

# The Authorship of Place

## A Cultural Geography of the New Chinese Cinemas

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(Left) A view from Jiufen, Taipei. Photo by Keith Chong on Unsplash.

(Right) Taipei City, Taiwan. Photo by Tommy on Unsplash.

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# Introduction

## *Film Authorship as Place Making*



**Figure 0.1:** Film shoot in Jiufen, Taipei County (photo by author, December 22, 2012)

When I first encountered Hou Xiaoxian's and Jia Zhangke's films as a student of film history, I felt an immediate and intimate connection to the rural settings depicted in them, as if I were setting foot in the actual shooting locations in the Taiwanese and Chinese countryside. The images of the rural landscapes (see Figure 0.1) fashioned by these and other directors associated with the Taiwan New Cinema, and Fourth through Sixth Generation Chinese Cinema—known collectively as the New Chinese Cinema—felt uncannily familiar, blurring with memories from my own childhood of growing up in a rapidly transforming Asia. Alas, the experience of witnessing the countryside disappear in my childhood neighborhood in northern Taiwan—and be redeveloped overnight into industrial parks and luxury housing—was a traumatic memory I thought I had long forgotten until it was vividly projected onto the silver screen. Sitting in the college auditorium experiencing the settings as if I were at a virtual homecoming, I felt certain that the location-shot works of the New Chinese Cinema captured in their portraits of rural

Taiwan and China more than just a faithful historical record through their long shots, long takes, and slice-of-life tableaux. Beyond merely looking realistic, I felt the social and existential traumas captured in these films were uniquely authentic.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) defines the “realistic” as “characterized by faithfulness of representation . . . representing things in a way that is accurate and true to life.” By contrast, authenticity is not merely an “accurate reflection of real life, verisimilitude,” but also “the quality of truthful correspondence between inner feelings and their outward expression; unaffectedness, sincerity.” It is, moreover, “a mode of existence arising from self-awareness, critical reflection of one’s goals and values, and responsibility of one’s actions; the condition of being true to oneself” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2014). In other words, whereas how “realistic” a film appears depends primarily on its external style and formal construction, a film’s “authenticity” is an experiential quality stemming from the interiorized and affective relationship between oneself and the world depicted within the film.

This dichotomy of the realistic and authentic encapsulates the differences between my classmates’ and my own viewing experiences at the time. For my classmates, many of whom had only seen images of Taiwan and China for the first time through the New Chinese Cinema, the films’ visual sophistication was read as an indication of the filmmakers’ mastery of realist aesthetics. The images were the products of formal techniques that could be totally and systematically understood through rigorous textual deconstruction. I myself, however, doubted the premise that the filmmakers shot on location simply by applying principles of realist cinematography; I had a suspicion that a more intimate connection with place, one perhaps not unlike my own, belied these portraits of the rural. Thus, in my first viewings of the New Chinese Cinema, I found myself drawn not only to questions of form but to the relationship between cinematic form and the actual contexts and practices of production. In particular, I was drawn to the questions of what was it specifically about the shooting locations themselves, or the filmmakers’ perceptions of these shooting locations, that resulted in images that felt so authentic—and in a medium that can be notorious for its inauthenticity no less?

This book is the culmination of my project to explore the experiences of rural places by New Chinese Cinema auteurs.<sup>1</sup> It addresses the crucial but largely ignored role that rural film location shooting ought to play in our understanding of the cultural politics and histories of contemporary Taiwanese and Chinese film authorship. This book shows that New Chinese Cinema auteurs were drawn to rural shooting locations not because the settings were simply picturesque, provided appropriate backdrops for their scripts, or served as spaces in which they could experiment with film techniques, but because they were perceived as sites of deeply authentic individual and collective memories—lived and remembered experiences that were on the verge of disappearing because of unprecedented social changes occurring in the countryside between the 1970s and 1990s. New Chinese Cinema auteurs went in search of authenticity in rural sites of location shooting at a time when the rural, once considered a bastion of national and cultural heritage, risked losing its perceived authenticity through radical social transformations, such as rapid urbanization, large-scale social displacements, and destabilizing geopolitics.

1. The term “auteur” refers to filmmakers who exhibit distinctive and consistent narrative and aesthetic tropes throughout their works. In its original formulation by French film theorists contributing to *Cahiers du Cinema*, auteurs were conceived of as directors who made art out of images, whose creative visions shone through in spite of commercial constraints. As critics of the auteur theory later pointed out, however, the notion of autonomy is itself a myth—especially in the capital- and labor-intensive film industry. Unlike their French New Wave predecessors, none of the auteurs in this work claim to create art for art’s sake or seek to fashion art in a social vacuum. Indeed, one of the strategies Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs have employed to differentiate themselves from their Western counterparts is by stressing how their works are impacted by their sociocultural, institutional, and political environments, thus making their films authentic “documents” of their lived experiences.

To capture the nuances behind these stories of how New Chinese Cinema auteurs searched for authenticity in rural sites of production, this book goes beyond merely summarizing their “behind-the-scenes” experiences. Rather, I will broadly examine the politics, history, aesthetics, and practices of location shooting for Taiwanese, Chinese, and coproduced art cinema shot in rural communities since the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> My core argument is that rural location shooting goes well beyond serving aesthetic and technical needs, constituting reflexive practices of cultural interrogation, salvage, and survival in a region beset with disorienting and epochal social change. Thus, production environments are not blank canvases upon which auteurs project a preconstituted imagined geography or “apply” principles of realist filmmaking, but places where cultural meanings are being contested and reimagined. Consequently, filmic representations of rural places are more than motifs, metaphors, and cultural signs; they result from the complex interplay between the auteurs’ creative agency and the institutional politics, sociocultural contestations, and geopolitical ambivalences negotiated in the midst of production.

## Geography and the New Chinese Cinema

Rural location shooting does not take place in a void. Rural sites of production, while often imagined in the collective consciousness as spaces of timeless heritage, are, in actuality, anything but. In both Taiwan and China since the late 1970s, the rural was radically transformed by rapid—and frequently unregulated—redevelopment and urbanization. These processes were complemented by an accelerating transfer of wealth from rural centers of industrial production to urban areas better suited for capitalist accumulation in an era of global neoliberalism. In Taiwan, national development policy had begun to shift by the late 1970s from a focus on agricultural modernization and industrialization toward the construction of a post-Fordist economy, which focused on areas of development more in tune with the needs of globalized capital, including computerized technology, commercial media, tourism, banking, and other service industries. The southern counties, which were once centers of Taiwan’s industrial boom in the 1950s to 1970s, were hollowed out as the younger generation moved north seeking more lucrative employment opportunities. Migration from rural to urban areas within all counties—both in the north and the south—accelerated as Taiwan’s economic powerhouse shifted from the countryside to the city (Gallin and Gallin 1982). In the meantime, the combination of foreign investment and the government’s push to modernize Taiwan’s infrastructure through massive state-funded projects such as the Ten Great Constructions meant that large swaths of formerly rural communities, as well as pristine natural areas, would be redeveloped into industrial zones and swallowed whole by urban sprawl. These unprecedented transformations in the fabric of Taiwanese society graced cinema screens for the first time, unadorned, through the films of the Taiwan New Cinema.

Domestic spectators, who had been fed a staple of manicured representations of the rural through state-sponsored film movements like the healthy realist cinema, may well have been shocked to find such gritty images projected on cinema screens.<sup>3</sup> From rural communities

2. With the exception of the conclusion, this book focuses exclusively on fictional films to dispel a widespread misperception that documentaries are the sole genre devoted to investigating “real” social issues. By examining location-shot art cinema, this work complicates the lay notion that the aesthetic designs of fictional works stem primarily from the filmmakers’ creative visions, rather than from their interactions with actual places and communities.

3. According to Wicks (2014), other state-sanctioned genres in the 1960s to 1970s included “nostalgic films,” patriotic war films, adventure and martial arts films, and melodramas shot with a local backdrop (112–18)—hardly films that presented a critical view of Taiwan’s modernization.

seemingly emptied by migration to urban centers in *Boys from Fengkuei* (Hou 1983) and *Dust in the Wind* (Hou 1986), to the urban slums in *The Taste of Apples* (Zhuang 1983) and portraits of homelessness in *Flower in the Rainy Night* (T. Wang 1983), audiences were exposed to an “other” Taiwan not to be found on any state media channel or tourist brochure. More than simply documenting the changing façades of Taiwan’s small towns and rural communities, these cinematic images interrogated the very unity of Taiwan as an imagined community, challenging official accounts of progress and national harmony by critically reflecting the growing cultural and socioeconomic divides between the urban and rural, and the affluent and marginalized.

The geopolitical backdrop at the time further fueled the sense of urgency communicated in these films. The nationalist party, also known as the Guomindang (KMT), staunchly defended its aggressive developmentalist policies with a Cold War-era rationale, arguing that retaining a leading economic edge over the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was a matter of national security. Countering the nationalist discourse, Taiwan New Cinema filmmakers would join forces with dissenting voices from opposing political parties and ideological camps in their calls to consider Taiwan not as a temporary military stronghold—in which one could *fangong dalu*, or launch a counterattack to conquer mainland China—but a place one would call home permanently. Thus, in the context of the debates at the time about Taiwan’s national identity, the Taiwan New Cinema’s images of social displacement and defamiliarization were politically charged. These images ushered in a new image of Taiwan as more than a Chinese province, as a place with its own origin narratives, autonomous from Chinese cultural hegemony.

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait in mainland China—hereafter simply referred to as China—comparable patterns of geographical change were playing out on a much grander scale. Intended to fulfill its promise of bringing socioeconomic equality to the rural masses, Maoist-era developmentalist policies had focused on redistributing wealth from metropolitan areas to the countryside. Recognizing the vulnerability of China’s port cities and Eastern provinces to foreign invasion and influence, the needs of national defense further made it a priority to industrialize and modernize the inner provinces, former hinterlands that had been neglected in China’s efforts to modernize throughout the Republican era. Deng Xiaoping’s postsocialist reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, would officially reverse this prioritization of underdeveloped and rural areas over urban centers, opting instead for what Chinese geographers call the “ladder-step policy” of development (Fan 1995), where the wealth accumulated in newly allocated zones of neoliberal investment and development in the urban centers of the eastern provinces would supposedly trickle down to rural areas and eventually, the inner provinces (D. Yang 1997).

While this reallocation of capital may seem to parallel the prioritization of the urban over the rural in Taiwan, driving this geographic restructuring in China was a more fundamentally disorienting ideological shift. The Nationalist Party in Taiwan simply pursued the logical next step of capitalist development in its transition from Fordist to post-Fordist macroeconomic policy. China, however, had effectively reinvented itself from a socialist developmentalist state to a neoliberal market economy with “Chinese characteristics.” In films such as *Platform* (2000) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) in Jia Zhangke’s “Hometown Trilogy,” spectators witness the devastating effects of such an abrupt economic restructuring on small-town China through images of widespread demolition, the dismantling of communes, and a “development fever” (Hsing 2006) that wiped landscapes clean of any vestige of socialist China. While standards of living throughout the major metropolitan areas in the eastern provinces continued to climb to unprecedented levels, Fourth and Fifth Generation Chinese films from Wu Tianming’s *Old Well* (1987b), to Zhang Yimou’s *Not One Less* (1997) and Li Yang’s *Blind Shaft* (2003), show the



economic devastation wrought on the countryside and inner provinces where it was assumed wealth would eventually trickle down.

With economic opportunities drying out in these hinterlands, China would soon witness the largest and most destabilizing waves of migration in its modern history, creating a “floating population” of migrant workers who would power the coastal economies as a low-cost, itinerant labor force. Further, China’s controversial *hukou*, or household registration, system—now undergoing major reforms—meant that more than 200 million migrants were displaced from familiar social networks, bereft of the social benefits and safety nets once enjoyed in their home provinces (Zai and Ma 2004). An entire movement of Chinese independent cinema, the Sixth Generation cinema, would be dedicated in a large part to documenting the radically destabilized, vulnerable, and nomadic existences of these omnipresent others who were either stigmatized or made invisible in mainstream media (Zhen Zhang 2007). Like the Taiwan New Cinema, the films of the Chinese Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Generations challenged Deng’s slogan that “to get rich is glorious” by capturing images of social change that would not cleanly fit official narratives promoting “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Rather than merely interrogate the unity of China’s imagined community, these films posed the question of whether, indeed, a Chinese imagined community could even be forged at a time when such rudimentary questions about China’s national identity remained ambivalent and in flux.

### Production Narratives as Deep Industrial Texts

One might easily assume that, having fashioned such clearly critical representations, the New Chinese Cinema auteurs viewed filmmaking as an act of political subversion. In fact, this is a popular view in existing scholarship, which reads the location-shot images of urban and rural decline as incontrovertible evidence of the auteurs’ critical ideological positions. Yet, as I prepared for a series of interviews with New Chinese Cinema directors and cinematographers between 2011 and 2012, I discovered that all but a few would consider their location shoots as acts of political subversion.<sup>4</sup> I found this to be especially true in my interviews with an older generation of directors, who seemed suspicious that I might read their reflections on their filmmaking experiences from an Americanized or politicized perspective. They cautioned me before even starting the interviews not to read too much into their aesthetic decisions. It was not until I defused tensions by explaining that my primary intent was not to politicize but to explore their personal experiences of location shooting that they felt more at ease with sharing the details of their location shoots.

As this anecdote illustrates, there is a striking chasm between the way auteurs describe the meanings of their productions and the symptomatic meanings that scholars often rush to attribute to the films. As more than one filmmaker related to me, the themes in their films were not that *gao shang* (intellectually sophisticated). They were merely trying to tell stories that flowed authentically and from their *shenghuo jingyan*, or “life experiences.” They noted that powerful stories may inevitably touch on the *zeitgeist*, even if unintentionally. Initially, I was dismayed to hear such responses, which seemed intent on deflecting my critical gaze. But, as I conducted more interviews, it became clear that what auteurs considered life experiences were

4. This is a pattern that can also be found in numerous other interviews with Western scholars and critics, such as in Michael Berry’s *Speaking in Images* (2005). Ostensibly to avoid controversy, it is more common to find Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs describing their influences in terms of their cultural identity, philosophical views, autobiographical background, and artistic training than in their politics.

not only deeply related to their encounters with the rural but also sculpted out of richly layered autobiographical narratives that illuminated the complexities of location shooting in times of social upheaval.

To understand how auteurs responded to the uncertainties of geographical and economic restructuring on their own terms, rather than taking the distanced perspective of the armchair theorist, this book closely examines filmmakers' production narratives, or the stories that filmmakers tell about the production process. I view these production narratives, which can be found in a range of paratextual artifacts, including interviews, creative statements, film books, and publicity appearances, as what film and media anthropologist John Caldwell (2009) has dubbed "deep industrial texts," artifacts fashioned by the industry to make meaningful sense of its own creative labor, social organization, and business practices. In the vein of recent anthropological studies of global film and media industries, including Sherry Ortner's *Not Hollywood* (2013) and Aynne Kokas's *Hollywood Made in China* (2017), this book similarly examines production narratives through interpretive discourse analysis. My goal is neither to contextualize readings of films with the views of the filmmakers, nor to reconstruct the "objective" history of a production, but to account for how filmmakers themselves understand the social stakes, political complexities, and cultural impact of their authorship. Simply put, what are the values and beliefs that explicitly and implicitly guide rural location shooting?

## Experiencing Life in the Countryside

To answer this question by way of an example, let me start by investigating the location shooting practices for *In the Wild Mountains* (Yan 1987a), a Fourth Generation Chinese film that advocates for rural reform through realist portraits of physical and spiritual poverty in China's mountainous villages. I have chosen the following vignettes from the production because they clearly demonstrate how the filmmakers viewed location shooting as much more than just a technical expedience, as an opportunity to put into practice their values toward nation building, a process that required them to *tiyan shenghuo* (experience life) in the rural setting. Through these and other location shooting practices, the filmmakers engaged in what this book calls place making—the transformation of sites of production into places, or symbolically and affectively meaningful landmarks of collective memories and aspirations, spaces where lived experiences of nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage could be reenacted.<sup>5</sup> By theorizing location shooting as place making, the rest of the introduction sets a firm foundation for exploring in the following chapters the complex cultural dynamics that both guide rural production practices and resonate as motifs in the New Chinese Cinema.

Director Yan Xueshu settled on the shooting location of Zhen An County in southern Shaanxi Province after three months of location scouting (Yan 1987b, 7). According to Yan, this location was chosen because it exuded a *qi fen* (aura) that he thought was aligned with the collective excitement of reform, an aura full of *li du* (vigor and energy) (Yan 1990, 255). A self-proclaimed expert in northwestern Chinese cultural geography, Yan also believed that the *li*

5. The question of how places are "made" has been a fundamental one in the field of cultural geography since the 1970s. One of the first waves of scholarship to systematically theorize the role of agency in making sense of place can be found in the field of humanist geographies, perhaps best known through Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977). Complicating earlier studies that viewed landscapes as the effects of predetermined sociocultural practices, Tuan's landmark contribution proposed that place should be viewed as a fundamental building block in a subject's sense of phenomenological, cultural, and social being. He argued that our identities, sociocultural belief systems and worldviews, as well as relationships with others not only occur in settings that are preexisting "containers" of action but are constitutive of place itself.

*du* he discovered in this location emanated a sense of *yuan sheng mei*, or “original beauty” (Yan 1987b, 7), a preexisting and authentic cultural essence he believed was unchanged by the rapid modernization occurring in neighboring counties. For Yan, this unique combination of qualities composing the location’s aura—at once appearing open to change but also steeped in traditions—made Zhen An County ideal to shoot a film about the necessity of rural modernization.

