

The Mediated Myth of Lin Zexu

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Abstract

The present study aims at determining the role played by the media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu in China. It precisely attempts to illustrate how, as a media form of popular culture, the myth of Lin Zexu epitomizes precise practices of representations embedded in a wider cultural network within which, determined actors, agencies, signs, and practices – somewhat struggling and interacting over the production, communication and consumption of specific meanings and ideologies – give shape to a peculiar articulation of the social and cultural texture of Chinese society. The subject of this study are thus a series of representations of Lin Zexu conveyed by distinct Chinese media since 1978. I endeavour at analysing how Lin Zexu is a meaning-making resource produced and communicated by specific Chinese media such as Television products and various Internet content, and consumed by Chinese media users through a multiplicity of media forms – movies, documentaries, digital images, cartoon, songs, Internet database research engines, microblogs, and digital photographs – in order to allow the constructed myth of Lin Zexu of upholding Chinese society's institutions, to legitimize its rulers, to celebrate their values, and more generally to preserve China's trajectory and the specific way of life that follows it. By semiotically examining Lin Zexu representations' content and meaning, their political economy of production, and partially the users' reception and response to such media representations, I try to weave the cultural network that they generate and are simultaneously part of. This work also wishes to address the specific modalities through which the media forms of the myth of Lin Zexu exemplify a diversified cultural phenomena that I understand as the *mediatisation* of historical knowledge, that is the process through which the *historical* is culturally produced by the Chinese media – TV products, movies, Internet various content – in the form of a myth (Lin Zexu's), supposedly conveying historical truth, and thence becoming *facilitators* of specific cultural experiences that people are taught and/or encouraged to recognize as Chinese history, namely their past.

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Introduction

The present study aims at determining the role played by the media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu in China. It precisely attempts to illustrate how, as a media form of popular culture, the myth of Lin Zexu epitomizes precise practices of representations embedded in a wider cultural network within which, determined actors, agencies, signs, and practices – somewhat struggling and interacting over the production, communication and consumption of specific meanings and ideologies – give shape to a peculiar articulation of the social and cultural texture of Chinese society.

This work also wishes to address the specific modalities through which the media forms of the myth of Lin Zexu exemplify a diversified cultural phenomena that I understand as the *mediatisation* of historical knowledge, that is the process through which the *historical* is culturally produced by the Chinese media – TV products, Movies, Internet various content – in the form of a myth (Lin Zexu's), supposedly conveying historical truth, and thence becoming *facilitators* of specific cultural experiences that people are taught and/or encouraged to recognize as Chinese history, namely their past.

Lin Zexu (林则徐; August 30, 1785 – November 22, 1850) was a Chinese scholar and official during the Qing Dynasty (清朝). Today, Lin Zexu is a Chinese historical figure¹ recognized for his constant uprightness and high moral grounds

¹ In 1838, Lin Zexu (till then Viceroy and Governor of Hunan and Hebei Provinces), was appointed *Imperial Commissioner* by-then Emperor Daoguang (道光帝), and sent to Guangzhou to put an end to the importation of British opium to China. Lin Zexu's attitude and policy toward the problem of opium consumption in Guangdong Province, led within a few months to the arrest and detention of more than 1.700 Chinese opium dealer, confiscating more than 70.000 opium pipes, and the sizing of 1.2 million kilograms of British opium which was destructed in the *by-now* famous burning of opium at Humen beach, in Guangdong Province. This action is considered to be catalyst of the Opium war and of the consequent defeat of the Qing Dynasty's army against the British military fleet, which led to the signing of the first so-called unequal treaties, the Nanjing treaty (1842). The treaty granted an indemnity and extraterritoriality to Britain, the opening of five treaty ports, and the cession of Hong Kong Island. The harsh outcomes of the Opium war and the following growing influence of the European powers over China's territory untill the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, has been treated historically as a watershed in Chinese history. The humiliation suffered by China and Chinese people in those years of foreign occupation and rule, had provided the PRC with an important ideological instrument serving two main and different political visions. As a national hero Lin Zexu's high moral ground have been employed during the Maoist era of the PRC, for the ideological identification of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-bourgeois values and beliefs, defending, legitimizing and symbolically represent Mao's thought of "class struggle", "anti-imperialism", and "Marxism-Leninism" among the most important. Since 1978 though, Lin Zexu's representations came to symbolize the ideological shift of China's new trajectory,

expressed mostly in his fight against the British in the late 1830's and early 1840's. Lin Zexu's forceful opposition to the opium trade in Guangzhou, and his famous action of seizing and burning – in Humen (Guangdong Province) – the British opium, is considered to have ultimately led to the outbreak of the so called Opium War (鴉片戰爭), 1839-1842. His firm resistance to foreign aggression, but also his proven openness and interest to the outside world², made him to be regarded as a *national hero* (民族英雄) and a *patriot* (愛國者) of modern and contemporary Chinese history.

The subject of this study are thus a series of representations of Lin Zexu conveyed by distinct Chinese media since 1978. I endeavour at analysing how Lin Zexu is a meaning-making resource produced and communicated by specific Chinese media such as Television products and various Internet content, and consumed by Chinese media users through a multiplicity of media forms – movies, documentaries, digital images, cartoon, songs, Internet database research engines, microblogs, and digital photographs – in order to allow the constructed myth of Lin Zexu of upholding Chinese society's institutions, to legitimize its rulers, to celebrate their values, and more generally to preserve China's trajectory and the specific way of life that follows it. By semiotically examining Lin Zexu representations' content and meaning, their political economy of production, and partially the users' reception and response to such media representations, I try to weave the cultural network that they generate and are simultaneously part of. I intend to understand and show how the media productions, communications, and consumptions of the myth of Lin Zexu become multiple point of access to a broad cultural network, within which issues of identity formation, of national belonging, of production of the *self* and of the *other*, of social behaviours, of political legitimacy, of economic interests and domination, and of nation-building process are peculiarly embedded.

exemplified by Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening up' (改革開放, *gaige kaifang*), which introduced market principles within a state-led economic system. Furthermore, the introduction and diffusion of media such as the TV and the Internet mainly, has allowed a sophistication of both the media representation of Lin Zexu and of its audience, allowing the interrelation of many disparate discourses (addressed in the present work) to be conveyed by, and associated with, the production, communication, and consumption of the myth of Lin Zexu.

² Lin Zexu felt the need of understanding the foreigners in order to provide (Qing) China with the means and theories to advance technologically, an effort underlined by the collection of geographical material (*Geography of the Four Continents* 四洲志) that Lin Zexu handed to Wei Yuan (魏源) for the compilation of the 1843 "*Illustrated treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*" (海國圖志).

Moreover, I seek to deal with the mediatisation process of a specific form of historical knowledge produced by Chinese media through the representations of the myth of Lin Zexu. Specifically, I aim at examining how different media forms of Lin Zexu are representative of the growing media practices, critically displacing the production of “historical knowledge”, the formation of a precise “sense of history”, as well as the way the “historical” is engaged and treated by people. Therefore, I point at showing how the myth of Lin Zexu as a form of historical knowledge is an agency to mainstreaming national feelings, and how it’s (media) appeal is catalyst of a current dissociation from (apparently) formal ideological standpoints, becoming in the eyes of its audiences alternative aesthetical forms³, engaged and consumed within a media-promoting everyday life.

Understanding the myth of Lin Zexu means to get hold of the motivations that have engendered its production and communication, which in turn means to acknowledge the discourse by way of the *signification* uttered (Barthes, 1957). The 1980’s and 1990’s in China – the years following the ‘*Reform and Opening up*’ policy (改革开放) – have on the one hand, been characterized by the superseding of the existing planned economy by a socialist market economy, which involved the gradual injection of liberal economic principles within the Chinese economic system, and the introduction and development of new communication technologies as integral elements of these changes; whereas on the other hand, society at large faced new signs of defiance in which new social contexts emerged, challenging the CPC’s⁴ ideology, the government’s autonomy, and by transforming the hitherto people’s passive role in terms of personal and individual engagement and involvement with media technologies and representations. The marketization of the economy and the settlement of an articulated – and always transforming – indigenous Chinese media system, brought about the emergence of a heterogeneous commercial popular culture, whose only shared (economic and ideological) value was, and still is represented by consumption. “*Commercial popular culture is by nature a materialist space of sensuality, wealth and material and bodily desires,*

³ *Form* is intended here as a *thing* which is defined not only by the substance with which is made visible in the sensible world, but also by its functionality. Barthes in explaining what a myth is, maintains that “*myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form*” (Barthes, 1972: 107).

⁴ Communist Party of China.

with all the images and styles reproduced and circulated for consumption by the populace and for creating the desires for such consumption” (Liu Kang, 2004: 76). Although Deng Xiaoping’s and later on reforms, emphasized the need of legitimacy by depoliticizing peoples’ commitment to any ideological involvement with political issues – thus deprioritizing principles such as “mass struggle” (群众斗争), and “revolutionary theory” (革命理论) – the absence of a firm political stand, capable of leading and bridging the people towards the new China’s trajectory, precipitated the legitimization crisis.⁵ The Chinese media (television and Internet products mostly) attempt to provide popular forms of culture among which the myth of Lin Zexu is an influential one, inducing consent to specific political issues and imaginings, and at the same time disseminating such media forms as commodities, enabling the audience/users to participate to the media celebration of the everyday life, where both economic development, national policy (that is nationalism), and people’s experientiality, are strictly connected within a consumer-driven national agenda contented by the Chinese media. Indeed in their everyday ground, the media are fast becoming an intrinsic part of people experiences, providing the way of looking at, and understanding the social world which only deceptively exists as an endless, enduring entity. Chinese media are literally bombarding (and evidently creating) the social texture with an infinite flow of images and information, creating a cultural environment increasingly sustained by, and accessed through the media. Movies, documentaries, online websites, cartoons, music, social network and the vast Internet’s repository of digital images, are just a tiny portion of the overall network of symbols produced and communicated by the Chinese media. Narratives become “*the quintessential form of customary knowledge*” (Lyotard, 1984: 20), connoting meanings and ideologies that in a very important way shape people’s integration with a precise imagining of reality/society. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of media forms that make up the alleged Chinese cultural landscape, suggest that *representation* and *communication* always draw on a multiplicity of modes (multimodality) of production and consumption (TV and the Internet), all of which contribute to meaning. In fact, the vast assortment of media representation of the myth of Lin Zexu disclosed in the

⁵ As Liu Kang maintains “*the political mechanism of the state and the CCP has become increasingly dysfunctional in the course of the reform....the revolutionary ideology and its discourses, which legitimated the rule of the CCP in the past and are still being used by the post-Deng regime today, have lost their legitimating power*” (Liu Kang, 2004: 13).

following chapters (movie, digital images, documentary, cartoon, music and photographs), aim precisely at addressing the various modes through which the myth of Lin Zexu is uttered, naturalizing specific meanings and ideologies.

These are the questions that I seek to answer: What is the myth of Lin Zexu? How is the myth of Lin Zexu linked to media practice and culture? What are the means by which Lin Zexu, as a media representation, can be said to produce meanings and ideologies that influence and shape people's views? What are the socio-cultural networks in which Lin Zexu's media forms are embedded? Do Lin Zexu's representations correspond to one coherent and uniform mode of knowledge? What is the relationship between Lin Zexu's media form and the social space, both physical and media space? How, as a media discourse, the myth of Lin Zexu is to be regarded as a form of historical knowledge? As an important and long-standing reference of Chinese past, what kind of mediatisation is the figure of Lin Zexu expected to trigger, and what are the consequences of such process?

Following these particular questions, there are a few more general ones that need to be addressed: Is Lin Zexu associated to a precise idea of Chinese *modernity*? What is a representation? What does it mean for an image of Lin Zexu to be an expression of popular culture in the everyday life?

I attempt to answer these questions with the main aim of bestowing the representations of Lin Zexu with their historical character, with their dignity. In this sense, I employ an interdisciplinary approach that involves a stranscultural understanding of the media processes put in place to produce, communicate, and consume the media forms by which the myth of Lin Zexu is uttered. A transcultural mode of inquiry, as a matter of fact, acknowledges the need of exploring cultural practices by following the flows of communication that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries and cultures. A realm in which different cultural systems and accessible temporal horizons are seen and treated as essential assets in order to provide an analysis that takes into account heterogeneity and asymmetries, and that considers the hybrid nature of discourse and practice formation. It is in this context of diversified disciplinary forms that the present study wishes to collocate itself. Thence, I rely on, and deal with multiple aspects of different academic disciplines, among which particular features of Chinese history (Late Qing Dynasty, the Opium War period, the Dengist era and afterward), cultural anthropology (interpretive ethnography, culture as text), cultural semiotics (culture as system of signs), media

studies (mediatisation, media logic, media culture), cultural geography (the interrelation between culture and space), and social theory (actor-network theory), arise as the subjective and partial ensemble of knowledge, employed by the author of this work to gain access to the symbolic cultural network that unfolds through the Chinese media representations of Lin Zexu.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to demonstrate how the media cultural representations of Lin Zexu are involved in broad critical aspects of the Chinese society (the formation of *individual* identities; the identification of the *self* and of the *other*; the characterization and commodification of *styles* and *ideas* in the everyday life), of the Chinese nation (the formation of collective identities; the ideological apparatus that sustains the nation-building process; the deployment of *banal nationalism*), and of the Chinese media (the particular relationship between the Chinese media, the State/government's institutions, and the market; and the peculiar engagement of people/users with media-generated popular history).

What needs to be pointed out is that, although the 1989 is clearly a turning point, with regard to the relationship between the media system and the political institutions in contemporary China, the main concern here is not focused on censorship and on Beijing's strengthened control over the Chinese media system, rather this study is conducted in order to draw the attention on the production of narratives and discourses that instead of denying and ban certain type of messages and meanings, promote through unambiguous strategies (the production of the myth of Lin Zexu, though not limited to it), the communication of beliefs, behaviours and values that reflect the need for the construction of a nation, the Chinese nation. Thereby, I analyse the role of the myth of Lin Zexu as an "*instrument of cultural policy*" (Andrea Zlatař, 2003), as well as its ambiguous nature of being at the same time a form of, and a producer of cultural practice. However, the need to address the media representation of Lin Zexu as a form of historical knowledge, will allow this study to shed light on certain state-led censoring practices that shape to a certain extent (at meaning level) the power of the media of creating the cultural network within which the myth of Lin Zexu is acknowledged. Having said so, in no case such issues of censorship and of media control will be weighted with biased ethical and moral arguments, on the contrary I'll underline these practices where and when, as concrete constitutional procedures, they alter (empower or weaken) the representations of Lin Zexu, and consequently the media independence.

Moreover, the following study wishes to differentiate itself from other studies in the way the Chinese social, political and cultural contexts are expressed. As a matter of fact, the structure of this work does not set out an all-encompassing theoretical framework that precedes and carries out the analysis of the empirical data illustrated by Lin Zexu's media representation. Instead, I have opted for an interpretive examination of the data collected, that allows me in each chapter to turn and adopt a course of action that I subjectively, and thus partially, consider suitable and appropriate with regard to the discrete representations displayed in this study. In this sense, the employment of the above mentioned academic discipline (anthropology, media studies, semiotics and so on) should be considered as conceptual and empirical tools that, far from integrating an exclusive grand theory, alternatively provide heterogeneous and asymmetrical perspectives from which is possible to stress different traits and qualities. To quote Clifford Geertz "*studies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things*" (C. Geertz, 1973: 25).

This work will explore how the media representations of the historical figure of Lin Zexu ultimately contribute to the construction and strengthening of a strong sense of nation. In order to provide an overall understanding of the multimodal qualities of the representations of Lin Zexu communicated by the Chinese media, I intend to provide an account in which the identification of different representational strategies will allow an analysis of the media practices and discourses representative of a dominant ideology, addressing specific behaviours and ideas, self-conscious practices, and ways of thinking, as fundamental features of a nation-building process, thus legitimating the present ruling class and China's trajectory. Lin Zexu, being representative of a Chinese historical past, will be accounted as a national model (the hero, and the patriot), serving as a prominent incarnation and symbol (the myth) of the new values that have been emerging since the '*Reform and Opening up*' (individualism, consumerism, economic liberalism), a model of moral integrity, of virtuous ethical principles, and of righteous beliefs;

The illustrations of Lin Zexu, its varied depictions over time, the widespread of its images through specific media technologies, the distinguishing design of its characteristics, all these points will be investigated considering also the role of the visual dimension tied up to such representations. The meanings, values, and other

ideological social definitions like *class* and *identity* uttered by the mediated myth of Lin Zexu, will be taken into consideration by regarding “*the centrality of visual experience in everyday life*” (Mirzoeff, 1998: 7).

This work has been structured following the principles delineated above, that is, I avoided the setting out of a preliminary chapter, in which both context and methodology would have been disclosed as a given, necessary stage or background against which the following analysis would stand. Instead I chose to let the specificity of the data analysed in each chapter, to make up their own cultural context (network) and to resort to a functional theoretical approach able to weave, every time accordingly, the cultural network within which the representations of Lin Zexu are actively involved. I have thence made an accurate selection of the media forms illustrating Lin Zexu, observing, inspecting, and actively seeking such representations in two different Chinese media, TV and the Internet, collecting a miscellaneous of media representations that range from the 1997 Chinese movie “*The Opium War*” (鸦片战争, *Yapian Zhanzheng*), to the televisual documentary “*The misterious death of Lin Zexu*” (林则徐死因之密, *Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*); from the Internet cartoonish digital-born image, to the children’s song “*Lin Zexu bans opium*” (林则徐禁鸦片, *Lin Zexu jin yapian*); from the digital photographs of the former residences, the memorial, and the square of Lin Zexu, to the online video game FC “*Lin Zexu bans opium*” (林则徐禁烟, *Lin Zexu jin yan*); from the *Baike Baidu* online encyclopedia (at the entry “Lin Zexu”), to the digital image in a Chinese touristic web site. These and other media representations of Lin Zexu are the core data of this work, and they have been appropriately assembled in four different chapters, in respect of the qualities they showed.

In Chapter one I provide an analysis of Xie Jin’s 1997 movie “*The Opium War*”. The main objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that the historical figure of Lin Zexu is cinematically produced in order to clearly convey its mythological status, whose function is that of naturalizing and normalizing a series of ideological practices and national policies, and depoliticizing historical contingencies. In this regard, in the first part of the chapter I will examine the political economy of production of the movie, which has been released on July 1, 1997 to coincide with the ceremony of the historical handing back of Hong Kong from the British to China. I will argue that, as an expression of popular culture and as a product of a media and mediated representation, “*The Opium War*” offers an important account

of the relationship between the state-government, the society and the market, throughout the 1990's. I will thus attempt to underline the growing importance and impact that a new system of values and of forms, within the emerging everyday sphere produced by the media in China, served and still serve distinct aspect of Chinese nationalism and precise forms of territorialization. In the second part of chapter one, I undertake a semiotic approach to the movie by analysing the linguistic and cinematic codes that construct both the myth of Lin Zexu, and the Chinese history that its myth sustains and legitimizes. Thus the main aim of this section is to examine the motivations behind the representation of the myth of Lin Zexu in Xie Jin's "*The opium War*". By means of an analysis that takes into consideration camera positionings, lightings, music, costume drama, dialogues and other central aspects in the staging of Lin Zexu (voice-over, furniture and so on), I wish to show that "*The Opium War*" is the bearer of an open nationalism, an essential background which serves legitimacy to the CPC, and to the government policies (both internal and external), celebrating particular values and societal trajectories through the mediation of the myth of Lin Zexu.

In Chapter two I attempt to get an insight on Chinese modern aesthetics through the analysis of a collection of images of Lin Zexu that I have gathered up from different Internet's web sites. The introductory part of this chapter copes with the images of Lin Zexu in the attempt to unveil some modern conventions and social discourses present in the arrangement and functioning of the modern aesthetics in China. In fact, by engaging directly the very notion of (modern) *representation*, and by analyzing the specifics of these representations exemplified in the images of Lin Zexu, I aim to address these images by inquiring the idea of *representation* itself, and by questioning its self-evident character through which the acceptance of certain knowledge depends on. With this purpose in mind, I will employ Timothy Mitchell's critics to the *metaphysics of representation* to show how a *system of certainties*, peculiar of the modern constitution, to use Latour's terminology, has been subordinated to a specific "*ordering, distributing and enframing*"⁶ of the historical actor commonly known as *representation*. I shall also resort to Cordell

⁶ Timothy Mitchell, "*Colonizing Egypt*", Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Yee's "*Chinese Cartography among the Arts*"⁷ to address specific features of an alleged Chinese "*way of seeing*", as it is deduced from Yee's history of the entanglements between cartography and the arts (painting and calligraphy). In the second part of the chapter I will endeavour to analyse all the data collected, that is the digital images of Lin Zexu found on different online Chinese web sites. Indeed, each image, adequately isolated by the others, will be analysed considering the *social discourses* that through the grand narratives of enlightenment, rationality and humanism, stage and perform that *official culture* that we call Chinese culture. The cultural network that I will try to trace back through the images of Lin Zexu, is often secluded between the apparent attractiveness of the image, its design – in the case of Lin Zexu's images by its physiological arrangement – and the ideological message or meanings they convey. For these reasons I will provide both a detailed analysis of the technological features through which these images have been (digitally) produced and came to be visualized, and a textual-analysis able to make sense (interpretively) of the symbolic system displayed by these varied media forms of Lin Zexu.

In Chapter three I will deal with the media representations of Lin Zexu's commemorative spaces in China. Here, I'm interested in understanding what processes are involved in the production of media images (photographs and texts) that supposedly are representative of actual spaces – memorials, museums, squares, landscapes – all dedicated and/or entitled to the historical figure of Lin Zexu. The representations analysed in this study are, ostensibly, rendition of urban places and landscapes which, seemingly, are naturally bound to the mythical figure of the historical Lin Zexu, and thereby mythical themselves. These visual renditions of Lin Zexu's representational spaces, materialize in the form of (digital) photographs on different Chinese web sites, and in most cases are accompanied by *parasitic* texts that sublimate the images (Roland Barthes, 1977: 25). Here, I aim at demonstrating whether Lin Zexu's media representations are used as complement to architecture, urban settings, historical artifacts (as in the case of museums), as well as to speeches and written texts in the production of (its) space. By reflecting on the role and significance of a particular aspect of *landscape* practices – a socially

⁷ Cordell D. K. Yee, "*Cartography in China - Chinese Cartography among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation*", in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), "*History of Cartography, (Volume Two) Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*", published by the University of Chicago Press, 1994.

constructed form of knowledge (Harley, 1988) able to articulate and structure our understanding, and consequently our experience of the social in the peculiar practice of ‘taking a photograph’ – I propose an analysis of the ways in which landscape “*as part of the broader family of value-laden images*” (Harley 1988: 278) may elucidate how the media discourse, exemplified in Lin Zexu’s media images as a language of power, spatializes knowledge in the attempt to produce social space. The focus of this chapter is then on a number of (digital) photographs, five to be exact, found in different Chinese Internet web sites, representing spaces – places and landscapes – commemorative or celebratory, probably both, of the historical figure of Lin Zexu. Spaces whose sense of history and past seem to be deeply rooted into the ground belonging to such sites. I therefore attempt at mapping a portion of the media terrain⁸ in China, intended as the battleground in which knowledge and culture are caught up merely as contingencies, in the moment of their production and communication, transversed by objects and people and their relations, united by system of ideologies that reproduce dominant social conventions (Douglas Kellner, 1980), and ripped apart by tensions and contradictions.

In Chapter four I will try to provide an understanding of some media representations of Lin Zexu, by analysing their qualities as a broad attempt to produce and communicate historical knowledge. I endeavour to account for the mediatization of a specific form of historical knowledge epitomized by Chinese media through the representations of the myth of Lin Zexu. I will therefore analyse different media forms such as movie, documentary, cartoon, videogame, born-digital images, music, Baike Baidu database information technology, and blog, to emphasize the peculiar impact that each of these media technologies and products have in representing the Chinese mythological figure of Lin Zexu within/as Chinese society, suggesting that the use of different media technologies, serve and frame the communication of the myth itself, and consequently provide and sustain distinct ways of experiencing popular forms of historical knowledge in China. In this chapter, I thus point at developing a theoretical framework able to account for the ways in which *historical knowledge* in China is produced and made circulating as a

⁸ The media terrain seen as a moment of interaction and convergency between actors, agencies, and mediators; each with its own profusion and/or scarcity of power, inspiration, leverage, impact, bias, and weakness that can only be assessed by examining case by case the circumstances in which such qualities, as well as others, are carried out.

media influenced commodity-sign (Jansson 2002), on account of the various media illustrations of the myth of Lin Zexu.

Lin Zexu's media representations, wouldn't thus be seen only as mediated cultural forms representing a genre⁹ of Chinese historical knowledge, but also as processes changing the very ideas and authority of historical knowledge in China. This would perhaps mean that the production, communication, and apprehension of what is to be considered the "historical" in China, is almost exclusively negotiated by the media itself, transforming people's access and interaction with their past.

The central idea that this entire study wishes to develop, is how the Chinese media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu disclosed in the following chapters, contribute to a peculiar mode of understanding the *present* by using different ways of imagining Chinese history, as well as engaging with the past through the distinctive activity of the Chinese media in framing and staging the myth of Lin Zexu, which by means of the connoted meanings and ideologies that its various media forms convey, evoke and encourage the acknowledgment of a precise sense of nation, of particular collective values and beliefs, but also of individual behaviours and practices. As has been suggested by Chu Godwin (1978), it is through symbolic processes, often supported by the representations of authority figures, that people are made to learn determined values and beliefs. "*The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them*" (C. Geertz, 1973: 24). Thereby, I explore the power that Chinese media, with respect to the State/government's policies and rules, and the market intervention, have in constituting and shaping a cultural symbolic environment, within which the production of knowledge is strictly bound up to the type of technology employed, to the arrangement of signs that such technologies convey, to the sort of narrative that these signs communicate (considered also the official ideological orientation), to the market-dictated popularization of the forms represented, and last but not least to the people's uncertain reception and consumption.

⁹ The term *genre* indicate the production of recurrent cultural codes historically combined (during the production process) within a cultural product (literature, cinema, music and so on), that become intrinsic of a specific way of *representing*. Genre is a mode of structuring language that expresses precise cultural ideologies. See Jacques Derrida and Avital Ronell, "The Law of Genre", The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

In conclusion, with the present study I aim to address the problematic matter of the *interpretation* of various media-cultural expressions and issues, which remains an aspect that cannot be ignored when approaching an alien culture, either when dealing with the Chinese media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu or with Chinese culture in general. This entails the acknowledgement that any investigation rather than providing a universal explanation, results instead in a negotiation between the researcher-observer and his informers (M. Kilani, 1994); a research approach ruled by participation, identification, comprehension, interpretation and evocative representation of the symbolic dimension; a mediation, therefore, between the observer and the observed, never forgetting that the final result accomplished is a second degree result (Geertz, 1973). Through the recognition of the symbols present in the specific alien situation which is subject matter of the research, and by means of the intellectual efforts made by the researcher in the investigation, it is possible to evoke their potential engagement in inducing and communicating a subjective, though multi-perspectival, knowledge.

Chapter I

Lin Zexu and “The Opium War”

The present chapter attempts to analyse the mediated myth of Lin Zexu with the aim of disclosing to what extent, by means of its cinematic media form, China's national hero serves the need of staging China's contemporary cultural identity by virtue of a precise access and imagining of its past embodied in the representation of Lin Zexu. On the eve of the handover, in Beijing and Hong Kong, Xie Jin's (谢晋) 1997 epic movie “*The Opium War*” (鸦片战争, *yapian zhanzheng*) was screened for the first time as part of the Chinese ceremony that celebrated the end of a period of shame. As a matter of fact, on July 1, 1997 Hong Kong was handed back to the Chinese authorities as expected by the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed on 19th December, 1984. The handing over of Hong Kong ended more than 150 years of British colonial rule, putting an end to a humiliating condition that had begun in China with the Opium War. The ceremony that accompanied the official handover of Hong Kong saw many people on the streets celebrating what everybody understood being a big moment in history. Hundred of fireworks exploded, marching bands lightened up the atmosphere, and flags had artificial breeze to flutter in.

In Hong Kong the movie had three well-attended premieres. Popular charity Operation Smile, which operates in China sponsored a gala attended by more than 300 celebrities and moneyed locals. Among them were the former Chief Secretary Sir David Akers-Jones, socialite fund-raiser Alice Chiu, and the art-house filmmaker Wong Kar Wai.

The film's promotional brochure declared, it is “*dedicated to a great moment in history*”. This great moment, useless to say, was the return of Hong Kong to China, and therefore the strengthen of China's authority over its territory.

“*The Opium War*” initial budget was backed by the China National Culture Promotion Society, The Sichuan Chengdu United Bank, and Xie's own Xie Jin-Hengtong Film and Television Company, which at the end of the production amounted to almost 15 million dollars, making it the most expensive production in Chinese movie history, until then.

“*The Opium War*” tells the story of the Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu (钦差大臣林则徐), which in 1838, is sent to Guangzhou by then-Emperor Daoguang (道光帝) of the Qing Dynasty (清朝), to stop the British merchants from selling opium to their Chinese counterparts, that through its trade had rendered the population weak and addicted, and caused the growth of corruption at all levels.

Lin Zexu then, started to fight the commerce of opium in Guangzhou by punishing Chinese traders and officials who had offended the Celestial Empire (天朝大国) with their behaviour, and decided to seize and publicly destroy all the opium confiscated to the foreign traders¹⁰. Unexpectedly, England resolved by sending military navy, and attacked the Qing Empire (清帝国), which due to its underestimation of the situation, and its weak military power, had been forced to recognize their own defeat, and eventually signed the treaty of Nanjing (南京条约) on 29th August, 1842, relinquishing the territories of Hong Kong to the British Empire.

Superficially, “*The Opium War*” is an important example of independent film production, and many of the positive reviews from China and abroad – influenced by the fact that the funding of the project derived from privately raised funds – showed astonishment in discovering that the movie couldn’t be charged as pure government propaganda, as many were perhaps expecting. Although, a more attentive analysis of the film, shows that the government involvement has been of great importance for the production of the movie; an involvement granted through direct and indirect support accorded by, for example, then-president Jiang Zemin (江泽民), who’s meeting with Xie Jin assured him public visibility, or the retired warships provided by the navy for the scenes displaying the British military attack, or the free airfares to Xie Jin’s crew and cast to and from England received by China International Airlines, or yet the government support at the box office by the sponsoring of group viewings, and many other forms of encouragements as pointed out by Xiao Zhiwei¹¹ in his essay on Xie Jin’s “*The Opium war*”. A further examination however, makes clear that the film is pervaded by nationalistic

¹⁰ Arthur Waley, *The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes*, Stanford University Press, 1958. Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964.

¹¹ Xiao Zhiwei, *Nationalism in Chinese Popular Culture: A Case Study of The Opium War*, in *Exploring Nationalism of China: Themes and conflicts*, Edited by C. X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu. Greenwood Press, 2000.

elements, which served the economic and political policy of the Chinese regime in the 1990's; or we could say that the new economic path undertaken by the Chinese government in the 1990's, and started at the beginning of the Dengist era back in the 1980's, has been also largely sustained by the deployment of nationalistic features in the film as part of its political strategy.

As an expression of popular culture and as a product of a media and mediated representation, "*The Opium War*" offers an important account of the relationship between the state-government, the society and the market, throughout the 1990's. This relationship, far from being understood as an immobile monolithic paradigm, should be rather approached, and comprehended with an awareness of the complexities, ambiguities and contradictions that distinguish any culture. Even words such as state-government, society and market above mentioned, remain empty semantic expressions, if not provided with the heterogeneous array of meanings and the different backgrounds whereby they arise from, running the risk of letting them vanish and become indefinite, and incapable of grasping any secure land, which is the very place upon which any analysis should start building its validity. The contingent features that characterize the cinematic expression, as well as other media forms, of the myth of Lin Zexu will allow me to show the modalities through which the process of nation-building in China (and not limited to it), is dependent on the arrangement and display of a set of familiar symbolic expressions (signs) able to make up and convey distinctive ideas and conceptualization of the Chinese nation, of its appropriate role in the world of nations, of the kind of relationship that the people should have, and the association they *have* with the territory of China and the authority that govern it.

Xie Jin began shooting his historical film "*The Opium War*" on May 8, 1996 at Humen, a town in Guangdong province, located on the east bank of Pearl River Delta, a strategic gateway that allows ships to reach the eastern, northern and western regions of Guangdong. Besides its first-class port, which has represented a decisive factor in the development of domestic and international trade route, Humen is also famous as it was the venue where Lin Zexu, in 1839, supervised the destruction of about 20.000 boxes of seized opium, weighing over 118.5 million kilograms altogether, provoking the anger of the foreign merchants, which eventually led to the Opium war.

At the time of Xie Jin's first shooting of "*The Opium War*", in 1996, Guangdong province was already known as the nation's "Gold Coast". Since 1981, its economy had boomed unbelievably, with an annual economic growth that averaged 20 percent. Since its opening to the international market, foreigners have poured billions of dollars into the province, becoming China's promised land for many people, foreign investors and Chinese unemployed rural laborers, that every year flooded into the province, seeking success or better chances. Even though Guangdong province, since the beginning of the reform in 1978, has been more open, independent and entrepreneurial than other Chinese regions, it is not an isolated case of economic development.

The relevance of a brief introductory political economy of the 1990's in China, is motivated by the China's rulers efforts to develop and modernize the country in order to become a prominent actor active in the international arena, and thus qualified to compete with the other powerful countries, a message accurately inscribed in the whole text of "*The Opium War*" as well as through the mythological construction of the figure of Lin Zexu. In fact, China's military defeat during the Opium War (1842) by the hand of the British, and the contemporary (in the 1990's) urgency for a military modernization – part of the actual message connoted by the movie – is an example of the role popular culture had since the 1990's on Chinese politics and economic, as well as on society and culture in general, in the attempt to gain support toward the official trajectory of economic *Reform and Opening up*, which in turn was strictly related to the social transformation occurred in that period, and of which I will try to provide a general understanding in this preliminary account.

The 1990's in China have been characterized by an extraordinary impulse of the economy in urban and rural areas, rapid in the former and more ambiguous in the latter. After the slowdown caused by the troubled events of 1989 – partially sustained by the authorities – the relaunch of the economy has been, since then, the main concern of the ruling class. Deng Xiaoping's *Southern Tour* (南巡), at the beginning of 1992, had a strong symbolic meaning in regard to the new economic trajectory that China undertook, a trajectory that actually had been drawn since 1978, but that due to obstacles of different nature, had to be straightened out in a period (the 1990's) whose political conditions allowed the ruling elite to better manage the economic opening. This new path was made official in the XIV

Congress of the CPC¹², with the adoption of the concept “*socialist market economy*” (社会主义市场经济). A concept strongly promoted by Deng Xiaoping, and justified with his own words in this way: “*Practice of a planned economy is not equivalent to socialism because there is planning under capitalism too; Practice of a market economy is not equivalent to capitalism because there are markets under socialism too*”. This has been a formula used by Deng Xiaoping that, on the one hand had the power to reassure the conservative faction of the party, which until then had obstructed the economic opening, and on the other hand had restored trust on the eyes of Chinese entrepreneurs and foreign investors. The cinematic message encoded in the film can be best understood through an effort which attempts to reattach the text of “*The Opium War*” to the ideology that it sustains and utters, namely fervent patriotic nationalism, which in turn served (and still does) diversified interests that the movie is called to naturalize and normalize, in order to make then-present conditions, the 1990’s, to be seen as the natural convergence of social and economic circumstances, which are now backed by the intervention of a specific way of producing historical narrative that expresses itself through a precise media form, the movie.

For this reason, If I were to assign a theoretical designation to the nature of this study, I would probably affirm that its main feature is represented by its hybridism. A necessity that cannot be escaped by reason of the diversified contexts in which the present study wishes to collocate itself. Indeed, a field of investigation as it is Chinese media studies, demand for a transcultural and multidisciplinary mode of inquiry, which takes into account heterogeneity and asymmetries, and that considers the hybrid nature of discourse and practice formation, which must therefore be reattached to the direct, indirect, and even oblique motivations that lie behind any production of texts¹³. A text, as I intend it, is a structure of meaning. It could contain images or words or sounds, both alone or together; those are related to each other within a context, and all the part of a text cohere and tell us something (R. P. Kolker, 2000). “*Any event*”, says Robert P. Kolker, “*that makes meaning can*

¹² Communist Party of China (中国共产党).

¹³ Natascha Gentz and Stefan Kramer, *Globalization, Cultural Identity, and Media Representations*, SUNY Press, 2006.

be called a text if we can isolate and define its outside boundaries and its internal structure – and our response to it.”¹⁴

Applied to the specificity of the Chinese movie “*The Opium War*”, a text can be read only in relation to its narrative, its economy, its culture, its politics and yet, as suggested by Kolker, its production, distribution, exhibition and viewing. In this sense, by outlining pertinent features of the *reformation* process, and of the consequences it produced, I might be able to reattach them to the considerations that will originate from the perusal of “*The Opium War*”.

The economic reform launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 gradually integrated Chinese economy with the global capital and culture, and it had diverse effects on Chinese social life and on the system of signs circulating within society. Xudong Zhang explains these effects in this way:

*“On the one hand, it had exposed the Chinese market and the realm of daily life to global capital and to international fashions and ideologies... On the other hand, Chinese massive entry to, and penetration by, the world market also has enabled Chinese consumers to encounter a world of difference, often delineated in term of nation-state border.”*¹⁵

Consequently, it becomes necessary to better examine and understand the range and dimension of these changes occurring in China in the 1990’s, and see how media popular culture has been transformed and has transformed itself into a product, as well as an instrument of production of mass consumption.

“The Opium War” as a media form of popular culture that “*partakes of the communist/capitalist pacification project*” (Sheldon H. Lu, 2001: 211), is the result of, and simultaneously expresses an uncertain process of cultural (re-)construction, which was part of a wider state-imposed reorganization of the materials and the principles for the production of (cultural) capital. In the 1990’s, industrial, technological and economic development have been the priorities of the *Reform and Opening up* (改革开放), and after 1989 it was clear that the political survival

¹⁴ Robert P. Kolker, *The Film Text and Film Form*, in *Film Studies: Critical approaches*. Ed. by John Hill and Pamela C. Gibbs, Oxford University Press, 2000, p – 10.

¹⁵ Xudong Zhang, *Nationalism, Mass Culture, and Intellectual Strategies in Post-Tiananmen China*, in *Social Text*, No. 55. *Intellectual Politics in Post-Tiananmen China* (Summer, 1998). Duke University Press.

of the ruling class and of the CPC fell into the agenda, too. Xie Jin's movie may be seen under two major lens, which might highlight the ideological commitment of the movie and of the political era: nationalism and development. If in fact, we recognize that one central thematic concern accompanying the disocurse of national development in China has been the "*humiliation for the atrocities inflicted upon the nation since the Opium War*" (J. L. Qiu, 2003: 3), the framing and staging of the myth of Lin Zexu in the movie, though not limited to it, reveals how much important was for the Chinese political actors in the 1990's, the necessity of providing a general ideological discourse that uphelded China's need of restoring its technical supremacy, and to put forward economic principles that were clearly in contrast with the traditional communist ideals. On the other side, China as a nation-state soon found itself embedded within a global network of capital and culture whose signs, values and meanings strongly challenged the Party's authority and capacity of providing social stability and legitimation to its policy and institutions, thus facing a significant confrontation with a series of problematics that have been dealt with through the production of a specific form of nationalism. "*The Opium War*" movie can thence be seen as a temporary answer to such difficulties, which were not only theoretic but became practical when applied to the socio-economic changes that many people went through. The public industries for example, represented a great concern over the years 1992-1998 in China. In fact in 1998, 36% of public enterprises were in loss, and they employed something like 108 million urban workers (Bergère, 2000). Traditionally, the public industries had represented a firm standpoint both in the organization of Chinese economy, and in the control of mass employment, and the authorities were well aware of the fact that any decision toward a decisive liberalization would have resulted, in the eyes of the million of laboures employed, as an aggression to one of the founding principle of socialism.

"*The Opium War*" represents many different things that somehow are linked to each other. It represents the state's effort at self-legitimation; it represents an agency for the implementation of a nation-building process; it represents a new step towards the successfull use of a media technology to produce popular content serving multifarious interests; it represents China's re-territorialization under the guise of its alleged spontaneous form of social and political organization – a point constantly stressed in the narrative of the movie; it represents a special combination

between sovereignty, territory, and culture which gave rise to an imagined configuration of the Chinese state's power asserting itself as an eternal, legitimate political and spatial entity; it represents the inspiration and incentive to sustain the social and economic forces that were supposed to drive and boost the industrial-technological development of/in China; it represents the commercial interests of the indigenous cultural industry (Emei Film Studio and Xie Jin's Heng Tong Film & TV Company Ltd.), with its 15 million dollars production; it represents part of the ideological apparatus that was necessary to the political leaders, to the major economic actors, as well as to the foreign investors who started to pour billions of dollars into the middle king, and of which China had absolute need, in order to maintain its *development* credible both at home and outside. Therefore, "*The Opium War*" as a media popular form, through its format, genre and narrative provides – or at least tries to do so – political legitimation to the new path that China had undertaken, and to the gradual dismissal of the previous Maoist ideology. Economically, the movie's complex arrangement of encoded meanings aim at justifying the acceleration of the *Reform* and the consequent transformations brought about, through a system of signs epitomized and simultaneously deployed by the new media and information technology associated with global capital and culture, which meant new cultural forms that had a strong impact on the life of Chinese people, in terms of communication, of identity formation, and of general understanding of the *self* and the *other*, for the new relationship with Western foreign countries (as a result of the *Reform*), exemplified also in the transnational flow of capital, images and people, engendered as well as imposed to find new ways of conceiving the relation between the territory (China), and the people (Chinese), namely nationhood and self-understanding. This was only a tiny part of the peculiar and precarious situation in which China stood. The social alteration caused by the economic development and the attempt to modernize China, have been ambiguous and not without negative consequences, and the major role of "*The Opium War*" has been exactly to smooth the negative alteration caused by the shift that China decided to undertake. The way the myth of Lin Zexu has been framed in the course of the movie – a subject matter discussed in the section below where a semiotic analysis is provided – designates at the same time the ideological, if not mythological, legacy of the Maoist past, which although needed to be corrected and appropriately addressed to fit the new course foreseen by Deng Xiaoping. In the

1980's the politics of the "*Four Modernization*" (四个现代化) had already opened the way for a social renovation, but it is only in the 1990's that we see part of the Chinese people joining the universal popular culture of industrialization.

At a superficial level, the Chinese reform started in 1978 and accelerated in the 1990's, is seen as an attempt to modernize China in line with the already advanced countries, and to develop its economy by allowing foreign capital/technology and tourists to enter its territory. But if we look deeper at the implications of the process of opening to the international market and global capitalism, we see that it also gave rise to what we call global popular culture which, as de Oliveira Jesus says, is "*based on the reification of the image, a celebration of diversity and individuality, and the exaltation of everyday life*".¹⁶ The transformations in the everyday life caused by the opening to global capital, and by the development of the media and information technologies, along with the overwhelming use of TV, computer technologies, videorecorders, digital photocameras, the increasing use of the Internet, and the consequent growth in the communication of informations, capital and people, and yet the globalization of labor, the decentralization of the market and the growing competition-mentality, all these factors and many others, strongly contributed to a decisive and rapid social transformation which brought to a world of confusion, tensions and contradictions.¹⁷ As a form of media popular culture, "*The Opium War*" can then be seen as a successful conveyor of a contemporary (media) mythology that strived against the social imbalances caused, also, by the same (media) technology – if we consider it as a part of the whole process of *Reform and Opening up*.

This mythology, detailed illustrated below, expresses itself as a media aesthetics that results from criteria dictated by principles of a market and consumer-driven society, by the movie's commitment at conveying national feelings, by the need to accelerate the economic growth without delegitimizing the political authority of the

¹⁶ Marco A. de Oliveira Jesus, *Postmodernism with Chinese Characteristic: Media and Politics in the Cinematic Images of the Post New-Era*, Master's degree thesis, 2005, p-36.

¹⁷ Issued in 1995 by the Chinese government, "*The Provisional Guidelines for Foreign Investment Projects*" (外商投资项目的临时文件), aimed at guiding the orientation of foreign investment so to keep them in line with the national economy and social development planning of China. A narrow focus on the document, unravel that the most important objectives of the guideline sought to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI), which would introduce advanced technology into designated industries; the information technology and communication, and the electronic sector were, at the end of the 1990's, the major targets of FDI.

country, and above all by the *visuality* that it encourages, if not imposes, that is the cinematic codes and conventions utilized to allow a precise imagining of China within a broad, transnational visual culture. Consumerism, individuality, differentiation, are all definitions of the ideals and beliefs that the movie cunningly uttered, although their apparently opposite principles (nationalism, patriotic feelings, homogenization of forms) are connoted inasmuch to rise as the main meanings. When I say that the trajectory undertook by China, since the *Reform Era*, gave birth to a world of confusion, of contradictions and inequalities, I attempt to underline the growing importance and impact that a new system of values and of forms, clearly illustrated by Xie Jin's movie, had on what too much generically we call China. These values and forms were not pertinent to, and a result of, a single specific category, which would be that of the society, of the state or of the market. It is rather a result of an intertwined relationship between them. Political ideology has been tremendously affected by economic considerations. Economic decisions have been deeply influenced by political reflections and struggle. Many different form of social configurations and practices have been determined by, and drawn the attention of political and economic actors and institutions, while at the same time had them inspired and stimulated by the society itself.

The movie "*The Opium War*" conveys the myth of Lin Zexu to utter a precise thinking, a specific way of consuming knowledge produced to generate a distinct idea of the world, but also of the self, both individually and collectively – the myth of Lin Zexu connotes at the same time shared national feelings that lead toward the idea of a national community within which the people as a collectivity think and act; and individual aspirations promoted by the peculiar framing of the media figure of Lin Zexu, which through its constant righteousness, focus, and desire to *know*, is able to accomplish (by means of its individual ambition to serve the great good) any task it is presented with. However, as Barthes says in "*Mythologies*", the decipherment of a myth requires the identification of its motivations, without which the myth cannot be justified. A specific form of nationalism could be considered in general terms as the foundations of the myth of Lin Zexu in Xie Jin's movie. The complex dismissal of the Maoist ideology undertaken since the 1980's by Deng Xiaoping, hadn't been replaced by a coherent ensemble of guiding principles; rather concepts such as "*socialist market economy*" (社会主义市场经济) or "*seeking the truth from facts*" (实事求是), became the redundant lullabies

which served to remind that a new path *but* with socialist characteristic had been undertaken, or better, that the old same path (the socialist way) now displays some new features (marketisation, mixed ownership)¹⁸. The new conditions imposed by the *Reform and Opening up* policy, had profound repercussions in the everyday life of people at all levels. Political and ideological discourses (in the Maoist guise of mass mobilization and class struggle) were gradually substituted by mass consumption. New alliances between bureaucracy and local enterprises have led off to different form of nepotism, and corruption grew esponentially, to a certain extent money became the supreme good (Bergère, 2000).

It was in this very state of things, namely the decline of traditional ideology, and consequently the need for legitimacy, that *nationalism* - in the form of a new nationalistic consciousness, and rendered possible through the media production and deployment of nationalistic features – could arise to the rank of main ideology in China in the 1990's. The necessity for this form of legitimation is primarily motivated by the longing to support the neoliberal principles of the new market, and to rationalize the state apparatus to the global economy; a process that couldn't have been sustained by the socialist doctrine as conceived by Mao's China. Far from being that form of nationalism traceable in pre-reform China, which highlighted patriotic sentiments vs imperialism, or class struggle vs bourgeoisie, all directed toward an unconditional affirmation of the party; China's nationalism of the 1990's, possesses a different structure, deployment and objective, and more important is the result of an extremely confused and intricate pragmatic ambiguity, not in regard to the message displayed, but rather in respect to the forces that it sustained (political, economic, intellectual). As a cinematic narrative, the myth of Lin Zexu in the movie displays a complex cultural network to which it provides legitimacy and validation, and somewhat concealing and obscuring the unwillingness, rather than the inability, of Chinese politics to face responsibilities for the social inequalities and uncertainty that the *Reform* brought about. The Communist Party extended its internal modality of confrontation – that is to

¹⁸ In March 1979, Deng Xiaoping enunciated the “*Four Cardinal Principle*” (四项基本原则): upholding the Socialist Path; upholding the People's Democratic Dictatorship; upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China; upholding Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism. In september 1997, those four principles were written into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, albeit concepts such as class struggle and constant revolution were not mentioned.

compromise, bargain, negotiate and even struggle between party members – to the entire Chinese politics. The ruling and technocratic elite, lacking long-term social planning, as well as work to “*critically analyze contemporary Chinese society and culture*” (Zhang, 2001: 5), was instead inclined toward an approach based on constant compromise and negotiation with the multiple social actors¹⁹. A condition that relentlessly affected the State, which resulted impoverished and undermined, as Xudong Zhang suggests:

*“The State must be considered a remaining or reinvented ideological sham necessary for real power operations on both subnational and supranational levels. In other words, the uniformity of the Chinese State must now be regarded as a function or agency of the economic, social, and ideological reconfigurations driven by global and local forces and interests.”*²⁰

With such a foundation, Chinese nationalism attempted to grant an ideological fulfillment that overshadowed the State’s desorientation vis-à-vis disparity and social fragmentation (Xudong Zhang, 2001).

Therefore, Chinese nationalism of the 1990’s served the need for definition and identification of the self against new spaces of interaction (Lin Zexu’s confrontation with the British connotes dichotomies such as East vs West, China vs the world, the self vs the other, development vs tradition, private vs public and so on), both domestic and international, which challenged the everyday life through rampant flows of informations, images, fashions, and even what I call ‘commercials’ ideologies’ (the increase of advertisements as complex set of meanings associated with various aspect of social life, and thus able to cognitively transcend the objects or services offered in the advertisements). The rise of a global culture within Chinese society, becoming in the meanwhile more and more consumeristic and diversified, had precipitated the need for individual and collective repositioning within a frame of reference in which, identity and

¹⁹ In my opinion, the political sphere of the 1990’s has been, among other things, characterized by an approach that has determined the measures and operations to be taken, depending on the needs that the moment and the situation required. It seems to me that in some ways, that typical mode of negotiating power and decisions peculiar of the diverse factions within a political party, namely to bargain, treat and retreat in order to reach compromise – and which has distinguished the extraordinary effort put by Deng Xiaoping in riding the rushing and sudden waves provoked by the strong political factions within the CCP – it seems that this attitude or manner had been expanded to all areas of the public domain.

²⁰ Xudong Zhang, *The Making of the Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field: A Critical Overview*, in *Whiter China, Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China*, Ed. by Xudong Zhang, Duke University Press, 2001.

subjectivity were re-defined in opposition to an outside (not to be intended only as a foreign outside) that aroused curiosity, as well as bewilderment. “*Nationalism must of necessity reconstruct a national culture as both a means of ideological legitimation and a goal of social reconstruction*” (Liu Kang, 2004: 41). “*The Opium War*” thus contemporarily stages nationalism as a form of cultural hegemony preserving the ruling class from political unrest (something perhaps learned in 1989), supposedly caused by a course of action (the effects of the *Reform*) that wouldn’t bestow a firm grasp of then-present conditions; while on the other side the kind of nationalism encouraged by the movie and by the figure of Lin Zexu served to stage the triumph of economic success. The myth of Lin Zexu in this sense is central for it is produced to provide a sense of belonging and of ardent patriotism employed to create an extensive and popular support to the new economic path. The lack of vision sprang from, and caused by the new economic path, eroded the ideological discourse – Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought, class struggle and mass mobilization – that until then had represented the main source for the political course (or its appearances), and the main leading feature for identity formation among people, which undoubtedly relied on, more or less, fixed set of symbols and meanings. Many of the decisions taken by the government and the party in the 1990’s, such as the granting of better tax conditions to the workers of the state-owned steel industries after the riots in 1994, or more in general the adjustment and retreat, the acceleration and slowing down of the *Reform*, indicate the absence of a firm referential standpoint that the media representation of the myth of Lin Zexu, and the “*The Opium War*” movie in general had to surrogate. Clearly enough, the ideology conveyed by the movie and by our hero’s mythology was not the only one in play at the time, nor carried alone all the weight of the ruler’s unwillingness to plan and conduct a much more equilibrated transformation of/in China.

