Fu	Administrator	M	40s	6/15/16
8	Mao	Producer	F	50s	4/18/14
9	Li	Director	M	30s	7/13/17
10	Wang	Photographer	M	30s	7/13/17
11	Zhang	Director and music editor	M	40s	7/26/14
12	Yu	Translator	M	20s	5/9/14
13	Han	Producer	F	30s	2/27/14
14	Fan	Director	M	40s	7/8/14
15	Sheng	Director	M	40s	7/1/17
16	Jiang	Investor	M	40s	3/25/14
17	Xin	Producer	M	40s	4/6/15
28	Xu	Producer	M	50s	12/13/16
19	Li	Producer	F	20s	4/8/15
20	Gao	Producer	M	60s	3/19/14
21	Zhao	Producer	M	40s	3/18/14
22	Chao	Producer	M	40s	12/23/16
23	Guo	Director	M	30s	5/6/14
24	Miao	Producer	F	40s	12/23/16
25	Wu	Director	M	20s	7/13/17
26	Xiao	Festival organizer	M	40s	7/7/17
27	Chen	Director	M	30s	5/2/16
28	Liang	Editor and producer	M	30s	10/8/16
29	Song	Photographer	M	40s	5/16/14
30	Fai	Producer	M	40s	4/20/14
31	Tian	Fund manager	F	40s	12/18/16

32	Lan	Distribution manager	F	30s	12/19/16
33	Ping	Project manager	M	30s	12/28/16
34	Fen	Director	M	40s	12/1/16
35	Ping	Director	M	60s	8/1/16
36	Olli	Production assistant	M	20s	10/1/16
37	Mu	Director	M	40s	5/2/14
38	Meng	Director	F	30s	5/6/15
39	Ni	Official	F	40s	7/8/16
40	Lu	Photographer	M	20s	7/3/15

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