As part of the preproduction process, Yan, together with his production team, lived on location in Zhen An County for more than a year, where they attempted to familiarize themselves with rural living while extracting and distilling the aura of the environment through script revisions (Lo 2016). Beyond ensuring that the film would look realistic, Yan viewed the entire production as a process of translating an environmental essence into cinematic imagery, a process that required the production team to patiently absorb *li du* into their aesthetic techniques. As Yan theorized, *li du* was not just “any exterior rhythm, but a type of internal quality. It comes first from the depth of thinking and the passions of our emotions, and at the same time from the simplicity of one’s style” (1990, 255).<sup>6</sup>

While the cast and crew shared Yan’s overarching views toward the aura of the environment, how they actually experienced the shooting location depends on their roles in the production team. For instance, whereas Yan held that *li du* is a cultural essence that must be aesthetically reimagined through the film, cinematographer Mi Jiaqing believed that the environmental aura must, above all, be preserved in its original state. Mi compares his work to a delicate archaeological procedure of preserving “a concealed depth that has not changed for thousands of years.” Lighting was used cautiously to prevent “the original beauty of this type of rural landscape . . . [from being] damaged by externally imposed, high powered lights” (1986, 205).

By contrast, actors Yue Hong and Xin Ming described how *li du* was not simply an aura they could comfortably observe from a distance but an embodied and lived experience. While Yan and Mi had the luxury of aestheticizing *li du*, the actors experienced it firsthand when they were directed by Yan to labor alongside the rural residents for months, until their mannerisms could no longer be told apart from the villagers’ (Yan 1990, 261). Far from being merely a cultural essence of the region to be reconstructed or an aesthetic quality to be preserved, *li du* was to be imprinted on their calloused hands and embodied by their anxious desire to break free of the monotony of rural living. As the actors recounted in their production narratives (H. Yue 1986; Xin 1986), the main challenge they faced during preproduction went beyond properly preserving *li du* or aligning it with reform-era ideologies to living on location in a way that demonstrated *li du*. In their accounts of production, the cast described their fears of “going native.” Even as they lived and breathed the aura of the place, they had to remind themselves not to fully align their views with the conservative values of the villagers. They had to be “vigorous” in maintaining the director’s critical perspective of feudal traditions despite their being called to “experience [the] life” of rural subjects. To experience the rural authentically, they were called to embody a double consciousness of empathizing with the rural while also reminding themselves of its shortcomings (Lo 2016).

The purpose of this comparative analysis is twofold. First, it demonstrates how there is no one “convention” of how a filmmaker engages in place making. Even within a single production unit, there is a diversity of approaches to experiencing life, let alone across productions. This suggests how place making can be a highly individuated process through which filmmakers make meaningful sense of their roles in film authorship. Indeed, this book elucidates how place making is not simply the practice of projecting preexisting cultural values and collective

6. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

meanings onto a site of production but constitutes, rather, a reflexive mode of authorship, a creative and discursive process through which filmmakers strategically perform their authorial identities. For the auteur who claims to experience place authentically, place is never simply “made,” as if it could be fashioned out of a preexisting mold. Rather, place is authored, bearing the unique signature of the auteur’s lived experiences and sociocultural insights.

Second, the styles by which filmmakers “author place” also clearly depend on what role they play in the production team. As an employee of the state-owned Xi’an Film Studios, Yan presents himself in his production narratives as a mouthpiece of the studio and thus openly expresses his belief that the aura should be molded to conform with the dictates of reform-era ideology. Corresponding directly to his “second-in-command” position in the creative hierarchy, the aura was a quality to be preserved by Mi Jiaqing, not to be “reconstructed,” as only the director wielded such authority. Members of the cast had the authority neither to reconstruct or preserve *li du* in their period of experiencing life. Rather, *li du* was to be embodied and performed through their struggle to carry out the director’s orders of living authentically. Thus, even if filmmakers claim that their lived experiences of place are unique, systematic differences in the ways cast and crew members author place can be at least partly accounted for through the hierarchical power relations that are institutionalized in Chinese film production cultures.

To narrow the scope of this investigation, this book leaves a more full-fledged sociological analysis of Chinese and Taiwanese film production cultures to future studies.<sup>7</sup> Instead, it focuses primarily on the cultural politics underlying the practices of authoring places by film directors—cultural and professional elites who identify as creative practitioners with the ultimate authority to shape the meanings of their films’ images of place. At the same time, it is important to note that unlike their Western counterparts, New Chinese Cinema directors view their practices of authorship not primarily as individualistic modes of creative expression but as opportunities to carry out what Robin Visser (2010) calls the “moral mandate” (91–92) of Chinese intellectuals, a social expectation holding that cultural critique should not stop at mere description and deconstruction.<sup>8</sup> As each chapter makes evident, Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs experience shooting locations as stages to present their unique visions of national and cultural progress, which aim to be coherent and authentic, but can often also display deep ambivalence toward official narratives of nation building.

## The Cultural Politics of Location Shooting

This book thus joins the rapidly growing film and media studies subfield of location shooting studies to examine the complex relationships between cinematic representations of place and the cultural politics of film and media production. A field currently dominated by histories and production studies of Hollywood (James 2005; Palmer 2016; Gleich 2018; Gleich and Webb 2019; Steinhart 2019), relatively few book-length studies based in Asian production

7. In the pioneering collection of critical studies on Hollywood location shooting, Joshua Gleich and Lawrence Webb (2019) argue that such a sociological approach would involve systematically examining location shooting as social practices in a workplace or social environment “stratified by class, race, and gender relations” (5).

8. According to Daniel Steinhart (2019), postwar Hollywood film directors who shot on location aimed to craft images that only looked visually authentic. This is in sharp contrast to European New Wave auteurs, such as the Italian neorealists, who strove to arrive at film “truth” through location shooting (Nowell-Smith 2013). For the Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs in this book, creative practices are in general viewed in less immediately commercial or individualistic terms. Rather than constituting simply a form of artistic craft or an experiment in existentialist truth seeking, location shooting—along with other aesthetic techniques—is viewed by auteurs as a social practice through which the individual finds his or her unique voice through cultural critique.

environments (DeBoer 2014; Pandian 2015; Choe 2016; Jaikumar 2019) have paid sustained attention to location shooting as a social and creative practice conditioned by economic, technological, aesthetic, and logistical forces.<sup>9</sup> Within Chinese film studies, the location shooting techniques employed in art cinema are repeatedly mentioned in stylistic histories of national cinemas and the career trajectories of auteurs.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in these accounts, location shooting is often viewed simply as a stylistic trait consciously used by the auteurs to create more culturally authentic images. Location-shot images are thus read uncritically as defining markers of a film's authenticity, in contrast to the inauthenticity of films shot using more "commercial" modes of production in studio back lots. By contrast, production cultures of location shooting in Chinese-language film and media are vastly underexamined, with only a handful of studies such as *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience* (Curtin 2007) and *Coproducing Asia* (DeBoer 2014) engaging in truly interdisciplinary, multisited ethnographic analysis of the political economies, institutional politics, and geopolitics of on-location film production and circulation in Asian media capitals. Before proceeding to theorize on the cultural politics of rural location shooting, then, it will be illuminating to first address the question of why production studies of location-shot, Chinese-language film and media are so few and belated.

Most importantly for the purposes of this book, this may be due largely to the fact that Chinese cinema studies has, historically, been dominated by text-centric approaches (Kloet 2007; C. Berry and Pang 2010; C. Berry 2012) and until recently, set aside sociological approaches in favor of "auteur and movement approaches" (Yingjin Zhang 2010, 18) more popularly employed in literary and area studies (Kloet 2007). In English studies of representations of space and place in Chinese-language cinema, this methodological narrowness has meant that images of the urban and the rural, local and global, national and transnational, are primarily read as semiotic signs that symptomize ideologies of nation building, globalization, or the cultural logics of modernity, postmodernity, and postcoloniality. For early theorists on space and place in the Chinese-language cinema such as Fredric Jameson (1986), place representations were symptomatic of a global postmodernity and could thus be read as cultural signs translatable between various "world cinemas." Opposition to the overly reductive reading of cultural signs as "national allegories" soon came from "local-turn" national cinema scholarship, which critically examined representations of place within the historically specific and local contexts of modernization and political reform taking shape in China and Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> Though these studies actively refrained from translating the cultural specificity of place representations into universalizing frameworks of geopolitical change, they nevertheless interpreted urban and rural forms as symptomatic of binary divisions between the transnational and the local, the modern and the traditional, as well as the developed and the underdeveloped.<sup>12</sup> Quite tellingly, rural forms were often equated with tropes of local and national resistance against urban processes of modernization and homogenization, thus uncritically replicating romanticized

9. These are the four "constructive factors" Gleich and other contributors to the compilation *Hollywood on Location* (2019, 5), have identified as key contexts to be addressed for critical studies of location shooting practices.

10. Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs themselves consciously bring attention to their use of location shooting—particularly in interviews with Western critics and scholars—to differentiate their styles and practices from Hollywood's mode of production.

11. For a discussion of how models of geopolitical space misconstrued the symptomatic meanings of spatial representations in New Chinese Cinema shot in urban locations, see Tolentino (2001).

12. For example, Chinese film scholar and critic Dai Jinhua proposed the following spatial chronology of "city films"—films that showcase the urban/rural binary (1978 to mid-1980s), films where the urban is independent of the rural (1980s), and films of the "age of diversity" (1990s), where the urban is refashioned into more transnational than local forms (Wang and Barlow 2002). This periodization is problematic, as it suggests that as China modernizes, the rural disappears in the cultural imaginary, superseded by cosmopolitan urbanisms. This chronology thus presents an overly reductive reading of representations of Chinese cultural geography that assumes urban forms are somehow more modern than rural ones.



notions of the rural as a site of de facto cultural authenticity in Chinese nativist discourses.<sup>13</sup> Since the local turn, Chinese cinema scholars have amply addressed the need to break out of reductive dichotomies by investigating instead filmic representations of traveling (X. Lin 2005; Fu 2008; McGrath 2008; M. Berry 2009), mobility and spatial practices (Lai 2007), overlapping imagined geographies (J. C. Li 2000; Yeh and Davis 2005), hybridity (Chow 1993; Abbas 2002; R. Chi 2004), haunted/palimpsestic places (Lim 2001; C. Berry 2007), and polylocality (Yingjin Zhang 2010). Yet, while these studies opened up the critical examination of space and place in the New Chinese Cinema to new horizons—including, as Zhang (2010) points out, previously overlooked areas of research such as audience studies, cross-mediality, and transcultural visuality—much of the field has continued to view images of mobility or “in-between spaces” as cultural signs symptomatic of a film’s “minor” or “marginal” cultural politics (Zhang Zhen 2007; Yingjin Zhang 2010). Methodologically, this meant that when detailed accounts of production from directors’ interviews were included, they still served primarily as contexts to validate symptomatic readings of place representations—evidencing a disregard for the fact that accounts of production are themselves paratextual artifacts, which production cultures scholars have cautioned against reading as “documents” detailing a film’s “objective” production history.

In contrast to their English-language counterparts, Chinese and Taiwanese scholarship on place representations in location-shot Chinese-language art cinema often provide a more detailed accounting of production histories, ostensibly due to their access to a wider range of production narratives and artifacts beyond those published in English. Yet these studies are too often devoid of a critical framework that adequately problematizes the politics of cultural production, a pattern that Chris Berry (2012, 497) and Chen Xihe (2012, 470) have surmised is due to the risks associated with engaging in ideological critique in Chinese academic institutions. Consequently, filmic representations of space and place are most often examined as a part of larger genre histories of Chinese film, where rural representations are believed to reflect an earlier and “simpler” stage in Chinese sociocultural and economic development, while urban representations symptomize the growing complexity and plurality of social experiences in post-socialist China (C. Lu 1999). Approaches borrowing from classical auteurist criticism are also popular, where representations of rural forms that are deemed “socially valuable” are believed to have been fashioned by filmmakers who hail from a rural background—and are thus presumed to be more knowledgeable of rural social issues than their urban-based counterparts (W. Xiao 2007). Equally commonplace are studies that read images of cultural geography (J. Zhang and Wu 2005; D. Zhong 2007) as if they provided reflections of social and cultural “truth” with documentary-like accuracy. These studies uncritically interpret the urban and rural as sites of moral corruption and purification, respectively, overlooking how cinematic images are, in fact, cultural constructions (Cao and Li 2011; Gong 2011) bearing loaded ideological meanings. Last but not least, in lieu of formal analysis, the overwhelming popularity of plot analysis (S. Li 2012), genre criticism (L. Li 2011) and thematic studies (Ni 1999) as approaches to textual analysis often leaves the examination of place representations at an entirely descriptive level.

In sum, despite several notable differences in their approaches, the centrality of the filmic text is rarely questioned in both English and Chinese scholarship on representations of space

13. Early studies on the history of spatial representations in the Taiwan New Cinema repeated similar assumptions. The Taiwan New Cinema was frequently referred to as a rural film movement because of Hou’s nostalgic representation of the Taiwanese countryside and the directors’ ties to 1970s Taiwanese nativist discourse. Contrastingly, post-Taiwan New Cinema films were often portrayed as being decadently urban, with characters suffering from social alienation and immersed in more modern existential malaises (Deppman 2009). While spatial categories can be useful for the purposes of describing the settings in films, classifying an entire film movement as either rural or urban clearly amounts to a generalization.

and place in the New Chinese Cinema.<sup>14</sup> In such a text-centric paradigm, interviews and production narratives detailing the processes and practices of location shooting are largely employed as “contexts” rather than as “paratexts,” which can result in an overreliance on symptomatic readings on the one hand, or provide merely descriptive accounts of production on the other. Significantly, an inadvertent consequence of text-centrism is the continued mythologization of the director as an “auteur” whose visual style is assumed to have an identifiable origin in his or her autobiographical background or cultural identity, only waiting to be excavated by the observant scholar. This “intentionalist fallacy” of auteurist criticism obfuscates the complicated relationships between cultural capital, creative practices, directors’ ever-shifting authorial identities, and even the complicit role that area studies scholarship can sometimes play as a promotional platform for authorial, industrial, and national agendas.<sup>15</sup>

Actively addressing these shortcomings are new approaches in Chinese-language film and media scholarship that have expanded the corpus of their studies well beyond the genre of art cinema to include popular cinema, unofficial cinema, video documentaries, television, and new media—genres and mediums whose screen cultures offer rich alternatives to the now-dated model of national cinema production, distribution, and reception (Khoo and Metzger 2009; Voci 2010; Yingjin Zhang 2010; Neves and Sarkar 2017).<sup>16</sup> The methods used to critically investigate these frequently location-shot mediums are accordingly diverse, infusing textual analysis with more than just autobiographical, industrial, and political economic “contexts,” but also ecological (Lu and Mi 2010), urbanist (Braester and Tweedie 2010), spatial (Yingjin Zhang 2010), geographical (Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016), biopolitical (Lu 2007; Mon 2016), and media anthropological (Pickowicz and Zhang 2006; Zhen and Zito 2015) readings, just to name a few. In addition to the titles already mentioned at the start of this section, the recent proliferation of interdisciplinary methods has brought the field a long way in weaning Chinese cinema scholarship off its former text-centrism.<sup>17</sup> Yet, perhaps due to the unfortunate association of more dated, text-centric methodologies with the study of aesthetics in the New Chinese Cinema—the first film movements based in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to have received widespread attention from Western scholarship—the application of these interdisciplinary approaches remains largely limited to other genres, mediums, and visual cultures, as well as in cosmopolitan and urban production environments where transnational cultural flows appear

14. A notable exception can be found in Zhang (2010), which employs concepts of space and place inventively to complicate dominant theoretical frameworks in Chinese cinema studies and to map out new “spaces”—including those of scholarship, production, polylocality, subjectivity, and performance—previously underexamined in the literature. While this work is pioneering in its application of theories of space and place to Chinese cinema studies, it remains focused on spaces that are mostly urban, transnational, or global in scale. Rural locales remain unaddressed.

15. Because of the popularity of textual and autobiographical approaches in existing studies of Chinese film authorship, the intention of this work is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the directors’ narrative and stylistic traits. While familiarity with the directors’ overarching career trajectories can certainly be useful, prior knowledge is not necessary to follow the case studies presented in this book. Detailed contexts informing the productions are explored whenever they directly illuminate the directors’ experiences of location shooting.

16. It is also for these reasons that this book deliberately excludes, with the exception of the concluding chapter, the study of documentaries shot by or on New Chinese Cinema directors. Indeed, the literature on the politics of location shooting in documentary production is extensive and has already challenged text-centric approaches that draw from classical models of auteurist criticism. For book-length studies on the aesthetics and politics of documentary filmmaking in China, see C. Berry, Lu, and Rofel (2010), Robinson (2013), and Edwards (2015). An excellent compilation of studies in both English and Mandarin for Taiwanese documentaries can be found in J. Cheng, Wicks, and Noguchi (2016). Of particular note for its timely attention to post-Taiwan New Cinema documentaries is S. L.-c. Lin and Sang (2012). The fifth chapter of Yingjin Zhang (2010) is also especially pertinent for how it specifically addresses issues of space, place, and subjectivity in the production and exhibition of independent Chinese documentaries.

17. Yingjin Zhang (2010) contends that three major shifts—diversifying objects, methodologies, and scales of analysis—have occurred recently in Chinese cinema studies (21). For a more comprehensive discussion of recent transformations in the field than can be included in the scope of this book, see Zhang’s first chapter.

to be the most dynamic. As of this writing, these approaches have rarely been applied systematically to a rereading of the cultural politics of art cinema production in local and regional production environments during the heyday of the New Chinese Cinema, much less in rural production environments.

A work that warrants special consideration for its rare focus on Chinese-language film location shooting—for multiple genres and mediums including art cinema—as a social practice, then, is Yomi Braester's *Painting the City Red* (2010). In his pioneering study, Braester presents a sociological analysis of how contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese cinemas both impact and are impacted by urbanist practices and policies. He argues that filmmakers who shoot on location in urban environments forge an “urban contract” by mediating multiple visions of the city held by other social agents who also plan, inhabit, imagine, and construct the city. Reading films as “much more than a vehicle for forming individual and collective identities,” as texts that “provided a discursive framework for urban policies” (5), Braester demonstrates that filmic representations of the urban environment reflect the shifting power relations in the urban contract, thus revealing social contestations revolving around issues of nation building, cultural development, preservation, and gentrification. Yet—and as Braester himself indicates—this approach caters specifically to the study of urban location shooting and is most effective when applied to films and theatrical productions with topics directly related to urban planning.