In fact, the 1990’s in China were a decade in which, various forms of nationalism can be identified – and among which that communicated by the movie is only one version – all of them representative of a broad effort aimed at the organization (perhaps poorly conceived) of a hegemonic ideological network. In this sense, it is possible to single out the “*Patriotic Education Campaign*” (爱国主义教育) that began in 1991, as one of these forms. Zheng Wang, in his study on Chinese national humiliation, explains that “*this campaign is a nationwide mobilization effort*

targeted mainly at Chinese youth. As a central part of the campaign, Beijing called upon the entire nation to study China's humiliating modern history and how much the country has been changed by the Communist revolution"²¹. In order to do so the Party conducted a revisionism of school's history textbooks, in which a new patriotic narrative took the place of Maoist's class struggle narrative, and a new victimization discourse has been highlighted in this new narrative. Very generically, the aim of the campaign was that of shaping young generations in the form of patriotic citizens which would, on one side, recognize the political system of the CPC's one party rule and its glorification, while blaming West for China's suffering and humiliation on the other side. The campaign launched in 1991, hadn't been carried out at full scale until 1994, and since then it has been politically sustained till today²².

The myth of Lin Zexu in the movie seems to provide a consolation and a utopian appeal. Being Lin Zexu a historical, national hero, its mythical relevance is deeply rooted in that, culturally produced, ideal space that since the foundation of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国) in 1949, has been filled with nationalistic narratives and ideas with the purpose of creating a national historical tradition or mythology able to yield a sense of continuity with the past, and which still today, though differently, is a powerful and effective ideological instrument. In other words, the representation of Lin Zexu in the movie "*The opium War*", although the clear shifts (changed the interests, changed the meanings) that its mythology has undergone since the Maoist era²³, and the consequent attempts to

²¹ Zheng Wang, *National Humiliation, History Education and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China*, *International Study Quarterly* (2008) 52, p -784.

²² Another form of nationalism that I wish to highlight, is that provided by what Michael Billig in his book "*Banal Nationalism*". By this term the author stresses the attention to the countless situations in which, in the course of a day, the concept of nation is emphasized and accentuated in such a way, as to make it seems the most natural thing in this world. According to Billig, the idea of nation and of national identity is a background always present in the discourse of politicians, as well as in many other cultural products such as television, magazines, daily newspapers, the flags in the institutional buildings, emblems, the national football team etc.. The aim of this omnipresent nationalism, has the power to naturalize the idea(l) of nation and, in an underhand manner, it constantly reminds us of being part of that nation. Although the study of Billig tends toward an approach that wants to point out that a nationalistic discourse, despite what many people might think, is still conducted in those Western and democratic countries that traditionally are not considered as such, this same analysis can be easily applied to China of the 1990's, for in that period it had already entered, albeit at a different stage, the realm of *everyday life*, meaning that a universal popular culture had already started to stage its own features, and thus shaping new type of individuals within Chinese society, often using the same means as in those Western countries recalled by Billig.

²³ During the Maoist era the myth of Lin Zexu served different political needs (anti-emperialistic ideas, anti-capitalistic principles, anti-bourgeois behaviours, and so on).

renew its functions within Chinese society, as a “*process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past*” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 4), it is still attached to a specific Chinese old-fashioned mass culture of which a contemporary nostalgia, though mostly expressed in a consumeristic manner, is a recognizable form. The myth of Lin Zexu seems to belong to the olympus of the great fathers of modern China. Its figure, as expressed by Xie Jin’s media product, with its confucian fashion and nationalistic ardour, conveys a comfort and a utopian relief to disperse and dissolve the anxieties of daily life in the 1990’s, in China.

As stated in the first pages of this chapter, “*The Opium War*” aims at rendering a historical account of the facts occurred in China between 1838-1842, which led to the British military attack known as the ‘Opium War’.

This is the very first aim of the movie; that of providing a “*historical account*” of the... But what does it really mean to provide a historical account? What processes does it really contemplate, and why it is so normal to ignore, as often happens, the idea that the past can be thought, represented and reproduced?

The historical time, as we know it, is a singular time organized in a set of stages of development, or, to quote Timothy Mitchell, “*is singular, moving from one stage of development to another*” (Mitchell, 2000: 8). The concept of modern history is strictly bond to the idea of time, rendered as a progression on the axis of human development, which goes from an indefinite archaic stage, to a presumable endless one. For instance, if we look at China and England, we would almost certainly say that the present historical trajectory of England, places it at an advanced stage of development than that of China, and perhaps, we would say the same for China if compared with a country as, say Thailand. What associates them, is that they all have a place in modern history, they are all part of the same singular historical time, they are part of a single narrative. “*The narrative*”, affirms Mitchell, “*is structured by the progression of a principle, whether it be the principle of human reason or enlightenment, technical rationality or power over nature*”(Mitchell, 2000: 9).

This understanding of time and of history, hasn’t always been present. It is rather the product of specific dynamics active in a distinct moment, and perhaps in different regions of the world. The dynamics I’m referring to, are those carried out by the development of global capital, whose forces – mode of production, organization of labour, accumulation of capital itself – deriving also from the exploitation of human labour and resources in the colonial projects, had a decisive

impact on social relations and on the organization of political spatialization, an impact that corresponded to the creation of the territorial state, as the more suitable way to produce and accumulate capital (Minca, Bialasiewicz, 2004), and of which the media framing and staging of the myth of Lin Zexu in the movie, though not limited to it, is the modern symbolic version in support to such conceptualization of time and history.

“The dispersed geographies of modernity were reorganized into stages of Europe’s past, where discrepant developments outside Europe are translated into something else: expression of time itself”. This is how Timothy Mitchell (2000: 9) expresses the constitution of a singular historical time, and he continues by presenting histories as variations of a universal history, in relation to which they receive their meanings. *“Singular does not mean uniform. In different countries, the historical process assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at a different periods. But these differences can only be thought of as different in relation to an underlying uniformity.”* The figure of Lin Zexu produced cinematically in the 1997’s movie, emerges as the urgent need of recognizing this underlying uniformity, to recognize the historical time in contrast to the Qing Dynasty’s misrecognition²⁴.

Walter Benjamin speaks about a *“homogeneous empty time”*²⁵, a time container marked by calendar and clockwork, which allows society, understood as a sociological organism, to move calendrically through a homogeneous empty time. Benedict Anderson, in his *“Imagined Communities”* uses Benjamin’s theory to explain the idea of nation, seen as a cohesive community moving steadily through history; a concept that opened up the way to the quantification and representation of historical time in modern societies, and which allowed the state and social groups not formally organized, as pointed out by Eric Hobsbawm, to invent traditions in order to provide a cultural and historical foundation, for the creation of a national identity, based on a shared historical origin, and common tradition.

²⁴ Rebecca Karl in her *“The Burdens of History: Lin Zexu (1959) and “The Opium War” (1997)*, provides an important account on the contemporary understanding of China’s defeat in the Opium War, highlighting the concept of (the Qing’s) misrecognition of the (world) historical momentum.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, Gesammelten Schriften I:2. Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt am Main, 1974.

In the reading of the movie “*The Opium War*”, I believe it is useful and necessary to explore the complex ways through which social practices, narrative, images, myths, and sounds are bound together in the production of meaning, and/or ideology, as Douglas Kellner would probably say. Nevertheless, a thorough investigation, also requires to take into account, and unravel, those dimensions that we often ignore, and never question. A normal activity such as watching Xie Jin’s “*The Opium War*” - a movie that, before deploying its vast array of constructs, pretends to provide a *historical account* – actually conceals the basic principle that lies behind the constitution of nationalism and nation, hence rendering possible the shaping of a national identity. Consequently, modern historical time is the departure point upon which “*The Opium War*” has been conceived and realized.

What is more remarkable, is the intrinsic coherence that has been given, since then (since the production of historical time), to human experience and to all human products; a coherence that has allowed the production and representation of a specific idea of reality. A reality that required and still requires to be perpetually re-produced and represented, which in turn is a commitment almost integrally accomplished by the media. Media culture, in fact, is not an innocent cultural product, as it isn’t innocent its message. Xie Jin’s work is no exception. Douglas Kellner argues that “*media culture is a contested terrain across which key social groups and competing political ideologies struggle for dominance and that individuals live these struggles through the images, discourses, myths, and spectacles of media culture*” (Kellner, 1995: 2).

Providing materials out of which creating and shaping a wide system of reference within which people draw their sense of identity, of nationality, of good and bad, of sexuality, of otherness and sameness, of homogeneity and heterogeneity, is the everyday task of media culture. It is also one of the most prominent sectors of the global economy, which also justify why it is a terrain of competing forces. In 1990’s China, many of the traditional social institutions still present in the 1980’s were gone. The people’s commune (人民公社) introduced in 1958, had disappeared in 1984; the division of the population into political categories had vanished; the system of registration which differentiated rural and urban residents had lost part of its efficacy; the work units (单位), which had expressed the attachment of the traditional working elite to the public sector, and which had represented the fundamental social and spatial unit of urban China under socialism,

appeared in the 1990's as a corporativistic practice that fought in order to defend the old privileges. The active²⁶ participation of the population to the development brought about a world of differences and of inequalities.

Now, in order to highlight in the movie those peculiar components displaying nationalistic features, whose aim is to sustain the shaping of a national identity in the process of nation-building – a process characterized by the dismissal of Maoist *radical* ideology (i.e., class struggle and mobilization, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, constant revolution), in favour of a market-oriented ideology, which would justify then-present party policy of openness to global capital and international market, as well as the ongoing modernization of the country and of the institutions of the state, and last but not least, to encourage people's trust and devotion to the party and its members, with the clear intent to avoid social opposition and politicization – I have decided to distinct the analysis of “*The Opium War*” in two different approaches. In the attempt to realize this purpose, the first approach will provide a semiotic analysis of the figure of Lin Zexu intended as a vehicle – in the form of myth – whereby “*the national*” (devotion, belonging, common origin and culture and, in the specificity of the figure of Lin Zexu, high moral values) becomes the inevitable and natural background by which it is possible to develop and further – this being part of the second approach – other argumentations on specific meanings cunningly encoded in the narrative of the movie.

²⁶ The term *active* refers to the use of the new means provided by the process of opening and of the reform.

1. *A semiotic analysis*

As I affirmed in the introduction to this research, understanding the myth of Lin Zexu means to get hold of the motivations that have engendered its production and communication, which in turn means to acknowledge the discourse by way of the *signification* uttered (Barthes, 1957). As an agency to mainstreaming national feelings, the representation of Lin Zexu is to be semiotically explored in order to recognize and decipher the semiological systems that produce its myth and allow the signification process to successfully occur. The need for a semiotic analysis also lies in the urgency to unfold meaning encoded into “*all kinds of human products, from words, symbols, narratives, paintings, and comic books to scientific theories and mathematical theorems*”²⁷. The urgency to unfold encoded meanings lies in the demand for *de-naturalization* and *re-politicization* of all those aspects and things that express meaning.

As said above, the aim of this study is to examine the motivations behind the representation of the myth of Lin Zexu in Xie Jin’s “*The opium War*”. Quoting Roland Barthes, I could say that Lin Zexu – as represented in the movie – is a *depoliticized speech*, history that becomes nature, contingency that becomes eternal, politics that becomes the very state of reality, an innocent essence, a myth. Barthes in his “*Mythologies*”²⁸ tells us that a myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification (Barthes, 1956), and adds that a myth is a type of speech.

What does it mean to say that Lin zexu is a myth? When Barthes sais that the myth is a type of speech, he means that the myth is a system of communication which carries a message, and “*the myth is the specific way to utter this message*”²⁹.

Hence in our case, Lin Zexu is the particular way through which a specific message is expressed.

Lin Zexu’s representation throughout the movie, is encoded in such a way, as to infuse its figure with features tending toward a reading which mythically portrays Lin Zexu as a hero. Camera positioning and lighting, as well as music, frame Lin

²⁷ Marcel Danesi, *The Quest for Meaning: A guide to Semiotic Theory and Practice*, University of Toronto Press, 2007

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, 1991

²⁹ Ibidem

Zexu by glorifying its image, and infusing him with positivity, promoting full devotion and unassailable loyalty to the nation and to the Chinese long standing culture and civilization.

In its first appearance in the movie, Lin Zexu wears a Chinese scholar dress, his head is half shaved in compliance with the typical Qing Dynasty's use of pigtail, he also has long mustache, and the traditional thin long beard. Lin Zexu is seated at a desk (presumably at home), and holds a writing brush, with which he is writing a personal account on opium that will be dispatched to Emperor Daoguang (visible in the next scene).

While Lin Zexu is writing, behind him we clearly see a bookshelf filled with books, and a series of traditional Chinese paintings hanged on the wall.

At a level of denotation, this scene shows Lin Zexu – a scholar official - seated at a desk, writing an account on opium, with the voice-over providing the content of his writing. Nonetheless, its connotations are multiple, and are a result of the arrangement of the figure of Lin Zexu along with the objects he is surrounded by, the voice-over, and the music. In this regard, we can observe that Lin Zexu's dress, the writing brush he is holding, and the books on sight, are all symbols which connote him as a well educated figure, and above all, ascribe Chinese traditional features of advancement and progress in the various art to Lin Zexu itself. The scholar dress and the books leave no doubt about Lin Zexu's belonging to the group of Chinese intellectuals, whose role, according to Chinese tradition, was one of defending, however unsuccessfully, moral values rather than performing great tasks. In this scene Lin Zexu is positioned at the center of the camera shot, and the objects above mentioned (the books on the bookshelf, the paintings, the various tools and handicrafts on the desk), all surround him, connoting that he is a representative of Chinese culture; not just of contemporary culture (that of Lin Zexu), but of the long-standing culture, which made China to be known as a great civilization. Indeed, the paintings hanged behind Lin Zexu, reminds us of this ancient Chinese fine art, which requires the skill of using strokes and ink; the books are there to connote the great contribution given to human knowledge provided by the Chinese Classics; the objects on the desk, such as the brush leaned against the proper base, the ink pot, and the small jar in porcelain, are all features of the high level reached by Chinese manufacturing.

Hence, the entire scene presents Lin Zexu overwhelmed by Chinese traditional art features, which require absolute affection, passion, and rigorousness in their apprehension and command, as we see in the moment in which Lin Zexu holding the writing brush, brushes it against the ink with a touch of stroke typical of someone absolutely confident with the art of calligraphy. He therefore embodies China's cultural tradition, not only that of his time, but Chinese culture as a whole. The use of the voice-over allows us to acknowledge the content of the letter that Lin Zexu is writing to Emperor Daoguang, adding an important signifying to the figure of Lin Zexu which will be constant during the entire movie:

“Rampant opium use has become a serious threat to the Celestial Empire. In my opinion, if we do nothing, within ten years, the Qing Dynasty's treasury will be drained and the country will be defenseless. Foreign could conquer our nation without using force”.

According to the voice-over, in Lin Zexu's regard, the main concern is the use of opium as a main threat to the Celestial Empire, to the Qing Dynasty, to the country, and ultimately to the nation. The focus is thus on opium as devil, as a menace to the treasury of the dynasty, and consequently to the security of the entire country. Foreigners are mentioned only in the last sentence, for they are not the primary matter of concern. Indeed, the focus on opium reveals that Lin Zexu's attention is aimed to save the country from the corruption and moral deviation caused by the rampant opium use. At a level of denotation, the content of the voice-over crystallizes the figure of Lin Zexu as a scholar-official whose preoccupation are social and political, inasmuch as he is worried for the sort of the celestial empire and for the political survival of the Qing Dynasty. The connotation of the voice-over tells the viewer that the nation is the only thing that matters, that there is no future without a healthy country, and that only through an absolute devotion and sheer patriotic behaviour is possible to save the nation, without which everything that exists (the Great Chinese Culture already embodied in Lin Zexu) would be wiped out.

Therefore, the first scene in which Lin Zexu appears, is constructed in such a way as to deploy its image in the form of a myth (as shown in the rest of the movie), a national hero whose attachment to the nation, whose patriotic behaviour and moral

integrity, all converge together to invite the audience to identify with him. Thence the lengthy takes and close-ups present in this first scene, all overlaid by soft flutes melody which add positivity to the character, should thus be read in this sense.

In an other sequence of the film, Lin Zexu visits Emperor Daoguang in the Imperial Palace. This scene is particularly significant, for it provides relevant and central features to the image of Lin Zexu. In their meeting Lin Zexu appears to the viewer bent on his knees (kowitz, 磕头) in front of the Emperor, as a sign of respect to the authority and to the imperial protocol. The low camera angle behind Lin Zexu is positioned so to make the audience identify with him while being bowed down, whereas the emperor/authority, on his desk, asks him whether he has a solution to the opium problem or not. Only when asked to talk Lin Zexu raises his head, adding in this way solemnity to the moment. In this scene Lin Zexu wears the proper Qing Dynasty's dress. Indeed, during the Qing Dynasty (and not only), there were regulations that codified dress for the imperial family, the Qing court and court officials, distinguishing the ruling élite and government from the population. Those like Lin Zexu who passed the civil service examination and attained the status of a government official were granted the privilege of wearing court robes. The rank was further distinguished by a hierarchy of colour and ornamentation. Rank was therefore a sign of accomplishment and status. There were nine grades of civil officials, represented by birds motifs. Lin Zexu's depiction in *"The Opium War"*, presents him with a *"manchurian crane"* motif (actually the camera never allows the viewer to see entirely and in detail the picture on the badge, nevertheless, after having compared the different bird images of the Qing Dynasty along with the one displayed in the movie, I've come to the conclusion that the bird in Lin Zexu's badge is the crane, despite its resemblance to the *"wild goose"*), embedded on his badge, and shown in the front and back, which corresponds to the first rank in the civil official hierarchy, which in turn has a symbolic meaning of *"longevity and wisdom"*. As for the trumpet-shaped hat wore by our hero, it consists of a black velvet cap with a finial on the top, whose colour and shape depended on the wearer's grade. Lin Zexu's finial on the top of the hat seems to be a solid red ball, corresponding to a first or second grade, depending on whether it is a ruby (*chaoguan*) or a coral. During the Qing Dynasty, those who achieved special distinction at court, were granted the right to wear peacock feather plume in their hat, showing one, two or three eyes, depending on the recipient's rank. The peacock

feather plume was thus attached to the hat by a jade tube or a glass imitation. Lin Zexu's depiction shows him wearing a hat with a knob (red ruby or coral?) and with the plume, a distinction which positions him, as a scholar-official, at the highest levels of the imperial civil hierarchy. In the scene Lin Zexu also wears a long necklace, which was another indicator of status, and whose materials were carefully regulated. It is said that the court necklace was patterned after a mala (a string of Tibetan prayers beads) that was given to the Emperor Shunzhi (順治帝, 1644 – 1661) as a gift from the Dalai Lama, and since then, the court necklace has been a constant throughout all the reigns of the twelve Qing Emperors. In the entire scene, Lin Zexu's appropriate dress, hat and necklace - which I might call Lin Zexu's fashion - suggests not only that he is unquestionably a member of the ruling élité, a devoted servant of the Qing Dynasty/government, but also that he embodies the very essence of both politics and Chinese culture. He speaks even when he is silent; its character is conceived and staged to produce meaning every instant. However, Lin Zexu doesn't express only devotion. He shows trust and has confidence in the capacity of the Emperor/authority to defeat the plague of opium:

"It is my opinion that if your Majesty issues an order..."

The *"If"* he uses is so important inasmuch as let's the audience assume that it is only a matter of *doing* something, in order to eradicate the use of opium, and thus suggesting the idea that the authority, has the right, and above all the strength and power to do it, which in turn, legitimate its right to act. Lin Zexu as a myth, staged to be a national hero, puts himself in the hands of the emperor/authority, to whom he is devoted to, through a natural/political/moral bond as expressed in the continuation of the dialogue:

"It is my opinion that if your Majesty issues an order, the cabinet enacts prohibitions and customs rigorously enforces them, I'm certain that opium can be wiped out. Your Majesty's power can destroy any monster".

Politics is possible only if there is a unity of purposes and everybody operates and behave for the good of the Empire/Nation/Qing Dynasty/Party-government.

The identification with Lin Zexu is equal to an identification with the attachment to the authority, and his affection to the Celestial Empire, is a kind of affection that all the people/citizens should have toward the nation and the government.

Lin Zexu is duty bound and ready to sacrifice himself for the Celestial Empire, as he says; although, as displayed in the film, the sacrifice will be that of sadly leaving his former teacher, Lu Zifang (himself addicted to opium), being prosecuted by the Emperor, in order to prove Lin Zexu's loyalty to the cause and to the country. Lin Zexu is on his knees almost for the entire scene in front of the Emperor. The only moment when he stands on his feet is when the doors behind him opens revealing Lu Zifang (being also Emperor Daoguang's former teacher) in chain, waiting for capital punishment. Here Lin Zexu finds himself confronted with a choice: imploring Daoguang in the attempt to save his teacher, or sacrifice him for the Empire's sake.

As Rebecca Karl has pointed out, Lin zexu is bound to Lu Zifang "*out of a traditional teacher-student loyalty*", but on the other hand he is also bond to the emperor-official relationship. The scene thus presents Lin Zexu apparently trapped between two confucian obligation, toward his teacher and his emperor. Even though Lin Zexu suffers in seeing his own teacher prosecuted – his attachment to him is shown through the changing of his posture, from on his knees to on his feet – his expression never hesitates; rather, after Lu Zifang is escorted to his destiny, and Lin Zexu returns in the dim room in front of Daoguang, his gaze shows determination and no trace of hesitation; the door closes behind Lin Zexu, connoting that he is leaving personal feelings behind, and that he is ready to undertake the task at all costs. Then he prostrates.

Music is alway solemn and it adapts itself easily with the austerity atmosphere and dim light present in the scene. The choice of the indoor location for the confrontation of political issues is another signfier, which again suggests that any matters of a certain importance, such as the social disruption caused by the opium, or the later territorial issue, are to be discussed within the only possible avenue, the Imperial palace. We assist at a naturalization of the fact that politics has a proper place (the state's institutions), and that only those (party members) who are empowered to move within these places, have legitimacy to discuss and take adequate measures in order to solve political matters. It is thus represented the mechanism of a modern nation-state, where political representatives meet and

discuss daily issues within building that embody the very essence of power. In this case the naturalization that occurs, aims to create the impression that what we see on the screen is as normal as in the reality/present.

In another scene Lin Zexu questions some Chinese rich merchants, accused of being guarantors for all foreign ships that carry opium, and of bribing officials in order to sell opium freely. Again the location is indoor, and the light is dim, as in most of the indoor sequences. The indicted are genuflected in front of Lin Zexu, which is seated behind a desk on a dais. He is positioned at the center of the camera shot, and the set of the stage in this scene clearly reminds of a court room. The focus of the discussion between Lin Zexu and the accused, is on opium and corruption:

“Now there is opium everywhere, breaking up millions of families, killing millions of people, and robbing the Great Qing of million of silver”.

Lin Zexu says something significant for the understanding of the film’s message. As we see, trade and foreigners are not even mentioned; in Xie Jin’s work all the sequences and statements are structured and staged in conformity to the political course of the 1990’s. Hence opium becomes the very devil, a disruptor of families, an illegal drug which breaks up the Chinese society. Furthermore, the accused are all Chinese people, suggesting that moral corruption is to be eradicated on the Chinese side, which is exactly the very core of the issue in Lin Zexu’s concern. By punishing the corrupted and deviated immorals, the country can be saved. The actual debate is within China; it is in fact, because of its weakness that the British Empire will humiliate China. At the beginning of this scene, the lengthy take and close up, which center on Lin Zexu, tend to deify the character, suggesting his mythic patriotism.

The Chinese merchants in front of Lin Zexu not only represent China’s guilt in front of the audience, but they also provide a resolution of the historical trauma caused by the opium war. Indeed, by an identification with Lin Zexu, the audience attain the pleasure of the sadistic position, as when Lin Zexu refuses He Jinrong proposal to share all his assets, and Lin Zexu quite adamatically says *“I don’t want only your money, I want your life too”*.

In addition to this, the Chinese merchants, gathered in front of Lin Zexu/authority, are the equivalent of actual spontaneous social aggregations of merchants, or of other social categories typical of the 1990's.

At the end of that decade (the 1990's), there were in China almost 200.000 registered social organization (*shehui tuanti*), and many other not officially recognised. In 1998 was issued a new regulation for the the establishment of social organization. According to article 2 of the "*Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations of the People's Republic of China*", "*social organizations are non-profit-making organizations composed of citizens (individual members) or organizations (unit members) who volunteer to perform activities in accordance with its articles of organization for the realization of their common desires.*"³⁰ Many of this organizations received public financing, and were dependent on a political patronage: governmental authority/office, or party control. Nevertheless, in those years, many of these organizations were born so as to solve actual problems linked to the process of opening of the reform, and pertaining to their own category. However, Beijing government very seldom took into consideration the idea of negotiating with them. Their institutionalization, albeit professed, was anyhow obstructed by the many bureaucratic passages, and by the financial asset that each organization should have possessed, as requested in the article 10 of the Regulation of 1998:

"Possession of lawful assets and sources of funding: a national social organization shall have a business fund of more than 100,000 yuan, while a local social organization and a trans-administrative-district social organization shall have a business fund of more than 30,000 yuan".

Their politicization is impeded and prevented. Lin Zexu in front of the merchants shows how politics is able of monitoring those associations, which are (allegedly) free of conducting their business if they abide by the law; otherwise, they might end as He Jinrong did in Xie Jin's work, prosecuted and then punished to death.

In another scene we see Lin Zexu, probably in his residence in Guangzhou, supervising his interpreter He Shangzhi, who is wearing Western clothing, and eats using fork and knife. Lin Zexu is depicted in non-formal dresses and, as always, his figure is surrounded by many Chinese traditional abjects and features, such as

³⁰ http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol2iss3/art_2.htm.

porcelaine vases, paintings, ornamental carved stones, and different kind of engraved wooden furniture set in the room. Lin Zexu seems particularly jovial, and dispenses smiles as we never find in the rest of the film. He is amused by the performance of He Shangzhi in Western clothing; and when Lin Zexu sees how to use Western tableware he says:

“The foreign tableware requires the use of both hands, our chopsticks require one hand only, and have greater adaptability”.

Even though Lin Zexu dismisses too easily the foreign habit of eating with two hands, instead of using one hand only as Chinese people do, and thus suggesting that he is not yet fully aware of the real technological advancement of England (this is perhaps the way Xie Jin decided to show that patriotism alone is not enough); the entire scene provides positive images of the confrontation between two different country, two different way of being. The quick views of the garden overcome by sunlight, the audible bird-song along with Lin Zexu’s informal behaviour, all contribute to create a good effect on the audience, and our hero appears as invested with positive energy. Here the connotations are the following; to confront with other civilizations is not wrong, and it is also possible to be positively intrigued by other’s people habits, albeit Chinese culture and tradition has nothing to learn. Nonetheless, the scene also tells us that the confrontation between China and the Western cannot be postponed anymore. Lin Zexu is the only character in Xie Jin’s *“The Opium War”* that has understood the importance of joining the rest of the world, though he is not yet well aware of the other countries’ power. The confrontation with the British, actually masks the confrontation within the Chinese political government, within the Qing Dynasty. Indeed, on one side there is Lin Zexu who throughout the movie utters this message: *I’m a citizen of the Chinese Nation, and as such I serve my country with full devotion and loyalty, and I’m ready to sacrifice my personal feelings as well as my life for my country.* On the other side there is the Qing Dynasty and his corrupted officials, which didn’t get the sense of the historical moment, misrecognizing the historical trajectory. Presenting the Chinese characters in this way, Xie Jin could advance the idea that the actual trajectory undertaken by the government, is the ruling class’s *“right recognition”*,

which have an awareness of what the country needs in order to compete with other powerful nations.

In the next scene, Lin Zexu meets up with a priest belonging to the British community present in Guangzhou. Lin Zexu in this sequence wears official dress, hat and necklace. The camera shot frames him on the bright side of the room, while the priest is on the dark side of it; therefore connoting positivity for Lin Zexu and negativity for the priest. In the scene, again, the theme of the confrontation is central, and shows Lin Zexu's readiness to approach the foreigners, like when he says: *"Whether you come alone or with all your people, I'm ready to meet you here"*. This statement reinforces Lin Zexu's awareness of the inevitability of China's encounter with foreign powers, thus suggesting his better comprehension of the historical situation. This is particularly clear when, after the priest's accusation *"cutting off food and water is not human behaviour"*, Lin Zexu focuses again on the disruptive power of opium, never accusing trade (which is the very inevitability) or the presence of foreigners in Chinese territory. Hence, the Imperial Commissioner cites some English newspapers which report the Queen's strict ban on opium in British territory. The scene provides important connotations. In the conversation with the priest Lin Zexu uses many words such as *"Chinese people"*, *"English newspaper"* (), *"your own country"*, *"your Queen"*, *"our tolerance"*, *"we"*, *"all your people"*. These words even if innocent at first sight, actually have the power to strengthen and naturalize the idea of belonging to a community, better understood as a *nation*. To mention English newspaper, suggest the existence of Chinese newspaper, as well as every other country's newspaper; such words and expression – Chinese people, your Queen – mentally create, and make it seem natural and eternal the conception of a world divided into several nations, the unique, unrivaled vision allowed. Furthermore, Lin Zexu expresses his intolerance toward the selling of opium in Chinese territory, and makes clear that Chinese laws must be respected as it happens in England. Lin Zexu's determination is aimed to induce the foreigners (or the Chinese audience?) to understand that China as England is a nation, and everybody within its territory must abide by the law. *"What about a country that has been broken apart for the last hundreds years and the millions of people that died or whose families have been ruined because of opium? These English newspapers have reported clearly strict bans on opium smoking in your country by your Queen"*.

As the priest is invited outside, the camera closes-up on Lin Zexu in order to dramatize what he is going to say:

“I’m not afraid of these foreigners, but what I really fear is that if the traitors are not eliminated, they will bring opium back to this country”.

For the first time Lin Zexu clearly reveals of underestimating the foreigners, showing too much confidence in China’s own capacity of overcoming the problem. This is perhaps the only historical burden on Lin Zexu’s conscience, that of having understood too late (the last three scenes in which he appears) that the world is full of powerful nations, and that China must enter this international arena by enhancing its own status to that of the other developed countries (as the military technology of the British will show). In addition to this, he also points out the finger against the traitors, the immoral imperial officials and the Chinese opium dealers, which through their behaviour had let China down, ruining their own people and society, and causing, for their own interest, this shameful situation. Thence, the Chinese incapacity of interpreting and rationalize the significance of the world trajectory, is embodied in the figures of the officials and of the Emperor, the Qing Dynasty.

In a further scene, we see Lin Zexu and his collaborators together with Qishan, newly appointed as Imperial Commissioner. Lin Zexu has been just dismissed from his position, he wears informal dressess like the other in the scene. Qishan is seated at the center of the room, and Lin Zexu is on the right side, as seen from Qishan’s point of view. The depiction of our former commissioner Lin, shows him deep in thought, silent. The scene shows two different approaches to the British attack (British navy is meanwhile sailing toward north); on the one hand we see Qishan that is aware of the military superiority of the enemies, and thus wishes not to go to war against the foreigners, he is instead inclined toward a negotiating approach, which is more rational, but at the same time shameful for China. On the other side, there is Lin Zexu that is conscious, as Qishan is, of China’s military weakness in comparison with British power, nevertheless, having also understood that Qing China is at the beginning of its decline, he opts for fighting till death, defining once and for all his role as a hero, who prefers to die for the country than see it conquered by foreign people; an approach dictated more by his feelings, and thus resulting less rational than Qishan’s, though inevitably more glorious. Semiotically

this scene can be interpreted as the acknowledgement of China's (military) subordination, a rational self-understanding which is a step necessary to plan the new rise of China; on the other end, Lin Zexu's apparent illogical will to fight connote China's pride and upstanding attitude of a country that is not afraid of facing the *other* (actually wishing to be somehow *otherized* as the only way to recognize the true *self*), and the responsibilities of its self-aware actions.

This scene represents the delineation of China's military defeat, and the missed opportunity of being part of a world that writes its history, instead of suffering it. The constant comparison with the military advancement of England, and necessity for technological development, has a clear correlation with the will of present China (1990's), to develop and modernize the country, in an effort to place China back to a position of prominence, which by the way is its natural destiny.

"I like a frog in a well didn't know much about the world affairs. Not until today did I understand that there are many powerful countries in the world....I'm aware of the approaching calamity."

In the consecutive scene, Lin Zexu walks in what seems to be an enclosure of institutional buildings, among which he stops in front of a class, whereby young students diligently apply themselves in studying. Outside the class, where Lin Zexu stands, is raining. The music is a soft delicate flow of flute sound, which connote a sense of melancholy, reinforced by the incessant rain. While the camera shows the students in the class, Lin Zexu is framed in a long shot, dark shadowed. This kind of set of the camera frame suggests that we are soon going to leave Lin Zexu to his destiny (the exile in Xinjiang), and therefore adding more intensity to these last moments with our national hero; and then the voice-over starts:

"The Chinese could tower like a giant in the east for 5,000 years..."

here, the camera closes-up on Lin Zexu, to let the audience assume that the voice-over is none other than Lin Zexu's thoughts.

“...by relaying on these younger generations of scholars. No matter how powerful the enemy outside is and how frightening and earthshaking the changes are, the training of scholars should not be neglected.”

Through the voice-over, the message we receive is that China's culture and tradition is redeemed. The outstanding 5,000 years of Chinese civilization were not vain, they instead have assured Chinese people to reach the threshold of modernity, and should be regarded with respect and deference forever. Even more, if we want to rebuild a 'new China' (新华), ready to face the new modern challenges and opportunity (social changes and trade), we must look back to our tradition and culture and learn from it. At the same time, the present, the Qing China, is regarded as the cause from which originated the Chinese illness, that is, corruption, ignorance, and lack of national devotion.

In the third from last scene in which Lin Zexu appears, he pays a visit to the soldiers killed in the battle against the British army. The wind strongly blows, connoting that the battle, however finished, it is still there, embodied in the corps of the fallen soldiers, still causing sorrow. The music is solemn and sadly ceremonial. Lin Zexu wears informal dress, indicating that he is there not officially but only for a sense of human participation to the regrettable loss. He pays his respect, by conforming to the Chinese tradition of burning figures made of joss paper, thus connoting him, for the umpteenth time, as a citizen whose bond with his culture, history and tradition – which all together create a sense of nationality – is staunch and inescapable. In this scene we see Lin Zexu outdoor, he is there to extend the respect to the dead, and to see in person the dread of the war, the sorrow caused by the misrecognition of the Qing Dynasty. The scene presents certain aspects that make it look as a proper ceremony (the burning joss paper, the white colour for funerals that covers the dead bodies and the horses, the solemn music), and therefore connoting that the dead are not just dead, but that they are national citizens that have been sacrificed for a national cause, for the country. As such it becomes a public event (outdoor), which must be seen by the general public, by the people.

In his last appearance Lin Zexu, in his way to Xinjiang, runs into Qi Shan who is going to Beijing for capital punishment. From the audience point of view, Lin Zexu appears to the right of the screen, while Qi Shan appears to the left. Ma Ning

in his *“Xie Jin’s film melodrama”*, citing Chris Berry says that *“by spatial positioning I mean the use of the techniques of mis-en-scène to designate the spatial relationships among different characters, a device important to the construction of character identity and audience identification in Classical Chinese Cinema.”*³¹

Ma Ning affirms that the layout of the traditional Chinese stage is influenced by the ancient Chinese cosmology of yin-yang. This means that the character’s position on a movie can designate the personal characteristic that the author wants to convey on them. According to Ma Ning’s theory *“the spatial code of the right designates yang, which means masculinity/positivity/law/order, while that of the left denotes yin, which means femininity/negativity/lawlessness/disorder”*.

Consequently, the set of the stage that frames Lin Zexu and Qi Shan, might signify the images portrayed. Lin Zexu being on the right side of the screen (as seen by the viewer) designates “yang” (阳), and thus represents positivity, respect for the law, and commitment to establish order. Qi Shan, on the other hand, being staged on the left side of the screen, is “yin” (阴), representing negativity, disorder, lack of morality and of devotion to the Celestial Empire/Nation. Furthermore, the angle camera shot frames Lin Zexu followed by a numerous group of devoted friends and faithful colleagues; while Qi Shan is backed only by two guards that stand near a cage, to escort him to Beijing, connoting two different destiny, appropriate to their behaviour and conduct.

This last scene, is the only one set in a natural location, besides the one in which a courier rides a horse in a wide landscape to dispatch a message to Beijing. Here, the stage is an indistinct seashore, presumably in Guangdong province. The scene presents no trace of human constructions such as buildings or roads; the sea is nearly always at sight. The sea-sound is ever present, perhaps to add incisiveness to the natural set. Music is calm and provides intensity to the words of Lin Zexu, so to positively dramatize what he says:

“Since I came to Guangzhou, I have never thought of myself. I fear that the Chinese are being thrown into a long dark night, and have nowhere to turn for help”

³¹ Ma Ning, *Spatiality and subjectivity in Xie Jin’s Film Melodrama of the New Period*, in *New Chinese Cinemas, Forms, Identities and Politics*. Edited by N. Browne, P.G. Pickowicz, V. Sochack, E. Yau.

The first words of Lin Zexu permanently connote him as an heroic patriot, who has renounced to himself to serve the country, in a complete and intense identification with the nation and its principles; an identification that asks each one to let individual interests and feelings to vanish, in lieu of a new renaissance between the arms of the motherland, whereby every new subject can be fed and protected, until the strength and will-power of each one, will be put at work to indiscriminately serve the common cause, the imagined community everybody belong to, the nation. However, in the very last moment of the scene, Lin Zexu holding a globe that he soon after will consign to Qi Shan says:

“There are so many powerful nations in the world. Our Qing Dynasty could no longer be out of touch with reality.”

The fact that Lin Zexu, in order to show the existence of a world made of nations – which in his words represents reality – uses a globe, a map of the world, is very significant.

Indeed its connotations express a total confidence in the power of representation, as an exemplary way to depict the actual features of reality. A confidence that is exquisitely modern, and which is one of the pillars of the modern nation-state.

The production of modern geographical maps since the enlightenment period, inaugurated an era whereby the spatialization of politics, strongly contributed to the creation and acceptance of a world made of nations; thus naturalizing a historical contingency, and providing a specific vision of the world; a world that since the so called scientific revolution, has been denominated and measured according to alleged objective and immutable characteristics that undoubtedly identify it. Thence in this last scene, the figure of Lin Zexu, our patriotic and devoted hero, takes possession of this powerful instrument of representation to convey the message that if we, China, do not enter history in the form of a nation, we won't be able to enter it at all, and in order to be a nation, everybody's behaviour must adapt to the new circumstances (social inequalities or economic opportunities of the 90's?) that the situation requires; accept trade as a positive event, and conform to our Chinese tradition as part of our Chinese history; serve the national cause as well as the authority, and consequently behave and think of yourself as an essential part of the national body, the Chinese Nation.

2. *The Opium War*

In the previous pages, I indicated how the myth of Lin Zexu as a cinematic popular form is able of inducing consent to specific political issues and imaginings, enabling the audiences to participate to the media(ted) celebration of a historical moment, by virtue of which both economic development, nationalism, and people's experientiality, are strictly connected and crucially dependent on to the use of a system of signs that, adequately arranged and displayed, constitute a narrative, a text in which the figure of Lin Zexu plays the part of the major conveyor of meanings and ideology, although its myth is constantly sustained by the networking functionality (that is the interaction) of the set of signs participating to the production of the movie. I also pointed out the relevance a modern concept of history has in the making of the film "*The Opium War*". I said before that a new (modern) concept of time, had allowed Benedict Anderson to conceive the nation as a cohere community, moving steadily into history, through different stages of development. Here, the discourse conducted by Anderson on the importance of a specific idea of time in the process of constructing the nation, is particularly significant inasmuch as it allows me to focus on a peculiar aspect of nationalism, as well as on the major accomplishment of "*The Opium War*"; the reappropriation of history.

In their analysis on Xie's film, both Xiao Zhiwei³² and Rebecca Karl³³ share the opinion that the "*The Opium War*" represents a main departure, a shift from the conventional predominant Party ideological narrative that, until then, had blamed the British for the war, denouncing Western imperialism as a devastating, immoral practice that humiliated China, reducing it to the status of semi-colon (*fenhaò*); a narrative which, by the way, is the main theme of another film on the opium war, directed by Zheng Junli, and released in 1959.

Rebecca Karl in her account on "*The Opium War*", uses the term "*the burden of history*" – being also the title of her essay – borrowed from Hayden White's work

³² Xiao Zhiwei, "*Nationalism in Chinese Popular Culture: A Case Study of The Opium War*", in "*Exploring Nationalism of China: Themes and Conflicts*", Edited by C. X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu. Greenwood Press, 2000.

³³ Rebecca Karl, "*The Burdens of History: Lin Zexu (1959) and 'The Opium War' (1997)*", in Xudong Zhang Whiter China, 2001.

(“The Burden of History”, 1966), to explain the trend, in Xie’s film, of “*abandonment of a conflictual notion of history in favour of an affirmation of contemporary benefit and experience.*”³⁴ She proposes the idea of a “*recolonization*” of Chinese history, according to the current élité’s desire of promoting the new liberal convergence between China and global capitalism, and thus affirming the new trajectory undertook by Chinese leader, which would place China, back into universal history. Moreover, Karl explains that the historical burden must be identified in the “state’s misrecognition” - the Qing Dynasty’s – of the historical moment:

*“The past is thus reconfigured as a missed opportunity, or a burden, that is erased in the present through the realization of a new state-sponsored global market inscription of power.”*³⁵

At first glance, it is clear that the idea of the historical misrecognition is the main theme in Xie’s “*The Opium War*”, and that the historical revisionism presented in the film, aims to normalize China’s present trajectory (of the 1990’s).

Nevertheless, before I go on examining in details Xie’s work, I would like to pay specific attention to the term “*recolonization*” of Chinese history, and show how this should be intended not as a result of then-rulers’ élité initiative (it is, only in the form it takes), but rather as a “*permanent*” process intimately linked to the notion of nation and modernity, and their representation.

Assuming that with the term *modernity*, I intend a certain kind of economic program (capitalism), a specific political realm (nation-state), and cultural course (science), and given the fact that they all join the ideology of development, it wouldn’t be irrational to say that, since *time* has been historicized, each stage of development required a precise process of production and representation of history (the past), which had favoured the political and economic objectives pertaining to that distinct stage of development.

³⁴ Ibidem p. 234.

³⁵ Ibidem p. 235.

To see China of the 1990's, as being in the process of recolonizing his history by dismissing the previous Maoist conception of China's past is, in my opinion, as right as limited. I think that the abandonment of the Maoist revolutionary interpretation of history, shouldn't be seen neither as a single revisionism of local history, nor as an attempt to put China back into universal history; rather the new production and representation of that historical narrative (the new interpretation of the events in "*The Opium War*") results in a wider attempt to advance – to use the language of modernization – from a stage of backwardness (as many supporter of modernity would call the Maoist era), to a stage which would (and actually does) denominate China a "*developing country*". Therefore, we see that it is not a matter of placing China back into history, but to give China an active role in the contemporary production of universal history itself. Consequently, what Rebecca Karl calls the burden of history, is none other than the economic, political and cultural process that China had to engage with – culminating in the Maoist socialism – which until then, might have been believed to be an alternative modernity.

However, although I believe that China's reconfiguration of the 1990's is to be primarily seen in its global resonance, it is undeniable that locally it had to display pertinent features in order to provide a historical narrative which would have fit the imaginary national trajectory, and in this sense Karl's identification of the burden of history, in the Qing Dynasty's misrecognition of the historical opportunity, is an effective lens to gain insight of the actual motivations behind the representation of Xie Jin's "*The Opium War*".

After an attentive and meticulous viewing of the film, I have been convinced that the most striking characteristic of Xie's work, is its constant and cumulative binarism, used as an efficient tool to construct the narrative of the film, and help its reception at a cognitive level, by displaying a vast array of opposites and/or complementaries, which introduce, at every step, the Chinese audience to a confrontation that fix and identify categories and sides. Since the beginning of the film, the audience is faced with one of the ever-present binarism, the inside/outside and indoor/outdoor conception.

In the first scene of the film the camera shows a wide dark room, in which some scholars are editing official documents of the Celestial Empire that are sent to the most important viceroy of the empire, among which is Lin Zexu; in the next scene

Lin Zexu is writing an account on opium (supposedly at home) in a dim light; then again, the sequence frames Lin Zexu at his former teacher's house, and immediately after at Emperor Daoguang's Court. Clearly, we see how the political debate and confrontation is meant to be conducted within enclosed spaces, which in the movie are represented through the building of the imperial palace, thus suggesting an interpretation of politics as enclosed, as a practice that has its own place, the institutions of the state. However, this representation of politics as an interior atmosphere, as something that pertains to a confined space and circle of people (politicians), seems to me to be in line with the Dengist (but also Jiang Zemin's) endeavour to depoliticise the Chinese society in order to separate the political life of the PCC from the everyday sphere of the people, not erasing the presence of the Party from people's conscience, not nearly, rather by naturalizing the role of the state as guarantor of a multi-centered open market-economy and culture, whereby the state-party-government is a firm reference system.

In this light, must also be seen the role that global culture plays, a culture much more politicised than ever, which normalize politics and, paradoxically, depoliticises society, putting an end to the Maoist policy that attempted to mobilize the masses in order to build people's support to the party.

Evidently, for the state to be the supreme arbiter of the new convergence between Chinese economy and global capital, it has to be also the promoter of economic development, and in order to do so, trade should be seen positively and inevitable. This is the reason why the main concern of the political apparatus in Xie's work is opium as drug, as a disruptive social addiction, which not only erodes people's daily life and familiar unity, but also acts as a destructive force that undercuts the morality and devotion of the officials toward the emperor/rulers and the empire/nation.

In this sense Lu Zifang, the former teacher of both Lin Zexu and Emperor Daoguang, is guilty of having irreparably damaged (through opium consumption) the traditional teacher-student loyalty, and therefore the traditional Chinese hierarchical relationship expressed by the Confucian "*filial piety*". Indicative of the role of opium as a main threat for Chinese society, is also the corruption of the Qing officials which receive bribes from British merchants; while the former are accused of having betrayed the bond between them and the celestial empire, the

British are only accused of unfair trade, and we never assist to the rejection of trade as an immoral practice.

Here the binary construction is displayed in the dual confrontation morality/corruption, and fair trade vs unfair trade, where Lin Zexu stands as a supporter of morality and fair trade, while the Qing officials and foreigners stand on the side of corruption and unfair trade. Nevertheless, the movie presents an interesting and fundamental shift from the traditional depiction of the foreigners as immoral imperialists, depraved invaders and bearer of immoral corruption and deviation.

Indeed Xiao Zhiwei in his account of “*The Opium War*” affirms that:

*“Xie’s film does not purport to fan anti-west emotions but presents the conflict as a historical inevitability. In so doing it reduces the moral indignation over Western imperialism and offers its audience a history lesson: patriotic feelings alone did not and will not save China. In order to avoid repeating the humiliating experience of the Opium War, China must focus on domestic reforms, strengthening itself, and remain open to the outside world.”*³⁶

It is clear that the figure of Lin Zexu has the task to highlight those patriotic feelings and devotion to which Xiao Zhiwei refers to, as it is been shown in the previous semiotic analysis; on the contrary it is through the depiction of the foreigners and the use of multiple binary conceptions that the need for reforms and openness is displayed.

In this context, the foreigners are portrayed by constantly contrasting the mode of representation of their omonyms in Qing China. First of all, the Westerners always appear in sequences, which show a different use of light if compared to those scenes depicting the Chinese. While the light is bright for Danton’s people, and in the shots framed in England, a light that often is presented as natural, indicating that Westerners are more than occasionally portrayed *en plein air*, the Chinese characters are almost always shown indoor, with a dim, dusky light which connotes a negative and passive historical position. Even though the foreigners are depicted

³⁶ Xiao Zhiwei, *Nationalism in Chinese Popular Culture: A Case Study of The Opium War*, in *Exploring Nationalism of China: Themes and conflicts*, p. 42, 2000.

as arrogant and brutal (see the scene in which Danton shoots a seagull), they also present a sense of humanity (Danton's love for his daughter), initiative (some of them write and speak Chinese), and positive ambition (their determination to defend and further trade).

Furthermore, they show a better knowledge of China and of Chinese habits, than the knowledge their Chinese counterparts have of England and of English people. Emperor Daoguang ignorantly dismisses the English nation as a small country, and he is offended by their diplomatic note. The triviality with which Lin Zexu's assistant – and to a certain extent Lin Zexu himself – judge the current English fashion and habits (dress and tableware), is another attestation of their ignorance of the outside world. On the other hand, during one of the scenes shot in England, some English politicians look carefully at a detailed map of China (to be noticed the bright light in the room), and Xie Jin makes them say:

“Here, on the table we have a map which shows all rivers, all harbours, all the fortifications. A map much more accurate than anything they have in their Imperial Palace.”

There are two important connotations here. Without any adequate knowledge of the outside world, it is impossible to compete in the inevitable confrontation with other countries, suggesting that openness is essential to development, and that ignorance means subjugation. The other message is that an ordinary, but powerful instrument as a map is, has its place (when produced) in the “*Imperial Palace*”, in the institutions. The English official doesn't finish the sentence with a more general “*in China*”; rather, he assumes that if a map exists (and he doesn't believe it), it is in the hands of the Emperor, the only place where it could be. Hence, a banal map of China is not only treated as a sign of progress, but also as a powerful weapon which consents a theoretical and then territorial (by force of arms) conquering.

In this manner Xie Jin decided to show the British *enlightenment* as opposed to Chinese ignorance. The only exception in this sense, is given by He Shangzhi, a fictional character, son of the opium smuggler He Jingrong (eventually sentenced to death). He Shangzhi has been part of Danton's crew overseas, and upon his arrival in Guangzhou, he is favoured by Lin Zexu only because he has a better knowledge of the world, of the British people and habits, and more important he is the only

Chinese in the film that speaks and understands English. The fact that despite his collaboration with the opium traders, he is forgiven by Lin Zexu – and we know how much incorruptible he is – connotes that a specialized education in foreign affairs, and more in general in matters which look beyond the traditional sino-centric education, is as positive as productive, for both personal ambition and national development. The staging of the character of He Shangzhi in Xie's film, is indeed in line with the mid-1990's Chinese process, promoted by the state, to strengthen its control over the entire Chinese educational system; in fact the Ministry of Education, with a larger budget, had gained since then a stronger finance-based policy instrument. On the one hand, it allowed the Ministry of Education to introduce all kinds of national level research projects, schemes, programmes and awards, consolidating its authority in ranking Chinese universities³⁷; on the other hand, it promoted the introduction of specialized studies, in the effort to provide better prepared expert, whose contribution to the differentiated and export-oriented economy, was becoming essential. In addition to this, the character of He Shangzhi, has also the task to utter at least two other messages. In the course of the film we see him struggling many times to save his father. He is shown as a devoted son whose main preoccupation is to take care of his old father. Undoubtedly, the *one-child* policy here is recalled; in fact by showing the many tasks He Shangzhi is able to accomplish (mediating with Danton, serving Lin Zexu, helping his own father) and the skills he has developed (as an English interpreter), he becomes the perfect example of how useful a son can be. Since the 80's indeed, the Chinese government introduced the *one-child* policy to alleviate, and slow down the demographic growth in order to maintain it within a proper range. It also introduced a sophisticated system that would reward those who had observed the policy; the reward system was precisely conceived because of the unpopular effect that the new policy had on the population. The figure of He Shangzhi in Xie's film, doesn't leave any doubt in regard to its intent of promoting the above mentioned policy; and the comparison with Rong'er, the only Chinese woman portrayed in the film, confirms what just said. Rong'er is depicted in such a way as to constantly contrast the image of He Shangzhi; she is in fact an opium

³⁷ Zhao Litao and Zhu Jinjing, *China's Higher Education Reform – What has not been changed?* East Asian Policy.

addict, a prostitute, and at the end of the film, albeit not guilty, she is sentenced to death for having betrayed the Celestial Empire.

The other message uttered by He Shangzhi pertains to the condition of the welfare system in China in the 1990's. As stated above, He Shangzhi shows what in China is called "*filial piety*", a fundamental Confucian principle which establishes the general obedience and respect to be used in society, according to the social hierarchy. In this regard He Shangzhi provides support to all his father's needs (or at least tries to); even though he finds himself unable to save him from Lin Zexu's resoluteness, he never loses hope. Throughout the 1990's, the Chinese welfare system has been reformed three times – in 1991, 1993 and 1997 – in the attempt to alleviate the burden of million of elders, which were supposed to receive a pension from the state³⁸. The new economic development had changed the quality of life and its expectations; the new intense flows of human migrations from the countryside to the coast, along with the steady demographic growth, had exacerbated the situation, and though different reforms tried to compensate the delay of public intervention, the condition of many elders retiree deteriorated. Only through familiar intervention (encouraged by the state) most of the elders without any public aid, could get along. In this regard, the role of the family became indispensable, and He Shangzhi, through its character utters the message of the son who takes care of his own father in his elderly, a message which wishes to normalize the idea of helping the parents by providing them a full economical support, and thus save the state from a social disaster, which to some extent occurred even so.

The sequence representing Queen Victoria, is another indicative way of the complex and diverse fashion in which the British are depicted in Xie Jin point of view. In her first appearance, the audience encounters the Queen outdoor, nimbly riding a horse on a vast green field, nearby a castle (her castle), which is shown through a long shot in its totality. As she gets off the horse, going toward Lord Palmerston who is waiting for her in the grassy plain, we see Queen Victoria in full frontal portrait, young, confident, perceptive, in a white dress which gives her a sense of fresh innovative approach to life. It is impossible for the viewer not to think at Emperor Daoguang, and how contrasting those two monarchs are in the

³⁸ Xiaona Tao, *Prospettive del Sistema Pensionistico Cinese*, Tesi di Laurea, Università di Padova, 2011-12.

representation that Xie Jin provided. Daoguang is always represented indoor, the audiovisual effects frame him in dark rooms and with solemn music, transmitting an idea of an Emperor trapped into a rigid bureaucracy, into infinite rituals and protocols, and what's more, he is always deeply concerned and hesitant, he lacks vision, knowledge and initiative; thus his character appears to be in the dark side of history. Queen Victoria, on the contrary, with her femininity, directly confronts the Chinese audience, showing them an easy manner with her subordinates, like when she says: *"So, what have you brought me, my dear friends? Budget, deficit, or war in India?"*; or soon after, when Lord Palmerstone, after having invited her at a ribbon-cutting ceremony to inaugurate a new railroad, says: *"Lin Zexu has destroyed eight million pounds of our goods, and is driving all our British residents out of Guangzhou"*, and with a sarcastic tone she answers: *"But I hear that you are already assembling marine forces"*, and then she goes toward the castle. In this sequence where the audience is delighted with the figure of Queen Victoria, it still is the difference in the portraying of the two regnants that strikes at once.

In the scene depicting the British Queen, the sky is blue, the grassy plain is obviously green, but intensely so, and her beautiful figure in white, let the viewer have no doubt where the sympathies lie. Furthermore, she is also capable of decisive political considerations, she is never hesitant, and knows what she wants for herself (a wax copy of Lin Zexu in Mme. Tussaud's museum) and for England: *"If I were in Lin Zexu's position, I would also burn all the opium"*, with this statement she gains respect from the Chinese audience inasmuch as she reveals to understand Lin Zexu's motivation, and at the same time, she somehow redeems Lin Zexu for being guilty of having understood too late (however, before anyone else in China) the strength and power of England. And then she continues:

"If all nations follow China's example and reject free trade, the British empire will no longer exist within a year. This is the reason for us to use force. We must teach them a lesson on free trade...Whoever gets hold of China will have the entire East the Nineteenth Century."

This discourse, is the lesson China is invited to learn; free trade is the key for modernization, for a new brilliant future which will definitely reposition China

among the most powerful nations, a place that China deserves, but that must be conquered with everybody's (the people) support to national development.

Finally, technology becomes an essential requirement to compete at an international level, and only with a proper technological enhancement can China avoid subjugation. Many scenes in the film point the finger on China's lack of military and communication technology. The emphasis on the British navy, on its powerful cannons, on the British map of China, and on the new railroad inaugurated by Queen Victoria, shows that a powerful nation (as England is), distinguish itself from a weak country (China evidently), for its military superiority and its modern ways of communication, which allow trade to reach every territory of the empire as shortly as possible. In the sequence when the British navy sets out toward Beijing, and Lin Zexu sends 600 couriers to inform the Emperor of the approaching calamity, we see the big, strong and rapid English ships sailing fast toward north; while Xie Jin shows us one of Lin Zexu's courier riding a horse on a desolated land, supposedly going to Beijing. The disparity is evident to everybody.

It is curious to notice that, in parallel with the message of modernization of china, uttered by "*The Opium War*", China's policy toward Southeast Asia in the 1990's, aimed to increase China's preponderance in the area. In doing so, China not only boost its control over the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations), but also in the South-Asian-Sea for the control of energy reserve, and of the maritime straits (it is acknowledged that many grain carrier full of petroleum, coming from the Persic Gulf, transit everyday from the Malacca Strait, Singapore Strait, and Makassar Strait, representing strategic gateways for China). Indeed, since 1993 China has become an important importer of petroleum; hence, to control the maritime traffic of ships and vessels in the South-East-Sea, means to control the provisions of all the countries of South-East Asia. Moreover, the strong debate with Japan for the control and exploitation of the alleged energetic resources over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, in the East China Sea, had rendered necessary for the ruling class to seek a military development that could consent China to confront with the other regional powers in the area. Clearly, however, China since the 90's, is trying to regain – if we consider the old tributary system which saw many population of the South-East paying their tribute to the Imperial China – its predominance in Asia, in order to play a strategic role not only in the political balance of the South-East area, but also in the wider context of global geopolitics.

In this regard, at the end of the 1990's, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has undergone transformative adjustments which led to a period of reform that, since the end of the ninth Five Year Plan in 2000, has seen a modernization effort aimed to: the development of procurement and acquisition of new weapons systems and technology, the production of Chinese-made submarines and surface vessels, as well as conventional missiles; basic research and development in which the PLA is engaged domestically to produce information age military technologies; a reform of the institutions within the PLA itself, as well as a major focus on raising the levels of professionalism of the officer corps and enlisted force³⁹.

This and many other reforms, must therefore be seen as a general attempt to play a global role, not only in the economic and finance fields, but also in order to render China a global actor able to impose its own vision on current global affairs.

In this way Xie Jin's "*The Opium War*", despite its designation of independent and market-oriented production, remains a popular product that reflects, normalizes and, more important, justifies the current (the 1990's) political, economic and social trend that China, through its rulers (far from being only political), had undertaken.

We also see how nationalism – a specific form of nationalism – has become an essential background which serves to provide legitimation to the PCC; we see how concepts such as nationalism and modernization, are strictly intertwined; nationalism is thus used to enhance Chinese modernization, while modernization allows displaying different form of nationalism.

If Television exclude the tragic and seamy side of life, as suggested by Kellner, then it is possible to say that although "*The Opium War*" tend to render manifest that it was due to misrecognition and corruption at all levels of Chinese society (especially at political and commercial level) that China missed its first encounter with *history*, it is also true that no explanation is provided in the movie to explain what caused the moral corruption of Chinese people. This happens because Television too often stays on the surface of social appearance.

In conclusion the myth of Lin Zexu is the bearer of an open nationalism that rejects extreme forms of anti-Western feelings, while at the same time tries to contain them within a sphere in which they can be shaped in different manners, following current interests and necessities.

³⁹ David Finkelstein, *China's National Military Strategy: An overview of the Military Strategic Guidelines*.

Chapter two

Images of the Myth

The main purpose of this chapter is to get an insight on the role played by Chinese media to address specific forms of national feelings and imaginings through the analysis of a collection of images conveying the myth of Lin Zexu that I have gathered up from different Internet's websites. I aim at analysing the processes of symbolic production supporting the representation of the authoritative figure of Lin Zexu, necessary as Chu Godwin maintains to help people learn determined values and beliefs. The myth of Lin Zexu uttered in the images analysed in this chapter provides access to a conceptual world or imagined society within which the production of knowledge, and therefore the contingent symbolic environment that produces it are seen as natural, eternal, and above all Chinese. Trying to engage in an analysis of the images of Lin Zexu with the objective of actually adding some knowledge to them, means diverse things. It means trying to answer to a series of questions that haven't been posed yet, questions such as: What objects, actors and agencies do Lin Zexu images mobilize? What kind of mobilization would that be? Do Lin Zexu's representations correspond to one coherent and uniform mode of knowledge, or do they result from processes of construction varying in accordance to the purpose they are meant for?

However, willing to answer to these questions alone, I believe won't be sufficient to produce an account able to accomodate all the dimensions in play in Lin Zexu's images. For this reason many other questions, some of which have already been posed by earlier and present studies, will be enquired: What is a representation? Is it even possible to define "*representation*" regardless to what is represented? Is representation a privileged means of constituting our vision of the world? Concept such as modernity, culture, nature, society, inform our cognitive perception of Chinese modern aesthetics, or should we rather begin looking at the object of our study, and to the network it activates to discover everytime what the social world is made of? How does a media image come to be produced by graphics, design, narrative and display? What does it mean for an image of Lin Zexu to be an expression of popular culture in the everyday life?

These series of questions, though resembling at first sight as not being able to provide answers that haven't already been conceptualized, are approached with a sense that excludes those presuppositions and assumptions originating from traditional ⁴⁰ accounts on "*representation*", "*modernity*", "*visuality*", and on concepts such as "*everyday life*", "*culture*", "*nature*", and "*society*".

Thus the subject of this study are Lin Zexu's images as they are shown below. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge since the beginning of this enquiry, of the extremely different visualizing effect that the images present in this study will create on the reader, in comparison with the original digital images that I have visualized through a computer screen, while connected on the Internet, and while exploring Chinese websites populated, besides Lin Zexu's images, of a dense layer of signs such as texts, logos, entertainment panels and advertisements, all being static or dynamic images and texts which appeared as suddenly as they disappeared, condition that rendered the experience of research and analysis much more enterprising and edulcorated.

Indeed, it is not only our visualization practices that would be different, for the reader will see the images printed on paper or, in case of a digitalized copy of this work, on a screen, being it that of a computer, a tablet or smartphone; but in any case he or she will deal with an immobile and paralyzed thing which has already become something else, and which anyone would hardly consider a representation of what, in turn, I had experience of in its own ambience and dimension. In fact, it is also a matter concerning the specific "*logic of visualization*"⁴¹ – dependence on the written text and the process of spectacularization are both functions of this logic, whereas the other senses (taste, smell, touch) fade away, and the eye dominates – that a visual presentation of the images of Lin Zexu, on a sheet of paper or in a digital format (Jpeg, Pdf, Tiff), would be tied up to. Why is so important this attention toward the different modalities in which the reader of this work is going to visualize the images of Lin Zexu, compared to the way I visualized them? First of all because they combine different modes of representation. The images present in this work do not combine language, sounds and animation (this

⁴⁰ The term *tradition* does not refer here to any temporal character of the accounts. It rather refers to those accounts which almost consensually result canonical in the way they unproblematically treat their object of study.

⁴¹ Henry Lefebvre recalling Erwin Panofsky in Henry Lefebvre, "*The Production of Space*" (p.286), Blackwell Publishing, 1991

last one usually being used for commercial offers or for game advertisement) as they do in the websites where I found them, thus resulting in two different collectives that mobilize quite different objects that, in turn, draw different trajectories.

The use of digital light in a website, for example, carries with it a number of general and specific meanings or forces that, as a matter of fact, determines the shape of the network which it is part of. It does so by spectacularising (in general) the quality of a website's layout, such as those in which I found Lin Zexu's images, and by highlighting (in specific) the graphic substance of the elements present in the webpages – advertisements, entertainment panels and so on. Furthermore, the co-presence of elements alongside the images of Lin Zexu, and their relation with them, cannot be ignored if I don't want the social world that from them arises, to result restricted in advance. This means that the images of Lin Zexu present in this study will produce, or better, are able to produce texts that in any case won't be the same of the ones resulting from the images as if they were visualized in their intended dimension, the websites.

A copy of an image of lin Zexu such as the one below, taken from a website and copied on a doc/pdf document, can be said to have a diverse communicational landscape, meaning that it is thrust by forces (actors, mediators, intermediaries) significantly dissimilar from those that might have arose if the picture was analyzed in its own environment. The spatiality of the visual results in this way transformed by that same environment in which the image is set, and that it actually contributes to produce and constitute.



Lin Zexu, (<http://bbs.zhongsou.com/3/20120530/5229242.html>)

Hence the communicational landscape of an image – which in the case of the image showed above is formed by the dynamic interrelationship between the *zhongsou.com* (中搜) website, the digital nature of the image, the overall meaning of the text-image conveyed by such representation, as well as its position in the hierarchical ordering that the web page expresses through the arrangements of the other elements within it – and the spatiality of the visual, that is the range of vision that both our eye and our cognitive process are able or pushed to cover, meaning also that the range of vision of the eye may extent to a greater or smaller area than that of the cognitive process; these two principles go hand in hand in mobilizing the social world of an image and in constituting the subjective dimension (or at least a part of it) of the individual, reader of the image (Manovich, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991). It is therefore reasonable to say that the collection of images of Lin Zexu participating to this study, in the explicit and partial format they have been given by the author of the study – and in order to provide an analysis which is self-aware

of the manipulation of the data presented here – result reduced to a single plan, confined to a surface, to a euclidean space. However, what I call here a reduction, is in all respects a real transformation of the object re-presented, for outside of its habitat (the website) the meanings, objectives, ideologies and all its social world vanishes to form a new social configuration, a new network. Those images of Lin Zexu thus become cut out from the normal flow of experience, from the networks to which the images formerly belonged, and within which they could be said to be actively involved in broad critical aspects regarding the relationship between Chinese society and nation, and the media. In fact the myth of Lin Zexu through the discourse from which it arises and the one that it necessarily produces, allows the formation of individual and collective identities by means of the identification with the values of the nation, and the values attached to it, namely commercialization, individualism and consumerism; the deployment of a banal nationalism manifest in the numerous signs that soundlessly carry out the function of naturalizing and normalizing the idea of nation and all the involved by-products; the commodification of styles and ideas within an everyday life conception of reality. Nevertheless, an attentive reader might argue that the images of Lin Zexu as any semiotic system, in the way they can be seen and visualized in the websites that host them, have undergone a reductionist process (this time during their production) since they too are as any image a re-presentation of something else, the historical Lin Zexu. However, this kind of predication implies a precise perspective of what one considers a “*representation*” to be. But I would like to delay any reflection on this highly ephemeral concept a little more, and keep focusing a bit longer on a few personal concerns about the collection of Lin Zexu’s images disclosed in this study. The issue here is what kind of theoretical and methodological approach would provide the images of Lin Zexu with their dignity, their being historical actors?

The intellectual debate within the academic disciplines of Chinese cultural studies and Chinese media studies over issues concerning the understanding of contemporary Chinese society and culture, and post-Maoist Chinese society – with regard to China’s media landscape – has been absorbed, since the 1980’s by an exhausting search for an epistemological model or theoretical framework able to explain the conditions under which Chinese society, this immense eternal, carries out its functions and reaches its objectives (Liu Kang, 2004; Jing Wang, 1996). Significantly enough, this search has produced a variety of analytical formulations

that have populated the academic terrain and have, more than often, functioned as actual standpoints from which one could approach his/her own topic. Chinese scholars and authors as Xiao Zhiwei, Liu Kang, Jing Wang, Xiaobing Tang, Zhang Yiwu, Ma Ning, Han Shaogong, Lin Yiping, Xudong Zhang, Sheldon H. Lu, Chen Xiaoming, Sun Wanning and others, represent the intellectual Chinese cultural space this study has been relying on, in order to acquire a sufficient, even though not always comfortable, knowledge of the ongoing ideological debate on Chinese culture.

Marxist, post-Marxist, modernist and postmodernist – just to name a few – although struggling fiercely to affirm this or that status for China, this or that label for China's path, this or that model of development, this or that stage of history (be it modernism, postmodernism, New-Era, post New Era, post-revolutionary era, industrial or post-industrial era and so on), nevertheless they all share one indisputable key point: the idea that Chinese culture as a whole exist and, more important, that it can be represented.

In such congested theoretical ensemble of conceptualizations, the paradigm of modernity (and of modernism), as well as that of postmodernity, are the most adopted sources of interpretations able, according to their advocates, to yield a reliable knowledge on Chinese culture and society. Movies, TV shows, magazines' articles and pictures, Internet-based images, entertainment media products, music, advertisement signs, TV news, and many other media products are accounted as the recurring objects of study by the authors' works aforementioned; and in most cases these objects of enquiry end up by being almost entirely labeled under such paradigms as *modern* or *postmodern*.

The Chinese debate about modernity and postmodernity, similarly to the international academic debate, reflects primarily the concern over China's stage in history; and more extensively in succeeding to find a thorough conceptual framework adequate enough to explicate China's present condition. The Chinese debate's argumentations range from claiming the crisis of ideology to the collapse of modernity's grandnarratives, passing through the imagination of alternative modernities, and the deconstruction of political/ethnic nationalism. All this intellectual enthusiasm gravitate around a distinctive ideal segment of the progressive time-line that coincide with modern history, and which includes the following stages of progression: *modernity* and *postmodernity*.

The first part of this chapter deals with the images of Lin Zexu in the attempt to unveil some modern conventions and social discourses present in the arrangement and functioning of the modern aesthetics in China. In fact by engaging directly the very notion of (modern) *representation*, and by analyzing the specifics of those representations exemplified in the images of Lin Zexu, I aim to address these images by inquiring the idea of *representation* itself, and by questioning its self-evident character through which the acceptance of certain knowledge had depended upon. With this objective in mind, I shall employ Timothy Mitchell's critics to the *metaphysics of representation* to show how a *system of certainties*, peculiar of an alleged modern constitution, to use Latour's terminology, has been subordinated to an ideal and imagined "*ordering, distributing and enframing*"⁴² of the historical actor commonly known as *representation*.

I will consequently approach the images of Lin Zexu as *representations*, with regard to the technology used to produce them as *representations*. I will thus endeavour to formulate a semiotic analysis able to reveal the mythical nature of the representative quality through which the images of Lin Zexu are acknowledged. It must be clear that in this first part of the account, in no case shall I treat the symbolic space that each image of Lin Zexu, each in its own way, constitutes. Indeed, considerations on the encoding and decoding processes, on narrative, meaning and ideology, will inform the second part of this analysis on Lin Zexu's images.

In this preliminary account on the mediated and media representation of Lin Zexu, it is my objective to provide an analysis of the production/conception of the images of Lin Zexu as they are shown below. I shall therefore begin by acknowledging specific qualities in each of the images displayed, and by so doing, revealing what modernity is, or seems to be, in the author's mind. With regard to the images showed below, and in respect of the dualism inherent in Chinese modernity,⁹ (also commonly known as the "*New Era*"), I will assign a criterion of analysis which consist in the distinction of two set of qualities that concern the images object of this study and which refer, on one side to the concept of *representation* that, as we

⁴² Timothy Mitchell, "*Colonizing Egypt*", Cambridge University Press, 1988.

⁹ The dualism I'm pointing out refers to the modern convention of considering representation and what it stands for as an "*order of appearance*" that creates a binary system, exemplified in the dualism observer/observed and representation/represented. A detailed explanation of the concept will be treated later in the chapter.

will soon understand, goes far beyond the fact of being just a concept, resembling much more a *dispositif* able to authorize a “*hierarchy of truth*”, and thus determining a specific social order; and since the engagement with T. Mitchell’s theory on *representation* is regarded by the author as efficient enough to explain certain conventions – as modernity itself – in play in China, I shall apply it indiscriminately to all Lin Zexu’s images present in this part of the chapter.¹⁰

On the other side, each image, adequately isolated by the others, will be analysed considering the *social discourse* that through the grand narratives of enlightenment, rationality, and humanism stages and perform that *official culture* which, contrary to what the Chinese postmodernist believe, it is not so easily exposed and endangered by the revelation of its partial, subjective, and positioned character.

Indeed, according to the major attitudes and theories on contemporary China and of China in the 1980’s and 1990’s, this collection of Lin Zexu’s images could be *seen* and *regarded* both as modern and post-modern, global and local, as part of a metanarrative of world history or as an indigenous traditional form. In fact, the modern and postmodern dispute in China, in its oscillating grounds, supports and provides the means of nourishment to the *official culture*, the Chinese culture.

- *Toward the understanding of the modern representation of Lin Zexu*

The ambiguous nature of being at the same time a form of, and a producer or facilitator of cultural practices, makes the myth of Lin Zexu a powerful “*instrument of cultural policy*” (Andrea Zlatar, 2003), constituent of narratives and discourses that produce meanings and ideologies, promoting precise way of conceiving the contexts of the social, of the economy, and of the political as the cardinal elements

¹⁰ This choice is motivated by the digital nature of the images analyzed in this study. The reader is invited to refer to the part in which I explain the difference between graphics and design.

that make up the nation, the Chinese nation, which through Lin Zexu's digital productions come to be peculiarly visualised.

Cordell D. K. Yee in the volume two, book two of "*The History of Cartography*", in the chapter "*Chinese Cartography Among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation*", explaining Liu Xie's¹¹ comments on the importance of language in representing physical reality affirms: "*language functions not just as a means of preserving utterances, but also as a way of seeing*"¹². Timothy Mitchell in his "*Colonizing Egypt*" maintains that "*Orientalism illustrates not just the strange ways in which the West has treated the outside world; it illustrates how the Western experience of order and truth, epitomized in the exhibition, depended upon creating the very effect of an outside, of an external reality beyond representation*".¹³

To say that the images of Lin Zexu are the result of a peculiar media technicality (the media also as a communicative tool and its digital specifics) serving the construction of a national myth means that the symbolic space that each image constitute is a media-originated symbolic space; which in turn means that, for a symbolic space such as an image, to be modern, must have modern characteristics, and thus posses and/or express, according to the general understanding, distinct qualities and features as a hegemonic narrative, a coherent ideology, a homogeneous meaning, a univocal message, a formal and rational resemblance, and so on. But as Liu Xie indicates, language – and Lin Zexu's images are language – is also "*a way of seeing*". Therefore, given the fact that the images of Lin Zexu as *representations* require a specific *way of seeing*, it is plausible to say that a modern representation of Lin Zexu demand for a modern *way of seeing*.

The need to rely on T. Mitchell's critics on the *metaphysics of representation* is dictated by the aspiration to deal with a specific procedure in the production of knowledge historically built-in in the mode through which a *representation* of Lin Zexu (see the images below) is granted the validity and the authority of defining and assigning a quality or a set of qualities to that social world that we call China.

¹¹ Liu Xie, "*Wenxin diaolong*" (*The literary mind and the carving of dragons*) in Cordell D. K. Yee "*History of Cartography*", University Chicago Press, 1994

¹² Cordell D. K. Yee "*History of Cartography*", (Chapter six) "*Chinese Cartography Among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation*", University Chicago Press, 1994

¹³ Timothy Mitchell, "*The World as Exhibition*", Cambridge University Press, p. 218

It is a matter of determining the conditions and the terms that led to the constitution of a “*certainty of representation*”, of a distinct way of seeing.

Timothy Mitchell in the late 1980’s in his “*Colonizing Egypt*”, advanced the idea of the *world-as-exhibition*, a logic that allows for displaying the representation of an object as an exhibit that stands in front of an observer, a *model* set up in order to resemble as much as possible an alleged *original*, a model which “*however realistic, always remains distinguishable from the reality it claims to represent*”.¹⁴

Recalling the Parisian World Exhibition of 1889, Mitchell describes the model of a street of Cairo set up and exhibited to the visitors present at the exhibition:

*“The remarkable realism of such displays made a strange civilization into an object the visitor could almost touch, yet, to the observing eye, surrounded by the display but excluded from it by the status of visitor, it remained a mere representation, the picture of some further reality.”*¹⁵

The first important point that needs to be grasped here in order to begin to understand the logic of the *world-as-exhibition* is that part of its power resides on the fact that a “*certainty of representation*” depends first of all on the separation between representation and reality. It is a matter of recognising that representation is not reality, but its legitimate, more or less accurate model; that a representation doesn’t pretend to simulate reality in order to substitute it, but that it can only approximate it. In fact, only by conceiving a model (read: *image*) as an approximation we are reassured of the existence of an *original*, of a real beyond representation. The visitors that found themselves in front of the model of the street of Cairo at the 1889 exhibition in Paris, however astonished and amazed by the meticulous re-production of the detailed model that formed the image they had before them, not even for a moment believed that that was the *real* street of Cairo; they knew they were looking at a representation which as such, evoked the real thing (a specific street of Cairo), external to both the representation and the exhibition.

The effect created by the apparent realism of a representation and its claim to be only an approximation of the original operates in such a way as to begin constructing a *correspondence* between representation and reality. Nevertheless,

¹⁴ Timothy Mitchell, “*The World as Exhibition*”, p.223.

¹⁵ IBIDEM.

Mitchell believes that this *correspondence* – that when complete results in the *certainty of representation* – requires at least two more principle: the arrangement of the representation around a common center, and the positioning of the observer in this center. The representation of reality embodied in the exhibit, Mitchell explains, were arranged as to encircling a common central space, and thus “allowing for the isolation of a point of observation”.¹⁶ This privileged and positioned point of view was occupied, useless to say, by the visitor/observer:

*“The representation of reality was always an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst: an observing gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition’s careful order. The more the exhibit drew in and encircled the visitor, the more the gaze was set apart from it as the mind (in our Cartesian imagery) is said to be set apart from the material world it observes.”*⁴³

The detachment of the observer from the representation sustains the awareness in the observer’s mind of looking not at the real thing, at the referent of the representation, which is supposed to be far and outside the exhibition, but just to a representation, to a model of reality. Therefore the center in which the observer stands is not a fortuitous one, it rather is a privileged space - as when we look at a computer screen or television - it is a point of observation that only the observer occupies, and which consequently is separated and set apart from the object observed. Nonetheless, as Douglas Kellner calls the attention to, “in TV space, the spectator is a King or a Queen from whom all the wonders are being produced, as they sit in their front-row center seats, creating the illusion that they are in the center of social space”⁴⁴. In this way, affirms Mitchell, it is possible to recognize a double distinction: the distinction between the observer and the representation, and the distinction between the representation and the reality; a distinction that can also be read as a binary system: observer/observed and representation/represented.

¹⁶ Claudio Minca, “L’Esibizione del Mondo o il Mondo come Esibizione”, *Riv. Geogr. Ital.* 107 (2000), pp.47-81.

⁴³ Timothy Mitchell, “*The World as Exhibition*”, p.223.

⁴⁴ Douglas Kellner, “*Television, Images, Codes and Messages*”, in Gayle Gibbons, Larry Kirkman (eds.), *Television Magazine*, Volume 7, Number 4, 2009.

At this point, despite the fact that the logic of the *world-as-exhibition* has not been fully illustrated, yet, I can begin to correlate – this time consciously – the images of Lin Zexu to a peculiar *way of seeing* which Liu Xie understood the relevance of.⁴⁵ The *world-as-exhibition* demonstrates that the way we accord a representation the ability to resemble something that somehow is present in what we call reality, cannot be regarded as self-evident, but rather designates a distinct, partial and mediated visualization. For reasons of simplicity, and given the fact that the symbolic content of an image doesn't undermine the way we look at it – quite the opposite, I will argue that the symbolic content and the understanding of it in an image is dependent to the specific way of seeing it – I will employ for the moment only one image of Lin Zexu; and faithful, this time, to the modern classificatory attitude, I will call it *image one*.



Lin Zexu, (http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_c4b0868b0101sung.html)

⁴⁵ With this I don't mean that Liu Xie was thinking to anything similar or near to what I've been explaining so far. I just point out the necessity to account for a *logic of visualization* – when it comes to representations - that influence or determine our vision of reality.

The first image of Lin Zexu obeys in my opinion to the logic of the *world-as-exhibition* for various reasons. Primarily because its cross-reference to an external reality, whether a material referent or a conceptual one, and its general referential quality (the first three characters of the centred text undoubtedly are referential), which encourage the observer to think at the external reality that such representation promises (be it the Opium war period, or China's past, or history itself), is uttered and emphasized by the image deliberate triviality, that is having been produced as a cartoon-like design; an attribute that reinforces the sense of artificiality of the image, declaring its intentional approximation to what is believed to be the real Lin Zexu⁴⁶, rather than the substitution of it, and thus setting out the *correspondence* between the representation of Lin Zexu and an alleged material or conceptual referent present in the material world, what in Western modernity is conventionally called reality. We are therefore led to think that outside of this image, in a distant but not remote Chinese historical past Lin Zexu not only existed, but possessed more or less the characteristics that the image conveys. Furthermore, the difference in time and displacement in space⁴⁷ separating the representation from the supposed real referent accentuates their discreteness, and thus creates (again) the correspondence between them, establishing what T. Mitchell calls the "*certainty of representation*".

Moreover, the privileged position from which Lin Zexu's image is observed – central and frontal if the image is displayed on a computer screen or tv, and central and from on high (almost vertically) if displayed on a book or magazine or daily newspaper – stresses the dualism inherent in the logic of the *world-as-exhibition*, observer/observed, representation/represented, inside/outside; divisions that, says Minca, are at the origin of the "*modern machinery of power that inaugurated the colonization of the other and thus of the self*".⁴⁸ In fact, this dualism reflects also an appearance of order to which it follows an *order of appearance* that allows us to

⁴⁶ Clearly Julia Kristeva's concept of *Intertextuality* plays here an important role in defining what is generally accepted as the physiognomy of Lin Zexu. See Julia Kristeva, "*Word, Dialogue and Novel*", Columbia University Press, New York, 1966.

⁴⁷ The spatial segregation of the representation of Lin Zexu such as the flat surface of a screen or of a page, stresses the acceptance of the separation between them.

⁴⁸ Claudio Minca, "*L'esibizione del Mondo o il Mondo come esibizione*", in *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 107 (2000), pp. 47-81.

look at the world as a *relation between image and reality*.⁴⁹ According to this order we are inclined not only to lend legitimacy to the *representation* – for its alleged ability to evoke reality – but it (the order) actually becomes a fundamental element of reality which though, depends on its representability.

The segregation of the image of Lin Zexu on a restricted interior – in the sheet of paper or in the screen – fosters the belief and conviction that outside, in the *exterior*, we deal with reality; and that in this outside is reasonable to find what the image of Lin Zexu anticipated. Now, reflecting for a while on the semiological difference between signifier and signified, may help understand better this *correspondence*, and it might also lead, with the help of both Roland Barthes's theory on myth, and Timothy Mitchell's the world-as-exhibition, to the comprehension of *representation* as a myth.

As I mentioned before, the dualism implicit in the logic of the world-as-exhibition – observer/observed and representation/represented – occurs and constitutes itself in the form of an order of appearance, a hierarchy says Mitchell. In fact, according to this logic we understand the social world in terms of the “*relationship between picture and reality, the one present but secondary, a mere representation, the other (the supposed reality it refers to) only represented but prior, more original, more real. This order of appearance can be called the hierarchy of truth. It is in terms of such hierarchical division between a picture and what it stands for, that all reality, all truth is to be grasped. The methods of ordering, distributing and enframing that create the division, therefore, are the ordinary way effecting what the modern individual experiences as the really real*”⁵⁰. The hierarchy of truth and the consequent ordering of the social world that this hierarchy operates, is the final aim of the logic of the world-as-exhibition, and it results in legitimating the role of *representation* by granting it the ability of structuring our cognitive understanding of what we believe to be reality. Now, by means of this hierarchy and order, I would like to propose a reading and deciphering of what, in our time, one unproblematically call *representation*, and hence illustrate the mythical nature of the image of Lin Zexu as *representation* through a semiotic analysis of the

⁴⁹ Timothy Mitchell, “*The World as Exhibition*”, Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁰ Timothy Mitchell, “*Colonizing Egypt*”, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

term/concept. It stands to reason that the mythical nature I'm willing to enact hereafter doesn't refer, yet, to the symbolic content of the image, but to its representative quality.

Roland Barthes tells us that in order to decipher a myth we must identify two elements, a signifier and a signified, the sum of which provides what he calls the signification, the myth. But he also tells us that the signifier (in the second semiological system) must be a global sign, "*the final term of a first semiological system*"⁵¹. This means that if I want to construct a greater semiological system, I should first be able to provide *representation* as a sign, that is the combination of form and meaning, and thus compose a first semiological system. In our time it is not unusual to interchange and use indifferently the terms *image* and *representation*, and even in this study I mentioned various time the words *image* and *representation* to refer to the illustrations of Lin Zexu. Nevertheless, even though it is hard to find an image which is not a representation at the same time, the two don't come into the world as a unity, but rather as two distinct elements. It is my opinion that the image of Lin Zexu comes to be a representation only at the time of encounter between two well defined component, *graphics* and *design*. Indeed, if we accept that graphics is the materialization of a substance on a surface, such as ink, oil color, and graphite in lead pencil, on blank pages, canvas, walls and, as for computer-based images, rasters and vectorials made of pixels and geometrical primitives on screens, we must also recognize that graphics alone can't do all the work; graphics is able to provide the visual materialization of a substance on a surface, but it unquestionably needs a second, as much determinant, element, *design*. Design, dissimilarly from graphics, requires a decisive attribute able to confer the materialization of the graphic substance on a surface, a cultural form, an intellegible cultural expression, a meaning. This attribute is the *intentionality* of the designer as Gunther Kress points out: "*Design takes for granted competence in the use of resources, but beyond that it requires the orchestration and remaking of the resources in the service of frameworks and models that express the maker's intention in shaping the social and cultural environment*"⁵². Design then as the

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, "*Mythologies*", The Noonday Press – New york, Farrars, Staus and Giroux, 1957.

⁵² Gunther Kress, "*Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: the potentials of new forms of text*", in I. Synder (Ed.) "*Page to Screen: Taking Literacy Into the Electronic Era*" (p. 53-79), London and New York: Routledge.

ideological apparatus that provides passion, care, meaning to the sheer, naked substance of graphics. Design which, through narrative and display, assigns value and partiality to a concrete substance – here narrative must be understood as a networking agency operating, ontologically, “*with multiple references to categories of subject and object*” (B. Clarke, 2005:41), that is being at the same time an integral part of design/intentionality and graphics/technicality, in a sort of metamorphic dynamics, in Latourian terms⁵³. Finally, to get back to our semiotic analysis, design as the signified in the first semiological system. It follows that graphics (the image not yet representation) is the signifier, the form without meaning. The sum of the two, signifier and signified ensure the constitution of the sign. The image is now representation, it has a direct association – by being an expression of it – with what Umberto Eco calls *the world of action*, our social world.

At this point, if the equation graphic/form – design/meaning is correct, we are in presence of a first semiological system (in which representation is the sign), necessary to build the greater system that should lead to conceive *representation* as a *myth*.

Roland Barthes (1957) explains that in a second semiological system the place of the signifier is occupied by the third element of the first semiological system, the sign. Therefore *representation* as a sign becomes the signifier in the new system, and as such has two aspects says Barthes, one full, the meaning (the intentionality implicit in design, namely its intellegibility as a cultural form), and one empty, the form (the materialization of a substance on a surface, graphics). It is in this moment that the second element (the concept or signified) of the second semiological system occurs, appearing and offering itself to the signifier as (a sense of) reality, existence, presence, equivalence, correspondence. It distorts, rather than obliterate, the part which is full in the signifier, the meaning; it then deprives the intentionality, congenital in design, of its history, of its contingency. Representation (the sign/signifier) leaves its contingency – the historical intentionality – behind, to embrace a certain knowledge, the concept, the *sense of reality* or the *certainty*, that is attached to the form of the signifier (representation as a sign) as a perfect

⁵³ Latour’s quasi-object occupy neither “*a nature outside of society nor a society outside of nature*” (Clarke, 2005: 41), preferring to follow their circulation (mobilization) in the network.

correspondence in order to provide representation with a meaning. We have thus two elements: representation as the signifier, and reality or the certainty of it as the signified. The third element, the signification, the myth, will result as that same *hierarchy of truth* Mitchell explained through the *order of appearance*. The aggregation of representation with its newly attached meaning, the *sense of reality*, establishes a correspondence and a certainty of representation which brings about a cognitive ordering in the mind of the observer; this order is therefore imposed as *natural* by the hierarchy of truth through the erasing of the historical procedures that formed it. By means of this hierarchy says Minca, “*the modern thought has produced a system of certainties tied up to the functioning and meaning assigned to its representations*”⁵⁴. I can conclude by saying that *representation*, as a way of making sense of the social, of the real, ceases to appear self-evident, returning back to its constitutional nature, to its being a modern convention. Lin Zexu’s representations – as the objects of the modern subject’s gaze – are active mediators in negotiating an all-encompassing ideology and market logic (nationalism, individualism, consumism), and the subject’s more or less conscious tactics and diversions against the dominant subsumption that its mythology is able to exert. It is also understandable that Lin Zexu’s images, though hidden by the argumentations so far provided in this first part of this account, have always remained at the center of it by virtue of their representative quality.

- *Introduction to data analysis*

An image is a message holder, produced by few for the consumption of many. The technological image is a scientific fact, a fact produced as technology by other technology, obtained in small places such as laboratories or research centres, which

⁵⁴ Claudio Minca, “*L’Esibizione del Mondo o il Mondo come Esibizione*”, (p. 50) *Riv. Geogr. Ital.* 107 (2000), pp.47-81.

sometimes become big centres of power. Places where politics vanishes though it articulates the entire process of production. Lin Zexu as an image, is a technological product that becomes human through a bump of a magic wand. The science that produces it takes away, affirming that they just replicated something real, already among us, the historical Lin Zexu. Politics invests it with meanings and ideologies (the national hero, the essence of Chineseness, the future), though the same politics hides itself by wearing the mask of *normality*, legitimizing and eternalizing a mere matter of fact.

The following data analysis is concerned with the online circulation of digital images of Lin Zexu on Chinese websites conveying its myth. What can be summarized from the analysis of the collection of images that follow this introduction, is that each image of Lin Zexu is a cultural space among others, where from to interpellate the network within which the image itself resides, and which contributes to create and expand.

What these networks are made of? If an image is a *culturally established space* and, at the same time, itself an *establishing space*, it means that it doesn't belong anymore to the linear progress of modern time. Indeed, if it is a *space culturally established*, is thus connected to a variety of actors, agencies, and mediators that through efforts of various and hybrid nature (political, economic, technological, cultural etc.) have come to produce it; let's call it the "starting network" of the image. If in turn, it *establishes cultural spaces*, it means that the network that has produced it is expanding through the image, giving rise to a series of social formations (experiences as cultural forms and practices) that contour and shape the network itself as a peculiar expression of the social world. And since an image is always a culturally established and establishing space, it is thus a medium of communication, a social articulation, a gateway to a social world.

Each of Lin Zexu's images analysed in this study exemplify a distinct mode of knowledge, in the sense that each of them – in their modern conception/understanding, and as outside of the network – somehow and only to a certain extent, refuse the perspectival nature of a heterogeneous reality which require the (strategic) development of different viewpoints through the delineation of the network; opting instead, for an enclosed and structured projection, a structure of meaning that is bond to the mode of knowledge that has produced them. Each of

Lin Zexu's image therefore become a practice of visualization, a specific social order, a space that opens up to our sight, offering mediated subjective positionings. Nevertheless, the images visualized hold in place a *web of significance* - to quote Clifford Geertz - which is not instantly visible, but can be *ideally* defined in the mind of the reader in the form of a future commitment, that is the *will to unravel*. It means that the cultural network we are after, is often secluded between the apparent attractiveness of the image, its design – in the case of Lin Zexu's images by its physiological arrangement – and the ideological message or meanings they convey. The cultural network, though hidden by the rigid structure of the meaning that only apparently overwhelms it, is always at work behind the scenes. Still, even in the situation in which one is able to distinguish between the networking nature of the image, and its rigid intended objective, that is the meaning with which it is encoded, we still find ourselves faced to a series of binarisms typical of modernity. That happens when one hasn't left the logic of the modern metaphysics of representation, when he or she still walk its ground. The dispositif of representation is still in place, which means that we are still looking for a reality behind the representation, and that conviction keeps us trapped into the modern metaphysics of representation. In this sense, and only as such, an image provides knowledge by its ability to convey reality, and thus accomodating inevitable dichotomous fixed ends or immobile theoretical stand points. Trapped in this symmetrical tension between what is presented and what is not, we have experience of the self and of the other, precisely because our position allows the mechanism of representation to project its fixed objectivities, of which we are supposed to become the carrying subjects.

The will to unravel, or rather to trace back the economy of the images' networking life is conditioned to an analitical operation of connection of the images' meanings to the actors, to the producers of the image, and from there follow the communication. As such an image is a point of intersection where distinct entities - being the very essence of the network - might emerge, representing the core relationship between perception (that of the visualising subject), and that social power eventually turned into something immanent, opposed to any transcendentalism. A relationship which lives and shows itself in these interstices, which are also the places where it hides, where tries to escape a potential straight recognition. When one aims to establish the sort of relation that may occur between the *objects* or *things* that are used in China in a specific moment, as in the case of

media production, representation, and consumption, it is necessary to determine and define the relations by considering the modalities through which that relationship manifests itself, that is “*the relation between the production of objects that conditions (human) relationships*”, along with “*the relations between subjects (human and non-human) that condition the production of the means of existence...*”⁵⁵

The myth of Lin Zexu often results as the convergence between the state and the market, allowing these two actors to play with people’s conscience by representing themselves in peculiar ways, and last but not least by rendering a sense of national everyday life. The idea of everyday life has indeed secured our sense of reality, which through media representations is much more vivid than before. Tv programs, movies, Tv series, internet blogs, websites’ content, online images, music and movies, karaoke contests, Peking Opera, soap operas, Western commercial popular culture and many other media products as well as media technology, represent the cultural substance *everyday life* is made of. The extensive use of technology such as Tv, mobile cellphones, tablets, personal computers, but also ambient media (media in public places as cafés, airports, city centers and so on), suggest that *beyond* the moment in which we privately or publicly, look purposely at the flow of images represented in these same mediums above mentioned, it is as though the displaying of images continue to mediate the lives of people (by now became everyday life) in a sort of ever-lasting representation of a system of symbols, and therefore of a system of values, that not only creates the social world in which people live, but most of all mediate the identities and subjectivities that populate this social world. The commercialism inherent in *the way we look* at the world and at the media *things* organized in a frontal center position, the truth and order that they convey, are fundamental for a cognition of the world which obeys to the rules of a capitalist mode of production and to a specific view of reality, of which the everyday life is the ultimate product. The media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu, the widespread of its images through a specific media technology, their designs, their meanings, values, and the other ideological considerations that concern the consumption of its myth will be taken into consideration by regarding “*the*

⁵⁵ Philippe Descola, “*Beyond Nature and Culture: Forms of Attachment*”, (p. 459), Translated by Janet Lloyd, 2012 | HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 2 (1): 447–471.

centrality of visual experience in everyday life" (Mirzoeff, 1998: 7), serving as a dominant modality of apprehension of the knowledge that the myth imparts, as the embodiment and symbol of the new values that have been emerging/produced since the 'Reform and Opening up'.

- *Image One*



Lin Zexu - Image one - (http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_c4b0868b0101sung.html)

The *image one* of *Lin Zexu* has been found by the author of this work on the Internet, posted on *blog.sina.cn* by a Chinese blogger – “学习易” (xuexi yi) – as a suggestion for another blogger’s request to find an interesting story for an article to be written. It actually is one of a series of images posted by the same blogger for

the same purpose (the one mentioned above). The image is a digital⁵⁶ one (evidently in the present context is only printed), being formed by rasters (rectangular grids of pixels) and vectorials (geometrical primitives as points, lines, and curves), and it is accompanied by three autonomous written texts⁵⁷, each of which determinant for the understanding of the image as conceived by its producers or owners. Of the three texts, two are inside the image, being an integral part of the digital realization, while the remaining text accompanies the image⁵⁸ as a detached entity, but nevertheless bound up to it.

As Roland Barthes tells us, in the *image one* of Lin Zexu may be identified “*a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception*”⁵⁹ (Barthes, 1997: 15). *The source of emission* refers to the actual people/technicians which through the use of digital technology such as computer graphics softwares (CAD, CAE, CAM, CIM)⁶⁰ have been able to produce the image, as well as to create and add the texts. Further information on the source of emission will be provided later on, after a better understanding of the overall quality of the image.

As for the *channel of transmission*, for the moment I will maintain that it is the blog *blog.sina.cn* where the blogger posted the image, but as will be shown below shortly after, one of the two texts inside the image will direct the investigation further on to other channels of transmission as well as to other sources of emission. The same must be said for the *point of reception* which for the moment seems to be limited only to the public reader of the blog, as myself for example, but a deeper focus on the image will expand the field of action – the network – of the *image one* of Lin Zexu to a further audience.

⁵⁶ Digitality allows the image to be reproduced infiniteless without degradation, in contrast to the analog media which loses quality at each new copy (Lev Manovich, 2001). It also means that it can be almost instantly transferred via communication network (Internet, bluetooth, intranet).

⁵⁷ Usually digital images in computer graphics use both *vectors* and *rasters* when they make use of a text alongside the image itself, as it is notable in the image one analysed above.

⁵⁸ This occurs always keeping in mind that the media image is a cultural text itself.

⁵⁹ Roland Barthes, “*Image, Music, Text*”, Fontana Press, London, 1977.

⁶⁰ The above acronyms correspond to the following computer softwares: *Computer Aided Design*, *Computer Aided Engineering*, *Computer Aided Manufacturing*, and *Computer Integrated Manufacturing*. See E. Sampanikou and A. Kawa, “*The Digital Environment in Visual and Audiovisual Arts. A theoretical Approach.*” ISIMD - 4th International Symposium of Interactive Media Design, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, 28-30 April 2006.

The representation of Lin Zexu is a media product which conveys an information, a message, and as such is an “*object endowed with a structural autonomy*” (R. Barthes 1997: 15). This structure is formed by two cooperative but distinctive entities, the image itself and the written text, the latter being a linguistic structure. In order to understand the overall quality and message of the representation it is important to treat the two entities separately first, and then proceed by analysing the actual relation they have in the specificity of the representation object of study.

Starting from the two texts present in the image one, a few words on the role of texts in images might be of help. The presence of a text in an image may have various reasons, the most common of which, according to Roland Barthes, are exemplified by the concept of *anchorage* and *relay*. With the term *anchorage* the French semiotician expresses the will (of the producers) to fix the *floating chain of signifieds* present in a representation, that is to determine, by means of a linguistic message, the denoted or symbolic meaning of an image. Therefore, a text functions as an anchorage when it allows the observer to establish “*a correct level of perception*” (Barthes 1997: 39), and thus understand the image, or when it serves to avoid, in case of a symbolic meaning, undesired readings and therefore helping the reception of others. On the other side, with the term *relay* Barthes points out how a text in an image works complementarily to the image itself, meaning that at the level of diegesis, of the narrative, both the image and the text serve to create the unity of the message. This is typical of cartoons and films if we consider the text to be both verbal or written.

The first text analysed here is the central superimposed one – 林则徐对联立志 (Lin Zexu duilian lizhi) – which means *Lin Zexu gives expression to his ambition and aspiration through the composition of a poetic couplet*. A couplet in Chinese poetry is a composition made of two rhymed lines written on two vertical strips of paper (usually red), and as it is comprehensible requires high-level skills both on Chinese language and Chinese characters.

Now, in order to understand the function of this text, Barthes’ previous distinction between text as *anchorage* and text as *relay* can be useful. Indeed, from the point of view of its functionality, the text can be divided into two sections, the first section comprises the name 林则徐, the second section the rest 对联立志. To understand the first part, the role of the name “*Lin Zexu*” in the text, the concept of *anchorage* fits quite well inasmuch as the name not only fixes the denoted description of the

image but it actually produces it. Why is that? *Lin Zexu* as a digital character/simulacra does not obey natural law, instead the producers of the image have the power over its digital quality, and are thus able to create a a-historical face/body which doesn't correspond to the accepted physiognomy historically attributed to Lin Zexu (Sampanikou, Kawa, 2006). I doubt anyone would be able to recognise Lin Zexu in the image without the decisive help of the text. Nevertheless, as proved by the *image one* of Lin Zexu and thanks to the text, the observer reader of the image is immediately capable – if he/she has knowledge of the linguistic code used – to recognise the image as (the historical) Lin Zexu. Therefore, in this case the written text “*Lin Zexu*” helps the reader to identify the element(s) in the image. It stands to reason that the text operates from the very beginning (the first three characters) in an ideological way, imposing its hegemonic value on the signifier (the graphic form) as a signified (the fact of being Lin Zexu). This also explains why the text is centred and superimposed in respect to the image, for its centrality is not only material, but also conceptual.

As for the second section of the text 对联立志 the concept of *relay* is much more adequate as it refers to the narrative of the image, meaning that it is understandable at a higher level, that of the diegesis. But in order to grasp appropriately what kind of story it refers to, it is necessary to take into consideration the second text present in the representation, the one that stands on the upper-left side of the image, which is none other than the *CCTV.com* logo, telling the reader that the image is undoubtedly a product of Central China Television (CCTV). Following the traces of the elements present in the image (the *CCTV.com* logo), it turned out that the *image one* of Lin Zexu is not an isolated, autonomous image, but is instead a captured frame of a cartoon on Lin Zexu, which in turn is part of a large-scale animation series, 52 to be exact, on different historical heroes of China. In light of these *facts* must be understood the caution showed above regarding the information on the source of emission, the channel of transmission and the point of reception and, as will be shown soon, these three elements shall be redefined in consideration of the new information provided.

As a frame of a cartoon-like design, the image one opens itself up to a collective – in terms of the network that it activates – much more vast and populated than it was supposed to consist of, in which new actors and mediators take on their task and responsibility.

The animation is a short story, lasting seven minutes, and addressed to Chinese children with the aim of being “*informative, interesting, educational; an effort to transmitt an excellent story, a rich and funny cartoon, providing children with happiness, being entertaining while letting the kids watch the course of the story, making them understand that only through an assiduous study and incessant effort one can attain to reason.*”⁶¹ What is the value of this text in respect to the *image one* of *Lin Zexu*, and more important what’s the relation between the *image one* (the frame) and the cartoon? The text translated here is the first web result showed after having searched the words and characters “CCTV 林则徐对联立志” on the Internet⁶². Therefore, it (the text translated above) is the result obtained by regarding the *CCTV.com* logo – laid out in the upper-left side of the *image one* – as a mediator, that is establishing, or even better, accounting for the relationship between the *CCTV.com* logo and the rest of the image. Indeed, the logo *acts* – precisely in the circumstances in which it allows and mediate the transposition – as a translating agent, laying out the path of the network already delineated to a further extension; and it does so in different manners. What does the logo do? It stands fixed in its corner, silent but threatening as it whispers the reader of the image “ignore me if you want, but you won’t get any additional understanding than a denoted comprehension of the image (and the centred sumperimposed text) which in the end tells you so little”; but it also makes noise and invites the reader any moment as it urges one to step up from the scarcity⁶³ of the collective under examination (the *image one* so far analysed), to *take*⁶⁴ the reader to the abundance of a new collective (though interrelated to the former), the one in which one

⁶¹ The text reported has been translated from the Chinese by the author of this work, and is only a part of a longer account on the entire animation series published on Baike.Baidu.com. What follows is the original Chinese text: 这部动画片集知识性、趣味性、教育性于一体，力图通过精彩的故事，丰富的卡通趣味，给孩子们带来快乐，同时又寓教于乐，让孩子们在观赏的过程中，懂得只有通过勤奋好学，不断努力，才能成才的道理。

⁶² The website address as result of the search: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1124399.htm>

⁶³ The evaluation criteria used in this passage *scarcity/abundance* refers only to a quantitative estimation of the size of the two collectives, and not to their quality. See B. Latour, “*We Have Never Been Modern*” (1991).