In rural areas and undeveloped natural settings, one would be hard pressed to identify an equivalent “rural contract” that New Chinese Cinema auteurs negotiated throughout the course of location shooting. After all, art cinema set in rural locations are mostly targeted toward urban and international audiences, not the rural communities in which the films were shot. Indeed, as I learned from my interviews, filmmakers in both Taiwan and China often view the rural as an environment far less regulated than do their urban counterparts. This lack of regulation continues to be a major drawing point for filmmakers tired of the logistical complexities involved with location shooting in major metropolitan areas. As I discuss at length in Chapter 4 and in the conclusion, singular works of film and media may indeed be so popular that they transform entire rural communities into tourist destinations, making it necessary for future productions to negotiate a social contract with its residents and planners. This, however, is a recent development that has taken shape only in the past decade, well after the heyday of the New Chinese Cinema. For most of the New Chinese Cinema produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s, rural location shooting remained, by most accounts, a self-regulated practice.

For Rey Chow (1995), the lack of an apparent social contract results in an absolutely uneven set of power relations between directors and their rural subjects. In *Primitive Passions*, she claims that Fifth Generation directors exoticized rural subjects and objectified women to advance the state's projects of cultural modernization. According to Chow, it was only by primitivizing these social others, that directors were able to condemn Maoist ideology and express support for post-reform era policies. Yet, because Chow relies solely on textual analysis of on-screen representations of gender and ethnicity, without considering the institutional contexts the filmmakers were working under at the time, she may well have overestimated the directors' seemingly absolute power over the representation of rural communities. As Chapter 3 discusses at length, Fifth Generation directors would clearly not be advancing the state's cultural modernization by portraying rural subjects as others. Rather, to accord with official narratives of progress, directors in their production narratives strove to represent rural subjects as model pioneers who struggled to break free of the shackles of feudal traditions.

This brief detour into the institutional background of Fifth Generation Chinese filmmaking serves to illustrate that like urban-based productions, rural location shooting can be politically



sensitive even if the settings themselves are more loosely regulated. In fact, it is precisely because the rural is imagined in official narratives as a space of cultural authenticity and national heritage that auteurs tread carefully when representing the rural. When auteurs encounter shooting locations as nexuses of historical, social, and geopolitical contestations, in tension with idealized imaginaries of the rural, the choice of how to properly represent the rural becomes a delicate matter of authorial self-positioning.

More broadly, this example also demonstrates how, regardless of whether a social contract is forged between the auteur and his or her filmed subjects, the cultural politics of place making cannot be understood outside the specific institutional and social contexts of the production environments. Thus, instead of romanticizing the auteur as an autonomous creative agent or reading the auteur as a purely discursive construct fashioned out of greater socioeconomic and ideological forces, this book takes the middle-ground position in anthropologies of film and media that auteurs are reflexively conscious social agents who are savvy at performing creative, professional, and sociocultural identities.<sup>18</sup> As the ensuing chapters illustrate, auteurs are keenly aware of how their creative agency is being regulated and make creative decisions with the knowledge of both the extent and limitations of their autonomy.<sup>19</sup> That is, creative practices' greater degree of self-regulation in rural production environments does not imply that an absolutely uneven set of power relations will inevitably be established between auteurs and rural communities.

## The Touring Auteur

If power relations are neither absolute nor determined by a social contract in rural production environments, what then is an appropriate framework for mapping the cultural politics of rural location shooting? Once again, let me turn to how auteurs search for authentic experiences while “experiencing life,” for insight into this question.

When filmmakers describe the differences between urban and rural shooting locations in their production narratives, a quality that is frequently contrasted is the location's degree of authenticity. For instance, Fourth and Fifth Generation Chinese auteurs often characterize the urban as culturally pluralistic and forward looking but also incoherent and inauthentic. The rural, by contrast, is imagined as a space of cultural and national origins, a place of timeless cultural authenticity where the residents appear molded out of the very geological contours of their surrounding natural landscapes. As Chapters 2 and 3 explore, numerous Fourth and Fifth Generation auteurs boasted how they were imbued with a privileged connection with rural places, which enabled them to intimately dialogue with the *minzu jingshen*, or “folk spirit.” Location shooting was thus seen as a process through which they could gain greater insight and clarity into complex questions of nation building.

By contrast, Sixth Generation Chinese and Taiwan New Cinema auteurs were more guarded with their descriptions of the cultural differences between the urban and rural, perhaps conscious of how the imaginary of the rural as an inherently authentic cultural space—one defined in Manichaeian opposition to the inauthenticity of the urban—might be perceived as overly

18. For an overview of the various theoretical frameworks of authorship typically used in film and media studies, see Janet Staiger's “Authorship Approaches” (2003).

19. The “reflexive consciousness” of filmmakers first became apparent to me when I studied existing interview transcripts of directors in preparation for my own interviews, only to discover that they had carefully reworded their views and experiences of production depending on the cultural and institutional contexts of the interview.

reductive or even self-Orientalizing. These auteurs thus contrasted the urban and rural not in terms of a cultural divide but between the realms of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

As a case in point, Sixth Generation director Jia Zhangke explained to me how he was attracted to location shooting in rural communities not because he believed that such locations were by their very nature more authentic than urban areas but because traveling to these unfamiliar settings would produce a new *jiaodu*, or “perspective”:

Traveling made me find a different point of view. If you get used to one way of living, you might not be aware. But if you change your point of view to look at your past life, you'll get a new point of view. That's why I said only when you leave your hometown will you be able to get back to your hometown. (2012)

Similarly, in my interview with Taiwanese director Lin Jingjie, Lin elaborated on how traveling played a pivotal role in his production of *The Most Distant Course* (2007) because it heightened his sensitivity to his surroundings in ways that would have been impossible at home:

When we're in a familiar, everyday environment, we will become numb. . . . As a result your internal reality won't move, it won't flow. Instead, when you travel, you're in an unfamiliar environment. . . . Your five senses through your eyes, ears, nose, taste, body, and mind, and your alertness will all expand, then this opening will bring out those things deeply buried inside you. So traveling is both an exterior and interior movement; it's happening simultaneously. It's exploring something new, but at the same time also returning to reflect on what has accumulated from the past. (J. Lin 2011)

Regardless of their focus on the autobiographical self-awareness or phenomenological sensitivity engendered by traveling, both Jia and Lin stress how each new encounter with place is a new encounter with the self. In other words, it was through the experience of traveling between the urban and rural, not the settings in and of themselves, that they nurtured a more authentic relationship with the environment. As these examples illustrate, regardless of whether the rural is believed to be a more inherently authentic space than the urban or a space in which one can become authentic by experiencing the unfamiliar, the search for authenticity takes auteurs on journeys between the urban and rural.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, this desire to seek out an authentic experience, either by traveling or by visiting the rural as a site of cultural “difference,” partly aligns these urban-based auteurs with a social group whose experiences of place are typically viewed as being the most inauthentic: tourists.<sup>21</sup>

In his sociological study of tourist practice, John Urry (Urry and Larsen 2011) defines the tourist gaze as a seeking out of sites of distinctiveness, places that are out of the ordinary, or so-called liminal zones. Extending Urry's argument further, Dean MacCannell (1999) ventures

20. Similarly, Hou Xiaoxian has, in response to Michael Berry's interview question regarding the recurring motif of “movement” and the “dialogic relationship between the country and the city,” explained that the meaning underlying his focus on mobility is his “longing for the world outside.” Hou continues to elaborate how “living in a small, closed space, it is only natural to look to the outside in order to develop. This longing for the outside seems to have almost unconsciously worked its way into my films in these road sequences” (2005, 257).

21. This does not imply that auteurs experience rural places solely through the tourist perspective. Bearing fraught relationships with their shooting locations—as those uprooted from stable notions of place and belonging by radical sociocultural and geopolitical changes—New Chinese Cinema auteurs clearly engage in what Hamid Naficy (2001) has called “accented” modes of production. In existing auteur studies of New Chinese Cinema directors, one of the primary lenses through which the auteurs' styles are examined is how accented lived experiences such as exile, homecoming, nomadism, and homelessness impact their aesthetics. My study seeks to both complement and complicate these studies by looking at how auteurs' accented lived experiences are dialectically related to their experiences of place through the tourist gaze. I argue that it is precisely because of auteurs' “accented” lived experiences, which defamiliarize their perceptions of the communities and spaces encountered in the midst of production, that the tourist gaze becomes such a fundamental aspect underlying their experiences of rural places.

that the tourist gaze goes beyond characterizing only the gaze of actual tourists. Rather, he asserts that the tourist is an apt model for the modern individual, one who goes on “quests for authenticity” to retrieve meaning from his or her alienated role in the production of late capitalist modernity. The desire to sightsee, for MacCannell, goes beyond a casual, superficial curiosity to consume all signs of “difference.” Rather, “sightseeing is a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuity of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience” (13). In other words, sightseeing is a way of making sense of the traumas associated with modernization, a practice of reclaiming a wholesome sense of self in an age of intense cultural and social defamiliarization. Like a religious pilgrim, MacCannell’s sightseeing tourists associate both sites of otherness and the experience of the pilgrimage as keys to understanding their place in society and history. Informed by MacCannell’s framing of sightseeing as a quest for authenticity rather than a superficial pursuit of the exotic and other, this book posits that it is in this more holistic sense that New Chinese Cinema auteurs can also be considered tourists.<sup>22</sup> As urban-based directors attempting to make coherent the social disorientations caused by Taiwan’s and China’s economic and social restructuring through their quests for authenticity in rural production environments, these auteurs have become “tourists” in their own backyards.<sup>23</sup>

And yet New Chinese Cinema auteurs are a truly distinctive group of tourists. They are tourists who attempt to experience the authentic in their own constructions of place, who inhabit the worlds they themselves have authored. Extending the metaphor further, they are like tourists who sightsee in attractions they have staged for themselves. For instance, longtime cinematographers for Hou Xiaoxian, Li Pingbin and En Chen (P. Li 2012; H. Chen 2011), both described to me how Hou would direct a scene not by playing out the traditional role of a director who manages and oversees all the details of the shoot but as a spectator. Rather than referring to a script, he would give his cast and crew an unusual degree of freedom in their creative decisions, whether it came to constructing the set, designing the camera movements, or acting. This was not because Hou believed that improvisation was inherently superior to more structured modes of production but to ensure that his viewing experience of each new take was as fresh as possible. Like a tourist of history, Hou was not content with the take unless he experienced it as an authentic historical reenactment—when he could no longer tell that the play was in fact just a play. Hou’s case might seem like an extreme example, but as later chapters reveal, his “directing-through-the-tourist-gaze” mode of production is paradigmatic for numerous New Chinese Cinema auteurs, who view location shooting not as a means to an end for carrying out preplanned production decisions but as a period of observing, witnessing, and reflecting upon the unfamiliar, unexpected, and contingent aspects of production.

Moreover, for New Chinese Cinema auteurs aiming to uphold the moral mandate, the aesthetic meanings and interiorized experiences embedded in these images of place must not only appear authentic but also be capable of making coherent disorienting social changes. For example, while location scouting for *Yellow Earth* (1984), director Chen Kaige was initially perplexed by his encounter with rural poverty in northern Shaanxi. Why would a site of origins

22. In other words, New Chinese Cinema auteurs are not actually tourists traveling through the countryside for the sake of leisure. Rather, this book argues that a touristic dimension of their lived experiences in place—evidenced by their pursuit of authenticity in rural sites of difference—needs to be highlighted to more fully take into account the complexity of their experiences of place.

23. In keeping with the conventional usage of the term “tourist gaze,” this term will be employed—for the remainder of the book—in reference to Urry’s original formulation rather than MacCannell’s refinement, unless otherwise noted. The adjective “touristic” will also be used to characterize those seeking out-of-the-ordinary experiences and should not be conflated with MacCannell’s more holistic notion of sightseeing as a quest for authenticity.

for the Chinese Communist Party be so utterly destitute? Yet Chen describes how he arrived at an epiphany that the image of the rugged and destitute landscape “from afar” could serve as a visual metaphor of Chinese cultural resiliency (Kaige Chen 1985, 111–12). This image of the forlorn landscape, captured with long-shot cinematography, was thus eventually adopted as the key visual motif for the film.

Chen’s practice of constructing a meaningful visual motif from the vast and formidable desert landscapes of northern Shaanxi constitutes what urban planner and environmental psychologist Kevin Lynch (1960) calls the cognitive process of “imaging,” or the transformation of mere encounters in space into legible and navigable, distinctive and memorable images of place. Imaging, Lynch argues, is fundamental to our feeling of rootedness in unfamiliar settings, as it allows one to inhabit space in a personalized and intimate manner. Auteurs thus share yet another aspect of their search for authenticity with tourists: both experience places by imaging them. Imaging occurs not only during production itself but afterward as well. Just as it is a ritual for tourists, upon their return home, to explain the “backstory” of the photographs from their trip as a way of enhancing the authenticity of their experience (Urry and Larsen 2011), auteurs use production narratives to elaborate on how images in the resulting films were captured “behind the scenes.” From heroic tales about surmounting production challenges and finding sources of creative inspiration in unlikely settings to recounting the autobiographical memories triggered by these experiences, production narratives are told to attest to the authenticity of their films’ images. Like tourists, auteurs’ practices and discourses of imaging “enact and inscribe places with their own stories” (193) to transform a site where authenticity is merely staged into a place of intimate and lived experiences.

If a crucial dimension of the auteur’s experience of place is through the tourist gaze, how do they set themselves apart from actual tourists in their production narratives? Perhaps most obviously is how auteurs describe their experiences of place as multisensual, fully participatory adventures. Auteurs “experience life” with rural residents, embark on journeys in search of autobiographical meaning, and immerse themselves in the constructed realities of their own productions—all embodied, lived experiences that go beyond mere sightseeing. To further highlight their social status as authors, rather than passive consumers of place, much ink is spilled in production narratives on how only an auteur with a sharp aesthetic sensibility and moral compass is able to transform an experience with the contingent, unknown, and unfamiliar into images and stories that make coherent sense of the encounter. Similarly, their cultural upbringing and identities—whether as “native” directors, refugees, exiles, nomads, or hometown seekers—are structuring tropes in their interviews, where they draw from richly layered autobiographical accounts to authenticate their engagements with place. Like Hou and Chen, directors perform their identities as cultural elites when they claim that they alone—for reasons of talent, experience, or cultural upbringing—are capable of transforming these elements that are unfamiliar and other in the production environment into meaningful images that will impact the way society views questions of history, identity, and culture.<sup>24</sup>

24. It is important to note that nowhere does this book insinuate that these experiences are not “true.” Simply that these are structuring tropes and discursive strategies used to fashion directors’ authorial identities does not imply that these experiences must necessarily be fabricated. At the same time, this book follows the example set by production studies scholars to deliberately place a critical distance between what directors claim—or even truly believe—are the “origins” of their creative practices and the sociocultural, political, economic, and technological forces that informed their production. This more layered and critical approach to reading directors’ production narratives is intentional in not taking directors at their word, recognizing that interviews, creative statements, and public engagements are paratextual artifacts that—like the filmic texts they are designed to authenticate—demand scrutiny and careful contextualization. As a case in point, there were notable narrative discrepancies I discovered between accounts of production Chinese and Taiwanese directors provided to interviewers from

This book thus argues that the making of place as an authorial practice is at its core an attempt to bridge the gaps between the realms of individual and collective experience and between the actual and fictional. In contrast with the tourist, the auteur's logic goes, only the experience of place by a member of the cultural elite can speak for the greater social experiences of the collective. To wield the authority to represent the collective, the auteur must also find ways to efface the divide between the diegetic and the nondiegetic, the actual social reality and the fictionalized one represented on screen. Thus, not only do auteurs deliberately blur their production narratives with images and stories from the resulting film, but conspicuous allegorical parallels can also be found between the films' representations of place with the auteurs' own experiences of the rural shooting locations. In short, by conceiving location shooting as a practice that goes beyond the inauthenticity of the tourist gaze, New Chinese Cinema auteurs are tourists of history who refuse to be associated with actual tourists.

## Cross-Strait Cinema

It would be a gross mischaracterization, however, to assume that just because the tourist gaze is an essential aspect underlying the directors' experiences of rural places, they have no actual ability to rewrite, reinterpret, or impact the histories and identities of places. As creative practitioners with "accented" identities—a term coined by Hamid Naficy (2001) to designate auteurs who have experienced both material and immaterial forms of exile, displacement, and border crossing—auteurs often experience and reimagine places in ways that contest and destabilize—even if inadvertently—essentialist and official frameworks of cultural geography. Challenging the view that place is merely a static and "organized world of meaning" (Tuan 1977, 179) fashioned by timeless and unchanging rhythms, auteurs conduct contentious experiments with imagining communities through their location shooting, thus envisioning bold and dynamic ways of thinking about cultural geography adapted to an era of rapid social change and geopolitical instabilities. In their attempts to experience place beyond the tourist gaze, auteurs actively reimagine Chinese and Taiwanese cultural geographies beyond the rigid containers designed to manage places as knowable objects that can be easily possessed and consumed.

A good example that this book explores can be found in films that I categorize as "cross-strait cinema," which includes Taiwanese and Chinese coproductions, as well as films that exhibit clear-cut aesthetic influences from their counterparts across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>25</sup> In *Coproducing Asia* (2014), Stephanie DeBoer has argued that, historically, coproductions in Asia are not only complex and uneven but also "haunted" by the lingering effects of Cold War geopolitics. For cross-strait cinema in particular, this means that the representations of Chinese and Taiwanese imagined communities as seemingly bounded and autonomous places are often experienced by auteurs as anything but bounded and autonomous during the production process. For instance,

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different cultural settings. I noticed, for instance, how directors often emphasized the "Eastern" qualities of their aesthetics in Western interview settings, in contrast with interviews in mainland China where they downplayed cultural influences that could be read as Orientalist. This book thus cautions against a broad tendency in Chinese cinema studies to associate the aesthetic representations in a filmic text unequivocally with a director's "intentions" or cultural "origins." Instead of taking directors at their word for being experts on the topics of their films, this book acknowledges that expertise is often performed through production narratives.