⁶⁴ The use of the verb “*take*” shouldn’t in any case be associated with a sort of neutrality of the agent (the logo), in fact the carrying action of the logo is an articulation that modifies its, let’s say, cargo, the image itself.

discovers the cartoon, the animation series, the story of the image in terms of source of emission, the narrative of the cartoon that explains both the centred text and their connotations, as well as multiplying the channel of transmission (TV and/or internet video websites for the cartoon, of which the *image one* is part of, and the blog *blog.sina.cn* where the *image one* as a single frame circulates), and the point of reception (supposedly the children for the cartoon, and the blog users for the frame). Therefore, the logo as mediator expands the network of the image and enables part of the text (对联立志) to acts by explicating its function.

In this way the *CCTV.com* logo is determinant for the contextualization of the second section of the centred text in the *image one* of Lin Zexu, 对联立志, which as stated before, functions as a *relay* in the global economy of the image. Indeed, the cartoon is a fictionalisation of the historical figure of Lin Zexu (represented in his alleged childhood), whom aspirations, perseverance, alacrity, ambition, and determination prove to be already an essential part of his firm character. In fact he is able (and he is the only one among other little students) to manage, at the end of the story, the difficult task that the school teacher had assigned him and his schoolmates, to compose a correct and relevant couplet.

Now, the role of the second part of the centred text as *relay* is to anticipate or advance “meanings that are not to be found in the image itself” (R. Barthes 1997: 41). Therefore, while the first part of the text 林则徐 as *anchorage* in *image one* directs the reader to the denotation of the image or to its controlled signifieds, 对联立志 as *relay* sets out the story of the cartoon through a specific short-lasting frame that we know as *image one*, and it does so by anticipating the diegesis of the story, and by telling the reader the gist and significance of the story that the image alone is incapable of providing, which then must be searched at the level of narration, the cartoon.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that the figure of Lin Zexu in the framed *image one* is, as one would expect, of an adult Lin Zexu in full of his intellectual strength; nevertheless, the frame is taken from a cartoon in which Lin Zexu’s physiognomy is produced as a child. Why is that? The *image one* is the first frame of the cartoon, and it is accompanied by a voice-over with the intent of introducing to the (young) Chinese public the personality of Lin Zexu by remembering, and shortly showing (the entire scene lasting less than a minute), his famous and audacious action of

sizing and burning the english opium in Humen town, Guangdong province, in 1839, and therefore celebrating his heroic gesture that still makes him a patriot and a national hero. This explains the relation between the adult Lin Zexu and the young one, and it also explains the relation between the image one and the cartoon. As an adult in the first scene, Lin Zexu serves the need of signifying the entire story through the imposition of a fixed point of view (Lin Zexu as patriot), and by securing the general meaning of the story (only through an assiduous study and incessant effort one can attain to reason), through which is then possible to convey the ideology of ambition, future, career direction, but also of past, tradition, and loyalty, to the entire narrative of the cartoon, in full compliance with the political and economic (for what these words mean) trajectory undertaken since Deng Xiaoping's opening and reforms.

The cartoon has been produced by “*China Central Television Animation Department Youth Centre*” (中国中央电视台青少中心动画部) in 2004, and was released for domestic broadcast the following year, on July 2005. CCTV Cartoon Youth Program Center has been established in 1991, specializing in animation production (cartoon and comics), and it currently is China's largest animation production unit. “*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*” (林则徐对联立志) is the 33th production of a large-scale animation series, which gathered together a total number of 52 Chinese historical figures⁶⁵ in as many short cartoons, with the official aim of inspiring Chinese future generations. The entire animation series, titled 中华勤学故事 (*zhonghua qinxue gushi*) and premiered on CCTV-1 and CCTV-14 少儿 (shao'er, meaning *children*), has been produced by Wenjiang Zhao and Wu Bao, directed by Lin Qiao, and adapted by Hu Yue. Needless to say, these information define, with regard to the *image one*, the source of emission, the channel of transmission and the point of reception; but if for the first there is no doubt that “*China Central Television Animation Department Youth Centre*”, represented by its staff, is the source of emission, what can then be said about the other two? They are clearly destined to produce a shift within their own nature, in fact if, with regard to the cartoon, they can be identified respectively as the “television” (the channels CCTV-1 and CCTV-14少儿) and the “Tv audience” (supposedly children, but not

⁶⁵ Here are some of the historical figures (historians, painters, writers, calligraphers) used to produce the CCTV animation series: 万斯同, 少年包, 陆羽弃, 陈平, 唐伯虎.

necessarily), for the *image one* – which is what mostly interests now – they can be identified only by looking at the blog *blog.sina.cn* where the *image one* circulates and is visualized.

As stated at the beginning of this image analysis, *image one* has been found on the blog *blog.sina.cn*⁶⁶, posted by the blogger 学习易 on 12/14/2013 at 15:08 China time-zone. As a result, the Internet blog is the channel of transmission of Lin Zexu's *image one*. Under these specific circumstances the blog object of this study has an identifiable blogger, 学习易; it functions as a direct medium of communication towards the points of reception, the readers of the blog. Furthermore, the present blog *blog.sina.cn* is “one of China's largest and most well-established web portals which includes a fast-growing blog-hosting service”⁶⁷, which together with Blogbus, Bokee, DoNews, Microsoft MSN and many others has become in China, as well as in other regions of the world, part of the media ecosystem, having created an autonomous, if not privileged, media-space for discourse, interaction, interchange, and communication between varied individuals within Chinese society. Without entering into the issue of censorship and control in the Chinese media system, it is fundamental to understand that, as a form of online participatory media, blogs convey diverse type of communication - reviews, feedbacks, suggestions, complaints, comments and many other forms of language dissemination - deepening the media-space for civil discourse.

The blog page under analysis, the one where *image one* circulates, though is there to allow the author of the blog to use it for communication, whatever kind of information is actually provided, it is structured as to permit specific actions and, evidently, to deny others. As said before the *image one* of Lin Zexu has been posted by the author of the blog along with other six images and just as many detached, accompanying texts. The images all represent heroes or distinguished historical figures of China, and as suggested by the texts, they all have in common a certain kind of inspirational, informational, didactic, educational and pedantic character. Moreover, they all are the protagonists of the CCTV animation series 中华勤学故

⁶⁶ The integral blog address of the *image one*: http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_c4b0868b0101sung.html

⁶⁷ Rebecca MacKinnon, “Flatter world and thicker walls? Blogs, censorship and civic discourse in China”, Springer Science+Business Media, BV 2007, (p. 38)

事 (*Zhonghua qinxue gushi*). As for the structure of the blog, in the upper side of the blog page, starting from the left-side, four kind of different actions – such as “signin in”, “night/day vision modality”, the access to the author’s articles organized by category, and a “search” tool - are provided. On the other hand, in the bottom line, five additional actions are provided, four of which require anyone to sign in, in order to access specific service contents such as “QQ”, “UC Mobile Browser”, “Sina Weibo”, “favourites”, and eventually “comments”. Certainly, to consider the comments present in the blog as the entirety and exhaustive Barthes’ point of reception would be limiting, since not all users of blogs write reviews; nonetheless, the seventeen comments left by eleven readers are a number quite satisfying to delineate an average grade of response, and to look at the ideological encoding/decoding process at work.

The comments posted on the blog object of this study do not refer exclusively to the *image one* of Lin Zexu, but to all the images posted simultaneously. Of all seventeen comments, seven are posted by one blogger, each comment for each image, resuming the denoted content of the stories (the cartoons) as for example : 林则徐自幼聪颖 (Lin Zexu intelligent since childhood); 查禁鸦片 (suppression of Opium); 有容乃大 (tolerance is a virtue). The other comments have expressed in different ways their appreciation for the stories’ morality such as: 有教育意义 (educational); 励志, 太棒 (inspirational, great); 小故事, 大智慧 (small story, great wisdom); 太有教育意义了 (very instructive); 好故事, 欣赏! 问好博友, 祝周末愉快 (Good story, enjoy! Hello bloggers, have a great weekend); 学习! (study!).

Clearly enough, these comments reveal the readers’ successful decoding practice if we consider the entire visualization process of the image as seen from the point of view of the producers. The *image one* of Lin Zexu, as a multimodal media product – its multimodal quality is deduced by the manifold modes used in the representation and communication of the meaning (visual and written in the frame, visual, gestural, written and oral in the cartoon) – draws upon diverse meaning-making resources that, almost innocently, impose a mythical nature to the figure of Lin Zexu. Intertextuality for example, plays here a relevant role, although children are less affected by its pervading *modus operandi*, the comments in the blog evidently indicate a prior knowledge of the historical figure of Lin Zexu, as when

one comment says 林则徐自幼聪颖 (Lin Zexu intelligent since childhood), demonstrating that the new information has been added to a prior one already known: Lin Zexu became the hero we know because since he was a child he has proved to be ambitious, diligent, tenacious, and intelligent. The seductive cultural form embodied in the representation of Lin Zexu with its persuasive, rather than commanded, cartoonish narrative, allows on one hand to produce an ideology of desire, aspiration, pretension, ambition, attraction, as well as pressure, urgency, competition, hysterical emulation, and antagonism, while on the other hand it affirms principles of attachment to the nation, loyalty to the authority, tradition, historical linearity, and a series of feeling of collective belonging.

- *Image Two*



Lin Zexu - *Image two*

<http://www.zsnews.cn/epaper/zsrp/ShowIndex.asp?paperdate=20110721&part=12&article=2>

The *image two* of Lin Zexu is a digital illustration of a journalistic article on “Lin Zexu and corruption” or “Lin Zexu and morality”, published on 7th July, 2011 by

the Chinese daily newspaper “Zhongshan Daily” (中山日报) at page ten of its electronic version (e-paper) in the following webpage: www.zsnews.cn/epaper⁶⁸. The image, along with the article, has been published under the title “林则徐：人到无求品自高”⁶⁹ (Lin Zexu: ren dao wu qiu pin zi gao) which might mean “to become a person of high moral character, one must dim fame, dim money, regard material joy for nothing and cultivate its own virtue”⁷⁰.

The *image two* is a digital production, its dimensions being 481 x 283 pixels with a DPI⁷¹ resolution equal to 72pixels/inch, using an RGB⁷² color model generic profile, meaning that three light beams (colors), red, green and blue are superimposed to each other in order to obtain a vast array of other colors.

The *image two* of Lin Zexu depicts two distinct figures standing on a dockside and not too far, but apart from the two figures, a cargo ship full of containers. The entire scene supposedly shows to the reader a “Western” and “Asiatic” personage, distinguishable by the different codes – clothes and physiognomies – used to produce the two figures, which if known allow the reader to culturally differentiate them.

As for any digital production that doesn’t re-produce an accurate resemblance of the historically accepted form depicted, the Asian character in the *image two* for example – which we know being Lin Zexu – is first of all the work of a personal creative expression that combines many alterable pixels in order to create an intellegible graphical form – a person – which, only with the addition of other graphical and digital elements such texts (the title, the caption within the cloud, the article), the opium pipe in the hand of the other figure, the clothes of the Asian character itself, and the general intertextual quality of the representation, is able to

⁶⁸ The Internet address for the *image one*: <http://www.zsnews.cn/epaper/zsrb/ShowIndex.asp?paperdate=20110721&part=12&article=2>.

⁶⁹ 人到无求品自高 is the lower line of the following famous Chinese couplet: 事能知足心常泰 人到无求品自高

⁷⁰ Chinese couplets are famous for being object of careful consideration, accordingly to their diverse levels of expression. Another understanding of the above mentioned couplet (see note 1) might be: “*Being content leads you to peace, and seeking no excess finds you noble.*”

⁷¹ DPI, dots per inch, is the number of dots in digital graphics that can be placed within a space of one inch measuring 2.54 cm.

⁷² RGB is the acronym for Red, Green, and Blue. It refers to the three hues of light that can be mixed together to form any color in digital production softwares. TVs and computer monitors use RGB to create colorful images on the screen.

convey the identity of the represented, being indeed that of Lin Zexu. The other figure depicted, as said above, is an anonymous westerner carrying an opium pipe – here is a triple association that can be made in terms of intertextuality, and of which specific details will be provided later on – who is disconsolately pulling back from Lin Zexu’s warning: “请阁下将烟具带回贵国，存入皇家博物馆当展品吧!” (Qing zha xia jiang yanju dai hui guiguo, cun ru huang jia bowuguan dang zhan pin ba!) meaning: “*Please sir bring your smoking tool back to your country, deposit it at the royal museum for exposition*”.

The *image one* is followed by the text, the article, which is not hierarchically subordinated to the image, but it rather establishes a dialogical relationship among the two, underlining the continuity or unity between Chinese history and present condition. Indeed, although the article, recalling Lin Zexu’s outstanding service, points out the necessity of leaving future generations with something more than material enjoyment (usually gained through the practice of corruption among officials), such as a profound philosophy of life able to yield virtue above all; nevertheless, the entire text of the article carries out its function by dialoguing with the image on diverse levels. As it happens at the beginning of the article for example:大家自然会想到他是“虎门销烟”民族英雄，但同时他也是一位清正廉明的清官 (Dajia ziran hui xiangdao ta shi Humen xiaoyan minzu yingxiong, dan tongshi ta ye shi yi wei qingzheng lianming de qingguan) “*Naturally everybody thinks that he (Lin Zexu) is the national hero who burned the opium in Humen, but he is also an honest and upstanding official*”. Now, with regard to the image, this sentence firstly recalls the heroic event which undisputably makes him a national hero; securing in this way the remembrance of a historical event that concerned and still concerns the nation. This kind of narrative is traceable in the image as Lin Zexu’s hand clearly says “no” to foreign’s unacceptable “things” (the opium pipe), in the same way he said no to opium back in the 1830’s and 1840’s. Secondly, both the image and the text dialogue when the article explicates how the British representative Sir Elliot sent Lin Zexu a generous gift (read: bribe) worth more than ten of thousand of platinum diamond opium pipes, at which point Lin Zexu refuses, remembering the importance of keeping good relations between the two countries and stating the same sentence as the one in the caption within the cloud in the *image two*: “*Please sir bring your smoking tool back to your country, deposit it at the royal museum for exposition*”. In this way, continues the text, Sir Elliot is

ridicolized by Lin Zexu's righteous behaviour.⁷³ Therefore, the relation between image and text is strengthened by the positive light under which Lin Zexu – both in the image and text – is represented, negatively connoting not only the British official (in the text), but the entire western world – for the image depicts an anonymous westerner, a business man. In fact, the two figures in the image, do not only represent Lin Zexu and a smuggler; their connotations stress the binary opposition *self/other* in order to lead the (Chinese) reader of the image to identify him/herself with the myth of Lin Zexu for his clear, digitally produced, ethnic quality (physical traits, and imperial fashion), and historical identity (the shame for the opium war is still reproduced in China), and to implicitly re-affirm the citizens belonging to the vast community called Chinese nation.

Furthermore, Lin Zexu's image marks a distinction between tradition/past and modernity. The image (along with the article) subtly becomes “*an imagined, traditional, and authentic*” (for the moderns) Chinese cultural space from which to “*evaluate the progress of modern society*” (T. Oakes 1993:514)⁷⁴. Lin Zexu, belonging to a humiliating past of Chinese history, functions as a remembrance of what Chinese modernity is no more part of; though at the same time, the *image one* having the aesthetic (digital) quality that constantly valorizes its patriotic-national behaviour and positive moral values, serves the attitude of “*praising progress by eulogizing tradition*” (T. Oakes 1993:514). It is therefore possible to say that the *image two* of Lin Zexu is an image of both modern break, rupture and disjunction from a backward Chinese past, as well as it is an image of modern continuity with the great tradition of Chinese culture and history. A binary order inscribed in the image that is dependent on the aesthetic, designing quality of the image itself, which might highlight either one or the other ideological understanding. In considering these two overlapping features of the image of Lin Zexu, I should be careful in delineating too early their frontiers. It should be left apart any tendency

⁷³ The part of the text in Chinese as reported above: 1839年, 林则徐奉命查禁鸦片, 英国代表义律送来一套价值十多万英镑的白金钻石烟具, 林则徐义正词严拒绝说: “这套烟具属于违禁品, 本当没收, 但两国交往, 友谊为重, 请阁下将烟具带回贵国, 存入皇家博物馆当展品吧!” 义律被讥讽得无地自容。

⁷⁴ Timothy Oakes, “*Place and The Paradox of Modernity*”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sept., 1993).

of fixing boundaries and identities, and rather ask what is the correspondance that allows these two apparently different principles, acts, practices, and modes of production to yield a hybridizing effect. In fact, to concentrate exclusively on the difference between them, renovating and re-authorizing their dialectic in terms of stable oppositions, of contrasting terms, in the losing binary game, would only reproduce a uniqueness that doesn't exist. In *image two*, the representation of Lin Zexu should be seen as a tradition revival or, as the natural celebration of a hero. Lin Zexu as tradition, history, culture is a legitimation force, as well as a tightening ideological/cultural embrace against the frightening mass mobilization; it is in favor of a globalized interdependent economy as shown in the *image two*, where the cargo ship seems to be waiting for the smuggler to leave with its opium pipe, to moore and discharge its precious cargo, symbolizing trade, symbolizing free will, symbolizing the newly (re)acquired power of China among the other nations; it is the past that is produced (through a digital image) as modernity by staging the differences between Lin Zexu and the smuggler, Asia and the West, virtue and corruption, past and present, and as Timothy Mitchell explains "*the modern occurs only by performing the distinction between the modern and the non modern*"⁷⁵, as well as it performs the differences between the proliferation of signs⁷⁶ and things (the former intended as Clifford Geertz's system of symbols of a culture, the latter to be considered in Latourian terms), namely all cultural forms - as the *image two* does - that make up culture and society; and the great, isolated repository called CULTURE in the *modern constitution*⁷⁷. Lin Zexu's image naturalizes and normalizes that sense of direction performed by those grandnarratives of progress, development, objectivism, and by universals such as "*fraternity, innovation, tolerance and harmony*" – as stated in the website of the "*China Zhongshan*"⁷⁸ (中

⁷⁵ Timothy Mitchell, "*The Stage of Modernity*", p. 26, in T. Mitchell (Edt.) "*Questions of Modernity*", University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

⁷⁶ Clifford Geertz in his "*The Interpretation of Cultures*" maintains that culture as a system of symbols produce a web of significance that may be analyzed through a semiotic approach to culture itself, by orientating the symbols toward the actors present in the specific cultural context whithin which the researcher is working. See C. Geertz "*The Interpretation of Cultures - Selected Essays*", Basic Books, Inc., Publisher New York, 1973.

⁷⁷ Bruno Latour defines the "*modern constitution*" as a structure that determines the division between human and non-human, their properties, relations, competencies and group divisions. See B. Latour "*We Have Never Been Modern*", Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachussets, 1993.

⁷⁸ The website address for the 中国中山(政府之窗) China Zhongshan Government portal: <http://www.zs.gov.cn/>.

国中山) government portal – that populate the networks within which what we call Chinese culture and society are produced.

To this end, a look at the *Zhongshan Daily* (中山日报) as the source of emission of the *image two*, and at the online digital publication as its channel of transmission, may help understanding the kind of mobilization (in terms of actors and mediators' mobilization) resulting in the image's network.

The *image two* of Lin Zexu and the article of which it is part of, has been published on a digital copy of the *Zhongshan Daily* (中山日报) a hundred and seventy years after the occurrence of the opium burning in Humen Town, Guangdong Province at the hands of then imperial official Lin Zexu. The *Zhongshan Daily* is part of the Zhongshan Network (中山网) three media's group: 中山网 (Zhongshan wang), 中山日报 (Zhongshan ribao), and 中山商报 (Zhongshan Shang Bao). The group was established in 2005, and since then has been in charge of the city propaganda committee in Zhongshan city. The Zhongshan Network (中山网) is a media and news group which reports policy measure and provides news and lifestyle information as well as economic information and business services, in an integrated media network with the above mentioned media outlets. Moreover, by clicking on the lettering “other” (更民) of the Zhongshan daily (中山日报) it is possible to access public services such as “life inquiry” (生活查询), “financial business” (财经商务), “transport enquiry” (交通查询), administration” (行政部门), “tourism services” (旅游服务), resulting in a comprehensive online portal integrated with the municipality of Zhongshan. Indeed, the group is also an important media window for the Zhongshan municipal government (中山市委市政府), working as a relevant platform for the integration of network resources, dissemination of online information, and guidance of public opinion. The Zhongshan Group together with Zhongguo Zhongshan (中国中山) Government Portal - the latter under the care of “Zhongshan Municipal People Government Office (中山市人民政府办公室) – provides public services for the interaction with citizens of the municipality, and for the communication between the government and the community of Zhongshan City through dedicated government information channels.

Furthermore, through Zhongshan Shang Bao (中山商报) the Zhongshan Group focuses its attention on economic issues and current social dynamics, involving

people's livelihood by means of entertainment sections, leading fashion consumers guide, and the omnipresent political news.

Therefore, the media group represented by the Zhongshan Network (中山网), acts as an all-emcompassing and superimposing source of knowledge both for the citizens of Zhongshan city, and the overall Chinese readers that might end up reading the journals of the group. In this context politics, economy, culture and society as independent, autonomous entity, result destabilised by the combined networking process put on play by the Zhongshan Group. The socio-economic effort carried out by the Group, aimed at technological development and social integration, the market competition that it necessarily produces, the use and imposition of computer technologies, the convergence with global culture and labour, all these factors do not induce social transformation, they are already that transformation, they give rise to specific ever-changing social and cultural conformations⁷⁹. Considering, for example, the contemporary anxiety yielded by the new lifestyle in urban china - where the search for jobs, the consumistic urge, the technological communication, and the general bewilderment felt by many citizens around the country - we see how Lin Zexu digital image and its online article, published by the Zhongshan Daily (中山日报), might be able to provide a consolation and an utopian appeal to its ideal anxious readers. In fact, being Lin Zexu a historical, national hero, whose personal relevance is deeply rooted in that ideal national space filled with nationalistic narratives and ideology (as does *image two*), with its confucian fashion and nationalistic ardour, it conveys a comfort and a utopian relief dispersing and dissolving the anxiety of daily life. At the same time, the reading page of the Zhongshan Daily (中山日报) promotes that same anxiety and bewilderment that Lin Zexu's image may prove to soften, by publishing in its dedicated advertisement banners⁸⁰ luxurious real estates publicities that might work as sources of uncertainty. And in doing so, the Zhongshan Group has the power of producing knowledge that contradicts itself (as it has been showed right above) in an coherent system of representations.

⁷⁹ Stefan kramer, Peter Ludes (Eds.), "*Networks of Cultures*", LIT Verlag Dr. W. Hopf Berlin, 2010.

⁸⁰ The cost for private use of an advertisement banner in the Zhongshan Daily (中山日报) is 500 RMB per day for the bigger banner, and 300 RMB per day for the small ones.

- Image Three

古有林则徐虎门销烟，今有……？此处省略7个字，求跟帖



Lin Zexu - Image Three - <http://bbs.zhongsou.com/3/20120530/5229242.html>

The *image three* of Lin Zexu has been found by the author of this work in the forum section (论坛 luntan), BBS portal of the Chinese site *zhongsou.com*. It has been posted on the forum of the *zhongsou.com* website by the blogger 妒云恨雨 (du yun hen yu) on 2012-05-30 at 12:52 under the title (thread) “古有林则徐虎门销烟，今有……？此处省略7个字，求跟帖”(Gu you Lin Zexu Humen xiao yan, jin you……? Ci chu shenglüe 7 ge zi, qiu gen tie), meaning “In the past Lin Zexu burned the opium in Humen, today/presently……? Seven words are omitted here, please find the thread”. The *image three* is a digital image made by 437 × 322

pixel, with a DPI⁸¹ resolution equal to 72pixels/inch, using an RGB⁸² color model. The image displays a severe Lin Zexu, drew in profile and in a centered position, pointing with two fingers of its right hand to something, allegedly to the opium confiscated (if intertextuality, thrust by the text above, works properly), though nothing is actually displayed. However, down on the left side of the image, right where its fingers point at, is a text formed by four lines: 傳众家之所长 (fu zhu jia zhi suo zhang); 看人生之百态 (kan ren sheng zhi bai tai); 文向心之冷暖 (wen xiang xin zhi leng nuan); 思社会之责任 (si she hui zhi ze ren). It seems to be a self evaluation of Lin Zexu, or a comment upon its historical exhortations and propositions. The possibility of being a poem has been rejected as it lacks the strict standard format of Chinese poetry. Nevertheless, the following translation of this text may bring a closer attention to the general meaning of the image, as well as to specific aspects of the elements present in the digital representation: “*learn advantages/specialities from other schools*” (傳众家之所长); “*onlooker of the vicissitudes of life*” (傳众家之所长); “*write down about the unfairs and fairs of society*” (文向心之冷暖); “*think about social responsibility*” (思社会之责任). The denoted meaning of the text should be clear enough if the translation is accurate, but to identify what kind of relationship this text establishes with the other elements in the image, may help the overall understanding of it.

As it is visible on the upper side of the *image three*, there is a “no smoking” logo which in my opinion establishes a double semiotic relation with the figure of Lin Zexu, having at the same time the function of signifier and signified. In fact, as a signifier, the logo receives its (connoted) meaning from the illustration of Lin Zexu (the signified), which signifies the logo by conveying a sense of “*authority*” (see the severe and austere digital face of Lin Zexu) already inscribed – in this and in other representations – in Lin Zexu’s mythical understanding. On the other hand, the logo functions as a signified by investing the image of Lin Zexu with a sort of “*contemporary*” meaning. Indeed, through the re-production of a specific Chinese past (Lin Zexu in front of the sized opium) it is possible to serve the needs and

⁸¹ DPI, dots per inch, is the number of dots in digital graphics that can be placed within a space of one inch measuring 2.54 cm.

⁸² RGB is the acronym for Red, Green, and Blue. It refers to the three hues of light that can be mixed together to form any color in digital production softwares. TVs and computer monitors use RGB to create colorful images on the screen.

interests of present time (forbid smoking on public places for example) determining, among the people, a normative consensus that Lin Zexu's mediated and media representation is able to articulate. Now, the first line of the text in the *image three* seems to suggest to rely on Lin Zexu's schools of thought to learn how to deal with specific matters; the second line to be weary of what surrounds us; the third line to determine what is right and what is not within society; the fourth line expresses the aspiration to a civic society. The three main elements of the image, the text, the "no-smoking" logo, and Lin Zexu (he is accompanied by two guards whose role is to reinforce Lin Zexu's authority, and therefore to naturalize the ruler's identification with military force), communicate in such a way as to enact a solid and authoritative regulatory intervention or prescriptive action, oriented towards a cognitive model (Lin Zexu as authority, as intervention and sanction) able to induce feelings of obedience. The mythical role of Lin Zexu, as this entire study is investigating, served and still serves various interests that cannot be too naively classified or labeled as political, economical, or financial powers, for these are obscure forces that vanish under the weight of their own inconsistency, but must be analysed within the pertinent system of symbols that nourish life understanding, and life interacting, that nurture culture in an incessant flow of signs-making, signs-dissemination, and signs-consuming, whatever form these processes (producing, communicating, and consuming) might take.

The four-lines text in the *image three*, for example, do not only works by adding its regulatory discourse to the general meaning of the image, but it expresses a surreptitious message which can be read if the (vertical) linguistic code is known or individuated. In fact, if the first character of each line are read vertically, they form the following composition 博看文思 (Bo kan wen si), that is the name of a Beijing based company (iBokan Wisdom), providing 3G technology platform to IOS, Android, and HTML5 for mobile telecommunications technology, complying with the International Mobile Telecommunications 2000 (IMT-2000) specifications. 3G telecommunication networks support services that provide an information transfer rate of at least 200 kbit/s. It finds application in wireless voice telephony, mobile Internet access, fixed wireless Internet access, video calls, and mobile TV.



The reference 博看文思 (Bo kan wen si) functions in the image as an agency, molding the ethical value of the text to the extent that the text itself strengthen the pervasiveness of the agency by legitimating its entrenched occurrence, meaning that the presence of a symbol of technology, which is also a symbol of progress and advancement, might well fit, as it does, beside the figure of Lin Zexu and within the text precisely because of its onward, progressive, continuing attitude and orientation. This reinforces Lin Zexu's contemporary mythology. Indeed, as T. Hjellum explains "*one myth of maoism was that China's backwardness was a result of Western imperialism from the time of the opium war. This idea justified isolationism. As China has opened up to the outside world, this idea has lost much of its legitimacy.*"⁸³ Since the 1980's and through the 1990's and the 2000's, Lin Zexu's mythology had been revised in function of the new modernization policy, becoming much more pragmatic as it also represented the natural convergence between two interdependent Chinese social classes, politicians and entrepreneurs, and now undertaking under its mythological umbrella the symbols of technological advancement and progress. However, there is another important aspect that is worth to be considered while investigating the presence of the vertical reference 博看文思 (Bo kan wen si) in the four-line text of the *image three* of Lin Zexu. In traditional Chinese graphic arts, distance 远近 (*yuanjin*) or perspective, was disciplined or dealt with through different conventions, as Cordell D. K. Yee specifies in "*Chinese Cartography Among the Arts*". One of these conventions was the use of variable viewpoint: "*The standpoint of the observer, instead of being fixed, is movable without restriction or else multiple. Each portion of the composition is drawn with its own viewpoint perpendicular to it at some distance. This convention was useful for composing a spatially dynamic sequence of scenes on, for example, scrolls, one of the traditional media for Chinese painting*

⁸³ T. Hjellum, "*On the Legitimacy of the Dengist Regime*", (p.3), The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies, 1996.

and maps.”⁸⁴ Although the peculiar presence of the text 博看文思 (Bo kan wen si) might be easily exemplified by the vertical linguistic code officially in use until 1956 in China, and still employed in arts representations and other social practices as in the production of red strips of paper hanged on the two sides of many Chinese doors with couplets written on them, or those carved on stones in Chinese parks; nevertheless, the production of paintings and maps with multiple viewpoints in ancient China – though still practiced during the Qing dynasty as attested by the “*Tai Shan Quan Tu*” (complete map of Tai Mountain)⁸⁵ – indicates that the reading of graphical representations was conceived, essentially, to allow the reading subject to visually penetrate the painting or map from diverse entry points, as the vertical text in the *image three* is not complementary to the (horizontal) text that it simultaneously creates, rather it assigns to the whole image an alternative entry point for the reading of the digital representation. In this sense, if one is accustomed to the above mentioned 3G technology platform (iBokan wisdom), and is thus able to recognize it (vertically) before reading the text horizontally, does not only visually enters the image from an alternative point of view, but he or she will also be affected by its instrumental function in the overall narrativity of the image, as it has been stated above with regard to the *agency function* of the vertical text.

There are two other written texts in the image, both of them at the bottom of it, respectively in the left and right side of the digital representation. The text on the left side comprises two different linguistic codes, chinese language and english language: “该图片由妒云恨雨 上传到” (gai tu pian you du yun hen yu shang chuan dao), meaning “*picture uploaded by envy-clouds-hate-rain*”, and right besides it the english reference “*Club.China.com*”, which is the same text that we find on the bottom-right side of the image, but this time produced as a logo and with the chinese reference right below it “中华网论坛” (zhonghua wang luntan), that is the chinese equivalent of *Club.China.com*.

At the beginning of this analysys, I pointed out how the *image three* has been found on the BBS page of the *zhongsou.com* website, but before disclosing some

⁸⁴ Cordell D. K. Yee, “*Cartography in China - Chinese Cartography among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation*”, (p. 146), in J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Eds.), “*History of Cartography, (Volume Two) Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*, published by the University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁸⁵ IBIDEM. Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

interesting relations and information about the hosting website of the image, I wish to start by following the sign *Club.China.com* in order to trace back the original posting of the image before it got in the forum section of *zhongsou*, and try to understand better its motivations. As said above, in the *zhongsou.com* website the *image three* has been posted on 2012-05-30 at 12:52, while in the *Club.China.com* on 2012-05-30 at 11:26, meaning that the latter had posted the image prior than the former, but on the same day. The image has been posted by such 舒和钟甘 (shu he zhong gan), whose profile image is a red heart with the five chinese flag's stars, and the Chinese caption "*zhonghua wang zhongguo xin*", meaning "China's network, China's heart" as shown here:



It is even too easy to determine the feelings of attachment and belonging to the motherland of the above mentioned 舒和钟甘 (shu he zhong gan), author of the post. What is of concern here is why has the image been posted on the same day in two different sites, although both were forums (luntan), by two *Club.China.com* Internet users? The May 30, 2012 (date of the post), was the day prior to the 31th, which would have been the 25th "*World No-Tobacco Day*". In fact, since the 1950's many studies have demonstrated the risks for human health caused by tobacco, and the World Health Organization in November 1987 proposed to institute every year on April 7 the "*World No-Tobacco Day*" which started in 1988. Nonetheless, since 1989 the "*World No-Tobacco Day*" is celebrated each year world wide on May 31.

As such Lin Zexu becomes the medium of a transnational event, mediating the perception of a global sentiment (smoking harms your health) by way of a process of translation. Lin Zexu in the *image three* serves the need to accomodate the global, and therefore foreign, message into the system of symbols that circulates and are used in China. Then, it is not only a matter of conveying the message "smoke kills" on the day of the "*World No Tobacco Day*" in China. It rather is a matter of participating to a global event by means of a sentiment, which is addressed through the particular digital realization of Lin Zexu's image, and the

transposition of the value of its narrativity⁸⁶ (in the representation) to reality (the global event). Therefore the past is remembered, the community is re-imagined, tradition celebrated, authority re-emphasized, and participation (to a global righteous event) guaranteed.

The *image three* has been found in the BBS site of *zhongsou.com* Internet page. What is a BBS site? Bulletin Board Systems are internet forums and discussion boards. They are computerized systems used to exchange public messages and files, as well as learning about products and sometimes even making purchases through the BBS sites. Most bulletin boards serve specific interest groups, and many users also enjoy sharing stories about their personal life, publishing posts, participating in polls and enjoying the type of communication such sites provide. Currently about 70% of Chinese BBS sites use the Discuz! system. Discuz! is a software developed by Comsenz Technology Co., Ltd, and it is the most popular platform for BBS sites in China. Chinese internet users enjoy expressing themselves and their opinion on BBS sites, and the advent of social network hasn't decreased the use of BBS forums, rather it seems that BBS and social networks co-exist successfully in China's internet sphere. Lin Zexu's image has therefore been posted on such ensemble of media spaces where there is an infinite number of categories, article titles, posts, and internal pages where the flow of news is never ending. Such condition needs to be pointed out inasmuch as it may affects the reception of the meaning/ideology that any image conveys.

However, the website that hosts the BBS site where the *image three* of Lin Zexu has been posted is *zhongsou.com*, which after an attentive search has resulted being a Beijing-based leading third-generation search engine services and technology provider. Since its establishment in 2004 中搜网 (*zhongsou wang*) has been committed to the third generation of search engine technology providing Internet information search services to users and customers. To put it simple, 中搜网 (*zhongsou wang*) is a competitor of Google and Baidu as it functions as a search engine service for Internet users. The web search engine is designed to search for information on the World Wide Web or any kinds of web servers, but the precious characteristic of 中搜网 (*zhongsou wang*) is that its founder and CEO Chen Pei

⁸⁶ Hayden White, "The Narrativization of Real Events", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer, 1981), pp. 793-798, Published by "The University of Chicago Press".

released, in 2005, the first type of "Third Generation Chinese Search Engine" as chief designer. Chen Pei has developed a personal gateway from a single search engine, whose key technique combines search engine technology and personalized syndication technology. Compared with the competition (Google and Baidu) 中搜网 (Zhongsou Wang) facilitates the retrieval of real-time information and provides customized interactive services. The home page adopts a conventional vertical layout with a search box in the middle. The page also offers e-commerce search functionality, as well as vertical search functionality for companies, supply and demand, books, financial information, and others. The company generates revenue from offering business companies the chance of replacing or complementing their own single website with a higher or lower ranking on search results returned by the seven leading national portals (Sina, Sohu, Wangyi, Tom.com, 3721.com⁸⁷, 263.com) with whom zhongsou is affiliated.

As a tool to search for information, the search engine works as an immense online archive, which through customized applications and services provides information, demonstrating the media adaptation to cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic codes. Even though processes of globalization and of internationalization often “*are insensitive to deep cultural diversity*”⁸⁸, in the case of 中搜网 (Zhongsou Wang), the greater knowledge of the Chinese market – not only in terms of clients hoarding, but also of clients understanding – mostly made of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), allowed Chen Pei and his company to cut out Google from the Chinese market and launch a serious challenge to the most used Chinese research engine, Baidu. This kind of information are fundamental inasmuch as they define the context – which is neither political, nor economic, nor cultural, in the same way it is neither national, nor international, but a dense and complex hybridization of actors, agents, mediators, intermediaries that interact relying on systems of symbols that make up the networks in which they act – where certain aspects of nationalism (Lin Zexu’s heroism) go hand in hand with profound transnational processes (Google approaching Baidu to challenge Zhongsou in China); or where the historical shame

⁸⁷ In 2003 Yahoo has acquired 3721.com.

⁸⁸ Gunther Kress, “*Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: the potentials of new forms of text*”, (p. 3), in I. Synder (Ed.) “*Page to Screen: Taking Literacy Into the Electronic Era*” (p. 53-79), London and New York: Routledge.

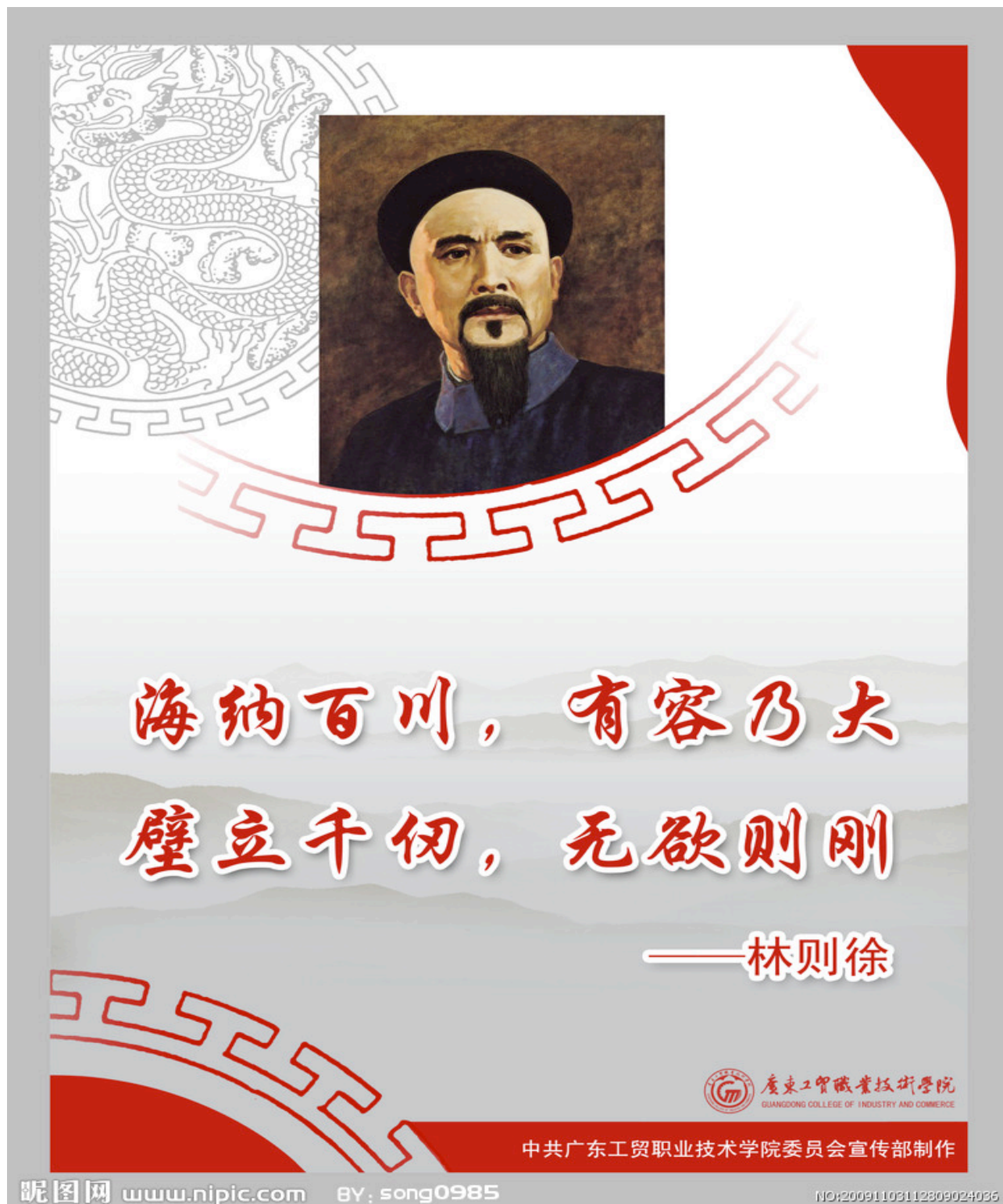
suffered for the Opium Wars (still conveyed by Lin Zexu's digital representation) is mediated by the IOS software highlighting advertisement banner; or again where the ethical and moral integrity communicated by the image of Lin Zexu is negotiated by the erotic appeal of nearly naked young women that show prosperous body forms, enticing one to articulate social desires and consequent needs (cosmetic surgery and so on). In this way Lin Zexu's images, along with many other online representations, becomes part of an online culture that supports the goals and interest of diverse social actors.

Furthermore, Chen Pei's designing of "Third Generation Chinese Search Engine" is not an isolated case of technological advancement in China, it rather is a contribution to an exceptional growing development of digital communications technology that precipitated what Esarey and Qiang define as the "Information Regime III": the digital age. As the authors explain "*by the early 2000's, millions of citizens had purchased telephones, cell phones, and personal computers and subscribed to broadband Internet service. A growing percentage of Chinese citizens gained the technological capability to express their views via digital networks around the country*"⁸⁹, as well as to rely to the same technology to get information and thus consume a well-structured knowledge of the world around them, allowing digital media to be integrated to people's mode of communication and ways of life, and to grant people, from diverse backgrounds, to share common experiences related to digital media.

⁸⁹ Ashley Esarey and Xiao Qiang, "Digital Communication and Political Change in China", (p.7), International Journal of Communication 5 (2011), 298–319.

- Image Four

名人名言林则徐图片



Lin Zexu – Image Four - <http://www.nipic.com/show/4/137/9a9aefa4d1f41a51.html>

The *image four* of Lin Zexu has been found by the author of this work on the Chinese website 昵图网 *Nipic.com*, posted by an anonymous user whose username is *song0985*, and uploaded on 2009/11/3. The user's only personal information provided, besides the pictures and images posted, is the "personalized message" 个性签名 (*ge xing qian ming*) published on the user's profile space and meant as a characteristic signature: 好好学习, 天天向上 (*hao hao xue xi, tian tian xiang shang*), "study hard and make progress every day". The website 昵图网 *Nipic.com* is a photo sharing network platform, intended for "*creating shared value*" 共享创造价值 (*gong xiang chuang zao jia zhi*) as stated in the website's logo. The website is an online platform that allows users to share photos, publish multimedia digital images, exchange amatorial photo creation, and even sell professional designed images. A website thought to be an online space where visual culture is not only produced, exhibited, exchanged, commercialized, and consumed; but a website in which *visuality* is the only thing that matters. Further information on the website and its role as an expression and producer of media culture, as well as the user *song0985*'s visual orientation will be provided later on, after Lin Zexu's image will have been detailed dissected.

The *image four* is a digital production, created through a raster graphics editor (photoshop)⁹⁰ with a *DPI* (dots per inch) resolution (分辨率) equal to 300dpi; it is made of 3455×4636 pixels (像素), using an RGB⁹¹ color model (颜色), whose overall format is PSD (CS2)⁹².

Besides the linguistic reference, that is one of many of Lin Zexu's exhortations, and which will be analysed later, the entire representation is characterised by four well-distiguishing features: the portrait of Lin Zexu in the upper-centred position, the dragon-alike image in the upper-left side, the traditional decorative auspicious pattern right above Lin Zexu's portrait as well as on the down-left side, and finally the foggy mountains as the background of the linguistic reference in the

⁹⁰ A raster graphics editor is a computer program that allows users to create and edit images on computer screens and save them in different formats such as JPEG, TIFF and so on.

⁹¹ RGB is the acronym for Red, Green, and Blue. It refers to the three hues of light that can be mixed together to form any color in digital production softwares. TVs and computer monitors use RGB to create colorful images on the screen.

⁹² A PSD file is a layered image file used in Adobe Photoshop. PSD, which stands for Photoshop Document, is the default format that Photoshop uses for saving data. CS2 refers to the 2005 Photoshop version.

lower side of the representation. The global meaning of the digital image, in the process of construction of the myth of Lin Zexu, conveys a comprehensive ethical and moral value inscribed in a standardized impression of Chineseness, communicated by the recurrent *Chinese* signs as are the dragon, the decorative pattern, and the foggy mountains. The portrait of Lin Zexu has been copied in a digital format by the user of the website 昵图网 *Nipic.com* from an existing oil painting (100x80cm), produced by the Inner-mongolian painter 王燕青 Wang Yanqing in 2006, resembling in my opinion the cinematic poster of Zheng Junli's 1959 movie "*Lin Zexu*", played by Chinese actor Zhan Dao. Although the whole ideology communicated by the 1959's movie offers a perspective on the issue of the opium war during the Great Leap Forward, and thus subject to major ideological concerns such as maoism (here meant as Maoist socialism opposed to Soviet socialism), imperialism, and anti-rightist campaigns among others; nevertheless, the ideology that Lin Zexu positively conveys in the present digital representation aims at different objectives: industrial and technological development, global trade promotion (these two archetypes also suggested by the logo of the "Guangdong College of Industry and Commerce" in the low-right side of the image), as well as more general modern paradigms such as progress, future, development, and historical linearity. It is clear that the ideology communicated is the result of the entire narrative made up by the relation between all the features displayed in the representation. Lin Zexu and the dragon for example, work together in constructing the ideology of technological development through the medium of water. According to Qiguang Zhao, in Chinese mythology, dragons (as the one featuring in the upper-left side of the image) are associated with and control of water in the context of a "Chinese hydraulic culture". *"The term "hydraulic," as Karl Wittfogel defines it, draws attention to the agromanageirial and agrobureaucratic character of Chinese civilization."*⁹³

For the ancient Chinese paesants the dragon has been a symbol (myth) of water power⁹⁴, and as such has always been connected not only with the geography of

⁹³ Qiguang Zhao, "*Chinese Mythology in the Context of Hydraulic Society*", (p.231-232), *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 48, 1989: 231-246.

⁹⁴ *"Like legendary Yu, the dragon is a product of the hydraulic system. The royal position of the Chinese mythological dragon should be attributed to the early integration of water control and national leadership, started in Xia Dynasty with Yu as its founding father. The dragon's behavior is that of a water god. It is believed " to descend into the waters at the autumnal equinoxes. At the vernal equinoxes, it rises from them and ascends into the sky " (XU 1972, Vol. 3, 30). It*

the country – “the names of forty Chinese rivers contain the word dragon”⁹⁵ 龙 (long) – but also with the figure of the emperor regulator of the water, consequently becoming a symbol of imperial authority: “Since 221 B.c., the time when Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 first styled himself Huangdi 黄帝 (emperor), the term wang has denoted merely the local ruler. Having achieved its greatest degree of transfiguration, the Chinese mythological dragon emblemizes imperial power.”⁹⁶ In fact an alternative attribution to the emperor was 真龙天子 (zhenlong tianzi), to indicate the “true dragon emperor”. It is also reasonable to think that the symbol of the dragon in the *image four* refers to a mere expression of Chinese (traditional) popular culture, where the dragons stands just for *China*, without any further meaning. Nonetheless, its association with Lin Zexu in the context of the opium war, and with regard to the new ideology inscribed, since the Reform period (1978), into the representation of Lin Zexu as the promoter of technological advancement, after having suffered but understood – though too late – the “water despotism” of the British navy as a result of their superior naval force, it is plausible to think that the two features – Lin Zexu and the dragon – make use of the medium “water” as an agency that communicates the ideology of progress. Indeed Lin Zexu, during his assignment in Guangzhou as imperial commissioner, employed four assistant translators in order to obtain adequate Western sources of knowledge to better understand the origin of the British technical superiority in shipbuilding. Lin Zexu therefore had the 1834 *Encyclopedia of Geography*⁹⁷ written by Hugh Murray translated as the *Geography of the Four Continents* (四洲志), becoming the source for the geographic treatise “*Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries*” *haiguo tuzhi* (海

rides on the wind and clouds; its very breadth, condensed, forms the rain - not only the gentle rains of spring and summer, but the fierce storms that make rivers overflow their banks. The dragon's spiral paths to the highest heavens form tornadoes, whirlwinds, and waterspouts.” In Qiguang Zhao, “Chinese Mythology in the Context of Hydraulic Society”, (p.234-235), *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 48, 1989: 231-246.

⁹⁵ IBIDEM see pages 236-237 for a list of Chinese rivers containing the word dragon 龙 (long).

⁹⁶ IBIDEM (p.241).

⁹⁷ Hugh Murray, William Wallace, Robert Jameson, Sir William Jackson Hooker, William Swainson, “*The Encyclopedia of Geography: Comprising a Complete Description of the Earth, Physical, Statistical, Civil, and Political*”, Longmans, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, (1834).

國圖志) written and published in 1844 by Wei Yuan⁹⁸ (魏源). This is to say that Lin Zexu's contribution to the development of Chinese social and political thought wasn't directed only toward the understanding of the world in terms of geographycal mapping and/or location of the western powers, but was rather focused in mastering the fundamental views and ideas that had made, at that time, Western science so vital. In this sense should, in my opinion, be read the correlation between the dragon and Lin Zexu in the *image four*, the dragon as the symbol of water and the myth of imperial authority (originated from the hydraulic water control), and Lin Zexu as the master heroic patriot which understood the necessity to “*employ the superior techniques of the barbarians in order to control them*”⁹⁹, namely the techniques of shipbuilding (but not only) to win the dominion of the British in the oceans. These two myths together, make use of the most powerful semiotic resources to convey a sense of power and authority as well as a strong exhortation to make progress in every field of science. In this respect should indeed be comprehended the logo of the “Guangdong College of Industry and Commerce” (广东工贸职业技术学院) in the low-right side of the image. A university institution that offers knowledge and career opportunities in diverse sectors within the fields of industry and commerce: computer network technology (计算机网络技术), computer software (计算机软件技术), computer multimedia technology (计算机多媒体技术), software outsourcing services (软件外包服务), computer information management (计算机信息管理), computer art and design (电脑艺术设计), networking application technology (物联网应用技术), computer application technology (计算机应用技术). The relationship of Lin Zexu and the dragon with the Guangdong College of Industry and Commerce, confirms, again, the myth of Lin Zexu in contemporary China, the patriotic hero that looks at the future and promotes progress.

⁹⁸ Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) was a late Qing period philosopher and writer. He also participated in the translation of Hugh Murray's “*Encyclopaedia of Geography*” that was published by Lin Zexu as 四洲志 “*Geography of the Four Continents*”.