25. For a pioneering study in English of the direct aesthetic affiliations between Taiwanese and Chinese film directors in the 1960s—two decades prior to the New Chinese Cinema—see Wicks's (2014) comparative analysis of Chinese director Xie Jin's and Taiwanese director Li Xing's political melodramas. He argues in the second chapter of his study that in spite of differences in the directors' institutional environments and ideological constraints, their films were equally indebted to the Shanghai realist film tradition, which thrived during the 1930s to 1940s. According to Wicks, this crucial if underexamined affinity can account for Li Xing's later friendship with Xie Jin and other "realist" mainland Chinese directors.

more than half the scenes in Hou's *The Puppetmaster* (1993), a "canonical" film about Taiwanese history, were shot in Fujian, China. The film's representation of Taiwan as a bounded imagined community distinct from China's could not, ironically, have been fashioned without its film-makers crossing the borders between Taiwan and the PRC. Similarly, Jia Zhangke's "Hometown Trilogy," which is often praised for its attention to the specific and local experiences of China's small-town communities undergoing neoliberal redevelopment, utilized modes of imaging that Jia has himself stated are directly inspired by his viewings of Hou's films about Taiwan's social changes.

In both examples, films that are often viewed by the scholarly community for how they distinctively represent Taiwan and China as autonomous imagined communities turn out to have been produced in ways that challenge the very notion that an imagined community must be bounded. At the same time, this should not be read as evidence that Hou and Jia are being intentionally subversive. Far from it—fundamental to the experience of place by the tourist of history is viewing the world through a lens of "translocality," which Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta (2011) describe as a way of experiencing one place while being deeply impacted by the imagined, affective, and social connections one has to another, oftentimes distant, place.<sup>26</sup>

This being said, the fact that translocality is fundamental to the tourist gaze does not make the auteurs' practices of place making any less of a challenge to traditional frameworks of imagining Taiwanese and Chinese communities. In fact, beyond contesting official frameworks of cultural geography, the translocality of cross-strait location shooting also exposes the confining geographical borders drawn within Chinese-language cinema scholarship itself. By following the border-crossing journeys of auteurs who shoot on location, this book avoids the tendency in Chinese-language cinema scholarship to view regional film movements in the New Chinese Cinema as parallel cultural phenomena, thus echoing calls in recent scholarship to emphasize "cross-regional practices" and "translocal flows" (Yingjin Zhang 2010, 13), as well as to challenge "academic perspectives within Chinese studies that present Taiwan's film history as parallel to rather than intertwined with China" (Wicks 2014, x). This approach thus revises two common biases in the field of Chinese-language film studies—one that considers Taiwan New Cinema to be a predominantly homegrown movement and another, which views it as a mere subset of Chinese-language film—by shifting attention to the oft overlooked role that coproductions with China played in the Taiwan New Cinema's development, in addition to the direct impact of the Taiwan New Cinema on Fifth and Sixth Generation Chinese filmmaking.

## Reading Strategies for the Spectator-Tourist

So far, I have limited my examination of how directors author places to a discursive analysis of their production narratives. As stories claiming to present behind-the-scenes accounts of how sites of production are transformed into places, production narratives provide valuable insight into the authorial meanings directors attribute to their creative practices. Yet production narratives are only one medium through which directors perform their identities as auteurs. Equally important are the rural representations in the films themselves. What kinds of cultural politics are brought to light when filmic texts are read alongside production narratives?

26. Translocality is not just another synonym for flexible citizenship, nomadism, or liminality; experiencing place in a translocal manner means the ability to feel at home and rooted in a single locale even as one maintains or strengthens connections with another.



As my research progressed, I found one example after another where the cultural politics symptomized by the filmic text failed to correspond neatly with the cultural values performed in the production narratives. Films that Chinese film scholars typically view as subversive works, such as *Yellow Earth*, were accompanied by production narratives that seemed to fully support state ideologies, leading one to question whether the filmmakers were complicit all along, only for Western critics to misinterpret their creative intent. Alternatively, the production narratives for films that seem to align themselves more clearly with state ideologies, such as the works of directors Li Xing and Wu Tianming, turn out to contain surprisingly ambivalent views of Chinese-ness. Rather than argue that these films have simply been misread or that the auteurs have been misunderstood, this book interrogates the overall tendency in existing studies of national and transnational cinema to classify filmic representations of culture on a narrow spectrum of political positions. I believe this practice of merely labeling the politics of authorship—based largely on symptomatic readings of space and place—unfortunately restricts a deeper understanding of the multifaceted processes through which directors author places and ends up reducing the multiplicity of meanings associated with cultural production.

Thus, this book explores a diverse set of ways in which the practices and processes of place making can be represented both in filmic texts and their accompanying production narratives. Rather than interpret filmic texts as signifying one cultural logic or another, this book reads films as both indexical records and allegorical refractions of the filmmakers' production experiences. This means examining how narrative forms and stylistic motifs in a film shape the spectators' experience of filmed locations by transforming mere sites in which narrative events occur into places imbued with affective and symbolic meanings. In more theoretically rigorous terms, this book likens these processes through which spectators experience cinematic settings as places to what humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) has called emplacement, or one's being in place—a process of engaging with and within one's social, material, and imagined environments that makes a space feel intimately familiar, visible, and knowable.

While this book's theorization of spectatorial identification as a cognitive and affective process of cinematic emplacement finds inspiration in Tuan's models of place making, I am also keenly attentive to the critique cultural geographers have since raised of Tuan's studies; namely, that humanist notions of place are often ahistorical, overly romanticized, or even essentialist. Scholars drawing from both structuralist and poststructuralist methods have, more specifically, argue that humanist frameworks of place depoliticize the study of cultural geographies by assuming that place is uniformly experienced when in fact experiences of place are highly uneven and distinct for various ethnic, gender, social, and cultural groups. Structuralist geography offers a corrective by viewing places as "texts," or artifacts coded with ideological content that could be constructed by dominant social groups to enforce hegemonic control over systems of representation. The structuralist approach, however, arguably goes too far in stripping subjects of their agency.<sup>27</sup> Seeking to restore the experiential qualities of place lost in structuralist

27. Much of the scholarship by cultural geographers on film is still heavily informed by the structuralist approach. For instance, in Aitken and Zonn's (1994) seminal anthology, contributors drew from Cosgrove's (1998) notion of "symbolic landscapes" to critically examine the semiotics of geographical representations in cinema, but without paying much attention to actual discourses and practices of cinematic place making, let alone experiences of place by film producers and spectators. Even in more recent studies such as Lefebvre's *Landscape and Film* (2006), the ideological meanings of the representations of place are often held to be purely textual effects, which either constitute a distortion of social reality, a subversion of classical continuity, or are said to "practice" a "minor" or "major" cultural politics. Common to these approaches is a lack of attention to the fact that films are shot in the social spaces of real locations, whether in the studio sound stage, backlot, or on location in a rural community. Part of this lack of attention to how the material conditions of production shape the politics of production is almost certainly related to the wariness of structuralist scholars to affix a politics to the film author, who has been declared "dead" by poststructural theorists. Yet I argue that by being overly wary of the intentionalist fallacy in classical auteur theory,

accounts while remaining cautious not to essentialize the experience of place, poststructuralist approaches assert that place is anything but static and focus rather on the specific—and ever-evolving—ways in which places are experienced in a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts.

While a systematic study of actual experiences of cinematic places by real spectators is outside the scope of this book, my approach to textual analysis is deeply informed by this central tenet of poststructuralist cultural geography that place needs to be read not as a fixed, preexisting representation that one becomes emplaced within but as performed, narrated, and practiced (Cresswell 2004).<sup>28</sup> My framework for reading the spectatorial experience of place as an ongoing process of emplacement—never signifying a predetermined or fixed meaning but contingent upon the affective and cognitive effects engendered through the film's narrative and aesthetic devices—is thus broadly aligned with the methods of poststructuralist spatial analysis utilized in recent scholarship on cinematic geographies (MacDonald 2001; Bruno 2002; Cresswell and Dixon, 2002; Borden 2013; Hallam and Roberts 2014), mediated geographies (Couldry and McCarthy 2004; Ali 2017), and film and tourism (Beeton 2005; Tzanelli 2007; Roesch 2009; Leotta 2011; Choe 2016). Diverse as these works are in their approaches to studying space and place in film and media, my work shares with them an underlying aim to complicate models of film and media spectatorship as voyeuristic and passive, as well as models of place as static and preexisting containers of meaning—assumptions that were once dominant in psychoanalytic and structuralist approaches to examining filmic spaces. Bearing these theoretical considerations in mind, the following turns briefly to notable examples in the literature of how this mode of textual analysis has actually been applied, as well as their implications for our understanding of spectatorship as a dynamic process of place making.

A particularly elegant illustration of the poststructuralist approach can be found in *Garden in the Machine* (2001), where Scott MacDonald conducts deep textual analysis of experimental films by reproducing the critical process of spectatorship. MacDonald demonstrates how the landscapes and places within avant-garde films are meaningful only insofar as they are experienced by the spectator as process. He argues that little meaning can be garnered if only isolated representations of place and landscape are plucked from these films as objects of study without considering how landscapes and places are always performances in their own right and thus demand to be viewed as narratives of becoming. Similarly, Alfio Leotta (2011) maps the narrative and aesthetic processes that make places consumable and desirable for tourists in her study of film-induced tourism in New Zealand. Despite the different genres examined by MacDonald and Leotta, the empirical spectators in their studies—whether “critical” as in MacDonald's work or complicit in a tourist gaze as in Leotta's—are equally active and knowledgeable of their relationship with the places shaped within the filmic text. Implicit in both works is the notion that the spectator, like the auteur, can take pleasure in becoming emplaced within a filmic setting, in spite of his or her knowledge that cinematic places are constructions. Indeed, as John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (2011) have aptly observed, it is the very experience of being able to participate in the construction of a personalized, mental image of the filmed place that makes the spectator's experience of the diegetic environment feel authentic despite its obvious constructedness.

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these studies have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, overlooking how a film's real-world production history directly shapes the meanings of a text, with or without clear authorial intention.

28. For a lucid summary of the rudiments of poststructuralist cultural geography, see Cresswell's *Place* (2004).



Much like the touring auteur, then, the film spectator can also be considered a “tourist” who explores the creative geographies being fashioned by the film, or as Giuliano Bruno has put it poetically in *Atlas of Emotion* (2002), a “voyageur, a passenger who traverses a haptic, emotive terrain” (16). In this book, I will refer to the spectator who suspends, momentarily, his or her disbelief in the inauthenticity of the images—to aspire to an experience that transcends the tourist gaze—as the spectator-tourist. Recognizing these affinities between authorial, spectatorial, and touristic experiences of place, this book explores the following questions: How is the spectatorial experience of place within a film a model for understanding the auteur’s experience of place within a production environment? How might the diegetic forms and narratives of place making in a film shed light on the auteur’s practices of authoring place in actual production environments, and vice versa?

## Chapter Outline

What follows is a guided tour of the prominent location shoots and rural production environments in the New Chinese Cinema. Each chapter explores how auteurs, in pivotal moments of transition in their careers, have critically responded to social trauma rarely through outright political subversion, instead embarking on quests for authenticity in their shooting locations. Divided into three parts, I examine how auteurs reenact lived experiences of nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage through location shooting, thereby transforming mere sites of production into symbolically and affectively meaningful places of collective memories and aspirations. Rather than attempt to present a total and “objective” history of location shooting by classifying and periodizing different modes of production, these chapters will map the cultural politics of production in a variety of geographical and institutional settings, focusing on how auteurs perform a multitude of authorial, national, and cultural identities when imagining communities during times of disruptive social and geopolitical changes.

Mimicking the frequent border crossings by the auteurs themselves, the chapters alternate between Taiwanese and Chinese location shoots to better reveal aspects of place making that might be less evident in studies confined within the disciplinary borders of Taiwanese and Chinese national cinemas. To complicate the binaries of the hegemonic and the subversive, textual analysis of representations of place and travel in filmic texts is interwoven with discourse analysis of production narratives, which are drawn from paratextual artifacts ranging from film marketing materials and media reports on productions, to cast and crew members’ production diary entries.

Recognizing that this is also a project of “studying sideways,” a term in ethnography referring to the study of social subjects who are in a social group similar to that of the ethnographer, I have taken additional care in considering how my own status as a border-crossing *zhishi fenzi*, or “member of the intelligentsia,” might inform and color my understanding of authorial experiences of place. To explore the affinities between my own experiences of place with the auteurs’ quests for authenticity, I have embedded my own fieldwork experiences in touring rural shooting locations and interviewing filmmakers. These narratives present not just another approach to understanding the filmmakers’ experiences of place but also critically reflect on my own positioning as a spectator-tourist within Taiwanese and Chinese production environments.

Our tour of the cultural geography of the New Chinese Cinema begins in Part 1, “Nation Building,” which looks at how auteurs mythologize location shooting as authentic, lived, and embodied experiences of nation building. Chapters 1 and 2 explore how place making enables

auteurs to boldly imagine communities by performing cultural and national identities perceived to be under threat from a range of social changes, from internal social divisions between the *waisheng* (outer-province) and *bensheng* (inner-province) Taiwanese to uneven development in China under Deng Xiaoping's postsocialist market reforms.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter 1, "Appreciate from Afar," investigates the cultural politics underlying *waisheng* Taiwanese auteurs Li Xing's and Wang Tong's adaptations of two *xiangtu wenxue* (nativist literature) classics, *China, My Native Land* (1981) and *A Flower in the Rainy Night* (1983). At this point in their careers, Li Xing had developed a reputation as a director of popular cinema as well as a pioneer of the state-sanctioned healthy realist genre, while Wang Tong's first two directorial features were anti-Communist narratives based on mainland Chinese "scar literature." Shooting films bearing both a conservative politics and aesthetics, Li Xing and Wang Tong were seen in the industry as aging advocates for the Nationalist establishment. Their films were slowly but surely losing touch with younger audiences, whose political and aesthetic tastes were increasingly aligned with the nativist "hometown cinema" of a younger generation of Taiwan New Cinema directors like Hou Xiaoxian, Edward Yang, and Wu Nianzhen. Cognizant of the changing historical tides, Li Xing and Wang Tong began their first forays into this genre of location-shot nativist films through *China, My Native Land* and *A Flower in the Rainy Night*. Perhaps because of the films' largely conventional narrative forms, however, these works have remained relatively unknown internationally and are overshadowed by the more experimental thrust and edgier politics of the Taiwan New Cinema directors. Yet it is precisely their awkward—and even oxymoronic—positioning as nativist "hometown films" shot by more conservative *waisheng* directors that makes these films particularly fruitful for a study of the contested cultural politics of production in the Taiwanese film industry of the early 1980s.

Shooting on location in Taiwanese settings was certainly not new to these directors, but their focus had clearly shifted in these two productions from employing Taiwanese locales either as sites of production—scenic backdrops or stand-ins for foreign locations—or spaces designed to promulgate the aims of nation building, to viewing the locations as actual places—palimpsests of the local Taiwanese experience. This chapter thus explores the hesitations and contradictions associated with Li Xing's and Wang Tong's transitions to experiencing Taiwanese locations as "places," rather than as mere sites of production. More specifically, I argue that by experiencing and imaging their shooting locations—from domestic settings such as southern and northeastern Taiwan, to far-flung production sites in South Korea—as hometowns ironically symbolizing an impossible longing for their Chinese homeland, Li Xing and Wang Tong perform exilic identities that hybridize motifs of geopolitical displacement from official narratives of nation building and the nomadic subjectivities of *bensheng* protagonists in *xiangtu wenxue*. These productions thus constitute novel experiments in forging an intersubjectively imagined community, boldly crossing what were then clear divides between *waishengren* and *benshengren* structures of feeling.

Unifying *benshengren*, *waishengren*, and popular structures of feeling at the time were not, as one might expect, reconciliation narratives but, ironically, images of Taiwan as a place haunted by melodramatic anticipation for unfulfilled cultural aspirations. Through these productions,

29. This book acknowledges that the terms *waisheng* and *bensheng* are themselves ethnic constructions and classifications that bear loaded ideological meanings—contested since the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945—and so employs these only as adjectival shorthand to differentiate between first generation émigrés who were originally born in China then moved to Taiwan in the years of the Chinese Civil War between 1945 and 1949 (such as directors Li Xing, Wang Tong, and Hou Xiaoxian) from those whose families established roots in Taiwan prior to this period (such as director Wu Nianzhen). Following its usage in James Wicks's *Transnational Representations* (2014, 9), this book also refers to these individuals collectively as *waishengren* (outer-province people) and *benshengren* (inner-province people).

Taiwan was imaged as a place that could not yet be called home, but a space from which one could “appreciate from afar” (Guan and Zhang 1985)—in the words of a popular tourist guidebook to northeastern Taiwan—the possibilities of an eventual homecoming. This geographical imaginary of Taiwan as a space haunted by unfulfilled and unfulfillable aspirations, as ensuing chapters examine, later evolves through the Taiwan New Cinema into a nascent image of Taiwan’s imagined community.

Chapter 2, “Myth Making in Place,” continues our tour of nation building at the frontiers of Taiwan’s and China’s imagined geographies: the undeveloped eastern coastline in Taiwan and the underdeveloped northwestern Chinese province of Shaanxi. By critically examining Li Xing’s *The Heroic Pioneers* (1986a) and Wu Tianming’s *Old Well*, I argue that the narratives and representations of place making in these so-called *xibu dianying* (Chinese Westerns) suppress exilic longings, forging rather new myths of nation building, thus desperately pronouncing that official narratives of progress remained alive and well even at a time of decreasing influence for state-sponsored policy films in Taiwan and China.

Having failed to establish himself on the Taiwan New Cinema scene despite efforts to reinvent his authorial image, Li Xing makes a last-gasp attempt to refresh the policy film genre through *The Heroic Pioneers*. By contrast, Wu Tianming, studio head of the renowned Xi’an Film Studios—home of Fifth Generation auteurs including Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang—shoots *Old Well* as a part of a larger effort to rebrand Xi’an Film Studio as not just the award-winning studio of avant-garde art cinema but also a commercially viable center for producing accessible yet epic nation-building narratives.