⁹⁹ 魏源 Wei Yuan. 海國圖誌 Haiguo tuzhi (Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries). 50 卷 juan in 2 ze. 1844; 60 卷 juan. 2nd ed. 1847; 100 卷 juan. 3d ed. Yangzhou, 1852. In Sergey Vradiy, “*The Interest in World Geography in 19th Century China and “Fundamental Information about the Russian State” by Lin Zexu*”, Slavic Research Center (June-October 2008).

However, there are two more Chinese traditional characteristics in the image that reinforce the sense of Chineseness mentioned above: the decorative patterns and the foggy mountains. The decorative patterns are produced through computer-generated programs which offer many algorithmic possibilities for creating two-dimensional decorative effects, showing also the convergence between traditional decorative design models and modern technology.¹⁰⁰ Chinese traditional decorative patterns are part of a rich and wealth heritage of Chinese visual art; an art that today contributes to nurture the representation of Chinese official culture in China as well as worldwide. Nevertheless, as Chi Han warns us “*if just only blindly indulging in the tradition and simply copy it (the traditional decorative patterns) to today’s works while no new nutrition, it will doom to die, and we will eventually face a large number of antique copies in our times.*”¹⁰¹ Many of these decorative patterns have different meanings, depending on the context in which they are used or the context that they make up. Usually they possess a general meaning of “auspiciousness” and “fortune”, though in the digital *image four* further meanings can be individuated. The symmetrical open rectangulars that seem to be hanged to the curve but straight line (the term *straight* here indicates a progressive pace) signify rationalized repetition, indicating that what has been achieved in the entire history of China is maintained and used, while the straight curve line that goes upward expresses the evolution and progression of Chinese civilization toward a brilliant future. The image of Lin Zexu right above the decorative pattern emphasizes this sense of direction and progress.

As for the foggy mountains, they have the role to increase and underline the Chineseness and the identification of it with Chinese culture, for the reference to traditional Chinese paintings is clear. Furthermore, the infinite horizon that the reproduction displays supplement the idea of looking onward, facing the future that has to come. Moreover, if all the features of the *image four* are made spoken together and not individually, they all express “*direction*” (the line of the decorative patterns and the gaze of Lin Zexu) and “*open spaces*” intended as an

¹⁰⁰ Kulwant Singh, Atul Kumar, Nitin Sharma, “*The Mathematical Aspects in Art to Create Decorative Effect in Design Patterns*”, International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE) ISSN: 2278-3075, Volume-2, Issue-2, January 2013.

¹⁰¹ Chi Han, “*A Study on Application of Chinese Auspicious Pattern in Modern Design*”, Asian Social Science; Vol. 10, No. 12; 2014 ISSN, 1911-2017 E-ISSN 1911-2025, Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education.

infinite world where the Chinese nation might culturally expand (the water reference of the dragon as well as the intertextuality implicit in Lin Zexu's attempt to achieve the dominance in the oceans, and the landscape offered by the mountains). But that is not all.

There is an important linguistic reference that provides the codes and keys to understand the image:

海纳百川 (hai na bai chuan), 有容乃大 (you rong nai da)

壁立千仞 (bi li qian ren), 无欲则刚 (wu yu ze gang)

"The sea can contain thousand of rivers because posses the virtue of tolerance".

"The cliff can stand high because has not desires".

Meaning: People must be educate to be tolerant and open-minded, and refuse useless desires to stand strong facing life.

Again, the sense of direction embodied in the myhtology of Lin Zexu is expressed to naturalize the course of Chinese society since the opening and reform undertaken by Deng Xiaoping's policy, and improved since then. And again tradition and present, if not future, meet to create a historical sense of progression and belonging; in fact not only Lin Zexu is recalled, but also specific forms of civic education (and in a confucian style) are reproduced.

Finally, with regard to the role of the *image four* in the website 昵图网 *Nipic.com*, although at first sight it would seem that the representation of Lin Zexu has been made to represent or promote the Guangdong College of Industry and Commerce as a part of their promotional strategy – for the presence of the logo of the University would lead anyone to think so – I've come to the conclusion that considered one the aim of the website 昵图网 *Nipic.com* – 如果你想出售自己的设计、摄影作品, 昵图网同样能够满足你 – as stated in their presentation page, it deals predominantly with a specific global commercial service known as "crowdsourcing", more specifically called "crowdsource design", which is the process of getting a specific work (design of fashion, furniture, logos and so on) done by many people, which somehow compete (usually online) each other in order to see their own work chosen, for a specific commercial need, by private

companies and/or multinationals. In addition to this, an analysis of further images posted and produced by the user *song0985* seems to confirm the crowdsourcing function of the *image four*, as many other digital productions have been found on his/her profile with similar characteristics and, apparently, with the same commercial and consuming destination, for I failed to find the same images in the websites, the logos of the images where supposed to lead me to. Therefore, the *image four* of Lin Zexu might be considered as a media product whose hybridity and multipositionality stems “*from its complex interaction and entanglement with globalization*”¹⁰² (Liu Kang 2004: 13) and global capitalism, being part of a contemporary visual culture which constantly produces and changes identities, values, and subjectivities; and where the process of decoding of an image is mediated by ever-changing advertisements brightly shining, and often overlapping the image itself, with meanings and ideologies of various nature, but seemingly entrenched with a consuming culture that produces popular cultural forms, which in turn impose themselves on the people as the everyday life.

- Image Five



Lin Zexu - Image Five - <http://pm.findart.com.cn/bigimg.php?aid=967022>

¹⁰² Liu Kang, “*Globalization and cultural trends in China*”, (p.13), University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004.

The *image five* of Lin Zexu has been found on the website *findart.com.cn*¹⁰³ (搜艺搜), an online Chinese search engine dedicated to the research of pieces of art to be sold at (online) public auctions. The image is a digital re-production (JPEG) made of 800(height) x 396(width) pixels (像素), with a *DPI* (dots per inch) resolution (分辨率) equal to 72dpi, using a generic RGB color model (颜色). It specifically is a digital reproduction of an oil on canvas, produced in 1999 by Chinese painter Guo Beiping 郭北平 (1949) in occasion of the celebration for the returning of Macau to China's sovereignty. The painting is a super size historical oil painting entitled 林则徐视察澳门 (Lin Zexu inspects Macau). The painting is three meters wide and six meters long. It records a rare known historical event prior to the 1840's Opium War. Lin Zexu, the representative of the Emperor Daoguang of Qing Dynasty, visited Macau and expressed the Emperor's favour and cares to the Macau people and the Portugal residences. The painting made three records in Chinese art history: the largest size, the most figures, and the shortest period of time (it's been produced in less than three months).

The painting has been object of exhibitions, as well as prizes:

- in 1999 林则徐视察澳门 (Lin Zexu inspects Macau) participated in a Beijing exhibition in the "China Revolutionary Museum" (中国革命博物馆), Chinese History Museum (中国历史博物馆), to celebrate the return of Macao to the motherland, promoted by the People's Republic of China, Ministry of Culture.
- in 2000 it has been exhibited in Macau in the context of the 中国艺术大展 "Chinese Art Exhibition".

In both occasions the 郭北平 Guo Beiping's painting has been awarded a prize: the "Gold Award" (获金奖), and the "*work n°1*" by the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao Special Administrative Region (澳门特别行政区政府文化局). It is also said that Guo Beiping (郭北平) in order to meet the timeline of the celebration of the return of Macau to China's motherland, after having been asked by the Ministry

¹⁰³ The following is the complete Internet address of the website where the *image five* of Lin Zexu has been found: <http://pm.findart.com.cn/bigimg.php?aid=967022>.

of Culture to paint a celebrating art-work, painstakingly undertook the task working fourteen hours per day, and successfully finishing the painting in 100 days.

Guo Beiping (郭北平) was born in 1949 in the northwest Chinese province, Shaanxi (陕西省), being one of the best student of art of the only art school of Xi'an (西安市). During the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命) Guo Beiping was sent in the north side of Shaanxi province, in a poor and isolated area and was assigned to a small unit of work composed only of five people. In this period he had contact and experience with people and social conditions that might have influenced his painting attitude and subjects (mostly portraits and figures studies) that often appear in an ideal-space and/or historical background. Guo Beiping oil painting art is considered to be realistic with abstract expressions, both elements rooted in realistic and idealistic feelings that tell the historical vicissitudes of life of the figures that he has been painting. In the context of a historical Chinese culture, that is the progressive evolutionary orientation so much debated among Chinese scholars and non, realism as a category of ideology stands as a sort of universal humanism whose credibility lies in its "*melodramatic and sentimental*" critic of a deplorable human condition in China, thus regarding the *grandnarratives* and the entire architecture of enlightenment as the source through which is possible to leap forward to a better future. In this sense most of Guo Beiping's works depict human figures belonging to a revolutionary, as well as to a post-revolutionary condition, revealing a modern frustration in the eternal search for alternatives. In this way should be understood the role Guo Beiping, as an institutionalized personality, and the work 林则徐视察澳门 (Lin Zexu inspects Macau) play, as a representative of the so called "official culture". In fact, he currently serves as vice president, professor and doctoral tutor of Xi'an Academy of Fine Art 西安美术学院 (AFA) as well as council member of China Oil Painting Society. He is also considered to be one of the most important Chinese artist able to understand the inner essence of Western oil painting adapted to the Oriental aesthetic ideal. Indeed, the American Oil & Acrylic Painter's Society granted Guo Beiping its overseas membership, becoming the first and the only Chinese artist who received the honor.

As for the *image five*, the digital reproduction stands in a particular relation to the *original* Guo Beiping's painting. Walter Benjamin explains that "*what whiteners in*

*the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art*¹⁰⁴, where for loss of aura he intended a meaning that goes beyond the artistic environment. The reproduction in series of the Guo Beiping's painting 林则徐视察澳门 (Lin Zexu inspects Macau) in a digital format, perturb the function of the work of art, actualizing and incorporating it into the present condition both of the viewer and of the dominating ideology. If the *original* painting's function, at the time of its production, served the propagandistic need of celebrating a collective national moment, namely the return of Macau under the authority of the motherland China, and thus performing an ideology necessary for that specific historical moment – recall the humiliation of the opium war, reaffirm China's nationalism as central, reshape the *other*, and so on – the technical reproduction, as Benjamin calls it, surely serves many other needs. In the context of a nation building-process and of mass consumption, popular cultural forms work by approaching the masses as close as possible, both spatially and humanly; they almost interactively engage the viewer/consumer within the logic of possession. The media product as the *image five* is, being digital and online, has the ability to enter collective and private spaces in such a way that the original could not in any case; in the best situation, that of a public exhibition, there would be some hundreds of people that might hierchically and in an organized mode visually access the *original*. The digital image possess a pervasiveness that isn't comparable to the private, sometimes isolated *original* work of art. In this sense, the technical reproduction of the image of Lin Zexu is only a way of calling the gaze that hides its functional, interested and partial nature, a nature that cannot be defined neither as political, nor as economical for these two terms represent a reduction of the reality in which this reproduction consume its life as a cultural form. I haven't yet delineated the global commercial role of the website in which the *image five* has been found – an online Chinese search engine dedicated to the research of piece of art to be sold at (online) public auctions – nevertheless it is possible to distinguish the *image five*'s characteristic as a media product. First of all, the digital reproduction is positioned within a context, the website, itself expression of an ideological process. Within the website it immediately becomes an object of consumption in two specific terms; one through

¹⁰⁴ Walter Benjamin, “*L’opera d’arte nell’epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*”. Arte e società di massa, trad. it. di Enrico Filippini, Einaudi, Torino 1966, 1991 e 1998.

a visual consumption (if one just look at it), and the other through a previously, imagined and strongly idealized tactile feeling that the desire of possessing the thing is able to convey (for example if one pays the best price and award the auction, or in case the user requests to rent the piece of art for an exhibition). Furthermore, in the moment in which the image is visualized, it is said to enter the context (meant as the reality in which the user lives) of the viewer, when instead it contributes to construct around the viewer that sense of everyday life that the media and their products constitute, providing a mediated reality that naturalizes itself. The observer also adjust itself, both physically and cognitively, to the image. It does so by positioning itself in a centered position; he or she is allowed to observe, through the focus options that the media offers, details of the digital image that otherwise wouldn't have been noticed; the user ideologically understand the image – or at least this is what is expected to do – by attaching to it an economic, commercial value that the website *findart.com.cn* (搜艺搜) conveys with its expressed scope (the two banners, for instance, that appear on the left and right side of the screen displaying an object with a price of 600 yuan underlined by the red color).

Moreover, the specific subject of the image – Lin Zexu in its imperial fashion standing elevated in front of the Macau officials and populace, gathered there to celebrate his visit right after the burning of opium in Humen in 1939 – with its strong ideological meaning, doesn't allow for a critical review of the image itself, as it is the celebration of a national hero whose importance and relevance in Chinese history is inscribed in the cognitive imagining of the nation itself.

However, deconstructing the *image five* by labeling it only as a commodity would mean limiting this analysis to a Marxist interpretation. In turn, I would like to direct the investigation toward a questioning of the modern dichotomies such as local-global, East-West, high-low, art-commercialism. The network in which the *image five* is embedded and that it constitutes, overcome the modern binary system because the network itself excludes constrictions that are not in play. It would be too easy to define the image of Lin Zexu only as an opposition of the local (the closed China in the 1840's) and the global (the British empire and its imperialism); or the opposition between the self (china) and the other (the colonialist portuguese in the representation). “*Visuality in contemporary China*”, as Sheldon H. Lu

maintains, “*partakes of a transnational cross-cultural politics of representation*”¹⁰⁵, and Lin Zexu’s image as a cultural form that circulates online, within a website that supposedly promotes art as a commodity, and which surely promotes visuality as a value, becomes part of a transnational flow of images and capital that constantly reshapes fixed terms and dichotomies such as nation, subjectivity and experience itself. Knowledge becomes a mediated and mediatized space, within which the symbolic environment is nurtured by the media that serves both as the projection technology, and as the content of the symbolic environment. Therefore the network building process as an emancipatory practice that destabilizes superimposed, transcended, immobile and fix structures.

Lin Zexu in the *image five* becomes a historical perspective; a firm grasp of history; a mediated access to past and present; a strategy to contain national fragmentation both from outside (transnational culture) and inside (subnational expressions of culture, economy, politics and altogether), through the displacement of its images which create a national space in the attempt to achieve national homogenization; it becomes the appropriation of the *other* as history, and the appropriation of *itself* through the other; it is a specific mode of temporal engagement through which memory is enacted; a commercial form of popular culture; a masculine national ideal; an instigator of cultural predation and consumistic anxiety; a sign of high culture within a restricted elitist group of art experts or collectionist. It is a symbol of capital flow, as when the original Guo Beiping’s painting has been sold in 2007 at a public auction for Yuan 8,690,000. It also becomes a sign of China’s transnational competitiveness if one looks or has knowledge of China’s success in the global auction market. In fact, according to the 2011-2012 “The Artprice Annual Report” “*China, has become the most upscale in the world*”, accounting for the “*90% of the Asian market and generated € 109 million more from Contemporary art than the United States from approximately the same number of works sold (China and the USA each accounted for about 15% of global transactions).*” The same can be said if one looks to these financial trade, which the image of Lin Zexu is part of, has led to: “*the creation of the first financial centre dedicated to art in the city of Xiamen. The International Art & Xiamen Financial*

¹⁰⁵ Sheldon H. Lu, “*China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*”, (p.218), Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2001

*Center is a project implemented by Beijing Huachen Auctions, the 24th auction company in the world for Contemporary art sales, to try to impose a new platform via exhibitions, auctions and other services linked to art and its market.”*¹⁰⁶

Finally Lin Zexu's *image five* as representative of a particular technological advancement, of a distinct political commitment and economic development.

Lin Zexu as a specific visualization practice.

- Conclusion

The myth of Lin Zexu expressed in the images above is thus a series of digital representations that the viewers, purposely or not, visualize on a digital screen in interaction with other (digital) popular, commercial elements – ads and links. As with the digitality of the illustrations, the viewer's *interaction* with the images is very limited, if not completely absent, meaning that there is not a massive participation of the senses, as it would be in the case of virtual reality, where the positioning of the viewer in a parallel reality necessitate an important physical (bodily) involvement (Sampanikou, Kawa, 2006). The term *dynamic* would perhaps be more appropriate to characterize these images of Lin Zexu, for they are produced and set in order to dialogue with the (written) texts which, though are detached from them, are an essential part in the general economy of the representations.¹⁰⁷

However, Lin Zexu's myth is the product of a digital technology (computer graphics using rasters and vectors to construct the images, illustrated in the previous pages of this chapter), which is part of a digital environment (Sampanikou, Kawa, 2006) that embraces almost all fields of visual arts at professional and non-professional levels, directly serving the web pages's content of which the Internet is populated. The images of Lin Zexu displayed in this chapter are part of the state's aim of nurturing an online culture that support its goals and

¹⁰⁶ “The Artprice Annual Report”, 2011-2012, founded by Thierry Ehrmann.

¹⁰⁷ As I have pointed out the producers of the images, having the power over their digital quality are able to create a a-historical face/body which doesn't correspond to the accepted physiognomy historically attributed to *Lin Zexu*. In this sense the written texts accompanying all images, allow the viewers to recognize the national hero (民族英雄).

objectives. China's post-industrial condition – represented by its information-based economy – enables, both directly and indirectly, a multitude of actors to make use of “*visual forms of representation and communication*” (Gunter Kress, 2004: 2), here epitomized in the digital images of Lin Zexu, able to ideologically territorialize the *nation* and its imagining within the media space represented by the Internet. Computer graphics and design explicated in Lin Zexu's images and essential to them, articulate a specific modality of visualization which, inasmuch as Timothy Mitchell (1988) has sustained, reveals the interested construction of an idea of reality that is always dependent on its (possible) representation(s), and the order of appearance that such representations put forward. The myth of Lin Zexu uttered in the digital images analysed above, indicate also the extent to which forms of nationalism and of ideologies in general, rely on the visual as a preferred mode “*for carrying and 'processing' great amounts of information*” (Gunter Kress, 2004: 2) that have been previously produced in a digital environment, where the producer – too often ontologically invisible to the viewer – enters and exits this cultural space (almost at its own pleasure), by virtue of the fact that it is the one who has produced it. It also becomes clear that as cultural expressions, Lin Zexu's images are part of a network of signs, or a *web of significance* (Geertz, 1973) that these signs convey, that the media technology of the Internet and of digital screens entwines.

Chapter III

Media Photographs of Lin Zexu

The present chapter deals with the media representations of Lin Zexu's celebratory and/or commemorative spaces in China. It aims at understanding what processes are involved in the production of media images (photographs and texts) that supposedly are representative of actual spaces – memorials, museums, squares – all dedicated and/or entitled to the historical figure of Lin Zexu. By relying on a plurality of approaches that question any institutionalized, self-evident interpretation of these representations, I suggest that media representations are used as complement to architecture, urban settings, historical artifacts (as in the case of museums), as well as to speeches and written texts in the production of space.

I also suggest, given the fact that each spatial organization requires an adequate system of representation of space, that the media have a direct relationship with a certain experience of space. In this sense, I will thence focus on the meanings and ideologies that legitimate specific visions of Chinese society, and norm distinct behaviours both within the media space – that is during the interaction with media technologies and culture – and in the physical spaces dedicated to Lin Zexu. Indeed, the apparently banal photographs of such commemorative places in which Lin Zexu is regarded, conceal a complex knitting of concrete social relations and social reproduction that regulate the way people make sense of social space, both physical and in the media.

Geography, cultural geography, has for long time reflected and debated on the role and significance of landscape practices, comprehended as a socially constructed form of knowledge (*Harley, 1988*) able to articulate and structure our understanding, and consequently our experience of the social.

As a means of representation, a medium which produces space and a miscellaneous of other cultural forms, landscape, to a great extent, approximates the outcomes – the naturalization of historical intentions – of present communicational media technology and content (pc, laptops, mobile phones, conveying images, texts, videos, and sounds); indeed, media representations due to their graphic nature,

more than often have the power to dispense their producer and promoter from social responsibilities and consequences; and landscape seems to resemble quite considerably this characteristic, being it visually acknowledged as the natural conformation of space or history.

Indeed, in the processes of production of space, both landscape and present media technology, besides the important fact of being themselves the final result of such productions and, therefore, being forms of social space of their own, they also contribute to construct their *represented* spaces through modes that express impartiality, objectivity, inevitability and certainty; whereas the values, beliefs and principles designating those spaces are produced as processes dependent on human agencies and individual/collective interests.

The representations analysed in this study are, ostensibly, rendition of urban places and landscapes which, seemingly, are naturally bound to the mythical figure of the historical Lin Zexu, and thereby mythical themselves. These visual renditions of Lin Zexu's representational spaces, materialize in the form of digital photographs on different Chinese websites, and in most cases are accompanied by *parasitic* texts that *sublimate the images* (Barthes 1977: 25). The abundance of valuable images (photographs) springing from the Chinese Internet, and the necessity to assemble them in a manner that would help obtain a collection as assorted as possible, required, clearly enough, a discriminating reasoning that led to the choice of five images that best embody, in their discrete characteristics, a mythical quality of the space represented, produced.

The following explorations therefore aim at mapping a portion of the media terrain in China, intended as the battleground in which knowledge and culture are caught up merely as contingencies, that is to say in the moment of their production and communication, transversed by objects and people and their relations, united by system of ideologies that reproduce dominant social conventions (Kellner, 1980), and ripped apart by tensions and contradictions.

The media terrain within which Lin Zexu's places in the form of photographs are circulating, far from being conceived of as a grand abstraction, it is seen as a moment of interaction and convergency between actors (the producers of the photographs), agencies (the websites), and mediators (the Internet); each with their own profusion and/or scarcity of power, inspiration, leverage, impact, bias, and weakness that can only be assessed by examining case by case the circumstances in

which such qualities, as well as others, are carried out. The myth of Lin Zexu in its media forms has been an important contribution to the consolidation of Chinese nationalism, which has truly transformed the people's acknowledgement and relationship with the Chinese nation-state, its institutions, and the territory, triggering a strong sense of patriotism among the people, highlighting specific moral values and beliefs that contribute to the ideological construction of collective identities as the result of a definition of the *self* in contrast to an alleged *other*. The photographs of Lin Zexu's representational spaces analysed in this study are, as a mediating technology, knowledge in a double measure. As a result of an image focused onto film, or on a sensor made of pixels, these photographs are consolidated knowledge, stabilized in the form of their own functionality (photographs as form of communication, acknowledged through visualization). As the image displayed before a Chinese audience, as signs within networks of signs (the web pages' signs, but not limited to them), along with the specific way through which the photographs are displayed to, and decoded by the viewer(s), these photographs are fluid knowledge, spasmodic in character as they are dependent on, and subject to a variety of factors that might affect their decodification, both in terms of meaning production and of visualization practice (two separated processes that actually sustain each other) (*Barthes, 1977; Berger, 1982*). Therefore Lin Zexu's representational spaces, (digitally) materialized in the form of photographs circulating in the Chinese Internet, inasmuch as they are a manifestation of culture – here intended, with Clifford Geertz (1973), as a network of signs producing a web of significance driving social action – necessarily come to be read (interpreted) in conjunction with other cultural signs, for instance those present in the web pages in which Lin Zexu's images have been found and somehow interfering with them (one may think at the advertisement banners that strike at once with the digital spectacularized light they make use of), or the previous knowledge (intertextuality) of the representations visualized.

For an analysis to be historical in character, to be contingent, requires that one looks at the object of enquiry to seek what it is dependent on, what it is subject to, and who it is determined by. Said in a succinct manner, one must direct his/her own investigation by asking what are the historical conditions of its existence? Let's then first define properly what this present attempt is dealing with, what is the object of its research in a more detailed manner, at cost of sounding a bit redundant.

As has been stated above, the focus of this study is on a number of photographs, five to be exact, found in different Chinese Internet websites, representing spaces – places and landscapes – commemorative or celebratory, probably both, of the historical figure of Lin Zexu. Spaces whose sense of history and past seem to be deeply rooted into the ground belonging to such sites, or felt as a breeze in the air reminiscent of the (secular) sacredness of the national past. Such is the power of history..... or was it of space? And what about the photographs then?

Seemingly, three elements challenge as early as at this stage the analysis on the media representations collected for this study; and precisely from this, from the significance of media representation I intend to start weaving the network to which the media representations of Lin Zexu's places belong, both materially and discursively.

On the one hand, it is nowadays clear (or thus should perhaps be) how much and to what extent, a distinct cultural space, one that may be defined *media space*, is always at reach by means of technological devices. A space that can be entered and exited at one's own wish¹⁰⁸ by turning on and off pc, mobiles, laptops, (i)whatches, tablets, radio and television; a space literally populated by signs and signs only, whose visibility is dependent uniquely on the fact of being produced and arranged (and visualized of course) or not. From the graphical digital traits that make up words and punctuation, and which in turn create news articles, stories, reports, essays, studies, reviews, column, blogs, and so on, to the fabrication and fashion of digital images by means of computer softwares (CAD, CAE, CAM, CIM, and others)¹⁰⁹, that produce all the images we see for example on the Internet – except for photographs and film images, although these last two have joined the computer-graphic image manipulation family, too, and which in any case belong to the broader space of media products and signs. And if, as Clifford Geertz maintains, we understand culture as a system of signs that has to be approached, among other ways, semiotically, we therefore defy the abstraction of culture itself and direct our attention to a conception of culture *seen* as a *web of significance* (C. Geertz, 1973) in which an extraordinary population of signs – *acting* within, and as a discursive

¹⁰⁸ Undeniably, this is a controversial subject, for media space is more and more producing the social space people live in, and has therefore rendered difficult any distinction between mediated and unmediated space/activity.

¹⁰⁹ Computer Aided Design, Computer Aided Engineering, Computer Aided Manufacturing, Computer Integrated Manufacturing

practice – produce, mediate, and disseminate the material substance of power, knowledge.

On the other hand, the presence of mass media technological devices is becoming more and more intruding as they are invading the actual places we live in, both private and public – this last being a distinction that media are rendering extremely problematic – imposing their cultural forms and logic (practices and performances) on people and institutions almost regardless of their dispositions, constitutions, and attitude; providing the means for the construction or implementation of subjectivity.

The spatialization of power performed by the media is therefore twofold, for it spatially distributes the means (the technological devices) through which the texture of the social world (signs, symbols) is conveyed and cognitively understood. The *media-as-techné*¹¹⁰, and the media as the signs communicated through the cultural forms produced, represent together, and to a great extent the main modality and content of culture. The technological devices used to convey the myth of Lin Zexu as its representational spaces in the form of digital photographs, spatialize power through the materialization of the communicative appliances and equipment (both the interface technology of communication such as laptop, TV, and mobile phones; and the technological resources that allow the former to function in specific ways, such as wires and cables to transmit signals, satellite signal receivers, routers), as well as through the digital renditions (the visualized) of the native house of Lin Zexu, of its Xinjian residency, or of its museum. Culture become in this way not only the product of media content, the sign communicated, but also of the modalities through which the content is produced/communicated/expressed. Lin Zexu's representational spaces indicate that culture itself is a form of spatialization of power, materially and cognitively. Clearly enough, the media does not provide the entirety of signs-traffic circulating in a society, nor is the only agency doing so. Nevertheless, the relevance of a media space within (Chinese) society is something that as much as it needs to be demonstrated and substantiated, it cannot surely be ignored.

¹¹⁰ The term *techné* here refers to the technologies used to set in motion communication. It refers to the communicative devices used to communicate (Pc, mobile phones, TV and so on). Clearly, it also entails the understanding of their workings.

Lin Zexu's media representations, or better the photographs and texts representing Lin Zexu's places are undoubtedly part of what constitutes Chinese society, this grand abstraction; and they are so in such a complicated and tortuous way as to justify the following explorations. Lin Zexu's representations articulate conflicts in order to legitimize power, to displace politics and knowledge, and to control the ongoing social transformations and crisis experienced by society at large and by the Chinese state; but what distinguishes this study, is that Lin Zexu's media representations are, most importantly, the expression of the transformations caused by China's convergence with global capital and culture, as well as the expression of the role that the popular media had in facilitate this convergence, and of being simultaneously its product.

The common expression *Chinese society* in itself expresses vicious generalizations if not adequately grounded on actual cultural manifestations – material forms (the photographs uttering Lin Zexu's myth) and social practices (behaviours, for instance consuming the media forms of Lin Zexu) – that are generated by, and generate relations among themselves and others, the actors and agencies that produce, communicate, consume, or that in other ways interact with them. Things and people every moment perform some kind of interaction, constituting in this way relations that unfold in a variety of social formations. Interactions, relations, and formations, far from possessing fixed qualities that are common in time, are instead the result of specific historical conditions and negotiations that make them unpredictable and erratic. The media representations of Lin Zexu's places, as I stated above in a very abstract way, are part of a so called Chinese society. But if I attempt to reduce this generalization and start establishing a first qualitative contact with them, I would acknowledge them as being expressions of a Chinese media space – itself a generalization – in the form and content of photographs which have been found, by the author of this study, on the Internet. Although I'm in presence of a good deal of information that would allow me to identify additional elements and relations to further my enquiry, I wish to briefly stress that this analitical work is not an attempt oriented to provide an ontological status to the photographs analysed, as that would perhaps expose them too close to a metaphysics whose need for essences would make it incapable of grasping the processes that constitute them. Instead of asking the photographs *what they are*, I'm rather concerned with the question *how have they come to be produced as such?* and *how do they express*

themselves? These are in my opinion the kind of questions that problematise to a fair extent the object of this investigation.

A simple *thing* as a photograph of the Lin Zexu's stele in Shaojiao Fort (see page 11) is hardly regarded as problematic in its daily use and consumption, inasmuch as it seems to reveal itself completely in the moment of its visualization; such photograph, regardless of its content, is a banal object, something that may slip under anyone's nose without posing, ontologically, a serious challenge. The representations of Lin Zexu's places, the photographs of the sites in which its historical figure is highly regarded and payed homage to, notwithstanding the transiency of their occurrence in people's sight/understanding, are not only the expression of a media practice (their *in-place* production through the use of a camera, and their later positioning on an Internet web page) that make them potentially visible to a mass audience, but also of entanglements with social discourses – mainly originating from the same media – that motivate their existence and confer them the quality they possess. Such ideological discourses are, mostly, popular expressions of the historical figure of Lin Zexu, which the Chinese media have expanded to a considerable extent, and made them circulating within society as a natural and genuine cultural form intrinsically present in the alleged national territory of China. They are therefore constituted by cultural flows – connoting Lin Zexu's myth and other associated meanings – which never operate neutrally or unbiased, although the apparent narrative fragmentation they purportedly show (the fact of being isolated images) may lead one to think they are disconnected elements swaying uncontrolled; whereas their cross-reference to ongoing (national) discourses communicated by the overall media practice in China, “*allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it*” (Lyotard, 1984: 20).

At first must be registered the practice of making photographs. In fact, what urges this impulse and inspire or activate it, both at professional and amatorial level, is not at all banal, nor should it be taken for granted. In any case, making a photograph implies at a very basic level the fact of *being there* using a device able to record appearances. Lin Zexu's photographs analysed in this study, like computer-generated images, require their specific modalities of production both in technical terms and at level of intentionality, that's why it is necessary to follow them step by

step from their very conception till the moment in which arranged with a text they are displayed and visualized by people on a flat screen while surfing the Internet. Let's then approximate, for now, by saying that each of the images of Lin Zexu's place are taken *in-place* and consciously to record a moment or a thing, therefore with a distinct purpose. These same photographs of the Chinese hero's mythical places are usually transferred through various means to a computer, and from there uploaded to a website along with texts that *sublimate* the images. The moment in which the photographs are communicated via Internet – but it could be via television, or displayed on a screen in a Chinese metro train in the form of entertainment image or commercial, as it is very likely to be – in that instant the photographs are no more apparent banal objects among others, communicating images of reality, but become cultural forms connected with that Chinese media space I have mentioned above. This connection, far from being of little importance, transform the Lin Zexu's photographs considerably. Still, this transformation essential to our comprehension of the images and of the media space that the photographs contribute to create, require a prior appreciation of what a photograph in very general terms conveys. It is a denote message or a connoted one? It is a *message without a code*¹¹¹, or the coexistence of two messages? Is the message a translation or a quotation? Evidently we must be able to answer these questions before we embark trying to understand what a photograph becomes once it is mediated by a mass media communication technology.

With the aim of addressing a peculiar characteristic pertaining not to the media representation in general, but to the very subject of this study – the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu's representational spaces – I maintain that *media* photographs are those pictures that after having been taken by a photo camera (a media in itself) in-place, have been communicated through *other* media devices (here distinguished for their capacity of communicating informations to a broad audience) – television, Internet, entertainment display in public spaces and so on – to a mass audience, assimilating or embodying a *media logic* that I understand also as the capacity of media cultural forms and media representations in general to *sustain the coordination of social activities* and relations between various actors,

¹¹¹ Roland Barthes in “*Image, Music, Text*”, defines a *message without a code* the apparent (and only apparent) literal reproduction of reality that a photograph is able to reproduce, ostensibly claiming to be the perfect reproduction, and therefore beyond any ideology.

institution and people (André Jansson 2005: 27). I think for example at social discourses and practices such as politics, tourism or sport to name just a few, as actors and agents that make large use of media representations to express, hypothetically, legitimate visions of the world, of the social fabric, using their power (and that of the media) to create common sense: *objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic relations of power, in visions of the social world which contribute to ensuring the permanence of those relations of power. In the struggle for the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, in which science itself is inevitably involved, agents wield a power which is proportional to their symbolic capital, that is, to the recognition they receive from a group* (Pierre Bourdieu 1984: 238). The need to look at these two processes – Lin Zexu’s photographs *in-place* and the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu, is not dictated, as one might think by personal creativity, rather I think it is implicit in the way Lin Zexu’s photographs behave and express themselves in their entire existence, *in-place* and in the *media*. Here is a schematization that may help appreciate to a greater degree the point I wish to make clear:

<u>Photograph <i>in-place</i></u>	←←←→→→	<u><i>media</i> Photograph</u>
- small scale consumption		- large scale consumption
- low number of meanings conveyed		- high number of meanings conveyed
- low mobility		- high mobility
- practice type: landscape	←←←→→→	- practice type: <i>media logic</i> ¹¹²

As it shown above there are at least four different features distinguishable for the two kind of photographs. Photographs *in-place* are all those photographs that most people in their leisure time (but not necessarily), making more or less an amatorial use of a photo camera, take for personal reasons. Normally shared with very few people, photographs *in-place* are more than often taken by the same *subject* that charge them with personal meanings; meanings that are the by-product of the relationship – a practice or mode of relating to – established with the specific

¹¹² Media logic can be defined as the inherent rules that govern the mechanics of representation, or of display. The format, genre, style of storytelling, and “*the requirement to be successful in the battle for people’s attention*” (Strömbäck, 2008: 240).

space/place in which one shoots the photo. If the photograph is not materially uploaded in, and communicated by the media, then the number of people that are actually able to visualize it are controlled by the owner of the photograph itself (*small scale consumption*); it evidently follows that the meanings conveyed are limited because of the restricted number of people that look at it (*low number of meanings conveyed*). Stored on a device such as a mobile, pc, camera, or even framed, a photograph has not great chances of being an object of mass communication (*low mobility*).

Finally photographs *in-place* are the result of a practice that has its roots in the very way people understand and have experience of a specific sense of space, *landscape*. In fact, I argue that landscape as a category of knowledge, and thus within a distinct discourse peculiar to the idea of space and to its production has provided, and still does, *functional modes* of perception, interpretation, awareness, and assimilation of those qualities we conventionally ascribe to the category of space. These modes – examined in the following pages – are able to articulate different set of practices, making them appear as natural operations. What are then such *modes* embodied in the idea of landscape, and how do they work in order to articulate practices as ordinary as those concerned with the *production* of a photograph?

The two groups in the scheme aforementioned are organized as to indicate the data generated, according to their group of belonging. These features are therefore classed in compliance with the uniqueness of the group they are part of. Nevertheless, as it is visible, I have drawn arrows in between four elements; among the two main component constituting each section, namely photograph *in-place* and *media* photograph, and between the last two features of both units, that is *practice type: landscape* and *practice type: media logic*. The arrows clearly enough do not point toward one (progressive) direction only, but are rather reciprocal; they, in fact, exemplify the way the two photograph units inform each other through a constant flux of techniques and procedures – the *modes* mentioned above – that define, organize and naturalize the significance of a photo as a practice (*in-place*) and as a media experience (visualized through a mass media communication technology). Indeed, even though Lin Zexu's places photographs in the media, as we will see in the course of this analysis, has become something different, they nevertheless maintain and unsuspectingly convey those discursive conditions that had previously informed the photograph *in-place*, better known as landscape

practice. Therefore as these landscape practice's residuals become part of the photographs in the media, I argue that Lin Zexu's media photographs through the mythical aura they convey, work also in order to epitomize how space has to be seen or looked at, and how as a result has to be acknowledged, treated and practiced.

林则徐纪念碑破损亟待修葺



http://news.sun0769.com/dg/headnews/201507/t20150724_5640277.shtml

林公则徐纪念碑的碑沿已经出现脱落碑文化源远流长。在中国近代史的开篇地之一的虎门，沙角炮台的林公则徐纪念碑与爱民抢险七勇士纪念碑、新湾董德庚烈士纪念碑，除了能解读到林则徐的民族大义与解放军官兵的舍生取义，更能让人们知道虎门不同时期的人文发展。然而记者近日发现，上述纪念碑的现状令人担忧。¹¹³

¹¹³ The presence of shedding pieces in the commemorative stele of Lin Zexu, has already a long history. In China's modern history, the opening of Humen's Lin Zexu and the Seven Brave warriors commemorative stele in Shaojiao Fort, and the commemorative stele of the new bay Dong Degeng Martyrs, besides allowing the understanding of the overall national interest of Lin Zexu and the PLA's martyrs, it also allows people to know Humen's human development in

The above digital (media) photograph of Lin Zexu's commemorative Stele in the Shaojiao Fort, Humen County (Guangdong province), and the text that goes along with it, has been published on July 24, 2015 in the Chinese website 东莞阳光网 (*Dongguan Yinguang Network*) at the following Internet address www.sun0769.com. The website, opened since 2005, is a national key website sponsored by the Dongguan Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department, and Dongguan Radio and TV station. As one of the top ten national key *News* website in Guangdong Province, the *Dongguan Yinguang Network* is considered to be an influential local news portal, and it declares to be a network ethically bound to the "local community, to the nation's view, as well as being world-oriented", a three level network – regional, national, and global – whose all-encompassing orientation is made clear in the unterminable list of services that it provides to the networking community.

The press photograph and text have been published in the section *Dongguan Headnews* (东莞要闻) of the homonym website under the title "*The Damaged Lin Zexu's Commemorative Stele to be Urgently Repaired*", to denounce the damages on the Stele of Lin Zexu, and on the *Seven Brave Warriors* stele located in the same area, and to urge a sensibilization campaign in order to make people (yongs especially) understand the value of national heroes and patriots, and therefore to respect such (sacred) national spaces. This is the denoted message conveyed by the online article, clearly constituted by a photograph and a text. In fact, through the particular relation established by the two main elements, it is possible to produce a (denoted) meaning that, to say the least, is evident and quite indisputable. As a matter of fact, the photograph with its undiscussed (read: *alleged*) quality of quoting from reality without expressing any connotative dimension, provides realistically the forms (appearances) of reality. The text supports and carries out the argumentations that the photograph renders incontrovertible. We therefore see with our eyes, and without doubts read about the true existing damages on the stele of Lin Zexu.

different periods. However, journalists have recently discovered that the current situation of the above-mentioned steles is worrying.

Nonetheless, the press photograph and the text are able of providing a connotative dimension that contributes to the already existing and constant process of mythicization of the figure of Lin Zexu, this being an aspect that renders the physical place where the stele is located – Shaojiao Fort in Humen County (Guangdong province) – somehow sacred or mythological (the figure of Lin Zexu functioning as a signified); at the same time, the function of the media photograph and text, in the production of social space (both in the media and physical), and in the representation of places, confirms the ubiquity of historical contexts (in the exercise of politics, of economic practices, and in the production of media forms) in which the creation and staging of specific knowledge is the core process. This media representation becomes a dimension in which different contexts are fused together, the production of (national) history, the preservation of the nation-state, the affirmation of authority, and perhaps even the declaration of property rights. This narrative claims, pertaining to the connotative perimeter of the photograph and text, are attained through various expediences employed in the text. The photograph is the tangible, immobile arbiter that provides foundation and materiality to the content of the text, and this happens despite the fact that the text goes well beyond the narrow depiction of the photograph.

Lin Zexu, in the text, is addressed as the “honourable” Lin Zexu (林公则徐), the character *gong* 公 establishing at such an early stage (*gong* is the second character of the text) a permanent basis upon which re-construct (re-presenting) the myth of Lin Zexu, which as I said above functions as the main signified. The place is then rendered *nationally territorialized* through the communication of the presence of other two commemorative monuments dedicated to the *Seven Patriots Warriors* (爱民抢险七勇士), and to the grave of the martyr *Dongde Geng* (董德庚烈士). The damages on the stele become a mere excuse to express the national values the heroes convey 除了能解读到林则徐的民族大义与解放军官兵的舍生取义, and what they meant to the locals 更能让人们知道虎门不同时期的人文发展. Furthermore, the use of the characters *shen* 身 or *shangba* 伤疤, respectively meaning “body” and “wound/scar”, to represent the lesions and damages occurred to the monument, emphasize the embodiment of the myth of Lin Zexu in the stele itself, and thus making the overall national body (the stele but also the physical space that host it) literally *wounded* (伤疤). It is interesting noticing that the stele

of Lin Zexu has been built in the 1930's under the Guomindang ruling; the party symbol (the shining sun) is still visible in the upper part of the stele, within the crown that stands above the inscription 林公则徐纪念碑. This might be read as the contemporary convergence of a political vision between two historically antagonistic parties, the Guomindang (国民党) and the (present, or since Deng Xiaoping's) Chinese Communist Party (中国共产党), which see Lin Zexu not only as a way to bind the people to the territory, but also as a drive for economic purposes, functioning as a moral authority whose alleged desire for technological development – a narrative and meanings well conveyed in Xie Jin's 1997 blockbuster movie *The Opium War* (鸦片战争) – is naturalized by means of staging in specific ways different kind of representations. Much of the effort put on the narrativization of a digital representation of a place, and thus to the communication of precise meanings and ideologies, lies in the fact that collective memory, national memory, requires a commonality of experience to ensure that the process of decodification of the viewer reaches the (ideological) objective previously determined. In this way taking a photograph, one of the most ordinary action people perform daily, becomes a complex knitting of concrete social relations and social reproduction that regulate the way people make sense of social space, both physical and in the media.

As the opposite of a pindaric flight, the link between the photographs of Lin Zexu's places and landscape is the correlation of two cultural forms and two practices – we make, and look at photographs, as well as we engage with, and in, landscape – that beyond being bond by the fact that nowadays very often a photograph is a landscape, and a landscape becomes a photograph, implying therefore that they are determined by similar or even common constituents, they are more importantly informed by traditional assumptions on the idea of space as something existing prior to human action and understanding, something natural that can be found any moment, anywhere.

The comparison between Lin Zexu's places as photographs and landscape, is an effective tool to understand how, in a game of correspondance, photographs show the way people invent, embody, and perform landscape, both in-place and in the media. It also tells us how specific qualities attached to the visual sight are adopted uniformly, so much so that all that is made visible is at the same time arranged for the spectator (John Berger, 1982).

As a matter of fact the usage of photography in China¹¹⁴ as well as in other countries, has always been *intimately connected with making stage-sets, panoramas, and moving diaoramas* (Denis Cosgrove, 2003: 257), granting legitimacy to space as the natural, universal measure for imposing systems of classification and ordering. Photographs and landscapes need to be historically investigated in order to bring to light to what extent the production of those spaces that are supposed to embody and materialize the myth of Lin Zexu, and as the photograph of the stele shows, are connected to a precise idea of territory and of nation, to their scaling and mapping, fragmentation and unification; and to assess how much the mechanization of vision as a means for experiencing space – in locus and in the media – has made *representations* a powerful form for experiencing imagined geographies. Lin Zexu's images and the concept of landscape are both part of a system of certainties intrinsic in the way a *representation* is produced, communicated, and understood. However, they distinct themselves from other forms of representation, inasmuch as their claim to legitimacy seem to be constitutional of their form, that is, their claim to be exactly what they appear to be. They both pretend to speak to people through their very appearances (the Shaojiao

¹¹⁴ In China, photography, perhaps due to its mechanical origination, doesn't seem to have developed in ways dissimilar to those it did in Europe, meaning that its fundamental characteristic, that is being able to stop the flux of experience in a picture that quotes reality (appearances) as it is, has been regarded with the same enthusiastic and public praise it had in Europe. The "Opium war" period in China is traditionally considered to be the epoch of the blossoming of the photographic medium. The Western commercial interests, the opening of city-ports in China, and the treaty port system in general, increased the public curiosity toward China to an extent that European travelers and merchants had only started to feed. The establishment of photographic studios in the main coastal cities incremented the spreading of photographs of China in Europe – for the visual enlightenment of the European – but it also reached an indigenous audience, materializing through the spreading of native press agencies, which relied on the photographic industry that, in the short term, had boomed considerably (see Cody and Terpak, 2011). Photography has therefore been part of those technologies known among the Chinese population to be of colonial origins. The two best known Chinese commercial photographers in the second half of XIX century were Lai Afang (or Afong) (赖阿芳, 1839-1890), and Liang Shitai (also known as See Tay) active in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tianjin in the 1870s-1880s. Nevertheless, most accounts on photography in China are still focused on foreign photographers and collections, and the censorship exerted on photography by both the Chinese and Japanese governments from 1937 to 1949 – the years of the Sino-Japanese war and the Civil war – has perhaps precluded the springing of analysis and investigations on the early photography in China, from which present-day scholars would have strongly benefited. In fact, only recently scholars have started to pay much more attention on the development of the photographic medium in China, since during the Maoist era the Communist Party controlled the entirety of the media system, and accounts on previous photographs, even if possible, would have surely been doomed by the political orientation of the period, namely the Maoist ideology (Cody, Terpak, 2011). In any case, present-day photography and *media* photography in particular, seem to have reached a standardization as a global visual language, as to render it a conventional and innocent practice that serves a myriad of individual and collective, professional and amatorial activities and circumstances; and China is not an exception, it only needs to be addressed in its specificity, which is what the media photographs (and texts) of Lin Zexu's places are intended for, as the object of this study.

Fort as a sacred national space), their materiality (the damaged Stele of Lin Zexu), without any kind of cunning mediation of reality.

The media photographs of Lin Zexu's representative spaces epitomize the interrelation of spatial categories and media logic. The *media* photographs of the Chinese national hero, as the result of a landscape practice that informs photographs *in-place*, are concerned with representations and social interactions in specific spatial terms. The need for a comparative approach between *media* photograph and landscape lies exactly in this equation that makes Lin Zexu's representations relevant in media terms as much as in spatial ones. It is important to clarify that the idea of landscape is not of something that necessarily has to have mountains and forests, or rivers and valleys, or oceans and hills, as the canonical turistic conception of landscape would tell us. Landscape here is any land or area (any urban *place*) visualized from a previously determined, naturalized vantage point. A vantage point is any point that provides a perspective visualization of the object one looks at. As David Cosgrove declares, a vantage point serves to detach the viewer from the landscape, to put her/him in the outside, and thus establishing a correspondance appreciated through the reification of meanings that designates the boudaries of the landscape itself, *a relationship of dominance and subordination between differently located viewer and object vision* (D. Cosgrove, 2003: 254) from which many photographs are taken. The correlation between the capacity of the eye to register the external world – from a position outside, and seen as an object – and the specific imaginative faculty that renders a simple *sense impression* full of meaning, ordered and rational (even if abstract and chaotic), this correlation might be said to be at the roots of an aesthetic principle tied up with other distinct historical processes that constitute the (modern) *subject*, understood here as an individual with a precise way of seeing, experiencing space as landscape (the Shaojiao Fort for instance) and practices (the photograph of the Stele) according to common modes and procedures that have the power of turning *material space into landscape* (D. Cosgrove, 2003: 254).

Perspective imagines the world from the point of view of the seeing eye/subject, it emphasizes the dominant role of the visual in the understanding, as well as in the representing process, of reality as truth. That is the why we see the Stele of Lin Zexu from a point of view that probably anyone would consider normal. Perspective serves to naturalize the ideological origin of landscape practices that

people perform at Shaojiao Fort, and of one of its material outcome, the photograph of Lin Zexu's Stele. The naturalization process of the meanings encoded through the arrangement of the Stele at Shaojiao Fort (the landscape), which is seen from a specific designed vantage point, is aided by regarding *vision as a guarantor of truth* (D. Cosgrove, 2003: 258). Such truth, useless to say, is a national truth, possible to the extent that the vantage point and the encoded perspective from which is acknowledged, remain the main principles of the kind of visibility that Lin Zexu's spaces impose. Thence, each of Lin Zexu's image is a practice of visualization, a specific social order culturally established by the image itself, a cultural space projecting networks of meanings that create order producing a sense of reality, the nation. Lin Zexu's public spaces – the places in which its national figure is celebrated – are more than often represented from the same point of view, emphasizing perspective as the only natural vision. How many photographs of Tiananmen Square have we seen, both at professional and amateur level, that portray the Beijing symbol differently from the traditional view – Mao's picture at the center of the red wall between the two Chinese inscriptions, with the Chinese traditional architecture that arises behind it, the Chinese flag lifted on its flagpole, and the vast, huge space of the square that divides the viewer from its object.

In conclusion, what is central in the practice of landscape as one of the constitutional factors informing the way we make and understand photographs *in-place* and as the media photographs of Lin Zexu's representational places, is not what we see in it, the objects (the stele), natural or material, and the meanings (the territorialization/naturalization of national belonging and of national history), but how people see it, as *subjects* (national citizens) whose positionings – physical and cognitive – and way of seeing allow for a reading of the Shaojiao Fort not as a cultural text, namely the Shaojiao Fort as where the ideologies of Chinese societies are expressed and naturalized by means of its design and appearance, and reflected by people's visual measure established in relation to an object that is seen, and to which one does not belong (people's point of view is detached from the object); but by seeing it as the natural and eternal (traceable in history) convergence and expression of the bond (a bloody one) between the people and the territory, that sacred soil that still today may be homaged by the citizens by visiting it, or more simply by consuming it through a photograph circulating in the Internet. This is in my opinion the way photograph and landscape come to be part of a ubiquitous

discursive practice that connects space production, visualization practice, and representation within the same social network.

A *media* photograph of Lin Zexu's residence is among all things a photograph, and this is what needs to be looked at now. The Chinese Internet, just as any other Internets, allows enormous amounts of images to flow as an endless stream of messages and meanings that make up the content of communication. Of all the images that one may encounter during the use of the Internet, some are the product of softwares for computer-generating images, digital images; whereas other images are photographs. Photographs are said to be one way to capture reality as it is - the other is said to be videos (Barthes, 1977; Berger, 1982) – without interferences of sorts that somehow might construct (a false) reality. Photographs it is said, do not lie, they stand before our sight as analogon of reality. Other forms of representation are too much related to artistic conceptions, *creativity* or *inspiration*, they are too visibly the product of an expert who uses various means of production to generate them. Photographs instead are true – the advocate says.