At the heart of this chapter is my argument that the location shoots in *The Heroic Pioneers* and *Old Well* were staged as present-day reenactments of the films’ narratives of colonization and rural development, a process through which the auteurs could perform their identities as archetypal national subjects. Despite Li’s and Wu’s attempts to demonstrate their dedication to social activism, a neocolonial cultural logic underlies their place making. A comparison of Li’s practices with the discourses of Taiwanese land developers and local county officials suggests that his notion of “pioneering,” like official plans for touristic development, seeks to transform an “other” and “native” place into a hegemonic cultural space of Chinese-ness, out of sync with the needs of Taiwan’s eastern counties. Wu Tianming’s discourses of place making, by contrast, strike the guilt-ridden tone of the revisionist Western, suggesting that while it may be impossible for cultural producers to truly live up to the promises of the state by fully “cultivating” rural Shaanxi, fighting cynicism and keeping the desire to live up to these promises alive remains most essential to continuing the project of nation building. Whether pioneering or cultivating, Li and Wu were ultimately unable to envision their shooting locations as more than signs of underdevelopment. These frontier geographies will be imagined, for these auteurs, as wild and uncultivated so long as their aspirations of nation building remained unfulfilled.

Part 2, “Homecoming,” follows auteurs who travel home to shoot on location. Whether a site of cultural origin or one’s actual childhood home, these places are experienced and imaged intimately, in sharp distinction from the distanced modes of place making explored in Part 1, where auteurs are positioned outside the geographies they imagine and in seats of seemingly undisputed cultural authority. In contrast to Part 1, which showed auteurs sculpting rural shooting locations into stages for exilic and nationalistic longing—but made little impact on the communities in which their films were shot—Part 2 examines the social and material effects of location shooting on shaping production cultures and rural communities.

Chapter 3, “Reel Pilgrims,” joins Fifth Generation Chinese director Chen Kaige on his pilgrimages to the Chinese heartland in Shaanxi and Yunnan Provinces while shooting on location

for *Yellow Earth* and *King of the Children* (1987a), where he wrestled reflexively with his awareness of the neocolonial politics of “experiencing life.” Out of Chen Kaige’s many illustrious works, this chapter focuses exclusively on *Yellow Earth* and *King of the Children*—his first and third major directorial features, respectively—as they were location-shot during periods of intense directorial soul searching. Chen attempted yet failed—according to the director himself—to establish himself as a simultaneously proper Chinese national subject and an international auteur capable of exercising creative independence. Launching readers into the layered geographies both imagined and experienced by Chen, this chapter reconstructs two parallel journeys to the rural associated with these productions—one diegetic and the other extradiegetic. Just as the films’ protagonists were “sent down” to the countryside, Chen Kaige toured northern Shaanxi and Yunnan Province with his production crew during preproduction for *Yellow Earth* and *King of the Children*. When read together, these journeys blur the diegetic and nondiegetic to map rural China as a haunted psychogeography. Within this geographical imaginary, China’s most sacred historical landmarks were experienced by Chen and the main protagonists of his films as places where they could probe the intellectual’s privileged but tenuous and anxious connection with the collective unconscious.

Ultimately, by reading the films’ journey narratives as allegories of Chen’s own pilgrimages, I show that Chen’s place making not only interrogates the coherence of official frameworks of nation building under Deng Xiaoping’s reforms but is also emblematic of a broader shift in discourses of film authorship in the Chinese film industry in the late 1980s. These discourses transformed from performing one’s membership in the mythic nation to forging an individualistic, and indeed elitist, myth of the auteur as a semiautonomous creative subject.<sup>30</sup>

Chapter 4, “A Home in Becoming,” tells the story of how Jiufen, a once-sleepy mining community in northeastern Taiwan, transformed into one of Taiwan’s most iconic sites of heritage through *Dust in the Wind* (1986) and *City of Sadness*. This chapter shows how the transformation of Jiufen was both enabled by and helped to forge a new paradigm of location shooting as cultural remembrance.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts, Taiwanese auteurs prior to the Taiwan New Cinema turned to location shooting primarily as a technical and aesthetic expedience (Z. Lin 2003). *Dust in the Wind* is thus a watershed in the history of Taiwanese cinema, as director Hou Xiaoxian, screenwriter Wu Nianzhen, and cinematographer Li Pingbin shot on location for the purpose of more fully immersing themselves in autobiographical recollection. Significantly, the rural representations in *Dust in the Wind* not only stem from the filmmakers’ collective remembrances of their childhood homes but also provide the spectator-tourist with a visual framework for recollecting his or her own memories. Jiufen is thus imaged as a paradigmatic Taiwanese hometown, a space in which one has learned to accept one’s unfulfilled aspirations. *City of Sadness*—widely regarded to be the definitive masterpiece of the Taiwan New Cinema—employs a similar visual framework but reshapes this image of Jiufen into a metonym for the nation, a home where all, regardless of identity—gender, class, ethnicity, and age—remembers something they had lost but must now accept as part of their collective history. Through *City of Sadness*, Jiufen materializes into a microcosm of the nascent Taiwanese imagined community, a living museum of Taiwan’s arduous coming of age, filled with haunting memories of the lost homelands and fragmented cultural memories of the island’s residents. Thrown into the national spotlight by

30. This does not imply that directors began framing creative production as the making of art for art’s sake. Rather, this chapter argues that Chen’s changing discourses of authorship are indicative of the increasing weight auteurs placed on their personal, lived experiences over collective memories and aspirations in the fashioning of their authorial identities and “brands.”

the film's popularity, Jiufen would soon become a socially contested space, attracting the diverse attentions of local and international tourists, cultural preservationists, advertisers, filmmakers, historians, urban developers, and politicians. Jiufen not only evolves into a microcosm of the Taiwanese public sphere but also emerges as Taiwan's first site of historical origins almost entirely reimagined by the cinema, making it a truly postmodern nativist landmark.

Part 3, "Salvage," explores how place making, beyond enabling authorial performances and effecting institutional and social change, can also be considered a critical practice, a process where auteurs reflexively interrogate the cultural tensions emerging from their own practices of historiography and ethnography. The critical aspects of place making are most evident when auteurs engage in cultural salvage, where they attempt to cinematically preserve cultural identities believed to be under threat by a variety of external and internal social forces, only to discover limitations and contradictions in their methods. From Hou Xiaoxian's experiments with location shooting in southern China as a method of salvaging Chinese oral narratives—a process he calls "authenticating life"—to Jia Zhangke's projects of rescuing the very notion of "place" itself, Part 3 shows how auteurs, through location shooting, contend with the dichotomies of authenticity and inauthenticity, the local and translocal, and space and place as frameworks of knowledge for making meaningful sense of disorienting social change.

Chapter 5, "Hou Xiaoxian as Ambassador," examines Hou's contentious modes of place making while he shot on location in China for the "Taiwan Trilogy," the series of films that first launched him into the international spotlight and established him as the quintessential director of Taiwanese national cinema. Prior to the "Taiwan Trilogy," Hou had been associated mostly with the *xiangtu* "hometown cinema" genre, which featured coming-of-age, slice-of-life narratives set in Taiwan's suburban and rural communities. The "Taiwan Trilogy" was Hou's bold entrance into historical epics that critically interrogated Taiwan's political history, with *City of Sadness*, *The Puppetmaster*, and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995a) set against the backdrops of the 228 Incident, the Japanese colonial era, and the White Terror campaign, respectively. Viewed by scholars and critics alike as canonical examples of nativist historiography, little attention has been paid to the fact that key scenes in the "Taiwan Trilogy" were actually shot in China, where southern Chinese locales substituted for Taiwan's historical settings.<sup>31</sup>

Through cross-strait location shooting, Hou experimented with a radically translocal and potentially controversial historiographical mode that involved layering the films' dialogue between Taiwan's present and its colonial past, with an off-screen dialogue with Taiwan's future, one inevitably bound with China's. During this period of cross-strait production, Hou also tested out the viability of working in a regional mode of production, where he would perform the role of a cultural ambassador for the Taiwanese film industry. This was not, of course, without its own controversies and challenges.<sup>32</sup>

31. In the first English-language edited collection on Hou Xiaoxian studies, Richard Suchenski (2014) has already complicated a tendency in earlier readings of Hou as a strictly Taiwanese national cinema auteur by clearly noting Hou's experiences of cross-strait production. Suchenski specifically points out that "the lifting of travel restrictions with the end of Martial Law in 1987 made it possible for [Hou] to act as executive producer on Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and shoot scenes of *The Puppetmaster* in China" (8). Suchenski also includes a quote from Hou himself that explicitly states his double consciousness as a Chinese and Taiwanese director. However, beyond these relatively brief references, little is elaborated in depth about the actual production challenges or experiences in China that informed Hou's aesthetics and career trajectory. Suchenski seems to simply assume that Hou's period of cross-strait production naturally lead to his later, more transnational coproductions with Japanese and French filmmakers.

32. Hou's career trajectory has commonly been described by critics and scholars as moving in a highly linear fashion from a commercial, to a local, a national, then finally a transnational stage. This chapter complicates such a narrative by showing that between the local and transnational stages is a period in which Hou experimented with a regional, translocal mode of production—one that radically problematizes the notion of the "national" as being spatially and temporally bounded.



These challenges were fully manifested in the production history and textual forms of *Good Men, Good Women*—Hou’s first, and final, film to feature present-day Chinese settings. By reading the film’s spatial representations alongside Hou’s diary entries from the period of production, I demonstrate that Hou’s object for “authentication” in this production is nothing other than his own understanding of authenticity. During the production, Hou was pondering a risky career move, no longer limiting himself to Taiwanese topics but extending his work to stories set in present-day China. Yet Hou found it challenging to distill an authentic “aura” in Guangdong Province through his process of “authenticating life.” Alas, neither he nor his cast were able to experience their surroundings as anything more than through a tourist gaze. Developing a “second gaze” (MacCannell 1999), or a self-consciousness of the constructedness of the tourist experience, Hou finally acknowledges the geopolitical constraints of “authenticating life.” Like an exile who had returned home only to find it transformed beyond recognition—and thus making his own cultural imaginaries of contemporary China appear inauthentic—Hou experienced through this production the contradictions of salvaging “Greater Chinese” culture through Taiwanese modes of historical remembrance. By tracing parallels between Hou’s production practices and the politics of historiography fashioned in the films, this chapter ultimately argues that Hou’s place making constitutes reflexive modes of cultural salvage, interrogation, and survival adapted to a volatile period of cross-strait relations.

The sadness in *City of Sadness* refers to the structure of feeling revolving around Taiwanese society’s inability to make sense of the tides of historical change. Chapter 6, “Translocalities of Sadness,” shows that since the “Taiwan Trilogy,” sadness has continued to shape not only Taiwanese but also Chinese and cross-strait imagined communities in the cinema of Jia Zhangke and Hou Xiaoxian. This sadness goes deeper than historical melancholy, capturing nothing less than the loss of the ontological category of “place” itself as a signifier of authenticity and familiarity. In *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996)—Hou’s first film since the “Taiwan Trilogy” to be entirely set in the present day—and *Still Life* (2006b)—Jia’s first feature-length film to have incorporated digital effects in otherwise realist rural landscapes—the very notion of place is in crisis, destabilized in Taiwan by the commoditization of its cultural landmarks into sites of tourist consumption and literally demolished in China to make way for neoliberal development.<sup>33</sup> This chapter focuses on how Hou and Jia have responded critically and reflexively to these crises by challenging their own notions of authenticity and realism in two iconic locales of “sadness”: Jiufen and Chongqing.

In the four years between the production of *The Puppetmaster* and *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, Jiufen has steadily evolved into what Urry (Urry and Larsen 2011) calls a “tourist place” (119), a nostalgia-themed space where film-induced tourism has all but overwhelmed the historical aura so cherished by Hou. Recognizing his own complicity in eroding Jiufen’s historical aura, Hou reflexively responded to Jiufen’s transformation by disrupting his iconic realist style. Operating in a manner akin to the Brechtian alienation effect, moments of what I call “visual violence” in *Goodbye South, Goodbye* expose how the spectator-tourist’s perception of Jiufen is far from natural, instead mediated through images popularized by Hou’s films. Jiufen remains sad, no longer because it exudes a melancholic historical aura but because its former image has been revealed to be inauthentic.

33. Jia Zhangke first began experimenting with CGI effects in *The World* (2004). For a look at how the film’s hybridized aesthetics—combining location shooting in urban settings in Beijing with digital animations—reflexively comments on the travails of China’s “floating population,” see Lo (2014).

While *Goodbye South, Goodbye* is unable to reimagine Jiufen outside the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity, Jia Zhangke's cinema provides a promising alternative by playfully redefining the very notion of place. Our tour of critical modes of place making takes us across the Taiwan Strait to the Beijing Film Academy library, where Jia reportedly experienced the sentiment of sadness for the first time after watching *City of Sadness*. The story Jia tells of his viewing experience remarkably parallels Chen Kaige's "experiencing life" narrative in Shaanxi, with the exception that it is now Taiwan, rather than the rural, that signifies China's lack and serves as a cultural other. Through this root-seeking pilgrimage across the strait, Jia shaped a translocalized origin story of how his mission to salvage disappearing places in China was born out of cinephilia.

Remarkably, this translocal and virtualized mode of place making provides new opportunities for inhabiting China's destabilizing cultural geography, as seen in Jia's *Still Life*. While *Still Life* pays homage to *Goodbye South, Goodbye* through a similar use of "visual violence," it celebrates the constructedness of place as a necessary and inevitable precondition for displaced groups to survive China's epistemic shifts. *Still Life* accomplishes this by reflexively exploring new modes of agency and opportunities for China's migrant workers. Rather than "appreciating from afar" the post-reform era landscape with an authoritative, detached, and privileged gaze, Jia turns the gaze inward. It is this simultaneously critical, reflexive, translocal, and mediated mode of place making that exposes the ultimate limitation to how places are experienced by many a film auteur—the elitist lenses through which they practice their "moral mandate" as creative practitioners.

As this itinerary shows, each of the chapters in our tour of the cultural geography of the New Chinese Cinema offers a glimpse into how film auteurs have endeavored to travel beyond the narrow world seen through the viewfinder and aimed to cultivate an authentic connection with the rural. Blurring the lines between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the reel and the real, actuality and memory, auteurs aim to experience place beyond the tourist gaze. This means that the cultural politics of rural place making is not easily classifiable into a singular cultural logic; rather, it arises from the tension between the urban-based auteur's tourist gaze and his or her desire to exceed it through a variety of affective, symbolic, and aesthetic means—ranging from exilic longing and mythmaking to pilgrimage and critical practice. Indeed, rural location shooting provides auteurs with a wealth of opportunities to perform how they are more than just passive consumers of place. From their accounts of production as nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage to the representations of place in the films themselves, rural shooting locations are refashioned into "sites of contestation over which memories to evoke" (Cresswell 2004, 90), stages on which auteurs perform their aspirations to social activism and attempt to make meaningful sense of their ever-shifting and often precarious roles of authorship.

The conclusion, "Place and the Politics of Nation Branding," draws my investigation of location shooting as lived experiences of touring, nation building, pilgrimage, homecoming, historiography, and salvage to a close. Extending my insights on the cultural politics of location shooting for the New Chinese Cinema to the study of popular film and televisual media in the "experience economies" (Pine and Gilmore 1998) of the post-WTO era, readers return to the present to view the troubling geopolitical implications of a development in the region's media industries—the institutionalization of rural location shooting into modes of nation branding that commoditize cultural signs in line with the nation-building narratives of the *Zhongguomeng* (Chinese Dream) and *Ai Taiwan* (Loving Taiwan).

Through a comparative analysis of rural location-shot media, including the Chinese lifestyle TV show *Dad, Where Are We Going?* (2013–) and Taiwanese documentaries *Island Etude*

(H. Chen 2006) and *Beyond Beauty* (P. Chi 2013), I show how the rural offers both actual and virtual spaces for urban-based tourists and spectators to cultivate values of self-governance in accordance with the grand narratives outlined in the Chinese Dream and Loving Taiwan national brands. Building on existing studies of Asian lifestyle TV, I demonstrate how middle-class audiences in China and Taiwan learn to participate in “proper” practices of consumer citizenship by vicariously “experiencing life” in mediated rural spaces. Importantly, these “memorable experiences” come at a grave cost to the rural, resulting not only in the normalization of self-exoticizing discourses but also in the physical displacement of rural residents.

This book ends on a cautionary note, exploring how these troubling developments have only been amplified in the wake of China’s One Belt, One Road initiative and Taiwan’s sunflower student movement. Drawing from examples such as Jia Zhangke’s *I Wish I Knew* (2010a) and an emerging genre of independent Chinese road movies, I propose several ways in which critical modes of touring might serve to complicate the Chinese Dream and Loving Taiwan discourses. The use of reflexive place making in these productions not only offers yet another alternatively themed experience but envisions how alternative public cultures can emerge from within—rather than outside—the institutionalized spaces of nation branding.

Through this work, I hope to demonstrate the rich potential for applying a cultural geographical and comparative approach to the study of Chinese and Taiwanese film authorship. With its focus on Taiwanese and Chinese practices of rural place making, this book opens up existing research on location shooting, filmic and mediated geographies, and film and tourism to new and underexamined cultural settings and practices. It also presents methodological insights into the study of place making for cultural geographers and film theorists aiming to bridge interpretive and empirical approaches, with the former based largely on textual analysis and the latter on digital humanities methods such as Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping as explored in Les Roberts and Julia Hallam’s *Locating the Moving Image* (2014). While both approaches have advanced our understanding of how films shape cultural geographies in novel ways, interpretive approaches are often criticized for reading space and place metaphorically. Empirical approaches, by contrast, illuminate broad spatial trends but are accused of contributing little to our understanding of the complexities of individual experiences of production and spectatorship. This book responds to concerns of scholars from both camps by showing how ideological meanings are not only symbolized through narrative and visual motifs but can also be culturally performed through embodied and affective practices of place making, as well as socially produced through the auteurs’ negotiation of various institutional, cultural, and geopolitical tensions in a production environment.

More broadly, the aim of this book is both to revise histories of contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese cinemas and to blur the distinctions between the alternative and hegemonic, and the subversive and complicit, reductive binaries too often mobilized by scholars when periodizing and classifying the evolution of national cinemas. Integrating critical, ethnographic, and reflexive perspectives, this book also intends to encourage productive dialogue between historians, theorists, practitioners, and administrators. By presenting a cultural geography of Taiwanese and Chinese film and media that seriously considers the rural as a site through which communities can be imagined and contested, the following pages offer useful insights for filmmakers into the larger institutional and geopolitical stakes of location shooting, while providing administrators with a look into the cultural complexities of location shooting—facets of production too often overlooked during the crafting of production policies.