To challenge this claim would be difficult for anyone if not adequately equipped with the necessary tools – *sight* is one of these – to approach a photograph. *Of all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by a 'denoted' message, a message which totally exhaust its mode of existence. In front of a photograph, the feeling of 'denotation', or if one prefers, of analogical plenitude, is so great that the description of a photograph is literally impossible; to describe consists precisely in joining to the denoted message a relay or second-order message derived from a code which is that of language and constituting in relation to the photographic analogue, however much care one takes to be exact, a connotation* (Roland barthes, 1977: 18). The perfect resemblance of the apperances that the above photograph of Lin Zexu's stele is able to convey, makes it difficult for anyone to speak of connotation (even though I have already demonstrated to what extent the text works precisely to this end); even the description of a photograph, maintains Barthes, would operate as to signify the denoted message, and thus building on a meaning created by the codification of a structure external to it, the language used to describe the image. Nonetheless, if one takes into account the production process of a photograph, and asks how the analogy with reality should be read, it might be the case that the general functioning pertaining to the shooting of the photograph

produces the conditions for a connotation to occur. In fact, as for any other image, the photograph of Lin Zexu's stele in Shaojiao Fort, in order to be visualized must first be produced, and the decisions taken during this process through the authority exercised by the photographer – the subject chosen, treated, and choreographed – as they correspond to aesthetical or ideological standards or models, they act as connotating factors producing specific effects (still objective in form) resulting in just as many meanings. These decisions the photographer takes, come into being through the employment of codes (the aesthetic, professional rules) that affect the reading of the image through its connection *to a traditional stock of signs* (R. Barthes, 1977: 19). In other kind of images different from photographs, the connotative message or dimension has the main task of, somehow, guiding *the navigation of meaning*, as Marcel Danesi sustains, through the representation's narrative. Ensured the presence of a connotation encoded in the photograph's production process – the aesthetic for instance – it is a matter of clarifying how this connotation develops and works in the overall reading of Lin Zexu's photographs.

Barthes sees the presence of denotation and connotation in a photograph as a paradox: *the photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogon), the other with a code (the 'art', or the treatment, or the 'writing', or the rethoric of the photograph); structurally, the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted and a connoted message (which is the – probably inevitable – status of all the forms of mass communication), it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message without a code* (R. Barthes, 1977: 19).

The difficulty in reading and treating properly the connotative dimension of Lin Zexu's representational places (photographs), lies in the peculiar collaboration between denotation and connotation; in fact the coded messages of such photographs, being the result of decisions applied on the broad class of aesthetic and technical treatments, are set apart from the entire structure. The recording effect provided by the photograph of the stele of Lin Zexu, the objectivity it is respected for, undermine the work and presence of those procedures that as a matter of fact affect the message of the photograph. The myth of its objectivity (the myth of the photograph) is built on two central aspects: the mechanicalness of the photograph origination, seen as a scientific instrument to capture reality as it is; and the photographer presence – the in-place practice I've underlined above – the *there* and

then awareness conveyed by any photographic image. What we have is a new time-space category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then. It is thus at the level of this denoted message or message without a code that the real unreality of the photograph can be fully understood: its unreality is that of the here-now, for the photograph is never experienced as illusion....its reality that of the having-been-there, for in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of this is how it was, giving us, by a precious miracle, a reality from which we are sheltered (R. Barthes, 1977: 44-45). This quality of quoting from reality, instead than of translating or transforming from it, allows a mechanism of naturalization to be laid at the expenses of any culturalization of the photograph, allowing the myth of Lin Zexu to be visualized as the natural expression of a historically existing, instead of created, space. The analogy of the appearances the photograph shows, has the power to naturalize the symbolic presence by means of its own forms, the denoted image. It follows that the cultural signs that are in the image (the stele) are considered to be found in nature or being its articulation. Nevertheless, we now know that photographs can be connoted through the use of certain procedures that sabotage – even if not acknowledged – the photograph claim of using a truthful and accurate language.

Barthes has identified six elements that, according to his reasoning, are able to impose a second meaning on the photographic message, a connotation. Those are respectively “*trick effects*”, “*pose*”, “*objects*”, “*photogenia*”, “*aestheticism*”, and “*syntax*” (see Barthes 1977: 21), qualified procedures that allow the reading of the signifieds of connotation. It is possible to say that these procedures connote the photograph from the inside, although in a paradoxical way; but it is also true that another element – this time external to the photograph’s structure – forces its way in, to burden the photograph with an additional connoted meaning, the text.

林则徐纪念馆



<http://spot.125uu.com/detail/linzexujinianguan>

蒲城县林则徐纪念馆位于陕西蒲城县城内权把巷六号，属县城繁华地段。该馆依托“林则徐寓所”（王鼎族弟王益谦家宅），由原县文化馆馆长高起胜及长子高小明个人出资历时五年创建起来的，整个建筑规模宏大，气势宏伟，庄严肃穆；院落里青砖漫地，飞檐斗拱，雕梁画栋，古色宜人，建筑面积1080平方米，是一座十分精美的清代宦官人家宅第，也是渭北保存最为完整的关中典型的四进室宅院。整个院落布满各色木雕、砖雕、石雕艺术品，雕刻手法娴熟，生动逼真，生意盎然，有出神入化之妙。该院内仅高浮雕看墙就有十多块，木雕有200多幅，各种砖雕就有数百种，雕刻有龙凤、鹿、狮、虎、猴、鼠、人物、花卉山水等。两边的走廊不但能观赏字画、花草也是游客休息的绝佳场所。¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ The Memorial Hall of Lin Zexu in Pucheng county is located in the alley 6 of the urban branch of Pucheng, in the Province of Shaanxi, belonging to a flourishing section of the county town. The museum relies on the residence of Lin Zexu, the former county cultural head-curators of the museum Qi Shengji, elder son of Gao Xiaoming, provided a personal contribution for a period of five years to the creation of the entire building's grand scale, its magnificence, the solemn atmosphere; the courtyard's disseminated bricks, the bracket's cornice, carved beams and painted rafter, the pleasant patina, constructed on a surface of 1080 square meters, it was a fine mansion of a eunuch during the Qing, and is also the best preserved four-room house typical of the Central Shaanxi plain. The whole courtyard is covered with coloured wood carving, tile carving, sculpture artworks, hand-carved sculptures, that are vivid, full of life, superb and wonderful. The courtyard had only a dozen high-relief on the wall, 200 pieces of carved woods, hundreds of tile carving, carved with dragon and phoenix, deer. Lions, tigers, monkeys, rats, figures, flowers, landscapes etc... At both sides of the corridor, not only can be appreciated the paintings, but the flowers and plants are also an excellent place to rest for the tourists.

The above media photograph and text have been found in the Chinese website 125 旅行网 (*luxingwang*) – 125 Travel Network - a network technology platform which provides comprehensive e-commerce services for the whole world of tourism enterprises and individuals. The website offers a full range of services both for enterprises interested in marketing and trading their touristic products and services, and for individual travelers who wish to purchase domestic and international air tickets, make hotel reservations, and be informed about the most popular attractions in various Chinese cities. In the specific, the above image displays a traditional Chinese construction that, as the text below the photograph informs us, is the Lin Zexu Memorial Hall in Pucheng County 蒲城县, a former residence of Lin Zexu in Shanxi province 陕西省. The text indeed provides a full and detailed, as well as partial description of the architectural design of the Qing dynasty residence, illustrating the size of the building and the material constituting the courtyard, praising the *vivid and full of life* wood and stone carvings, not to mention the numerous carved animals - dragon, lion, tiger, deer monkey, rat – and human figures, as well as paintings of flowers and plants in the traditional Chinese style, and landscape. All these details are apprehended only through, the reading of the text. The photograph is there to provide truthfulness to those objects that are nonetheless invisible.

It is however curious to notice that, in contrast with other representations, there is no mention of the heroic gestures of Lin Zexu as the national hero (民族英雄) of China. Nothing, apparently, seems to suggest, or attempts at conveying a mythical dimension to the media photograph and text. I say *apparently* because, as a matter of fact, it is identifiable an ideological representational strategy that conveys the myths, in the plural. Those are respectively, the myth of Lin Zexu and the myth of the *place*, and both originate from the *objects* described in the text, from the Qing dynasty architecture to the paintings, passing through the wood and stone carvings, and the human and animal figures, that create a narratological stage upon which an *imagined* historical richness of culture is set. The *objects* described become in this way *non-human* actors, or *mediators*, able of uttering meanings whose shape, entity and quality are defined by the *objects* themselves. The wood,

and stones and paintings missing in the photograph, but present in the text, are no more stable and predictable entities, but are instead put at the center of a negotiation of meanings that conveys the myth of *in-place* cultural patrimony, and of Lin Zexu. The text in fact imposes second-order signifieds which, depending on the hierarchical structure that holds the two – meaning the correlation that takes place among the text and the image (news article and commercial entertainment assign different role to text and image) – may characterize the text as *parasitic* or leading. It should be pointed out, though, that the figure of Lin Zexu may contribute to the mythification of such space if, as it is likely to be, there is a prior knowledge of its historical figure. The specificity in the construction of the myth(s) in the present photograph and text is accomplished by virtue of the capacity of these *objects* of translating, rather than transferring, specific knowledge. They take on the role of promoting – touristically – alleged long standing (Chinese) techniques, and (Chinese) procedures of manufacturing artifacts, worth to be appreciated for their beauty and emotional power historically. But they also take on the role of encouraging (human) actors, namely tourists, to socially respond, or react, to such an abundance of signs by subsuming the values they mediate.

The media photograph and text of Lin Zexu's place showed above is a cultural space of accumulation; accumulation of knowledge, of historical progression and unity, of identity, of separation from the *other*, of devotion, and of power. But it also is a space for the accumulation, arrangement, and ordering of *objects* that are dependent on spatial categories, to the construction of specific spatial codes – 两边的走廊不但能观赏字画、花草也是游客休息的绝佳场所 – that guide, even though only hypothetically, the readers/visitors's understanding (and behaviour if physically there) of such spaces.

As a platform serving the touristic industry, the website “125 Travel Network” by means of this media representation creates an imagined national-oriented tourism that relies on the invention of a tradition, and in the communication of historical myths within a nation-building process that undergoes market logics. Within this touristic logic, the *objects* represented in the text and only partially visible in the photograph, play a fundamental role as symbols that become part of a national heritage, creating a national past, a history of continuity. *More interesting from our point of view, is the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of*

a novel type for quite novel purposes. A large store of such materials is accumulated in the past of any society, and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is always available. Sometimes new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouse of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation (E. Hobsbawm, T. O. Ranger, 1983: 6). State interests, under the innocent label of “Industry of National Artistic Heritage”, and market interests, under the attractive practice of “Tourism”, intertwine each other within a media logic that makes ample use of the power of representation, and of a precise form of commercialization of history, for communicating visions of the world (and encouraging practices within it) that sustain those interests. These existing social relations, therefore, come to be concealed within a *web of significance* as symbols whose fashion is naturalized in the forms (and meanings) of media popular culture.

The photograph and text above result then to be a *partial* description of the architecture displayed and the *objects* narrated, as their treatment of time and space is not at all objective, nor pertain to an alleged denoted dimension a photograph is supposed to convey. Understanding this *partiality* means to get hold of the motivations that lie behind the manoeuvre that mystify what we *look at*. The production of the present photograph and text being published in the *125 Travel Network*, has an objective, a goal, that is quite obvious – motivating people to practice tourism, which in turn means to consume cultural forms, and to embody landscape. In order to do so, the photograph and the text rely on already established social conventions that regard cultural relics, works of art, national heritage and other such places (museums, themed parks, landscapes, gentrified city centers and so on) as valuable spaces. This conventions though – they have been partly analysed in the present study when the concept of *landscape practice* has been treated – seem to me to have been entirely misconceived, indeed the word *convention* entails the acceptance of a certain behaviour for specific, accepted reasons; and I personally doubt that this would be the case. Nevertheless, they have not always been present, but are rather young and in constant evolution. This *conventions*, I maintain, belong to the transcendental category of space, to a certain way of conceiving space in all its contemporary facets and scales – local, regional, national, global, but also urban space, rural space, public space, private space,

natural space, restraining space, wild space and so on ad infinitum, and to the immanent mechanic of photographs. In China, this conception of space has been impressed in its present form when the abstract term of *modernization* – with its corollary of paradigms as nation, development, culture, society, subject – invested China with the Western discourse of modernity as a universal signifier (Oakes 1995: 98). The *media* photograph of Lin Zexu's places displayed above, offer a "*profound mythology of space*", as David Harvey would perhaps say; a mythology that participates of, and sustains the language through which Lin Zexu as a myth is acknowledged; even so, as an historical knowledge and a form of collective memory, this mythology of space is an independent and comprehensive mythic framework that signifies culture as *essentialist*: "*the idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of a stable territorialized existence (Clifford, 1988: 338). Here, culture and nation are kindred concepts: they are not only spatializing but territorializing; they both depend on a cultural essentialism that readily takes on arborescent form*" (L. Malkki, 1992: 29). The cultural essentialism that constructs "*China*" as a nation-state is the result of a tendency to treat space, or better of producing space, in order to provide an intact sense of history and geography that the media (photographs of Lin Zexu) with their profusion and streams of signs, seem to fragment in infinite particles only to the extent that each of these particles are autonomous units efficient in yielding and disseminating narratives of roots and soil as "*symbols associated with national life*" (H. Bhabha, 1993: 4). As the cultural production of Chinese (historical) space, the Lin Zexu Memorial Hall maintains a particular relationship with the actual physical site it pretends to objectively represent. As a spiral, the *media* photograph and the actual place set up a game of correspondence that can never stop, inasmuch as they would reveal the ideological origin of both practices and understanding. Indeed, in the cultural production of history both the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu Memorial Hall, and the physical national heritage site the image represent, make use of a common perception of history, so that "*the presentation of history on site only makes explicit*" (M. Azaryahu, K. E. Foote, 2008: 1) that which is implicit in the media, whereas the production of history in-the-media only makes explicit that which is intrinsic in the local landscape, meaning that whatever of the two experiences (in the media or on-site) one may undergo, the other one comes to support and naturalise the meanings expressed by the chosen practice. This correspondence on the other hand, brings

about a sequentiality – in a non stopping progression *media photograph*→*landscape practice*→*media photograph* – that unfolds in a sort of imagined story-line. Most images of Lin Zexu are in fact accompanied by texts that provide a sense of temporal progression necessary for any account on national history to be such; a temporal progression conveyed even when the text is absent, as in a few *media* photographs displayed in this account, in which the specific arrangement of things on-site – this is actually one way story-lines develop in many historical sites – resulting also in the photographs, have the power of reifying the temporal progression as historical narrative.

In this sense, in the beginning of this work I affirmed that the representations of Lin Zexu's places are used as complements to architecture, urban settings, historical artifacts, as well as to speeches and written texts, in the production of space, presenting common denominations, a common myth of common ancestry (Han), a common shared memory (the opium war and the myth's deeds), the association with a specific homeland (China) and a specific culture (Chinese), offering cultural dimensions that become intrinsic of the social space that people make experience of. However, these narratives conveyed through the *photo* of Lin Zexu Memorial Hall revolve around visual and linguistic modes that connotatively express distinct beliefs, values, and ethics, all in support of feelings of national attachment and belonging, but also in the production of a defined (*Han*) ethnicity, and in the production of touristic identities (the subject's gaze) within a touristic sense of space. Moreover, our hero's rendition have a direct relationship with a certain experience of space, for the image is able to impart precise ideas of how this space should be used; it has therefore a normative character and function, which evokes senses of inclusion and/or exclusion. *"Images and texts construct a narrative of place in which people see themselves reflected – and which they themselves then reflect. But also indicates the way in which space is to be used – for the parading of gentrified middle class glamour. By saying what space is for, images and text say who the space belongs to and who is entitled to it"* (A. Desiderio, 2013: 2-3).

For this reason, the media offer what could be called a democratic access to (urban) space, as it allows anyone who, technologically equipped, wishes to perform space by being illuded by it. What actually one experiences is a networking process of interactions between entities, whose result is the production of forms of media culture, *media* photographs and texts, that produce and displace senses of

(mythical) national space. The mythology underlined by the *media* photographs, as said before, is the merging or intersection of two different, but related, types of myths; the myth of Lin Zexu, partly constructed in these same *media* photographs, though mostly conveyed by a supposed previous awareness of it (intertextuality); and the myth of sacred, national space. These two kind of myths, by converging in the representations below, produce a unified new economy of the myth, which is composed by three overlapping features as Eric Hobsbawm declares: “*those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial community; those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority; and those whose main purpose was [is] socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour*” (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983: 9). Accordingly, the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu Memorial Hall in Pucheng County 蒲城县, for the myth it conveys, invent a tradition that informs us on the qualities of a certain, more or less contemporary, Chinese nationalism, which in turn enlighten about the procedures, though only some of them, used to produce peculiar forms of space, both in-the-media and *in-place*; and thus providing the means for an estimation of the extent media forms and institutions participate in the ever-lasting production of cultural signs that make up what, not at all unproblematically, we call Chinese society and culture. It is therefore plausible to say that the above analysed photo of Lin Zexu’s place, ideologically convey the natural association of a culture (Chinese culture), of a territory (China), and of a people (Chinese people). The care and sophistication of the (visual and written) language of the photograph and text in the media, rely on *conventional* ways of conceiving space, but they somehow reveal the media logic to which they have been consigned, the media logic that intensifies and even spectacularises the object represented to distort (augment in this case) the *experience of place* one does in the media, and is supposed to do on-site. A network of social relations that sees the tourist industry make use of modern *conventions* for the understanding and practice of space, that materialize and communicate such values through a media technology (Internet), that imposes its own logic through specific forms of representations (photograph and text), which are supposed, by conveying meanings and ideologies, to function as drives for leisure experiences that sustain tourism as an industry, and at the same time manage the constitution of national subjects moving within a national territory.

东莞特色还有啥 人文历史旅游景点也很多¹¹⁶



虎门林则徐纪念馆¹¹⁷

虎门林则徐纪念馆是为了纪念民族英雄林则徐而建立的历史人物纪念馆。位于广东省东莞市虎门镇口村南面的林则徐销烟池旧址内。虎门林则徐纪念馆收藏的文物主要有：销烟池木桩、木板、鸦片烟具、林则徐手迹等。该馆基本陈列《林则徐禁烟》分三部分：鸦片战争前的形势；罪恶的鸦片输入；林则徐与广东禁烟。该馆通过讲解宣传、录像放映等形式向观众开展爱国主义教育。¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Published at the following Internet address:
http://sn.ifeng.com/lvyoupindao/youfenxiang/detail_2014_02/12/1838049_0.shtml.

¹¹⁷ Humen Memorial Hall of Lin Zexu.

¹¹⁸ The memorial hall of Lin Zexu in Humen has been erected in commemoration of the national hero Lin Zexu. Located in Guandong Province, Dongguan city, Humen town, in the south side of the old pool site where Lin Zexu burned the opium. The main artifacts collected in the Humen Memorial Hall of Lin Zexu are: the pegged stakes of the pool, the planks, opium smoking set, Lin Zexu's original handwritings etc... The Memorial main exhibition "Lin Zexu bans Opium" is divided in three parts: the situation before the Opium War; the plague of Opium import; Lin Zexu and the Guandong ban of opium. The museum's guided propaganda is actualized through video screenings and other forms for developing the viewer's patriotic education.

The photograph and text above, display and describe the “*old pool*” (池旧) in which, in 1839 Lin Zexu (in Humen town) supervised the destruction of about 20.000 boxes of opium sized to the British opium smugglers, an act historically considered as the culmination of a series of political measures adopted by the “Imperial Commissioner” (钦差大臣), which led to the first *Opium War* (1840-1842). They have been published in the Chinese website *Phoenix New Media* (凤凰新媒体 *fenghuang xin meiti*) at the following Internet address www.ifeng.com. With an average of about 47 million daily users, *Phoenix New Media*, founded in 1998, is today a Chinese leading media network integrating three media platforms, Phoenix Mobile Phone Network (手机凤凰网), Phoenix Mobile Client (移动客户端), and Phoenix Video (凤凰视频). It is also the holding of *Phoenix Satellite TV Media Group*, providing media services and content of other media institutions, but also producing and communicating its own media products as audio and video content, in-depth reports, editorials (观点评论), financial products, interactive applications, online games, as well as other customized services.

The photograph and text representing the famous “*old pool*” have been published in the travel/touristic section (旅游频道) of the Shanxi Province of the website, under the entry *travel sharing* (游分享), and as part of a wider account on the cultural and historical attraction of Dongguan city to which Humen town belongs. The article is nine pages long, and each page displays photograph and texts (brief descriptions) of the most important attractions of Dongguan, among which are the “Opium War Museum” (鸦片战争博物馆), the “Shajiao Fort” (沙角炮台), the “Maritime Warfare Museum” (海战博物馆), the “Humen Bridge” (虎门大桥), the “Songshan Lake” (松山湖), the “Dongguan Science and Technology Museum” (东莞科技博物馆) and others.

What is of interest with regard to the photograph and text above, is that the entire conception of the account published in the *Phoenix New Media* website, is intended as a sort of anti-campaign against the sex tourism, and the pornography

business for which Dongguan is famous¹¹⁹. The article therefore reassures all potential tourists of the numerous and alternative, cultural and historical attractions that the overall area of Dongguan offers, and for which it is worth travelling to. Henry Lefebvre, in his famous work “*The Production of Space*”, maintains how representations of spaces play a determinant role in combining ideology and knowledge with the aim of constructing or modifying specific *spatial textures*. “*Representations of space have a practical impact, that they intervene and modify spatial textures which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology. Representations of space must therefore have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space*” (H. Lefebvre, 1991: 42).

If it is reasonable to think that a representation of space such as the one above is effective in providing a new knowledge and a new ideology, in opposition to an existing, but also imagined, cultural space (Dongguan’s sex tourism and the pornography business related to it), then it is as much plausible to believe that the photograph and text under consideration produce an alternative (or only a supplementary alternative) imagined cultural space of Dongguan city, which might be *translated*¹²⁰ in actual (on-site) practices and behaviours. When in the first pages of this account I stated that *the media has a direct relationship with a certain experience of space*, I was referring to the fact that our behaviours, practices and performances in a certain physical space, are motivated by sets of expectations, opinions and beliefs – a prior knowledge – that are more than often communicated by media representations, as for instance the one we are presently dealing with.

More generally speaking, each system of spatial organization requires an adequate system of representation of space, for the media representation frequently works as a first-line producer of space within a wider endeavour of producing, controlling and governing space. This is especially true within the touristic industry system, where the media acts as the primary creator of (imaginary) spatial experiences,

¹¹⁹近日，全国最火的地方非东莞莫属吧。轰轰烈烈的扫黄活动不光扫得东莞色情业从业者心惊胆战，也扫得全国网友沸沸腾腾。原本大家心照不宣却异常火热的色情业，被视为东莞的一大特色，如今这把火被浇上了一盆水。有想去东莞旅游的人该何去何从呢？别急，除了大保健，东莞也有很多值得旅游的地方，下面编者为大家一一道来。

¹²⁰ The term *translate* stands to indicate the negotiation, in forms and contents, of certain imagined, media induced beliefs and convictions while attempting to employ them in-place.

communicated in the form of conventional *landscapes*’ or *places*’ images, and conveying meanings that in their unified assembling generate an ideology of *leisure* and *entertainment* (or educational 教育), as opposed to a routinized working daily life. The photograph in this sense is a powerful instrument as it is effective in providing the exact shape and form of the apparences it displays.

The representation of the *old pool* in which Lin Zexu demonstrated an eviable righteousness, stands as a mythological space, where a mythic action – the burning of opium – had been carried out by a mythical historical figure. Therefore the mythical aura of this media space is uttered, and most importantly motivated to support a precise commercial policy, tourism, and perhaps even a political one, crack down on pornography and sexual business, by relying on a specific form of nationalism, a pedagogical or educational one, as declared in the text: 该馆通过讲解宣传, 录像放映等形式向观众开展爱国主义教育. The kind of socialities and cultural forms that the *media* provides, come to be combined with the kind of socialities and cultural forms that the *physical space* of landscape and place offer; “*social space interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide of their contours or as a result of inertia*” (H. Lefbvre, 1991: 86-87), they are rather essential to each other, as the media historical development, with its diffusion and *logic*, has been incorporated in many other institutions’ operational logics (see Stig Hjarvard 2013) – the touristic industry, the political arena and institutions for example – supplying its own peculiar cultural forms in an interaction and integration with other cultural forms and practices (do exist cultural forms independent of the media?).

It could also be argued, that the motivation of cracking down on the pornographic business in Dongguan, authorizes the media representation to act as a form of biopolitical power imparting, on the viewer/subjects of the image, meanings that if successfully decoded might result in an ideological self-managing of the subject’s body, in its understanding and behaviour. In this case, the myth of Lin Zexu and of the space (the *old pool*) conveyed by the photograph and text above, would function as mediators of senses of gender and class as results of a specific way of thinking about territory and practice through the media.

南后街林则徐老宅 最新福州好玩的地方列表



Lin Zexu's former residence in Fuzhou (Fujian Province)

南后街，每天生活在钢筋水泥都市中的我们。去逛逛南后街吧，会让你放松心情让你进入小镇的轻松感觉。在快逛完南后街时候，推荐你去看一看爱国人士虎门销烟禁毒英雄林则徐的住宅。林则徐故居，我去过很多次了，印象很好，你面有很多展区有很多媒体设备还有导游介绍，播放相关的资料让游客更直观的了解林则徐的一生事迹。很出名的十无益家训。皇帝御赐的石碑纪念林则徐。双抛桥（车站）下车。如图所示你就可以看到标有南后街几个大字的大门。往里走。逛完30分钟。¹²¹

The above photograph and text have been published on the Chinese website 在外地 (zaiwaidi) in date 08.08.2015, at the entry “*Fuzhou Speciality*” (福州土特产), in

¹²¹ The text is analysed below.

the sub-section “*interesting places*” (好玩的地方)¹²², under the title “*Lin Zexu Old Residence in Nanhou Street, the Latest list of Fuzhou’s Interesting Places*” (南后街林则徐老宅最新福州好玩的地方列表).

As for many visual representations (photographs, computer-generated images, paintings, and maps), the photograph above, although is mechanically qualified to resemble the appearances in their original shapes and colours, it nonetheless necessitates two different forms of written texts (the title and the commentary), to render intellegible the denotation intrinsic, but yet unnamed, in the photographic image. While the photograph is used to provide materiality to the representation – the materiality in the photograph is a proof, it stands for reality – the text instead supplies the meaning of the image, that “*is a function of who has the power to represent*” (D. Mitchell, 2003: 242). The ambiguity of a photograph - an ambiguity produced by the break of a continuity, the flux that the photograph interrupts creating a discontinuity – is concealed by the setting of written language whose function is to transform that ambiguity into a certainty (see J. Berger 1982).

The text informs the viewer/reader of the image, of taking the opportunity to go for a relaxing walk in *Nanhou Street* (南后街) – an old-fashioned Chinese style street within the famous and wider “*Three Lanes and Seven Alleys*”¹²³ (三坊七巷) area, located in the city center of Fuzhou – and it recommends to pay a visit to the former residence of the patriotic figure, the national hero Lin Zexu, famous for the burning of opium in Humen. It is interesting noticing that the text of the photograph, that as said above is supposed to render intellegible the denoted dimension of the photograph, points out the fact that within the former residence (故居) of Lin Zexu, one can make use of on-site specific media equipment (有很多媒体设备), and have the possibility to take advantage from guided tour (还有导游介绍). The media

¹²² <http://www.zaiwaidi.cn/haowan-1.html>

¹²³ *Three Lanes and Seven Alleys* is an important heritage site under the national protection that belongs to the Top 10 Historical and Cultural Street of China. Covering an area of 38.35 hectares and originally built in late Western Jin Dynasty (265-316), it keeps the basic street patterns of Tang and Song dynasties (618-1279) with 159 buildings in the styles of Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), of which including 9 national protected historical sites, and 8 provincial protected historical sites. According to the history, after the An Lushan Rebellion in 755 of Tang Dynasty (618-907), many people took refuge in this southern part of the city of Fuzhou, and gradually this residential block took shape being inhabited by many officialdoms and intellectuals. It gave birth to numerous Chinese historical figures and it still hosts many former residences of modern heroes and celebrities such as Lin Zexu, Zuo Zongtang, Zheng Xiaoxu, Deng Tuo, Yan Fu, Bing Xin, Lin Juemin.

photograph and text represent other forms of representation, of mediation. If in fact it is true that the text provides the meaning to the photograph, similarly the media equipment and guided tour on-site are there to provide a meaningful narration that the architecture alone is unable to provide. The text in the present representation, and the media equipment and guided tour *in-place*, they both function as narrations emotionally and symbolically charged by profound meanings whose role is not only that of, clearly enough, connoting the photograph and the material substance of the site, namely the house, or the architecture, but they also sustain a specific function that gives solidity and consistency to the opaque values that often surround both photographs and landscapes. How many time has happened to physically be in a historical site and, although being aware of the meanings that *place* stood for, nevertheless experiencing that those meanings were intangible, elusive, inintelligible, as if the place's material existence and setting alone weren't enough; how many times have we been looking at photographs for which we demanded explanations (narrations), for it wasn't capable of expressing what explicitly displayed. "*Their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality*" (E. Hobsbawm, T. O. Ranger, 1983: 11), by being evasive and fleeting they give the illusion of transcending culture or historical contingency, a transcendence that in the case of Lin Zexu means the manifestation of a mythical dimension that common men and women can only imagine about, or made be imagine about.

Media representation and landscape practice come to play a game of constant mediation in which, the previous holder of a consistent meaning, the text in the representation, passes the baton to the new relay, that is the media equipment and the guided tour on-site.

This kind of understanding of the media representation of Lin Zexu's *former residence*, is then perpetrated through the narrativization of the photograph, for which the text is the main conveyer. This textualization of the picture, a textualization that goes beyond the mere fact of having a written text to support the meaning, is the very cultural space within which the viewer/reader of the image constantly moves. With the photograph as the main reference, the textualized meaning is offered through overlapped layers of meaning that, on the one hand reproduce the myth of Lin Zexu and the myth of a territorialized space, and on the other hand come in support of a set of ideas, values, and beliefs as well as "*unquestioned assumptions about the way a society is, or should be organized*" (J.-

N. Duncan, 1988: 123), that inform the viewer/reader on how to embody and behave in physical space. Thus if one, after having had experience of the media representation analysed in this pages, then takes on the commitment to go and visit the residence of Lin Zexu in *Nanhou Street* (南后街) in Fuzhou, he/she will be likely to rely on the media representation for all the assumptions and expectations that might occur in his/her understanding. This also means that even *in-place*, one would consider *normal* the fact of entrusting the media equipment and guided tour, as producer and conveyer of the meanings that the *place* is supposed to possess regardless of them.

The media representation communicates *spatial narratives* whose codification require a “*complex configuration of geographic elements including buildings, markers, memorials, and inscriptions positioned with great care to provide a spatial story-line or to capture the key locational and chronological relations on historical event*” (M. Azaryahu, K. E. Foote, 2008: 2). The progression and sequentiality expressed here by the text of the image, does not unfold only in relation to the figure of Lin Zexu and to the mythical space object of the photograph and text, but also in relation to a more general standardization, if not normativeness, of the subject’s behaviour *in-place*: “*go for a walk in Nanhou Street*” (去逛逛南后街吧); “*you are recommended to go see....while you are strolling around*” (在快逛完南后街时候, 推荐你去看一看...); “*go in*” (往里走); and yet “*have a walk for 30 minutes*” (逛完30分钟). This apparently docile imperatives, have the power of naturalizing the process of *governmentalization* that, to us, to the /viewer/reader of the image, look merely like useful suggestion.



福州林则徐广场

The above photograph displays a statue of Lin Zexu in the omonym square in Fuzhou city (福州市), Fujian Province (福建省). One important analogy between photograph and landscape (or place) constist in the fact that both have demonstrated adequate capacities in dispensing their producer and promoter from social responsibilities and consequences, inasmuch as they construct their represented space through modes that express impartiality, objectivity, inevitability and certainty. Photograph and landscape entail distinct concepts of production, and carry out distinct acts of producing, nevertheless they attain at similar, if not equal, objectives, especially in those cases when media photograph and landscape practice become part of the same logic, as the one analysed here.

On one side there is the media representation, the photograph, whose *acts of production* involve the displacement of the scene depicted onto a digital image or film (used to produce photographs) by means of a camera, as well as another kind of displacement, this time through a different means of communication, the Internet, by which the, yet-to-be-analysed connotative dimension of the photograph, is conveyed at an extensive scale. To this moment the photograph is

still a message without a code, as Barthes maintains, “*from the object to its image there is of course a reduction - in proportion, perspective, colour - but at no time is this reduction a transformation (in the mathematical sense of the term). In order to move from the reality to its photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this reality into units and to constitute these units as signs, substantially different from the object they communicate; there is no necessity to set up a relay, that is to say a code, between the object and its image*” (R. Barthes, 1977: 17). The first-order message a photograph displays, its denotation, is retained and acknowledged even when its connotation has been deployed, they stand together as two distinct entities operating their own processes, denotation and connotation. On the other side, there is the media representation as *concepts of production*, indicating with this term the totality and assemblage of operational choices, treatments, and procedures aiming at creating and imposing a second connotative meaning, and thus implying a specific *intentionality*. It goes without saying, that what I’ve termed as concepts of production requires acts of production, they thus become visible as distinct processes only for the sake of the analysis one is committed to conduct. However, these choices and treatments one imposes on the photograph, and which I mentioned before in this account, are “*trick effects, pose, objects, photogenia, aestheticism, and syntax*” (R. Barthes, 1977: 21). The preparation, organization and arrangement of the objects composing the scene may be artificially managed by the photographer, and then made invisible in the denoted image of the (media) photograph. Nevertheless, this operation of concealing the procedures that stage intentionally and subjectively the scene, is not always possible. If, in fact, we take a look at the photograph of the square (and statue) of Lin Zexu in Fuzhou, we realize how such modification of reality is unattainable, since such modification would imply an endeavour too great to realize.

Does this mean that what has been said above about the photograph is not correct, or that there are exceptions to these general rules? Not at all.

This is another of those moments when *landscape practice* and production come to sustain the credibility of the denoted message in the (media) photograph of Lin Zexu; by being connoted on-site, or *in-place*, the landscape unburden and relieves the photograph from any responsibilities (the decodification of partial meanings and consequently the appropriation of a dominant ideology) – what actually

happens is that the landscape comes to be part of the photograph, and therefore as a unity (as a media photograph) express the connotative dimension of the space represented. The production of a space on-site implies the construction of a “*spatial configuration*”, a process of signification that unfolds in the narrativization of space or the arrangement of stories as space (M. Azaryahu, K. E. Foote, 2008). As the concretization of social relations, as a “*complex moment in a system of social reproduction*” (D. Mitchell, 1996: 35), space is produced materially to rationalize, organize, and then display ordinary visions of the world to a subjective gaze that visualizes the objects on the land as the natural order of things, and not as mediators or agencies that take part in the construction of ideological narratives.

In the Square of Lin Zexu in Fuzhou city, the spatial narrative reflected in the media photograph, is obtained through a relative simple configuration of things; the installation of the statue of Lin Zexu in a central perspectival position, and within an urban pedestrian area - to be noted that the statue without the signifying text carved in the black marble below would be anonym, and above all would lack the sequentiality and linear progression necessary to every historical narrative, a temporality that nevertheless is lost in the photograph; and the naming of the square (林则徐广场) which textualizes the urban territory of the city in a national fashion, making the viewer/reader of the image, but also the citizen that physically encounters the square, performing such space as a text. “*The act of social magic which consists in trying to bring into existence the thing named may succeed if the person who performs it – the city’s institutions of Fuzhou, or the Chinese State itself through national policies – is capable of gaining recognition through his speech for the power which that speech is appropriating for itself by a provisional or definite usurpation, that of imposing a new vision and a new division of the social world*” (P. Bourdieu, 1982: 223).

The acknowledgement of the space of Lin Zexu, namely the *square*, by means of its naming (Lin Zexu), and the setting of objects in it (the statue), naturalizes the bond between territory and people, between territory and the state, and yet between people and the state both on-site and in the *media* photograph, as the signs physically distributed *in-place*, and the act of reifying abstract spaces by naming them, bring into existence what they assert (P. Bourdieu, 1982).

The spatialization of politics that this kind of production of space entails (the setting of things in, and the naming of, the square of Lin Zexu), and the consequent mediatization of such spatialization (the media photograph above), are part of an everyday language and tactics that essentialize the meanings of the social space that surround (Chinese) people. This is not to say the the acknowledgement of such spaces, represented or not, involves the automatic decodification of the dominant ideology supposedly produced by means of an encoding process, as in this way one would confer a certain fixity to the nature of these spaces, eradicating and disqualifying *practices*, which we know are at the base of every relationship and thus of the life of everyday, both in the media and *in-place*. Nevertheless, it is also true that specific (represented) spaces such as natural parks, memorials, themed parks, heritaged areas and others, are highly normative places, meaning that the practices one is allowed to perform in them, are strongly regulated as well as limited in number.

However, the *media* photograph of the square of Lin Zexu above showed is the materialization of the displacement of Chinese historical past, of national narratives and traditions, but it is also the exemplification of the criteria that make up a tradition “*through which the community’s relationship to itself and its environment is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond*” (J. F. Lyotard, 1979: 21).

The mediatization of the narrative produced in the square of Lin Zexu, allows a local national narrative – locale inasmuch as it is limited to the local people of Fuzhou city – to become a collective national narrative that spatializes and territorializes the values and beliefs that link the Chinese people with the Chinese State. We have therefore seen how a photograph, though accurately quoting from reality, cannot be considered to be neutral, it cannot escape the cultural dimension from which it is produced and within which is consumed. From the arrangement and setting of stages, passing through the manipulation of objects, to the use of texts that help channeling the message of the image, a photograph reveals its biased manner of dealing with specific aspects of what we call reality.

Regardless of how the aforementioned procedures or elements are employed in the construction of a meaning in the photograph, I suggest that the production of space, in the form of landscape, and understood as a type of place is crucial in the practice and knowledge of photographs. As mentioned before, Lin Zexu’s photographs of its

reresenational spaces showed above, demonstrate the way people invent, embody, and perform landscape, both in-place and in the media, and this is so because the physical places we live in, and the virtual places we look at when before the photographs of Lin Zexu's representational places analysed above, are the combination of materiality, meaning, and practices that become constituent agents in building, shaping and organizing people's perception of the social, both at individual and collective level. *By trying to reconstitute in its specific structure the code of connotation of a mode of communication as important as the press photograph we may hope to find, in their very subtlety, the forms of our society* (R. Barthes, 1977: 31).

In the 1980's, the cultural turn in Human Geography allowed for a reading of space and of landscape that entailed the refusal of paradigmatic approaches in favor of interpretations that encouraged the understanding of the specific historical conditions under which space in general, and landscape in specific, have been constructed as forms of articulation of power. Although space – in the form of landscapes and places – is not a universal value common in every society; considered that the cultural approaches to landscape originated in Europe, and that the conception of landscape in China has strong roots in different sphere of Chinese society, and has worked as a joint force that combines and articulates peculiar forms of expression and communication addressed in the course of this analysis; nevertheless, I maintain that today landscape is a transnational language shared by disparate nation-states in the making of their spaces as national territories; in the shaping of national identities; in the distribution and organization of people according to their ethnicity and gender; in the planning, construction, and administration of national and global economies, both public and private; in the dissemination of national and global imagined geographies by means of media technology and representations; in the ideological construction of the *other*; not to mention the enormous capitalist industry that produces and offers leisure experiences, namely tourism, a practice that since the advent and spreading of mass-media technologies has drastically relied on the universal language of landscape representations.

The photograph of the square of Lin Zexu, as a type of Landscape, is a specific form of producing space, is a *concretization or reification of social relations* (Don Mitchell, 2003: 240) through which staging particular forms of social life. The

image of the famous square in Fuzhou is thus a product that allows for the stabilization of a definite, although not always entirely containable, flow of features that are organized as to present themselves as lasting, essential, and most of all natural; whereas they are actually fleeting – though some permanencies do exist – acquired, and utterly historical. These features that apparently characterize the media image in a permanent way, are *humanly created resources* (D. Mitchell, 2003: 239), therefore resulting not from something as a system, abstract, immobile, transcendent, but from a network of actors and agencies that are themselves involved in making the most out of it. Landscape is at the same time the concretization of the relationship between social actions – meaning-making processes, ordering, arrangement of things, as well as struggle over them – on the one hand, and the abstraction of these *facts* through a translation that turns them into dreams, desires, imaginations, passions and inspirations on the other; it is thus coded not only to convey certain meanings that are then rendered through specific set of ideas and practices, but also to conceal the conditions under which such manifestation, the landscape itself, has been produced. As a social product, this space called landscape does not contain the social relations of production that created it, it rather is the expression of these social practices and actions that impose - and are simultaneously regulated by – the order of a specific symbolism. Obviously, the factors in play in a given landscape, and the network of actors and motivations that sustain it, can only be addressed by analysing the society's peculiar space and its individual and collective meanings.

This is then the first important peculiarity of the landscape's practices that are residual in the photographs of Lin Zexu, that of being ideological instruments for the expression of naturalized values that seem to emanate genuinely from the territory, the landscape; used for the production, exchange and consumption of collective ideas, values, and meanings that render the landscape a commodity as any other. *One of the thing that landscape is for, then, is the establishment of patterns of circulations, patterns of production and reproduction* (D. Mitchell, 2003: 240).

As with regard to the production of Lin Zexu's images, it is reasonable to say that the commodity-quality through which the landscape is acknowledged, is reflected in the photograph's (of a place) utilization as an object able to guarantee the authenticity of what is represented, testifying therefore the *thereness* of the subject who made the photograph and whose consuming-driven experience (of the

landscape) is embodied and materialized through, and in, the photograph. I show a photograph of Beijing's Tiananmen Square (天安门广场) to some friends of mine, and that photograph becomes the proof not only of my "*being there*", but also that I experienced/consumed the specific values and meanings the urban landscape of Tiananmen Square is meant to convey. If this is true, if we have experience of landscape as a commodity – actually most places in our cities are planned and constructed to guide and/or encourage consumption – it means that the physical arrangement of a landscape suggests or imposes a determined visual order necessary for the reading of its narrative. *Landscape denotes particular 'way of seeing' (to use John Berger's felicitous phrase) wrapped up in a particular relationship to land understood as property. That is to say, while landscape as an areal association or assemblage of things on the land is a moment in processes of production and social reproduction, as an ideology it is a particular means of organizing and experiencing the visual order of those things on the land* (D. Mitchell, 2003: 241-2).

Lin Zexu *media* photographs are first of all representative of a specific aspect of a Chinese media culture that may be designated as *territorialized*, that is, related to the nation-state as the reference focus. In fact, the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu – as contemporary communication technology – are the reworking expression of the bond between the Chinese nation-state and the citizens, between territory and people.

The mythical role of Lin Zexu, as constructed by media discourse performs, through its ability of making sense of the world, a spatialization. What we call media culture, that specific part of the texture of the social world, cannot exist without a spatial distribution. This distribution – the spatialization – needs to be both physical and theoretical. It is physical inasmuch as it needs infrastructures to allow the communication carried out by the media. At the same time this distribution is theoretical as it permeates our cognitive understanding through the assimilation/consumption of the meanings that the signs – themselves materially present – convey. "*Thus a sheet of paper or a screen, for example, impose their own form of spatiality which inacts a particular logic of position and juxtaposition*" (M. Callon, J. Law, 2004: 5). The media therefore play an integral part in the constitution of physical spaces, the national territories, and it produces a media culture able to evoke and suggest the experiencing of actions through specific

practices. This is the reason why I assert that Lin Zexu's *media* photographs are *territorialized* media culture, they entail (as constituted by media) a participation in the construction of physical (national) space, while being socially acknowledged elsewhere. These *media* photographs as a matter of fact are a form of imagined geographies or "*imagined territories*" (Cosgrove, 2003: 263) playing a powerful function in territorializing or re-territorializing – as it is often the case – the role and place of nation-states, by naturalizing their existence in a specific territory and in a precise political form.

With regard to Lin Zexu's representations, "*a majority of citizen may never have visited these landscapes, but know and treasure them through pictorial images*" (Cosgrove, 2003: 254). Every time we happen to encounter the images of Lin Zexu, we are confronted and reassured by the idea of being part of an integral national territory that is supposed to naturally contain those abstract principles and values from which our subjective identities allegedly originate. This is in my opinion the main aspect of an ideology nurtured and fed by the particular kind of media culture that the *media* photographs of Lin Zexu's places convey, an ideology of territory constructed as the outcome of the convergence and intersection of varied social relations, where media, politics, market and industrial entities as tourism, along with the essential gaze of the subject/viewer, all produce social space, its practices, and its representations. However, it must be pointed out that such an understanding – media culture as *territorialized* – does in no way deny the existence of a transnational media culture, nor consider them both to be exclusive. On the contrary, much if media culture, territorialized or not, is understood and receipted as flows of signs (images, texts, sounds, videos and so on) whose connotative dimensions, although cognitively operative, are barely noticeable if not through detailed analysis.

It has been shown above how through the interpretation of landscape formation and positioning one might apprehend how to make sense of a *media* photograph. Lin Zexu's representations have actually a palimpsestic character of their own, for the *media* photographs are the mediatization of photographs *in-place*, which in turn are the result of landscape practices, that is, of lived spaces; these practices are yet the reification of specific ways of seeing (the viewer detached and positioned in a fix point of view) that are often imparted by other media representations of landscape. If this is true, if this network exists and can be traced back, it means that the *media*

photographs of Lin Zexu's places are not only what they claim to be, but are a production of sort themselves, meaning that what we look at when visualizing them is their own cultural space, and not only another's place's space. Having their own cultural space means for these *media* photographs that they are able to convey, regardless of the referent they point at, senses of one's identity, of one's social position or self-representation, from which it is legitimate to experience various social impressions and beliefs which might materialize in different type of practices whose range may oscillate, for instance, from feelings of expectations, of desire, and anxiety, to the concretization of plans or the materialization of ideas. Nevertheless, the specific structure of almost any *media* photograph maintains a relationship with its analogon, with the appearances they capture in the sensible world. This strong relationship originates on one side from the photograph's characteristic of producing an image identical to the object photographed (as mentioned above), and on the other side from the confidence people have historically developed toward representations.

I have so far tried to trace back what in my judgment is the discursive and material network informing the cultural form I call *media* photograph. I have accounted for the role played by landscape production and practice in the constitution of a photograph *in-place*, and how residual of these practices are still present in the *media* photograph.

- *Conclusions*

In this chapter I endeavoured to show how a simple photograph acknowledged on the Chinese Internet, is an *object* or *thing* (in Latourian terms) whose overall network of belonging – the network that precedes its formation, and the same network expansion by means of the (media) photograph interaction with other actors and agencies – comprises the reciprocal interplay and convergence with a particular way of conceiving of space, that is landscape; it also comprises the very practice of such space, what I have called *landscape practice*, an apparently innocuous and genuine exercise, which turns out to be the result of historically constructed knowledge whose employment of precise codes (visualization,

perspective, material settings) frame precise way of “*articulating and structuring the human world*” (J. B. Harley, 1988: 278). Although, as Gunter Kress (2004) has maintained and as it is appropriate to mention, individuals are also the remakers of the resources of representational modes, and not stable users in a system of unimodal processing, but active users within multimodal networks of representational practice, that may alter the expected (ideological) outcomes.

Moreover, I delineated how this peculiar understanding of social space (as both landscape and place) and the social practices that we perform in it, are a constituent part of another social practice, that of taking photographs *in-place*. The detachment of the viewing subject by way of its central positioning, and whose perspective and way of seeing is determined by the very material production of those spaces, not to mention the normative functions they often exert on people, all these features are retained in the *in-place* production of a photograph. In addition to this, I maintained that a *media* photograph – which I understand as a photograph that after having been taken by a photo camera *in-place*, and after having been communicated through specific media devices to a mass audience, assimilating or embodying a *media logic* that I apprehend as the capacity of media cultural forms and media representations in general to *sustain the coordination of social activities* and relations between various actors and institution and people (André Jansson 2005: 27) – retains much of the codes and procedures that inform the production of space and the consequent *landscape practice* that this production implies. In this sense I’ve demonstrated in the course of this analysis that although a *media* photograph, similarly to other type of media representations, creates its own cultural space and forms regardless of the referent the image points at, and thus contributing to the creation and fashioning of a media culture that fuses with the rest of social formations; nonetheless, the power of the denoted dimension in a (media) photograph is enough to maintain, or give the illusion of maintaining a strong tie with its referent, and for this reason I say that the media has a direct relationship with a certain experience of space.

The media representations of Lin Zexu’s places are designated to embody the values, beliefs, and principles of its historical figure – the hero, the national patriot – but as spaces for the representation of collective identities and codes of behaviour, they are built, assembled, and set, to provide their own independent mythical dimension, a quality that is supposed to stress senses of territorialization and

attachement to the the sacredness of national soil, a quality that treats the territory as natural.

In the image analysis I've instead demonstrated to what extent the mythical dimensions these representations convey are produced as processes dependent on human agencies, by means of individual (tourist industry) and collective (the state and the rulers) interests; how these images "*help control social behaviour, and shape identities by homogenising the use and practice of the space*" (A. Desiderio, 2013: 11). As attempts of national territorialization, or perhaps re-territorialization, these media representations are the rationalization of national territory, what makes social space a social product. Furthermore "*the partial erosion of spatially bounded social worlds and the growing role of the imaginations of places from a distance*" (A. Gupta, J. Ferguson, 1992: 11) assigns to these representations the function of connecting imagined people to imagined territories; also, the mobility and displacement of people has an impact of how distinct perceptions of territory, of homeland and home are re-created through different forms of (media) memories.

I do believe that the *media* photographs and texts of Lin Zexu's places function as claims of national identity and belonging, as a result of the spatialization of historical narratives that are determined by distinctive spatial dynamics inherent both in the media communication and in photographs; and although in China the right to urban space is a problematic and contradictory issue, these media representations as forms of imagined geographies allow a democratic, as well as a highly ideologized, access to such imagined spaces.

Chapter IV

Mediatiation and the Myth

This chapter's objective is to account for the mediatiation of a specific form of historical knowledge epitomized by Chinese media through the representations of the myth of Lin Zexu. I intend to look at the contingent processes through which the media forms of the myth of Lin Zexu exemplify a diversified cultural phenomena that I understand as the *mediatiation* of historical knowledge currently underway in China, that is the process through which the *historical* is culturally produced by the Chinese media – TV, Movie, Internet – in the form of a myth (Lin Zexu's), allegedly conveying historical truth, and thence becoming *facilitators* of specific cultural experiences that people are taught and encouraged to recognize as Chinese history, namely the(ir) past. The media representations of Lin Zexu, as a form of historical knowledge, are indeed expression of such mediatiation, a cultural process involving a variety of actors, a specific number of heterogeneous technologies, a common social ground (the national territory within which such actors operate) upon which such actors and technologies negotiate their products and services, as well as their internal constitutions, their logics, and their modes of interacting around the activity of the *media*, and within the *in-the-making* surrounding social world. The myth of Lin Zexu is therefore emblematic of a mediatiation process that I intend as the activity of the media meant as a process of production of the social, or as the social itself.

The present work illustrates different media forms of the myth of Lin Zexu, which entail the use of different media technologies, serving and framing the communication of the myth itself, and consequently providing and sustaining distinct ways of experiencing popular forms of historical knowledge in China. These media forms of Lin Zexu have been singled out among a huge amount of media representations of China's heroic figure, and have been selected according to their multifarious media forms and their social relevance in purporting the myth of Lin Zexu – though as it will be shown in the course of this investigation, the outcomes, repercussions and ramifications for all social actors involved, voluntarily or not, in such media processes (production, communication, and consumption) will

extend beyond the simple fact of communicating (mediating) such cultural phenomena. Thus, I analyse different media forms as movie, documentary, cartoon, videogame, born-digital images, music, Baike Baidu database information technology, and blog, to emphasize the peculiar impact that each of these media technologies and products have in representing the Chinese mythological figure of Lin Zexu within Chinese society. These media products have been mostly taken from the Chinese Internet, exceptions made for the movie *The Opium War* (鸦片战争, *yapian zhanzheng*) – whose symbolic content has already been analysed in this work; and the TV documentary program “Archive” (档案, *dang an*), subtitled “old times”, on the (allegedly) mysterious death of Lin Zexu (林则徐死因之密, *Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*). Not at all surprising, these two last forms of media representation of Lin Zexu are easily accessed for visualization through the Chinese Internet, too. By means of these media representational modes I aim, firstly, at developing a theoretical framework able to account for the ways the myth of Lin Zexu is produced and made circulating as a *media influenced commodity-sign* (Jansson 2002), on account of the various media illustrations of Lin Zexu; moreover, while the myth of Lin Zexu is being visualised and consumed as a media form of popularized historical knowledge, I will look at how the Chinese media system, or the media operating in China, are embedded in political and cultural power, and to what extent they are allowed to exert their influence and authority over social actors and practices; finally, the two analysis just mentioned, along with the analysis of the media forms of Lin Zexu, will allow me to have a precise and particularized viewpoint on distinct aspects of the *everyday life* phenomenon that the media representations of Lin Zexu, as an expression of the *mediatisation* of historical knowledge in China, nourish and carry on.

Then, before we turn to the analysis of the media modalities through which Lin Zexu, as a national myth, has been represented and by means of which I maintain for an existing process of *mediatisation* of historical knowledge, it is necessary to clear the air about the terminology used so far, and in use in the course of this work, and understand their significance and versatility to the present Chinese context. This certainly is the most critical passage, requiring a process of translation suitable enough for the kind of argumentations that I wish to make intellegible in order to interpret specific (media) *processes* in contemporary China.

Expressions such as *mediatisation* and reflexively *mediation*; *media logic*; *historical knowledge* and, consequently, *history*, all need to be addressed considered also the magnitude of symbolic weight they are charged with.

As a matter of fact, the exceptional variety of media operating in China, as well as in many other places in the world, is clearly under the eyes of anyone looking in this direction; on the contrary, what's not so clear is the impact such media technologies and cultural forms have on Chinese people, on their social life, and on their specific way of being and interacting within a media-oriented society.

Mediatisation, in the present context, is as much a theoretical, as an empirical attempt to make sense of the significance of the effects of media (re)production of the social – the production of a myth, of historical knowledge, and of the modalities of people's interaction with the(ir) past. The heterogeneity of terms used by scholars doing media studies – *mediatization*, *mediatisation*, *mediatisierung*, *media logic*, *mediation*, 媒介化 (meijie hua)¹²⁴ – indicate the growing awareness towards explicit aspects of media processes and practices, but it also indicates the uncertainties arising from the various analysis about the interplay between the media, people and institutions.

In general terms, the myth of Lin Zexu expressed by the cultural forms analysed below is seen as the cultural materialization of the mediatisation of historical knowledge, that is the media production of a network of signs that determines the means through which the access to a constructed China's history is experienced; and expliciting such access through the staging of the myth of Lin Zexu. What is central in this conception of mediatisation, is the idea that the cultural forms and social practices that are conventionally labeled as the historical (Lin Zexu's myth and the imagining of the past) originate entirely from, and are almost exclusively dependent on the media. Even more succinctly, I suggests that the media's resources (the technologies they are made of) allow them to yield an everyday life's effect that gives shape and content to the social world, emerging as the main source of social experience - knowledge acquisition and social behaviour. Lin Zexu's media representations, wouldn't thus be seen only as mediated cultural

¹²⁴ The Chinese translation of the term *mediatisation*. Used in 童兵,马凌,蒋蕾,“媒介化社会与当代中国”,复旦大学出版社, 2011, as well as in the Chinese version of a paper of Stig Hjarvard published in China by the Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Science), Vol. 38 n.5, Sept. 2015, Stig Hjarvard “媒介化: 社会变迁中媒介的角色” (Mediatization: The role of Media in Social Change), translated by Liu Jun, and Fan Yi-xin.

forms representing a genre of Chinese historical knowledge, but also as processes yielding modalities for the expression of cultural authority, with regard to the production of historical knowledge. This would perhaps mean that the canonical production, communication, and apprehension of what is to be considered “historical” in China – namely the work of academic historians, the activities of universities, of the state/government, and of all the traditional educational system operating in China – come to be renegotiated by the media itself, consequently transforming people’s access and interaction with their past. Historical knowledge is then mediatised, in the sense that is something that pertains completely to the media, its conception, origination, emergence, communication, and consumption. The myth of Lin Zexu displayed in the movie, in the documentary, in the cartoon, in the children song and so on, is an entity, a symbolic dimension of social action as Geertz claims, but also itself an incitement, a stimulus or catalyst in furthering social behaviours and practices. As a media artifact though, its final (communicated) result, in terms of the significance that its form and content are able to convey, are negotiated within the institutional regulation (China’s media policy) to which all media in China are subjected to. Therefore, one should also look at mediatisation in China considering the distinct institutional regulation of the media system, the state/governmental principles prescribing what is admissible as symbolic content, as well as the individual practices allowed as, more or less, direct consequences of media consumption. Evidently, this clearly affect not only the specific settings constituting and empowering the media system in China, but above all the kind of interactions – intended here as the media logic(s) they are able to deploy – that the media establish with the surrounding social world; or yet, it affect the way Chinese media are qualified to produce, shape and govern the social fabric they are unquestionably part of. Hence, an analysis of the mediatisation of historical knowledge in China through the media forms of Lin Zexu, requires to take into account those peculiarities and properties pertinent to the Chinese conditions of production, communication and consumption of such media products. New media technologies (Internet, TV) have, indeed, rearranged and transformed people’s interaction with informations and meanings, “*suggesting and creating new hierarchies, hegemonies and ways of imagining society*” (de Groote 2009: 94). What Lin Zexu’s media images illustrate is not only the kind of historical knowledge that the media production of the myth of Lin Zexu is made conveying,

but the very way through which the relationship between Chinese people and the “historical” materialize; moreover, as said above, the authority of traditional institutions come to be renegotiated in light of the modalities of production, communication and consumption imposed by the media. Considered such implications inherent in the modes the media behave and make people and other actors behave, it is difficult to talk about processes of *mediation* when they mean, as often do, that the media are merely channels of communication between people and the actors owning or using the media. Even in party-controlled media countries, as it might be the case of China, political institutions have to *adapt* to, or adopt the operational workings of the media, to their format and rhythms, to their grammar (Strömbäck, 2008), as well as to their pervasiveness in/as society, and influence they have on the audience, let alone the meanings involved. Thereby, Lin Zexu’s media representations do not just stand between the social entities participating to the communication process (i.e. the state/government, the market, and the media users), they don’t just convey meanings and ideologies that affect, influence, and shape the way Chinese people understand and behave within Chinese society, but are somewhat representative of the erosion of independence and power of other mediating canonical institutions such as the family, the school, the government in addressing the *historical*; to a certain extent transforming their identities, practices and internal functionings, by mediatizing a distinct aspect of their cultural life, the conceivability and production of historical knowledge. The ‘medium becomes the message’; “*print created individualism and nationalism in the sixteenth century. Program and content analysis offer no clues to the magic of these media or to their subliminal charge*” (McLuhan 1964: 19). The claim that Chinese media might affect people and social institutions beyond the messages expressed is, for instance, demonstrated by the popularization of Chinese historical knowledge that the media representations of Lin Zexu in part institute; the “historical” culturally becomes “*part of an important and complex set of representational practice*” (de Groote, 2009: 4), whose access to, and consumption of, becomes only a matter of a few digits (in the case for example of the Internet’s browsing practice on research gates as *Baike Baidu* 百度百科 or *Sohu* 搜狐). The dissemination and proliferation of Chinese historical knowledge into vast areas of social space under various media forms – movies, documentaries, games, cartoons, news and so on – and of which Lin Zexu’s representations are only an aspect of, help shape a Chinese public that

becomes historically conscious. Hence, such consciousness subsume two major aspects, that are the core issues of this investigation: on one side one has to consider the analysis of Lin Zexu's media forms in terms of their texts, meanings, narratives, in order to attain an interpretation of the connotative dimensions of the forms represented. This kind of analysis may provide clear indications of the ideological weight these representations are charged with, as well as the symbolic form Chinese past takes on, with a significant impact for the understanding of the 'self', the 'other' and the alleged reality people live in. On the other side, a large-scale diffusion of historical knowledge within Chinese society has, as a primary effect, the fact that people come to be 'informed and resourced' (de Groote, 2009) historically by the media, "*altering the way people interact with each other when dealing with*" Chinese historical knowledge (Hjarvard, 2006: 3).

The totality of the modalities the media make use of, in order to generate the social context (the network of signs mentioned above) within which specific social understandings and interactions occur between the people, institutions, and other actors, has often being conceptualised as the *media logic* (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Strömbäck, 2008), which, even though is inclined, as a mode of expression, towards problematic generalizations that should possibly be avoided, it nevertheless is worth being explored for a while for it might turn out to be useful for the present study.

Media logic can be defined as the inherent rules that govern the mechanics of representation, or of display. The format, genre, style of storytelling, and "*the requirement to be successful in the battle for people's attention*" (Strömbäck, 2008: 240), are generally considered part of the media logic. Seen in this way media logic might seem to present a sort of 'standardized media grammar and content formats' (Altheide and Snow, 1979), whereas the many heterogeneous media that populate say, Chinese society, bring into question whether the media logic is a principle too distant, from the empirical reality of the (multi)modalities that explain the ongoing technological changes, the commercialization and commodification of media cultural products, the degree of independence of specific social institutions from the media influence, or even the contrasting representations of Lin Zexu's media forms, where the *epic* cinematographic format of the *yapian zhanzheng* (鸦片战争) movie – mostly based on the presence of, and acknowledged by, a visualizing subject – and based as much on the teleological expression of history as on the mythological

representation of Lin Zexu , is contrasted by a different form of popularized media product, the children's song (儿童歌曲) *Lin Zexu's ban of Opium* (Lin Zexu jin yapi'an), entirely appreciated through the hearing sense, and where expressions of genre, style, and format denote different intentions and purposes. Accordingly, media logic might rather be used to indicate the general range of settings put in place by the media to articulate and manifest their activities, the kind of institutional strategies that the specificity of the media may allow to employ/exploit. This also means that, when looking at the different media representations of Lin Zexu, the distinctiveness of the media utilized may help explain and elucidate on the degree of mediatization of historical knowledge undergoing in China. Hence, following the argumentations evinced above, media logic is *general* when it refers to the influence that the overall indistinct media processes within a society, are believed to exerted among indefinite actors of society; it is instead *specific* when it refers to the determined impact it has on people, institutions or fields of production, based on the employment of distinctive procedures recognizable through the identification of institutional regulations, formats, and genres characterizing the media in question. As maintained by Hjarvard (2006: 3) "*media are not a unitary phenomenon. Individual media are dependent on their technological features, aesthetic conventions and institutional frameworks*", and therefore the mediatization of historical knowledge articulated by the media representations of Lin Zexu, and as purported for instance by the Internet, will display a media logic dissimilar to that expressed for example by the Televisual documentary on the mysterious death of Lin Zexu, or yet by the Children's song mentioned above.

The media social functions within (Chinese) society, have brought about the necessity to articulate a conceptualisation of the media processes that would take into account, not just the text-meaning production embodied in the media representations – as it would be when analysing the symbolic production and arrangement of Lin Zexu's images visualized on the Internet, and producing more or less precise meanings and ideologies – it rather entails an understanding of the built-in media procedures (accessibility, interaction, spectatorialization¹²⁵), and the

¹²⁵ Spectatorialization refers, in my own understanding, to a social activity that implies a person looking at –therefore a subject – a spectacle, which I consider as a built-in attribute of the media.

impacts such procedures generate. One should think for example to the mediatization of historical knowledge in China in which, as will be extensively demonstrated, the popularization of historical events, practices, and symbolic content effected by numerous media technologies and thorough media representations, has subsumed the authority of traditional 'historical' institutions, and has made the Chinese media not only the primary source of access to the historical, but perhaps the most effective one. Mediatization, mediation, media logic, all these abstractions indicate the urgency of providing an explanation, and a significance, to such important social occurrences that constantly provide some kind of social configuration, characterizing the cultural life of entire societies. China, again, is not an exception.

- (Mediatization of) *History, Historical Knowledge or the Historical*

The myth of Lin Zexu is a cultural process entailing works of production, communication, and consumption. Lin Zexu is embedded in the interactions of social actors yielding cultural expressions, and struggling to generate, uphold, and increase their control over precise qualities of cultural forms circulating within Chinese society. Chinese media institutions¹²⁶, the CPC¹²⁷/Government under the form of directives and regulations enforced and implemented by the Central Propaganda Department (中共中央宣传部), and the SAPPRFT's¹²⁸ two branches, GAPP¹²⁹ and SARFT¹³⁰, the market actors (among which media institutions

¹²⁶ Chinese media institutions indicate both Chinese media technology industries (i.e. China Broadcast Corporation, Tencent Holding Limited, China Broadcasting Shandong Technology, China Mobile Multimedia Broadcast, China Mobile, Lenovo, ZTE), as well as Chinese media content providers (Sina Weibo, Baidu Baike, Douban, Renren, Youku & Tudou, Sohu, CCTV, Hunan TV among others).

¹²⁷ CPC, Communist Party of China.

¹²⁸ The State Administration of Press Publication, Radio, Film and Television.

¹²⁹ General Administration for Press and Publication.

¹³⁰ State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

represent a good share of them), and the legions of media users, such are in very general terms the social actors participating to the ongoing media cultural life of China. Lin Zexu's media representations – a specific form through which a precise aspect of Chinese historical knowledge is articulated – are not just the visualized or hearing outcomes of broadcasting, displaying technologies; they are not only the products of Chinese media content providers (movies, images, songs); nor are merely the result of instrumental ideological encodements; as are not exclusively innocuous historical informations the media users come across in their everyday life. Lin Zexu's media representations are the social substance and cultural texture, upon which all the above mentioned actors meet, negotiate, and give shape to the mediatisation of historical knowledge, in China.

Nowadays, anyone looking into the content of the Chinese media system – mostly TV, Film, and the Internet – besides the bewilderment caused by the wealthy and varied cultural forms that populate such media, wouldn't find it difficult to encounter representations that might be said to depict 'history', exemplify 'historical knowledge', or express the 'historical'. Internet streaming media services such as Youku (优酷), Tudou (土豆), and LeTV (乐视网), but also database information search engines as Baidu (百度), Zhongsou (中搜), and Sohu (搜狐), and yet microblogging site like Sina Weibo (新浪微博), all these cultural forms, representing only a tiny quantity compared to the huge repository available, are social media platforms that allow users to connect with a tremendous amount of digital data. Movies, videos, news, articles, digital images, photographs, documentaries, TV shows, video sharing, e-commerce information, videogames, reviews, music, academic essays, e-books, online ktv (karaoke), online travel, online museums and many other media products inhabit and denote what can be labeled as a 'media space and culture'. *"The media have become the most important source of our experience of society. They increasingly constitute society's center stage, and thus structure feelings of community and belonging"* (Hjarvard, 2006: 5). The media today¹³¹ supply a huge quantity of cultural symbolic materials circulating within Chinese society, and thereby constitute an important facilitator

¹³¹ The term *today* is used by the author of this work to refer, conventionally, to the period that goes from the 1990's to present in China. In the 1990's in fact we assist to the diffusion of the Internet which, since then, has allowed people to communicate, interact, and access information in a brand new way. Television has also increasingly become more and more diffused among people.

for disparate social experiences. Among such experiences in which one may be subject to or encounter with, Chinese media offer a profusion of media cultural products that many would define as history, or that are made be understood as such. “*History provides an infinite supply of dramatic events, stories, characters and conflicts*” (Agger, 2013: 300), and apart from this important aspect, history has long served needs of territorialisation and of attachment to specific places and/or people; it has served the need to construct individual and collective identities, definitions of the *self* and of the *other*, process of inclusion and exclusion, as well as of processes of development and progress. Certainly, the importance of mediating the past has not been discovered by contemporary Chinese media, rather they have taken on a social function – producing the historical – which has generated a transformation in the way people make use of the information regarding their (alleged) past, and has simultaneously allowed many other social discourses to enter *the-by-now* opaque field of history. Furthermore, Chinese orthodox institutions (the CPC, universities and so on), more or less legitimized producers of canonical history, have come to a point where the need to adapt to, or adopt the media logic(s) couldn’t be ingored without running the risk of losing contact with the social and cultural transformations that media technologies have brought about in coping with the production of historical knowledge. Should be pointed out, especially with reference to the Chinese situation, that the media “*influencing social practices and institutions with reformed logics of their own, media and other social actants co-develop and are mutually constitutive*” (Cavanagh, 2013, 93), meaning that the degree of mediatisation of historical knowledge that Chinese society and culture are experiencing, and of which Lin Zexu’s media representations are an expression of, need to be subject to an analysis of the Chinese rules governing the media, as these have a direct impact on what I have previously identified as the media logic(s). I shall return on this issue later on, during the analysis of Lin Zexu’s media products. What the media forms of Lin Zexu convey, besides the meanings and ideologies that its symbolic arrangements may imply, is that the apprehension and practice of historical knowledge become increasingly dependent upon the media, whereby institutionalized historical knowledge and much popularized versions of it seem to be combined.

Most of the media representations of Lin Zexu available within the media space, do not originate from the academy, they are instead “*produced and edited by the media*

themselves and delivered through genres like news, documentaries, drama, comedy, entertainment etc.” (Hjarvard, 2006: 3). In China though, like I maintained in the previous pages, this doesn’t indicate a full or incontrollable and independent authority, dominance and application of the media and their logics. Lin Zexu’s media representations, the ‘*Yapian Zhanzheng*’ (鸦片战争) movie, the televisual documentary ‘*Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*’ (林则徐死因之密) on its mysterious death, the CCTV (中国中央电视台) cartoon ‘*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*’ (林则徐对联立志), but also other representations of the national myth, they all illustrate the negotiations between a media system – the fundamental structural configurations of media communications and connectivities, namely the sets of practices and standards, required for the actualization and implementation of specific modes of communication (Television, the Internet, mobile media) – and the Chinese state/government, that is the political rules, directives, and laws that Chinese media institutions have to abide by. As a result, on one side there is the pre-determined structures and configurations of the media, instituting and imposing their own technicality¹³² over any of Lin Zexu’s representations, bringing into being a series of concomitant by-products (commodification, commercialization, and popularization discussed below), associated *in part* to the massive extension and diffusion of the media, bridging spatial and temporal distances, and *in part* to the specific organization of Chinese society which allows, and privileges to a certain extent, principles of economic and cultural consumerism that the media simultaneously institutes and take advantage of. On the other side there is the CPC, which evidently does not own all the media in China¹³³, but instead makes use of its Propaganda Department (中国宣传部) which oversees and is in charge of censorship of all media content. “*At the nationwide macroscale, the Central Propaganda Department oversees the Propaganda and Education System (xuanjiao xitong) that monitors, instructs and censors all of China’s newspapers and magazines, film, television and radio broadcasting, the Internet, the publishing*

¹³² In the present context, one should understand *technicality* merely as the use of all media technologies, Tv screens, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, smart watches, wireless earphones and many other and the sort of visual acknowledgement of culture they impose on individuals.

¹³³ The CPC owns the newspaper People’s Daily (人民日报), the news agency Xinhua (新华网), and the broadcaster CCTV (中国中央电视台). They are the country’s top three state-run media outlets.

industry and all aspects of cultural and information production from the highest to the lowest levels of society” (Jun Luo, 2015: 54). Thereby, when an image of Lin Zexu is displayed on the Internet, on TV, or on a movie, or is broadcasted on the Internet via streaming in the audiovisual form of the children’s song ‘*Lin Zexu Bans Opium*’ (儿歌 林则徐禁鸦片), the range of meaning and ideology these media representations may convey, are accurately determined in respect of the ideological principles that are culturally dominant in a precise moment, and accordingly, they are given media forms. Mediatisation, in this case, occurs when Chinese media and other (political) institutions have the simultaneous and reciprocal power of setting (changing and adapting) part of the rules that govern themselves. Chinese media conciliate the need of appealing media users by balancing, for instance, *amusing* and *entertaining* experiences along with a precise ‘sense of history’ that each representation of Lin Zexu must convey. By contrast, the Chinese Party and the government cope with the necessity of imparting the ‘*right and proper*’ history of China to its citizens while alluring the image of the national hero through much more enjoyable (media) forms, and yet benefiting of the wide-ranging dissemination of such cultural forms that the media permit, covering all national territory. Undoubtedly, a hierarchy is established between Chinese media institutions and the other social actors, and certainly such hierarchy expresses the degree of mediatisation of historical knowledge materializing in China, but in no case this hierarchy invalidate the fact that a shared mutual influence occurs.

By embedding contemporary Chinese media in the production of media representations of Lin Zexu, we assist to a disembedding¹³⁴ of historical knowledge from its traditional contexts, from the cultural agencies of Chinese *High Modernity* (traditional Chinese state-Party media such as newspapers, periodicals, journals, books, radio, state-television, and movies; but also the Academy, and the education system). “*History is not so much connected to our educational systems as to our media culture where it is treasured by large audiences*” (Agger, 2013: 302). Indeed, today’s (Chinese) media can hardly be labeled simply as mass media, for

¹³⁴ The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization defines the term “Disembedding” as follows: “*Disembedding refers to the way in which contemporary social practices can no longer be primarily defined by their grounding, or embeddedness, in the local context of a restricted place and time. Social practices are now, in large part, removed from the immediacies of context, with the relations they involve typically being stretched over large tracts of time and space*”. Published Online on 29 February, 2012 by Rob Stones. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470670590.wbeog154/abstract>

web sites, video hosting sites, online games, blogging platforms, social media, search engines, and many other Internet and mobile media are much more personal and participatory in regard to media users. These media are extensive sources of knowledge and meaning, of cultural exchange and interaction; they are also sources of economic interests as well as of political concern; but mostly they have a profound impact on how the myth of history is perceived and consequently on how Lin Zexu, exemplifying mediatised historical knowledge, circulates and it is culturally consumed.

Gunhild Agger¹³⁵, in her work about the role of history writing in popular culture, maintains that a chronicle – a factual account on historical events – is transformed into a story when there is a characterization of the events in terms of “*inaugural motifs*”, “*transitional motifs*”, and “*terminating motifs*” (Agger, 2013: 304). To look at some of the media representations of Lin Zexu, considering Agger’s three *motifs*, may elucidate what I believe can be deemed one modality of translating the chronicle of Lin Zexu into a popular media product of historical significance. Moreover, the use of the term *chronicle* is, in my opinion, somewhat adequate for the interpretation of Lin Zexu’s story, since such term implies (and, perhaps, ideologically imposes) a time-line chronological order and progression in the unfolding of the historical events, conferring upon the figure of Lin Zexu two crucial values: first, that of being historically unequivocal, unquestionable, and beyond doubts, necessitating no interpretative approach, for ‘*chronicle*’ merely designates the act of recording actions, rather than interpreting them; second, the chronological order of occurrence of the facts that a chronicle is distinguished for, assigns to Lin Zexu, and to history in general, a teleological quality, which aside from being of critical importance for scaffolding the entire ideological framework that sustains the nation-state, is essential for preserving both Lin Zexu’s mythological status, and its renewed versions that unequivocally serve the present. The media representations of Lin Zexu thought to be emblematic of a process of mediatisation of historical knowledge in China are, the 1997 Xie Jin’s epic movie “*The Opium War*” (鸦片战争); the 2013 televisual documentary “Archives” (档案)¹³⁶, on the alleged mysterious death of Lin Zexu “*Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*” (林则徐死

¹³⁵ Gunhild Agger, “*The Role of History in Bestseller and Blockbuster Culture*”, Academic Quarter, Vol. 7, Fall 2013.

¹³⁶ Broadcasted by the “*Shanghai Documentary Channel*” (上海纪实频道).

因之密); the 2004 CCTV cartoon “*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*” (林则徐对联立志); the audiovisual Children’s song “*Lin Zexu jin yapian*” (林则徐禁鸦片); the computer videogame FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁鸦); the Baidu Baike database information result to the entry “*Lin Zexu*”; Lin Zexu’s representations on touristic travel guide web sites; and Lin Zexu’s images on the blog *Sina Weibo* (新浪微博). In all these representations is possible to distinguish at least one of the three motifs aforementioned, the *inaugural*, the *transitional*, and the *terminating*, and often all the three together. If we follow Roland Barthes’ reasoning in the way he considers that a “*myth is a type of speech*”, namely the system of communication that carries the message, we see how the myth of Lin Zexu in its media forms is given the narratological structure described by Agger as the *motifs*. There is no representation among those analysed in this study, which doesn’t put into the foreground the *inaugural* ‘historical event’ of the ban and burn of opium executed by Lin Zexu. In the movie ‘*Yapian Zhanzheng*’ for example, the opening and introductory scenes serve the need of justifying and underpin (at a denoted level) Lin Zexu’s recognition that opium is a vicious habit and product, and a detriment to the Chinese people and the Chinese nation, thus leading to the moral obligation of banning (and then burning) the opium for the sake of China’s own existence and future¹³⁷. In the televisual documentary “*Archives*” (档案), on the alleged mysterious death of Lin Zexu, the presenter introduces the program to the audience in this way: “*I believe there is no person who does not know him*”, setting already the stage for the unconditioned reception of the myth, “*he who was in Humen’s burn of opium and in the Opium War*”, the myth is unveiled, “*the national hero who shake the entire world, Lin Zexu*”¹³⁸. The Children’s song “*Lin Zexu Bans Opium*” states the inaugural formula in the title and in the first verse “*Lin Zexu bans opium*”, as well as in the second verse of the song “*burning opium on the sea side*”¹³⁹. The same goes for the online videogame where the game cover depicts Lin Zexu with the caption “*Lin Zexu Bans Opium*”, while the game starts with a

¹³⁷ The connotative meanings and the ideology (mythology) conveyed by Xie Jin’s movie are semiotically analysed both in the chapter on “The Opium War”, and below in this own chapter.

¹³⁸ 相信没有人会不认识他，他就是在虎门销烟和鸦片战争中，让世界都震撼的民族英雄，林则徐。

¹³⁹ 林则徐 禁鸦片，焚烟土 在海边。

fighting servant summoned to Lin Zexu's residence, informing him of the trade carried out by the English opium smugglers, thus Lin Zexu authorizes the fighter to find the opium and to seize it. In the CCTV cartoon "*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*" (林则徐对联立志), before the story of a young Lin Zexu begins, a voice-over accompanied by rapid images introduces to the young Chinese public the personality of Lin Zexu by remembering, and shortly showing (the entire scene lasting less than a minute), his famous and audacious action of seizing and burning the opium in Humen. In the *Baidu Baike* free encyclopedia repository and supplier, out of 325 lines of written information on Lin Zexu, we find mention of the ban of opium as early as in the fourth line¹⁴⁰.

If these are all examples of what I regard as the *inaugural motifs* of the (hy)story of Lin Zexu and of its myth, the *transitional motifs* can be undoubtedly identified within the context of the Opium War itself, namely the strategies and tactics put in place by Lin Zexu and the Qing soldiers in preparing, arranging, and managing the conflict against the British military army. We indeed find the characterization of these events in Xie Jin's "*The Opium War*", with detailed descriptions of the concerns and preoccupations that harass Lin Zexu and the Qing rulers for undertaking a difficult war; in the third verse of the Children's song, the mid-motif is mentioned as "*fire the cannons and hit the ocean/foreign ships*"¹⁴¹; in the video game, the final fight is against the English military vessels; in the CCTV cartoon's introduction to the figure of Lin Zexu, the voice-over and the images displayed show the depictions of the war, with ships and cannons fighting strenuously; and eventually, even the televisual documentary "Archive" on the mysterious death of Lin Zexu shows, after having mentioned the ban and seizing of opium, images of the Chinese people surrendered to the English and signing the "*Treaty of Nanjing*" (南京条约).

Ultimately, Agger's *terminating motifs* in Lin Zexu's (hy)story may be identified in the final moral victory that he, the national hero, has accomplished by blindly (some argue, even too naively, see Xie Jin's movie analysis in another chapter of

¹⁴⁰1839年，林则徐于广东禁烟时，派人明察暗访，强迫外国鸦片商人交出鸦片，并将没收鸦片于1839年6月3日在虎门销毁。虎门销烟使中英关系陷入极度紧张状态，成为第一次鸦片战争，英国入侵中国的借口。

¹⁴¹ 开大炮 打洋船。

this work) following those principle of loyalty, uprightness, and justice towards the nation, the people, the authority, and towards himself. This terminating narrative – which in the myth proper holds and surrounds the figure of Lin Zexu entirely – is clearly traceable in every representation of Lin Zexu, from the movie to the documentary, from the CCTV cartoon to the children’s song, as well as from the videogame to the *Baike Baidu* free encyclopedia; and although is often highlighted in the conclusive acts of Lin Zexu’s narratives, it nevertheless encompasses and embraces the whole story of the Chinese modern hero. Indeed, Lin Zexu as a myth is not an indefinite, obscure, blurry entity, for the media that constitute it define such myth historically as an explicit discursive practice.

The importance of having defined the narratological structure of Lin Zexu’s media representations, lies in the need of defining the actual ways by means of which, as a *type of speech*¹⁴², the myth of Lin Zexu is given historical character and relevance through different media, although these same media might make use of dissimilar genres (epic, biographical, war movie), formats (movie, cartoon, documentary, music, digital written information), and platforms (TV, the Internet) to express the same ideological meaning (at least the one regarding Lin Zexu, and not necessarily the discourses associated to him). In this way Lin Zexu as historical knowledge, is “*ubiquitously presented in all genres and on all platform*” (Agger, 2013: 300), coming to be a mainstream cultural media product, and sharing some of its distinctive historical codes (the three *motifs* aforementioned) with other social institutions – the school, the party’s ideology and propaganda bureaus, the government, the academia – but nonetheless, setting off the processes for imagining the past, understanding and dealing with the present, and dreaming the future, in a mediatic way.

There is not, therefore, a ‘history’ as a merely formal academic field of production, there is rather a field of history production, for which the media analysed in this study (TV and Internet) make up an important portion of the various representations circulating within Chinese society. Lin Zexu illustrates how the production of historical knowledge by means of the media above mentioned, represent the dominant existing forms of historical awareness, and of all the aspects linked to it (national attachment, collective identities, legitimacy of nation-

¹⁴² See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957.

building processes). In China, Lin Zexu's forms of media historical knowledge are just a tiny part vis-à-vis the huge number of historical media products that are included in mainstream media content, or to contemporary popular culture; still, the popularization and fictionalisation of the figure of Lin Zexu imparted by/as the media, is actively involved in the national process of mediatization of historical knowledge in China, drastically imposing people's engagement with the past, as well as the significance of the '*past*' itself. *History* emerges out of this process not as a delegitimised practice or as an obsolete knowledge-related institution, but as an heterogeneous and multiplying social process in which the media play, definitely, a central role. "*The breadth of access to history – either embodied re-enactment, interactive exhibit or actual archival materials (however digitised or virtual) – and the bleeding of genres into each other suggest that, as Raphael Samuel argued, history is a socially and culturally constructed and consumed entity, able at once to hold within itself difference and sameness, to represent otherness and familiarity, and to remind the individual of their distance from the past while enabling them through that difference to understand themselves somehow in a way more complex than hitherto*" (de Groot, 2009: 4-5). In China, the media productions of Lin Zexu do not question the traditional historical assumptions or the present paradigmatic discourses around Lin Zexu and Chinese history. There seem to be no interrogations about Lin Zexu and the Chinese past it refers to, not at least those kind of interrogations that might challenge, somehow, the official beliefs. Nevertheless, if we look at the characteristics of the media representations disclosed in this study, we can appreciate how many new forms and new aesthetic dimensions get involved in the media popularization of Lin Zexu – new forms and aesthetics that are peculiar aspects of the mediatization of historical knowledge – allowing other social discourses to be addressed through such popularization of the myth; or, in the other way around, enabling Lin Zexu as the 'historical', to penetrate (or create) other realms of Chinese cultural life.

Having to look at all the representations of Lin Zexu that circulate in the Chinese media may provoke a sense of bewilderment, arousing from the dissimilar genres, formats, and functions to which Lin Zexu is exposed; shifting from the 1997 blockbuster movie "*The Opium War*", celebrating the handing over of Hong Kong to mainland China, and thus becoming the hallmarking of an era; to the Internet format, in which Lin Zexu takes on the form of an audiovisual children's song "*Lin*

Zexu jin yapien”, found in the website “*mama bang*” (妈妈帮)¹⁴³, literally ‘mama helps’, where (allegedly female) users are asked the following question: “Do little children know the opium war?”; or to the somewhat investigative television documentary “*The mysterious death of Lin Zexu*”, fictionalising the alleged last days of the national hero in the guise of a popular crime investigation genre, or detective story genre, so fashionable these days among popular media products. The interactions of Lin Zexu with contrasting social discourses – the political reunification of Hong Kong to China, the (pedagogical) amusement of children, the entertaining function of a TV program in scheduled sets of activity within (a mediatised) everyday life – which indeed reflect the interactions historical knowledge has with other aspects of Chinese cultural life (economy, politics, art); these interactions indicate the intricate and complex network within which popular culture takes action and carries on its claims and contentions.

Understanding the relevance of the mediatisation of historical knowledge embodied in the present context by Lin Zexu’s media representations among others, means not only acknowledging that the ways the past functions and is expressed within society is relevant “*to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations*” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 267), but also recognizing that the ways audiences engage with, and create their sense of history suggest sophisticated, if not refined, approaches to historical discourses and to the multiplicity of social experiences that the media convey. According to the representations disclosed in the present context, Lin Zexu’s narrative may be experienced as a movie, as an evening TV program, as a children’s song, as a cartoon, as an online encyclopedic information, as a videogame, as a touristic attraction, and as a discussion or digital image on a blog. What they all have in common is, on one side, the fact that the traditional discourse on Lin Zexu has become much more intricated, because more complex is its interaction with people (as a result of the media technology involved); on the other side, such media representations express the peculiar valuing of historical knowledge as a commodified practice, a commercial product which, as for all media products, is organized around “*the consumption of images*” (Best and Kellner, 1997: 4), meanings and experiences. When the symbolic system of values associated to the

¹⁴³ <http://www.mmbang.com/bang/446/112850>.

myth of Lin Zexu (the national hero, the loyalty, the uprightness, and so on), is attached, by means of the media, to other social activities or services, or to other values, such as going to a movie, to a museum, or to a trip, or is associated perhaps to the entertainment of children through cartoons or songs, or to the general public through a documentary after a difficult or boring working day, or is yet associated to the debating of, more or less serious, issues on Internet's blogs; when this happens, it means that the media culture Lin Zexu is expression of, is also a consumer culture; and thus media culture is understood as the realm where *consumption* controls the web of significance that is produced and uttered to such an extent that the distinction between the two (media culture and consumer culture) becomes almost irrelevant (Eskjaer, 2013).

If I consider for example the representation of Lin Zexu displayed in the Internet web site eLong Tourist Guide (*yilong lǚyóu zhinan*)¹⁴⁴, I have a clear example of the above mentioned reasoning about the interrelation of media culture with consumer culture. Lin Zexu's media representation in the web site is articulated in such a way as to re-present Lin Zexu as an historical touristic attraction worth a visit, and definitely a stay, in the city of Fuzhou (Fujian Province). Firstly, the page on Lin Zexu is included, in the web site's touristic section, among the "Historical Units Protected at National Level"¹⁴⁵, naturalizing in this way the fact that history is something so much essential to the country, as to justify its protection with the intervention of the state, and simultaneously naturalizing the fact that history is experienced, and consumed as a product, a commodity. Indeed, alongside the text telling the story of the venue representative of Lin Zexu – originally an ancestral temple built during the reign of Qing Emperor Guanxu, in 1905 (an information which adds historicity to the place) – and next to the mythical official narrative reporting the 'historical' deeds of the national hero Lin Zexu, we find for instance a digital city map indicating the exact location of the touristic place, ironically suggesting that the experience (and consumption) of history may produce the need of spatial orientation among people¹⁴⁶. Right under the text about the ancestral temple and Lin Zexu's tale, which is no longer than 5 lines, there are a series of

¹⁴⁴ 艺龙旅游指南 website address: <http://trip.elong.com/fuzhoulinzexujinianguan/>.

¹⁴⁵ 国家级文物保护单位。

¹⁴⁶ Actually, it demonstrates the normative quality of the representation in spatial terms.

promoted hotels offering discounted prices for overnight stays. Pictures of double and familiar rooms, along with prices and additional offered services, populate the rest of the online page, thus implying how the autonomy of commercial strategies is negotiated in relation to both the use of media technologies, namely web sites pages on the Internet, and the mediatization of historical knowledge through the media representation of Lin Zexu. Lin Zexu as history is therefore touristically commodified, allowing “eLong Tourist Guide” to make direct use of the medium of the Internet, and supposedly of a digital screen connected to it, in order to popularize the historical figure of Lin Zexu in service of its commercial strategy for selling holiday stays, at specific hotels. *“Past is fast attaining the attributes of a commodity... Consumption practices influence what is packaged as history and work to define how the past manifest [or is made manifest] itself in society”* (de Groot, 2009: 2). In the case of the touristic website above described, we see how the historical knowledge epitomized by Lin Zexu’s media production, become a cultural background, a popular imagination supporting the articulation of economic practices, and promoting specific discourses of leisure that are associated, in this case, to fixed and definite ‘historical’ values. Lin Zexu’s indirect (non-institutionalised) pedagogy, comes to be highly commercialised and linked to advertising and consumptive logics.

Reflecting on the above example just examined one may ask, how does the process of mediatization of historical knowledge occur? If we consider the ideological importance that ‘history’ has traditionally had in China – in the Maoist period ‘*history ideology*’, as Zhou Jiachen¹⁴⁷ calls it, strictly served the political ideology of the party, being therefore kept within the bounds (official academia, party intellectuals, professional historians) established by-then rulers – it appears reasonable to think that before the advent of the media, or at least before the contemporary Chinese liberalization of the media (commercialised Television, and the Internet), *history* was somewhat a distinctive field of production, highly regulated both in ideological terms and institutionally, so that those who (the CPC and the government through “*multiple layers of administrative bureaus from the provincial, municipal or prefectural levels to the county level*”¹⁴⁸) controlled then

¹⁴⁷ Zhou Jiachen, “Discuss the philosophy ideology of Mao Ze Dong’s poem”, Journal of Suihua University 2006-04.

¹⁴⁸ Jun Luo, “Media System in China: A Chinese Perspective”, Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture 2015, p. 52.

traditional mass-media (newspapers, periodical journals, books, radio, television, but also movies), at the same time controlled the institutions or individuals that were in charge of producing official historical knowledge. Today, the media in the hands of private media institutions, of private individuals, of market actors, of cultural agencies, of political actants and others, allow a myriad of discourses to intersect and intertwine in a way that is fast changing even the basic rules for controlling and managing the infinite flow of data and information communicated within Chinese society. Nowadays, the tension between the state/government and the media system, is the result of such heterogeneousness of media authority on one hand, and the grip that political institutions as the CPC and the government, through their political power and agencies have, in imposing certain restrictions on the production and dissemination of specific ideologies. The media have moved ‘historical knowledge’ from one field of production (the academy for example), to the entire social arena, where media products and forms account for a great part of all the cultural symbols circulating in society; moreover, people are free and encouraged to appropriate the media as instruments of socialization, interaction, and participation, as well as are free to appropriate – with respect to the ideological component of the representation – explicit ‘*historical discourses*’ to shape, legitimize, address, translate, defend, advertise, other cultural activities and values, as “eLong Tourist Guide” has broadly demonstrated. Thence, the media and their logics have come to conduct an activity (the production and dissemination of historical knowledge), previously conducted in other social arenas; although, what they mostly did has been transforming *that* activity to such an extent that speaking of history before the media, and history after the media sounds quite inadequate. Lin Zexu’s media representation, or Chinese mediated historical knowledge “*have multiple meanings, all of which might be simultaneously in operation within [read: as] culture*” (de Groot, 2009: 13). As a matter of fact, the Internet users consuming the kind of historical knowledge offered by “eLong Tourist Guide”, while purchasing the touristic services addressed by that same historical narrative, are actually also consuming self-understanding and self-presentation, “*producing themselves as the source of value*” (Sassatelli, 2007: 149). Indeed, in the Chinese society where tourism as a leisure activity is increasingly being regarded as an important and constituent value in the overall organization of society, and where (touristic) experiences of the *other* serve mainly to define the individual *self* as a

standardized value recognized by the collectivity, we see how the newly media association of historical knowledge to individual commercial strategies, generate cultural practices and social formations that can hardly be related to traditional conceptualisations of history. Thereby, I identify history as popular culture within a mediatised everyday life.

Another interesting example of the mediatisation of historical knowledge may be captured in the CCTV cartoon “*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*” (林则徐对联立志). The cartoon has been produced in 2004 by “*China Central Television Animation Department Youth Centre*” (中国中央电视台青少中心动画部), and is the 33th production of a large-scale animation series, which gathered together a total number of 52 Chinese historical figures¹⁴⁹ in as many short cartoons, with the official aim of inspiring Chinese future generations. Here lie again a major characteristic of the Chinese process that I call mediatisation of historical knowledge. On one side there is the ideological hold of the party/government that, this time directly, oversees the symbolic content that has been conveyed through the figure of Lin Zexu. CCTV, in fact, is the main state television broadcaster in China, and a minister of the State Council (国务院) of the People’s Republic of China is the chairman of CCTV. No doubts then, on where the interests lie. Although, the cartoonish format and narrative of the “*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*” (林则徐对联立志) media product tells us more than just the fact of being a state-lead propaganda production. At stake here, there is not only the ideological aim of the animation, namely being “*informative, interesting, educational; an effort to transmit an excellent story, a rich and funny cartoon, providing children with happiness, being entertaining while letting the kids watch the course of the story, making them understand that only through an assiduous study and incessant effort one can attain to reason.*”¹⁵⁰ What really draws the attention, in the pursuit of an analysis able to account for a mediatisation process, is the clear and simple fact that

¹⁴⁹ Here are some of the historical figures (historians, painters, writers, calligraphers) used to produce the CCTV animation series: 万斯同, 少年包, 陆羽弃, 陈平, 唐伯虎.

¹⁵⁰ The text reported has been translated from the Chinese by the author of this work, and is only a part of a longer account on the entire animation series published on Baike.Baidu.com. What follows is the original Chinese text: 这部动画片集知识性、趣味性、教育性于一体, 力图通过精彩的故事, 丰富的卡通趣味, 给孩子们带来快乐, 同时又寓教于乐, 让孩子们在观赏的过程中, 懂得只有通过勤奋好学, 不断努力, 才能成才的道理.

the myth of Lin Zexu, the ‘historical’, has been produced and communicated by Television in a specific media format (cartoon/animation), and in a precise genre (historical/educational). The effects of such media representation of Lin Zexu on the perception of history, are arguably significant. Evidently, children’s accessibility to historical knowledge increases substantially. After all, it’s not by chance that expressions like media pedagogy, media didactics, and media education have already been objects of analytical research on the educative impact of certain media representations (Norm Friesen, Theo Hug, 2009). Choosing the animation format to represent Lin Zexu, enables the producers to place the historical figure of Lin Zexu within the realm of fantasy, and of the imagination, thus allowing peculiar modalities of reasoning and of conceptualising, pertaining to the childhood stage. The use of a cartoonish Lin Zexu, promoting specific ways of imagining both Chinese past, and Chinese society is not an isolated attempt. Examples of ways of mediatizing historical knowledge through cartoons abound in China. Of singular interest is the one regarding the 3D-cartoon “*Princess Fragrant*” (天香公主)¹⁵¹, an adaptation of the *wuxia* (武侠) novel “*The Book and the Sword*” by Jin Yong (Zha Liangyong). The cartoon tells the story of a Uyghur princess who married the Qianlong Emperor in 18th century China. The cartoon has been produced by the Shenzhen Qianheng Cultural Communication Company, and the production of the cartoon series is part of the “*Xinjiang authorities’ endeavor to develop the animation industry, with the aim of maintaining social stability by boosting cultural exchanges and understanding between Han and Uyghur people and culture*”¹⁵² as said by Sheng Jun, a deputy director of cultural industry office at the Xinjiang Bureau of Culture. Historical knowledge as expressed through such media products, come to be a cross-reference point for engaging with a multitude of social actors and issues (Uyghur and Han, Chinese modernity, social stability, market, entertainment, moral values), by means of a consumption practice that is sustained by a visual culture inherent in the media logics. Children, through the cartoon of Lin Zexu, or the “*Fragrant Princess*”, get access to the past by (learning how to) deploying sets of necessary skills that accord hegemony to the visual sense among

¹⁵¹ Tianxiang gongzhu.

¹⁵² Interview of the *China News Service* (http://www.ecns.cn/2014/08-25/131213_2.shtml).

the others, as the only one capable to get full understanding, or emotional involvement, of the knowledge imparted.

In the case of the CCTV cartoon “*Lin Zexu duilian lizhi*” (林则徐对联立志), the mediatisation of historical knowledge is promoted directly by the State/government, since the relationship between media, history and audience is directly produced and shaped by a state-led broadcaster institution (CCTV), having an impact on the packaging of history as a popular product, and on the representation of the past as a fictionalisation of the official ideology. In addition to this, children are acquainted with a *media culture* whose main feature is that of (naturally) implying the use of media technologies as the primary sources for accessing knowledge, that is culture and society. In particular, how mediatisation of historical knowledge functions, and how Chinese people consume history, is a feature that needs to be addressed every time, through the examination of the specific media forms in question.

Movies, for instance, are incredibly efficient and powerful media forms, encouraging precise representations of history, and thence specific understanding of the past. In China, movies have long-established a preferential modality to access the past, popularizing figures and fictionalising stories that needed, and still need the contributions of novelists, play-writers, producers, curators, film-makers, instituting actual apparatuses often made of non-professional historians that populate the cultural industry associated to film production, and whose work alienate the paradigmatic concept of *history* from traditional social domains (although the paradigm survives the alienation in most cases), by placing it within the contested realms of the cultural industries that yield (media) everyday life. The sort of commodity quality, which *history* is provided with, and the mediatisation of *historical knowledge* brought about by movies, can be exemplarily illustrated by the 1997’s winning prize movie¹⁵³, “*The Opium War*” (鸦片战争, *Yapian zhanzheng*), by Chinese film-maker Xie Jin.

In chapter one, I have already put forward the ideological significance of the movie’s narrative through a text-meaning analysis, including a detailed semiotic investigation of the system of symbols deployed in the movie in order to display the

¹⁵³ The Movie has been the winner of the 1997 Golden Rooster and, in 1998, of the Hundred Flowers Awards for Best Picture.

conveyed specific sets of ideas, values and principles. What, the chosen format and genre of the movie may tell us about the kind of history imparted? A history produced in relation to the commercial nature of the movie, and its obvious relations with the political celebrations of the handing over of Hong Kong to China, ending more than 150 years of British colonial rule. What kind of mediatization of historical knowledge does Lin Zexu's representation in "*The Opium War*" expresses?

Xie Jin's movie was released to coincide with the Hong Kong handover ceremony in July 1997, an event which, thanks also to the movie, has made symbolize the restitution of China's dignity in front of a global audience (the myth of Lin Zexu conveying moral righteousness), and the strengthen of China's authority over its territory. The movie has been screened simultaneously in Beijing and Hong Kong on July 1, 1997 and as said above, set to coincide with the restitution ceremony of Hong Kong. What peculiarly characterizes "*The Opium War*", is the unconventional format that has been assigned to it. If it undoubtedly expresses all the qualities applying to a cinematic motion picture, its format had somehow been staged as a celebratory event, which – differently from other form of media popular culture produced for precise consumer segments – deserved a total media coverage inasmuch as it was part of an international event of historical proportions. "*The Opium War*" has been part of an accurate selection, organization and presentation of an (informational) event, that made it the only social stage where all the important social activities worth 'looking at', are occurring. In this sense, the media logic put forward in the media presentation of the movie, goes even beyond its cinematic format, staging it as a sort of *live* social phenomena, celebrating history. This kind of cultural production and staging of "*The Opium War*", is likely to allow the media to express their most powerful authority by being simultaneously the only (visual) stage by means of, and upon which the myth of Lin Zexu as a form of historical knowledge is produced and cognitively understood, as well as to convey at an extraordinary extent, a strong ideological impact over the audience.

The myth of Lin Zexu identified in this work, and its being expression of the media production of historical knowledge (mediatization), emphasize in particular the sort of alliance that the CPC and the Chinese government – through the legislative power that they can exert upon the media – have been engendering with the media institutions (see the state's indirect support to the production of Xie Jin's movie in

chapter one) by virtue of political strategies and *logics*, as some may call it (Strömbäck 2008, Mazzoleni 1987, Livingstone 2009), manifest in a nation-building process in which, Lin Zexu's media representations, media rituals (Couldry, 2003) and celebratory media events are integral elements. All Lin Zexu's media forms are the materialization of a kind of mediatization of history that indeed has enabled the Chinese rulers and institutions to benefit from it; indeed "*The Opium War*" is an example of the effectiveness with which the Chinese state has gained influence upon the proliferation of media technologies and content in the last twenty years, translating more effectively and disseminating more widely its ideological attempts of creating a sense of nation and in order to legitimise its rulers. Exploiting media logic has therefore been a clear political strategy effected by the Chinese Party/State through the backing of the epic movie "*The Opium War*,"¹⁵⁴.

History as a media popular product is mobilized for a multipurpose cultural activity, whose very practicability is assigned by the media's appropriation/production of a discourse of history. The complexities with which the historical figure of Lin Zexu is endowed with, are part of the power of media logics. The simple fact of being identified with a historical, political and diplomatic event like the handing over of Hong Kong to China after more than 150 years of British rule, suggest that the movie should be taken as a serious and almost solemn matter. Moreover, the movie functioned as a backstory that narrativized the whole ceremony, providing visual authenticity to the (media) stage by setting the historical context in which the (media) event of the ceremony rested. Chinese history as expressed by "*The Opium War*" became the dominant imagining of a contested past that finally obtained the world's recognition. The cinematic construction of the historical figure of Lin Zexu in Xie Jin's movie has idealised Chinese past, re-producing its mythological status and showing the people the genuine values and ideals that distinguished its long-standing past. What's more, the moral regulation that the media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu is able to impart, is indicative of the cultural arrangement of the media entity called *history*

¹⁵⁴ "*The Opium War*" initial budget was backed by the China National Culture Promotion Society, The Sichuan Chengdu United Bank, and Xie's own Xie Jin-Hengtong Film and Television Company, which at the end of the production amounted to almost 15 million dollars, making it the most expensive production in Chinese movie history, until then.

that the media themselves create. History has also been fetishised through the use of precise artifacts, costumes, and settings that re-create an environment supposedly able to represent history and suggest, accordingly, emotional responses. Thereby, the myth of Lin Zexu has been turned into a popular form whose ornaments, clothing, cosmetics and manners, are a matter of national identity, of political legitimacy, of technological development, and last but not least of (mediatised) social reproduction.