From filmmakers’ production narratives to my own fieldwork notes, every gaze outward from the viewfinder is accompanied by an inward gaze, an introspective look that simultaneously



affirms and haunts familiar notions of self. Indeed, what one feels is authentic about a place—and its on-screen representations—is not just a reflection of “objective” reality but a reflection of our own cultural values and how we want to be viewed by others. What tourists, spectators, auteurs, and scholars alike experience in a place is, in short, a reflection of the identities they aspire to perform. Ultimately, then, this book also provides a critical reflection on the tourist gaze of area studies film scholarship. Instead of “studying down,” studying sideways reminds me that I am not unlike the auteurs in my study. Faced with the realities of rapidly and unpredictably changing geographies, scholars can also be guilty of sheltering themselves behind a tourist gaze. But if we are to fulfill our longing to be more than tourists of imagined geographies, our first task must be to commit ourselves to a serious investigation of the experiences of auteurs who have dared to venture further than us in their quests for authenticity.

## A Home in Becoming

### *Forging Taiwan's Imagined Community in Jiufen*

Turning from the institutional politics of production in northwestern China, this chapter tells the story of how changing practices of rural location shooting in Taiwan gave birth to one of its most iconic and contested landmarks of historical origin, Jiufen. I will be focusing on the key roles that Hou Xiaoxian's cinema, along with his collaborators in the Taiwan New Cinema, played in transforming Jiufen into a postmodern site of heritage, a place where it is the very experience of authenticity that is being consumed by spectators and tourists. Rather than employ textual analysis to argue that Hou's films simply represent Jiufen with a postmodern sensibility, I argue that postmodern Jiufen is a microcosm of Taiwan's fledgling imagined community, a space beset with contradictions forged out of a confluence of discourses, representations, and practices surrounding the fraught relationships between cinema, place, and nation in Taiwan during the late 1980s to mid-1990s. This story begins with my own trip to Jiufen in 2012.

Is what appears real just an effect of my visual memory? How does one experience a place as authentic? What disrupts this authenticity, and how is inauthenticity concealed? These were some of the questions I was contemplating on my drive to Jiufen, the famed shooting location for Taiwan New Cinema classics such as Hou's *Dust in the Wind* and *City of Sadness* and Wang Tong's *The Hill of No Return* (1992), as well as the rumored source of inspiration for the settings in a more contemporary hit, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001).<sup>1</sup> A former Japanese mining town that continued its operations in the postwar period until the 1960s, Jiufen was once a bustling community that had been sidestepped by Taiwan's "economic miracle." Nestled in the northeastern edge of the Central Mountain Range, Jiufen is located in Ruifang Township, an area geographically isolated from the rest of Taipei County and Yilan, its neighboring county to the east. With only country back roads and a local commuter rail line connecting it to the outside world, Ruifang Township was relegated to the backwaters of county planning and designated a low priority for urban revitalization and land development. As a result, by the 1980s, Jiufen had become an architectural time capsule. Dotted the hills were structures from a range of historical periods in varying degrees of decay and deterioration, evoking precisely Michel Foucault's description of the "heterochronic" spatiotemporal qualities of the museum, "a place

1. Miyazaki has himself denied that Jiufen served as the direct inspiration for the fantastical settings in *Spirited Away* and clarified that any resemblance was but a coincidence. Since the film's release, however, the rumor that the settings in *Spirited Away* were based on Jiufen had become widespread and firmly entrenched in the audience's expectations about the film. Jiufen's tourist industry, quick to capitalize on this misperception, continues to perpetuate this rumor by advertising its landmarks as settings in the film and by selling *Spirited Away* merchandise to unknowing film tourists. The themed marketing is so pervasive that during my own visit to Jiufen in 2012, I was unaware that Jiufen's association with *Spirited Away* was merely an urban legend.

Despite the town's chaotic layout, I did not feel lost navigating its spaces. On the contrary, I was almost too well situated, with maps and arrows at every turn reminding me of how many steps I must take to the next landmark. However, I could not feel emplaced within the location; everything had been made too visible, while nothing was left off screen. My ability to insert myself into the scene, a key quality Kevin Lynch (1960) argues defines a "good image" for the urban landscape, was terrifically crowded out by the numerous other representations of imagined spaces. The delicate sensorial tapestry of *City of Sadness*, where the borders between the private and public, local and global, inside and outside, are so carefully maintained through the strategic use of L-cuts, off-screen sounds, and chiaroscuro lighting, had now been entirely overwhelmed by these businesses that bombarded the pedestrian-consumer-tourist-spectator with advertising to the point of sensory overload. A place where one could once only indirectly perceive the comings and goings of travelers through Jiufen had been redeveloped into a gaudy outdoor mall, where one would be force-fed exotic cultural spectacles designed to maximize the tourist's efficiency of consuming place. I found the aura of the location more suffocating and aggravating than quaint. The respect for narrative ambiguity and the richly layered contrast between the natural and the social in Hou's films was reduced to a sense of claustrophobia. Crowded out by tourists jostling one another for the ideal spot to pose with a contemplative gaze out to the bay in the distance—an iconic, if clichéd motif in Hou's and Miyazaki's films—I found myself relieved to wander off the main steps.

Jiufen's full-fledged transformation from a sleeping mining community to a focal point for international film tourism did not occur overnight; it began with the successes of Hou's films in the late 1980s. In 1987, *Dust in the Wind*'s success with audiences, increased media exposure, and a proposal by fifteen prominent Taipei-based artists to construct an artists' community—based no less on the design of the art district in New York City's SoHo—was the first time Jiufen was brought into the national spotlight (Liwen Zhang 1994, 41). Because of the sudden influx of tourists, rise of businesses catering to the town's fledgling tourist industry, and the sale of apartments to Taipei-based residents to be used as vacation homes, the living museum of Taiwan's recent past was itself faced with the threat of disappearance and had become the newest target of cultural preservation by county planners. *City of Sadness* only further popularized Jiufen for film tourists, exacerbating the conflict between preservationists and the hospitality and culture industries (Q. Lin 1995). Hou Xiaoxian would later align himself with the views of the cultural preservationists, contending that the most visible and regretfully unintended effect of location shooting in Jiufen was its total conversion into a destination where international and domestic film tourists flocked. Thus, not only had Jiufen become physically overcrowded, but it had also become "overcoded" by the competing discourses and practices of place making by local and international tourists, cultural preservationists, advertisers, filmmakers, historians, urban developers, and local politicians—each of whom held a different view of what truly constituted Jiufen's authentic identity.

In search of more room to breathe, I took a series of bends through narrow alleyways behind the scaffolding for the shops on the "Old Street" and was amused at how quickly my sense of Jiufen's "original" aura crept back. The sounds of the street began to emanate outside my peripheral vision, slowly decreasing in volume, shifting in their tonality as I took a turn around another cement structure. The delicate balance between what I could see visually and the mental images I perceived based on what I could hear in the distance returned. Curious of the effect that increased distance had on strengthening my sense of the place's aura, I found my way down a few more steps to the parking lot, where I promptly drove to the location where cinematographer Mark Li Pingbin had captured the iconic final shot in *Dust in the Wind*. I

that draws as much attention to the picturesque settings as it does to the plot. These images of place, which function to instruct its viewers what truly modern places should look like, served a normalizing and disciplinary function in concert with one of the primary goals of Taiwanese urban development at the time to manicure “disorderly” images of cities, which planners saw as embarrassing signs of Taiwan’s third world status.

The limited use of location shooting to such instrumental purposes was not due to a lack of technical sophistication among Taiwanese filmmakers but to the simple fact that discourses of Taiwan as a state with a distinct national identity were still only in their nascent stages until the 1980s. Against this backdrop, Li Xing and Wang Tong can be considered pioneers in viewing location shooting as a simultaneously creative and historiographical practice. Yet, as Chapter 1 argued, Li and Wang performed exilic identities in their production narratives, shooting on location as a way of pronouncing their resistance to accepting Taiwan as their home. It was not until a younger generation of Taiwan New Cinema filmmakers began shooting autobiographical and coming-of-age narratives in Taiwan’s small towns that location shooting gradually came to be viewed as an opportunity for filmmakers to reacquaint themselves with Taiwan—not just as a temporary place to stay but as their true and permanent home.

The evolving view of location shooting from a primarily aesthetic and industrial expediency to a lived experience of nation building and homecoming did not, of course, happen overnight. Instead, as this chapter will demonstrate through an analysis of the changing representations of Jiufen’s landscapes from *Dust in the Wind* to *City of Sadness*, it took several years for Jiufen’s image to evolve into a landmark that signifies Taiwan’s collective memories. More specifically, I argue in the following pages that *Dust in the Wind* fashions an image of Jiufen as the paradigmatic small-town home for Taiwanese spectators, a space of unfulfilled aspirations that one can learn to accept as one’s home. In *City of Sadness*, the image of Jiufen as the paradigmatic Taiwanese hometown is transformed into a metonym of the entire nation, a home where all, regardless of gender, class, generational, cultural, and national identity had something they had lost but must now accept as part of their collective history. The Taiwanese spectator-tourist who gazes upon the landscapes of Jiufen in *City of Sadness* is called not just to remember what “I” lost in my youth when “I” came of age, but what “we”—the Taiwanese nation—lost in our youth when “we,” collectively, came of age.

Beyond proposing new modes of national identification and alternative frameworks of historiography, *City of Sadness* also made an immense material impact on the economic development of Jiufen itself. Indeed, it was the film’s success that almost single-handedly launched Jiufen into both the national and international spotlight. No turning back, Jiufen had materialized into the modern-day reincarnation of its imagined filmic self, a contact zone of contending social interests and a microcosm of the Taiwanese public sphere. Further, the transformation of Jiufen’s image leads to a change in the film industry’s views on the value of location shooting, which comes to be seen as a promising new mode of historiography that can capture the nuances of Taiwanese lived experiences previously neglected in official narratives and histories. Peculiar to Jiufen, then, and unlike Chinese shooting locations, is that it was not a preexisting national landmark but a newly constructed site of pilgrimage fashioned by the cinema itself. The historicity of Jiufen is felt in a uniquely cinematic manner—through an aesthetic framework pioneered in *Dust in the Wind*, then politicized in *City of Sadness*—making it Taiwan’s first truly postmodern landmark of national origins.

### Collaborative Authorship in *Dust in the Wind*

*Dust in the Wind* opens with a dynamic and mobile shot of the passing train tracks and hilly landscape as seen from the front of a commuter train. As the ensuing shots reveal, the lead protagonists, Ah Wan and Ah Huen, are commuting between Taipei and their home in Jiufen. Despite opening with this dynamic image of movement, the ability to travel neither secures a future for the budding romance between them, nor does it translate into social mobility. Instead, after failing to enter college in Taipei, Ah Wan is drafted into the military and is stationed in Jinmen, a heavily guarded island located perilously in the Taiwan Strait between Fujian Province and Taiwan's western coastline. As if the dangers of living so close to mainland China were not enough to worry about, Ah Wan finds that Ah Huen has gotten engaged to the local postman, thwarting his plans to propose after returning home. The film ends with the sound of a train whistle emanating from the off-screen space over a wide shot of Jiufen's landscape, marking the characters' increasingly divergent lives as bittersweet memories of Taiwan's turbulent 1960s.

Though the narrative synopsis might appear straightforward, *Dust in the Wind's* representations of place are highly ambiguous. Rather than directly reflecting character development through the use of setting, *Dust in the Wind* rarely uses landscape imagery in an explicitly symbolic manner. Instead, captured with a long shot and long take aesthetic, images of landscape create what the filmmakers called *liu bai*, or "white spaces," which slow down the pace of the narrative, allowing room for spectators to reflect on the narrative from a more distanced, objective perspective.

The ambiguity of the film's representations of place has led to an array of interpretations regarding Hou's landscape aesthetics. The most prevalent reading of Hou's use of landscape is that the images function to convey a contemplative tone. In this camp are Nicholas Browne's (2005) reading of Hou's landscapes as an expression of the Kantian sublime and June Yip's observation that the images are "pillow shots," which serve "no narrative function, but create atmosphere, suggest emotional associations, and enrich the overall cinematic experience" (2004, 178). Emilie Yeh and Darrell Davis (2005) draw a more specific connection between Hou's "contemplative depiction of landscape" (163) and his Chinese cultural background by examining stylistic similarities with the ethnographic literature of nativist Chinese author Shen Congwen. Yip, by contrast, has attempted to distance Hou from mainland Chinese authors by suggesting that his landscape aesthetics are homegrown. She argues that beyond the use of pillow shots, cinematography and editing in *Dust in the Wind* fashion Jiufen into a rural "chronotope"—a setting with spatial and temporal qualities opposed to the film's urban settings, thus reflecting Hou's indebtedness to the anti-urbanist discourse of the Taiwanese nativist literary movement (Yip 2004, 206–7). Employing a genre studies perspective, Haden Guest (2005) reads the film's representations of landscape as motifs signifying various aspects of the characters' coming-of-age experiences, which he argues follows the universal conventions of the bildungsroman narrative. While each of these interpretations suggests that Hou's representations of landscape and place can be explained through their thematic and aesthetic associations with existing genres and artistic movements, surprisingly little has been written on the relationship between the film's aesthetic forms and the filmmakers' actual experiences of Jiufen as a shooting location. To provide a clearer view of how the filmmakers' production practices directly informed the film's ambiguous representation of landscape, the following pages are devoted to exploring production narratives by key crew members in the production team.

As it turns out, ambiguity was not part of *Dust in the Wind's* preliminary aesthetic design. Instead, the original script for *Dust in the Wind* is a semiautobiographical text written by Wu

Nianzhen that details a more dramatic, storytelling focused, and less episodic coming-of-age story. As cowriter and Hou's frequent collaborator, Zhu Tianwen elaborates in her production notes, Hou adapted Wu's autobiography into a more medium-specific form by eliminating all scenes that he deemed were dramatically "excessive" or scenes that in his eyes produced a gratuitous heightening of psychological identification (Zhu 2006b, 176–77). Thus, the bare minimum of dramatic scenes were selected to provide the spectator with an identifiable plot, leaving the travel narrative between Jiufen and Taipei as one of the few surviving elements of the original script. While some have interpreted this as an indication of Hou's desire to usurp creative control over the project, this claim is difficult to substantiate without a fuller picture of the production process. As such, my focus will instead be on exploring what Hou's revisions, as well as the creative practices employed by his cinematographer, Li Pingbin, reveal about their experiences of Jiufen as a place.

Typically, if tight narrative or causal links are removed, the narrative emphasis will shift from the content of the story to the mechanics of how the story is being told. In *Dust in the Wind*, this means drawing attention away from narrative motivation to the perceptual experience of landscape and place, a practice that the filmmakers in their production narratives reveal is intimately linked to their personal memories of Jiufen. Indeed, whereas Wu remembers Jiufen as his childhood home, a place full of regrettable memories, Hou, who first visited Jiufen while growing up in Taipei, remembers Jiufen more fondly. For Hou, shooting the scenes of train travel evoked joyful memories of his young adulthood. Hou's experience of place is thus recollected in a highly nostalgic register:

In Taiwan, the train is a very important mode of transportation. When I was little I would ride the train often; the atmosphere was seductive. This is why when I grew up it was still hard to let go of or forget the trains. Like in the film *Dust in the Wind*, the train tracks appear more often than roads. I still remember taking carsickness pills when riding the train to participate in my high school graduation trip. (Hasumi and Hou 1988, 62)

As his nostalgic rhetoric evokes, Hou experienced his high school trip to Jiufen through a tourist gaze. In the same interview, Hou's view of Jiufen as a pastoral escape from Taipei is further corroborated by his comparison of the two spaces: "In Taipei, the alleys are narrow, stuck between and under those tight houses, it makes you feel claustrophobic, when the lead character returns to Jiufen, suddenly you'll feel more relaxed (and carefree)" (Hasumi and Hou 1988, 61). Hou thus shares a similar tendency to that of other Taipei-based intellectuals and artists in romanticizing Jiufen as a site of tourist "difference."

By contrast, for Li, Jiufen is more than simply a place of escape but a unique production environment where he could cultivate a creative philosophy that is open to ambiguity—an attitude toward production he argues would be difficult to nurture in densely populated urban shooting locations. In the following anecdote, Li recounts at length the experience of shooting Jiufen's landscape as a conversation he held with the natural environment:

There was only one day when I had a scene breakdown, and that was the last scene (of *Dust in the Wind*). It was originally ten separate empty shots: the entire mountain, the city, and the clouds. One day we were wrapping up and my assistant and I parked our bus in a spot. In fact, every day when we parked our bus in that place, I was ready to shoot one of those empty shots, one of the shots in those ten, but that day when we wrapped there was a typhoon, and the sky was layered with clouds. I saw in the distance that there was a light coming from a place and streaking through; it disappeared in just a moment and then I noticed that in the extreme distance in between the layers of clouds there were many cracks, but I didn't know if the light would



shine through again. If it did, the shot would be very beautiful, but the director wasn't there, so I decided to capture it. I felt that the layered clouds were important, so I added an ND filter and added half another layer of ND filter to show the layers in the clouds. Then I just stood there waiting, and when clouds appeared in the distance and the light was shining, I would turn on the machine and wait for it to move closer. I felt that this shot captured all there was to say. . . . I knew those layered lights, the image, and the movement of the lights could capture the emotions of that time. (S. Chen and Li 1988, 13)

In this patient recounting of an intimate encounter he had with the natural sublime, Li describes how he preserved the aura of the shooting location by capturing the interplay between spatial depth and fickle lighting conditions. For Li, shooting on location was not about projecting a preformed image onto the landscape but about learning to “just stand there waiting,” to be sensitive to and respectful of the time it takes for natural phenomena to unfold.

In addition to fostering a deepened phenomenological sensitivity, Li also sees Jiufen as a production environment that teaches one how to experience place intersubjectively, a crucial technique in a collaborative setting:

I felt the key aspects of the story in *Dust in the Wind* are the passing of time, the vagueness of the objects and scenes, and the nothingness of people and events. These events occur in a small village in the mountains, so surrounding it is the light, there's a sense of time there. . . . Hou Xiaoxian had his own idea, and I had mine; and between us, something we communicated to each other was the desire to leave white space, to capture a type of atmosphere, a taste, to use the lens as a language, to manifest a *yi jing* [mental image], an emotion, or the aura in a scene. (P. Li, Wen, and Yang 2009, 223)

It is important to note that Li's usage of “white space” not only refers to visual qualities of the shooting environment or a particular technique associated with Chinese landscape painting but also to a creative and dialogic space shared between the authors. White space is like a tacit agreement maintained between Li and Hou to remain respectfully in dialogue with each other in the same way they might engage in a “conversation” with the landscape from afar. At the same time, Li suggests that finding white space alone is insufficient to sustain the creative process. In this white space, an uninterrupted temporality is also needed for the creative process to remain dynamic.

In contrast to Jiufen, Li describes how Taipei's urban settings are frenetic and full of commotion, devoid of white spaces and so overwhelming to the senses that it becomes difficult to feel situated, let alone experience the tangible passing of time. Not unlike my own experience of Jiufen's bygone aura, the degree of intimacy Li feels with the rural environment is tied to his ability to feel in tune with what he believes are its internal “rhythms.” Together with the use of long-shot and long-take cinematography, Jiufen's rural settings are experienced by Li as places where his visual perception can feel coherent and purified, sensitized once more to the subtle rhythms of nature he had become numbed to after residing in the city.

The film's representation of Taipei as an unfamiliar and alienating environment, however, is based directly on scriptwriter Wu Nianzhen's experiences of commuting to Taipei seeking employment. Apparently, multiple scenes of traveling within Taipei were deliberately excised to produce a dislocated narrative space that replicated Wu's experience of the city as a foreboding and foreign setting (P. Li 2012b). When elaborating on how he remembered Wu's experience of Taipei, Li explained to me that even the experience of traveling away from Jiufen is entirely different from leaving Taipei for Jiufen. Rather than conveying a sense of joyous escape from the city as a tourist, leaving Jiufen for the city is an anxiety-ridden rite of passage into adulthood,

where one is struck with the sudden realization of how isolated and backward one's hometown actually is (P. Li 2012b).

In sum, each filmmaker attaches personal meanings and memories to his experiences of traveling and Jiufen as a place. Hou, whose identification with Jiufen was from the perspective of a Taipei-based tourist, fondly remembers his travels to Jiufen as an exhilarating time of escape. Li, who similarly views Jiufen from the perspective of an outsider hoping to find reprieve from the sensorial chaos of the city, remembers the experience of location shooting as a phenomenological rebirth, a return to a state of perceptual innocence. Wu, who actually grew up in Jiufen, conveys the least romanticized experience of place by basing Ah Wan's character on his own feeling of not belonging, simultaneously wishing to escape the small town but also being unable to fit in amid the disorienting and unfamiliar settings of Taipei. Yet, despite these differences between their individual memories, I argue in the following that they shared a collective desire to find coherence and meaning among their recollections, and that the film's use of narrative and perceptual ambiguity cannot be understood without taking into account their collaborative mode of imaging place.

Drawing from environmental and cognitive psychology, Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) lays out a theory of how urban residents experience the spaces of a city through "cognitive maps" constructed out of their lived experiences. Lynch defines a "good image" of the city as one that is legible, easily navigable, and memorable for a resident traveling within its spaces, where "the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern" (3). But coherence is insufficient; Lynch also proposes that a city with high imageability, or "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer" (9), must maintain a proper balance between "familiar" and "distinctive" formal elements that enable both practical and emotional identification between resident and city. For this to be possible, the image of the city must be constructed from spatial elements that foster cognitive continuity and minimize disorientation for the moving observer. Lynch describes an imageable space as one where "the perceptive and familiar observer could absorb new sensuous impacts without disruption of his basic image, and each new impact would touch upon many previous elements" (10). Perhaps not so coincidentally, these qualities of a good image—legibility, imageability, familiarity, distinctiveness, and continuity—are precisely the criteria the filmmakers used when designing the narrative and stylistic forms of the film, as well as what I found lacking in Jiufen in 2012.

Indeed, for Wu, a good image of Jiufen would need to follow the classical conventions of continuity editing and character-centered plot development, for any deviation from his autobiographical memories would be unfamiliar and thus disorienting. Hou and Li, on the contrary, have different priorities when constructing a good image. Hou's decision to trim and remove any excessively dramatic scenes, highlighting instead the more metaphysical dimensions of the characters' coming-of-age experiences, speak to his desire to make Wu's narrative more legible and familiar to an outsider to Jiufen such as himself. For Li, the construction of white spaces and location-shooting setups where the passing of time could be recorded in an uninterrupted fashion are not only necessary for him to project his own affects and memories onto the place but also help to familiarize him with a new production environment by translating its unique visual qualities into a language he is familiar speaking: the language of realist cinematography.

Read in this light, Hou's script revisions and Li's cinematography, which redirected Wu's emphasis from storytelling to capturing the experience of remembering one's roots, perhaps far from intended to be disorienting. Rather, their embrace of ambiguity was a way



of accommodating their disparate experiences and recollections of Jiufen as a place, without necessarily privileging one filmmaker's memories over another's. Along these lines, just as the use of narrative ambiguity and white spaces both respects and preserves the plurality of experiences of place, the long-duration shot, or long take, can also be understood as a device that enables a collaborative authorship of place rather than simply constituting a "signature" style for a single auteur. By preserving the uninterrupted temporality that Li describes as distinct to both Jiufen and the experience of recollecting the past, the long takes of Jiufen's landscapes together produce an image of Jiufen as a place remembered, an image forged collectively from the filmmakers' recollections of their pasts. In sum, the ambiguity, white spaces, long shots, and long takes function not in a strictly Bazinian sense to "preserve" the objective, present reality of the shooting location (Bazin 1967) but, instead, mimic the cognitive and psychological qualities of remembering a place as a site of familiarity, intimacy, stability, and legibility. Taking this argument a step further, I contend in the following that this stylistic form not only preserves the filmmakers' remembrances of place but also provides the spectator-tourist with a visual framework for recollecting his or her own past, thus associating the cinematic image of Jiufen with the affects of remembrance and nostalgia.

### Of Trains and Landscapes

The opening shot of the train tracks in *Dust in the Wind* launches the spectator immediately into a scene of traveling. With no other story being told at this moment in the narrative, spectators are immersed in the perceptual experience of moving through an unknown setting via train, captivated by views of the rushing tracks, changes in depth cues, and unfiltered breaks in lighting. This opening shot is thus precisely what Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1* (1986) calls the movement-image, a way of viewing the world that focuses on the actions, perceptions, and affects experienced in the presently lived reality. Such an image of movement links the indirect representation of time inferred through the narrative—or narrative temporality, in short—to the direct experience of time one registers through the sensorial perception of the on-screen images. When space is perceived as a pure movement-image, there are no expectations of what space should appear next, only a sensation of sheer movement in the present, making this sequence truly a liberating experience of place, rather than confining the spectator to the settings of a highly structured story world.

Thus, this is the one setting where social responsibilities, expectations, and anxieties are put on hold, where the spectator-tourist can momentarily indulge him- or herself in the spectacle of movement. Yet, such a precious space devoid of such concerns occupies but a fleeting moment in the narrative. Indeed, with no shot of the train arriving at the Ruifang station from the perspective of the moving train, but rather a static long shot showing the train already stopped at the station, spectators are abruptly transported from the dynamic experience of space in the opening shot to the following sequence in which the characters walk home to Jiufen from the Ruifang station in static long takes, as if the spaces of the train and Jiufen's settings exist in two separate registers of reality.

After Ah Wan assumes several burdensome responsibilities both at home and in Taipei, the carefree perception of space in the opening sequence becomes a luxury. Ah Wan has finally saved enough with his earnings as a package deliverer to buy presents for his family, but while he and Ah Huen are shopping for new shoes at the Zhonghua Shopping Mall, his motorcycle is stolen. The last straw, Ah Wan gives up on his former aspirations of making a living in Taipei

# Conclusion

## *Place and the Politics of Nation Branding*

This book has analyzed the cultural politics of rural location shooting by New Chinese Cinema auteurs. Offering a new paradigm for the study of (trans)national film authorship that goes beyond reading space and place merely as national allegories or stylistic tropes, I have used critical, ethnographic, and reflexive approaches drawn from production culture studies, post-structural cultural geography, and studies of film and tourism to show how auteurs engage in novel and contentious experiments of constructing Taiwanese, Chinese, and cross-strait imagined communities through location shooting. Throughout the book, I have noted how rural shooting locations are experienced by auteurs as stages to perform their aspirations to social activism, where they make sense of the disorienting effects of rapid urbanization, geopolitical shifts, ecological crises, and other social traumas affecting Taiwan and China since the late 1970s. Rural shooting locations are thus much more than mere sites of production; they are places that are “authored”—imparted with affective, symbolic, and ideological meanings associated with both the collective memories and personal aspirations of film auteurs.

Additionally, this book has argued that it is through practices and discourses of rural location shooting that auteurs fashion and revise their authorial identities. In their quests for authenticity, auteurs engage in location shooting as lived and reflexive experiences of nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage. Aiming to experience place beyond the tourist gaze, they perform accented authorial identities as exiles, pioneers, pilgrims, historians, ambassadors, and ethnographers—cultural elites who practice the “moral mandate.” As Part 3 has demonstrated, this means auteurs often reflexively and critically interrogate the cultural politics of their own authenticity seeking. Consequently, the resulting representations of the rural in the New Chinese Cinema cannot simply be classified as signifying one ideological position or another. Rather, filmic representations of China’s and Taiwan’s cultural geographies bear traces of the complex institutional politics, sociocultural tensions, and geopolitical ambivalence both negotiated by auteurs during production and reflected upon in their production narratives. Complicating the binary of the subversive and hegemonic, this book has shown how aesthetic forms are as much a product of auteurs’ creative agency as of the cultural politics negotiated in the midst of production.

Our tour of the cultural geographies of the New Chinese Cinema, however, would not be complete without a final stop in today’s production environments. To offer a wider vista of the cultural geographies of location-shot film and media in Taiwan and China, this conclusion moves beyond the genre of art cinema to explore how the rural is experienced and imagined in popular genres and mediums in the post-WTO era, including outdoor lifestyle television, road

movies, and eco-critical documentaries. While I leave a more thorough analysis of the geographies of popular Taiwanese and Chinese media to future studies, what follows is a roadmap of the key themes, questions, and stakes related to the authorship of place in today's vastly transformed mediascape.

### Media-Induced Tourism in the Experience Economy

I was taking a break from preparing notes for my final leg of fieldwork in Taiwan when I scrolled through the movie listings on the six-inch seat-back screen on my EVA Airlines flight from LAX to TPE. Browsing through the Chinese-language film offerings, I was pleasantly surprised to find that my fieldwork did not have to start in the archives but could begin here in economy class with a video archive at my disposal. I soon noticed a pattern in the in-flight curation: a large number of titles prominently featured themes of travel within cultural China. These films presented major metropolitan areas such as Taipei, Hong Kong, and Beijing not just as backdrops to melodramas but as characters in their own right. Including such films as *Taipei Exchanges* (Y. Xiao 2010), *Beijing Bicycle* (X. Wang 2001) and *Kora* (Du 2011), the in-flight entertainment introduced captive audiences to urban and rural geographies not through blatant tourist marketing but through various narrative and aesthetic motifs that travelers might eventually associate with their destinations. Evidently, the experience of touring begins not when one steps out the airport doors but well before, when travelers find creative ways to pass the time in their economy-class seat.

I took a stretching break from my in-flight "archival research" and paced down the aisle. My view of the cabin revealed dozens of six-inch screens flickering in the dark; at any moment, I could see at least one landmark from each of the three major cultural Chinese territories, whether it was the Taipei 101, Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, or Beijing's *hutongs* (alleys). This image serves as an apt metaphor of the paradoxical nature of the way places are experienced by today's globe-trotting spectator-tourists. While the content seems customized and personalized—after all, there are literally hundreds of films one could choose from to selectively shape one's imagined geographies—the way in which these experiences are delivered is breathtakingly homogeneous.

Welcome to the "experience economy." Management consultants Joseph Pine and James Gilmore coined this term to describe how business strategies have evolved in the twentieth century from the extraction of commodities and the making of goods to the delivery of services, and most recently, the staging of experiences. Pine and Gilmore define the experience as that which "occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (1998, 98). Comparing how goods and services were created by a process of "research, design, and development" to how experiences are now fashioned by processes of "exploration, scripting, and staging" (102), Pine and Gilmore note that the new experience economy is based on business models first pioneered by the entertainment industry. Borrowing from my anecdote as an illustration of this concept, it is no longer sufficient for an airline to merely transport passengers; it must also prepare tourists for an enjoyable experience of their destination.

Pine and Gilmore are not critics of the experience economy but advocates for it. They propose several qualities essential for shaping a memorable experience, which unsurprisingly align entirely with Hollywood's business strategies and aesthetic forms. The experiences must first be themed, then harmonized with positive impressions, where cues must be provided "that affirm the nature of the experience." Third, negative cues are to be eliminated, so that "anything

that diminishes, contradicts, or distracts from the theme” (Pine and Gilmore 1998, 103) is removed. Fourth, memorable experiences must “mix in memorabilia” (104), which is purchased as a physical reminder of the experience, and last but not least, all five senses must be engaged throughout the experience.

I have started with this anecdote to point out several key characteristics of place and place making in the age of the experience economy that are notably different from how place is experienced and authored in the New Chinese Cinema. First and foremost, the ability to shape experiences of places is no longer solely in the hands of producers but in the hands of consumers as well—even those flying economy class. Unlike art cinema spectatorship, where the audience enters into a tacit contract accepting the film auteur as the sole “author” of place—by acknowledging the director as the ultimate authority in shaping the film’s meanings—spectator-tourists in the experience economy can lay claim to being coauthors of place when film spectatorship is but one piece of their entire experience of place. Starting from their choice of in-flight entertainment, spectator-tourists actively design their own experiences of place, which extend off screen in multiple directions and through multiple mediums, both virtually and actually. In other words, place has metamorphosed from what Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) calls an “essentially static” site (179) into a “performative object that emerges from a meaning-generative process” (F. Yang 2016, 16), a hypermediated cultural form whose meanings are no longer predetermined by a cultural authority but dynamically interpreted by cultural consumers. This means that images of place of popular film and media texts, in particular, make no claim to representing cultural meanings authoritatively; rather, these texts merely furnish narrative and aesthetic guidelines for how spectator-tourists might author their own memorable experiences.

The film auteur’s authority to author places is further diffused when it is no longer a small creative team at the helm of shaping imagined geographies but entire industries of place making. Everything from the film and media texts themselves to film books, ancillary merchandising themed around the film and media texts, blogs, guidebooks for location shooting by film commissions, and themed tourist products bundled with hotel and airline accommodations are part and parcel of what Urry (Urry and Larsen 2011) calls the “soft” and “hard” infrastructures of the experience economy. Both private and public, formerly disparate tourist, publishing, film and media, telecommunications, advertising, public relations, automotive, and hospitality industries, not to mention film fans and tourists themselves, have emerged and converged as new actors in authoring places as institutionalized, consumable, branded—and hopefully memorable—experiences.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that while these industries are largely based in metropolitan, urban centers, their products are often set in rural communities or constructed around rural themes, where experiences can be shaped around motifs of authenticity and cultural difference, which urban-based tourists, spectators, and consumers eagerly consume for a taste of the exotic and the other. Thus, not only is the rural not left out of the experience economy but it is a prime contact zone in which producers and consumers in the experience economy interact to engage in new modes of authoring and experiencing place. In the following, I will sketch out the magnitude and scale of these transformations in rural China and Taiwan, showing how the transformation of rural communities with the advent of the experience economy is the story of Jiufen’s post-1980s development writ large. I will then closely examine the narrative and aesthetic strategies through which places are remade into stages of memorable experiences. My goal is to arrive at a broad understanding of how rural places are remade into stages for experiences targeted at middle-class spectator-tourists, before sketching out the contentious cultural politics associated with today’s branding of rural places.

### Experiencing Life in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*

In terms of sheer numbers, outdoor lifestyle TV, out of the many genres that proliferate in the mediascape, inarguably has the greatest impact on rural communities. From such eye-catching statistics such as *Dear Inn* (Xinyu Chen 2017) increasing the number of tourists to its shooting location by 56 percent, to *Dad, Where Are We Going?* helping to raise interest in Guizhou by over 79 percent, and *The Great Challenge* (D. Chen 2016) generating 48 percent more interest in Foshan, Guangdong (Yuan 2018), it is perhaps no surprise that the link between TV viewership and rural tourism is well studied in Chinese tourist, business, and media industry trade presses. A *Shanxi Daily* editorial, for instance, cites the staggering statistic that more than 1,810,000 search requests for “Running Man Taiyuan” were made on the Chinese search engine Baidu alone after the shooting of the *Keep Running!* (Yao 2014) episode in the Shanxi provincial capital, to make the argument that TV episodes are the ideal medium for rebranding communities in need of a makeover and for engaging in so-called soft propaganda (Yuan 2018). But what, more specifically, lies behind the actual success of these shows? In the following, I will look at a representative case by examining how the outdoor lifestyle show, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* brands “memorable” experiences in rural China.

First, a memorable experience must have a clear theme. Even before an episode begins, in the opening credits video of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, the rural is themed as a place of escape and family bonding. A digital animation shows a father sitting at a computer, busy at work, while his child sits behind him, neglected. The child then throws a paper airplane at the father, which flies through the computer screen and opens up the vista of a verdant, picturesque landscape. The father and child fall through the hole in the screen and soar, hand in hand, through one virtual landscape after another in the ultimate escape fantasy. The lasting appeal of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, however, goes well beyond the representation of the rural as an exotic vacation destination.