The media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu reveal how much (Chinese) history, as a social discourse concerned with a peculiar sense of an alleged national past, exists only in the present. Political authority, national integrity and identity, traditions, culture, and self-understanding, are only few of the forms that the 'historical' may take on during the phases of its consumption. This is, as a matter of fact, the fundamental quality attributed to the term mediatisation in this chapter. The diverse media forms through which the myth is uttered, may show by means of an analysis of the network(s) of signs disclosed in the representations, the kind of access to the mythical past provided and accordingly the present actor-oriented motivations that sustain the media representations disseminated as culture, within culture. On this account, history as a popular cultural phenomena, requires an engagement with contemporary media (popular) conventions able to afford a better perception of its nuances. The following media forms of the myth of Lin Zexu, will attempt to bring to light such conventions that help stage the Chinese hero's mythology as indicative of a broader mediatisation process of historical knowledge. In the television documentary program "*Archives*" (档案, *Dàng àn*), on "*The mysterious death of Lin Zexu*" (林则徐死因之密, *Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*), one finds another interesting version of the media popular phenomena called history. Broadcasted by the "*Shanghai Documentary Channel*" (上海纪实频道, *Shanghai jishi pindao*) during night prime hours, the documentary places itself as a mediatised everyday life component in which "*people feel a fundamental need for orientation in time*" (Ludvingsson, 2003: 14), and gain access to a peculiar expression of history as a popularly aestheticized media product. Among the high number of historical documentaries that anyone can get access to through Chinese cable and satellite television, a very great deal of them are manifestly ideological tools of visual literacy to further and boost historical education and tutoring. The documentary on Lin Zexu follows this tradition, and as a matter of fact is rather

formal and serious, sober and predictable, and although there are some narrative detours – with regard to the trope distinctive of the figure of Lin Zexu – that might persuade one to think otherwise, in reality these are only tactics used to lure the audience’s attention, and to respond to both the sophistication of contemporary audiences brought about by the new media technologies, and the need to entertain them. The program is in fact an expression (and thus a creator) of an everyday life media schedule – it’s been broadcasted on TV at 9:30 p.m. – and practice, which necessarily makes it an entertaining program with the aim of easing and relaxing the mind of the Chinese working subjects who, while are delighted with the figure of their national hero, are also consuming one of the last media feature of their routinized daily life; therefore the need to be modestly undemanding. The documentary resorts to the investigative story genre, fabricating a representation of history whose fictionalisation falls into the transnational conventions of the *crime* genre (犯罪类型), of which the *investigative* (调查) is a subgenre. China had known forms of detective literary fictions¹⁵⁵ since the mongol Yuan Dynasty, although in many ways they differed from contemporary ones. Here, the investigative genre I refer to, describes the documentary on the death of Lin Zexu following the popular transnational conventions of the genre, requiring a narrative that follows an investigation, and a presenter (for documentaries often have a presenter that guides the audience within the narrative) that functions as a detective-figure. The documentary is a televisual media product, framed through the articulation of diverse modes of representation. The main investigative narrative is directed by the presenter who acts as the director of events, while experts and historians clarify specific details of Lin Zexu’s life, “*providing the clues as to where to go next*” (de Groote, 2009: 22). Furthermore, the documentary made use of a fictional film in the form of re-enactment of the events occurred, to help the audience empathise with history, and visualize the figure of Lin Zexu and the entire ongoing investigation. The visualization of the past provided by the use of re-enactment in documentary, is a trope popular to the crime, investigative, and detective genre at a transnational level, and serves as de Groot maintains to *dramatise narratives and place history into a discourse of performance* (de Groot,

¹⁵⁵ Some well known stories include the Yuan Dynasty story *Circle of Chalk* (灰闌記), the Ming Dynasty story collection *Bao Gong An* (包公案) and the 18th century *Di Gong An* (狄公案) story collection. For further information see the work of Dutch sinologist van Gulik.

2009). Through re-enactment historical knowledge can be imparted by means of precise images that evoke explicit imaginings of history. The realism of re-enactment experienced by the audience, confers to history a twofold characteristic: on one hand the artificiality of re-enactment is visible to everyone (they are often of very poor quality), meaning that the audience is aware of the fact that what is being broadcasted is a fictionalised version of history, allowing a cognitive process that temporally distances history in a past that is gone, and thus *othering* it from the present. On the other hand, the visualization of such fictionalised history that the re-enactment offers, enables the audience to have a perception of the historical that can be leisurely consumed, thence integrating it as part of the *self*. Authenticity is somehow not required by the audience in documentaries. “*Televisual and visual versioning of the past are increasingly influential in a packaging of historical fact and a creation of history as leisure activity. What is produced is, for all it might attempt to be ‘real’ or ‘educational’, a subjective version of a constructed history*” (de Groot. 2009: 147). Lin Zexu’s documentary, as a Chinese form of mediatisation of historical knowledge is devoid of postmodern features such as *pastiche* or *collage*, unless one considers the *re-enactment* as being part of these qualities; this is mostly because the producer of the media product in question has to respect fundamental attributes linked to the ideological mood of the narrative, for there cannot be bias associated to (the myth of) Lin Zexu and the arrangement of information concerning its mythical status. The documentary “*Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*” (林则徐死因之密) presents a reconstruction of the historical – effected by the presenter, the guests and the actors – that avoids any kind of complexities, and that consciously simplifies the historical knowledge produced to adapt it to the media logics (low or absent level of interaction¹⁵⁶; visualization practice), to the media conventions (format and genre), and to political and commercial requirements (ideology; entertainment). The trope distinguishing the national hero and its myth, the narrative of the investigation (based on the hypothesis that Lin Zexu has been poisoned when at 66 year old he died of a sudden mysterious stomach disease), and the general treatment of *history*, create at a cognitive level, a progressive and

¹⁵⁶ “Jerry Kuehl, producer of ‘The World at War’, long ago noted the problem of immediacy: ‘One characteristic of television as a communication medium is that it offers its audience virtually no time for reflections. It is a sequential medium, so to say, in which episode follow episode, without respite. This really means that the medium is ideally suited to telling stories and anecdotes, creating atmosphere and mood, giving diffuse impressions’.” In Jerome de Groot, “Consuming History –Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture”, Routledge, 2009, p-151.

sequential processing of the matter object of the TV program, so to enable the teleological quality of such regardfully consideration of the historical, to emerge as the main structure of past human experience, the limitless onward progression of ideas and reasoning, the progress that the figure of Lin Zexu, in all its media representations since the 1980's, has been made conveying as a universal right and duty of the people.

The ideological stage on which Lin Zexu stands and the leisurly dimension of the documentary, along with the general handling of history as a result of both the ideology and the spectacle, mitigate the vaguity of a chaotic everyday life by forwarding a Chinese media national cultural programming that values leisure time activities as both amusing and educational. In this sense doesn't sound improper to say that history, seen from the point of view of *mediatisation* is not so much about knowledge epistemologically conceived, but aesthetically, meaning that *visualization* is regarded as the primary sense for constructing sign-originated knowledge. Furniture and artefact displayed in documetaries' re-enactments, bring into play aesthetic codes and attributes able to inspire and value explicit sense of history and historical themes. "*The breadth of this historical imaginary, demonstrates the grip that the historical has on cultural production. The range of audiences addressed similarly illustrates that history has a breadth, scope and range of influence that demand attention. These texts also demonstrate the fetishising of history and the commodification of the past through its being turned by the cultural industries into consumable product*" (de Groot, 2009: 181). In "*Lin Zexu siyin zhimi*" (林则徐死因之密) costume drama¹⁵⁷, furniture and heritage artefacts tend to deliver and sell Chineseness as a commodity. The setting of these cultural objects on the filmed stage, trigger the materialization of history itself. They are able to convey appearances, surface, depth, thickness to Chinese history, and even tactile feelings are suggested by these objects's visualization. In the Lin Zexu's documentary such costumes and artefacts look very conservative, reflecting traditional, westernized commonplaces of Chinese culture and past, showing no postmodern aesthetical attributes that would render the cultural material environment of the documentary more flexible with regard to the rigid aesthetical

¹⁵⁷ A television or film production set in a particular historical period, in which the actors wear costumes typical of that period.

standards showed. These costumes, furnitures and artefacts, allow the viewer to recognise the past – and concurrently themselves – through recurrent tropes, promoting a consumption of historical knowledge that goes beyond the canonical unfolding of historical narrative where only events and figures are highlighted. Although, such commodified materialization of history does not challenge the viewer's well defined and solid knowledge of Chinese history, it rather displaces it by attaching to it additional discourses and values so to render it an interconnected popular product. Costume drama, furniture, artefacts, in the overall adornment of the myth of Lin Zexu, they all serve to establish the cultural hegemony of a certain kind of Chineseness, and the cultural supremacy of the Han's ethnicity. Mediatisation of historical knowledge pass for the cultural valorization of cultural items and objects that the media produce by naturally associate them to the general understanding of the cultural form communicated; in this way too, history is created as something liquid and multifunctional.

Different media technologies provide diverse experiences of historical knowledge, experiences that reflect also the technological arrangements and developments of the forms communicated, and utter knowledge as a synonym of *information*. The dual interchanging condition of the *knowledge-as-information*, brought forth by the wealth of connections that *information* have with notions as currency symbol¹⁵⁸, real-time communication and database information, and around discourses upon identity, relationship, participation and so on, is ascribable to the use and diffusion of the *Internet* as a way of structuring communication, social relationality, and cultural productiveness.

In China, as Jun Luo observes, Internet media and mobile media are usually controlled and established by telecommunication carriers or mobile service providers (China Telecom, China Unicom, China Mobile), whereas the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology¹⁵⁹ is responsible of their online and mobile media services provided (Jun Luo, 2015). The Internet and (especially, but not only) the mobile media that make use of the Internet, constitute a fundamental

¹⁵⁸ A sign representing a (figurative) currency. One may think for instance, at the significance of *information* in connection with the political notion of *leverage*, where the use of precise knowledge/information against political actors may procure positive outcome to the one who possessed and valued them as such.

¹⁵⁹ The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (中华人民共和国工业和信息化部) is a regulatory body in charge of the manufacture of electronic and information products, the communications and software industry, as well as the promotion of informatization of the national economy and social services in the country.

social institution and social space for/of interactions (through microblogs, instant-messaging, information database, online games). The Internet, as a repository of diverse *media logics* and forms of the myth of Lin Zexu enables the mediatisation of history, providing access to knowledge/information in such an interactive way (enfranchisement¹⁶⁰) as to empowering specific cultural imaginations in different realms or aspects of social life. Moreover, by integrating both mass communication (*Baike Baidu*, 百度百科 database informational web site, the “*free Chinese online encyclopedia*”), interpersonal communication (microblogging site *Sina Weibo*, 新浪微博), and interactive communication (Lin Zexu’s *online game*, 在线游戏), the Internet introduces novel social forms that transform institutionalized social practices (the use of books, the *reading* of history). Access to Chinese past has never been easier, and historical knowledge seen from the point of view of the Internet is just a matter of a few digits; and since media forms of Chinese past are as varying as many media format and genres exist, the Internet allow users to input/create, retrieve, and engage with specific representations of Chinese past in an individual/customized way.

Internet in this sense has been groundbreaking, it in fact allowed a myriad of social actors and agencies to organize their entire range of “activities” around the functions and communication opportunities offered by the Internet medium itself; not only by accomodating its functions (real-time connectivity, retrievability of information, increased visibility for actors and/or their products, and so on), but by incorporating them as intrinsic activities of their own social existence. This process occurs to an extent whereby an actor’s social existence (cultural manifestation), ensues from the media’s own ability of culturally reproducing the actor itself.

The myth of Lin Zexu, as a cultural entity circulating within society, is by and large mostly represented in the Internet, although TV plays its part, too. The great variety of historical forms and representations presented by online resources, suggest the increasing production and communication of historical knowledge in China. Lin Zexu’s historical myth, since the opening up of knowledge accessibility, ensured for instance by the online databases and weblog’s activities, has been part of a popularization process led by the exponential growth of its digital re-productions,

¹⁶⁰ *Enfranchisement* is a liberal mode of theorising access to media-provided knowledge/information. For a concept of *enfranchisement* of the individual into the past see Jerome de Groot, 2009 p-59.

serving disparate needs and interests, and thereby altering history's traditional function (a form of knowledge imparted in literate societies, as well as an institutionalized ideology) and engagement.

Baike Baidu's historical knowledge of Lin Zexu, is the result of a collaborative built encyclopedia, meaning that Baidu's registered users abiding by the Chinese law, may decide to edit knowledge/information on Lin Zexu, and thus render these informations public and accessible to anyone online. *Baike Baidu* is today China's largest online encyclopedia, an immense online repository of shared informations, highly influential with regard to popular knowledge. The interactivity expressed by the Internet and *Baike Baidu* (retrieving information based on personal interests and needs; being able to contribute personally to the production of knowledge), render online cultural consumption much more complex and articulated than the passive engagement offered by movies and television products. The consumption of the myth of Lin Zexu expressed by the users' exploitation of the heterogeneous Internet's functions, materialize in the *Baike Baidu's* retrieval service, which is based on the stated desires of the users. This has a profound impact on the way people acquire historical knowledge, for Lin Zexu becomes a mere online information that can be almost instantly checked and consumed, and which definitely challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge (de Groot, 2009). People's engagement with the(ir own) past is therefore radically changed, becoming a commodified knowledge which can be barely distinguished from other cultural media product participating to the immense digital archive represented by the Internet. Furthermore, even though Lin Zexu's historical ideology is constantly put under control and supervision by various censorship authorities – among which *self-censorship* is the most effective and popular – its born-digital representations (images, texts, songs) represent an important issue, challenging any previous engagement with the historical, with uncertain results and effects. “*Born-digital historical documents profoundly affect the way that people use them and the types of knowledge that are accessed and created. There is a new and emerging sense of dynamic textuality and technological literacy*” (de Groot, 2009: 92-93). Thence, mediatisation and censorship are likely to coexist, because historical knowledge interacts with, and often reproduce, social actors and institutions mostly at a structural level (communication as format and accessibility), as well as other social fields by discursively producing them.

Following this reasoning, *Baike Baidu*'s representations of Lin Zexu become a matter of generating the transmitted information and interacting with them - by means for example of "*information architecture*" (the discipline for organising and presenting information), and "*information designs*" softwares (linked to the concept of user experience).

Baike Baidu is thence one modality, an influential one, to engage with popular historical knowledge, with Lin Zexu. But the Internet offers heterogeneous ways of producing, consuming and interacting with the historical. Everyday many people find themselves immersed in media practices that include, consciously or not, coming into contact with their past. This may happen through the reading of an ebook (very popular among China's commuting urbanites), or by watching a TV program, a movie, or by listening to the radio, or yet it might occur in a more personal and interactive way, by (micro)posting a comment or discussing a historical topic in a microblog. *Sina Weibo* (新浪微博) is a Chinese microblogging website¹⁶¹ which, with its 100 million daily users, is contributing to the popularization of historical knowledge within a broader public sphere of social interaction, where the intrusion of the state is relatively scarce¹⁶² and the people can give voice to individual narrativization¹⁶³ of Chinese past.

Sina Weibo (新浪微博) is thus a form of online social platform allowing people to express, create and engage with new forms of popular history. Lin Zexu becomes the subject of the most disparate online discussions – on his researchs and publications conducted during the exile in Xinjiang, as a suggestion from a blogger as a topic for a school essay, an evaluation of its handwriting skills, a picture of its statue taken on a trip, or an image on a Chinese painting – in likewise dissimilar

¹⁶¹ Other famous Chinese microblogs are: Tencent Weibo, Sohu Weibo, and NetEase Weibo.

¹⁶² On August 2014 an article entitled "*Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participation observation*", focusing on Chinese censorship, showed the "*first large-scale experimental study of censorship by creating accounts on numerous social media sites, randomly submitting different texts, and observing from a worldwide network of computers which texts were censored and which were not. We also supplemented interviews with confidential sources by creating our own social media site, contracting with Chinese firms to install the same censoring technologies as existing sites, and—with their software, documentation, and even customer support—reverse-engineering how it all works. Our results offer rigorous support for the recent hypothesis that criticisms of the state, its leaders, and their policies are published, whereas posts about real-world events with collective action potential are censored*". Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts. 2014. "Reverse-Engineering Censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation", *Science*, 6199, 345: 1-10.

¹⁶³ Should be pointed out that all postings I've read and analysed, they all reflected the state's view, that is, Lin Zexu has been always addressed as the national hero (民族英雄), and/or as a moral authority.

contexts (the blog as a personal individual journal or diary, or as a form of concerned public involvement). In this way, Lin Zexu symbolizes the aptness of blogging as a media social practice, producing historical knowledge as a form of inter-activity, or promoting the emergence of community building processes, sharing their own form of past as the result of the blog's user-generated content. The active participation of individuals to the creation, dissemination, and consumption of historical knowledge as in the case of blogs or of other social media networks, suggest a peculiar apprehension of the mediatised historical information, bringing about new ways of owning history, of being part of the public constitutive process that makes up forms and senses of Chinese history.

An additional configuration of online historical knowledge through which Lin Zexu emerges as a cultural form, is expressed by the online video game¹⁶⁴ (在线游戏) FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟). As a leisure activity, online videogames are part of an overall digital cultural expression introduced by the Internet media along with computer technologies, giving rise to an interactive form of socialization led by the extensive invasion of media culture in people's life. Videogames are a storytelling media that are usually consumed in connection with other cultural goods as television, movies, and music (Borowiecki and Prieto-Rodriguez, 2013). Moreover, the flourishing game industry and the equivalent economic market behind the huge consumption of videogames in China, makes it an important ‘media form’ that shapes the socialization of millions of people, as well as the way through which precise social experiences and related meanings are popularly addressed. The historical, intended as a variety of knowledge utterance referred to an alleged shared past, is largely represented in online videogames culture, indeed people “*engage with past through their immersion in these virtual and ludic worlds, attaining some kind of – albeit skewed – historical awareness through an active engagement with a representation of the past*” (de Groot, 2009). In the specific case of the online computer game FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟), the experience with the ‘historical’ is quite poor, although the myth of Lin Zexu is successfully conveyed. The *active engagement* de Groot refers about, is strictly tied to the embodied virtual experience that a game's technological development is able to

¹⁶⁴ Video game in the present context refers only to the game played on a computer, as “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” is an online game played through access to the Internet.

provide. The FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟) is a very poor quality game, not comparable with contemporary products able to fully absorb – thanks to their displaying characteristics and requested interaction from the user – the players’ attention in an almost full embodied projection of the user within a virtual reality graphics. FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟) is a rather passive gamely experience, requiring minimum cognitive and body interaction, and thereby lacking complexity at a diegetic level. To start with, FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟) is not a point of view game, ergo the ‘historical experientiality’ is quite impersonal. The images flow from right to left as in a flat one-dimensional surface, without any deep perspective. Consequently, the eroic individuality (supposedly incarnated by the soldier sent by Lin Zexu to fight the English opium smugglers) with whom the player should embody through the structural interactivity of the game, is somewhat weak. The experience of history is thus distanced and othered, not as a result of a narratological choice, but as a technological unsophistication inherent to the game’s design and structure. The narrative sustains somehow the official ideology associated with the historical figure of Lin Zexu. Although there seems to be no institutionalized learning or educational activity imparted through the game, it is nevertheless “*keen to stress the legitimacy of their [the state’s ideology] view of the past*” (de Groot, 2009: 138), since the myth of Lin Zexu understood with Barthes is conveyed by a discourse that the player is somehow obliged coming to contact with. In the FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟) online game, a fixed and static model of history is represented, however linked to other social discourses related to leisure-time activities, and commercial interests. The visual immersion in historical environments is moderately uninfluencing, not allowing the emergence of a strong sense of history. Although, regardless of the poor quality game through which the popular figure of Lin Zexu is addressed, the past in this game is framed within very clear boundaries, both at a software-complexity level (the actions permitted in terms of digital interactivity), and at a narrative level (win against the British, or lose). What the FC “*Lin Zexu jin yan*” (林则徐禁烟) online game suggest is that, despite the unemotional experience of history provided by such media form, the Chinese national history conventionally designated as the “opium war” (*yapian zhanzheng*), is to a certain extent spectacularized by the media representation of a digital-born Lin Zexu, whose significance lie so much in its ideological positioning,

as in the everyday life displacement of the historical knowledge for which it stands for.

- Conclusions

Lin Zexu's media representations and the myth they convey are an agency moulding what I've so far called the '*mediatisation of historical knowledge*'. They express advantageous modalities to encourage social practices arising from a transforming cultural network they contribute to create, in which the Chinese media, the State/government, diverse market actors, and the people/users, all contribute to the staging, working, and performing of their, moderately elastic, social functions and activities.

Mediatisation, in this study, is the result of a precise conceptualization of the media practices meant as the social power the media produce and generate within Chinese society meant as the result of the media production and dissemination of networks of signs 's that provide substance and signification to the cultural texture that we conventionally call society. It also represents the interaction and interdependence with other Chinese institutions and actors (the Party-state, the Government) materializing through process, by way of the media frame and shape the means (technological/ideological) through which historical knowledge is created and communicated – according also to people's taste and commercial interests – and to a certain extent apprehended.

In China the media stand somehow between the political system and the market, sometime embodying the one, sometime the other, often both of them, with the result of articulating a mediatisation process whose overall configuration is to be searched in the tension between the political institutions, representing the regulatory boundaries within which the media are allowed to operate, especially at a content

level¹⁶⁵. Thereby, the Chinese institutional setting, expressed by the regulatory organs and the monitoring bodies (censorship agencies and practices), partially determines the degree of ideological freedom allowed to the media, or at least try to contain and manage it accordingly. *“In China, as elsewhere, increasing penetration of media and media technologies into the lives of individuals is reshaping the ways in which people relate to each other, to society in general, and to the government”* (Sun, 2104: 89). The Chinese media in fact, by means of their capacity of producing and shaping people’s relations and social experientiality – of instituting integrally Chinese society by actually defining people’s imagining of it and of their-self (and therefore of reality), and by giving the illusion of connecting all realms of social and cultural life as if they were existent beyond the media – *“they form a culture of real virtuality in which our symbolic environment is, by and large, structured in an inclusive, flexible, diversified hypertext, in which we navigate everyday”* (Kramer, Ludes, 2010: 12).

Entertainment, tourism, economy, national belonging, identity formation, they all rely, to a process of mediatisation of historical knowledge exemplified by the various representations of the myth of Lin Zexu in movies, tourist websites, videogames, children’s songs, documentaries, Internet database information and so on. The wealth of complexities represented by these media forms, indicate on one side the various modalities through which mediatisation of historical knowledge is effected – Internet blogs’ representations of Lin Zexu definitely reveal a divergent mediatisation process than, say, *Baike Baidu*’s result to the entry *Lin Zexu* – on the other side, they all contribute, although independently, to the popularization (and often also to its fictionalisation) of the historical knowledge that the myth of Lin Zexu embodies.

History, as it is illustrated by, and assumed to be in Chinese media, is organized and structured around a strict binary system that doesn’t allow for any ideological crossing, and most importantly offers a vision of the Chinese past that, despite the fact of being *media-culture-as-culture*, it produces the contingencies of/as the everyday life, like sharp distinctions between self/other, national/foreign,

¹⁶⁵ “In 2011, the SAPPRFT issued new rules restricting commercials from interrupting TV dramas, allowing them to air only back-to-back between programs. It has been reported that the restrictions, which went into effect at the beginning of 2012, were intended to spur broadcasters to show more cultural programming, helping them to uphold a ‘public service (Burkitt 2011)’. Jun Luo, “Media System in China: A Chinese Perspective”, Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture, 2015, p – 55.

male/female, law and order/caos and criminality, political/civic and son on, confining and limiting the potential infinite ideological expressions of Lin Zexu within society. Indeed, even though looking at the diverse media representations of Lin Zexu, might elicit the feeling or impression of being looking at a multiplicity of viewpoints – thus undermining the idea of a singular history – it is rather the opposite, for the main historical narrative of such representations re-tell the *by-now* familiar story of Lin Zexu highlighting the same old meanings and values¹⁶⁶, necessary for legitimising the ruling class and to sustain the nation-building process among others. *“The idea of constructing a country’s history through rating its figures- emphasising the individual rather than imagining a shared space – presents a multiple conceptualisation of nation, in some ways the sum of extraordinary parts rather than the slow accretion of significance”* (de Groot, 2009: 27). The popularization of Lin Zexu steered by the media, demonstrates that Chinese national histories (at least when mythically personified) have some kind of appeal on people’s imaginings of their past. Lin Zexu as a precise and peculiar form of mediatization of historical knowledge in China, is a form of media popular culture in a mediatised everyday life, which is a merely media social space (of struggle), to obtain people’s attention and consumption.

¹⁶⁶ This is actually true only in part, because the contemporary ideological function of Lin Zexu as a national hero promoting openness to the world, technological development, and progress can be traced back only till the end of the 1970’s (since the ‘gaige kaifang’). During the Maoist years, Lin Zexu’s ideological role had particularly focused on the anti-imperialistic rhetoric, and on the promotion of (Maoist-oriented) communist values.

Conclusion

In the course of this study I have explored many heterogeneous media representations of Lin Zexu, produced, communicated, and consumed within China proper since the commercialization of Chinese television, and the setting up of the Internet in the 1990's, and on. The main objective leading this research has been that of providing convincing answers to a series of questions involving critical aspects of Chinese society, of the Chinese nation, and the media system, through an overall analysis of the media representations of the myth of Lin Zexu circulating through TV and the Internet. Among such questions, the most important ones were concerned with issues regarding the formation of *individual* identities in China; the identification of the *self* and of the *other*; the characterization and commodification of *styles* and *ideas* in the everyday life; the formation of collective identities; the ideological apparatus that sustains the nation-building process; the deployment of *banal nationalism*; the particular relationship between the Chinese media, the State/government's institutions, and the market; and the peculiar engagement of people/users with media-generated popular history.

Many important works¹⁶⁷ in the academic field of Chinese media and communication studies, as I have partly verified, tend to highlight the problematic matter of the state control over the Chinese media system, focusing their attention on state-led censorship and on the lack of independence of both editors and journalists. Using the paradigm of Western democracy, these works often base their interpretations of the functioning and social significance of specific aspects of the Chinese media landscape, by resorting to alleged universal (Western)¹⁶⁸ ethic and moral values and principles that highlight distinct ideas of freedom, of social participation, of political expression, and of democratic elections, thus looking at

¹⁶⁷ Yuezhi Zhao (1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2009, 2012); Lee Chin Chuan (2000, 2003); Wanning Sun (2002, 2009, 2012, 2014); Clement So (2000, 2001, 2011); Chan M. Joseph (1998, 2002).

¹⁶⁸ "The decolonization of anthropology require that we cease colonizing other parts of the world simply to validate Western theories of modernization, marxism, feminism, socialism or capitalism. If we continue to use pre-articulated categories of Western knowledge we are merely redeploying our particular vision in transnational descriptive narratives." Aihwa Ong, "Anthropology, China and Modernities" (p-65), in Henrietta L. Moore (ed.) "The Future of Anthropological Knowledge", Taylor & Amp; Francis Ltd, 1996.

the multiple inter-relations between the Chinese media, the State/government, the market, and the people as evidences of the authoritarian rule of the CPC, and often addressing the media (especially the Internet) as a cultural expression, potentially able to emancipate the people's energies towards a (western-driven) democratic society. Now, let aside my personal opinions with regard to such issues, this work distinguishes itself for its focus on precise cultural articulations (media practices, ideologies, consumerism), and social formations (enhanced sign communication, individualism, nationalism, mediatisation of historical knowledge), that the analysis of the media representations of Lin Zexu have so far disclosed. I have demonstrated how by way of a semiotic approach to culture, Internet (and TV) has certainly the power of promoting and advocating dominant ideologies and practices that uphold and legitimate the ruling classes' vision of the world, quite in contrast with any liberating effect. Furthermore, the complexity of the mediatisation process purported by the media forms of Lin Zexu, namely the mediatisation of historical knowledge, has on the one hand showed the (legislative) procedures through which the state/government regulate the degree of independence of the media practices within Chinese society (an attribute common in every media-saturated society), and at the same time showed to what extent the media practices associated to each different media, are able to generate "*the performative requirements for producing authority and representing expertise*" (Hjarvard, Petersen, 2013: 4).

China's political and cultural policy in the 1980's, 1990's, and in the 2000's are the result of the new economic course inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping since 1978, leading to an increasing integration of Chinese economy to global capital and culture. Since the 1980's, the development of a new economic path brought about changes and more or less gradual transformations in many areas of social and cultural life, beginning to question "*people's ability to interpret and control reality*" (Iovene, 2002: 7). This socio-economic transformation in China, was aimed at technological development and global integration. The introduction of principles of market competition, of new information technologies, the globalization of capital and labour, the convergence with global culture, were all factors that precipitated social changes and shaped contemporary Chinese society. However, only in the 1990's the strive for modernization led to the materialization of such changes, for in the 1980's, as Jing Wang maintains, "*the syndrome of leaping toward the future was so strong that modernization emerged as a utopian discourse rather than as a*

material practice” (Wang, 1996: 38). In fact, it is only a few years after *Tian ‘an men* (1989) that the socialist market economy gradually became a space for the introduction of new cultural activities originating in the new media – remarkably the Internet, towards the end of the decade, and Television somewhat already in vogue – bringing forth forms of popular culture such as blockbuster movies, popular music, TV dramas, and an infinite flow of digital images. A new expression of national space begun to unfold, a space where transnational flows of cultural expressions, local-based traditions and habits, hybridization of values, folklore manifestations, peculiar ideas of lifestyle, but also new forms of political propaganda and civic education, all converged in an indistinct cultural network within which the *individual* emerged as a subject in constant search for identity. The emancipation sought by the New Era¹⁶⁹’s intellectual and artists (particularly through the adoption of new techniques, methodologies and technical experiments), was *de facto* achieved, though quite differently than that desired, through the 1990’s and 2000’s with the colonization perpetrated by countless media forms and technologies, that gave rise to new aesthetics and trends in all cultural forms with an explicit and unambiguous preference and deference accorded to *representation* and *visuality*. The extraordinary wealth of media devices (TV, mobiles, pc, laptops) possessed by always more segments of the populace, the new forms of communication and connectivity (satellite data transmission, Internet, cable antenna, bluetooth) with which such technologies were integrated, and the exceptional abundance of cultural resources produced by the media and consumed by the people, became the symbol of national modernization. “*As the Chinese nation furiously modernizes itself to overtake the postmodernity of advanced first world societies, culture and art have inevitably become matters of consumption and marketing handled by corporations and businesses*” (Liu Kang, 2004: 142).

The new self-awareness put forward by the new media cultural forms populating Chinese society, caused the emerging of a networked *subject* exemplified by the young generations, that since the 1990’s have increasingly differentiated their social complexity, founding themselves bombarded by an extraordinary wealth of

¹⁶⁹ The *New Era* (新时期) is the conventional denomination used to describe the new artistic expression and production during the 1980’s in China that followed the “cultural revolution”, which saw the emergence of an intellectual and artistic sensibility that looked forward new way of expression of the *subject* (see Jing Wang, Sheldon H. Lu, Xiaobing Tang, Lin Yiping, Chen Xiaoming, Zhang Yiwu).

media images and styles, and therefore captured in the constant need of articulating multiple and heterogenous identities.

Clearly enough, this quite chaotic and challenging social configuration that Chinese society underwent and still copes with, and within which the media found themselves and simultaneously produce, gave rise to a legitimation crisis caused by the inevitable erosion and induced dismissal of the previous (Maoist) ideological apparatus that had somehow lend legitimacy to the ruling class. If we accept the distinction provided by Manuel Castells (2004) between *capitalism* and *statism* (both of them being modes of production, which regulate the appropriation of surplus in the production process), where capitalism is oriented toward profit-maximizing, while statism toward power-maximizing, it is possible to understand part of the contradictions that gripped the Chinese state ideological orientation – its progressive alienation – and the difficult of its organization to follow a coherent path. In this sense, the will to merge a distinct state-led ideological apparatus (a socialist one) with a capitalist mode of production, has generated a *katabasis* of the state capacity to orient itself and the society, and to control (if not produce) the changes and transformation that Deng Xiaoping, since the “*Reform and Opening up*” (改革开放, gaige kaifang), had inaugurated. Thus, the Chinese state’s disorientation originated “*in the inability of the modern nation-state to navigate the uncharted, stormy waters between the power of global networks and the challenge of singular identities*” (Castells, 2004: 304). This meant that the guiding ideological role of the Chinese nation-state (the CPC and the government), needed to be redefined in function of the new mechanisms of cultural and social re-production that the openness to global capital and culture, and the overcoming of the media as the central catalyst of cultural expression, had engendered.

The study of specific forms of popular culture and of the Chinese media, are thus important phenomena to study, if one wants to get insights into the socio-cultural circumstances that characterized China during the 1990’s and 2000’s.

The grown and intensified role of the media institutional setting, and the complex media forms that sprang from their practices within/as Chinese society posed, with their ability of overlapping different temporal and spatial configurations, much more concerns than those they worked out. “*They [the media] form a culture of real virtuality in which our symbolic environment is, by and large, structured in an inclusive, flexible, diversified hypertext, in which we navigate everyday. The*

virtuality of this text is in fact our reality, the symbols from which we live and communicate, the enclosure of communication in the space of flexible media and the media become the essential space of politics” (Kramer, Ludes, 2010: 12). The media representations of Lin Zexu displayed and scrutinized in this work are, as Kramer and Ludes suggest, part of the Chinese symbolic environment, and an aspect of the *essential space of politics* that characterize both China’s identity, and China’s attempts to cope with such identity. Lin Zexu media forms – as media culture produced, communicated and consumed – served to articulate conflicts, to legitimize power, to displace politics and knowledge, and to control the ongoing social transformations and crisis experienced by society at large and by the Chinese state. But what has been central to this study, is that Lin Zexu’s media representations are first of all the expression of the transformations caused by China’s convergence with global capital and culture, as well as the expression of the role that the popular media had in facilitate this convergence, and of being simultaneously its product.

Lin Zexu in contemporary China has proved to be a media consumption activity within a media-induced “*symbolic environment*” that structures or frames the everyday life among Chinese people. Lin Zexu, as the official culture, as the myth, as the discourse on/of the nation, as the language of the state and of nationalism, as the ideology of power and domination, as historical knowledge, as all these features altogether, Lin Zexu is the “*culture of real virtuality*” or the culture of virtual reality that the Chinese media generate within the social network they are part of.

Lin Zexu has therefore been the symbolic manifestation (and response) of an emancipatory practice elicited through the media by the wished ‘*gaige kaifang*’ (改革开放) process that soon became “*uncharted, stormy waters*”. If what Jing Wang says is true, namely that an emancipatory practice (the Reform and Opening up itself) requires the arrangement of the terms of emancipatory goals (Jing Wang, 1996), then the myth of Lin Zexu, as uttered by the Chinese media, is ‘official ideology’ in the sense that it reacts to the lack of planning and preparation of a system of radical reforms that now haunts the present-power elite. Although Deng Xiaoping and his successors rejected, or believed to reject, those cultural forms associated to the Maoist ideological apparatus – for they considered them to be too radical or revolutionary – they actually inherited a great deal of their styles and

forms, as Lin Zexu's media forms (since the 1980's) may prove to be¹⁷⁰, having them just been reshaped and adapted to the new discourses and necessities, producing new (digital) aesthetics.

The myth of Lin Zexu, in all its media forms, thus points to two well delineated objectives: on the one hand it is called to represent *in toto* the affection and patriotic pride for the long standing Chinese nation, for its glorious past and its distinguishing culture – though, we know that Lin Zexu produces rather than represents such ideas of nation and culture. On the other hand the national myth is called to provide both a term of conclusion to an alleged pre-modern era characterized by the blindness of the Qing Dynasty and the national humiliation (国耻) of the foreign aggression and defeat, while bringing a sense of new beginning distinctively inclined toward the recognition of the need for technical and industrial development that (quite unclearly) is supposed to define the Chinese idea of modernity. This double aim underlined by the myth of Lin Zexu is achieved by granting *visuality* a primary role for the engagement with (ideological) knowledge (being also a constitutive quality of the media analysed in this work), and by encoding specific signified to the commonly accepted appearance(s) of Lin Zexu. Nevertheless, Lin Zexu's function is not so easily concluded. In fact, if we consider the Chinese state from the twofold perspective of performing 1) the dominant interests and values that have characterized it historically, and 2) that of (the only one declared) representing the citizens as in its modern acceptation, then the myth of Lin Zexu conveyed by the media representations come to embody a new motivation, that of providing an interface that superimpose on the State's functions mentioned above, and thence bestowing political and social stability.

In this way, the media play a major role in simultaneously producing and communicating forms of domination through appearances of legitimation, determining the presence or absence of a balance (the role of Lin Zexu's media forms) central to the stability of all social institutions, being them political, economic, cultural.

Over this study the myth of Lin Zexu has been analysed in its cinematic form, amply demonstrating that a movie such as Xie Jin's 1997 "*The Opium War*", whose

¹⁷⁰ I have in the course of this study touched upon some of the major differences between the Maoist ideology, and the new China course's ideology.

first evident feature is its entertaining function, is able to convey strong messages of national unity and of patriotism while offering a high level entertaining experience, mixing the consumption of a leisure activity with the delivering of (encoded) ideological meanings. This cinematic product allowed the CPC to carry on its ideological commitment by means of a cultural product, somewhat expression of the new course of economic liberalization undertaken by China. The cinematic medium, through the representation of the myth of Lin Zexu, instituted a particular relation between the Chinese state and its institutions, the government, the people, the territory of the state, and the imagining of history, namely the Chinese past. The releasing of “*The Opium War*” has indeed been made to coincide with the ceremony of the British handing over of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, and required to provide a background narrative upon which staging the entire ceremony.

Lin Zexu’s myth in its cinematic framing and staging, showed a state-led ideological complexity that perhaps was novel in the history of Chinese cinema, for the encoding process that ideologically shaped its figure, encompassed a very wide range of potentially connoted meanings, merging together then-contemporary Chinese issues concerned with matters of national and international politics, with cultural industry’s economic interests, with social peacefulness, with national unity, patriotism, political legitimation based on economic success, with the need of military technological advancement, with the depoliticization of the masses, the territorialization of specific values and beliefs, the transnationalisation of a Chinese cultural product (the movie itself) and its convergence with global culture where, for once, the foreign countries were part of an interested and also quite satisfied audience.

Lin Zexu in “*The Opium War*” provides the means for the imagining of the Chinese nation by highlighting the ‘extraordinary’ – for the hero transcend the everyday space of the quotidian – which is set out against the routinized lives that most people live, therefore problematizing the distinction between the lived and the imagined, and allowing the media to be the arbiter of such matter. Moreover, during the Maoist period Lin Zexu had mostly served the legitimation of China’s isolationism by conveying meanings that blamed the Westerner for China’s backwardness, and its myth thus evoked and encouraged anti-imperialist feelings and ideas. With the new China’s trajectory inaugurated by the Deng’s *Reform and*

Opening up era, whose emphasis mostly aimed at catching up with the development of Western countries, Lin Zexu's previous ideology had to adjust and adapt to the new circumstances (T. Hjellum, 1996), and accordingly to the shift of paradigms development¹⁷¹, which saw the myth of Lin Zexu lend legitimacy to capitalist modes of appropriation. Thereby, disengaging from the previous Maoist mythology/ideology, and justify the new policy has certainly been one of the multiple function of the myth of Lin Zexu in the movie, demonstrating the media's ability to generate, through a sophisticated popular cultural form, a precise cultural network.

In the proceeding of this work I analysed the communicational landscape¹⁷² of diverse digital images of Lin Zexu found on the Chinese Internet. The investigation of these images have unveiled some modern conventions and social discourses present in the arrangement and functioning of the modern aesthetics in China. In fact by engaging directly the very notion of (modern) *representation*, and by analyzing the specifics of those representations exemplified in the images of Lin Zexu, I called the attention upon both the *methaphysics of representation* that epistemologically sustain the media representations of Lin Zexu, and on the *system of certainties* substructuring such metaphysics on the basis of a specific "*ordering, distributing and enframing*" (T. Mitchell, 1998). All elements that allowed me to underline the specific procedures in the production of knowledge historically built-in in the mode through which the *representations* of Lin Zexu are granted the validity and the authority of defining and assigning a quality or a set of qualities to that social world that we call China. Indeed, such analysis revealed that every digital image of Lin Zexu circulating in the Internet and displayed in the chapter, embodies a "*certainty of representation*" which depends first of all on the separation between representation and reality; meaning that a representation doesn't pretend to simulate reality in order to substitute it, but that it can only approximate it. In fact, only by conceiving a model (read: *image*) as an approximation we are reassured of the existence of an *original*, of a real beyond representation. This

¹⁷¹ One of the ideological shift the representation of the myth of Lin Zexu underwent, is about its identification with the entrepreneur class. In fact under the Maoist ideology, Lin Zexu was seen as hostile to the class of merchants, for they represented the Chinese alliance with the imperial capital. However, since the *Reform era*, Lin Zexu is represented as to symbolize the natural convergence between politics and private business.

¹⁷² The trajectories that an image activates through the mobilization of things. Its communicational network, namely all the things that make an image speak for itself, and allow it to activate its own network.

separation is fundamental in order to constitute a *correspondence* between reality and representation, thus enabling the power of the latter to merge with the circumstances of the former, and thus giving way to that *real virtuality* mentioned above. I have thus demonstrated that the way we accord a representation the ability to resemble something that somehow is present in what we call reality, cannot be regarded as self-evident, but rather designates a distinct, partial and mediated visualization based on the arrangement of the representation around a common center, and the positioning of the visualizing subject in this center; and that as a consequence the arrangement of the symbolic content of an image, and its understanding are dependent to the specific *way of seeing* that has conventionally been established. Furthermore, through a semiotic deconstruction of the image as a digital-born representation, I have shown how the mythical status of Lin Zexu in these images is constructed not only through the connotation of the meanings conveyed, but primarily by the constitution of the equation graphic/form – design/meaning, as a first semiological system, where graphics is the materialization of a substance on a surface, and design the intentionality, the ideological apparatus that provides passion, care, meaning to the sheer, naked substance of graphics. This allowed me to identify *representation* as the sum of graphic/signifier and design/signified, ensuring the constitution of the sign in the second semiological system, the myth system (Barthes, 1957). However, it also permitted me to acknowledge the media forms of Lin Zexu as *representations*, which meant to look at them as modern conventions produced to make sense of the social, but ceasing to be self-evident and returning back to their being cultural procedures of production, communication and consumption.

Another form of digital representations of Lin Zexu I have dealt with, are a collection of online digital photographs supposedly representative of actual spaces – memorials, museums, squares – all dedicated and/or entitled to the historical figure of Lin Zexu. These images of Lin Zexu's representational places are digital renditions of urban places and landscapes which, seemingly, are naturally bound to its mythical figure. Here, I suggested that these media representations are used as complement to architecture, urban settings, historical artifacts, as well as to speeches and written texts in the production of social (national) space. Indeed, the apparently banal photographs of such commemorative places in which Lin Zexu is regarded, conceal a complex knitting of concrete social relations and social

reproduction that regulate the way people make sense of social space, both physical and in the media. Through the exploration of the procedures that regulate what I called *in-place* photographs (the act of taking a photo), and thus of performing and practicing physical space, I argued that a *media* photograph works also in order to epitomize how space has to be seen or looked at, and how as a result has to be acknowledged, treated and practiced. As a social product, the native house of Lin Zexu does not contain the social relations of production that created it, it rather is the expression of these social practices and actions that impose - and are simultaneously regulated by - the order of a specific symbolism. The very modalities through which this space has been materially produced and charged with signs that provided meanings to it, transformed it in a *place*, the native house of Lin Zexu, often lived and practiced by the people. As a place, it has become an ideological instrument for the expression of naturalized values that seem to emanate genuinely from the territory, the national space, while it is used for the production, exchange and consumption of collective ideas, values, meanings and photographs that render such *place* a commodity as any other.

The representations of Lin Zexu have therefore come to be associated not only with the symbolic space they mythologically call the attention to, but also to the performative requirements for practicing and understanding the national space, the physical territory within which people's experience (such as taking a photograph) occur. Lin Zexu's media representational places, I've shown, are intrinsically informed by traditional assumptions on the idea of space as something existing prior to human action and understanding, something natural that can be found any moment, anywhere.

The relation between Lin Zexu's places as online digital photographs and specific constitutional aspects of the production of social space, have stressed a built-in correspondance between the two, so that Lin Zexu's digital photographs show the way people invent, embody, and perform landscape, both *in-place* and in the media, and this is so because the physical places we live in, and the virtual places we look at when before the photograph of Lin Zexu's native house or museum, are the combination of materiality, meaning, and practices that become constituent agents in building, shaping and organizing people's perception of the social, both at individual and collective level. *By trying to reconstitute in its specific structure the code of connotation of a mode of communication as important as the press*

photograph we may hope to find, in their very subtlety, the forms of our society (R. Barthes, 1977: 31). Lin Zexu's digital representations of its commemorative places are thereby specific aspects of a Chinese media culture that may be designated as *territorialized*, that is, related to the nation-state as the reference focus. In fact, these online photographs as contemporary communication technology are the reworking expression of the bond between the Chinese nation-state and the citizens, between territory and people, as well as conveyors of spatial regulatory praxis.

The wide ranging functions of the media representations of Lin Zexu extend considerably, involving another important aspect of Chinese society, the manifestation of historical knowledge. Lin Zexu's media forms, have in fact proven to exemplify a cultural phenomena that I understood as the *mediatisation* of historical knowledge. This means that the canonical production, communication, and apprehension of what is to be considered "historical" in China, namely the work of academic historians, the activities of universities, of the state/government, and of all the traditional educational system operating in China, come to be renegotiated by the media itself through the various and heterogeneous cultural media forms in which Lin Zexu is consumed, transforming consequently people's access and interaction with their past. Media technologies have, indeed, rearranged and transformed people's interaction with informations and meanings, "*suggesting and creating new hierarchies, hegemonies and ways of imagining society*" (de Groot 2009: 94). What Lin Zexu's media images illustrate is not only the kind of historical knowledge that the media production of the myth of Lin Zexu is made conveying, but the very way through which the relationship between Chinese people and the "historical" materialize. Lin Zexu's media representations are a specific form through which a precise aspect of Chinese historical knowledge is articulated by the media practices pertinent respectively to the TV and the Internet via televisions, laptops, pc, mobile phones, tablet and so on. Mediatisation occurs when Chinese media and other (political) institutions have the simultaneous and reciprocal power of setting (changing and adapting) part of the rules that govern themselves. Chinese media conciliate the need of appealing media users by balancing, for instance, *amusing* and *entertaining* experiences along with a precise 'sense of history' that each representation of Lin Zexu must convey. By contrast, the Chinese Party and the government cope with the necessity of imparting the '*right and proper*' history of China to its citizens while alluring the image of the

national hero through much more enjoyable (media) forms, and yet benefiting of the wide-ranging dissemination of such cultural forms that the media permit, covering all national territory. By embedding contemporary Chinese media in the production of media representations of Lin Zexu, we assist to a disembedding of historical knowledge from its traditional contexts (traditional Chinese state-Party media such as newspaper, periodical, journals, books, radio, state-television, and movies; but also the Academy, and the education system). Lin Zexu's media representations, wouldn't thus be seen only as mediated cultural forms representing a genre of Chinese historical knowledge, but also as processes changing the very ideas and authority of historical knowledge and historical institutions in China.

The mediatisation of historical knowledge reveals how much history, instead of being a matter concerning only the past, exists also in the present. Political authority, national integrity and identity, traditions, culture, and self-understanding, these are only few of the forms that the 'historical' may take on during the phases of its production, communication and consumption. As a popular phenomena history requires an engagement with contemporary media popular conventions able to afford a better perception of its nuances.

The Chinese media in fact, by means of their capacity of shaping people's relations and social experientiality – of becoming an integral part of Chinese society by actually defining people's imagining of their self, and of reality, and by producing all realms of social and cultural life – the media turn to be an “*omnipresent symbolic environment creating an essential part of the societal definitions of reality*” (Schulz, 2004: 93).

In conclusion, the historical figure of Lin Zexu has demonstrated to be extremely useful, and a multifunctional cultural resource over time. Its media representations and its mediated myth have been present throughout the historical development, and more or less gradual colonization of the media in China. Lin Zexu media forms have served the need of the Chinese state of adopting a neo-conservative political programme, to reject the principles of class struggle and mass participation, to advance and affirm economic principles of liberalism, and to legitimise the gradual penetration of global capital and culture in China since the 1980's. The myth of Lin Zexu in its media forms has been an important contribution to the consolidation of Chinese nationalism, which has truly transformed the people's acknowledgement and relationship with the Chinese nation-state, its institutions, and the territory,

discarding the previous Maoist ideology. The cultural forms of Lin Zexu analysed in this study, are also fundamental tools triggering a strong sense of patriotism among the people, highlighting specific moral values and beliefs that contribute to the ideological construction of collective identities as the result of a definition of the *self* in contrast to an alleged *other*. They have also demonstrated how much the role of the media has been, and is crucial for the effectiveness of the ideology that Lin Zexu as media popular culture conveys. As the commercialization of Chinese culture and historical knowledge, the encounter between the media and Lin Zexu have triggered complex processes that had a radical impact on political institutions, on people, and on the economy.

This research indicate that the role of the media within Chinese society needs to be followed in all their manifestations, and that popular myths are not only still present, but they have been assimilated by the media activities generating a wealth of historical popular forms that, although seem to provide only the means by which produce a leisure-time activity, they instead are networked with crucial elements of Chinese society, where the very existence of the governing political institutions of the country is dependent upon, as well as the people understanding of the self and their behaviour in society is determined by. The contemporary extraordinary dissemination of popular cultural forms, especially historical ones, that China is facing through the production of countless TV series, online movies, images and music, require an immediate attention and exploration for they represent the substance by way of, the cultural network contradistinguishing China's multiple manifestations both at home and abroad, is materializing.

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Online Resources:

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http://blog.sina.cn/dpool/blog/s/blog_c4b0868b0101sung.html
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<http://www.zsnews.cn/epaper/zsrp/ShowIndex.asp?paperdate=20110721&part=12&article=2>
<http://bbs.zhongsou.com/3/20120530/5229242.html>
<http://www.nipic.com/show/4/137/9a9aefa4d1f41a51.html>
<http://pm.findart.com.cn/bigimg.php?aid=967022>
http://news.sun0769.com/dg/headnews/201507/t20150724_5640277.shtml
<http://spot.125uu.com/detail/linzexujinianguan>
http://sn.ifeng.com/lvyoupindao/youfenxiang/detail_2014_02/12/1838049_0.shtml
<http://www.zaiwaidi.cn/haowan-1.html>

Appendices:

Chapter 2: Image of Lin Zexu



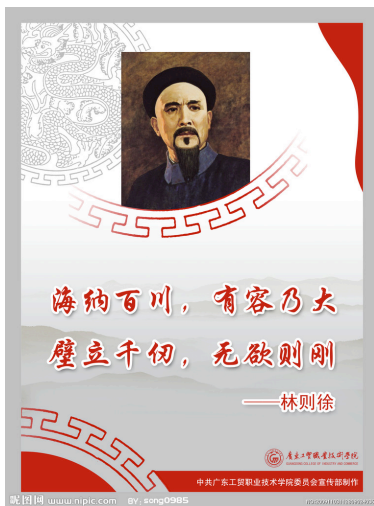
Appendix 1: Lin Zexu in the CCTV cartoon “Lin Zexu duilian lizhi”.



Appendix 2: Image of Lin Zexu, digital illustration of an article on corruption of the Chinese daily newspaper “Zhongshan Daily” (中山日报), published on 7th July, 2011.



Appendix 3: Image of Lin Zexu, posted in the forum section (论坛 luntan), BBS portal of the Chinese site *zhongsou.com*, on 2012-05-30 at 12:52.



Appendix 4: Lin Zexu, digital production promoting the Guangdong College of Industry and Commerce.



Appendix 5: Lin Zexu, digital reproduction of an oil on canvas, produced in 1999 by Chinese painter Guo Beiping 郭北平 (1949) in occasion of the celebration for the returning of Macau to China's sovereignty.

Chapter 3:



Appendix 6: Digital reproduction of the Lin Zexu's commemorative Stele in the Shaojiao Fort, in Humen County (Guangdong province).



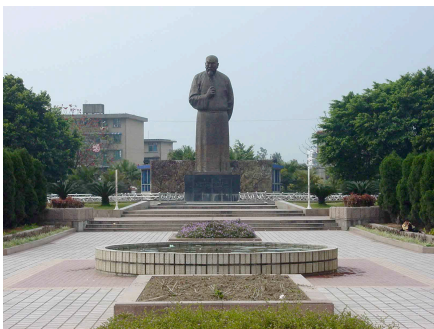
Appendix 7: Lin Zexu Memorial Hall in Pucheng county 蒲城县, a former residence of Lin Zexu in Shanxi province 陕西省.



Appendix 8: The “*old pool*” (池旧) in which, in 1839 Lin Zexu (in Humen town) supervised the destruction of about 20.000 boxes of opium seized to the British opium smugglers.



Appendix 9: Lin Zexu Old Residence in Nanhou Street, Fuzhou.



Appendix 10: Statue of Lin Zexu in the omonym square in Fuzhou, Fujian Province.