In each episode, four to five groups of celebrity fathers and their children from across mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are selected to vacation in a rural community, where they participate in a variety of games and contests designed to help the celebrity fathers bond with their children. While each episode is themed around the cultural and historical particularities of the location, the recurring, underlying theme of the show is none other than that of experiencing life, which Chapter 3 explored in depth through the location shooting practices of Fifth Generation filmmakers. Like the Fifth Generation auteurs before them, these urban-based celebrity families are taken out of their comfort zones when asked to adapt to life in the countryside. However, unlike the emphasis on enduring hardship and back-breaking labor as a way for intellectuals to “pay their debts” to the rural, experiencing life in *Dad, Where Are We Going?* is framed as a fun yet educational experience. From competing to complete chores around the farm, to racing against the clock to scavenge for food ingredients, what are typically mundane and arduous tasks are no longer represented as such; rather, the tasks are recast into periods of play, where families learn the value of teamwork while being both morally and physically rejuvenated. Needless to say, the fathers and their children are far from experiencing life in the ways originally mandated in *xiafang* policies or performed by Fourth and Fifth Generation auteurs. Instead, experiencing life has been fully transformed into a pastiche in *Dad, Where Are We Going?*

*Dad, Where Are We Going?* scores high, however, not just in its sophisticated theming, but in all other categories of the memorable experience as well. Indeed, participants engage all five senses by cooking together, listening to local folk musicians, exploring rural landscapes, and

familiarizing themselves with hands-on farm chores. The rural experience is also amply harmonized with positive cues, such as a reconciliatory narrative arc, which encourages spectators to root for the “underdog”—the father who initially feels estranged from his child, only to develop the most intimate friendship after the course of an episode.

Season 3 Episode 1, which is based in northern Shaanxi (Hunan TV 2015a), the same geographical area as where *Yellow Earth* was shot, is particularly illuminating of the strategies used by the show to eliminate negative cues. *Yellow Earth*, with its alienating representation of the landscape, use of discontinuous editing, representation of the rural as a space other to the urban, and critical depiction of the Communist Party, is paradigmatic of what not to sell to tourists. Tellingly, each of *Yellow Earth*’s negative cues are eliminated in this episode. In the opening montage introducing the location to the spectator-tourist, instead of depicting the Loess Plateau as a geographically other space dislocated from the rest of China, an epically staged musical performance for the arriving celebrities crosscut with shots of Mazda CX-5 SUVs carrying the celebrities to their destination, blatantly mix product placement and tourist promotion to transform the Loess Plateau into a playground for celebrity tourists. Whereas in *Yellow Earth* spectators are introduced to the haunted landscape of the Loess Plateau by the sound of eerie and melancholic folk music emanating from the off-screen space, here, the celebrities are welcomed with an on-screen image of a spectacular musical performance put on by local drumming troupes. Moreover, despite the monumental scale of this performance, it is never too overwhelming or formidable that it scares off the children, who are shown walking happily together with the parading men and women; the celebrities mix in with the crowd, rather than standing apart from it, as was the case in *Yellow Earth*.

Similarly, experiencing life continues to receive a tourist-friendly makeover from its gritty and ambivalent representation in Chinese Westerns when the celebrities are shown their accommodations: northern Shaanxi *yao dong*, or cave dwellings. While *Yellow Earth* was infamous for showing the decrepit state of rural living, the *yao dong* in this episode highlight the pleasures of the modern “glamping” experience. Outfitted with a full range of modern amenities, the *yao dong* from *Dad, Where Are We Going?* are worlds apart from the dimly lit, claustrophobic, dusty, and chilly interiors of the caves in *Yellow Earth*. The only *yao dong* in the episode that appears relatively unaltered from its original state was left for the father and son with the most estranged relationship, for whom cleaning up the *yao dong* together is represented as a unique bonding experience necessary for the two to build intimacy. In other words, there are no negative experiences to be had on the show; even what might appear negative initially turns out to be all the more rewarding and ultimately enjoyable.

Last but not least, the show mixes in memorabilia through its clever, and decidedly over-the-top, product placement. From framing “Oppo moments” of the families playing together inside the digitally superimposed silhouettes of Oppo smartphones and making bread with flour sold by one of the show’s sponsors to washing their clothes with sponsored detergents, spectator-tourists are reminded every time they purchase these products of the promise of familial bonding and adventure presented on the show. The show thus responds to urban-based tourists’ weariness of media saturation and the proliferation of advertising—which Hou Xiaoxian had called “visual violence”—not by featuring any less advertising but by rebranding the rural as an alternative space of consumption, a space where experiences of wholesomeness and authenticity can be purchased.

But why this seemingly paradoxical mixture of marketing strategies that simultaneously celebrate cosmopolitan consumption and back-to-basics rural living? According to Lewis, Martin, and Sun, “Narratives of personal transformation, self-empowerment, and the new



flexible subject's nimble adaptation to changing social and economic conditions" are core features of Chinese and Taiwanese "lifestyle media" not because they are simply in vogue, but because they symptomize "the aspirational character of modern formations of identity" (2016, 8). More specifically, Lewis, Martin, and Sun argue that through lifestyle media, spectators are offered "blueprints for being and living" (255) as "individualized, sovereign consumers with reflexive choices about their lifestyle and identities" (3). Being a modern consumer in a neoliberal economy with "Chinese characteristics" means being tasteful, well informed, and responsible with one's purchasing choices, spending one's hard-earned cash not on extravagant consumption but on experiences that promise long-term rewards of self-improvement and work-life balance. As Lewis, Martin, and Sun best put it, "Audiences are enticed . . . by the need to reorient oneself in a deregulated, privatized, and therefore disorienting material, moral, and ethical world" (31). Lifestyle media in Asia thus joins the global ranks to normalize the middle-class value of "self-governance"—the grand narrative that it is the individual, rather than the society or the government, who is ultimately responsible for choosing his or her own lifestyle and identity. In the case of *Dad, Where Are We Going?*, it is clear how tourist practices are not only consistent with but also help to circulate such "discourses of self-responsibility" (79). By framing rural tourism as more than just an escape but as a way to develop long-lasting familial bonds through selective forms of consumption, *Dad, Where Are We Going?* is a masterclass in teaching middle-class consumers how best to consume the rural—and the associated products one has to purchase to experience it memorably.

The cave dwellings may not be the most luxurious, the Mazdas may not be the flashiest, and the Oppo phones might not be the best outfitted, but they are sufficient even for celebrities to live the good life. When the rural is no longer a stage for performing one's aspirations of nation building, homecoming, or cultural salvage but a "key pedagogic space to teach individuals how to make informed decisions" (Lewis, Martin, and Sun 2016, 79) about consumption, no longer do participants in experiencing life repay their debt to the rural by reenacting tribulation and hardship, performing self-effacing roles under the watchful eye of the nation-state. Rather, these celebrities of the new age fulfill their patriotic duty simply by being informed, diligent consumers, having fun while setting an example for what a *xiaokang shehui* (moderately prosperous society) might look like in practice. Under contemporary China's normative value system of consumer citizenship, there is in fact nothing ironic that on a show about experiencing life, all the products being sold are creature comforts designed for tourists to travel comfortably without actually having to get themselves dirty. Why should you get dirty, after all, if you are the author—neither the director, the censors, nor the public—of your own memorable experience?

### Touring Guishan Island

On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, rural places are being similarly rebranded as middle-class tourist places in which memorable experiences are forged, albeit on a smaller scale than in China. In Taiwan as in China, lifestyle media sanitize the experience of place in what were formerly represented in the New Chinese Cinema as sites of cultural ambivalence—not by eliminating the history of a place altogether but by theming historical conflict as part of the experience. As a case in point, Guishan Island, the landmark off the coast of Yilan that Bai Mei in *Flower in the Rainy Night* looked longingly upon—thus signifying the impossibility of belonging in a society that treats her as an other—was finally reopened to the public in 2001 after being cordoned off by the military in the 1970s. Since its opening, in episodes featured in popular travel shows such

that the documentary critiques—makes *Beyond Beauty* less a work of investigative journalism than a piece of public relations media couched in journalistic rhetoric, a purportedly antitourist tourist promotional documentary.

*Beyond Beauty*'s self-contradictory narrative is only one of many cautionary reminders of how on-screen representations of Taiwan's rural places may become manicured to promote depoliticized, more tourist-friendly and business-friendly modes of loving Taiwan. More than a matter of wounded pride, then, there are grave economic, environmental, and geopolitical stakes to the institutionalization and commoditization of location shooting. Are filmmakers and cultural institutions crafting images that further a layered perspective of Taiwan's cultural identity, or do they reduce Taiwan's cultural distinctiveness to signs of a sanitized cosmopolitanism, effectively chipping away at the contours of Taiwan's imagined community and reshaping it to cater to the demands and expectations of its largest tourist demographics and most powerful business interests? Is the excessive branding of place and nation through location shooting or the pandering to foreign film crews to come shoot in Formosa "the beautiful island," an exercise in self-exoticization that risks reducing the island once more to the coveted, exploited geography of the colonial eras?

### Mapping the Internal Conflicts of Place

Calling it the "progressive place," cultural geographer Doreen Massey offered in 1994 a new framework for conceptualizing place beyond its essentialist formulations in earlier schools of human geography. Challenging views that identities are static, unchanging, and singularly unique, her framework of the progressive place provided a much-needed update to scholarly notions of place at a time of globalization. By positing that places are processes—not fixities in time—unbounded, uniquely heterogeneous, and internally conflicted (1994, 155–56), Massey envisioned place as a constantly mutating and ever-evolving cultural form, its multiple identities (re)interpreted and (re)performed daily through the everyday practices of its diverse inhabitants.

In this chapter, I have shown how rural places in Chinese and Taiwanese experience economies are indeed progressive to their very core. Rather than being seen as sites of uncorrupted authenticity and national heritage, they are stages for spectator-tourists, fans, and film and media practitioners to author their own, individualized experiences, where the seeking of authenticity is but one of many commodifiable themes. There is no doubt that these experience economies embrace change, openness, and heterogeneity, if only to make places all the more memorable. However, as the case studies have demonstrated, internal conflicts are being erased to minimize the negative cues that detract from the enjoyment of an experience. Whereas the notion of the progressive place highlights how cultural, social, and political contestations are at the very core of a place's identity, place makers in the experience economy often seek to depoliticize and flatten experience by equating it with broadly middle-class norms of consumption and participation. Further, I have argued that it is precisely through practices of consumer and participatory citizenship that the self-governing spectator-tourists of the modern neoliberal state are interpellated. Ideologies of nation building have not only not disappeared with the advent of the experience economy but are also embedded in nation brands that encourage subjects to fulfill their own Chinese Dream or to Love Taiwan. Most importantly, these nation brands disguise their hegemonic functions of circulating, regulating, and naturalizing new myths of the nation through depoliticized rhetoric appealing to seemingly universal norms—in spite of such

systems resulting in the displacement and exotification of rural and ethnic others, as well as the acceleration of cultural disappearance. Looking ahead, then, the cultural geographies shaped by Chinese and Taiwanese film and media will no doubt remain key battlegrounds in which contending modes and narratives of place making are waged. Future studies of location shooting in China and Taiwan have as much to look forward to as to be apprehensive about as they map the internal conflicts of new and emerging narratives of nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage, a few examples of which I will survey in closing.

Far surpassing the scope of initiatives to develop the Chinese “West” in the 1980s and 1990s, One Belt, One Road (OBOR) is an economic and geopolitical initiative proposed in 2013 that aims to make China a global leader by forging closer land-based and maritime relations with Eurasian and African countries. Covering “65% of the world’s population, three-quarters of global energy resources and 40% of GDP” (Campbell 2017), OBOR is Chinese Dreaming at an unprecedented and truly grand scale. While most commentators on OBOR have focused on its viability from the perspective of political economy, the central role that the initiative places on both outbound and inbound tourism for projecting China’s soft power means that the long-term success of OBOR will depend as much on China’s economic and geopolitical strategies as on the successful branding of OBOR as a modern reincarnation of the Silk Road to participating nations and tourists alike. This new mythology of empire, one that hybridizes the imagined geography of China as a risen superpower with a postcolonial discourse that opposes Western-style imperialism, is already being projected and reinforced in a variety of state-sponsored films and media, from Wu Jing’s openly jingoistic *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017) to *China Daily*’s seemingly innocuous weekly special features on the different types of tourism made possible by OBOR.

At the same time, this geographical imaginary is not uncontested. Of particular note is an emerging genre of Chinese road movies that feature “posttourists” as their protagonists, who critically and reflexively deconstruct the Chinese Dream in their very acts of touring—with examples ranging from Han Han’s offbeat independent dark comedy, *The Continent* (2014) and the arthouse hit, Jia Zhangke’s *Mountains May Depart*, to Meng Zhang’s mainstream melodrama, *Everybody’s Fine* (2016). Other films set in the West, such as Ning Hao’s *No Man’s Land* (2013), fashion the Silk Road less as a tourist-friendly environment or a space deserving of economic investment than as an apocalyptic wasteland having more in common with the spatial imaginaries of Mad Max films. Clearly indebted to the iconography of ruin in the Sixth Generation cinema, these works of popular and independent cinema, despite their varied approaches and audiences, similarly explore alienating rural and suburban landscapes to make sense of the contradictions that come with the freedoms of touring at a time when the Chinese Dream remains attainable only to the select few.

Greater China remains an equally contested imagined geography in Taiwanese public consciousness. Since 2010, one controversial policy initiative after another has promised to bring Taiwan and China closer but without much success, including the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement and the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement. Unsurprisingly, these initiatives have met massive resistance from the DPP and Taiwan’s progressive youth groups, culminating in events that have graced international headlines, such as the sunflower student movement’s occupation of the Taiwanese legislature for an entire week in March 2014, unprecedented in Taiwanese history and recently documented in Fu Yue’s *Our Youth in Taiwan* (2018).<sup>4</sup>

4. The persisting sensitivity of debates surrounding Taiwan’s political autonomy in the regional film industry is clearly manifested through a controversy during the 2018 Golden Horse Film Festival awards ceremony, when winner of the Best Documentary prize, Fu Yue, pronounced her advocacy for Taiwanese independence. In protest, several Chinese participants departed early, including Gong Li, who refused to present the Best Feature Film prize with Ang Li, the director of the festival.

What these events made evident is that just as the viability of OBOR depends not only on economic or political considerations but on cultural considerations as well, the Taiwanese public's level of acceptance of cross-strait policies is rarely about the numbers but rather dependent on public perception of the long-term cultural and geopolitical implications of building closer ties with China. Many are fearful that once these ties are forged, Taiwan will be led toward a point of no return with regard to political reunification with the PRC. This suggests that the success of policies promoting (or curbing) cross-strait ties are dependent not just on the decisions of Taiwan's fickle executive and legislative branches but on the public's views of whether cross-strait cultural tensions still unaddressed since the Civil War can indeed be reconciled in the imagined geography of a Greater China. Needless to say, cross-strait tourism, coproductions, and film and media representations of Greater China will all play pivotal roles in shaping these public perceptions.

As a case in point, the recent success story of cross-strait location shooting for Hou's *The Assassin*, for which Hou used locations from both Taiwan and northeastern China to fashion a mythological Chinese setting, suggests that there is little contention over the imagined geography to be shaped if it is a fantastical one. When perceived as a space of cultural salvage, where seemingly timeless Chinese cultural traditions are preserved as mesmerizing landscapes amid a global backdrop of political uncertainty and economic recessions, Greater China is synonymous with cultural China, an imagined geography that both sides of the political aisle can resonate with. Greater China is more controversial, however, if the geographical imaginary to be forged is set in the present, where the rhetoric of cultural unity conjures up not images of common cultural traditions but the condescending image circulated by Chinese state media of "separatist" territories like Hong Kong and Taiwan being welcomed back into the embrace of their *zuguo* (ancestral fatherland).

This geopolitical ambivalence toward a resonant cultural past and a divisive political present found an unlikely venue of expression in the Chinese state-approved documentary on Shanghai's history, Jia Zhangke's *I Wish I Knew*. Screening "ten times a day for one-hundred days" in the central room of the Chinese pavilion at the Shanghai World Exposition (Callahan 2012, 257), the documentary presented museumgoers with an image of Greater China that was far from unified but was instead internally conflicted. Rather than taking advantage of the opening of direct flights in 2010 between Taiwan and China to show images of the production crew physically traveling across the Strait—a sign that could easily communicate the narrative of Greater Chinese "political unity"—transition sequences between interview scenes in Shanghai, Taipei, and Hong Kong were strategically limited to filmed scenes of cross-strait travel as depicted in dramas from the three national cinemas, which reveal contradicting ideological positions no less. Like the digital ruptures in *Still Life*, these mediated representations of travel suggest that the links between China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are not physical but virtual, constituting collective imaginaries based on myths that have yet to be fulfilled. Altogether, the film constructs Shanghai as a sister city of sadness to Taipei, a city whose identity is similarly fragmented and divided between the parallel modernities of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, their cultures tied not so much by unified ideologies as by sharing unreconciled historical traumas. Jia Zhangke's subversive rebranding of Shanghai makes it all the more bewildering that the film was granted permission to be screened at one of China's most visible spaces for projecting soft power, let alone its personal endorsement by Xi Jinping.

Raising more questions than they answer, these vignettes nevertheless affirm that location-shot film and media in mainland China and Taiwan will continue to be a powerful medium through which film auteurs, media practitioners, fans, and tourists alike attempt to make sense

of the region's disorienting social changes. However much institutions and corporations attempt to brand places as sites for consuming memorable experiences, alternative modes, practices, and narratives of place making will ensure that place continues to serve as a stage and a forum through which unfulfilled aspirations of nation building, homecoming, and cultural salvage are performed. Thus, in today's experience economies, the filmmaker's quest for authenticity takes on a new urgency and form—no longer as the search for authentic modes of belonging in a geography believed to embody a preexisting cultural essence but rather as a critical and reflexive process of bringing to light the internal conflicts of place—a paradigm of place making this book shows has been pioneered by New Chinese Cinema auteurs in rural production environments.

The authorship of place is an ongoing story that multiple social agents have a stake in writing. In these evolving cultural geographies where new actors, settings, plot twists and turns are introduced on a daily basis, one constant remains—the promise that as the technologies and infrastructures of place making grow ever more sophisticated, so must the practices of cultural interrogation, salvage, and survival by today's and tomorrow's authors of place.

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